

WELCOME MESSAGE



Dear Learner

Welcome to Semester II !

This course is devoted to the development of Drama from Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century. The sociological, philosophical and literary implications of the prescribed plays as well as the different dramatic techniques will be studied by you in this paper.

You are requested to read the texts of the plays prescribed in detail. Also consult the books in the library.

Wish you good luck and success!

Prof. Anupama Vohra
Course Co-ordinator

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
DETAILED SYLLABUS OF M.A. ENGLISH SEMESTER - II

Course Code: ENG 221
Title of the Course: Drama II
Credits : 6

Duration of Examination: 3 hrs
Total Marks: 100

(a) Semester Examination - 70
(b) Sessional Assessment - 30

Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in May 2025, 2026, 2027

Objective: The Purpose of the course will be to acquaint the distance learners with the development of Drama from Restoration to the Twentieth Century. The sociological, philosophical and literary implications of the prescribed plays as well as the different dramatic techniques will be studied.

Texts Prescribed (For Detailed Study)

UNIT - I

Literary and Intellectual background of drama from the Restoration Period upto the 20th Century

UNIT - II

William Congreve : *The Way of the World*

UNIT - III

G. B. Shaw : *Man and Superman*

UNIT - IV

T. S. Eliot : *The Family Reunion*

UNIT - V

Samuel Beckett : *Waiting for Godot*

UNIT-VI

Bertolt Brecht : *Life of Galileo*

SEM II

Course No. ENG-221

Title of the Course : Drama-II

Syllabus for the examinations to be held in May 2025, 2026, & 2027

Internal Assessment Assignments carry 30% marks in each course. The format of the Internal Assessment Assignments is given below:

ASSIGNMENT 1: Long Answer Questions

Credit-06

Two questions: one each from Unit I and Unit II shall be given. And the learner has to attempt any one question in 450-500 words. (10 marks)

ASSIGNMENT 2: Short Answer Questions

Four questions: two each from Unit III and Unit IV shall be given. And the learner has to attempt two questions one each from Unit III and Unit IV in 100-150 words. (5x2=10)

ASSIGNMENT 3: Very Short Answer Questions

Four questions: two each from Unit V and Unit VI shall be given. And the learner has to attempt all the four questions in 40-50 words. (2.5x4=10)

The term end examination shall carry 70% marks in each course. The format of the question paper is given below:

MODE OF EXAMINATION

The paper will be divided into Sections A, B, C.

M.M. : 70

Section-A Multiple Choice Questions

Q.No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set, and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark. (10×1=10)

Section-B Short Answer Questions

Q.No. 2 comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks. (5×2=10)

Section-C Long Answer Questions

Q.No. 3 comprises long answer type questions from the entire syllabus. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in about 300-350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 10 marks. (5×10=50)

Suggested Reading :

1. Bernard Bergonzi : *Wartime and Aftermath : English Literature and its Background 1939-60.*
2. Colin Chambers and : *Playwright's Progress: Patterns of Postwar Mike Prior British Drama.*
3. Harold Bloom : *George Bernard Shaw (Bloom's Modern Critical Views)*
4. T. S. Eliot : *Selected Essays*

5. John Loftis (Ed.) : *Restoration Drama : Modern Essays in Criticism.*
6. Raymond Williams : *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht.*
7. Thomas H. Fujimura : *The Restoration Comedy fo Wit.*
8. John Russell Taylor : *Anger And After : Guide to the New British Drama.*
9. Katherine J. Worth : *Revolution in Modern English Drama.*

M.A. ENGLISH

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LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF DRAMA
FROM THE RESTORATION UPTO THE 20TH CENTURY

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DRAMA

STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 1.3 Restoration Period
- 1.4 Sentimental Comedy
- 1.5 Domestic Tragedy
- 1.6 The Stagecraft
- 1.7 The Melodrama
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Multiple Choice Questions
- 1.11 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.12 Suggested Reading

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The drama of the eighteenth century does not reach the same high level as the novel. One has to wait late in the century for Goldsmith and Sheridan to find writers who make any permanent contribution to the English stage. The Licensing Act of 1737 restricted the freedom of expression by dramatists and drove a number of good men out of the theatre. Henry Fielding had been a dramatist before that date and his more mature genius might have gone into the theatre instead of the novel. From 1737 to 1968 the theatre has been hampered by the restrictions of censorship. Further, the most austere section of the middle classes, the conduct of which is regulated by Puritan, and next by Methodist views, still fosters an aversion on principle for the play.

In the 18th century, the highbrow and provocative Restoration comedy lost favour, to be replaced by sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), and by an overwhelming interest in Italian opera. Popular entertainment became more dominant in this period than ever before. Fair-booth burlesque and musical entertainment, the ancestors of the English music hall, flourished at the expense of legitimate English drama. By the early 19th century, few English dramas were being written, except for closet drama, plays intended to be presented privately rather than on stage.

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

In this lesson, we shall discuss in detail the various characteristic features of the eighteenth century drama. The lesson will also throw light on the various differential characteristics of restoration comedy and sentimental drama.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the features of 18th-century drama – Explain its themes, structure, and influences, including the impact of social and political changes.
2. Analyze the decline of drama – Identify key reasons such as the rise of the novel, censorship laws, and shifting audience preferences.
3. Explain sentimental comedy – Define its characteristics, themes of virtue and morality, and examine key examples like *The Conscious Lovers*.
4. Discuss domestic tragedy – Describe its focus on middle-class protagonists, moral lessons, and analyze works like *The London Merchant*.

1.3 RESTORATION PERIOD

In Italy and in Germany, as in England and in Spain, the men-of-letters maintained the necessity of conforming to the theatrical theory of the French because they believed the French to be the only true exponents of the Greek tradition, which it was the bounden duty of every dramatic poet to follow blindly. The rules of the theatre as the French declared them had only a remote connection with the Greek tradition; and they consisted mainly of purely negative restrictions. They told the dramatic poet what he was forbidden to do, and they declared what a tragedy must not be. To accord with the demands of the French theory a tragedy should not have more or less than five acts and it should not be in prose; it should deal only with a lofty theme, having queens and kings for its chief figures, and avoiding all visible violence of action or of speech, and all other breaches of decorum; it should eschew humor, keeping itself ever serious and stately, and never allowing any underplot; and, above all, it should permit no change of scene during the whole play, and it should not allow the time taken by the story to extend over more than twentyfour hours.

How widely the ideal of tragedy upheld by the French dramatists under Louis XV differed from that pursued by the English playwrights under Elizabeth, and also from that followed by the Greek poets under Pericles, was made plain by Voltaire's own formal declaration in which he set up a standard of tragedy as he understood it: "To compact an illustrious and interesting event into the space of two or three hours; to make the characters appear only when they ought to come forth; never to leave the stage empty; to put together a plot as probable as it is attractive; to say nothing unnecessary; to instruct the mind and move the heart; to be always eloquent in verse with the eloquence proper to each character represented; to speak one's tongue with the same purity as in the most chastened prose, without allowing the effort of rhyming to seem to hamper the thought; to permit no single line to be hard or obscure or declamatory;— these are the conditions which nowadays one insists upon in a tragedy." From this explicit definition it is evident that Voltaire regarded tragedy as a work of the intelligence rather than of the imagination; and it might even be inferred that he distrusted the imagination, and that he thought that the intelligence could be aided in the accomplishment of its task by the rules.

These were the rules to conform to which Corneille cramped himself and curbed his indisputable genius. French tragedy had a graceful symmetry of its own, but it was lacking in bold variety and in imaginative energy. Here is an added reason why it was widely accepted in the eighteenth century, which has been termed "an age whose poetry was without romance" and "whose philosophy was without insight." The century itself, rather than the French example, is to blame if it has left so few poetic plays deserving to survive.

A flexible prose is plainly the fittest instrument for the comedy of manners; and the comedy of manners is as plainly the kind of drama best suited to the limitations of the eighteenth century. By their comedies rather than by their tragedies are the dramatists of that century now remembered. Their comedies, like their tragedies, were composed in imitation of French models. Within a few years after Molière's death the type of comedy which he had elaborated to suit his own needs and to contain his veracious portrayal of life as he saw it, had been taken across to England by the comic dramatists of the Restoration, some of whom had borrowed plots from him and all of whom had tried to absorb his method. No one of the English dramatists had Molière's insight into character or his sturdy morality.

Clever as these Restoration comedies were and brilliant in their reflection of the glittering immorality, their tone was too offensive for our modern taste, and scarcely anyone of them now survives on the stage. Yet the form they had copied from Molière they firmly established in England, where the conditions of the theatre had come to be like those in France; and this form has been accepted by all the later comic dramatists of English, who have never cared to return to the looser and more medieval form which had to satisfy the humorous playwrights under Elizabeth. Steele and Fielding and, later in the century, Goldsmith and Sheridan continue in English comedy the tradition established by Molière. In *She Stoops To Conquer* and in *The Rivals* there is an element of rollicking farce not quite in keeping with the elevation of high comedy. In the *School for Scandal* we have an English comedy with solid structure, but narrow in its outlook.

Although the French theorists insisted on a complete separation of the comic and the tragic, disapproving fiercely of any humorous relief in a tragedy, they also maintained that comedy should hold itself aloof from vulgar subjects, that it should ever be genteel; and there were some who held that it ought to be unfailingly dignified. Even in England Goldsmith was reproached for having disfigured *She Stoops to Conquer* with scenes of broad humor "to low even for farce"; and Sheridan in the prologue of *The Rivals* felt forced to make a plea for laughter as a not unnatural accompaniment of comedy. Without asserting categorically that the drama should be strenuously didactic, many critics considered that it was the duty of comedy, not first of all to depict human nature as it is with its foibles and its failings, and not to clear the air with hearty laughter wholesome in itself, but chiefly to teach, to set a good example, to hold aloft the standards of manners and of morals. Dryden had declared that the general end of all poetry was "to instruct delightfully"; and not a few later writers of less authority were willing enough to waive the delight if only they could make sure of their instruction.

1.4 SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

Thus there came into existence a new dramatic species, which flourished for a little space on both sides of the English Channel and which was known in London as sentimental-comedy and in Paris as tearful-comedy, *comédie larmoyante*. The most obvious characteristic of this comedy was that it was not comic; and in fact it was not intended to be comic, but pathetic. It was a mistake that a play of this new class should call itself comedy, which was precisely what it was not, and that by this false claim it should hinder the healthy growth of true comedy with its ampler pictures of life and its contagious gaiety. But the new species, however miscalled, responded to a new need of the times. It was the result of that awakening sensibility of the soul, of that growing tenderness of spirit, of that expansion of sympathy, which was after a while to bring about the Romanticist upheaval.

Sentimental Comedy is an 18th century dramatic genre which sprang up as a reaction to the immoral tone of English Restoration plays. In Sentimental comedies middle-class protagonists triumphantly overcome a series of moral trials. These plays aimed to produce tears rather than laughter and reflected contemporary philosophical conceptions of humans as inherently good but capable of being led astray by bad example. By appealing to his noble sentiments, a man could be reformed and set back on the path of virtue. While the plays contained characters whose natures seemed overly virtuous and whose problems were too easily resolved, they were accepted by audiences as truthful representations of the human predicament.

The best known work of this genre is Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in which the penniless heroine Indiana faces various tests until the discovery that she is an heiress leads to the necessary happy ending. Steele wished his plays to bring the audience, "a pleasure too exquisite for laughter." Steele was an Irish writer and politician, remembered mainly for co-founding the magazine *The Spectator*. While he wrote a few notable sentimental comedies, he was criticized for being a hypocrite as he wrote moral plays, booklets, and articles but enjoyed drinking, occasional dueling, and debauchery around town.

Scholars argue that a more important writer of the genre was Colley Cibber, an actor-manager, writer, and poet laureate who wrote the first sentimental comedy, *Love's Last Shift* in order to give himself a role. The play did establish him as both an actor and a playwright, and though some of his 25 plays were praised, his political adaptations of well known works met with much criticism.

Neither Steele nor Colley, or any other writer, made a career of writing sentimental comedies as the genre was popular for only a short time. In fact, all of the authors of sentimental comedy at this time wrote other forms including restoration comedy and tragedy. Sentimental comedies continued to coexist with more conventional laughing comedies such as Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) until the sentimental genre waned in the early 19th century.

Sentimental comedy was a reaction to the bawdy restoration comedy of the 17th and 18th centuries. Many believed that the sexually explicit behaviour encouraged by Charles II on the stage led to the demoralization of the English population outside the theatre. Many felt that restoration comedies, which started out ridiculing vice, appeared to support vice instead therefore becoming one of the leading causes of moral corruption. One of the leading environmental factors that made way for this new genre was Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, published in 1698. This essay signaled the public opposition to the supposed improprieties of plays staged during the previous three decades. Collier convincingly argued that the, "business of plays is to recommend Virtue, and discountenance Vice". Other sentimentalists took on the responsibility to moralize the stage in hopes of repairing the perceived damage of restoration comedies. These playwrights and theoreticians used the theatre to instruct rather than delight after puritan opposition to theatre grew from 1660 to 1698.

At the opening night of Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* at Drury Lane Theatre in January 1696 spectators experienced a new genre. They were genuinely surprised by the unexpected reconciliation and the joy of seeing this, "spread such an uncommon rapture of pleasure in the audience that never were spectators more happy in easing their minds by uncommon and repeated plaudits and honest tears." This enthusiasm was aroused by the virtue of the characters, creating a sense of astonishment in the audience because they allowed them to feel admiration for people like themselves. This feeling became the hallmark of sentimentalism. Richard Steele stated that sentimental comedies, "makes us approve ourselves more" and Denis Diderot advocated that sentimentalism helps spectators remember that all nature is inherently good. Sentimentalists met resistances with playwrights of true comedy, who also had a moral aim but strove to reach it by exhibiting characters from which the audience should take warning instead of emulate.

In England this sentimental comedy never amounted too much, even though it had for one of its earliest practitioners Steele, who claimed that a certain play of his had been "damned for its piety." But Steele, undeniable humorist as he was, lacked the instinctive touch of the born playwright, and his humour was too delicate to adjust itself easily to the huge theatres of London. Steele's is the only interesting name in all the list of writers for the English stage who intended to edify rather than to amuse and who did not regret that their comedies called for tears rather than laughter. That the liking for sentimental comedy was more transient in England than in France perhaps was due to the fact that the Londoners had already wept abundantly over dramas of an irregular species, not comedies of course, nor yet true tragedies, but dealing pathetically with the humbler sort of people.

If we needed proof of the temporary popularity of the ingenuous domestic drama which pretended to be comedy, although it preferred tears to laughter, we could find this in the fact that it tempted even Voltaire to essay it. Yet for sentimental comedy it would seem as though Voltaire had few natural qualifications, since he was deficient in sentiment, in pathos, and in humour. Wit he had in profusion,— indeed, he was the arch-wit of the century; and he was so amazingly clever that when he attempted tragedy he was able to make his wit masquerade even as poetry. In the drama, as in almost every other department of literature, Voltaire is the dominating figure of this time. He was very fond of the theatre, and he had possessed himself of some of the secrets of the dramaturgic art. He could devise an ingenious story; but he had no firm mastery of human motive. However artfully his plots might be put together, they were generally improbable in the main theme and arbitrary in the several episodes.

1.5 DOMESTIC TRAGEDY

Sentimental comedy influenced and became absorbed into a new genre called Domestic Tragedy beginning around the mid 18th century. These tragedies intended to use real life situations, settings, and prose to move an audience and foreshadowed the realism to come in the 19th century.

A domestic tragedy is a tragedy in which the tragic protagonists are ordinary middle-class or lowerclass individuals. This subgenre contrasts with classical and Neoclassical tragedy, in which the protagonists are of kingly or aristocratic rank and their downfall is an affair of state as well as a personal matter.

The ancient Greek theorist Aristotle had argued that tragedy should concern only great individuals with great minds and souls, because their catastrophic downfall would be more emotionally powerful to the audience; only comedy should depict middle-class people. Domestic tragedy breaks with Aristotle's precepts, taking as its subjects merchants or citizens whose lives have less consequence in the wider world.

In Britain, the first domestic tragedies were written in the English Renaissance. One of the first was *Arden of Faversham* (1592), depicting the murder of a bourgeois man by his adulterous wife. Other famous examples are *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1607), *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608), and *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). *Othello* can be classified as a domestic tragedy.

Domestic tragedy disappeared during the era of Restoration drama, when Neoclassicism dominated the stage, but it emerged again with the work of George Lillo and Sir Richard Steele in the eighteenth century.

Lillo revived the genre of play referred to as domestic tragedy (or bourgeois tragedy). Even though the Jacobean stage had flirted with merchant and artisan plays in the past (with, for example, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Heywood), *The London Merchant* was a significant change in theatre, and in tragedy in particular. Instead of dealing with heroes from classical literature or the Bible, presented with spectacle and grand stage effects, his subjects concerned everyday people, such as his audience, the theatre-going middle classes, and his tragedies were conducted on the intimate scale of households, rather than kingdoms.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the box below:

(moral values, middle class, sentimental, prose, comedy of manners, realism, emotions, domestic tragedy)

1. 18th-century drama reflected the concerns of the growing _____ audience, rather than the aristocracy.
2. The focus shifted from wit and satire to promoting _____ and virtue.
3. _____ comedy replaced the sharp and witty _____ of the Restoration period.
4. Sentimental comedy emphasized _____ over humor, aiming to teach moral lessons.
5. _____ tragedy focused on ordinary people and their struggles, unlike classical tragedy, which featured noble protagonists.
6. Playwrights increasingly used _____ instead of verse to create a sense of _____ in their works.

Answers

1. middle class
2. moral values
3. Sentimental, comedy of manners
4. emotions
5. Domestic tragedy
6. prose, realism

1.6 THE STAGECRAFT

The rules of the theatre, including that of the Three Unities, had been adopted in France in the seventeenth century largely because Corneille had given his adhesion to them, although they held him in bondage he could not but feel; and they were maintained in France in the eighteenth century very largely because of the authority of Voltaire, who was ever ready to reproach Corneille for every chance dereliction and to denounce Shakespeare for every open disregard of dramatic decorum. The weight of Voltaire's authority was acknowledged not only in France but throughout Europe. His plays were translated and acted in the various languages of civilization; and his opinions about the theatre were received with acquiescence in Italy, in Germany, and in England. It is true that in England, while the professed critics deplored the lamentable lack of taste shown by their rude forefathers, they themselves continued to enjoy the actual performances of the vigorous plays of the Elizabethan dramatists. It is true that in Italy the men-of-letters who accepted the rulings of Voltaire could take little more than an academic interest in the drama, since their theatre was not flourishing, and even the comedy-of-masks seemed to be wearing itself out. It is true that in Germany also the theatre was in a sorry condition, and that the German actors were often forced to perform in adaptations of French plays in default of native dramas worthy of consideration.

With his practicality and his perfect comprehension of the conditions of the modern theatre, Lessing made one important modification in the form of the drama which Molière had supplied. Where the Frenchman had no difficulty in concentrating the action into a single day and a single spot, the German, rejecting the Unity of Time and the Unity of Place, held himself at liberty to protract the action over so long a period as he might find advisable, and to change the scene as often as he might see fit. But Lessing perceived the advantage of not distracting the attention of the audience by changes of scene during the progress of the act; and he therefore made his removals from place to place while the curtain was down. He was apparently the first playwright who gave to each act its own scenery, not to be changed until the fall of the curtain again. Here he supplied an example now followed by the most accomplished playwrights of the twentieth century.

In this avoiding of the confusion resulting from frequent shifting of the scenery before the eyes of the spectators, Lessing was more modern than either Goethe or Schiller, both of whom appeared to hold that the example of Shakespeare warranted their returning to the more medieval practice of making as many changes of place as a loosely constructed plot might seem to require. Nowadays Goethe's surpassing genius is everywhere acknowledged,—his comprehensive and insatiable curiosity, his searching interrogation of life, his power of self-expression in almost every department of literature. But great poet as he was, a theatre-poet he was not. He was not a born playwright, seizing with unconscious certainty upon the necessary scenes, the *scènes à faire*, to bring out the conflict of will against will which was the heart of his theme. He lacked the instinctive perception of the exact effect likely to be produced on the audience, and he was deficient in the intuitive knowledge of the best method to appeal to the sympathies of the spectators. In fact, the time came in Goethe's career as a dramatic poet when he refused to reckon with the playgoers who might be present at the performance of his plays,—an attitude inconceivable on the part of a true dramatist and as remote as possible from that taken by Sophocles, by Shakespeare, and by Molière. When he was director of the theatre in Weimar he did not hesitate to assert that “the public must be controlled.”

It was Victor Hugo who once declared that the audience in a theatre can be divided into three classes,—the crowd which expects to see action, women, who are best pleased with passion, and thinkers, who are hoping to behold character. The main body of playgoers has always wanted to be amused by the spectacle of something happening before their eyes; and many of them, including nearly all women, desire to have their sympathies excited; but it is only a chosen few who go to the theatre seeking food for thought and ready, therefore, to welcome psychological subtlety and philosophic profundity. The great dramatists have been able to satisfy the demands of all three classes; *Oedipus the King*, *Hamlet*, and *Tartuffe* were popular with the plain people from their first performance. But Goethe seemed to care for the approval of only the smallest class of the three; and only in *Faust* did he reveal the dramaturgic skill needed to devise an action interesting enough in itself to bear whatever burden of philosophy he might wish to lay upon it.

A Theatre-poet Schiller was, even if Goethe was not; yet Schiller's first drama, the *Robbers*, was not written for performance,—although it soon found its way to the stage-door, after the poet had somewhat restrained its boyish extravagance. Schiller rejected the model he could have found in Lessing's tragedies of middle-class life, a model too severe for the tumultuous turbulence of the storm-and-stress period. He followed Goethe, who, in *Goetz*, had claimed the right to be formless as Shakespeare was supposed to be. There is in the *Robbers* a certain resemblance to the crude Elizabethan tragedy-of-blood with its perfervid grandiloquence and its frequent assassination.

In this first play Schiller's stagecraft was primitive and unworthy; he shifted his scenes with wanton carelessness, and he let his absurd villain turn himself inside out in interminable soliloquies. But however reckless the technique, the play revealed Schiller's abundant possession of genuine dramatic power. The conflict of contending passions was set before the spectator in scenes full of fire and action. The antithesis of Moor's two sons, one strenuously noble and the other unspeakably vile, was rather forced, but it was at least obvious even to the stupidest playgoer. The hero lacked common sense, no doubt; but he had energy to spare; and at the end he rose to tragic elevation in his willingness to expiate his wrong-doing.

Dramatist as Schiller was by native gift, he was but a novice in the theatre when the *Robbers* was written, and it was the fitting of that play to the actual stage which drew his attention to the inexorable conditions of theatrical performance. In his later dramas, in *William Tell*, for example, and in *Mary Stuart*, the technique is less elementary and more in accord with the practice of the contemporary playhouse. But Schiller appears to have been thinking rather of his readers than of the spectators massed and expectant in the theatre. He seems to have taken no keen interest in spying out the secrets of the stage. His plays are what they are by sheer dramatic power, and

not by reason of any adroitness of technique. Indeed, in Schiller's day the German theatre was almost in chaos; and probably he never saw any satisfactory performance of a dramatic masterpiece, German or French or English, until he went to Weimar.

Despite his limitations, Schiller was the one dramatic poet of the eighteenth century who is to be compared, not with Sophocles and Shakespeare, the supreme masters, but rather with Calderon and Hugo. He lacked their conscious control of theatrical effect, but he had something of their rhetorical luxuriance and their exuberant lyricism. He was intellectually deeper than the Spaniard and he was more masculine than the Frenchman. Schiller's influence on the later development of the drama would have been fuller if his structure had been more modern and if he had profited earlier by the example of Lessing, emulating the great critic's certainty of artistic aim and imitating his rigorous selfcontrol.

1.7 THE MELODRAMA

Most of the German dramas of this period of unrest were not intended for the actual theatre, although many of them did manage to get themselves acted here and there. With all their wild bombast and with their entire overstrained emotionalism, they were not without significance and a vitality of their own, a freshness of self-expression wholly lacking on the German stage before Lessing had inspired it. If these dramas had been controlled by something of Lessing's self-restraint, if they had been less excessive in their violence, they might have afforded shelter for the growth of a dramatic literature native to the soil and national in spirit. But they were not healthy enough, and they soon fell into decay; and what did burgeon from their matted roots was the melodrama of Kotzebue, with its exaggeration of motive, its hollow affectation, and its tawdry pathos. Kotzebue's taste is dubious and his methods now outworn; but his play-making gift is as undeniable as that of Heywood before him or that of Scribe after him. *Misanthropy and Repentance*, known in England as the *Stranger*, has caused as many tears to flow as *A Woman Killed with Kindness*; and whereas Heywood's simply pathetic play was known to his contemporaries only in the land of its language, Kotzebue's turgid treatment of the same theme was performed in all the tongues of Europe, in Paris and London and New York as well as in Vienna and Berlin.

Melodrama bears much the same relation to tragedy and to the loftier type of serious play that farce does to pure comedy. When we can recall more readily what the persons of a play do than what they are, then the probability is that the piece if gay is a farce, and if grave a melodrama. Even among the tragedies of the Greeks we can detect more than one drama which was melodramatic rather than truly tragic; and not a few of the powerful plays of the Elizabethans were essentially melodramas. So also were some of Corneille's, though they masqueraded as tragedies and conformed to the rules of the pseudo-classics.

Yet it was only in the eighteenth century that melodrama plainly differentiated itself from every other dramatic species.

The "tradesmen's tragedies" of Lillo and Moore in England and the tearful-comedies of La Chaussée and Sedaine in France had helped along its development; but it was Kotzebue in Germany who was able at last to reveal its large possibilities. In the pieces which the German playwright was prolific in bringing forth there was something exactly suited to the temper of the times; and this helped to make his vogue cosmopolitan. He was the earliest play-maker whose dramas were instantly plagiarized everywhere; and in this he was the predecessor of Scribe and Sardou. He influenced men like Lewis in England and Pixérécourt and Ducange in France. In the works of the Parisian playwrights there was a deftness of touch not visible in the pieces of Kotzebue, who was heavy-handed. It was this French modification of eighteenth century German melodrama which was to serve as a model for French romanticist drama in the nineteenth century. Theatre historians usually considered the runaway success of *The Stranger*, the English version of *Menschenhass und Reue* (*Misanthropy and Repentance* by Kotzebue), in both England (where it opened in 1798) and the United States as one of the harbingers of the emerging popularity

of theatrical melodrama, which dominated European and American stages for the first seventy-five years of the nineteenth century.

1.8 GLOSSARY

- Decorum – Proper and acceptable behaviour in art or society.
- Eschew – To deliberately avoid or reject.
- Symmetry – Balanced and proportionate structure.
- Imitation – Copying an existing model or style.
- Sentimentalism – Excessive emphasis on emotion and moral feeling.
- Pathos – A quality that evokes pity or sadness.
- Bourgeois – Relating to the middle class.
- Protagonist – The main character in a play or story.
- Grandiloquence – Pompous or overly elaborate language.
- Tawdry – Cheap, showy, and lacking real value.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

A century is only an artificial period of time adopted for the sake of convenience and corresponding to no logical division of literary history. Nonetheless we are able to perceive in one century or another certain marked characteristics. No doubt every century is more or less an era of transition; but surely the eighteenth century seems to deserve the description better than most. For nearly three quarters of its career, it appears to us as prosaic in many of its aspects, dull and gray and uninteresting; but it was ever a battleground for contending theories of literature and of life. In the drama more especially it was able to behold the establishment and the disestablishment of pseudo-classicism.

At its beginning the influence of the French had won wide-spread acceptance for the rules with their insistence on the Three Unities and on the separation of the comic and the tragic. At its end every rule was being violated wantonly; and the drama itself seemed almost as lawless as the bandits it delighted in bringing on the stage so abundantly. Throughout Europe, except in France, the theatre had broken its bonds; and even in France, the last stronghold of the theorists, freedom was to come early in the nineteenth century. Lessing had undermined the fortress of pseudo-classicism; and the walls of its last citadel were to fall with a crash at the first blast on the trumpet of Hernani.

1.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The Restoration period's most characteristic drama, 'the comedy of manners' was gradually replaced by 'sentimental drama' in response to the shifts in the audience's tastes. Which of the following sentences best represents the difference between these two types of comedies?
 - (a) Comedy of manners exposes human follies to laughter, sentimental comedies provoke sympathetic tears for the character's faults.
 - (b) Comedy of manners was commercially successful while sentimental comedies were not.
 - (c) Comedy of manners was critically successful while sentimental comedies were not.
 - (d) Comedy of manners were written in rhymed couplets while sentimental comedies were written in blank verse.

Ans. (a)

2. What is a Melodramatic play?
- (a) A play which has predominance of pity.
 - (b) A play which has predominance of violence and heinous crimes.
 - (c) A play which has boisterous laughter.
 - (d) A play in which the hero is the villain.

Ans. (b)

3. Which of the following dramatists is a writer of Melodramas?

- (a) George Etherege
- (b) William Congreve
- (c) John Webster
- (d) William Wycherley

Ans. (c)

1.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate Joseph Addison as a dramatist.

Ans. In 1713 Addison produced the tragedy *Cato*, part of which had been in manuscript as early as 1703. It is of little merit and shows that Addison, whatever his other qualities may be, is no dramatist. He also attempted an opera, *Rosamond* (1707), which was a failure and the prose comedy *The Drummer* (1715) is said to be his too. If it is, it adds nothing to his reputation.

2. Discuss Richard Steele as a dramatist.

Ans. Steele wrote some prose comedies, the best of which are *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, *The Tender Husband* and *The Conscious Lovers*. They follow in general scheme the Restoration comedies, but are without the grossness and impudence of their models. Indeed, Steele's importance as a dramatist rests on his foundation of the sentimental comedy, avowedly moral and pious in aim and tone. In places his plays are lively and reflect much of Steele's amiability of temper.

3. Examine the prose comedies of Oliver Goldsmith.

Ans. Goldsmith wrote two prose comedies, both of which rank high among their class. The first called *Good Natured Man* is not so good as the second *She Stoops to Conquer*. Goldsmith has a real sense of character, especially of the pleasantly grotesque, comic invention, natural sentiment and amusing dialogue. He despised the sentimental comedy, ridiculed it and introduced in his plays comic situation, humor and character all of which the sentimental comedy lacked.

4. Trace the replacement of Restoration Comedy with Sentimental Comedy in the eighteenth Century.

5. The Comedy of Manners is as plainly the kind of drama best suited to the limitation of the eighteenth century. Discuss.

6. How does Domestic tragedy break with Aristotle's precepts? Discuss.

1.12 SUGGESTED READING

Fisk, Deborah Payne, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Owen, Susan J. *A Companion to Restoration Drama*. Wiley, 2001.

“*18th Century Theatre: Sentimental Comedy and Bourgeois Drama*.” Fiveable, written by the Fiveable Content Team, last updated September 2025, <https://fiveable.me/introduction-theatre-arts/unit-4/18th-century-theatre-sentimental-comedy-bourgeois-drama/study-guide/lbaPLFYscWOuEONQ>.

LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF DRAMA FROM
THE RESTORATION UPTO THE 20TH CENTURY

NINETEENTH CENTURY DRAMA

STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 2.3 Melodrama
- 2.4 Romanticism and the Dramatic Subject
 - 2.4.1 Romanticism in Germany and France
- 2.5 Meiningen Ensemble and Richard Wagner
- 2.6 Theatre in Britain
- 2.7 Naturalism and Realism
- 2.8 Changes in the Methods of Theatrical Production
- 2.9 Boulevard Theatre
- 2.10 The Audience in the Theatre
- 2.11 Glossary
- 2.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.13 Multiple Choice Questions
- 2.14 Examination Oriented Questions
- 2.15 Suggested Reading

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century theatre describes a wide range of movements in the theatrical culture of Europe and the United States in the 19th century. In the West, they include Romanticism, melodrama, the wellmade plays of Scribe and Sardou, the farces of Feydeau, the problem plays of Naturalism and Realism, Wagner's operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Gilbert and Sullivan's plays and operas, Wilde's drawing-room comedies, Symbolism, and proto-Expressionism in the late works of August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen.

Several important technical innovations were introduced between 1875 and 1914. First gas lighting and then electric lights, introduced in London's Savoy Theatre in 1881, replaced candlelight. The elevator stage was first installed in the Budapest Opera House in 1884. This allowed entire sections of the stage to be raised, lowered, or tilted to give depth and levels to the scene. The revolving stage was introduced to Europe by Karl Lautenschläger at the Residenz Theatre, Munich in 1896.

2.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

This lesson introduces the learner with the various trends prevalent in the nineteenth century drama in England. Further it acquaints the readers with the various changes taking place in theatrical world due to technological advancements.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Explain melodrama – Describe its exaggerated emotions, stock characters, and use of music for dramatic effect.
2. Discuss Romanticism in drama – Identify its focus on imagination, emotion, and individualism.
3. Analyze naturalism and realism – Compare their emphasis on everyday life, social issues, and believable characters.
4. Describe boulevard theatre – Explain its role in entertainment, focusing on light-hearted, commercial plays.

2.3 MELODRAMA

Beginning in France after the theatre monopolies were abolished in 1791 during the French Revolution, melodrama became the most popular theatrical form. Although monopolies and subsidies were reinstated under Napoleon, it continued to be extremely popular and brought in larger audiences than the state-sponsored drama and operas. Although melodrama can be traced back to classical Greece, the term *mélodrame* did not appear until 1766 and only became popular after 1800. August von Kotzebue's *Misanthropy and Repentance* (1798) is often considered the first melodramatic play. The plays of Kotzebue and René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt established melodrama as the dominant dramatic form of the early 19th century. David Grimsted, in his book *Melodrama Unveiled* (1968), argues that:

Its conventions were false, its language stilted and commonplace, its characters stereotypes, and its morality and theology gross simplifications. Yet its appeal was great and understandable. It took the lives of common people seriously and paid much respect to their superior purity and wisdom. [...] And its moral parable struggled to reconcile social fears and life's awesomeness with the period's confidence in absolute moral standards, man's upward progress, and a benevolent providence that insured the triumph of the pure.

In Paris, the 19th century saw a flourishing of melodrama in the many theatres that were located on the popular Boulevard du Crime, especially in the Gaîté. All this was to come to an end, however, when most of these theatres were demolished during the rebuilding of Paris by Baron Haussmann in 1862.

By the end of the 19th century, the term melodrama had nearly exclusively narrowed down to a specific genre of salon entertainment: more or less rhythmically spoken words (often poetry)—not sung, sometimes more or less enacted, at least with some dramatic structure or plot—synchronized to an accompaniment of music (usually piano). It was looked down on as a genre for authors and composers of lesser stature (probably also the reason why virtually no realisations of the genre are still remembered).

2.4 ROMANTICISM AND THE DRAMATIC SUBJECT

Until the nineteenth century, most European playwrights drew their tragic plots from ancient myths or legendary history and their comic material from a repertory of stock characters and attitudes. These choices of dramatic subjects reflect the priorities that endured from the days of Periclean Athens to the middle of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, these choices demonstrate a belief that truly important things happened only

to those who were high on the social scale; on the other, they show that artists tested their abilities not so much through innovation as by imitation. Thus familiar plots and characters continued to be worth writing about; new talent revealed itself by finding new ways to dramatize old truths.

By the 1750s, however, the same changes that were brewing political revolution began to affect the drama. More and more plays began focusing on the trials and tribulations of those on the lower rungs of the social ladder. From this so-called bourgeois drama emerged a transformation that culminates in one of the great periods of theatrical activity, the modern era, which begins around 1870.

Interest in the experiences of ordinary people reached a high point with Romanticism and its exaltation of the common place. The poor invited little notice in pre-eighteenth century literature; when nineteenth century writers turned their attention toward these lives, they began by “romanticizing” them. However dirty and boring common life was, the Romantic artist saw in it a trace of Edenic innocence. Lives not lived in palaces were somehow perceived as being unspoiled.

If the dramatic subjects chosen by the early Romantics were wider ranging than those chosen by the ancients, the treatment the subjects received, as we have suggested, was far from realistic. The tendency to idealize the poor also led to the glorification of the outlaw, a sign of the revolutions that were to come. Added to this, a newly self-conscious nationalism found expression in a variety of historical dramas that extolled two often-lost causes, liberty and nationhood.

2.4.1 Romanticism in Germany and France

Romantic ideas emerged early in Germany in the work of three major playwrights: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Christophe Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. These writers articulated new theoretical justifications for their choice of dramatic material. As admirers of Shakespeare, to whom the neoclassicists had condescended on account of his indifference to rules, Lessing and Schiller in particular championed diversity and freedom in theatrical texts.

The most prolific playwright of the three, Schiller especially widened the range of theatrical plots. When he turned to the past for his subjects, he did not select the mythological figures who attracted Goethe, but rather the patriots of relatively recent European history. Prime among them are Joan of Arc, to whom the title *The Maid of Orleans* (1801) refers, and William Tell, the *Swiss National Hero* (1804).

In Germany, there was a trend toward historic accuracy in costumes and settings, a revolution in theatre architecture, and the introduction of the theatrical form of German Romanticism. Influenced by trends in 19th century philosophy and the visual arts, German writers were increasingly fascinated with their Teutonic past and had a growing sense of nationalism. The plays of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and other *Sturm und Drang* playwrights, inspired a growing faith in feeling and instinct as guides to moral behaviour. Romantics borrowed to Romantics, art is of enormous significance because it gives eternal truths a concrete, material form that the limited human sensory apparatus may apprehend. Among those who called themselves Romantics during this period, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck were the most deeply concerned with theatre. After a time, Romanticism was adopted in France with the plays of Victor Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Musset, and George Sand. By the 1840s, however, enthusiasm for Romantic drama had faded in France and a new “Theatre of Common Sense” replaced it.

2.5 MEININGEN ENSEMBLE AND RICHARD WAGNER

In Germany, drama entered a state of decline from which it did not recover until the 1890s. The major playwrights of the period were Otto Ludwig and Gustav Freytag. The lack of new dramatists was not keenly felt because the plays of Shakespeare, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller were prominent in the repertory. The most important theatrical force in later 19th century Germany was that of George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and his Meiningen Ensemble, under the direction of Ludwig Chronegk. The Ensemble's productions are often considered the most historically accurate of the 19th century, although his primary goal was to serve the interests of the playwright. The Ensemble's productions utilised detailed, historically accurate costumes and furniture, something that was unprecedented in Europe at the time. The Meiningen Ensemble stands at the beginning of the new movement toward unified production (or what Richard Wagner would call the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) and the rise of the director (at the expense of the actor) as the dominant artist in theatre-making.

The Meiningen Ensemble traveled throughout Europe from 1874–1890 and met with unparalleled success wherever they went. Audiences had grown tired with regular, shallow entertainment theatre and were beginning to demand a more creatively and intellectually stimulating form of expression that the Ensemble was able to provide. Therefore, the Meiningen Ensemble can be seen as the forerunners of the art-theatre movement which appeared in Europe at the end of the 1880s.

Richard Wagner (1813–1883) rejected the contemporary trend toward realism and argued that the dramatist should be a myth maker who portrays an ideal world through the expression of inner impulses and aspirations of a people. Wagner used music to defeat performers' personal whims. The melody and tempo of music allowed him to have greater personal control over performance than he would with spoken drama. As with the Meiningen Ensemble, Wagner believed that the author-composer should supervise every aspect of production to unify all the elements into a "master art work." Wagner also introduced a new type of auditorium that abolished the side boxes, pits, and galleries that were a prominent feature of most European theatres and replaced them with a 1,745 seat fan-shaped auditorium that was 50 feet (15 m) wide at the proscenium and 115 feet (35 m) at the rear. This allowed every seat in the auditorium to enjoy a full view of the stage and meant that there were no "good" seats.

2.6 THEATRE IN BRITAIN

In Britain, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron were the most important literary dramatists of their time (although Shelley's plays were not performed until later in the century). Shakespeare was enormously popular, and began to be performed with texts closer to the original, as the drastic rewriting of 17th and 18th century performing versions for the theatre (as opposed to his plays in book form, which were also widely read) was gradually removed over by the first half of the century. In the minor theatres, burletta and melodrama were the most popular. Kotzebue's plays were translated into English and Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* was the first of many English melodramas. Pierce Egan, Douglas William Jerrold, Edward Fitzball, James Roland MacLaren and John Baldwin Buckstone initiated a trend towards more contemporary and rural stories in preference to the usual historical or fantastical melodramas. James Sheridan Knowles and Edward George Bulwer-Lytton established a "gentlemanly" drama that began to re-establish the former prestige of the theatre with the aristocracy.

Melodramas, light comedies, operas, Shakespeare and classic English drama, pantomimes, translations of French farces and, from the 1860s, French operettas, continued to be popular, together with Victorian burlesque. The most successful dramatists were James Planché and Dion Boucicault, whose penchant for making the latest scientific inventions important elements in his plots exerted considerable influence on theatrical production. His first big success, *London Assurance* (1841) was a comedy in the style of Sheridan, but he wrote in various styles, including melodrama. T. W. Robertson wrote popular domestic comedies and introduced a more naturalistic style of acting and stagecraft to the British stage in the 1860s. So successful were the comic operas of Gilbert and

Sullivan, such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) and *The Mikado* (1885), that they greatly expanded the audience for musical theatre. This, together with much improved street lighting and transportation in London and New York led to a late Victorian and Edwardian theatre building boom in the West End and on Broadway. At the end of the century, Edwardian musical comedy came to dominate the musical stage. In the 1890s the comedies of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw offered sophisticated social comment and were very popular.

The Closet Drama

At the height of the Romantic period, just as more elaborate theatrical performance became possible, many poets turned to neo-Shakespearean dramatic verse to write plays that they never expected to see performed. Inspired by the Romantic quest for unreachable goals, these writers preferred not to concern themselves with the practical problems of staging plays and sought instead to explore philosophical issues in poetic dialogue that would have defeated credible acting before an audience. Such plays, written to be read rather than performed, are known as closet dramas. Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron all wrote in this form.

2.7 NATURALISM AND REALISM

Naturalism, a theatrical movement born out of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and contemporary political and economic conditions, found its main proponent in Émile Zola. His essay "Naturalism in the Theatre" (1881) argued that poetry is everywhere instead of in the past or abstraction: "There is more poetry in the little apartment of a bourgeois than in all the empty worm-eaten palaces of history."

The realisation of Zola's ideas was hindered by a lack of capable dramatists writing naturalist drama. André Antoine emerged in the 1880s with his *Théâtre Libre* that was only open to members and therefore was exempted from censorship. He quickly won the approval of Zola and began to stage Naturalistic works and other foreign realistic pieces. Antoine was unique in his set design as he built sets with the "fourth wall" intact, only deciding which wall to remove later. The most important French playwrights of this period were given first hearing by Antoine including Georges Porto-Riche, François de Curel, and Eugène Brieux.

The work of Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero initiated a new direction on the English stage. While their work paved the way, the development of more significant drama owes itself most to the playwright Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen was born in Norway in 1828. He wrote 25 plays, the most famous of which are *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* shocked conservatives: Nora's departure in *A Doll's House* was viewed as an attack on family and home, while the allusions to venereal disease and sexual misconduct in *Ghosts* were considered deeply offensive to standards of public decency. Ibsen refined Scribe's well-made play formula to make it more fitting to the realistic style. He provided a model for writers of the realistic school. In addition, his works *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) evoke a sense of mysterious forces at work in human destiny, which was to be a major theme of symbolism and the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd".

After Ibsen, British theatre experienced revitalization with the work of George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and (in fact from 1900) John Galsworthy. Unlike most of the gloomy and intensely serious work of their contemporaries, Shaw and Wilde wrote primarily in the comic form.

2.8 CHANGES IN THE METHODS OF THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century playwrights proved as eager as nineteenth-century novelists to emulate the camera, but major innovations in technology were required before photographically accurate scene pictures could be

mounted on stage. By the early 1800s, theatres could be equipped with substantial backstage storage space and revolving turntables; no longer did plays have to be presented against a single generalized painted backdrop. Gas lights were introduced into some theatres in the 1820s and by midcentury, lighting effects could be overseen by a technician stationed at a central control board. Sunlight could become moonlight and summer turn into fall in the course of a single performance; specific geographical locales could be reproduced on stage and shifted with ease.

At first, these resources were exploited in only a few extravagant productions. A famous early treatment of Schiller's *Maid of Orleans* recreated the French countryside and churches of Joan's childhood, most spectacularly in a coronation scene that had hundreds of actors and musicians on stage in full view of the audience. A London production in the 1850s of *Sardanapalus*, written by Lord Byron, the English Romantic poet, actually set up on the stage a replica of an ancient Babylonian palace that seemed to be consumed by fire at every performance, thanks to intricate scenic construction and lighting devices.

In other words, the stage in the mid-nineteenth century was capable of providing audiences with the large-scale panoramas that we associate with historical films. The embrace of limits that had fueled the imagination of earlier dramatists had been eclipsed by a fascination for decorative effect. This era of extravagant staging is notable as well for a new emphasis on the actor as celebrity, for star performers quickly learned to exploit the sophisticated lighting boards by commanding spotlights to follow their every movement onstage. Offstage, actors hired railroad cars and crossed Europe and America in hugely publicized personal tours. Stage image and star power drew so much attention that an entirely new theatrical professional, the director, emerged. The director's job was to coordinate the performances of self-absorbed actors and to oversee every detail of the expensive and complicated productions audiences increasingly demanded.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks using the correct words from the box below:

(melodrama, realism, emotion, naturalism, spectacle, boulevard theatre)

1. _____ focused on exaggerated emotions, hero-villain conflicts, and dramatic _____ to engage the audience.
2. Romantic drama emphasized imagination and intense _____, often drawing from nature and folklore.
3. _____ and _____ aimed to depict real life, with characters shaped by their environment and social conditions.

Answers

1. Melodrama, spectacle
2. Emotion
3. Realism, naturalism

2.9 BOULEVARD THEATRE

Mid-nineteenth century Europe luxuriated in the profits of industrial progress; not only in France, but also in England (where this period is named after the long-lived Queen Victoria) and elsewhere on the continent, new ruling classes based on wealth rather than intellect or inheritance wielded power. The theatre, always a barometer of social change, celebrated its achievements, and monied audiences gloried in a style of drama that catered to their tastes. Since Parisian tastes were especially crucial to the development of modern drama, we will focus here on the evolution of the French theatrical scene.

Playwrights themselves became entrepreneurs in this climate, giving the public a saleable product. Unlike the realist novelists of this period who satirized the bourgeoisie, the dramatists Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), the younger Alexandre Dumas (1824-95), and Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) pandered to it. Scribe, Dumas, and Sardou wrote literally hundreds of plays that exemplify Boulevard Theatre. This term, like the comparable American designation, Broadway Theatre, denotes plays written less for art than for profit.

In place of myth and history, of tragic heroes and nationalist firebrands, Boulevard dramatists and other playwrights of the mid-nineteenth century focused on comfortable middle-class lives. Drama in the pre-Romantic era, as we have seen, had begun to extend the range of subjects to include sympathetic portraits of humble and ordinary people. In the conservative middle of the century, however, melodrama, farce, and what were called *well-made plays* concentrated on the upper middle-class world of privilege funded by money and power rather than birth. The *nouveaux riches* were both envied and disdained by the old aristocrats, who responded with a heightened snobbery and avoided the gathering places where the new elite went to amuse themselves.

Well-made plays actually were the ancestors of the contemporary television series. Rarely exploring character development, the genre deployed instead stock figures involved in intricate plots that lead to last-minute dramatic revelations. Sacrificing human probability for theatrical effectiveness, these plays typically include a series of unbelievable coincidences that bring long-lost relatives together, or compromising letters that expose a villain's true motives. In other words, after an initial fright, true love and virtue (easily recognized categories in the relatively simplistic moral universe of melodrama and the well-made play) are rewarded in the end. In much the same way, complex dilemmas are resolved handily in the length of time available (minus several minutes for commercials) in the half- and full-hour format of prime-time TV slots. Audiences in every era have found these exciting but unchallenging plays eminently satisfying, for they provide evidence — if any beyond their own good fortune were required — that the deserving prosper in this world.

2.10 THE AUDIENCE IN THE THEATRE

The superior technical resources of the theatres built in the nineteenth century depended in large part upon the proscenium arch, which framed the stage and created a clean break between the playing area and the audience. Associated with the development of fixed perspective in Renaissance Italy, proscenium arches made possible the visually convincing realistic backdrops that proliferated in the 1800s. The first permanent theatre with a built-in proscenium arch was created for Cardinal Richelieu's palace in 1641. As new theatres were built throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, proscenium arches got higher and thicker and more imposing. Paradoxically, a device that originally promised to draw the viewer's eye into the playing area had the opposite effect of detaching audiences from the action.

The amphitheatres of ancient Greece, the thrust stages of Elizabethan England, the court theatre rooms of classical India or seventeenth-century Europe, indeed almost every theatrical structure that the world had known up until this time had flourished by uniting spectators and actors in dramatic performances with important consequences for all the participants. The nineteenth-century European auditorium, however, had evolved into a place where socially ambitious members of the audience had better views of each other than of the stage. Hoping to lure customers to their theatres, owners installed upholstered chairs in place of wooden benches and began selling tickets in advance for these comfortable accommodations. This apparent improvement actually meant that people began going to the theatre at times when they had committed themselves to do so rather than when they most desired to do so.

Furthermore, the most expensive seats often afforded the worst perspective for watching the play itself; patrons paid dearly to occupy walled-off boxes with movable armchairs and private anterooms that circled the auditorium in several tiers. On the extreme sides of the stage, often in box seats built into the proscenium itself

and facing toward the central royal box rather than the performance space, expensively gowned and bejeweled women displayed themselves to the gaze of those who sat opposite them. Other theatre goers, also more intent on personal matters than dramatic production, could sit in the dark recesses of the box and whisper to each other. During the lengthy intermissions, visits were exchanged from box to box; when the next act began, viewers often had moved from their own seats to be near those they had really come to see at the theatre.

So commonplace were these games of musical chairs that a theatre scene became a staple of nineteenth-century novels. Authors used their characters' attitude toward theatrical presentation as gauges of moral worth. Tolstoy, for instance, signals that Ivan Ilych has learned to detect the falsity of materialism by showing him cringe when his wife and daughter leave him on his deathbed to go see the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt.

Probably the ultimate theatrical form of the century was opera. In the size of its gestures and its direct appeal to the senses through music, dance, and spectacle, the opera filled ever-larger theatres. When Flaubert's Madame Bovary goes to see a performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, she is so swept away by the music and the melodramatic tale that she almost loses control of her senses. Indeed, it is no accident that many of the libretti (or scripts) of the greatest operas of the century were texts written by Scribe and Sardou, specialists in lifting their audiences out of humdrum reality, thrilling and flattering them at the same time.

The combination of the proscenium arch, the heavy curtain traditionally hung from it, and the darkened auditorium so segregated performers from audiences that the public's shift of attention from stage action to social interplay had become a formidable challenge to playwrights. Modern theatre artists have sought to restore the spectators' vital role in two diametrically opposed ways, either by disregarding the barrier separating audiences from actors or by insisting on it. Dramatic realists treat the space before the stage as the so-called fourth wall, with audiences in effect spying on the activities of their neighbours for the night, the actors appearing before them in essentially realistic settings. Other playwrights emphasize the gap between theatrical illusion and everyday reality. The early modern dramatists forced complacent and self-absorbed theatre goers to recognize the dilemmas of their own lives in the staged plays performed before them; the later modern dramatists force theatre goers to take account of the distance between them and the actors in front of them. In each phase of modern drama, however, the playwright strives to make theatrical experience integral to the life of the viewer and not simply a pleasant entertainment.

2.11 GLOSSARY

Monopolies – Exclusive control over an activity or service.

Melodrama – A dramatic form with exaggerated characters and emotions.

Reinstated – Restored or put back into effect.

Exaltation – The act of praising or glorifying highly.

Romanticizing – Portraying something in an idealized or unrealistic way.

Nationalism – Strong identification with and pride in one's nation.

Gesamtkunstwerk – A “total work of art” combining all art forms into one.

Naturalism – A style showing life realistically, influenced by science and society.

Proscenium arch – The architectural frame separating stage and audience.

Entrepreneurs – People who organize and run businesses for profit.

2.12 LET US SUM UP

The romantic movement did not blossom in French drama until the 1820s, and then primarily in the work of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas père, while in England the great Romantic poets did not produce important drama, although both Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley were practitioners of the closet drama. Burlesque and mediocre melodrama reigned supreme on the English stage.

Although melodrama was aimed solely at producing superficial excitement, its development, coupled with the emergence of realism in the 19th century, resulted in more serious drama. Initially, the melodrama dealt in such superficially exciting materials as the gothic castle with its mysterious lord for a villain, but gradually the characters and settings moved closer to the realities of contemporary life.

The concern for generating excitement led to a more careful consideration of plot construction, reflected in the smoothly contrived climaxes of the “well-made” plays of Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou of France and Arthur Wing Pinero of England. The work of Émile Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils combined the drama of ideas with the “well-made” play. Realism had perhaps its most profound expression in the works of the great 19th-century Russian dramatists: Nikolai Gogol, A. N. Ostrovsky, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and Maxim Gorky. Many of the Russian dramatists emphasized character and satire rather than plot in their works.

Related to realism is naturalism, which can be defined as a selective realism emphasizing the more sordid and pessimistic aspects of life. An early forerunner of this style in the drama is Georg Büchner’s powerful tragedy *Danton’s Death* (1835), and an even earlier suggestion may be seen in the pessimistic romantic tragedies of Heinrich von Kleist. Friedrich Hebbel wrote grimly naturalistic drama in the middle of the 19th century, but the naturalistic movement is most commonly identified with the “slice-of-life” theory of Émile Zola, which had a profound effect on 20th-century playwrights.

Henrik Ibsen of Norway brought to a climax the realistic movement of the 19th century and also served as a bridge to 20th-century symbolism. His realistic dramas of ideas surpass other such works because they blend a complex plot, a detailed setting, and middle-class yet extraordinary characters in an organic whole. Ibsen’s later plays, such as *The Master Builder* (1892), are symbolic, marking a trend away from realism that was continued by August Strindberg’s dream plays, with their emphasis on the spiritual, and by the plays of the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck, who incorporated into drama the theories of the symbolist poets.

While these anti realistic developments took place on the Continent, two playwrights were making unique contributions to English theatre. Oscar Wilde produced comedies of manners that compare favourably with the works of Congreve, and George Bernard Shaw brought the play of ideas to fruition with penetrating intelligence and singular wit.

2.13 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Why is a Poetic play so called?
 - (a) Because it is written in verse.
 - (b) Because it is written only by a poet.
 - (c) Because it is meant to be read as a poem and not meant to be acted.
 - (d) Because it has a high poetic imagery.
- Ans. (c)

2. Why is a Poetic play also called a Closet play?
- (a) Because it is a closed play.
 - (b) Because it can be read and enjoyed in a closet without any company.
 - (c) Because it is very short.
 - (d) Because it can be acted privately in one's own house.

Ans. (b)

2.14 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the condition of drama in the early nineteenth century.

Ans. After Sheridan and Goldsmith the drama rapidly decayed. There are several reasons for this. There was a gulf between the men of letters and the theatre which had grown vulgar. The age did not lend itself to dramatic expression. It was fundamentally critical, romantic, reflective and philosophic.

2. What type of drama was popular in the early nineteenth century?

Ans. In this period the Closet drama was popular. The romantic poets were set dramatists of the high order. The poetical plays make the first appearance of Closet drama—that is, of drama which is intended to be read and is not written for representation on stage. The prevailing note of the period was lyrical and not dramatic. Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote plays but they were not effective either as play or as literature. Keats, Southey and Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* are fine poems though not successful. The *Cenci* by Shelley was written for the stage and it is the only stage play of real merit though not without its defects.

- 3. Trace the evolution of the French theatrical scene.
- 4. Comment on the popularity of Meiningen Ensemble and Richard Wagner.
- 5. Write a note on theatre in Britain in the nineteenth century.
- 6. Comment on the superior technical resources of the theatres built in the nineteenth century.

2.15 SUGGESTED READING

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LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF DRAMA FROM
THE RESTORATION UPTO THE 20TH CENTURY

TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA

STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Introduction
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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Twentieth-century theatre describes a period of great change within the theatrical culture of the 20th century. There was a widespread challenge to long established rules surrounding theatrical representation; resulting in the development of many new forms of theatre, including Modernism, Expressionism, Impressionism, political theatre and other forms of Experimental theatre, as well as the continuing development of already established theatrical forms like naturalism and realism.

Throughout the century, the artistic reputation of theatre improved after being derided throughout the 19th century. However, the growth of other media, especially film, has resulted in a diminished role within culture at large. In light of this change, theatrical artists have been forced to seek new ways to engage with society. The various answers offered in response to this have prompted the transformations that make up its modern history.

Developments in areas like Gender theory and Postmodern philosophy identified and created subjects for the theatre to explore. These sometimes explicitly meta-theatrical performances were meant to confront the audience's perceptions and assumptions in order to raise questions about their society. These challenging and influential plays characterized much of the final two decades of the 20th century.

Although largely developing in Europe and North America through the beginning of the century, the next 50 years saw an embrace of non-Western theatrical forms. Influenced by the dismantling of empires and the continuing development of post-colonial theory, many new artists utilized elements of their own cultures and societies to create a diversified theatre.

3.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The main objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the characteristic features of twentieth century drama. Further it provides brief historical background and various trends popular in the theatre of twentieth century.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the blend of realism and myth in modern drama – Analyze how playwrights used mythical elements within realistic settings to explore human nature.
2. Discuss political theatre and war – Examine how drama reflected political ideologies, conflicts, and social change.
3. Analyze modern drama and social realism – Identify how playwrights depicted working-class struggles, social injustice, and everyday life.
4. Describe avant-garde movements – Explain the impact of surrealism, expressionism, and epic theatre in challenging traditional storytelling.

3.3 BACKGROUND

The early twentieth century denoted the split between 'frocks and frills' drama and serious works, following in the footsteps of many other European countries, "In Britain the impact of these continental innovations was delayed by a conservative theatre establishment until the late 1950s and 1960s when they converged with the counter-cultural revolution to transform the nature of English language theatre." The West End, England's Broadway, tended to produce the musical comedies and well-made plays, while smaller theatres and Irish venues took a new direction. The new direction was political, satirical, and rebellious. Common themes in the new early 20th century drama were political, reflecting the unease or rebellion of the workers against the state, philosophical, delving into the who and why of human life and existence, and revolutionary, exploring the themes of colonization and loss of territory. They explored common societal business practices (conditions of factories), new political ideologies (socialism), or the rise of a repressed sector of the population (women). Industrialization also had an impact on Twentieth century drama, resulting in plays lamenting the alienation of humans in an increasingly mechanical world. Not only did Industrialization result in alienation; so did the wars. Between the wars, two types of theatre reined. In the West End, the middle class attended popular, conservative theatre dominated by Noël Coward and G.B. Shaw. Commercial theatre thrived and at Drury Lane large budget musicals by Ivor Novello and Noel Coward used huge sets, extravagant costumes and large casts to create spectacular productions. After

the wars, taboos were broken and new writers, directors, and actors emerged with different views. Many played with the idea of reality, some were radically political, others shunned naturalism and questioned the legitimacy of previously unassailable beliefs. Towards the end of the century, the term ‘theatre of exorcism’ came into use due to the amount of plays conjuring the past in order to confront and accept it. Playwrights towards the end of the century count among their numbers: Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Brian Friel, Caryl Churchill, and Tom Stoppard. The last act of the century was a turn back towards realism as well as the founding of Europe’s first children’s cultural center.

3.4 TRENDS

3.4.1 Realism and Myth

Realism in the last half of the 19th-century began as an experiment to make theatre more useful to society. The mainstream theatre from 1859 to 1900 was still bound up in melodramas, spectacle plays (disasters, etc.), comic operas, and vaudevilles.

But political events—including attempts to reform some political systems—led to some different ways of thinking. Revolutions in Europe in 1848 showed that there was a desire for political, social, and economic reform. Many governments were frightened into promising change, but most didn’t implement changes after the violence ended.

Technological advances were also encouraged by industry and trade, leading to an increased belief that science could solve human problems. But the working classes still had to fight for every increase in rights: unionization and strikes became the principal weapons workers would use after the 1860s— but success came only from costly work stoppages and violence. In other words there seems to be rejection of Romantic idealism; pragmatism reigned instead. The common man seemed to feel that he needed to be recognized, and people asserted themselves through action.

Three major developments helped lead to the emergence of realism:

1. August Comte (1798-1857), often considered to be the “father of Sociology,” developed a theory known as Positivism. Among Comte’s ideas was an encouragement for understanding the cause and effect of nature through precise observation.
2. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and created a worldwide stir which exists to this day. Darwin’s essential series suggested that life developed gradually from common ancestry and that life favoured “survival of the fittest.” The implications of Darwin’s Theories were threefold:
 - (i) people were controlled by heredity and environment,
 - (ii) behaviours were beyond our control,
 - (iii) humanity is a natural object, rather than being above all else.
3. Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the late 1840’s espoused a political philosophy arguing against urbanization and in favour of a more equal distribution of wealth.

These three stated ideas helped open the door for a type of theatre that would be different from any that had come before.

Even Richard Wagner (1813-1883), while rejecting contemporary trends toward realism, helps lead toward a moderate realistic theatre. Wagner wanted complete illusionism, but wanted the dramatists to be more than a recorder—he wanted to be of “myth-maker.” True drama, according to Wagner, should be “dipped in the magic founding of music,” which allows greater control over performance than spoken drama. Wagner wanted complete control over every aspect of the production in order to get a “master art work.”

Because Wagner aimed for complete illusion, even though his operas were not all realistic, many of his production practices helped lead the way for realism. For instance the auditorium was darkened, the of stage was framed with a double proscenium arch, there were no side boxes and no center aisle, and all seats were equally good. Further, he forbade musicians to tune in the orchestra pit, allowed no applause or curtain calls, and strove for historical accuracy in scenery and costumes. Therefore, even though Wagner’s operas are fantastic and mythical, his attempts at illusionism helped gain public acceptance for realism.

Sigmund Freud inspired an interest in myth and dreams as playwrights became familiar with his studies of psychoanalysis. Along with the help of Carl Jung, the two psychiatrists influenced playwrights to incorporate myths into their plays. This integration allowed for new opportunities for playwrights to increase the boundaries of realism within their writing. As playwrights started to use myths in their writing, a “poetic form of realism” was created. This form of realism deals with truths that are widespread amongst all humans, bolstered by Carl Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious.

3.4.2 Poetic Realism

Much of the poetic realism that was written during the beginning of the twentieth century focused on the portrayals of Irish peasant life. John Millington Synge, W.B. Yeats, and Lady Gregory were but a few writers to use poetic realism. Their portrayal of peasant life was often unappealing and many audiences reacted cruelly. Many plays that are poetically realistic often have unpleasant themes running through them, such as lust between a son and his step-mother or the murder of a baby to “prove” love. These plays used myths as a surrogate for real life in order to allow the audience to live the unpleasant plot without completely connecting to it.

3.4.3 Women

The female characters progressed from the downtrodden, useless woman to an empowered, emancipated woman. They were used to posing subversive questions about the social order. Many female characters portray the author’s masculine attitudes about women and their place in society. As time passed, though, females began gaining empowerment. G.B. Shaw became one of the first English and playwrights to follow Ibsen’s influence and create roles of real women. *Mrs. Warren*, *Major Barbara*, *Pygmalion* all have strong female leads. Women first started voting in 1918. Later in the century, females (and males) were both subjected to the alienation of society and routinely were not given names to suggest to the audience the character’s worth within the play.

3.4.4 Political Theatre and War

Political theatre uses the theatre to represent “how a social or political order uses its power to ‘represent’ others coercively.” It uses live performances and often shows the power of politics through “demeaning and limiting” prejudices. Political theatre often represents many different types of groups that are often stereotyped - “women, gay men, lesbians, ethnic and racial groups, the poor.” Political theatre is used to express one’s political ideas. Agitprop, a popular form of political theatre, even had

its roots in the 1930s women's rights movement. Propaganda played a big role in political theatre, whether it be in support of a war or in opposition of political schemes, theatre played a big role in influencing the public.

The wars also affected the early theatre of the twentieth century. The consternation before World War I produced the Dada movement, the predecessor to Surrealism and Expressionism.

3.5 TYPES OF MODERN DRAMA

3.5.1 Realism

Realism, in theatre, was meant to be a direct observation of human behaviour. It began as a way to make theatre more useful to society, a way to hold a mirror up to society. Because of this thrust towards the "real" playwrights started using more contemporary settings, backgrounds and characters. Where plays in the past had, for the most part, used mythological or stereotypical characters, now they involved the lower class, the poor, the rich; they involved all genders, classes and races. One of the main contributors to this style was Henrik Ibsen.

Theatrical realism was a general movement that began in the 19th century theatre, around the 1870s, and remained present through much of the 20th century. It developed a set of dramatic and theatrical conventions with the aim of bringing a greater fidelity of real life to texts and performances. Part of a broader artistic movement, it shared many stylistic choices with naturalism, including a focus on everyday (middle-class) drama, ordinary speech, and ordinary settings. Realism and naturalism diverge chiefly on the degree of choice that characters have: while naturalism believes in the overall strength of external forces over internal decisions, realism asserts the power of the individual to choose.

Russia's first professional playwright, Aleksey Pisemsky, along with Leo Tolstoy (in his *The Power of Darkness* of 1886), began a tradition of psychological realism in Russia. A new type of acting was required to replace the declamatory conventions of the well-made play with a technique capable of conveying the speech and movements found in the domestic situations of everyday life. This need was supplied by the innovations of the Moscow Art Theatre, founded by the actor-director Constantin Stanislavski along with his impresario colleague Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Whereas the subtle expression of emotion in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* through everyday small-talk had initially gone unappreciated in an old-fashioned production in St. Petersburg, a new staging by the Moscow Art Theatre brought the play and its author, as well as the company, immediate success. A logical development was to take the revolt against theatrical artifice a step further in the direction of naturalism, and Stanislavski, especially in his production of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, helped this movement achieve international recognition. While the emphasis on truthfulness in Stanislavski's system of acting is in keeping with the underlying thrust of naturalism, Stanislavski stressed that his own aims were quite distinct, focusing on "the truth of feeling and experience" rather than on what he called "an outward and coarse naturalism" The Moscow Art Theatre's ground-breaking productions of plays by Chekhov, such as *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*, in turn influenced Maxim Gorky and Mikhail Bulgakov. Stanislavski went on to develop his 'system', a form of actor training that is particularly well-suited to psychological realism.

19th century realism is closely connected to the development of modern drama, which is usually said to have begun in the early 1870s with the work of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen's realistic drama in prose has been enormously influential.

In opera, *verismo* refers to a post-Romantic Italian tradition that sought to incorporate the naturalism of Émile Zola and Henrik Ibsen. It included realistic – sometimes sordid or violent – depictions of contemporary everyday life, especially the life of the lower classes.

3.5.2 Naturalism

While Ibsen was perfecting realism, France was demanding a new drama based on Darwinism:

1. All forms of life developed gradually from common ancestry.
2. Evolution of species is explained by survival of the fittest. The implications of Darwin's ideas seemed to be that:
 - 1) Heredity and environment control people;
 - 2) No person is responsible, since forces are beyond control;
 - 3) Progress is the same as improvement/evolution; it is inevitable and can be hastened by the application of the scientific method;
 - 4) Man is reduced to a natural object.

France had been defeated in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, ending Napoleon III's empire, and making France a Republic. Attitudes shifted: the working man had few privileges, it appeared, and socialism gained support. By 1900, every major country in Europe had a Constitution (except Russia); there was therefore a strong interest in the plight of the working class. Science and technology became major tools for dealing with contemporary problems.

Naturalism became a conscious movement in France in the 1870's; Emile Zola (1849-1902) was an admirer of Comte and an advocate of the scientific method. Literature, he felt, must become scientific or perish; it should illustrate the inevitable laws of heredity and environment or record case studies. To experiment with the same detachment as a scientist, the writer could become like a doctor (seeking the cause of disease to cure it, bringing the disease in the open to be examined), aiming to cure social ills.

Zola's first major statement came in a novel, *Therese Raquin*, which was dramatized in 1873; his preface states his views. He also wrote a few treatises about naturalism in the theatre and in the novel: he wanted art to detect "a scrap of an existence."

Even though *Therese Raquin* failed to adhere to most of the principles of naturalism, except in the setting (it was mostly a melodrama about murder and retribution), his followers were even more zealous. The most famous phrase we hear about naturalism is that it should be "a slice of life." We often tend to forget what a later French writer stated should be included with that phrase: "... put on the stage with art." Naturalism, as it was interpreted, almost obliterated the distinction between life and art. As you can imagine, there is a serious lack of good naturalistic plays and embodying its principles, has it is virtually impossible to do. Henri Becque (1837-1899) most nearly captured the essence of naturalism in two of his plays, *The Vultures* (1882) and *La Parisienne* (1885), both of which dealt with sordid subjects, were pessimistic and cynical, had no obvious climaxes, had no sympathetic characters, and progressed slowly to the end. However, Becque refused to comply with suggested changes when the show was first produced in a conservative theatre, so naturalism was still not really accepted.

3.5.3 Social Realism

Social Realism began showing up in plays during the 1930s. This realism had a political conscience behind it because the world was in a depression. These plays painted a harsh picture of rural poverty. The drama began to aim at showing governments the penalties of unrestrained capitalism and the depressions that lax economies created. One of the main contributors to this style was G.B. Shaw.

Kitchen sink realism (or kitchen sink drama) is a term coined to describe a British cultural movement that developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in theatre, art, novels, film and television plays, whose protagonists usually could be described as angry young men. It used a style of social realism, which often depicted the domestic situations of working class Britons living in cramped rented accommodation and spending their off-hours drinking in grimy pubs, to explore social issues and political controversies.

The films, plays and novels employing this style are set frequently in poorer industrial areas in the North of England, and use the rough-hewn speaking accents and slang heard in those regions. The film *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947) is a precursor of the genre, and the John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is thought of as the first of the genre.

The gritty love-triangle of *Look Back in Anger*, for example, takes place in a cramped, one-room flat in the English Midlands. The conventions of the genre have continued into the 2000s, finding expression in such television shows as *Coronation Street* and *East Enders*.

Unlike Socialist realism, social realism is not an official art produced by, or under the supervision of the government. The leading characters are often 'anti-heroes' rather than part of a class to be admired, as in Socialist realism. Typically, they are dissatisfied with their lives and the world—rather than being idealised workers who are part of a Socialist utopia in the process of creation. As such, social realism allows more space for the subjectivity of the author to be displayed.

Partly, social realism developed as a reaction against Romanticism, which promoted lofty concepts such as the "ineffable" beauty and truth of art and music, and even turned them into spiritual ideals. As such, social realism focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working class people, particularly the poor.

3.5.4 Avant Garde Theatre

Avant-garde theatre or experimental theatre began in Western theatre in the late 19th century as a rejection of the dominant ways of writing and producing plays. The term has shifted over time as the mainstream theatre world has adopted many forms that were once considered radical. It was created as a response to a perceived general cultural crisis. Despite different political and formal approaches, all avantgarde theatre opposes bourgeois theatre. It tries to introduce a different use of language and the body to change the mode of perception and to create a new, more active relation with the audience.

Traditionally audiences are seen as passive observers. Many practitioners of experimental theatre have wanted to challenge this. For example, Bertolt Brecht wanted to mobilise his audiences by having a character in a play break through the invisible "fourth wall," directly ask the audience questions, not giving them answers, thereby getting them to think for themselves; Augusto Boal wanted his audiences to react directly to the action; and Antonin Artaud wanted to affect them directly on a subconscious level. Peter Brook has identified a triangle of relationships within a performance: the performers' internal relationships, the performers' relationships to each other on stage, and their relationship with the audience. The British experimental theatre group Welfare State International has spoken of a ceremonial circle during performance, the cast providing one half, the audience providing another, and the energy in the middle.

Aside from ideological implications of the role of the audience, theatres and performances have addressed or involved the audience in a variety of ways. The proscenium arch has been called into question, with performances venturing into non-theatrical spaces. Audiences have been engaged differently, often as active participants in the action on a highly practical level. When a proscenium arch has been used, its usual use has often been subverted.

Audience participation can range from asking for volunteers to go onstage to having actors scream in audience members' faces. By using audience participation, the performer invites the audience to feel a certain way and by doing so they may change their attitudes, values and beliefs in regard to the performance's topic. For example, in a performance on bullying the character may approach an audience member, size them up and challenge them to a fight on the spot. The terrified look on the audience member's face will strongly embody the message of bullying to the member and the rest of the audience.

Absurdist Drama

The Theatre of the Absurd is a designation for particular plays of absurdist fiction written by a number of primarily European playwrights in the late 1950s, as well as one for the style of theatre which has evolved from their work. Their work expressed what happens when human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down, in fact alerting their audiences to pursue the opposite. Logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence.

Critic Martin Esslin coined the term in his 1960 essay "Theatre of the Absurd." He related these plays based on a broad theme of the Absurd, similar to the way Albert Camus uses the term in his 1942 essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus". The Absurd in these plays takes the form of man's reaction to a world apparently without meaning, and/or man as a puppet controlled or menaced by invisible outside forces. Though the term is applied to a wide range of plays, some characteristics coincide in many of the plays: broad comedy, often similar to Vaudeville, mixed with horrific or tragic images; characters caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogue full of clichés, wordplay, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive; either a parody or dismissal of realism and the concept of the "well-made play".

Playwrights commonly associated with the Theatre of the Absurd include Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Miguel Mihura, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Fernando Arrabal, Václav Havel, and Edward Albee.

Absurdist Drama was existentialist theatre which put a direct perception of a mode of being above all abstract considerations. It was also essentially a poetic, lyrical theatre for the expression of intuitions of being through movement, situations and concrete imagery. Language was generally downplayed. Symbolism, Dadaism and their offspring, Surrealism, Theatre of Cruelty, and Expressionism all fall into this category.

Dadaism

The first major anti-art movement, Dada was a revolt against the culture and values which - it was believed - had caused and supported the carnage of The First World War (1914-18). It quickly developed into an anarchistic type of highly avant-garde art whose aim was to subvert and undermine the value system of the ruling establishment which had allowed the war to happen, including the arts establishment which they viewed as inextricably linked to the discredited socio-political status quo. Erupting simultaneously in 1916, in Europe and America, its leaders were typically very young, in their early twenties, and most had "opted out", avoiding conscription in the shelter of neutral cities such as New York, Zurich and Barcelona.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks using the correct words from the box below:

(absurd, political theatre, Dadaism, Brecht, anti-art, meaningless, war, alienation effect)

1. _____ emerged as a reaction to World War I, promoting randomness, chaos, and _____ principles in art and drama.
2. Absurdist drama highlights the _____ nature of human existence, often using illogical dialogue and circular plots.
3. Bertolt _____ developed epic theatre, using the _____ to prevent emotional attachment and encourage critical thinking.

Answers

1. Dadaism, anti-art
2. Absurd
3. Brecht, alienation effect

3.5.5 Symbolism/Aestheticism

In England, Symbolism was also known as Aestheticism. A very stylized format of drama, wherein dreams and fantasies were common plot devices, Aestheticism was used by numerous playwrights from Yeats to Pinter. The staging was highly stylized, usually using minimal set pieces and vague blocking. While the playwrights who could be considered Aestheticists lived and worked at the beginning of the century, it influenced all of the following styles.

The symbolists aimed to eliminate all traces of naturalistic or imitative acting, and all romance and melodrama. In theory, the actor was to be a depersonalized symbol pointing to a meaning beyond what was visible on the stage. In France, the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre put on plays by symbolist writers and held experimental poetry stagings. In addition to the plays of French writers, they produced adaptations of works by Edgar Allan Poe, which had recently been translated, the play Oscar Wilde had written in French during his exile from Britain. Plays by the Belgian symbolists were also produced. Significantly, the sets were meant not to echo the visible shapes or forms of the characters, but, in a kind of synesthesia, to analogize the essence of the play itself.

Plays by the Scandinavian writers Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and August Strindberg (1849–1912) also became important parts of the French symbolist repertoire. The symbolist critic Camille Mauclair identified Ibsen with the symbolist struggle to express “libertarian ideas or taste for aestheticism” and “modern beauty.” Ibsen’s plays *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Hedda Gabler*, *A Doll’s House*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Rosmersholm*, and *An Enemy of the People* were all staged in the early 1890s. Part of the reason Ibsen was appropriated as a symbolist had to do with the staging. The Danish actor, director, and novelist Hermann Bang described Lugné-Poe’s staging of *Rosmersholm* as “without any firm contours. The actors wander restlessly over the stage, resembling shadows drifting continuously on the wall. They like to move with their arms spread out, ... like the apostles in old paintings who look as if they’ve been surprised during worship”. Bang’s description of actors resembling apostles and shadows on a wall gives us a sense of how the staging of the play used vagueness and suggestiveness to reach higher spiritual meanings. Several of August Strindberg’s psychological dramas (including *The Father* and *The Creditors*) were also staged at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, despite the fact that he too had previously been understood to be a naturalist.

3.5.6 Surrealism

Like Aestheticism, Surrealism has its base in the mystical. It developed the physicality of theatre and downplayed words, hoping to influence its audiences through action. Other common characteristics of surreal plays are unexpected comparisons and surprise. The most famous British playwright in the 20's surrealist style is Samuel Beckett. Theatre of Cruelty is a subset of surrealism and was motivated by an idea of Antonin Artaud. It argues the idea that theatre is a "representational medium" and tried to bring current ideas and experiences to the audience through participation and "ritualistic theater experiments." Artaud thought that theatre should present and represent equally. This type of theatre relies deeply on metaphors and rarely included a description of how it could be performed.

A product of Dadaism, Surrealism can be traced back to Guillaume Apollinaire's only play, *The Breasts of Tiresias*, which was performed in Paris in 1918. The unique verbal associations of this unique comedy, along with its anything-goes dreamlike atmosphere and the theoretical implications of the author's preface, became the foundation for the surrealist movement.

After Apollinaire's untimely death (1918), Andre Breton emerged as the main spokesman for Surrealism. Although Dadaism had been primarily negative, its destructive force had cleared the air, making room for Surrealism which believed in the great positive, healing force of the subconscious mind. Breton declared the subconscious to be the real repository of truth and advocated automatic writing, dream logic, and other techniques to tap into this universal wellspring of veracity. During the 1920s and 1930s, surrealists such as Breton, Louis Aragon, Roger Vitrac, and Antonin Artaud experimented with various techniques to liberate themselves from the straitjacket of convention. They consciously abandoned order, clarity, and rational thought (for centuries the prerequisites of great art) for the spontaneity, originality, and anarchic humour of disjointed, dreamlike (and sometimes nightmarish) episodes which attempted to capture a different kind of truth. Their objective was to abolish art as a mere imitation of surface reality and replace it with visions that were, in essence, more real than reality—that dealt with inner truth rather than outward appearance. Some of the plays produced during this period were Artaud's *Upset Stomach*, or *The Mad Mother*, Vitrac's *The Mysteries of Love*, and Aragon's *At the Foot of the Wall*.

Surrealist theatre was not received with great enthusiasm by the critics. For the most part, they seemed to keep it at an arm's length, not wishing to condone such uncivilized displays on the stage and continually asserting that it must only be a passing phase in the dramatic development—a disquieting anomaly. They, like many audience members of the time, seemed almost frightened by the surrealists' intuitive exploration of the nature of the subconscious.

During World War II, Surrealism was gradually absorbed by more successful movements such as the Theatre of the Absurd. After the chaos and uncertainty of this catastrophic global war, most people became more willing to accept the inexplicable onstage, for they were familiar with the absurdity of the human condition, having experienced it first hand. Today, the influence of Surrealism can be seen in the works of such dramatists as Caryl Churchill and Gao Xingjian.

3.5.7 Expressionism

The term 'Expressionism' was first coined in Germany in 1911. Expressionism also had its hey-day during the 20s although it had two distinct branches. The branches had characters speaking in short, direct sentences or in long, lyrical expanses. This type of theatre usually did not name the characters and spend much time lamenting the present and warning against the future. Spiritual awakenings and episodic structures were also fairly common.

There was a concentrated Expressionist movement in early 20th century German theatre of which Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller were the most famous playwrights. Other notable Expressionist dramatists included Reinhard Sorge, Walter Hasenclever, Hans Henny Jahnn, and Arnolt Bronnen. They looked back to Swedish playwright August Strindberg and German actor and dramatist Frank Wedekind as precursors of their dramaturgical experiments.

Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer, the Hope of Women* was the first fully Expressionist work for the theatre, which opened on 4 July 1909 in Vienna. The extreme simplification of characters to mythic types, choral effects, declamatory dialogue and heightened intensity would become characteristic of later Expressionist plays. The first full-length Expressionist play was *The Son* by Walter Hasenclever, which was published in 1914 and first performed in 1916.

Expressionist plays often dramatize the spiritual awakening and sufferings of their protagonists, and are referred to as *Stationendramen* (station plays), modeled on the episodic presentation of the suffering and death of Jesus in the Stations of the Cross. August Strindberg had pioneered this form with his autobiographical trilogy *To Damascus*.

The plays often dramatize the struggle against bourgeois values and established authority, often personified in the figure of the Father. In Sorge's *The Beggar, (Der Bettler)*, the young hero's mentally ill father raves about the prospect of mining the riches of Mars; he is finally poisoned by his son. In Bronnen's *Parricide (Vatermord)*, the son stabs his tyrannical father to death, only to have to fend off the frenzied sexual overtures of his mother.

In expressionist drama, the speech is heightened, whether expansive and rhapsodic, or clipped and telegraphic. Director Leopold Jessner became famous for his expressionistic productions, often unfolding on the stark, steeply raked flights of stairs that quickly became his trademark.

In the 1920s, Expressionism enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the theatre of the United States, including plays by Eugene O'Neill (*The Hairy Ape, The Emperor Jones* and *The Great God Brown*), Sophie Treadwell (*Machinal*), Lajos Egri (*Rapid Transit*) and Elmer Rice (*The Adding Machine*)

3.5.8 Epic Theatre

Epic theatre was a theatrical movement arising in the early to mid-20th century from the theories and practice of a number of theatre practitioners who were responding to the political climate of the time through the creation of a new political theatre. Those practitioners included Erwin Piscator, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and, most famously, Bertolt Brecht. The term epic theater comes from Erwin Piscator who coined it during his first year as Director of Berlin's Volksbühne (1924-1927). Piscator aimed to encourage playwrights to address issues related to "contemporary existence" thereby creating new subject matter to stage and then staging it through the use of documentary effects, audience interaction as well as creating ways in which the audience feel distanced from the event. Although many of the concepts and practices involved in Brechtian epic theatre had been around for years, even centuries, Brecht unified them, developed the style, and popularized it. Epic theatre incorporates a mode of acting that utilises what he calls *gestus*. The epic form describes both a type of written drama and a methodological approach to the production of plays: "Its qualities of clear description and reporting and its use of choruses and projections as a means of commentary earned it the name 'epic'." Brecht later preferred the term "dialectical theatre" near the end of his career over epic theatre to describe the style of theatre he pioneered. From his later perspective, the term "Epic Theatre" had become too formal a concept to be of use anymore; one of Brecht's most important aesthetic innovations prioritized *function* over the sterile opposition between *form* and *content*. A function of the style of theatre is to ensure that the audience is consistently aware that they are watching and involved in an artificial production.

Epic theatre was a reaction against popular forms of theatre, particularly the naturalistic approach pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski. Like Stanislavski, Brecht disliked the shallow spectacle, manipulative plots, and heightened emotion of melodrama; but where Stanislavski attempted to engender real human behaviour in acting through the techniques of Stanislavski's system and to absorb the audience completely in the fictional world of the play, Brecht saw Stanislavski's methodology as producing escapism. Brecht's own social and political focus departed also from surrealism and the Theatre of Cruelty, as developed in the writings and dramaturgy of Antonin Artaud, who sought to affect audiences viscerally, psychologically, physically, and irrationally.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Alienation – A feeling of isolation or separation from society or oneself.

Counter-cultural – Opposing dominant social values and traditions.

Illusionism – Creating an appearance of reality in art or theatre.

Positivism – A philosophy emphasizing scientific observation and facts.

Collective Unconscious – Shared memories and instincts common to all humans (Jung).

Naturalism – A dramatic style showing life as controlled by heredity and environment.

Avant-garde – Innovative, experimental, and radically unconventional art.

Proscenium Arch – The frame separating the stage from the audience.

Expressionism – A style emphasizing emotional experience over realistic depiction.

Epic Theatre – A political form of theatre aiming to make audiences think critically rather than feel emotionally absorbed.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

During the 20th century, especially after World War I, Western drama became more internationally unified and less the product of separate national literary traditions. Throughout the century, realism, naturalism, and symbolism (and various combinations of these) continued to inform important plays.

An important movement in early 20th century drama was expressionism. Expressionist playwrights tried to convey the dehumanizing aspects of 20th-century technological society through such devices as minimal scenery, telegraphic dialogue, talking machines, and characters portrayed as types rather than individuals. The 20th century also saw the attempted revival of drama in verse, but although such writers as William Butler Yeats, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, and Maxwell Anderson produced effective results, verse drama was no longer an important form in English.

Three vital figures of 20th century drama are the American Eugene O'Neill, the German Bertolt Brecht, and the Italian Luigi Pirandello. O'Neill's body of plays in many forms—naturalistic, expressionist, symbolic, psychological—won him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936 and indicated the coming-of-age of American drama. Brecht wrote dramas of ideas, usually promulgating socialist or Marxist theory. In order to make his audience more intellectually receptive to his theses, he endeavored—by using expressionist techniques—to make them continually aware that they were watching a play, not vicariously experiencing reality. For Pirandello, too, it was paramount to fix an awareness of his plays as theater; indeed, the major philosophical concern of his dramas is the difficulty of differentiating between illusion and reality.

World War II and its attendant horrors produced a widespread sense of the utter meaninglessness of human existence. This sense is brilliantly expressed in the body of plays that have come to be known collectively as the theatre of the absurd. By abandoning traditional devices of the drama, including logical plot development, meaningful dialogue, and intelligible characters, absurdist playwrights sought to convey modern humanity's feelings of bewilderment, alienation, and despair—the sense that reality is itself unreal. In their plays human beings often portrayed as dupes, clowns who, although not without dignity, are at the mercy of forces that are inscrutable.

Probably the most famous plays of the theatre of the absurd are Eugene Ionesco's *Bald Soprano* (1950) and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). The sources of the theater of the absurd are diverse; they can be found in the tenets of surrealism, Dadaism, and existentialism; in the traditions of the music hall, vaudeville, and burlesque; and in the films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. The pessimism and despair of the 20th century also found expression in the existentialist dramas of Jean-Paul Sartre, in the realistic and symbolic dramas of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Jean Anouilh, and in the surrealist plays of Jean Cocteau.

Somewhat similar to the theatre of the absurd is the so-called theatre of cruelty, derived from the ideas of Antonin Artaud, who, writing in the 1930s, foresaw a drama that would assault its audience with movement and sound, producing a visceral rather than an intellectual reaction. After the violence of World War II and the subsequent threat of the atomic bomb, his approach seemed particularly appropriate to many playwrights. Elements of the theatre of cruelty can be found in the brilliantly abusive language of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), in the ritualistic aspects of some of Genet's plays, in the masked utterances and enigmatic silences of Harold Pinter's "comedies of menace," and in the orgiastic abandon of Julian Beck's *Paradise Now!* (1968); it was fully expressed in Peter Brooks's production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1964).

Realism in a number of guises—psychological, social, and political—continued to be a force in British works. In keeping with the tenor of the times, many of the works of the period were marked by elements of wit, irony, and satire.

The late decades of the 20th century were also a time of considerable experiment and iconoclasm. Experimental dramas of the 1960s and 70s were followed by a mixing and merging of various kinds of media with aspects of postmodernism, improvisational techniques, performance art, and other kinds of avant-garde theater.

Thematically, the social upheavals of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s—particularly the civil rights and women's movements, gay liberation, and the AIDS crisis—provided impetus for new plays that explored the lives of minorities and women.

Feminist and other women-centered themes dramatized by contemporary female playwrights were plentiful in the 1970s and extended in the following decades. Skilled monologuists also provided provocative female-themed one-women shows.

Gay themes (often in works by gay playwrights) also marked the later decades of the 20th century. Homosexual characters had been treated sympathetically but in the context of pathology. Gay subjects were presented more explicitly during the 1960s.

3.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following phrases best characterizes the late-nineteenth century aesthetic movement which widened the breach between artists and the reading public, sowing the seeds of modernism?
- (a) Art for intellect's sake
 - (b) Art for God's sake
 - (c) Art for the masses
 - (d) Art for art's sake
- Ans. (d)
2. With which enormously influential perspective or practice is the early twentieth century thinker Sigmund Freud associated?
- (a) Eugenics
 - (b) Psychoanalysis
 - (c) Phrenology
 - (d) Anarchism
- Ans. (b)
3. Which thinker had a major impact on early twentieth century writers, leading them to reimagining human identity in radically new ways?
- (a) Sigmund Freud
 - (b) Sir James Frazer
 - (c) Immanuel Kant
 - (d) Friedrich Nietzsche
- Ans. (c)
4. Which scientific or technological advance did not take place in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century?
- (a) Albert Einstein's theory of relativity
 - (b) Wireless communication across the Atlantic
 - (c) The creation of the internet
 - (d) The invention of the airplane
- Ans. (c)
5. What did T. S. Eliot attempt to combine, though not very successfully, in his plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*?
- (a) Regional dialect and political critique
 - (b) Religious symbolism and society comedy
 - (c) Iambic pentameter and sexual innuendo
 - (d) Witty paradoxes and feminist diatribe
- Ans. (c)

6. How did one critic sum up Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*?
- (a) nothing happens twice
 - (b) Political correctness gone mad
 - (c) kitchen sink drama
 - (d) angry young men
- Ans. (a)
7. In what decade did the "angry young men" come to prominence on the theatrical scene?
- (a) 1910s
 - (b) 1930s
 - (c) 1950s
 - (d) 1990s
- Ans. (c)
8. What event allowed mainstream theatre companies to commission and perform work that was politically, socially, and sexually controversial without fear of censorship?
- (a) the abolition of Lord Chamberlain's office in 1968
 - (b) the illegal performance of work by Howard Breton and Edward Bond
 - (c) the collapse of liberal humanist consensus in the late 1960s
 - (d) the establishment of the Abbey Theatre
- Ans. (a)
9. Which of the following has been a significant development in British theatre since the abolition of censorship in 1968?
- (a) the rise of workshops and the collaborative ethos
 - (b) the emergence of a major cohort of women dramatists
 - (c) the diversifying impact of playwrights from the former colonies
 - (d) all of the above
- Ans. (d)

3.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What was Bernard Shaw's contribution to English drama?

Ans. Shaw's name is indissolubly linked with the new drama of the twentieth century. It is new because it converted the stage into a forum or pulpit or a debating society. Action was not so important as the discussion of ideas, which are at the bottom of men's faiths and convictions. In the earlier era, the stage was generally considered as a public place where one went for a couple of hours of entertainment, when people could forget their private worries and cares in contemplating a romantic world, dazzling people and pleasant scenes or stirring incidents.

2. Summarize some of the important developments in modern drama.

Ans. Some of the important developments in modern drama are expressionism, epic theatre, symbolism, surrealism, and the theatre of the absurd.

1. **Expressionism:** Expressionism in drama was concentrated in Germany in the early 20th century. Friedrich Carl Georg Kaiser (1878-1945) was the most famous expressionist dramatist. His popular plays include *From Morn to Midnight* and *The Burgbers of Calais*. The main feature of expressionism is a distortion of physical reality to highlight certain emotional effects and convey personal moods and feelings.
2. **Epic Theatre:** The chief proponent and successful practitioner of this form of modern drama was the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Its main feature was the use of the ancient epic convention of choruses and projections as a means of commentary. *Mother Courage* (1939) is Brecht's most famous play.
3. **Symbolism:** The aim of symbolism was to capture absolute truth by indirect methods. Symbolism emphasized mysticism, and the life of dreams and fantasies. The most famous symbolist theatre person was Maurice Polydore *Marie Bernard, Count Maeterlinck* (1862-1949). His most famous play is *The Blue Bird* (1908).
4. **Surrealism:** Wilhelm Albert Wodzimierz Apolinary Kostrowicki, (1880- 1918) is the foremost surrealist playwright and his most successful play is *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1903,1917). Surrealism's main aim is to reveal the dynamics of the sub conscious and is characterized by fantastic imagery and juxtaposition of bizarre subject matter.
5. **Theatre of the Absurd:** As the word 'absurd' indicates the dramas of the "Absurd" reveal the meaninglessness of modern life and depict man as a puppet controlled by some bizarre external force. Some of the important playwrights of this type of drama are Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1948,1953) is one of the most important plays of the twentieth century.
6. How did early modern playwrights use the physical resources of the stage to create meaning?
7. How does the political, social or religious context of a particular play help us to understand it?
8. Write an essay about the creation of, adherence to, and/or breaking of, generic conventions in the drama of the period.
9. Discuss Epic theatre as a reaction against the naturalistic form of theatre.
10. Write an essay on Avant Garde Theatre.
11. Write a brief essay on types of modern drama.

3.10 SUGGESTED READING

Smart, John. *Twentieth-Century British Drama*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

"*Drama in the Twentieth Century*." British Literature Wiki, University of Delaware, <https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/drama-in-the-twentieth-century/>

THE WAY OF THE WORLD
WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670-1729)

STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 4.3 The Writer and his Work
- 4.4 Congreve's Plots
- 4.5 His Characters
- 4.6 Congreve's Wit
- 4.7 Congreve's Strength and Weakness
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 4.11 Multiple Choice Questions
- 4.12 Suggested Reading

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will introduce the learner to Congreve as a dramatist.

4.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the life and works of William Congreve.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the life and times of William Congreve – Explain his background, literary influences, and the socio-political context of his works.
2. Analyze the themes and style of his works – Identify key themes such as love, deception, and social satire in his comedies.
3. Examine Congreve's use of plot and character development – Discuss the intricate plots, dynamic characters, and their role in his plays.
4. Appreciate Congreve's wit and dialogue – Explore his sharp wit, wordplay, and the significance of repartee in Restoration comedy.

4.3 THE WRITER AND HIS WORK

William Congreve was born at Bardsey, Yorkshire, in 1670. His childhood, however, was spent in Ireland, not in England where he was born. It was his father's military service that had taken the family to Ireland. There in Ireland, he studied at Kilkenny School, where Jonathan Swift was also a student. Then Congreve joined Trinity College in Dublin. Later he went to London to do Law, where he joined the Middle Temple in 1691. However, since he had little interest in the profession of Law, he did not take up the practice. Instead he began his career as gentleman author. He soon wrote four comedies and one tragedy. The first two of his comedies were staged at the Drury Lane theatre in London. The other two comedies and the tragedy were staged by the Betterton's Company in the new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His plays were attacked by Jeremy Collier, to which Congreve replied. But when *The Way of the World* (1700) received a cool reception, he virtually wrote nothing for the theatre thereafter.

Congreve held many government sinecures and lived politely with many friends and practically no enemies. In his later life he spent most of the time with Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, to whom he bequeathed the bulk of his estate, apparently with a private understanding that the Duchess was in turn to bequeath it, as she did, to their daughter. They had not married, but lived together and had this daughter. Their daughter's name was Lady Mary Godolphin. Some of the important works of Congreve include *The Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695), *The Mourning Bride* (1697), *The Way of the World* (1700). He was deeply shocked by the critical attack of Collier. To his mind, the attack was highly unjust.

Congreve always thought of himself as a reformer of the stage. He was regarded so by others also as evident from the fact that he (along with Vanbrugh) was chosen to direct the new theatre in Haymarket, which was opened in 1705 and was supposedly devoted to theatrical uplift. Another testimony to his merit as dramatist is that Dryden and Southerne praised him quite early in his career. Besides, his work was highly lauded by Addison and Swift, and many others. Congreve's reform was largely concerned with the technique of drama. The main areas of his interest included wit, structure and dialogue in the dramatic form. Maybe because he felt discouraged by the lack of sufficient response to his reformist zeal, he abandoned writing for the stage at the early age of thirty. His prefaces to his plays, as well as Swift's epistle to him, indicated that Congreve felt superior to his audiences. After abandoning theatre, Congreve chose to become an elegant minor poet, a gouty man about town, and the gallant of a wealthy duchess. If there was something of the snob in Congreve, he was still an amiable snob. He was decidedly one of the best liked of literary men during a period of nearly forty years (1692-1729), in which very few wits were generally beloved.

Undoubtedly, Congreve was a formalist and a technician, a man of artistic rather than moral conscience. He learned a good deal from his predecessors, such as Etherege, Wycherley, Shadwell, and Moliere. His characters were decidedly more subtle than those of Etherege. If we compare Congreve's gentlemen, Vainlove and Mirabell, with the celebrated Dorimant, the superiority of the former becomes clear. His lovers do not love a quarrel with a cast mistress. They do not condescend to berate their servants. They are also not vain of their inconstancy in love—though they are inconstant. Congreve is also free from Wycherley's vehemence, and yet the actions of his plays, especially of the *Double Dealer*, are far from being inherently comic. "Tis but the way of the world" might have been said of any of his sophisticated characters in any of his plays. The way of the world, evidently, is not a pretty way. With the superficialities of the world, however, the comic writer may safely and amusingly play. "There are," Congreve recognized, like a true neo-classicist, "Crimes too daring and too horrid for Comedy. But the Vices most frequent, and which are the common Practice of the looser sort of Lovers, are the subject Matter of Comedy." So among the affections and follies of men, Congreve as dramatist works, leaving more serious matters to be corrected by the courts, ecclesiastical or civil. "Unmasking," wrote his friend Swift, almost at the same moment when Congreve was defending his plays against Collier, "I think, has never been allowed fair usage, either in the world or the playhouse." But the unmasking of follies remained Congreve's forte.

4.4 CONGREVE'S PLOTS

Congreve's highest achievements in drama are not seen in his plots, although he observes the three unities more regularly than any other dramatist of his age. For instance, his very first play, *The Old Bachelor* (1693), observes the unity of action quite superbly. Its plot involves a series of intrigues on different social planes. The play was an enormous success; it assured the reputation of the young dramatist. Later, in the same year (1693), however, Congreve's second play failed rather miserably. The failure of *The Double Dealer* is hardly accountable. So far as the plot of this play is concerned, it is far more unified than the first. There are, no doubt, thrilling incidents, but no divergent intrigues as in the first play. The darkness of the villainy makes the play hardly more than tragicomic, and possibly this fact explains its cool reception. Congreve's third play, *Love for Love* (1695), remained for long the most popular of his works. The plot here tells how Valentine, at odds with a critical father, is likely to lose his estate to a sea-going younger brother and thus, miss getting his beloved heiress, Angelica. The intrigue is deftly suspensive, turning largely on the ultimate triumph of the intelligent younger couple over a star-crazed uncle and an unnatural father, with, in the last act, a masked marriage that tricks the fop Tattle into wedding the blemished Mrs. Frail, instead of the expected Angelica. In terms of its comic effect, the plot is perhaps Congreve's best.

Congreve's vastly acknowledged best comedy remains *The Way of the World* (1700). It is generally said that though Congreve had an excellent plot, he treated it rather carelessly. It is alleged that he had too much love of topical conversation to waste time in telling the story of how Mirabell evades the malicious plotting of Lady Wishfort, Mrs. Marwood, and her lover Fainall, and persuades the aloof but charming Millamant to marry him. Obviously, all these plots are conventional: we have a comedy, not of love, but of the love chase. Financial reverses, irate fathers, jealous cast mistresses (particularly coquettish aunts of the pursued lady), are the chief obstacles to success, and legal documents, signed or unsigned, disguising, and masked marriages that involve mistaken identities, are common episodes. It is the same old deck of cards, but Congreve does clever tricks with them. One can easily conclude that the power that moves the plot is the "intrigue," not what Johnson calls "nature". In other words, incidents that take place in the plot are contrived. As such, they look less life-like, less natural, and more cooked-up. Although Congreve is considered the best of the period in the genre of the comedy of manners, his plots sound rather artificial.

4.5 HIS CHARACTERS

Just as the plots of Congreve's plays are conventional, so are his characters. More often than not, his men and women are relatively flat. They are two-dimensional characters. Once in a while, his imagination works wonders and he creates, not only interesting, but also three dimensional, complex characters. As E.M.Forster has defined in his *Aspects of the Novel*, while the flat characters are simple, in that they are easily distinguished by one or two traits of their persons, round or complex characters are growing, in that they are not the same all the time. Encountering fresh experiences of life, while the flat characters remain unchanged, always the same, as if nothing new had happened, the round characters, who expose themselves to new experiences and absorb them, grow and are found different after every encounter. In Act II of *The Way of the World*, Mirabell talking to Mrs. Fainall about her husband, remarks, "when you are weary of him you know your remedy." The significance of the remark is apparent only at the final discovery in Act V that before marrying Fainall the lady had, with remarkable prescience deeded her entire estate in trust to Mirabell. She would never have done that to Dormant: the Congreve gentlemen can be trusted.

Congreve's female characters are, of course, not so finely drawn as his gentlemen. His leading female characters – the virtuous heroines of his plays—are not so finely imagined as his leading male characters. Of all his heroines, Millamant alone has colour and charm. But it is also Millamant who, above the other heroines of Congreve's comedies, is the clear victim of affectation. She finds the thought of a husband a little too tedious to

bear. In her case, it is perhaps Congreve's wit, rather than her charm, that is truly vivid. Her entry, which takes place in Act II, in full sail with "a shoal of fools for tenders" is unsurpassable. Equally unsurpassable is her capitulation to Mirabell at the end. Early in the play Mirabell and Fainall talk of her, and when Fainall opines that she has wit, Mirabell replies, "She has beauty enough to make any man think so, and complaisance enough not to contradict him who shall tell her so." Mirabell continues to say that even Millamant's affectation makes her more agreeable. The passage in question is in Congreve's finest vein. It is a specimen of excellence both in prose as well as wit.

Congreve's portrait of Millamant remains, however, an exception. Generally, he is at his best when he is drawing the portraits of incidental or inferior persons. His second gentlemen are negligible plot-ridden sketches. His villains and scorned ladies (except perhaps Lady Wishfort) are rather melodramatic. They actually belong in the species of the heroic plays. But his valets, his gulls, and his fops are quite likely to be superbly sketched. They are literary and not, like Sir Fopling Flutter, addicted to mere overdressing. Congreve's one worthy country squire, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, is much underrated as a character. Sir Wilfull's eagerness to get his books off in the drawing room or to get at his sack, and his lack of eagerness to get at his wooing are all broadly, but finely, tuned. When we appreciate Congreve's artifice and elegance we must make a mention of his roistering drunken squire, who nevertheless so pleases Congreve that he is made, before the end of the play, a friend and ally to Millamant. In this latest role he is far more acceptable than his affected, foppish brother.

Congreve's portraits of the gentleman's gentleman are, decidedly, original and unexpected. For instance, the admirable Waitwell can disguise himself as Sir Rowland and come a-wooing Lady Wishfort most genteelly: Of his lawfully wedded wife—another of Mirabell's thoughtful precautions to protect Lady Wishfort—Waitwell can say with Jeeves-like dignity: "With submission, we have indeed been solacing in lawful delights; but still with an eye to business, sir. I have instructed her as well as I could". But if Waitwell is prophetic of the Victorian butler, Jeremy of *Love for Love* surpasses prophesy. Note him, for instance, in Act V as he underlines the contrast between himself and his "betters":

Jeremy— Sir I have the seeds of rhetoric and oratory in my head; I have been at Cambridge.

Tattle— Ay! 'Tis well enough for a servant to be bred at a university: but the education is a little too pedantic for a gentleman. I hope you are secret in your nature, private, close, ha?

Jeremy— O, sir, for that, sir, 'it is my chief talent: I'm as secret as the head of Nilus.

Tattle— Ay! Who is he, though? A privy counsellor?

Jeremy— [Aside] O Ignorance! —[Aloud] A cunning Egyptian, sir, that with arms would overrun the country: yet nobody could ever find out his headquarters.

Tattle— Close dog! a good whoremaster, I warrant him....

Such passages in Congreve, and they are not in scarcity, illuminate his unrealistic but amusing characterizations. They also reflect his gifts in wit, and above all, his eagerness to take time out, even in a final act, for superfluous verbal by-play. It is, in fact, from these incidental passages, which overlay his plots invariably, that Congreve's rather sorry and not very comic stories gain life and sparkle.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks using the correct words from the box below:

(Restoration, The Way of the World, comedy of manners, wit, satire, love, deception)

1. William Congreve was a key playwright of the _____ period, known for his clever and sophisticated plays.
2. His most famous work, _____, is a masterpiece of Restoration comedy.
3. Congreve's plays are examples of _____, which depict the behavior and intrigues of the upper class.
4. His works often feature themes of _____ and _____, highlighting the complexities of human relationships.
5. Congreve's sharp _____ and dialogue are central to his comedic style.

Answers

1. Restoration
2. *The Way of the World*
3. Comedy of manners
4. Love, deception
5. Wit

4.6 CONGREVE'S WIT

The kind of conversation we just cited constitutes what is called “superadded social vignette” in Congreve’s drama. These vignettes are, in fact, the quintessence of Congreve’s genius. He incessantly dabbles in such witticism, which is sometimes antithetical in structure, sometimes pungent in repartee. It is, however, generally deftly humorous in its implications. If in the scale of being there had to be a maidservant called Mincing, she would inevitably announce dinner as Congreve makes her: “Men, I am come to acquaint your la’ship that dinner is impatient.” And her la’ship, who has “a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums,” bravely trusts that “Sir Rowland” will not think her “prone to any iteration of nuptials.” Verbal wit was perhaps Congreve’s highest value, and apparently it was that of all his gentleman fools (not of his servants) who aspire to wit but for whom it is, as Swift said, “the lost language.” For Congreve words danced with stately precision or with gay levity. No English dramatic writer has surpassed him in cool intellectual majesty of diction. He was perhaps too subtle for his own good. Here is a sample of Congreve’s wit at its best:

Millamant – Mirabell, Did not you take Exceptions last Night? O ay, and went away—now I think don’t I’m angry—no, now I think don’t I’m pleas’d—For I believe I gave you some Pain.

Mirabell – Does that please you?

Millamant – Infinitely; I love to give Pain.

Mirabell – You would affect a Cruelty which is not in your Nature; your true Vanity is in the Power of pleasing.

Millamant – O I ask your Pardon for that—One’s Cruelty is One’s Power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one’s Old and Ugly.

Mirabell – Ay, ay, suffer your Cruelty to ruin the Object of your Power, to destroy your Lover—And then how vain, how lost a thing you’ll be! Nay, ‘tis true : you are no longer handsome when you’ve lost your Lover; your Beauty dies upon the Instant : For Beauty is the Lover’s gift; ‘tis he bestows your Charms— your glass is all a Cheat. The Ugly and the Old, whom the Looking-glass mortifies, yet after

Commendation can be flatter'd by it, and discover Beauties in it : For that reflects our praises, rather than your Face.

Millamant – O the Vanity of these Men! Fainall, dye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the Lover's Gift—Lord, what is a Lover, that it can give? Why one makes Lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases: And then if one pleases one makes more.

Witwound – Very pretty. Why you make no more of making of Lovers, Madam, than of making so many Card-matches.

Millamant – One no more owes one's Beauty to a Lover than ones Wit to an Echo: They can but reflect what we look and say; vain empty things if we are silent or unseen, and want a Being.

It is this sparkling wit, displayed here in the cited dialogue, which gave Congreve an edge over all other contemporary dramatists. His gift of wit was far above the gift of any other in his time. Dennis paid Congreve great tribute for his wit: "Congreve quitted the stage in disdain, and Comedy left it with him." Byron felt equally ecstatic about the wit in Congreve's plays: "What plays!" What wit! *Helas!* Congreve and Vanbrugh are your only comedy. Our society is too insipid now for the like copy." Byron's instinct was right: the strengths of Restoration Comedy, which ended with Congreve, like its weaknesses and limitations, were to a great extent dependent upon a particular social situation. No equally adequate dramatic form was discovered when Sense, and later Sensibility, joined and replaced wit as the social ideal.

4.7 CONGREVE'S STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

"Since the *Plain-Dealer's* Scenes of Manly Rage," wrote Congreve, "Not one has dar'd to lash this Crying Age". Congreve, whom Gay called "friendly Congreve, unreproachful man," did not try to lash this age either. *The Old Bachelor* (1693), his first play, is a medley of unequal interest. The play's opening dialogue, however, suggests where his talent lies. *The Double-Dealer* (1693), too, is a mixture of different, and more discordant, kind; it mixes melodrama with romance and light comedy. But he again shows his individual talent, his "prodigious sense of human absurdity" in his portrait of Lady Plyant, and an uncommon tenderness and sensitivity in the love scenes between Mellefont and Cynthia. Congreve's most popular comedy was *Love for Love* (1695), and it has justly remained a perennial stage-favourite. Even the minor characters in this play have moments of dramatic life. They belong to familiar types, but are vivified and individualized by the excellence of dialogue which Congreve gives to them as well as to his Wits. Here, Valentine's "mad" speeches, if not the "pure poetry" as some have asserted, are an admirable artefact. One can see in this play, as well as in others, "a strong element of wistfulness...a constant fear of disillusion." It is perhaps merely the case that Congreve, like his fellow-dramatists, was unable fully to imagine and present, without sentimentality, a permanent affection or relationship.

Congreve's best play, *The Way of the World* (1700), was not, and has not proved, so successful a stage-piece, though it contains some of the best scenes and acting roles in the Restoration Comedy. The character of Millamant has been especially charming, and has been universally acclaimed as Congreve's finest dramatic creation. She represents the finest blend of gaiety, mockery, and genuine affection. Equally brilliant in the plays is its dialogue. Congreve's phrasing is fine, often surprising: this strength is indeed, too consistently and exclusively exploited. He delights the style-fanciers, such as Hazlitt, but he works too much in terms of the fine phrase, the dazzling or more robustly amusing scene. However, even this best of his plays, like his others, lacks coherence; the parts are more important than the whole. There is, in fact, no whole of any importance. The plot is rather intricate, but also meaningless. Congreve has, no doubt, a sharp eye for certain situations, such as, the gross self-deception of Lady Wishfort, the back-biting of Witwound, the inability of Millamant, who loves Mirabell rather "violently," to say more to his face than that she "might by degrees dwindle into a wife," or the love that Mirabell feels for her:

...For I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that become her; and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable.

However, Congreve's perceptions are not extensive. They do remain the perceptions of a dramatist who chose to quit the theatre at the age of thirty, and whose primary inspiration was literary rather than dramatic. Dr. Johnson noted this tendency in Congreve's very first play, which is true, as well, of his last. Congreve equally answers to the description commonly given of Jane Austen, that she is the amusing but superficial observer of a superficial and restricted society. He sometimes attains the depths of implication (Millamant's love is the best example), but he lacks the understanding of and concern for human values, which makes Jane Austen a major, while he remains a minor, writer. Thus, while Congreve's strength as dramatist lies in the power of individual scenes and in the working out of wit, his weakness lies in his inability to construct coherent plots and failure to comprehend the complexity of human life. With all his imperfections of plot-construction and life-comprehension he still remains the best and most representative writer of his age. The limitations of his age and his own weaknesses have direct correspondence with each other. Since the age was such, his options were limited. If he is superficial in drama, so was the age in life. If he is given to getting absorbed in scenes, forgetting the purpose of the entire life, so was the age engrossed in the momentary pleasures of life, which ignored the serious concerns, of viewing life steadily and viewing it whole. Hence, the writer and the age in Congreve walk hand in hand.

4.8 GLOSSARY

Sinecure – A paid position requiring little or no work.

Formalist – One who emphasizes artistic form over content or moral message.

Vehemence – Intense force or strong emotion.

Inconstancy – Lack of faithfulness or consistency, especially in love.

Intrigue – A secret or complicated plot.

Prescience – Foreknowledge or foresight.

Affectation – Artificial or pretentious behaviour.

Melodramatic – Excessively emotional or exaggerated in style.

Antithetical – Involving direct contrast or opposition.

Superfluous – Unnecessary or more than required.

4.9 LET US SUM UP

William Congreve shaped the English comedy of manners through his brilliant comic dialogue, his satirical portrayal of the war of the sexes, and his ironic scrutiny of the affection of his age.

4.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss William Congreve as a dramatist.
2. Evaluate wit and humouristic elements in William Congreve's plays.
3. Analyse the characters portrayal in William Congreve's plays.

4.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following is William Congreve's most famous play?

a) *The Country Wife*

b) *The Way of the World*

c) *She Stoops to Conquer*

d) *The Rivals*

2. In *The Way of the World*, what must Mirabell do to marry Millamant with her full dowry?

a) Gain the approval of Lady Wishfort

b) Defeat Fainall in a duel

c) Prove his nobility

d) Find a lost inheritance

3. Which theme is most commonly found in Congreve's comedies?

a) Revenge and tragedy

b) War and heroism

c) Love, deception, and social satire

d) Gothic horror and supernatural elements

4. What is the significance of the proviso scene in *The Way of the World*?

a) It is a political debate between characters

b) It lays out the conditions for Mirabell and Millamant's marriage

c) It serves as comic relief with minor characters

d) It introduces a dramatic twist in the plot

5. In *Love for Love*, what does Valentine pretend to be in order to avoid paying his debts?

a) A nobleman

b) A priest

c) A madman

d) A soldier

Answers

1. b) *The Way of the World*

2. a) Gain the approval of Lady Wishfort

3. c) Love, deception, and social satire

4. b) It lays out the conditions for Mirabell and Millamant's marriage

5. c) A madman

4.12 SUGGESTED READING

Anderson, John Parker, and Edmund Gosse. *Life of William Congreve*. Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2019.

Gosse, Edmund, editor. *Life and Writings of William Congreve*. Classic Reprint, 1kg Limited, 2015.

"Legacy of William Congreve." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Congreve/Legacy>

WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670–1729)
THE WAY OF THE WORLD

STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 5.3 The Restoration Comedy
- 5.4 Glossary
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 5.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.8 Suggested Reading

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will introduce the learners with salient features of Restoration comedy.

5.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to familiarize the learner with the salient features of Restoration comedy and also to acquaint the learner with the major writers of Restoration period.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the key features of Restoration comedy – Identify its use of wit, satire, and social commentary.
2. Explain the role of humor and satire – Discuss how these elements were used to critique manners and morality.
3. Analyze major themes in Restoration comedy – Explore themes such as marriage, gender roles, and deception.
4. Examine notable playwrights and works – Identify key figures like William Congreve, Aphra Behn, and William Wycherley.

5.3 THE RESTORATION COMEDY

Among the various forms of literature, drama is, decidedly, the most dependent upon and sensitive to its audience. Shakespeare's achievement was, at least partly, owing to a happy cross-fertilization between the genius of Shakespeare and the spirit of the age. Of course, this coincidence of the man and the moment does not take place very often, but whenever it does, it produces greatness or excellence just as it did in the case of Shakespeare, or the Renaissance as a whole. English drama since the age of Shakespeare has been on a perpetual downward slide. Several attempts have been made to revive the English drama in its past glory, but none really succeeded to

achieve the intended goal. There have been some achievements but only to an extent. Oscar Wilde, for instance, succeeded in a certain form of farcical comedy. So did Shaw, again in the limited form of social drama. And so did Eliot, to an extent, in recapturing the spirit of the poetic drama. All these attempts, however, were highly limited, confined to one or another small department of drama, and even as such did not last long.

Restoration Drama sparkles by comparison with the virtual nullity, which followed it, but it is clearly inferior, both in range and depth, to the Elizabethan Drama. The course of deterioration of the drama after the age of Shakespeare shows how much the individual talent is dependent upon the environment and tradition. Of course, like most periods of history, the Restoration period also took pride in considering itself superior to the preceding. We know how the Restoration writers (such as Dryden) considered “the last age,” “barbarous or Gothic.” They always considered their own period “our refined age.” The age of Dryden (as Restoration period is called) was highly self-conscious, especially about those social practices which distinguished it from the pre-Commonwealth England. It was the Restoration comedy, more than any other form of literature in the period, which provided the principal literary expression for this selfconsciousness. The spirit of the age, so to say, produced a new form of comedy, which later received the title of “Comedy of Manners.” This new comedy was, obviously, an expression of these new habits and values of the Restoration Society. No such values and habits favoured tragedy of the age, that is perhaps the reason why so little of it has survived. While the tragedies of the age reflect the sentimentality of cynicism, the comedies reflect cynicism itself. While the former sounds pathetic, the latter sounds pompous.

The spirit of the age of Restoration was well represented by king Charles II himself, whose coronation in 1660 was termed Restoration (of Monarchy). As Bishop Burnet observed, “His private opinion of people was very odd. He thought no man sincere, nor woman honest, out of principle; but that whenever they proved so, humour or vanity was at the bottom of it.” Charles’s love-life, another contemporary reported, manifested “the effects of health and a good constitution, with as little mixture of the seraphic part as ever a man had.” Charles is said to have notoriously differed from his entourage rather in the scope than in the nature of his private activities. As the most illustrious and one of the most assiduous of the drama’s patrons he exercised an exceptional influence on the drama of the age. We know how during this period (full forty years between 1660 and 1700) English literature, as well as culture, was totally “upper-class,” to an extent that it had never been before. On the reopening of the theatres in 1660 (they had remained closed during the period of the Commonwealth from 1642 to 1660), two companies, sometimes even one, sufficed for London, though the smaller Elizabethan London supported as many as six companies. The tendency of the drama to appeal less generally, and more specifically, to the court, had been noticeable before 1642. However, during the Restoration period the audience became limited and homogeneous as never before.

The Restoration audience took pride in being critical. No doubt, there remained during the period a good deal of discussion about dramatic theory among the readers as well as the writers of drama. But the taste of the audience, such as it was, cannot be considered nice, and the least of all was this audience critical of itself. The comic dramatists of the period depicted this rather degenerate and decadent upper-class society without making any attempt to disturb its self-complacency. Such an attitude of the dramatists did, of course, provoke some protest but the coterie of the upper class endorsed and enjoyed the depiction of their life on the stage. An important attack on Restoration comedy at the time came from Collier, who wrote *a Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 1698. Later critics, of course, condemned more openly. Macaulay’s powerful essay on the subject is well known. Leslie Stephen echoes Macaulay when he describes this comedy as “written by blackguards for blackguards.” Dr. Johnson earlier in the eighteenth century, had given to this common attack on “the wits of Chares” his usual weight and finality of phrasing:

Themselves they studied, as they felt they writ; Intrigue was plot,
obscenity was wit.

Vice always found a sympathetic friend;
They pleas'd their age, and did not aim to mend.

Some of the more sensible Restoration dramatists did “aim to amend.” Wycherley was one of them. His attitude was ambiguous. Another was Dryden, who felt quite unhappy with both the ethos and the form of contemporary drama. But as a professional dramatist Dryden had to comply with popular taste, so he contrived his “mechanical obscenities” and continued writing in loose dramatic form inherited from the Elizabethans, though he found it hard to believe in it himself. Shadwell’s fate was not different. He began his career protesting against the bawdy and repartee so popular in the comedy, as in the life, of the period, but he, too, succumbed to the pressure of the times. As a result, he created conventional characters, situations, dialogues, and attitudes. The authority of the social mode becomes quite clear when we find Dryden saying that repartee is “the very soul of conversation,” and Steel insisting that “the chief qualification” of a dramatist is “to be a very well-bred man.”

The most common setting for the Restoration comedies was London. The action was generally seen through the eyes of the Metropolitan wit, who would invariably be the play’s hero. Also, equally commonly, the hero would be a projection of the dramatist himself, who accepted the common assumptions like, the Countryman was a boor, the Puritan a hypocrite, and the citizen the husband of a wife who might be tempted. The presence of the upper-class wit, impoverished though he often was, at the center of the comic play’s action distinguished Restoration comedy from its predecessors. Traditionally, as a middle-ranking literature, comedy dealt with lower-class persons. Jonsonian comedy followed this model. So did most Elizabethans and Jacobean. One of the limitations that the Restoration found in the comedy of its preceding periods was its poor showing in “gentlemen.” Dryden himself complained that the Elizabethan dramatists’ wit “was not the wit of gentlemen.” At the same time, it cannot be denied that the Restoration comedy was derived from the Elizabethan comedy. Of course, not from Shakespeare, whose comedy was romantic, but from Ben Jonson, whose comedy was realistic. The descriptive surnames of the characters in the Restoration comedy were a direct echo of Jonsonian practice. Even more than Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher provided the true model for the Restoration comedy. Dryden, in 1668, noted that among the Elizabethans the last two (Beaumont and Fletcher) were most popular:

...they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartee, no poet before them could paint as they have done.

It was this pair, no doubt, that had introduced and popularized “witty obscenity” in English drama.

The Restoration dramatists made it their sole occupation, an exclusive concern. The best of them, we have seen, could not resist its vogue.

Decidedly, then, the Restoration Comedy has serious and conspicuous limitations, the extent of which becomes clear if it is compared with the Elizabethan comedy. However, within its own limited range, certain situations and character-types are seen sharply and amusingly. The most conspicuous quality of Restoration Comedy is the witty exchange of words. Wit and repartee were, of course, highly prized qualities in the conversation of gentlemen. Verbal cleverness and intellectual agility of this kind were comparative novelties in English social life. These qualities might have been overrated by the Restoration gentry as well as dramatist, they do remain attractive elements in the comedies which reproduce them. No comedies, however, rely entirely on wit exhibitions. Dryden, the greatest poet of the period, sensibly advocated “the mixed way of comedy; that which is neither all wit, nor all humour, but the result of both.” In this way, the various titles the critics have awarded the Restoration Comedy of manners, of intrigue, of wit, of immorality—are indicative of the different qualities this comedy displays. These different qualities also catered, so to say, to the different sections of the audience—the wits of the Pit, the ladies of

the Boxes, and the servants and wenches of the Gallery. Drama, being more directly meant to be enjoyed by the people, is largely shaped by the morals and manners of the society of its time.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks using the correct words from the box below:

(witty dialogue, comedy of manners, satire, The Country Wife, disguise, social norms, Aphra Behn, William Congreve)

1. Restoration comedy is often referred to as a _____, as it humorously portrays the behavior of the upper class.
2. Playwrights used _____ to mock the hypocrisy and vanity of high society.
3. _____ is a famous Restoration comedy by William Wycherley, known for its bold themes.
4. _____, one of the first professional female playwrights, contributed to the genre with works like *The Rover*.

Answers

1. Comedy of manners
2. Satire
3. *The Country Wife*
4. Aphra Behn

Every dramatist of the Restoration period mixed the elements just mentioned in varying proportions, but a look at the early comedies of the period shows quite clearly that its strength lies in the witty scenes. The dramatists of the time realized it, and there can be seen steady increase in and refinement of the “Manners” element. One can notice how the early plays of Dryden and Etherege are a hotchpotch of gay-couple adventures, low farcical intrigues and humours, and romantic-heroic, love-and-honour plots in verse. The vitality, however, clearly belongs to the gay-couples. The introduction of actresses on the stage by the Restoration theatres also contributed to the success and popularity of these sharp encounters between the sexes. For instance, one important element in Dryden’s plays was the “Proviso-scene,” in which hero and heroine bargained about the conditions under which each might contemplate matrimony.

Dryden’s success with these scenes established them as stereotype, and they were much imitated and burlesqued. The most brilliant of such scenes is, of course, the bargaining of Congreve’s *Mirabell* and *Millamant*. Dryden’s gay couples begin from such premises as these:

Florimel (a maid of Honour) – But this marriage is such a bugbear to me! Much might be if we could invent but any way to make it easy.

Celadon (a Courtier) – Some foolish people have made it uneasy by drawing the knot faster than they need; but we that are wiser will loosen it a little. (*Secret Love, or, The Maiden Queen*)

The couple traverse some familiar grounds for marital discord: *Florimel* hopes that *Celadon* may find “marriage as good as wenching,” if they are married, not into the damning titles of “husband and wife,” but “by the more agreeable names of mistress and gallant.” Such scenes are, decidedly, bright and shrewd, but they are, certainly, not penetrating.

Part of this brilliance of the Restoration came from its imitation of the French dramatist Moliere. Dryden’s *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1667) is a direct imitation of the French model; it proved one of the gayest farces of the period. It must, however, be noted here that the Restoration adaptations of Moliere were always made both more coarse and more complicated than their originals. For example, Dryden’s addition of a subplot to the French model in his *Sir Martin Mar-All*, was not only coarse but rather nauseous. The popular demand for the multiple-plot was actually a legacy of the Elizabethan habit. But while it worked very well in the Elizabethan comedy, especially

the Shakespearean, it proved rather disastrous for the Restoration Comedy. Although most comic dramatist of the period abandoned the mixture of verse and prose – another Elizabethan habit—it is rarely that any unity of impression is achieved. Wycherley and Congreve are extreme in retaining melodramatic plots in, *Love in a Wood* and *The Double Dealer*, but most plays of the period have at least three plots of various kinds, connected in so bewildering a way that one is often left asking: “How could an audience both be clever enough to understand the story, and stupid enough to be interested by it when they did?”

Etherege, of all the dramatists of the period, achieved unity in his plays, dropping some of the favourite scenes of contemporary drama, making shrewd selection of incidents. However, by the time Etherege wrote his last play, Restoration Comedy had its favourite character-types and situations. There were of course, individual modifications of the pattern. Marriage as an institution remained more of a joke, a butt of ridicule. Similarly, country remained another butt of ridicule. The rake-heroes persisted until they were gradually ousted by Virtue and Sense after the Restoration period was over in 1700. Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, commonly considered the finest of Restoration comedies, is also their quintessence. There is hardly, for sure, any incident or character or dialogue which can be called original. He only perfected the common mode used by all the dramatists of the age. He added to the mode a nicety of feeling and phrasing. Congreve’s main contemporaries were rather individual in their divergencies from the mode. For instance, Shadwell is uneven. He aspired to a Jonsonian breadth and seriousness, but he was in the habit of getting easily deflected by need or whim. We find that there is gay bawdy in his *Epsom Wells* (1672); virtuous didacticism in *Bury Fair* (1689); amusing satire in *True Widow* (1678). Shadwell’s *Squire of Alstia* (1688) is a lively play, which depicts a vivid picture of London’s underworld, but also ballasted with some well-meant discussions on the theory of education. Dryden may have depicted Shadwell as a dull writer, and he may not have been as great a dramatist as Dryden, he succeeded in doing something which none of his contemporaries, including Dryden did: he followed the Jonsonian ideal of exploring social classes which his contemporaries completely ignored.

While Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726) and George Farquhar (1677- 1707) remained rather at the tail end of the long line of Restoration dramatists, following the traditional Restoration mode, Wycherley was unmistakably the most individual of his contemporaries. He does impress us by the sheer vehemence of his language and the energy of his characterization. One can see in his plays the force of a moral passion which made even Collier acknowledge him “an author of good sense.” But considered in harsh terms, he is found rather too narrow and confused in his apprehension of moral issues. What he did was to satirize the stock butts of Restoration comedy – fops, lawyers, country-folk, the overforties. However, his distinctive gifts only appear when he can exercise his indignation against “that heinous, and worst of women’s crimes, hypocrisy.” His first play, *Love in a Wood* (1671), is a confused mixture of various stock situations of characters. The play’s strength lies in its scenes involving the hypocritical Alderman Gripe and Lady Flippant. His second comedy, *The Gentleman Dancing Master* (1672), too, does not engage Wycherley’s major talent. It is an amusing, if trivial farce. It is characteristic of the dramatist only in its main fault—that of iteration. Here it is more of a joke, not a moral or a hatred, that gets repeated only to become rather over-obvious. It is well said that Wycherley never learned discretion or economy in his dramatic depiction. The lengthy asides which take place rather implausibly and undramatically in almost all of his plays are, surely, a sign of this unwillingness to leave anything to the imagination of the viewers. In his later plays—*The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer* – we notice a force, a bitterness and scorn unique in Restoration Comedy. One can understand, if not share, the enthusiasm Dryden felt for “The satire, strength, and wit of Manly Wycherley,” who had “obliged all honest and virtuous men by one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which have ever been presented in the English theatre.”

When we read the representative Restoration plays of Wycherley, Etherege and Congreve, the best dramatists of the genre, our first impression, for sure, is that we have left behind the ordinary people and entered the closed and charmed world of the fashionable *beaumonde*. These plays are mostly set in London, where

elegant ladies and handsome gentlemen are shown living a life of languid luxury, spending the day in witty conversation among themselves. The ladies sometimes go out for a stroll in the fashionable St. James's Park and are then, joined by their gentlemen lovers or admirers. The gentlemen, while not in the company of the ladies in the park, sit in chocolate-houses where they enjoy their drinks and play cards. In this closed world there are two principal engagements – sex and repartee. The gentlemen are always on the look out for sexual adventures, so are the ladies equally anxious to have extra-marital escapades. Husbands and wives are shown leading independent lives; their indifference to each other is a byword in the conversation among the “gentle” folk. Mrs. Squeamish in *The Country Wife*, significantly, complains that the men of quality “use them with the same indifferency and ill-breeding as if we were all married to them.” By clear implication, marriage is a matter of joke in this complaint.

Rural England, whenever we are shown a glimpse of it, comes in for heavy ridicule. Country born are considered louts by birth. They neither know nor have the opportunity to learn the ways of “high” life considered civilized and refined. In Congreve's *The Way of the World*, for instance, Sir Willfull is shown to shock all around him by starting to take off his boots in Lady Wishfort's parlour and by getting repulsively drunk soon after. As for the country women (mostly girls), their problem is shown to be not that of modesty and innocence. For instance, Sue in *Love for Love* and Margery Pinchwife in *The Country Wife* both are shown as famished for sex. They are shown to be only too eager to learn the ways of the world and acquire lovers. Obviously, the implication is that it is the “ways” of the degenerate world of lords and ladies that constitutes the ideal of life. Since there would be hardly any countryman among the audience, the dramatists had the unlimited liberty to ridicule the country characters to any extent. The closed world of the King's coterie, no wonder, produced the closed comedy in the reign of Charles II.

Keeping in view all these aspects of the Restoration comedy it is not hard to understand why it came to be called “Artificial Comedy.” In this world of Restoration drama, as also perhaps in the world of Charles's Court, there was too much concentration on the manners, so much so that it had forgotten its natural instincts and feelings, even the moral and serious concerns of life. In such a world, obviously, life gets reduced to the externals only, one's dress, one's manners, one's physical appetites of sex and sensuous pleasures. The other, the deeper side of man's life, his moral and spiritual concerns, are completely obliterated. In such a case, “artificial” is the most appropriate title one can think of. Collier's attack on the artificial and immoral comedy, although forcefully countered by the defenders of the Restoration comedy, had its impact on public opinion. Unable to face the popular wrath against it, the plays dwindled away. Within a few years of the staging of *The Way of the World* in 1700, the wave of virtue replaced that of immorality. We can conclude our discussion of Restoration comedy with the opening remark of Charles Lamb (in his brilliant essay “On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century”): “the artificial comedy or comedy of manners, is extinct on our stage... the times cannot bear them.... The business of their dramatic characters will not stand the moral test.” Since then, the moral opprobrium has not yet fully gone and, even today, admirers have to take a defensive attitude, in fact, apologetic attitude. The case of the Restoration comedy once again proves the intimate link between art and life, drama and society. Whatever be the style of like in an age, so shall be the style of its drama.

5.4 GLOSSARY

Restoration Comedy – Comedy written after the Restoration of monarchy (1660), depicting upper-class social life with wit and cynicism.

Comedy of Manners – A form of comedy that satirizes the manners, morals, and social behaviour of fashionable society.

Repartee – Quick, witty exchange of remarks or dialogue.

Wit – Intellectual sharpness shown through clever language and verbal brilliance.

Artificial Comedy – Comedy focusing on surface manners and social conventions rather than deep emotions or moral concerns.

Proviso Scene – A scene where lovers bargain humorously over conditions of marriage.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

The term “Restoration Comedy” refers to English comedies written and performed in the Restoration period from 1660 to 1710. Comedy of Manners is used as synonym of Restoration Comedy. These comedies were rowdy and dirty, with lots of hilarious and scandalous dialogues focussing on sex. These comedies make fun of people and sometimes entire social classes. The plot revolves around unfaithful wives, cuckolded husband and tricky lovers.

5.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is considered the key figure in the development of Restoration Comedy?
 - A. William Shakespeare
 - B. Christopher Marlowe
 - C. Ben Jonson
 - D. William Wycherley
2. Which historical period does Restoration Comedy refer to?
 - A. Victorian Era
 - B. Elizabethan Era
 - C. Interregnum
 - D. The Restoration Period
3. What was the primary reason for the flourishing of comedy during the Restoration Period?
 - A. Political stability
 - B. Religious harmony
 - C. Social upheaval
 - D. Economic recession
4. Which of the following is a well-known work of Restoration Comedy by William Congreve?
 - A. *The Way of the World*
 - B. *The Country Wife*
 - C. *The Rover*
 - D. *She Stoops to Conquer*
5. Restoration Comedies are often characterized by:
 - A. Tragic endings
 - B. Satirical wit and social critique
 - C. Romantic idealism
 - D. Minimal use of wordplay

6. Which female playwright gained prominence in the genre of Restoration Comedy?
 - A. Aphra Behn
 - B. Mary Wollstonecraft
 - C. Jane Austen
 - D. Charlotte Brontë
7. What is the term for the comedic device often used in Restoration Comedies where characters disguise themselves to achieve their goals?
 - A. Foil
 - B. Disguise Plot
 - C. Soliloquy
 - D. Deus ex machina
8. Which social class is frequently portrayed in Restoration Comedies?
 - A. Aristocracy
 - B. Clergy
 - C. Peasantry
 - D. Intellectuals
9. Who is known for the phrase “Restoration Comedy” to describe the comedies of manners from the period?
 - A. Samuel Pepys
 - B. John Dryden
 - C. Colley Cibber
 - D. George Etherege
10. In Restoration Comedy, what term is used to describe a character who serves as a comic contrast to the main character and highlights their characteristics?
 - A. Tragic Hero
 - B. Antagonist
 - C. Protagonist
 - D. Comic Foil

Answers: 1d, 2d, 3a,4a,5b,6a,7b,8a,9c,10d.

5.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the features of Restoration comedy.
2. Define Comedy of Manners. What are its main components? Explain with illustrations.
3. Discuss Restoration Literature and its characteristics.

5.8 SUGGESTED READING

Wu, Duncan, and David Womersley, editors. *Restoration Comedy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008. Ebook.

Lynch, Kathleen Martha. *Social Mode of Restoration Comedy*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2019.

“*The Restoration and Restoration Comedy*.” Say Her Name: Discovering Women’s Voices in History, edited by Dr. Karen Palmer, Pressbooks, 2020, <https://pressbooks.pub/sayhername/chapter/the-restoration-and-restoration-comedy/>

WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670–1729)

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 6.3 Themes of Restoration Comedy
- 6.4 Glossary
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 6.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will introduce the learners with salient features of Restoration Comedy.

6.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to give the learner an insight into the various themes of Restoration Comedy.

By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify and explain key themes in Restoration Comedy, including marriage, social satire, gender roles, and hypocrisy.
- Analyze how the historical and social context of the Restoration era influenced the themes of the comedies.
- Compare the themes of Restoration Comedy with those of other dramatic genres or time periods, recognizing similarities and differences.

6.3 THEMES OF RESTORATION COMEDY

The very epigraph to the comic play, lifted from Horace, gives an indication of this theme of the play. The quotation reads as follows: “It is worth your while to listen, you who do not wish things to go well for adulterers” and “she who is detected fears for her dowry....” Significantly, the often-repeated phrase “the way of the world” is invariably used in the context of marriage. No wonder that at the end of the play Congreve emphasizes the moral “The marriage Frauds too oft are paid in kind.” The play presents several pairs of lovers, but in no case the early stages of love are shown on the stage. Mrs. Fainall’s amour with Mirabell, for instance, is something that belongs to the past. What we see on the stage is the aftertaste of the affair, which is not very palatable. When we see Fainall for the first time, he has already been married for some time. Also, even his extra-marital has begun to show the effects of satiety. By the time we reach the later part of the play’s action, we find that Fainall and Mrs. Marwood

cling to each other more as co-conspirators than as lovers. As for Mirabell and Millamant, they are accepted, right from the play's opening, confirmed lovers. The play only stamps the seal of betrothal on their love affair. Only in the case of Lady Wishfort do we see some of the titillations of love as she rehearses to herself the various poses in which she will receive Sir Rowland. But her affair is meant to be a mockromance, not a genuine love-affair. In other words, while in the Elizabethan comedy the subject is love as such, without the trappings of sex or marriage, in the Restoration Comedy, the entire emphasis is on sex rather than love, on the extra-marital affairs, and that too for the purpose of marriage or property or both, never love for its own sake.

It is for this very reason that the heroes and heroines of Restoration Comedy are not young men and women as in the Elizabethan comedy. They are mature men and women of experience, who have had affairs, at times marriages, before we see them on the stage. Here, the focus is on the follies, not flowering, of love; and how these follies lead to consequences which one cannot escape. One of the points driven home in the Restoration Comedy is that there is no way to get away with one's actions of indiscretion. Much of what happens towards the end of the play is shown to be a direct result of one's earlier acts of folly or wrong-doing. Mrs. Fainall's past affair with Mirabell, for instance, brings upon her a near disaster. Similarly, Mr. Fainall's adulterous liaison with Mrs. Marwood comes back full circle upon him. Inversely, Mirabell's responsible action of safeguarding his former mistress's wealth helps to save the situation. We may recall here how in the Elizabethan comedy there are no post-marriage affairs, nor even those contrived for marriage. The exclusive focus is on the blooming of love between two young individuals and its ennobling effect on their characters, on their growth as humane personalities.

In the Restoration Comedy, the need for true adjustment between married man and woman is coupled with the need for responsibility. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall are an example of a maladjusted married couple. Then, there are Fainall and Mrs. Marwood who, despite their being lovers, lack faith in each other. Against these mismatched or maladjusted couples, whose cases demonstrate the unpleasant consequences of incompatibility, is placed the ideal pair of lovers in Mirabell and Millamant. The love between these two does not bear any relationship to the rest of the story of the play. It seems to pursue an independent course, quite unconcerned with the general wrangle over property and wealth. No doubt, the lovers are involved rather directly in all the plots and counter-plots. In fact, Mirabell himself is the master-mind behind most of them. But all these matters are irrelevant so far as the personal relationship between the lovers is concerned. Their love remains their private drama. Before their love can be sealed with marriage they must come to terms with each other, which would require mutual honesty and reciprocal trust. This greatest moment in the play's action marks also the high watermark of Congreve's art. It is said to be superior to any other scene in the entire range of the Restoration comedy so far as its brilliance, its depth of emotion and profundity are concerned. After a long hide-and-seek between the lovers for reasons of ego and individuality, the bargaining scene arrives. Millamant has finally agreed to meet Mirabell, ending the love chase that has been going on for a long time.

Check Your Progress

Fill in the blanks with appropriate terms related to themes of Restoration Comedy:

1. Restoration Comedy often satirizes the institution of _____, portraying it as a social contract rather than a romantic union.
2. The plays frequently highlight _____ roles, often subverting traditional expectations of men and women.
3. The historical context of the _____ of Charles II greatly influenced the permissive and witty tone of these comedies.
4. A common theme is _____, where characters pretend to be virtuous while engaging in immoral behavior.
5. Restoration Comedy uses humor to critique _____ norms and expose their absurdities.

Answer Key

1. marriage
2. gender
3. Restoration
4. hypocrisy
5. social

In keeping with the Neoclassical obsession with reason and rationality, the lovers must come to terms with each other not as lovers, but as rational human beings. The Restoration belief was that it is only on the basis of reason, unclouded by emotion, that the sound basis for marriage can be formed. Congreve, therefore, deliberately makes them use legal language, for marriage is considered a sort of legal contract. In the contest for bargain, Millamant stakes claims for her privileges, for her liberty, for her right of privacy, for her freedom to meet whosoever she pleases. If these articles are subscribed, she would agree to marry. In the comic spirit of the age, Mirabell also asks, in the bargain, for certain articles ensuring his independence from the tyranny of the weaker sex. The scene is, of course, meant to sound unnatural and artificial, for no living man or woman, much less the lovers, would insist upon the kind of legal provisions that both sides insist upon in the marriage contract. Of course, artificiality, here, is more than a literary device. The idea is that mere natural instincts or emotions are not the sound basis for human relationship in a civilized society. Marriage, therefore, has to be some sort of nature methodized. Mind and heart, reason and emotion, art and nature, therefore, have to be reconciled and integrated for a civilized life.

Thus, Congreve, like a true neo-classical writer, states his theme, then proceeds step by step on the ladder of rationality, reaching finally to logical conclusion, winding up the theme that was being developed. In its own terms, *The Way of the World* (1700) is the best and the greatest play of its period. The treatment of the theme is single-minded, making the work an intense effort at presenting something central to the society it chose to depict. It remains a sort of social document so far as the play is concerned. Free from the tempting digressions of the Elizabethan drama, it remains neat and clean as a neoclassical construction.

6.4 GLOSSARY

Epigraph – A quotation placed at the beginning of a literary work.

Adulterers – People who engage in sexual relations outside marriage.

Satiety – A state of being over-satisfied or bored due to excess.

Titillations – Exciting or arousing suggestions or actions.

Extra-marital – Occurring outside the bounds of marriage.

Indiscretion – Lack of good judgment; careless behaviour.

Liaison – A secret or illicit romantic relationship.

Maladjusted – Poorly suited or incompatible, especially in marriage.

Reciprocal – Given, felt, or done in return by both sides.

Neoclassical – Relating to an artistic movement valuing reason, order, and restraint.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

During Restoration period writers wrote comedies criticizing the society as people, particularly upper classes, living without moral standards. The Restoration dramatists wrote works based on a satirical observation of the social behaviour.

6.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is the author of the Restoration Comedy *The Way of the World*?
 - A. William Wycherley
 - B. William Congreve
 - C. Aphra Behn
 - D. George Etherege
2. In *The Way of the World*, what is the name of the central female character pursued by many suitors?
 - A. Lady Wishfort
 - B. Millamant
 - C. Mrs. Marwood
 - D. Fainall
3. Which of the following is one of the main themes explored in Congreve's *The Way of the World*?

A. Romantic Idealism	C. Tragic Endings
B. Social Critique and Satire	D. Political Allegory
4. Who is the witty and intelligent servant character in *The Way of the World*, known for his clever wordplay and observations?
 - A. Fainall
 - B. Waitwell
 - C. Witwoud
 - D. Mirabell
5. What is the term for the comedic device used in *The Way of the World* where characters engage in clever and sophisticated verbal sparring?
 - A. Disguise Plot
 - B. Comic Foil

- C. Repartee
- D. Soliloquy

Answers: 1b, 2b, 3b, 4c, 5c

6.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Illustrate the various themes in Restoration Comedy.
2. Discuss *The Way of the World* as Restoration Comedy.
3. Why Restoration Comedy is called as Comedy of Manners? Explain with examples.

6.8 SUGGESTED READING

Muir, Kenneth. *The Comedy of Manners*. Taylor & Francis, 2022. Ebook.

Hirst, David L. *Comedy of Manners*. Taylor & Francis, 2017. Ebook.

Lombardi, Esther. "The Evolution of the Restoration Comedy." ThoughtCo, updated *Apr. 15, 2025*, <https://www.thoughtco.com/game-of-love-william-mycherly-735165>

WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670–1729)
THE WAY OF THE WORLD

STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 7.3 Plot Summary of the Play
- 7.4 Glossary
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 7.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.8 Suggested Reading

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will introduce the learners to the summary of the play *The Way of World*.

7.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the summary of the play and its critical analysis.

By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Summarize the main plot points and subplots of *The Way of the World*, identifying key characters and their motivations.
- Explain how conspiracies, deception, and romantic entanglements drive the development of the plot and reveal character dynamics.

7.3 PLOT SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Congreve, in his *The Way of the World* (1700) (considered without any qualification the best play produced during the Restoration period), has perfectly matched the movement of the play's action with the grouping of its characters and the balancing of its antithetical style. The central, and ideal, pair of play's lovers, Mirabell and Millamant, is balanced by an adulterous pair of lovers, Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Above these two antithetical pairs is Lady Wishfort, living in the pursuit of her illusory dreams of wedding bliss. Then, there is in between them Mrs. Fainall, living in the disenchanted world of an unhappy wedding. Complicating and coordinating the inter-relationships among these various characters is, indeed, Lady Wishfort who holds control over almost everyone's wealth. At one level, she constitutes the central link that binds almost all the play's characters together, relates them to one another. With these pillars of the play's action or plot, the structure of *The Way of the World* is raised into a complex but compact whole, the play has never been faulted for its plot construction. In fact, in terms of

plot structure, it has always been considered the best piece of its period. The Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end, with the conventional exposition, complication, and denouement, are followed as closely as is possible in a dramatic composition.

The opening Act of *The Way of the World* provides the exposition of the play's action. It introduces to us almost all the male characters, informs us about the others, and supplies us with the necessary background information. The opening scene between Fainall and Mirabell, which later gets echoed and paralleled by a similar scene between Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood in the beginning of Act II, apprises the audience right away of the necessary events that have already taken place before the play begins. One of the principal things established in the opening dialogue is the very pivot of the play's action—the love-affair between Mirabell and Millamant. The subject is, in fact, introduced obliquely, raising greater curiosity about the nature of the affair. It is done through a remark made by the hero's foil, Fainall, who says, "Confess, Millamant and you quarrell'd last Night." It is followed a little later by an information about the practical problem that must be solved before they can hope to get united in marriage. The problem in question is that half of Millamant's fortune is under the control of her aunt, Lady Wishfort, whose prior consent is necessary if the fortune is to be claimed by the female lover.

It must be noted here, and not just in passing, that while love is governed by marriage, marriage is overruled by wealth in the society of the Restoration period. In other words, there cannot be any love affair without the legitimacy of marriage, and there cannot be any marriage without the legality of wealth. Thus, while the emotion of love is subordinated to the interest of marriage, the institution of marriage is subjected to the interest of wealth. In this hierarchy of interests, therefore, it is the interest of wealth or property that occupies the uppermost place. One recalls here, by contrast, the Elizabethan world picture, in which love was the superior most value, a sort of virtue, and a reward of its own, never measured in terms of marriage or wealth. Love may lead to marriage, it invariably did, but it was never stringed to extraneous interests like that of wealth. Wherever it was so linked, it was presented as something villainous and vicious. Thus, there is a clear contrast between the romantic world of the Elizabethan comedy and the realistic or practical world of the Restoration.

Here, in *The Way of the World*, the problem of ensuring the possession of wealth before marriage can take place between the principal pair of characters, constitutes the central interest of the play. Every incident in the plot converges towards this event. Mirabell has already attempted one trick on Lady Wishfort and has failed. In a way, Lady Wishfort is true to her name: she holds in her fort the wishes of other characters; unless she releases, their wishes cannot be fulfilled. She is the fort. Equally true to her name is Lady Marwood, who mars or spoils the plans of various characters. Here, in the present case of Mirabell, it is Lady Marwood who exposes to Lady Wishfort the hero's sham of concealing his love for Millamant. Against this background begins the play's action. The elaborate structure of the subsequent action is built upon Mirabell's second trick, which relates to making his servant Waitwell to pose as his uncle, Sir Rowland, to win the hand of Lady Wishfort. Early hints are thrown about the intrigue afoot in Act I itself. We are told that something is in the offing which is not yet "ripe for Discovery." It is also hinted that this something relates to the secret appointment of Mirabell with Waitwell at one o'clock by Rosamond's pond. We further learn about the hurried and mysterious marriage of Waitwell with Foible, a maid of Lady Wishfort. Once again the names are transparently allegorical or symbolic. While Waitwell is a faithful servant of Mirabell, Foible is the harmless character in the game of intrigue.

Thus, when we approach Act II, everything already stands exposed or explained to us. Mirabell confides his plan or intrigue to his former mistress, Mrs. Fainall, who at once catches upon the plan's implications. The plan is designed to proceed thus: when Lady Wishfort gets contracted to Sir Rowland (actually Waitwell), Mirabell will step in to expose his imposter servant Waitwell. Feeling (supposedly) grateful to Mirabell for having rescued her from a big blunder, Lady Wishfort (hopes Mirabell) would allow him to marry Millamant. The apparent confusion as to details arises from Petulant's information (or misinformation) that Mirabell has an uncle newly arrived

in London who not only stands between the hero and his estate but also has an eye on his beloved, Millamant. Actually, as is made clear by Mirabell's conversation (confidential) with Mrs. Fainall that Mirabell himself has indirectly encouraged Lady Wishfort to circulate the rumor so that she can better conceal her affair with Sir Rowland. By the end of Act II Waitwell leaves the stage to get metamorphosed into Sir Rowland. The familiar trick of disguise is to make the plan (or intrigue) a success.

Act II also introduces, as part of the plot's complication, the subplot centering around Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Fainall has married a daughter of Lady Wishfort, who was formerly Mirabell's mistress. The marriage is, decidedly, one of convenience for avoiding a public scandal. There is no love lost between the two wedded for convenience. The husband, Mr. Fainall, is already engaged in an affair with Mrs. Marwood, a married woman. This woman is secretly in love with Mirabell, although he shows no interest in her. But she keeps a close watch on whatever he does and sabotages his moves as and when an opportunity arises. Her game is to secure him for herself. But when she receives no response, she sets out to harm his interests out of spite and jealousy.

Act III further complicates the action in the manner of the established convention of the dramatic plot. The Act stands structurally at the center of the play's action. The intense compilation begins with the entry of Lady Wishfort. The main thread of the action is therefore set in motion. Now begins a series of rapid alteration consisting of reversals and recoveries. This keeps the audience continually on the alert. It also helps to build up dramatic tempo. Mrs. Marwood arrives in haste to convey to Lady Wishfort her suspicion that perhaps Mirabell is up to some mischief involving the latter. Her suspicion is based on her having seen Mirabell privately talking to Foible, a maidservant of Lady Wishfort. But Foible turns out to be smart to save the plot (or intrigue) from the possible threat. She has been now married to Waitwell and has joined, thus, Mirabell's band in his conspiracy against Lady Wishfort. Foible invents a fictitious conversation with Mirabell, which further incenses Lady Wishfort against the gentleman, but it allays her suspicion about the real matter. Soon follows a meeting between Foible and Mrs. Fainall, a confidant of Mirabell, to plan the further execution of the plot against Lady Wishfort. There is also a passing reference in their conversation to the former affair between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall. The intrigue is, however, met with an intrigue. Mrs. Marwood, hidden in the closet, hears it all.

However, lest the action should collapse into an anti-climax, Congreve holds back the further movement of the play's action. At this stage in the play's action, he throws in a digression. We are invited to enjoy the buffoonery of Sir Willfull, whose name suggests a good deal of fun. The whole of the leftover Act III keeps the main action at bay; it keeps us instead involved in subsidiary matters. In fact, it is not until the very end of Act IV that Mrs. Marwood is allowed to play her trump card. In the meanwhile, lest we should forget the main plot, or rather to heighten our sense of impending danger, we are acquainted with the counterplot engineered by Mrs. Marwood and Mr. Fainall. This comes about at the end of Act III. These two discuss the details of their plot against Mirabell as to how the latter's intrigue is to be exposed to Lady Wishfort and others concerned. The main action is therefore kept, so as to say, in the state of suspended animation. Meanwhile, Sir Willfull, a nephew of Lady Wishfort and half brother of Witwoud, is kept on the stage with his country antics. Making the country gentleman a butt of ridicule, the Restoration urban gentry always enjoyed the show that nourished their sense of superiority over the unrefined country gentlemen. Meanwhile, the love affair between Mirabell and Millamant, the play's central interest, has not been asleep. It has been independently growing, developing towards consummation. Millamant's superb entry in the middle of Act II remains unforgettable all along. She is introduced in a highly dramatic fashion: "Here she comes as faith full Sail, with her Fan spread and her Streamers out." In the subsequent scenes the affair keeps coming through its mention in different conversations. But Mirabell himself wants to keep it unpronounced. He also wants the chase to be prolonged. Both aspects of the affair add to the heightening of suspense and curiosity about it.

In Act IV, the lovers are brought face to face on the stage. While Mirabell has been prolonging his chase, all this while Millamant has been in inner struggle against her own love for him. But now, at long last, she surrenders to her love. This scene comes out to be a great moment of the play. The dramatist places this “Proviso proposal scene” between other two so that an antithesis and a parallel is established on either side of the central interest. What precedes this climactic scene is the encounter between Millamant and Sir Willfull. In an obvious embarrassment and much against his will, the “fool” of the play tries to mumble a few words that a match has been proposed between him and Millamant. He retreats from the room where he was all alone with Millamant in haste as well as relief when she shows him the door. What follows the climactic scene is another farcical scene in which Waitwell as Sir Rowland enacts his grotesque courtship of Lady Wishfort. Just a little before this scene we see even a more hilarious scene with the drunken triumvirate of Waitwell, Petulant and Sir Willfull reeling across the stage. Thus, between the two farcical scenes is placed the fascinating scene of proposal for wedlock between the hero and the heroine. The contrast between the serious and the comic heightens the effect of the serious all the more.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks (Acts 1–3)

1. Mirabell wishes to marry _____, but must secure the approval of her aunt, Lady Wishfort.
2. To gain Lady Wishfort’s favor, Mirabell devises a plan involving his servant _____, who pretends to be his wealthy uncle.
3. Lady Wishfort dislikes Mirabell because he once tried to _____ her.
4. Mrs. Marwood overhears a conversation between Mirabell and _____, revealing the plot to deceive Lady Wishfort.

Answer Key

1. Millamant
2. Waitwell
3. woo
4. Mrs. Fainall

Framed in such a setting as we have just discussed, like a lily blossoming in a bed of weeds, rests this climactic scene of the play’s action. Perhaps in no other way could the dramatist have conveyed to the audience the force of the poetic moment as well as the inherent superiority of the central pair of lovers over all others around them. But even while they remain at a plane higher than the common, they are also a part of the common world. Their descent to commonality is achieved by Congreve with remarkable dramatic skill. Mrs. Fainall comes in to warn Mirabell that Lady Wishfort is on her way, thus bringing him back into the world of intrigues. As for Millamant, she slips back, with great naturalness, to the level of ordinary life when she is found engaged in conversation with Witwoud. Sir Rowland’s courtship scene, that follows the climactic one, brings us back to the main action of the plot—Mirabell’s plan to involve Lady Wishfort into a situation that should compel her to agree to his marriage to Millamant. Meanwhile, Mrs. Marwood, too, has been active on her side. She has sent an anonymous letter to Lady Wishfort exposing the counterfeit of Waitwell as Sir Rowland. But Foible and Waitwell quickly respond to the situation. They think out an explanation, arousing expectation that the calamity for the lovers would be averted. On this note of suspense falls the curtain, ending Act IV of *The Way of the World*.

The earlier tempo of the middle Act is now given momentum once again, moving rather rapidly towards the climax. By the end of Act IV, it had become clear that Waitwell and Foible’s ruse would just not work. Fainall and Marwood seem surely on the ascendance. They bear down on Lady Wishfort and demand, with accompanying threats and blackmail, the fortunes of both Millamant and Mrs. Fainall, the niece and daughter respectively of Lady Wishfort. The first hint of recovery on this side of the battle line appears in the person of Sir Willfull. He and

Millamant appear before Lady Wishfort to assure her that they have collectively consented to her wish that they should become man and wife. This way, Millamant's share of property is taken out of danger. But the fortune of Mrs. Fainall still remains hanging in fire. Even the exposure of Fainall's affair with Mrs. Marwood does not work to stem the ferocity of Fainall. At this point of time when the game seems to have been lost by the central pair of lovers, Mirabell and Millamant, Congreve once again produces his brilliant *Peripeteia* and *Anagnorisis* (Reversal and Discovery) in the form of the black box. Aristotle, we may recall, states in his, *The Poetics*: "A *Peripety* is the change from one state of things within the play to its opposite...in the probable or necessary sequence of events." Totally unexpected as the black box is, it is not, in any way, an external factor – a *deus ex machina* – suddenly introduced to bring about a happy ending. It is both probable and necessary that in a society like the Restoration, sustained by its legal systems, Mirabell, the true wit of his age, would use exactly such a device to protect the interests of Mrs. Fainall. Congreve had criticized the coarser devices of Plautus's plots. His own model was Terence, and like his model, he has given us a play in *The Way of the World* which contains within itself "the artful Solution of the Fable."

Notwithstanding the merits of *The Way of the World* within the matrix of Restoration Comedy, it cannot be ignored that Congreve's play is not free from the common weaknesses of the Comedy of Manners. One of these weaknesses is that the plot gets its wheels, not from the usual course of life so much as the contrived tricks of Wit. The entire action of the play is nothing but a game of Wit. Who outwits whom remains the central interest of the play's action. What we are called upon to appreciate in *The Way of the World* is, not the moral substance of characters and incidents, but the smartness of mind in scheming and counter-scheming. In such a case, it is not our whole being that is called upon to respond to happenings on the stage, but only the top of our head that can admire the intricacies of intrigues, the perniciousness of plots. Compared to the Elizabethan comedy, therefore, the appeal of the Restoration comedy is not very deep. It is highly restricted to the mental and social level only, and does not penetrate beyond into the regions of the heart and spirit. However, within its own genre of the comedy of manners, Congreve's greatest comedy, *The Way of the World*, remains the highest achievement of the Restoration period. Besides, its classical affinity and allegiance gives it a certain perfection of plot construction not possible in the Elizabethan, Shakespearean, or Romantic type of comedy. It may not have the vigour and vitality, or width and breadth, of the Elizabethan plot, but it does have the neatness and unity of the classical structure. Free from the relaxed pace of the Elizabethan comedy, which reveals in digressions, *The Way of the World* is marked by the rapid pace of action and inevitability of the chain of incidents from beginning to end.

7.4 GLOSSARY

Antithetical – Opposite or contrasting in nature.

Illusory – Based on illusion; not real or true.

Denouement – The final resolution of a plot in a play or story.

Obliquely – Indirectly; not stated openly.

Subordinated – Placed in a lower rank or made less important.

Intrigue – A secret plan or complicated scheme.

Metamorphosed – Completely transformed or changed in form.

Peripeteia – A sudden reversal of fortune in a literary work.

Anagnorisis – A moment of recognition or discovery of truth.

Deus ex machina – An artificial or sudden device used to resolve a plot.

7.5 LET US SUM UP

The Way of the World is generally viewed as the supreme example of its genre. Its characters – the vengeful and ultimately pathetic Lady Wishfort; the sparing lovers Mirabell and Millamant; the dark and devious Mrs. Marwood – remain in the mind long after the play is over.

7.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In *The Way of the World*, who is the wealthy, older woman pursued by the foolish Sir Wilfull Witwoud?
 - A. Lady Wishfort
 - B. Mrs. Millamant
 - C. Mrs. Marwood
 - D. Lady Wishfort
2. Which character in *The Way of the World* poses as the uncle of the main female character, Millamant, in an attempt to control her fortune?
 - A. Fainall
 - B. Witwoud
 - C. Mirabell
 - D. Sir Rowland
3. What is the central conflict in *The Way of the World* that drives much of the plot?
 - A. The pursuit of romantic idealism
 - B. Social critique of the aristocracy
 - C. The battle for control of Millamant's fortune
 - D. Political allegory and satire
4. Who is Mirabell's confidante and ally in his efforts to marry Millamant and secure her fortune in *The Way of the World*?
 - A. Waitwell
 - B. Fainall
 - C. Witwoud
 - D. Mrs. Fainall
5. In the resolution of *The Way of the World*, what condition does Millamant impose on Mirabell for their marriage to take place?
 - A. He must relinquish all claims to her fortune
 - B. He must write her a heartfelt love letter
 - C. He must prove his loyalty through a series of challenges
 - D. He must obtain the approval of Lady Wishfort

Answers: 1d, 2a,3c,4a,5b

7.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write the detailed summary of play *The Way of the World*.
2. Discuss the development of story in the play *The Way of the World*.
3. Write a short note on climax in the play *The Way of the World*.

7.8 SUGGESTED READING

Congreve, William. *The Way of the World: A Comedy*. Classic Reprint, FB&C Limited, 2018.

A Study Guide for William Congreve's "The Way of the World". Gale, Cengage Learning, Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2017.

Beiner, Suzannah. "The Way of the World Summary." LitCharts, LitCharts LLC, <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-way-of-the-world/summary>

WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670–1729)

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

STRUCTURE

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 8.3 Wit, Humour and Character
- 8.4 Characters
- 8.5 Glossary
- 8.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 8.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 8.9 Suggested Reading

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Wit and humour were the main characteristics of Restoration Comedy. This lesson will introduce the learners with these characteristics.

8.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to familiarize the learner with the elements of wit and humour in the play and also to give the learner a critical insight into various characters portrayed by Congreve.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify and discuss how Congreve uses wit and humour to develop character interactions and advance the plot.
- Analyze the personalities, motivations, and relationships of key characters through their use of language, especially in witty exchanges.
- Evaluate the social commentary expressed through humour and satire, particularly in relation to gender, marriage, and manners.

8.3 WIT, HUMOUR, AND CHARACTER

Generally, in the domain of literary criticism, wit and humour are not pitted against each other. In fact, they are always mentioned together as companions or complementary aspects of a literary work. Decidedly, these two qualities of the human mind are closely linked with each other. They can be rightly termed as the allied activities of the human mind. Congreve, in his own time, preferred to make a distinction between the two. In a letter to John Dennis, he defines wit and humour as two distinct literary qualities. In his view, Humour implies certain eccentricities of behavior that arise from, in his own words, “Constitutions, Complexions and Dispositions of

Men.” Wit, on the other hand, as Congreve views it, is the art of speaking pleasantly and amusingly. In one sense, while wit is the gift of a civilized mind, humour relates to lack of civilized way of thinking and behaving. No wonder, then, that the bulk of characters carrying comic traits are from areas not refined by civilized life. Thus, there is as much of a clear demarcation between wit and humour as between urban and rural life. This clear-cut division between the two societies gets reflected in the literature of the age as well, more so in the dramatic form. *The Way of the World*, being representative of its period, shows the same division, and as sharply, as any other work of the Restoration period. In the light of Congreve’s distinction between wit and humour, let us see how his greatest comedy, *The Way of the World*, responds to this distinction.

So far as humour is concerned, three characters in Congreve’s comedy of our concern clearly stand out. These characters are Sir Willfull, Petulant, and Lady Wishfort. One of the aspects of character common to all of them that makes them comic is the eccentricity of their behaviour. Each one of these characters is eccentric in his own way, which makes them ridiculous in the eyes of other characters in the play. They can be compared to the comic characters from Jonson’s comedy of humours. Like them, Congreve’s comic characters, too, represent one or another humour, reducing each to a static and flat character easily recognizable by the peculiar behaviour each one betrays in different situations of life. For instance, Petulant has “a Humour to Contradict.” Sir Willfull’s humour stems from his rural background. Lady Wishfort’s humour is her self-delusion about her age and beauty. Even in her middle years, she continues believing that she is young and beautiful. As has already been remarked, these humour characters, without any exception, mould themselves into stock types which are easily recognizable. For instance, Sir Willfull is the type of provincial country bumpkin. Similarly, Lady Wishfort is the type of an aged woman given to self-love. Such women refuse to admit age, and continue believing that they remain like Cleopatra young for ever, whom “Age cannot wither, Nor custom stale.” As for Petulant, he is the type of splenetic character. Congreve’s fine art lies in his ability to impart individuality even to such characters as are modelled on standard stock character-types. It is a tribute to his great art that these characters carry more of their individualities than the types in them.

The Wit characters in the play are a class apart, they belong to the upper strata and they represent qualities that make you a success in “the way of the world.” The Wit derives from the other characters. In Congreve’s play the wit dazzles us with its “verbal pyrotechnics” on every page. Even a character from low strata of society such as Foible has her moment when she tells Lady Wishfort, with delightful irony: “A little Art once made your Picture like you, and now a little of the same Art must make you like your Picture.” Wit can be seen reflected in the perfect control of vocabulary, in the polished, epigrammatic elegance of style, in the delicate antithetical balance of the sentences. The brilliance of the intellectual word-play has provoked some critics to complain that such a wit has blinding effect on the intelligence of the audience. It does not allow their minds to go beyond the sparkling surface where the jugglery of words make it show like the crackers. It blunts our sensitivity, and desensitizes us to the more serious issues of life. Congreve does, of course, take all care to maintain distinction between different characters. In other words, there is a specific tinge and edge to every wit; all are not alike. For instance, Millamant’s wit is the most spontaneous. We find that although her speeches have the period and balance of perfectly constructed sentences, we do not see much of conscious artistry in them. As compared to Millamant, Mirabell and Fainall are men of the world, and as such speak in a more studied and sophisticated manner. To begin with, the two sound very similar in their wit, their speeches, but just one tinge of Fainall’s cynicism makes all the difference, removing him far, far away from the more affable character of Mirabell. Witwoud’s wit, on the other hand, is forced and artificial. His rather laboured piling of similes drives Millamant to distraction. It is only on rare occasions that he is able to manage a genuine piece of witticism. But then, as Congreve himself so aptly observed, “even a Fool may be permitted to stumble on them by chance.” Hence, we have in *The Way of the World* abundance of wit and in a great variety, and of different order.

One of the most favourite media of wit is imagery. The antithetical and epigrammatic sentences lend themselves to the use of simile and metaphor. The element of imagery heightens the artistic effect of the speech. It makes the style more vivid and emphatic. Perhaps the most striking image in *The Way of the World* is Mirabell's description of Millamant when he sees her approaching. The imagery used by Congreve in this play, or any other for that matter, is, of course, not confined to a character's description alone. It reflects the life of the times. We get to have a feel of the seventeenth-century England. For instance, the newly developing interests of trade and commerce are reflected in a number of images. We come across references to "Acts of Parliament," "Credit of the Relation," "Exportation," "Trade," "loss," "overstocked," etc. Then there are references to contemporary books and other publications like newspapers and magazines. Besides, there are references to operas, clubs and coffee-houses. In short, there are clusters of imagery that evoke the life of London, which looms large outside the charmed circle of the Restoration society. Lady Wishfort's tirades depict a stark picture of hunger and poverty and seediness of the larger population of London. For example, we hear of long-lane Pent House, of Black Friars. Then we see shivering women sticking themselves around charcoal fires. Then, we further see second-hand shops, roadside stalls, and prisoners in Ludgate fishing for money. The world of Congreve's play may be formally confined to the charmed circle of the upper strata of London society, the city as such always constitutes background to the action. We are made to feel that all that happens in the play is against the background of that city.

Two sets of images stand out from the rest, which are crucial to the play's central concerns. One of these is the image of the "chase." It is introduced by Millamant when she recites Edmund Waller's poems to herself in Act IV. Just as she returns to third line of the poem, Mirabell enters the room and completes the couplet. The poem itself is about a chase, which has central significance in the play's action, for Mirabell is also on a chase of Millamant. Women are objects of chase for male characters in the play. Mirabell himself develops the image when he addresses Millamant and she elaborates on it in her reply. What we need to note here is that the nature of imagery a character uses reflects the type of wit he is. The reading habit, the choice of books, the nature of interest in the different aspects of London life, all help reveal the true nature of wit a character possesses. Every occasion in the play is used for converting the encounter of characters into some sort of combat of wit between and among different characters.

The second set of imagery more directly reflects the characters' preoccupation with the life of wit. This set relates to law and is more predominant in play than the other. We find legal terms scattered all over the play with documents to be prepared and signed by relevant persons. The very language of law and the speech therein is a subject of wit. We find characters taking up matters related to legal tangles, discussing them, showing their acumen for it. In other words, no subject can offer better opportunities for sharpening the wits than law. Thus, wit is central to *The Way of the World* as it is to every Restoration comedy. Characters are placed in the hierarchy of wit, not moral hierarchy. Those with superior wit are better placed in the play's plot. Those with inferior wit are not so well placed in the structure of the comedy. Even matters like love and marriage are determined by the quality of wit one possesses. Wit, in other words, is considered the mark of a man, also of a woman. Those inferior in wit have to be content with lower position in the scale or order of importance.

Humour, too, is largely a matter of wit in the neo-classical comedy, especially the Restoration Comedy. Those who have no wit, are made butt of ridicule. Thus, the sort of humour, peculiar to Restoration comedy, that is there in *The Way of the World*, is generally one-sided. Those who belong to the charmed circle of wit partake of it and enjoy it. Those who do not belong to that circle are disadvantaged and cannot become a part of that circle. In a way, this kind of humour is divisive. It divides society into the wits and others. It is not participatory humour, a jest for life, that we find in the Elizabethan comedy. There, humour is a form of community dialogue, a way of participating in the larger life of society. It gives you health and harmony. Here, it is divisive, has class base, and only the refined and sophisticated members can comprehend and appreciate it. Thus, it is more mechanical also,

emanating from stock situations and stereotype wit. In a comedy named artificial, everything, all aspects of drama, have to contribute to the artificiality. So does the elements of humour in *The Way of the World*. Wit and humour are, therefore, near allied.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks: Wit and Humour

1. The witty banter between Mirabell and _____ is a key example of intellectual courtship in the play.
2. Congreve uses _____ humour to mock societal norms, such as the pursuit of marriage for wealth or status.
3. Lady Wishfort is often a source of humour due to her _____ and desperation to appear young and desirable.
4. The play's humour often relies on _____, where the audience knows more than the characters, creating comic tension.

Answer Key

1. Millamant
2. satirical
3. vanity
4. dramatic irony

8.4 CHARACTERS

(I) MIRABELL

Although *The Way of the World* is as artificial in character portrayal as it is in the other departments of drama, its characters at the center stage are decidedly memorable. Most of these is the character of Mirabell, the hero of the play. He possesses all the assets of an urbane gentleman. He is gifted with the Restoration virtues of wit, polish, and grace. It is these virtues that the age of sophistication and refinement demanded. It is because of these very virtues that Mirabell succeeds in his battles of wit against his rivals. To the Restoration writers and readers (or audience) the battles of wit were no less than the epic battles of Achilles. Wit was their spear, wit the shield. They solely relied on it for survival as well as success. And the brave among men was the one who had wit in the greatest measure and of the most superior mettle. The Restoration coterie took these battles of wit to be heroic, not in the mock-heroic so much as genuinely heroic. The “heroic” drama of the age is an example of this belief, for in the conventional sense of the epic there is nothing heroic actually.

The immediate rival to Mirabell is Fainall, with whom Mirabell measures his sword of wit all along the play's action. In Act I itself, the series begins. Fainall initiates. He launches the attack. But Mirabell gives him a crushing reply. In his rejoinder, Mirabell demolishes his rival with effortless ease. He picks up the very words (sort of fireballs) that Fainall has used and, with a brilliant dexterity, tosses them around to impart them with different meanings (force) altogether. Mirabell's wit dazzles like the shining metal of Achilles's shield. It defeats not so much by hurt as by dazzle. The dazzle itself is too powerful to be withstood by the rival. The rival feels blinded by the dazzle. He winks and vanishes. In another instance, when Witwoud and Petulant decide to be severe with the ladies by trying to be witty at the latter's expense, Mirabell, like a true hero, comes to the rescue of these ladies. He not only outwits them but rebukes them, saying, to put “another out of countenance” is something to be ashamed of. What is involved in a battle of wit is a question of morality. Here are ethics too, just as they are in the epic battles. You do not use underhand means to hit your enemy. You do not hit below the belt.

Mirabell's wit is never lawless or low. It is always governed by its superior force, the force of morality. It is for this reason that Mirabell is not witty just for the sake of being so. The moral seriousness of his personality is revealed in his apparent distaste for frivolous and irresponsible conversation. If he finds even Millamant, his sweetheart, deviating from the moral norm, he admonishes her for the deviation. In a situation of this nature, he feels compelled to advise Millamant to avoid "the Conversation of fools." She may tease him by calling him "Sententious Mirabell," but it is for this very seriousness of his mind and moral sense of his person that he stands out in the entire lot of characters in the play as the superior most. He displays his superiority by the exercise of his shrewd judgement, foresight, and practical wisdom. These qualities of his character come out most clearly in his arrangement of the legal protection of Mrs. Fainall's wealth. Besides, it is these very virtues that enable him to encounter with victory the various reversals and setbacks in his perpetual battles against his rivals.

In a sense, the ideal of gentlemanliness or urbane refinement for the Restoration dramatist is no less than the ideal of the Christian in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. There is a close similarity between the "allegorical" structures of the two. In the Restoration comedy, the various battles of wit, which make it possible to overcome the several impediments, are very much similar to the various spiritual battles the Christian has to fight to resist and overcome temptations. In the case of the Restoration Comedy, the goal may be urbanity, but it is to be achieved in the same manner as Bunyan's hero achieves his ideal of Christianity. Here, the city of God is the paradise of wit. In structural terms, as well as in terms of ends and means, the two illustrate the common technique involved in each. Thus, Mirabell is a sort of Restoration "Christian" seeking the ultimate in the world of wit. He has his power of wit from the very beginning, just as Christian has, but he has to achieve its perfection only through trials. Hence, he is made to undergo those trials out of which he emerges, very much like Christian, fully victorious.

(II) MILLAMANT

Next to Mirabell in structural, as well as moral, significance in *The Way of the World*, is the character of Millamant. If Mirabell delights by his superior wit, Millamant delights by her superior gaiety. One can see in this a vital difference between two types of wit that these two characters represent. In the case of Mirabell, his wit battles it out with the rivals and shines in enlisting victory over them. In the case of Millamant, her wit is marked by exuberance, not by sharp edge. It is not something acquired through learning. Rather, it is more of a natural gift. One can apply to these two characters the difference, the neoclassical critics made between man of genius and man of learning. In one there is vitality, in the other there is correctness. There is a similar kind of difference between Millamant and Mirabell. They make an ideal couple in the Restoration mould. While she has the warmth of vitality, he has the superiority of sense. She is more spontaneous and forthright whereas, he is more subtle and oblique. Obviously, while Millamant displays her natural gifts, Mirabell demonstrates his gifts of learning. The two are complementary, not contradictory. That is why the two form a natural companionship, deserving each other. In the same allegorical sense we discussed earlier, their union symbolizes the perfection, the ideal, of Restoration urbanity in which the learning of wit has to be complemented with the warmth of vitality. The cold or lifeless wit cannot ensure a happy society. It must be value-added or enhanced with the warmth of vitality.

Millamant thus represents nature, just as Mirabell represents art. Not that Millamant is without art and Mirabell without nature. Millamant has art just as Mirabell has nature. The difference lies in the combination of the two. It is like preparing a compound by mixing or amalgamating two salts or elements. The resultant compounds show very different qualities, although both are formed by mixing the same two salts, or by amalgamating the same two elements. In the case of Millamant, she uses art in the service of her nature. In the case of Mirabell, he uses his nature in the service of his art. There is lot of art used by Millamant to look natural. No wonder then that Mirabell describes her faults as "so natural, or so artful." He is right because she uses her sophistication to sustain her natural gifts of beauty, gaiety and sweetness.

Millamant, unlike Mirabell, is more given to private life than to public performance. Mirabell shines in public performance, she impresses in her private moments. We find her relishing her “faithful Solitude” and “darling Contemplation.” She has a world within herself vaster than the world around her. She loves to live in that world intensely and entirely. Of course, she is not shy of walking out of this world. She does like the open air as well. She is not averse to human company. It is only a matter of more or less. Between the private and the public, the inner and the outer, she obviously is richer in the former in the binary oppositions. Otherwise, we know how she can impress even in her external or public appearances. She is the mistress of a certain depth of character that no one else, including Mirabell, has. She may have internal struggles and contests, but she seldom shows them externally. She has the capacity to keep her own problems and struggles to herself. Her love for Mirabell is one such example. She feels it quite strongly, but she does not easily reveal it. Even Mirabell is not allowed to share this secret. She gives out once that she loves him “violently,” but she permits none to have an inkling of her deep feeling. Millamant is, like Rosalind of *As You Like It*, a loveable and memorable heroine in English drama.

(III) MRS. FAINALL AND MR. FAINALL

Mrs. Fainall is a daughter of Lady Wishfort. As such, she is a cousin of Millamant. As mother of the former and aunt of the latter, Mrs. Wishfort holds power on the wealths of both. While Millamant, however, is yet unmarried, Mrs. Fainall is already married to Mr. Fainall. Not only that, she also has remained a mistress to Mirabell before she got married. In terms of qualities of person, Mrs. Fainall is a good woman. She is shown to bear no malice toward any one, although her own husband is deeply involved in intrigues and counter-intrigues. Although fate has denied her personal happiness, she tries to give happiness to others. Even though she is a former mistress of Mirabell, she creates no hurdles in his love for, and then marriage with, Millamant. On the contrary, she does all she can to see them happily united in marriage. In the matter of property also, where most people stoop down to lower depths, she shows no greed nor malice. Of course, she has no glamour in her person, like Millamant has, but she is extraordinary in her ordinariness. She comes out in less shining colours when compared with Millamant. She remains faithful to Mirabell even after her marriage. Of course, this faithfulness or loyalty is not for maintaining sexual relations. They are not shown to have any such affair once she has been married. Her loyalty is limited to helping the right against the wrong, the good against the evil. Unfortunately, her own husband turns out to be the wrong and the evil, so she helps Mirabell who proves to be right and good.

Fainall is a foil and a rival to Mirabell. If Mirabell is a True Wit, he is a False Wit. But he is not a Witwoud. There is no dearth of cleverness in him. He is clever, no doubt. But his cleverness is rather warped and stunted by his ego. His ego, too, is perverted. He impresses us with his first verbal duel with Mirabell. However, as the conversation proceeds he gets exposed. His cynicism comes out. Even his epigrammatic remarks reveal an unpalatable bitterness. For instance, the following : “I’d no more play, with a Man that slighted his ill Fortune, than I’d make love to a Woman who undervalu’d the loss of her Reputation.” Decidedly, no audience would relish such remarks. Mirabell’s rejoinder tells him as much: “you have a Taste extremely delicate, and are for refining on your Pleasures.” In his typical sophisticated manner, however, as we see here, Mirabell does even his telling through the indirection of irony. He cannot be blunt and crude like his rival. Fainall, cynical as he is, does not attach any value to love or marriage. For instance, when Mirabell speaks of his love for Millamant, Fainall’s cynical advice is that the former should go in for marriage so that he is cured of the disease of love. Obviously, for him, while love is a disease, marriage is a destroyer of all illusions.

Fainall is a thorough materialist. He has no inclination towards things spiritual or emotional. We can recall how he has mercilessly run through Mrs. Marwood’s wealth. Even about his own marriage he makes no bones. Quite brazenly he boasts that he married only “to make lawful Prize of a rich Widow’s Wealth.” He does not consider his wife more than an aging, useless animal. He uses rather objectionable language for her. For instance, he calls her a “leaky Hulk” which he will set adrift to sink or swim. His callousness knows no end. He

can enjoy the miseries of others. His sardonic pleasure at the misery of his own mother-in-law, Lady Wishfort, is notorious. When he finds her almost collapsing under the threat of his blackmail, he enjoys rather immensely his own attempt to terrorise her. The more she sulks in terror, the more he enjoys it. He has been a creature of the earth from the very beginning, but his ignoble deeds transform him into a beast of prey. He begins to enjoy the hurts of his victims. He shows the limit to which human nature can degenerate.

(IV) MRS. MARWOOD

In some ways, Mrs. Marwood is much more complex and much less degenerate than her accomplice, Fainall, in all sorts of sinful activities they commit in the course of the play's action. She lacks both the ferocity and wit of Fainall. However, within a narrow range of operation, she displays more cunning than her male counterpart. She also shows greater practical sense than is shown by Fainall. Besides, she has a brand of viciousness which is peculiar to the female species. She does wear a social mask which slips at crucial moments and her true nature comes to light. She is found out to be as violent beneath the mask as she pretends to be smooth with the mask on. The scene in St. James's Park reveals it all. Her violence comes out: "I care not— Let me go — break my Hands, do — I'd leave 'em to get loose."

Mrs. Marwood is a mistress to Fainall, although both are married. However, beyond both her husband and Fainall, she actually has love for Mirabell. In fact, behind all her villainous deeds, this secret love gone sour is the real motivating force. She thwarts very early the marriage proposal between Mirabell and Millamant by using the vulnerable ears of Lady Wishfort. She trusts no one where Mirabell is concerned. She even goes to the extent of hinting her secret love for him to Mrs. Fainall, with whose husband she is carrying on the affair. Her jealousy keeps her alert. It is her most activating force. She is the one who hides herself to hear conversation between Mirabell and Foible, which leads to the exposure of the plot that was afoot against Lady Wishfort. However, all her machinations come to nothing because Mirabell has no time for the likes of her. He has no love to spare for her, entirely absorbed as he is in his love for Millamant. Like other villains in the play, Mrs. Marwood, too, has nothing but defeat in store for her.

8.5 GLOSSARY

- Antithetical – Directly opposed in nature or ideas.
- Epigrammatic – Expressed in brief, witty, and clever phrases.
- Eccentricity – Odd or unconventional behaviour.
- Splenetic – Bad-tempered; irritable or spiteful.
- Cynicism – Distrustful attitude toward human sincerity or goodness.
- Urbane – Polite, refined, and socially polished.
- Perverted – Morally distorted or corrupted.
- Callousness – Emotional hardness; lack of sympathy.
- Machinations – Crafty or deceitful schemes or plots.
- Allegorical – Symbolic; conveying deeper moral or abstract meanings.

8.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary role of wit in *The Way of the World*?
 - A. To create a somber atmosphere
 - B. To highlight tragic elements
 - C. To entertain and satirize societal norms
 - D. To convey romantic idealism

2. Which character is known for their sharp wit and clever repartee, often engaging in verbal sparring with others in the play?
 - A. Lady Wishfort
 - B. Mirabell
 - C. Witwoud
 - D. Mrs. Fainall

3. How does humor function in *The Way of the World* regarding the characters' social interactions and relationships?
 - A. It intensifies dramatic tension
 - B. It adds a light-hearted touch, revealing societal absurdities
 - C. It diminishes the significance of character motivations
 - D. It promotes a tragic atmosphere

4. Which character uses wit as a tool to navigate the complexities of courtship and relationships in the play?
 - A. Fainall
 - B. Mrs. Marwood
 - C. Millamant
 - D. Sir Wilfull Witwoud

5. How does humor contribute to the satirical elements in *The Way of the World*?
 - A. By highlighting the characters' tragic flaws
 - B. By exposing societal vices and follies
 - C. By downplaying the significance of societal norms
 - D. By emphasizing romantic idealism

Answers: 1c,2c,3b,4c,5b.

8.7 LET US SUM UP

The central theme of the play *The Way of the World* is itself illustrated by its title “The Way of the World”. The three dominant themes which develop the plot structure of the play are money, sex, and intrigue. William Congreve is direct and ironic. The sincerity of Mirabell’s love does not make him lose sight of the importance of Millamant’s fortune. Fainall marries for money. Money is Lady Wishfort’s sole hold over her child and her ward. *The Way of the World* is full of amorous relationships. Mirabell is involved with Mrs. Fainall. Fainall is in illicit relationship with Mrs. Marwood where as Lady Wishfort secretly wants to marry Mirabell. Everyone is engaged in intrigue. Mirabell intrigues to gain consent to his marriage from Lady Wishfort and this involves intrigue within intrigue. Fainall intrigues in turn.

8.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note of 300 words on the Restoration Comedy.
2. Discuss the validity of the various labels that have been used for the Restoration comedy, such as the comedy of manners, the artificial comedy, or the immoral comedy.
3. Define and discuss the title of Congreve’s *The Way of the World*.

4. Examine the nature and variety of wit and humour in *The Way of the World*.
5. Discuss the theme of love and marriage in *The Way of the World*.
6. Examine the relation between marriage and wealth in *The Way of the World*.
7. Discuss the plot structure of *The Way of the World*.
8. Write a note of 300 words each on the characters of Mirabell, Millamant, Fainall, and Mrs. Marwood.

8.9 SUGGESTED READING

“*Humor & Wit in The Way of the World.*” Guiding Literature, by *Guiding Literature*, 27 May 2023, <https://guidingliterature.com/humor-wit-in-the-way-of-the-world/>

“*Discuss Wit and Humor from The Way of the World.*” Cloud School Pro, Al Mamun, 8 Sept. 2024, <https://www.cloudschoolpro.com/discuss-wit-and-humor-from-the-way-of-the-world/>

“*Character Analysis: Mirabell.*” CliffsNotes, CliffsNotes.com, <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/w/the-way-of-the-world/character-analysis/mirabel>

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
MAN AND SUPERMAN (1856–1950)

STRUCTURE

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 9.3 George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works
- 9.4 Glossary
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 9.7 Suggested Reading

9.1 INTRODUCTION

George Bernard Shaw is one of the most famous modern writers. The lesson will introduce the learners with his life and works.

9.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the life and major works of G.B. Shaw.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

- Describe key events in the life of George Bernard Shaw and understand how his background influenced his writing.
- Identify major themes and social issues addressed in Shaw's plays, such as class, gender, and morality.
- Discuss Shaw's contribution to modern drama and his role in challenging conventional theatrical norms.

9.3 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

G.B. Shaw, famous dramatist and critic, had become an institution in his lifetime. He was born on July 26, 1856 in Dublin, Ireland, and died at the age of ninety-four on November 2, 1950. Towards the end of his life he said, "I dread to think of the biographers waiting for me to go." He wrote no autobiography but he left a good deal of material for biography and took a hand in many of the biographies written during his lifetime; it was rather to maintain and magnify the figure he chose to present to the world than to reveal the true man. The mask in which he appeared in the public eye was often that of a mountebank and scoffer, an irresponsible joker and trifler. In a "Warning from the Author" attached to a special popular edition of his complete plays published when he was well over, he said:

“I must warn you, before you attempt to enjoy my plays, to clear out your consciousness most resolutely everything you have ever read about me in a newspaper. Otherwise you will not enjoy them: you will read them with a sophisticated mind, and a store of beliefs concerning me which have not the slightest foundation either in prosaic fact or in poetic truth... The person they (journalists) represent me to be not only does not exist but could not possibly exist.”

George Bernard Shaw was a native of Dublin. He was the third child and the only son in a family which he once described as “shabbily genteel.” His father George Carr Shaw, a second cousin to a baronet, had been a civil servant and retired on a pension of Sixty Pounds before Bernard, named after his father and grandfather was born. George Shaw sold his pension and became a corn merchant, but proved to be as unsuccessful as a man of business as his own father who was a stockbroker. Shaw remembered especially his father’s “alcoholic antics” as he was remorseful, yet unregenerated drinker. From him the son inherited his superb comic gift. Shaw’s mother was Bussie Gurly, granddaughter of a country squire; she was much younger to her husband. A gifted singer and music teacher, she led her son to develop a passion for music, particularly operatic. Both parents were Protestants, and Shaw was baptized in the faith of the Church of England in Ireland. Somewhat later Shaw said he had three fathers: “my official father, the musician, and my maternal uncle.” He gives an account of his father and his early years in the preface to his first novel *Immaturity*. The musician was George Vandaleur Lee, a teacher of singing, who being much taken by Mrs. Shaw, gave a lot of support to the family. To this fantastic man Shaw undoubtedly owed a great deal, including a method of voice production from which he greatly benefited and used afterwards not only in public speaking but in his work with actors on the stage.

One of the maxims in *The Revolutionist’s Handbook*, appended to *Man and Superman* reads: “He who can does. He who can’t teaches”. “Shaw, who was to insist that all art is didactic and viewed himself as a kind of teacher, had little respect for schoolmasters and formal education. First his uncle, the reverend George Carroll, tutored him. At the age of ten he became a pupil at Wesleyan Connexionall School in Dublin and later attended two other schools for a short period of time. He hated them all and declared that he learned absolutely nothing. It is so because Shaw possessed certain qualities which are not always developed in the classroom. In response to a question about his early education, he replied: “I can remember no time at which a printed page was not intelligible to me, and can only suppose I was born literate.” He further added that at the age of ten he had saturated himself in Shakespeare and the Bible. When he was sixteen, Shaw left school to accept an employment as a clerk in a Land Agency and he remained there for four and a half years. He proved to be an efficient and dependable employee but was never satisfied with such an occupation. In the year 1876, he resigned from his service and joined his mother who was then teaching music in London. From November 1876 to July 1878 he wrote criticisms and other articles for a weekly paper, *The Hornet*, under the name of Lee. For the next three years he gave up ‘working for his living’; he lived with his mother and concentrated largely on trying to support himself as an author. He was methodical and wrote articles on all kinds of subjects which unfortunately did not get the approval of the editors of the newspapers and magazines. So, he set himself to be a novelist, writing in his small hand five pages a day in an exercise book. Between the years 1879 and 1883, he wrote five novels. By this time even Miss Annie Besant had got interested in the young Shaw, and serialized his two earlier novels in her magazine *Our Corner*. The first novel, *Immaturity*, remained unpublished for some fifty years; four later ones finally did make their way into print. Best known among them is *Cashel Byron’s Profession*, the story of a prizefighter. It was apparent that Shaw’s genius was not that of a novelist. Shaw became a vegetarian at twenty-five, following Shelley’s example, and was a teetotaler, having before him an awful parental example. The same year in 1881, he had a mild attack of smallpox and gave up shaving, hence the beard. The year 1879 had greater significance for Shaw. He joined the Zetetical Society, a debating club, the members of which held lengthy discussions on such subjects as economics, science and religion. Shaw found himself to be “a horridly nervous public speaker”, and deliberately set out to

overcome this drawback by speaking on every possible occasion. Shaw owes much to his friends who taught him how to articulate words in public speaking; the result was that he added to what he had learned from Lee and he became one of the most fluent, cogent and attractive public speakers of his time. In 1882, he heard Henry George lecture, which made him an enthusiastic land reformer; afterwards he read Karl Marx, in a French version of *Das Kapital* at the British Museum. He says, "From that hour I became a man with some business in the world." Indeed, he became a socialist, and his life had reached a turning point. With his fifth novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, completed in 1883, his novel writing ended, though from time to time he wrote and published a short story.

The year 1884 is also a notable one in the life of Bernard Shaw. After reading a tract entitled *Why are the Many Poor?* and learning that it was published by Fabian Society, he attended the meeting of the Society. He was accepted as a member on September 5, and was elected in its executive committee in January. Shaw persuaded Sidney Webb to become a Fabian. The two, along with Mrs. Webb, became the pillars of the society which preached the gospel of constitutional and evolutionary socialism. Shaw's views, voiced in the meeting hall, are expounded at length in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928); many of his ideas find a place in his dramas, including *Man and Superman*. His love for Shakespeare brought him to the New Shakespeare Society and he became very friendly with F.J. Furnivall, joining the same scholar's Browning Society. He was already a member of the Shelley Society.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. George Bernard Shaw was born in _____ in 1856.
2. Shaw was a member of the _____ Society, a group dedicated to social reform and progressive ideas.
3. One of Shaw's most famous plays, _____, explores themes of class and transformation.
4. Shaw received the _____ Prize for Literature in 1925.
5. In addition to being a playwright, Shaw was also known for his work as a _____ and political thinker.

Answer Key

1. Dublin
2. Fabian
3. *Pygmalion*
4. Nobel
5. critic

In the next stage of his career, Shaw emerges as a critic largely through the help of William Archer, distinguished dramatic critic and now best remembered as the editor and translator of Ibsen. Shaw became a member of the reviewing staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885. Through Archer, who found for Shaw many journalistic jobs, he became art critic for the weekly review, the *World*.

When T.P. Connor, a leading advocate of Irish Home Rule, founded *The Star* in order to publicize his political views, Shaw was hired as a political writer in 1888. As Shaw's socialistic philosophy was too extreme for O'Connor, Shaw was shifted to writing regular columns on music under the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto." At the beginning of 1895 he started his three and a half years' career as dramatic critic on Frank Harris's *Saturday Review*, a post he held until May 1898 when Harris sold the paper. These were all material factors in the making of Shaw as dramatist. However, there were other significant friendships, for instance, of William Morris and W. B. Yeats that added to his courage and sparking energy. Shaw was a familiar figure at the meetings of various Societies. His reddish beard became well grown, and whether visiting or lecturing, he invariably wore the familiar snuff-coloured tweeds made in St. Pancras. Shaw then and always paid attention to his body, to cleanliness, to exercise, to food and to his physical health and appearance. He dressed for maximum bodily advantage and often flouted convention. His vegetarianism had a similar origin.

During this period Shaw reached a turning point in his life. In 1890, the Fabian Society had wanted a lecture on Ibsen. Shaw had seen twice the London performance of *A Doll's House* the year before. He had been engaged in rigorous defence of the dramatist. He offered to give a lecture which afterwards became *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, the first book in English about the Norwegian dramatist. What was more important was that Shaw's attention was turned to the drama as a means of expression of the ideas crowding his mind. As a result his first play, *The Widower's House*, which was announced as "An Original Didactic Realistic Play" appeared. Structurally, it represented no departure from the tradition of the well-made play. It deals with the evils of slum-landlordism, a subject hardly calculated to regale the typical Victorian audience. It was performed by Grein's society on 9 December 1892, at the Royalty Theatre in London and it made a sensation because of its 'daring' theme, but it never was a theatrical success and Shaw was not discouraged at all. A year later he wrote *The Philanderer*, an unpleasant satire, an amusing but rather slight comedy of manners. Many of his friends, including William Archer, disliked it and the play was not performed for twelve years.

A few months later he wrote his third play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* on the subject of prostitution due to the "underpayment and ill treatment of women who try to earn an honest living." In other words, Shaw focuses on the economic causes of prostitution and the conflict between the prostitute mother and her daughter. The play created a tumult and the censor refused to pass it. It could not be performed till January 1902 and is now often to be seen as the ban upon it having been raised in 1925. However, Shaw himself grouped it with his "Unpleasant Plays."

Shaw, unlike many men, flourished on opposition, and the result of banning the play was that he immediately completed two more plays, which were pleasant plays so that the censor should not touch them. The first was written because the "New Drama" had to exist. Shaw wrote *Arms and the Man*, one of his most popular plays which is an attack upon the romance of war. In 1894 the play enjoyed a good run at the Avenue Theatre from April 21 to July 7, and has been revived from time to time to this very day. Now the real Shaw had emerged: the dramatist who united irrepressible gaiety and complete seriousness of purpose. The play has been described as "a satire on the prevailing bravura style" and sets forth the "view of romance as the great heresy to be swept from art and life"- a theme which was to find its place in *Man and Superman*.

Shaw's fifth play, *Candida*, was started towards the end of the year, that is in 1894. It is an unquestionably superior play, which was first produced in 1895. Since and then it has been staged often extremely successfully and has found its place in anthologies. The play is known for effective character portrayal and use of inversions. The play shows how Candida and the Reverend Morrell, much appreciated as an advanced thinker, reached an honest and sound basis for a successful, lasting marriage. Early in January 1895 Shaw became a drama critic for *The Saturday Review* edited by Frank Harris, who was wise enough to give a free rein his articles, and essays written then fill two volumes which were first published in 1931; they form a valuable record of "Our Theatres in the Nineties." Shaw, as a critic as well as dramatist, put into his work an incredible dramatic energy. He wrote rapidly as he breathed, with intensity, concentration and imaginative power of a most unusual kind. As C.B. Purdom says, "His playwriting was his life; his other activities, extensive, as they were became altogether subsidiary to it."

While working with the Fabians, Shaw met Charlotte Payne-Towson, an Irish heiress, deeply concerned with the problem of social justice. He was immediately attracted to her. After she had helped him through a long illness, the two were married in 1898. She became a capable critic and assistant throughout the years of their marriage. That year, 1898, he published the volumes, *Plays Pleasant* and *Plays Unpleasant*. During this period he completed *You Can Never Tell*, *The Man of Destiny*, and *The Devil's Discipline*, which is an inverted Victorian type melodrama, and was first acted in the United States. It was a success financially and otherwise. The time of this play is 1777, during American War of Independence, and the theme is an incident of Burgoyne's invasion. By the end of the century Shaw had written *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Admirable Bashville*. He was now a major

force in the new drama of the twentieth century. Even William Archer, who believed that Shaw was no dramatist, acknowledged his supremacy.

Shaw, who used the stage “to convert a misguided people” to borrow his own words, completed and published *Man and Superman* in 1903. Some twenty-three other plays were added to the Shavian canon as the century advanced toward the halfway mark. Best known among them are : *Major Barbara* (1905), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), *Pygmalion* (1912), *Heartbreak House* (1916), *Back to Methuselah* (1921), *Saint Joan* (1923) and *Charles the Second* (1939). Like Shaw’s short plays, his long plays challenge the reader by their novelty alone. His literary pre-eminence had found world-wide recognition. He refused to accept either a knighthood or the Order of merit offered by the crown, but in 1926 did accept the Nobel Prize for Literature. It was quite typical of him to state that the award was given to him by a grateful public because he had not published anything in that year. Shaw once wrote while discussing *Macbeth*:

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no ‘brief candle’ for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generation.

Indeed, life was a burning torch for him till the end. In 1949, when he was ninety-two and his highly readable *Sixteen Self Sketches* was published, he was planning to write still another play when he died in November 2, 1950. He was sure of his superior talent, “I know of no man, with the exception of Homer, for whose intelligence, in comparison with my own, I have more contempt than for Shakespeare.” And Shaw had chosen drama as a ‘tool’ to use his intelligence to attain a serious objective. He says: “I write plays with the deliberate purpose to convert the nation to my opinions.”

9.4 GLOSSARY

Mountebank – A boastful trickster or showman.

Scoffer – One who mocks or ridicules.

Didactic – Intended to teach or instruct.

Zetetical – Relating to inquiry or investigation.

Teetotaler – A person who completely abstains from alcohol.

Cogent – Clear, logical, and convincing.

Bravura – A bold, showy style meant to impress.

Philanderer – A man who flirts or has casual love affairs.

Tumult – A state of loud confusion or uproar.

Pre-eminence – Superior rank or outstanding importance.

9.5 LET US SUM UP

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was an Irish playwright, critic, and polemicist. Born in Dublin, he moved to London in 1876 and initially worked as a music and drama critic. Shaw gained fame as a playwright, known for his wit and social commentary, with works such as *Pygmalion* challenging social norms. Throughout his life, Shaw was active in political and social causes, including women’s rights, socialism, and anti-war efforts, receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

9.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In which play by George Bernard Shaw does a flower girl named Eliza Doolittle undergo a social experiment to transform into a refined lady?
A. *Man and Superman* B. *Candida*
C. *Pygmalion* D. *Arms and the Man*
2. Which of Shaw's plays satirizes the romantic ideals and explores the concept of the "Life Force"?
A. *Major Barbara* B. *Arms and the Man*
C. *Man and Superman* D. *Saint Joan*
3. In the play *Arms and the Man*, which character rejects traditional notions of heroism and romanticizes war?
A. Raina Petkoff B. Bluntschli
C. Sergius Saranoff D. Catherine Petkoff
4. Which play by George Bernard Shaw features a protagonist named Barbara Undershaft, who grapples with her father's wealth derived from the arms industry?
A. *Arms and the Man* B. *Pygmalion*
C. *Major Barbara* D. *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
5. In *Saint Joan*, Shaw explores the life of which historical figure and her trial for heresy?
A. Mary Queen of Scots B. Joan of Arc
C. Catherine the Great D. Elizabeth I

Answer: 1c,2c,3c,4c,5b

9.7 SUGGESTED READING

Henderson, Archibald. *George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works, a Critical Biography*. Literary Licensing, LLC, 2014.

Pearson, Hesketh. *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality*. House of Stratus, 2015. Ebook.

"Five Things to Know about George Bernard Shaw." *National Gallery of Ireland*, National Gallery of Ireland, <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/exhibitions/shaw-and-gallery-priceless-education/five-things-about-GBS>

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950)
MAN AND SUPERMAN

STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 10.3 Bernard Shaw as a Dramatist
- 10.4 Glossary
- 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 10.7 Suggested Reading

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce the learners with salient features of plays written by Shaw.

10.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with Bernard Shaw as a dramatist.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

- Explain how Shaw’s plays reflect his views on society, politics, and morality through realistic dialogue and provocative themes.
- Identify Shaw’s use of drama as a platform for social criticism and reform, distinguishing him from traditional dramatists.
- Analyze Shaw’s contribution to modern drama, including his rejection of melodrama and focus on intellectual engagement.

10.3 BERNARD SHAW AS A DRAMATIST

If “the life of comedy is in idea’ as Meredith said, Shavian drama, which is written from the point of ‘the idea,’ represents the true comedy. His comic genius is drama that shows the power to perceive the general predicament of mankind, or the peculiar predicament of an individual, as absurd and laughter making. It arises from the vision of the folly, the lack of understanding or the sheer stupidity in society or in a particular man. Shaw’s aim as a dramatist is serious and his analysis is deep but this seriousness of purpose is hidden behind the mask of mirth, which emerges out of the recognition of imperfections in human nature. Shaw said of himself: “They tell me that so-and-so is no charlatan. Well, I am. Like all dramatists, I am a natural born mountebank.” There is so much to this self-portrait as he has taken the responsibility to cure the ills of the society by not covering up its failures but by arousing laughter, to heighten their sensibilities and inculcate a sense of life in them. Shaw’s

attack in the comedies may be sharp and stringing, there may be bruises and shocks, but the aim is transformation. Shaw was a comic genius in this sense and his plays are in the sphere of comedy. His fame does not rest, as does Ben Jonson's, upon less than a dozen plays, or as does Goldsmith's upon one, or as Sheridan or Wilde's upon three or four, but upon more than fifty plays of which thirty are major works. The range is astonishing though it may not be the sole criterion of greatness but it does invite respect. Furthermore, the vitality of his plays is indicated by the fact that even the early imperfect plays have gained reputation in the course of time.

Shaw was not malicious except in the three Unpleasant plays. His wit was inherent in the presentation of characters. It sprang out of his sympathetic appreciation and love for people and insight into their problems. He saw with dazzling clarity, and took pains to make others see what he saw. Shaw had no animus even against his bitterest enemies; he was never cruel and mingled with the masses freely because he was concerned with the state of mankind—a fact which made others believe that he was a proletarian writer. In truth he was essentially an aristocratic writer. Thus, he was an enigma to those who would not accept him on his own terms, which were those of a craftsman who used his skill to change the life of the people around him. Shaw did not start from the conviction of the irremediable evil of man, but from the belief in equality—that is, goodness—a belief more profound than any rationalistic notion. Though seemingly impatient with what men do, he was essentially tolerant because he believed in the ultimate saving virtue of the specific human quality—the intellect. This saved his comedies from being bitter. C.B. Purdom has made a very perceptive remark about him:

He could afford to say the worst because he believed in the best. This causes his work to possess a benevolence not always recognized, but invariably present, which makes him as a comedy writer unique, except for Shakespeare. His comic genius was honest- 'spiritually conscientious', in Nietzsche's sense—liberal, courageous, and gay.

Shaw's mind was practical and concrete though not less imaginative. He had a personal temperament. His predominant characteristic is a fearless intellectual criticism. He possessed to the highest degree inventiveness, wit, humour. He knew admirably how to animate ideas, make them alive; how to set them up one against another, and conduct an intellectual debate. He has thus invested the most serious thoughts with the exuberant liveliness of form, that is, comedy. Shaw at times descends to idle laughter knowingly and deliberately to provide relief from the mental efforts to which he invited his audience. Justifying himself he said, "Tomfoolery is as classic as tragedy." Therefore, as Irwin and Cinnes say:

Shaw was an entertainer, but with no loss to his dignity. He ascended the stage, not booth boards. His manner is no grimace, but the practice of a mental hygiene. It is also an efficient practical policy. To charge him with gratuitous and systematic paradox, or self-advertisement-as is still often done— is decidedly unjust; his thought is coherent and serious; he fights not for himself, but for his ideas.

When one comes to focus on his ideas they have their roots in Socialism that underwent a change from being dogmatic to leaning to radical solutions. It gradually drifted away from Marxian orthodoxy though his mind never recanted the indictment, which it had drawn up against what was to him economic disorder. With all the strength of his intellectual faith, he made his own principle and the hope of a rational reorganization of society. Shaw's other themes were the relations between men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children; the problems of conscience, character and disposition; the problems of individual and society, and the conception of life as creative energy. Hence, he presents the classic themes of drama, the clash within the individual mind, the clash between individual character and between the individual and the customs, manners, religion, and the policies of the time. His plays can be categorized according to their prominent theme though the fact is not to be ignored that each play has secondary themes as well which sometimes are strongly developed:

Conscience	: <i>Widower's Houses, Mrs. Warren's Profession, Major Barbara.</i>
Love	: <i>The Philanderer, You Can Never Tell, The Doctor's Dilemma, Pygmalion, Heartbreak House, Buoyant Billion.</i>
Marriage	: <i>Getting Married.</i>
Parents and Children	: <i>Misalliance, Fanny's First Play.</i>
Romance	: <i>Arms and the Man, The Devil's Disciple, John Bull's Other Island.</i>
High Politics	: <i>The Apple Cart, Too True to Be Good, On the Rocks, The Millionairess, Geneva, In Good King Charles's Golden Days.</i>
Religion	: <i>The Shrewing-up of Blanco Posnet, Androcles and the Lion, Saint Joan.</i>
Creative Evolution	: <i>Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles.</i>

It is the immense variety of the themes and ideas that Shaw explained himself saying "I am not an ordinary playwright, I am specialist in immoral and heretical plays."

Nicholl stated that Shaw brought to English drama "a new incisiveness of utterance, and given virtually a new dramatic dialogue, but he has also provided a fresh principle of characterization." The critics are divided in two groups so far as his art of characterization is concerned. Some of them say that characters in Shaw's plays are versions of himself while others say that he was an exceptionally conscious man; in his life he was wholly himself, and the characters he created were equally wholly themselves.

Shaw was deeply interested in people for their own sake and intended that they should speak for themselves.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. Shaw's plays often contain long _____ where characters express complex social or political ideas.
2. Unlike traditional dramatists, Shaw emphasized _____ over action in his plays.
3. In plays like *Major Barbara*, Shaw challenges the audience to think critically about _____ and morality.

Answer Key

1. dialogues (or speeches)
2. ideas
3. wealth

In his art of characterization Shaw at first merely used conventional devices but gradually achieved what Desmond MacCarthy said "the exceptional variety and vividness of his characters." He further added that Shaw developed:

...the insight to enter into the minds of people, to grasp their points of view, to objectify them in the expression of their personalities, which accounts for the wide range of his characters.

There are three important sources from which he drew the strength for the art of his characterizations: 'Observation' and 'meditation' and the methods of 'inversion' as a result his characters are inseparable from the themes of his plays. They are not the men and women with all their weakness, confusion and commonness but the living people who display in the bright hues their masked absurdities. They are meant to awaken the people out of their lethargy in thought. His central characters, both men and women, deserve praise but his secondary characters are sufficiently effective to carry on the interests of the play. It is noteworthy that it is the women who usually take the initiative in Shavian Drama, not only in love but in everything. They are the driving force.

Shaw's plays can be categorized into three important varieties for the purposes of analysis: Plays of social criticism, for example, *Widower's House*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, or *The Philanderer*. Plays of historical background like *The Man of Destiny*, where he presents the satirical portrait of the young Bonaparte or *Caesar and Cleopatra*, where he contrived an impressive and full concept of the character of Caesar and at the same time of comedy. The variety of the plays is that of philosophical plays as in *Man and Superman*, one of his most brilliant plays, which remains unclouded by the deeper vision which emerged after the First World War. The basic notion through which Shaw reveals his philosophy is as Evans stated, "If man would be but alert and active, the Life Force would use him in its unsteady and uncertain flight towards progress." Though indulging in an atmosphere of rich comedy, Shaw explores these ideals in *Man and Superman*.

It appeared that Shaw did not write new plays during the War years 1914-1918. He was back to the stage with his *Heartbreak House*, a satirical comedy in which he shows the influence of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* to record his impression of the futility of people and policies in post-war Europe. In 1921 with *Back to Methuselah* he produced his most elaborate dramatic creation in which he goes back to the very beginning of things in order to show the nature of Life Force and its effect on the destiny of man. Shaw makes a comment about the play *Man and Superman* that he intended it to be a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution, but "being then at the height of my invention and comic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly."

The play added an unprecedented status and reputation to Shaw as a dramatic genius. Not only that, at the end of the century his 'new drama' of ideas has contributed significantly to the dramatic art in many ways by fusing fantasy and reality, and experimenting in fresh dramatic devices which fulfill a two-fold function: (i) They make drama more literary in its qualities and (ii) They add stage directions and other additional matters through the *Preface* etc. that without losing the theatrical effectiveness. One of his critics has rightly said, "Seeing the rivalry of the novel, he dared to step into the enemy's camp and take from him some most jealously guarded devices."

Shaw's last group of plays like *St. Joan*, *The Apple Cart*, *Too True to be Good*, *The Millionairess* and *Geneva* give the impression that his creative powers were working in a spontaneous unity which makes his dramatic output have a design to be a complete whole. He acquired a greater command over the technique and stagecraft. His stage directions confirm that he is a consummate artist. It may appear that he had chosen a method which was untheatrical because, instead of expressing the meaning through the words of his characters, he has fallen back upon an easier and direct method of explaining his purposes. It makes many of his critics, like. T.H. Dickinson say, that he was not born to be a dramatist; he chose theatre because it gave him a platform to propagate his ideas, to preach his sermons. He is called to be a propagandist. This view would not hold ground because no writer of the century has shown such a vivid and subtle sense of theatre as Shaw. His plays, which are known to be the dramas of ideas would survive because of their theatrical qualities. In the *History of English Drama* Nicholl says,

Shaw's philosophy may be smiled at a century hence, and his 'problems' may seem then problems no more, but his drama-at least half a dozen of them-must retain their appeal because of the way in which he has made use of effects which are theatrically striking, and because of the incisive beauty of the dialogue.

It shows that he is essentially a playwright, not a philosopher. He has brought to drama "new incisiveness of utterance" and what is virtually a new dramatic dialogue; he has provided a fresh principle of characterization; he used new psychological insights which increased the interest in characters as distinct from plot; he has added a serious purpose to comedy by the impartial presentation of real life and saved it from being mere sentimentalism.

He has made drama fanciful, which depends on wit and satire. Shaw even changed the themes of drama by making the “problems of religion, of youth and age, of labour and capital,” as the suitable themes. Precisely, Shaw had a personal temperament and possessed, to the highest degree, an inventiveness in animating the ideas. He was a proclaimed enemy of sentimentalism. As Irwin and Cinnes state:

On the whole, however, he usefully renews and refreshes our notion of life and the world. Even when he irritates without convincing us, he makes our attachment to our own opinions better justified. He has been one of the most active leavening influences in the moral transformation of contemporary England.

10.4 GLOSSARY

Charlatan – A person who pretends to have knowledge or skill.

Consummate – Extremely skilled; complete and perfect.

Animus – Strong hostility or ill will.

Proletarian – Relating to the working class.

Enigma – A puzzling or mysterious person or thing.

Irremediable – Impossible to cure or correct.

Benevolence – Kindness or goodwill toward others.

Incisiveness – Sharpness and clarity of thought or expression.

Orthodoxy – Accepted traditional beliefs or practices.

Lethargy – Lack of energy or alertness (mental or physical)

10.5 LET US SUM UP

George Bernard Shaw’s extensive body of work includes plays, essays, and criticism. Renowned for his wit and social commentary, Shaw’s plays often challenge societal norms and explore themes of class, morality, and individualism. Notable works like *Pygmalion* satirize issues of language and social class, while *Man and Superman* delves into romantic ideals and the Life Force. *Major Barbara* critiques the morality of war and wealth, and *Arms and the Man* satirizes romanticized notions of heroism. Shaw’s prolific literary output reflects his commitment to social reform and his unique perspective on the complexities of human nature.

10.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- In which play by George Bernard Shaw does a linguistics professor transform a flower girl into a refined lady?
A. *Arms and the Man* B. *Major Barbara*
C. *Pygmalion* D. *Man and Superman*
- Which of Shaw’s plays presents a debate on the concept of the “Life Force” and features the character Jack Tanner?
A. *Arms and the Man* B. *Man and Superman*
C. *Saint Joan* D. *Candida*

3. What is the central theme of Shaw's play *Major Barbara*?
A. War and Heroism B. Social Class and Language
C. Morality of War and Wealth D. Romantic Idealism
4. In *Arms and the Man*, which character challenges romanticized notions of heroism and war?
A. Raina Petkoff B. Bluntschli
C. Sergius Saranoff D. Catherine Petkoff
5. Which historical figure is the central character in Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, focusing on her trial for heresy?
A. Mary Queen of Scots B. Joan of Arc
C. Catherine the Great D. Elizabeth I

Answer: 1c,2b,3c,4b,5b

10.7 SUGGESTED READING

Dukore, Bernard F. *Bernard Shaw, Playwright: Aspects of Shavian Drama*. 2025. Ebook.

Hugo, Leon. *Bernard Shaw: Playwright and Preacher*. Taylor & Francis, 2025. Ebook.

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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950)

MAN AND SUPERMAN

STRUCTURE

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 11.3 Major Themes in Shaw's *Man and Superman* : Concept of Life Force and Superman
- 11.4 Glossary
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 11.7 Suggested Reading

11.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce the learners to Shaw's most acclaimed concept of Life Force.

11.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with various themes in *Man and Superman* and Shaw's concept of Life Force.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify and explain the major themes in *Man and Superman*, including the Life Force, gender roles, marriage, and social evolution.
- Analyze how Shaw uses characters and dialogue to express philosophical ideas, particularly those influenced by Nietzsche and evolutionary theory.
- Evaluate how the play challenges traditional notions of romance and morality through satire and intellectual debate.

11.3 MAJOR THEMES IN SHAW'S *MAN AND SUPERMAN* : CONCEPT OF LIFE FORCE AND SUPERMAN

As the title of the play indicates, Shaw, who is influenced by a number of thinkers like Plato and Nietzsche, evolved his own philosophical ideas and the concept of Superman. What sort of being would this Superman be? is a vital question. Shaw believed that this race of Supermen would be stronger physically as it would have more bodily organs and long lives; it would have more evolved brains. Such persons would be "pure though" as Don Juan tells in the Hell scene of the play: "But to Life, the force behind the Man, intellect is necessary, because

without it he blunders into death.” Life force is vital and always endeavours to contemplate itself. Condemning hell as “the home of the unreal and of the seekers for happiness” Don Juan rebukes the Devil saying, “But even as you enjoy the contemplation of such romantic mirages as beauty and pleasure; so would I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things: namely Life, the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself.” It was in the Preface of *Man and Superman* that G.B. Shaw first definitely enunciated his belief in the Life Force, which was derived from a variety of sources. This contemplation is about the purpose. Thus, Shaw believes that Life Force is “vitality with a purpose.”

Life Force is Shaw’s name for creative evolution; he calls his play “a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution, and adds that “nobody noticed this new religion in the centre of the intellectual whirlpool.” He was, of course, right, because the explanation of his new religion is to be found in the Don Juan in Hell interlude, the third act of the play rarely included in a production with the other three acts, and in *The Revolutionist’s Handbook*, an appendix to the play. Life Force is the sustained will to progress, to rise on the hierarchical ladder of life. It is a Supreme Spirit that can be called Shaw’s God. It leads to a vast cosmic upward striving without any clear understanding of its intention that it can perform what it wished to perform. Rather it acts on the principles of trial and error, constant slips and advances, and its purpose is ‘eugenics’ or the evolution of a race of Superman through selective breeding, that is, the central theme of *Man and Superman*. In other words, through union of the Mother Woman, endowed with the creative instinct and concerned not for the individual but for the species, and Vital man, endowed with the will and the intellect to advance, Superman will emerge; he, the ideal philosophical human.

In this Creative Evolution the role of man and woman is well defined. In *Man and Superman*, Tanner has the role of creator and elevator while Ann—the mother woman—is preserving and perpetuating force. They exist in the play in a state of war. It makes her a ruthless pursuer who is determined to marry Tanner to create children. Hence, Tanner tells Octavius, the romantic poet, who loves Ann, that “her purpose is neither her happiness, nor yours, but Nature’s. Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it...” He further adds:

It is the sacrificing women that sacrifice others most recklessly. Because they have a purpose which is not their own purpose, but that of the whole universe, a man is nothing to them but an instrument of that purpose.

If woman has a purpose, the developed man or the artist is also not less scrupulous in his determination to fulfill a purpose. Thus, the Life Force strives to seek perfection it does not yet possess. In its realization of intention it uses men and women. If they are mindless creatures they are either scrapped or made servile to the needs of the finer creature the Life Force eventually evolved. Man differs from all the tools the Life Force had previously made, in the supreme respect that he has at mind, through it he can understand the purpose of the Force, and can, if he wishes, help or frustrate it. The creation of a thinking instrument called man established freedom, for freedom is essentially the right to choose. Man can help or hinder the Life Force, that is, Shaw’s God. Thus, it is clear that the play is heavily overloaded with Shavian philosophy, which he uses brilliantly in this comedy.

In his play, *Man and Superman*, Shaw dramatizes his philosophy discussed in the Preface. Through different characters such as Ann and Tanner, Devil and Don Juan he tries to establish the superiority of brain or intellect over physical achievements. This is how man’s supremacy is proved over his ancestors. Ultimately, the same brain is made an essential condition for superhuman attainments. The Don Juan of Shaw is a votary of brain power. The question arises whether man, for all his brain power and his capacity to enjoy and understand Life, has not done anything ‘in the art of Life.’ Even the Devil observes wittily that man has misused his mental gift and spent his remarkable gift of intellect ‘in the art of death.’ According to Don Juan only a “philosophic man” with his contemplation to discover “the inner will of the world” and look through Life, is the fittest person to advance the goal of Life. He believes that the Life Force works in man to save him from the forces of Death and

Degeneration and says:

‘Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organizing itself... The mammoth and the man, the mouse and the magatherium, the flies and the fleas, and the Father of the Church, are all more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, infallible, and withal completely undeludedly self conscious : in short, a god.’

Here is the full exposition of Shaw’s theory of Life Force and his concept of the Superman, the Ideal Man of the Future.

Shaw’s concept of the Superman is an embodiment of the essence of his studies in religion, metaphysics, biology and economics. It is the outcome of a number of influences – his studies on Plato and Nietzsche, his study of history and faith in Creative Evolution. Shaw was deeply influenced by the concept of Plato’s *Republic*. He believed that sense of Goodness, Truth, Beauty and Justice exist in an ideal form in some super-sensuous world. The common man, being a slave to passion, lacks control and cannot see them.

Hence, it is possible, by appropriate education, to elevate the soul of man to a level of insight at which he could achieve the knowledge of the ideal form existing in the other world. Plato’s ideal community could only be ruled by the ‘philosophic mind’, which would have a vision to govern the masses who are impulsive, passionate and irrational. Shaw stands in perfect agreement with Plato that the common man is frail and irrational and does not agree with the Greeks that the Superman is the ideal and philosophic man who can be evolved through education. In *Man and Superman* Shaw vigorously denies that man, the ‘philosophic man’, has evolved at all. His faith is that the selective breeding can produce such a man. In this sense Tanner is a more attractive male than Octavius, and Ann possessed by the ‘blind fury of creation’ instinctively realizes this and so pursues him and compels him to yield to her and be the father of her children. Dona Anna’s final cry is, “I believe in the life to come. A father! A father! For the Superman.”

Check Your Progress

1. The concept of the _____ represents Shaw’s idea of a driving creative force in humanity, especially seen in female characters.
2. In *Man and Superman*, Shaw critiques traditional views of _____ as a romantic ideal and portrays it as a strategic institution.
3. The character of John Tanner is influenced by the philosophy of _____, especially the idea of the “Superman”.
4. The long philosophical debate in Act III, also known as the _____ Scene, takes place in a dreamlike version of Hell.

Answer Key

1. Life Force
2. marriage
3. Nietzsche
4. Don Juan

Shaw disagrees even with Nietzsche’s belief that Life, or fate or God will ultimately evolve somebody greater than man and further he asserts that such a man would come as a result of prayer, working and striving.

Much has been left unexplained by him about the process of evolution and the nature of the prayer as to would it be the traditional Christian prayer or some other kind? Shaw believes that Life struggles upwards, not towards having better physical form but having superior brains. As Don Juan tells in the Hell scene, the earlier forms perished, despite their beauty and physical strength, because they lacked brains. “These things lived and wanted to live; but for lack of brains they did not know how to carry out their purpose, and so destroyed themselves.”

The Shavian superman thus, will be the product of profound intellectual power, and will dwell permanently in thought. Shaw elaborates in *Back to Methuselah* his idea of brain as the most important of the divine gifts to mankind. It is by the virtue of this brain that man has conquered not only birds and animals but also time and space to a great extent. In short, “the transition from man to superman is an advance from ‘object’ to ‘subject’ and individuality” to use the expression of Stanley Diamond from his article “Man and Superman – Anthropology in Question,” which appeared in *Partisan Review*, No. 2.

In *Man and Superman*, Don Juan is re-assessed and Shaw gave him a new *raison d’être* far more satisfying than mere sensuous indulgence. Referring to Shaw’s presentation of Don Juan in this play, Carl Henry Mills observes in his article “Man and Superman and the Don Juan Legend,” *Comparative Literature*, XIX, No. 3:

Shaw’s Don Juan is not a complete transformation, nor an anti-Don Juan, nor a hero simply because he escapes from women. On the contrary, Shaw’s Don Juan is an extension of the traditional Don Juan.

The sub-title of the play *Man and Superman* is “A Comedy and a Philosophy.” This shows that Shaw has tried to put the two, comedy and philosophy as separate entities. It means that his aim is not merely to entertain the readers, but to tell them something profound about life. Shaw was a comedian with a serious purpose. Shaw had serious and striking ideas, which he considered to be valuable. The substance of the play is serious, but it is treated with utmost levity. Waggery is Shaw’s instrument. He expressed his policy in this respect in the following words: “Spare no labour to find out the right thing to say; and then say it with the most exasperating levity as if it were the first thing that would come into any one’s head.” Thus, he was right in calling *Man and Superman* a ‘Comedy’ and a ‘Philosophy’, for the play is rich storehouse of Shavian thought on practically every subject between heaven and earth. Even in the Hell scene, the various subjects are discussed logically from different angles. Shaw has been impartial enough even to allow the Devil to have his say and freely express his point of view. Thus, the thought content of the play is varied and serious and in this sense the play marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of drama in England; it is a great literary landmark with which the new *Comedy of Purpose* is firmly established.

When Shaw combines comedy with philosophy, he will not allow the serious purpose to suffer because for him philosophy is Reality. In this connection the observation of A.M. Gibbs is important. He says in his article “Comedy and Philosophy in *Man and Superman*” which appeared in *Modern Drama*, No XIX. No 3 that:

Art although it is seen as contributing to the contemplation of Reality, as offering a means of extending human understanding and self-consciousness, is subordinate to Reality. Sidney’s brazen world becomes here the golden and the philosopher’s vision if preferred to that of the artist.

Thus Tanner, the philosopher, reluctant to marry has to marry, despite all paternal opposition, for Shaw wants him to take up the creative force of Life in his hands. Octavius, the actual candidate, is brushed aside in the battle between ‘art’ and ‘reality’ the latter must win. Here Tanner becomes a comic figure and the play turns out to be a comedy of the highest order. There are two statements which reveal both the sides of the play, first when

Tanner says : The Life force enchants me. I have the whole world in my arms, when I clasp you;” and second, the last speech where he says “I solemnly say that I am not a happy man...” He causes the universal laughter and proves that the dramatist’s serious purpose is to show that the female is dominant and man is not the victor in the game of sex - a thought which is at the heart of his philosophy of life.

A.C. Ward praises the play, *Man and Superman*, when he observes:

“*Man and Superman* was Bernard Shaw’s earliest full statement of his conception of the way of salvation for the human race, through the obedience to the Life Force, the term he used to indicate a power continually seeking to work in the hearts of men and endeavouring to impel them towards a better and fuller life. In later plays the Life Force seemed to become more and more closely identified with what most people mean when they speak of the Will of God or the Holy Ghost. Though Shaw’s Life force is not anthropomorphic, in its function it is not vastly different from the Christian idea of the function of the Holy Ghost. It might be described as the Holy Ghost denuded of personality – IT, not He.”

In this sense the play is the first indubitable masterpiece of the new intellectual drama which has taken a complete break from the nineteenth century drama.

11.4 GLOSSARY

Enunciated – Clearly stated or expressed.

Eugenics – The idea of improving the human race through selective breeding.

Anthropomorphic – Attributing human qualities to a non-human force or god.

Levity – Lightness or humour in manner, especially about serious matters.

Metaphysics – A branch of philosophy dealing with reality and existence.

Votary – A devoted follower or supporter.

Irremediable – Impossible to cure or correct.

Inculcate – To instil an idea or attitude gradually.

Re-assessed – Evaluated again from a new perspective.

Denuded – Stripped of something (here, personality).

11.5 LET US SUM UP

George Bernard Shaw’s plays consistently explore themes of social critique, challenging conventional norms, and questioning established hierarchies. The clash between individual morality and societal expectations, the deconstruction of romantic ideals, and the examination of language’s power are recurrent motifs. Shaw also addresses socio-economic disparities, critiques war and heroism, and advocates for intellectualism and progress. His works feature strong, independent female characters challenging traditional gender roles.

11.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which recurring theme in Shaw’s plays challenges conventional beliefs about class, morality, and gender roles?
 - A. War and Heroism
 - B. Social Critique

- C. Romantic Idealism
 - D. Wealth and Class
2. In *Pygmalion*, what theme does Shaw primarily explore through the transformation of a flower girl into a refined lady?
- A. War and Peace
 - B. Wealth and Class
 - C. Language and Communication
 - D. Feminism and Gender Roles
3. Which play by Shaw directly addresses the morality of wealth acquired through the arms industry?
- A. *Man and Superman*
 - B. *Major Barbara*
 - C. *Arms and the Man*
 - D. *Saint Joan*
4. What theme does Shaw explore in plays like *Arms and the Man* and *Major Barbara*, challenging glorified notions of war and heroism?
- A. Social Critique
 - B. Romantic Idealism
 - C. War and Peace
 - D. Feminism and Gender Roles
5. Which overarching theme in Shaw's plays is evident in the examination of the clash between individual morality and societal expectations?
- A. Social Critique
 - B. Intellectualism and Progress
 - C. Individualism and Morality
 - D. War and Peace

Answer: 1b,2c,3b,4c,5c.

11.7 SUGGESTED READING

Singh, D. K. *The Idea of the Superman in the Plays of G. B. Shaw*. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1999.

Paul, Samiran Kumar. *The Genius of George Bernard Shaw*. Notion Press, 2020. Ebook.

Bradford, Wade. "Themes and Concepts in *Man and Superman* by George Bernard Shaw." *ThoughtCo*, 6 Aug. 2018, www.thoughtco.com/man-and-superman-themes-and-concepts-2713246

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950)
MAN AND SUPERMAN

STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 12.3 *Man and Superman* : Summary
- 12.4 Shaw's *Man and Superman* as a Comedy
- 12.5 Glossary
- 12.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.7 Multiple Choice Questions
- 12.8 Suggested Reading

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Man and Superman is known as a Comedy and a Philosophy. This lesson will introduce the learners to comical aspects of the play.

12.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with *Man and Superman* as a comedy.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the elements of comedy in *Man and Superman*, such as wit, satire, irony, and exaggerated characters.
- Explain how Shaw uses comedy to address serious philosophical and social themes.
- Analyze the role of comic situations and dialogue in character development and plot progression.
- Evaluate how Shaw blends romantic comedy conventions with intellectual debate to create a unique dramatic form.

12.3 MAN AND SUPERMAN: SUMMARY

In the beginning of Act 1, Ramsden and Octavius talk about Ann Whitefield, whom Octavius wishes to marry. They also talk about his friend John Tanner. He is the radical author of *The Revolutionist's Handbook*. Tanner enters angrily and he is objecting to the fact that under the will of Ann's father's, he and Ramsden have been appointed Ann's guardians. Neither of the two wants to take this responsibility, but when Ann arrives with

her mother, she insists on keeping both guardians. Tanner says that Ann will act independently irrespective of their wishes.

After Ramsden and Ann leave, Tanner and Octavius talk about Ann, and Tanner predicts that she will ultimately marry Octavius. Ann soon returns with Ramsden, announcing that Violet, Octavius's unmarried sister, is pregnant. Ramsden and Octavius depart, leaving Tanner and Ann to reflect on their earlier relationship. Tanner claims he has matured beyond romance and now devotes himself to challenging social beliefs and moral ideals. Violet then appears, and though Tanner approves of her apparent rebellion, she reveals that she is actually married but refuses to disclose her husband's identity.

In Act 2, as Tanner's chauffeur, Henry Straker, repairs the car, Octavius confesses that Ann has rejected his marriage proposal. Ann enters and explains why she has forbidden Violet from riding with Tanner. Tanner jokingly says he is travelling to Algiers and invites Ann to join him; to his shock, she accepts. Ramsden, Mrs. Whitefield, Octavius, and Hector Malone, a wealthy American, arrive. Hector announces he will take Violet in his car. After the others leave, Violet returns and kisses Hector, revealing they are secretly married because Hector's father wants him to marry into the British aristocracy. Later, Straker tells Tanner that Ann is actually pursuing him, not the other way around. Alarmed by this idea, Tanner hastily decides to flee to North Africa.

Act 3 takes part in the mountains of southern Spain, Tanner and Straker are captured by brigands led by Mendoza, who plans to ransom them. Mendoza admits he is a former waiter and is hopelessly in love with Louisa, who turns out to be Straker's sister. Tanner attempts to reason with him.

During the night, a dream sequence begins. Don Juan appears in Hell with an Old Woman who transforms into Doña Ana, resembling Ann. Doña Ana's father, the Commander—who resembles Ramsden—arrives from Heaven, followed by the Devil. The characters debate the nature of Heaven and Hell. Hell is portrayed as a place of illusion and pleasure, while Heaven represents intellectual discipline and devotion to the Life Force, which seeks human progress. After a philosophical discussion, Don Juan leaves for Heaven, and the Commander departs with the Devil, referring to Nietzsche's concept of the Superman. Doña Ana longs to create the Superman. The scene returns to reality as Ann, Ramsden, Octavius, Violet, Hector, and soldiers appear. The brigands are arrested, but Tanner saves them by claiming they were protecting him.

Act 4 takes place in a garden in Granada. Hector's father confronts Violet and threatens to disinherit Hector if he marries her. When it is revealed that Violet and Hector are already married, he reluctantly accepts the situation. Ann tells Octavius that she cannot live up to his idealized image of her and admits that her mother wants her to marry Tanner. Mrs. Whitefield assures Tanner she has not manipulated Ann but believes the match would suit him. When left alone, Tanner protests against marriage, though everyone assumes he will marry Ann. Overcome by the force of life and destiny, Tanner finally gives in. Ann faints, and Tanner holds her, signaling his surrender to marriage.

12.4 SHAW'S *MAN AND SUPERMAN* AS A COMEDY

Traditionally in a comedy, love between a young man and a young woman who have to face some opposition in the beginning, mainly from the paternal side, are finally reconciled to marriage. Precisely, the same situation is presented in *Man and Superman* too. There are a number of father figures in the beginning of the drama, such as Ann's dead father, Ramsden, Melone Senior etc. The play opens with the reading of the deceased Mr. Whitefield's will which is an echo of the Victorian method. According to the will Ramsden and Tanner are jointly appointed Ann's guardians. The contrast presented here is that Ramsden is conservative whereas Tanner is a progressive guardian. Here again Shaw's familiar iconoclastic situation is presented to us. There are two potential candidates, Tanner and Octavius, to marry Ann. One of the important and interesting themes of the play is Shaw's presentation

of the two rivals, each having a potent cause to marry Ann. But in the interest of the comedy one has to be rejected. The paternalistic veto of Ramsden and the deceased father's will favour Octavius as the rightful partner of Ann. Up to this point there is an echo of the traditional comedy. In the sub-plot also almost the same comic situation has been presented. Hector Malone and Violet have a secret love affair. They do not want to subject themselves to Malone Senior's opposition. Malone wants Hector to marry into the English aristocracy. But here also his paternal opposition is overcome by Violet's commonsense. Shaw's anticapitalistic views gain a fresh momentum through this situation. Afterwards, Violet's father-in-law has to consent to her marriage with Hector. This situation is exploited by Shaw to be presented as a universal theme in the Hell scene. Of *Man and Superman* Shaw himself said that he had written

....a trumpery story of modern London life, a life in which... the ordinary man's main business is to get means to keep up the position and habit of a gentleman and the ordinary woman's business is to get married.

It obviously suggests that the play is a comedy of manners replete with wit, humour and farcical elements. Shaw himself insisted that despite the fact that he has expressed in the play his views on happiness, on love, marriage, sex-relations, women, art, socialism, democracy, industrialization, religion, morality, virtue, sin, death, war, peace, slavery and a host of other serious, significant topics which are strikingly original, he was not an inventor in the dramatic technique. Such familiar romantic and melodramatic elements as a will, a love triangle, the apparently fallen woman and an episode involving capture by brigands are also found in the play. Among the comic type of characters are the mother bent on marrying off her daughter; the brash, impertinent servant who knows more than his master; and others like Malone, the American millionaire. In the characterization he almost always depends upon overstatement; and such exaggeration is strictly in the tradition of the comic writers and satirists. As *Man and Superman* is a comedy with a serious purpose, the play provides a humorous treatment of a philosophical substance. In the play we witness the tragi-comic spectacle of love-chase of a man (Tanner) by a woman (Ann) and the result is amusing and laughter-provoking. The play provides a highly comic love-chase where a woman is in love, wooing, courting, pursuing and ultimately winning the unwilling male who regards marriage as a noose, a trap, something to ensnare a man into becoming a proper husband and bread-winner. Shaw here regards woman as the hunter, and man the hunted, woman the spider and man the fly. No wonder Ann brings to bear all her woman's wiles on this comic love-chase and gains her object, and Tanner becomes the comic figure who ultimately succumbs to her tricks. In other words, in Acts I, II and IV, the development, in the main, follows the style of the Romantic Comedy. Act I introduces to us the principal characters and informs us of the conditions laid down in the will of Ann's father according to which Tanner will be Ann's guardian. Tanner is considered to be a promising thinker and Ann is shown as a self-possessed and crafty adversary. In Act II the Love triangle develops and Tanner notices that he is the "marked down prey." The situation which emerges shows that Octavius pursues Ann while she pursues Tanner. Ann's pursuit of Tanner takes the physical form in the car chase. Shaw, like Shakespeare, develops the plot through a series of misunderstandings, which may be labeled as "mistaken awarenesses." In each successive act Shaw offers a series of amusing, often exciting climaxes. In Act 1, for instance, the audience witnesses Roebuck Ramsden, a rather elderly man of affluence and affairs, who is confident that he is the sole guardian of Ann Whitefield and is determined to see to it that the Revolutionist, Jack Tanner shall not come near her. When Jack appears, Ramsden learns that, very much against his will, the younger man, Tanner, is to serve as coguardian of the young lady. Dramatic irony of this sort is very amusing to the audience. In the same act, the sub-plot presenting Violet Robinson-Hector Malone gets underway and begins to provide a counterpoint to the main action. It carries two similarities with the main plot: (a) It develops the love-sexmarriage theme and (b) it reveals woman as the dominant partner in the love game. Before her appearance all believe that Violet has disgraced herself. The subplot is closely related to the main plot in so far as the secrecy about her marriage allows us to see how an intellectual like Tanner can in practice make a serious misjudgement. The secrecy later causes him further embarrassment when he is told that it is the unsuspected Hector who is the missing husband. In this way the sub-plot directly contributes to the main action of the play.

Here Shaw develops and sustains one of the finest example of dramatic irony in modern drama. The counter-discovery, that is, the correction of mistaken awareness, is dexterously handled: Violet is revealed as a respectable married woman. Such situations fulfill a two-fold function : (i) they lend themselves effectively to the development of character and (ii) they give opportunity to voice one’s ideas. For illustration, consider the case of Jack who holds a bold contrast to Ramsden, who being an old fashioned liberal, protests against his new and unsolicited responsibility. Or take another particular example when Jack eloquently defends Violet, he gets excoriated by the young lady. All this is relevant to the main theme of the play because it shows both Ann and Violet as young women who are determined in their way to achieve their own goals.

Throughout the play G.B. Shaw continues to make effective use of dramatic irony. In the beginning of the play itself, it becomes apparent to the audience through the dialogue between Jack Tanner and Straker that it is not Octavius but the blissfully ignorant Tanner who would be the victim of Ann’s wild impulses.

Ann can not be suspicious that Jack has already received the note from Roda giving the true reason as to why the younger sister cannot join Tanner on the motor trip that exposes Ann’s lie – the first hand proof of Ann’s reckless and unscrupulous behaviour in pursuit of the male. Similarly, when Hector Malone enters, all but Violet are unaware of the fact that he is her husband. Shaw realizes the comic possibilities of the situation, which provides much needed relief and balance caused by the earlier situation involving Violet. With a view to proving his liberal attitude Jack defends Hector and earns only the American’s indignation.

Check Your Progress

1. Shaw blends traditional romantic comedy with serious ideas, creating what is often called a _____ comedy.
2. The character of Roebuck Ramsden is portrayed with humour as a symbol of outdated _____ values.
3. Much of the play’s comedy arises from the contrast between John Tanner’s radical ideas and Ann Whitefield’s quiet _____.
4. The play uses _____, where characters are unaware of the contradictions in their own words or actions, creating humour.

Answer Key

1. philosophical
2. Victorian
3. determination
4. irony

Act III takes the reader to the Sierra Nevada in Spain, where Mendoza and his band of brigands capture Tanner fleeing from Ann. Shaw introduces here the story element as melodramatic as any to be found in the Victorian plays. It contributes significantly in two ways: first, it reveals that Mendoza, the brigand’s leader, was driven to lead this sort of life of crime because of the rejection in love. The coincidence is that the lady turns out to be Louisa Straker, the chauffeur’s sister. Anyway, Jack and Straker are treated generously and Tanner composes himself to sleep. Mendoza warns him saying, “these mountains make you dream of women—of women with magnificent hair.” “This is a strange country for dreams.” Coincidence and “mistaken awareness” are to be found even in the Don Juan in the Hell interlude. The old crone, who makes an inquiry to the first soul she meets, turns out to be Dona Anna and learns that she is speaking to her one time lover and “murderer” of her father. The Hell Scene is lengthy, and constitutes a complete One-Act play by itself. Though *Man and Superman* has often been

staged without this scene but it does not mean that it is not an integral part of the play. As a matter of fact it is a very important scene for it clarifies the issues discussed in the play. It is a dream of Tanner in which the foregoing Acts come to life. In a way, it may be called a parody of the procedure of the debates and the debaters of the play. The whole debate is musically constructed. The subjects of hell and heaven are replaced by the subjects of Man and Woman relationship, sex and marriage, purpose of life; and merits and demerits of Hell and Heaven. The theatrical properties of the scene enhance the entertaining value of the play. The characters are re-incarnated and the themes and ideas are enacted with the view to highlighting their absurdity. Thus, the play-within-the-play is an integral part of the play.

In Act IV, two important events take place which are carried on by common theatrical devices. Malone receives and reads the note Violet had intended for Hector. This is only a variation of the eaves dropping device commonly used in the popular theatre. Mistaken awareness also abounds in the act as Melone believes that his son is pursuing a married woman and then learns that Hector is her husband. Besides, in a villa in Granada, Ann manages to win the hand of Tanner by a series of tactical moves. The climax comes when she reveals that even the will of her father is her own in disguise as she had been allowed to choose her own guardian. "The trap was laid from the beginning" says Tanner and Ann adds "From the beginning of their acquaintance, from the childhood by the Life Force" Tanner submits to this kind of compulsion despite his concern to remain a freeman. Thus, *Man and Superman* is "a repertory of old stage devices, to use Reuben A. Brower's terms.

Shaw is a master of inversion which is used very effectively in this play, for example, the 'Victorian Womanly Woman' as heroine is replaced by the 'Vital Woman' who relentlessly chases her man. Shaw honestly admits that he has not invented the pursuing woman in literature; Shakespeare and many others anticipated it but it is difficult to deny that he innovated it differently. For instance, consider its use for the comic purposes in the character of Mrs. Whitefield, but it is difficult to find a mother who was devoted to Octavius as if he were her favourite son and one would expect her to welcome him as her son-in-law. But no, she candidly gives her opinion that Octavius was too nice a boy to be victimized by Ann, whereas Jack would be a match for her. Reversal of roles and attitudes illustrate every shade and variety of Shavian humour. Tanner becomes a comic figure because of a marked discrepancy between his earlier pronouncements and his instinctive conduct. He posed to be an apostle of male freedom and independence but suddenly declares, "I love you. The Life Force enchants me. I have the world in my arms when I clasp you." There are good examples of Shavian inversion and humour in Don Juan's Hell interlude also.

However, it is not to be assumed that *Man and Superman* consists of only comic reversals, farcical incidents and melodramatic type of characters. As Shaw himself wrote in the dedicatory epistle, "The pleasantry is not the essence of the play." It remains a comedy and a philosophy. "Man is not victor in the duel of sex" is the idea around which the simple comedy is built: an idea of natural biology.

Shaw shows an aversion to building a well-knit and organic plot in the conventional sense of the term though he uses many conventional devices. He believes in writing the drama of ideas which determine his philosophy as well as the plot of his plays. To achieve his end, he wants his characters to use language effectively. He is adept at varying the style of speaking from one character to another. The contrasting "voices" in the play explain what Herley Granville- Barker meant when he issued instructions to the cast he was putting through rehearsal "Do remember, ladies and gentlemen, that this is Italian opera." Shaw himself stated:

My sort of play would be impossible unless I endowed my characters with powers of self-expression which they would not possess in real life.

In other words, Shaw's success in individualizing the oral style of his characters may be illustrated by comparing the speeches of Ramsden and Tanner. If the former speaks like "a chairman among the directors," the latter sounds like "a street corner orator." Shaw's diversity of styles was meant to startle people or to shock people as do his ideas. Elaborating the aspect of the play one of his critics has aptly summed up:

Man and Superman is operatic in another way. The longer speeches, notably those made by Jack Tanner, are bravura pieces, comparable to the arias in grand opera.

There are many good illustrations as in Tanner's description of a true artist or his defence of Violet or Don Juan's memorable peroration which reveals Shaw's successful use of his training in voice culture that led to the varying style of speaking and added dramatic effect to his plays.

12.5 GLOSSARY

Trumpetry – Something trivial, worthless, or showy.

Iconoclastic – Attacking or rejecting traditional beliefs or customs.

Paternalistic – Treating others in a fatherly, controlling way.

Commonsense – Practical, sound judgment.

Melodramatic – Exaggerated, sensational, or overemotional.

Dexterously – Skillfully or cleverly.

Eavesdropping – Secretly listening to others' conversations.

Inversion – Reversal of roles, order, or position.

Farce – A type of comedy using exaggeration and absurd situations.

Arias – Solo vocal pieces in an opera, here used metaphorically for long speeches.

12.6 LET US SUM UP

Man and Superman by George Bernard Shaw is a comedic play that explores the eternal battle between the sexes and the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations. The play is a romantic comedy that challenges traditional notions of love and marriage, presenting characters engaged in witty repartee and intellectual pursuits. Shaw's comedic exploration delves into the complexities of human relationships, societal norms, and the pursuit of individual autonomy.

12.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Who is the protagonist of *Man and Superman*?
A. Jack Tanner B. John Bull
C. Henry Straker D. Octavius Robinson
- What is the central theme of *Man and Superman*?
A. War and Heroism B. Romantic Idealism
C. The battle of the sexes and individualism D. Social Critique
- Who is the female character in the play known for her intelligence, wit, and strong-willed nature?
A. Ann Whitefield B. Violet Robinson
C. Octavius' sister D. The Duchess of St. Olpherts

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950)
MAN AND SUPERMAN

STRUCTURE

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 13.3 Shaw's Art of Characterization
- 13.4 Glossary
- 13.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 13.7 Suggested Reading

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Shaw is famous for full-length portrait of his characters. His characters are personified abstractions. This lesson will introduce the learners to Shaw's character portrayal.

13.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with Shaw's art of characterization and give them an insight into various characters in the play *Man and Superman*.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the techniques Shaw uses to create complex, realistic characters with distinct voices and motivations.
- Analyze how Shaw's characters reflect social, political, and philosophical ideas, often representing opposing viewpoints.
- Explain how dialogue, irony, and conflict reveal character depth and development.
- Evaluate how Shaw subverts traditional character types, such as heroes or romantic leads, to challenge audience expectations.

13.3 SHAW'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION

Shaw made it absolutely clear that his purpose as a dramatist was that his plays were meant not only to be acted out but also to be read. It made him provide a detailed description of setting and other stage directions as well as full-length portraits of his characters. Shaw and his friend Sir James Matthew Barrie both followed the tradition in the character portrayal that goes back to Ben Jonson who too wished his plays to reach a wider

audience. It must be conceded here that often a given character, as revealed in the play proper, is not quite the same as he is described in the separate character sketch.

Shaw's art of characterization has invited diverse opinions from his critics. If one group denounces his characters as 'flat,' 'wooden, and 'static', others treat them as 'personified abstractions' or as gramophone records for playing on Shaw's themes or "personified mental point of view" to use T.H. Dickinson's expression. The controversy arises when Shaw's characters are judged on the conventional principles without remembering that his drama is a new kind of "the discussion dramas." Being the drama of ideas it has to be evaluated by its own canons and rules. In recent criticism Shaw's art of characterization is being praised and his skill in this area is duly recognized. In *The History of English Literature*, E. Albert points out that "after Shakespeare no English dramatist equals Shaw in the variety and vividness of his characters" and then adds that "he has contributed many memorable characters to the national heritage." Desmond MacCarthy in his article on Shaw comments, "What is true of Dickens – that his characters are his own such as no other novelist could create – can also be said of Shaw." The variety of his characters is of that sweep that no two characters are alike and each of his characters, being sharply individualized, belongs to the play in which he or she appears. As a matter of fact, Shaw has drawn them from all the strata of society and from all professions – kings, ministers, politicians, and mechanics – representing the whole range of humanity. He has drawn them even from different nations. Napoleon and Joan are French. In *Arms and the Man* there are the Serbs and the Australians, the Russians and the Bulgarians. *Man and Superman* has the Americans. The remarkable qualities, which they share, are of vividness and individuality. Desmond MacCarthy highlights these facts and says,

Shaw had the insight to enter into the minds of people, to grasp their point of view, and to objectify them in the expression of their personality, which accounts for the whole range of his characters.

Shaw started with people and invented his plots only to project them. He did not take the actual people as his models but he conceived them in original manner and endowed them with the power to create their own situations, which are full of all those confusions and huddles that prevail in their natural living. Shaw at times handles them like a caricaturist seizing upon their salient features and visualizing them through elaborate stage directions which give account of their dress, personal appearance, habits, manners, including their past history. The pen portrait of Ramsden in the beginning of *Man and Superman* is a relevant illustration. He did not hesitate even to create suitable dramatic situation for them to impart them distinctiveness and studied their reactions and behaviour to those situations. It is interesting to note that Shaw gives them enough rope to evolve their own ideas and speak for themselves. C.B. Purdom rightly assesses in his book on Bernard Shaw, that they often "present an argument against what is assumed to be Shaw's own point of view with utterly unprejudiced freedom." In *Man and Superman* Ramsden, Octavius, Tanner, Ann, and even Straker have their own individual opinions and views; and the dramatic interest arises from a clash between their respective views. Tanner is the representative of the new thought, that is, the Shavian philosophy, Ramsden is of the old school of thought; Octavius represents the romantic attitude towards love and woman; and Ann the fury of the creative Life Force, to take a few examples.

As A. Nicholl pointed out in his book, *The British Drama* Shaw's characters are not emotionless but their emotions are subordinated to the drive of the Life Force to attain a higher and better life. Shaw has given to English theatre a new type of character that faces the conflict between human will and human environment. Nicholl says:

Instead of timid heroines, we find intellectually daring woman; instead of strong heroes, men lacking power and self-will; instead of fantastically model clergymen, ministers who feel more at ease in buff-coat and jack boots; instead of impossible villains, men who are themselves the tools of society.

Shaw's special art of characterization reveals its strength in two ways:

(a) Shaw succeeds in evoking our interest and sympathy even for less attractive characters like Mrs. Warren and (b) He gives psychological insight to them, a "sort of sixth sense", which adds another dimension to their personality, for instance in the case of Joan.

Commenting on Shaw's women characters C.B. Purdom says that his world has a large place for women. "He honoured them showing in his plays that they are not only loved, but respected, even feared." Shaw has put women on the high pedestal. In Shaw's plays it is the women who take initiative not only in love but in everything else as they are the driving force, rather than instruments of the Life Force. To quote Purdom's words, "Such a gallery of remarkable women does not exist in the works of any other dramatist."

Thus, Shaw's characters are the essence of his plays. Let us study two characters closely to understand his extremely ambitious play *Man and Superman*.

(a) Ann Whitefield

Ann Whitefield is a young, graceful and perfect lady with very attractive eyes and hair. She is the woman "to make men dream." Shaw calls her "one of the vital geniuses" adding that she is not oversexed, which would be a "vital defect, not a true excess." Whether she is beautiful or not depends on individual taste as she fascinates such different individuals as Ramsden, Octavius and Tanner. None can deny that she is perfectly self-controlled, perfectly respectable, fashionable, frank and impulsive. To Ramsden for whom she holds affection and even slight contempt and calls him "Granny." She is "a wonderful dutiful girl." He cannot remember when she expressed her own reasons to do anything to please herself. She would always say "Father wished me to," or "Mother wouldn't like it." Such utterances have convinced him that she is totally selfless and has a keen sense of duty. She is full of tender sentiments and helpless; she even swoons in the presence of young men as is expected of the feminine, well-bred young Victorian Womanly Woman. Octavius is deeply impressed and easily deceived by her. Jack tries to enlighten him about her saying "Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to do it: do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?" He remains incredulous through out because she is to him the "reality of romance." The portrait of Ann as given by Shaw shows that she is an emancipated woman and inspires confidence as a person. She respects her sister Violet because she gets her way unlike her, though that is not really true. The fact remains that she too manages to achieve whatever she decides. For example, consider the event of her insistence on getting married to Tanner – against her wishes. He is nearly terrified by her. He crosses half Europe and goes to Spain only to escape her but it is to no avail. She corners him in Granada and ensnares him into a marriage proposal. As Hector Melone puts it, she tracked him, "at every stopping place; she is a regular Sherlock Holmes." Tanner is helpless in her hands, "a mere baby," as she herself puts it.

Jack Tanner later describes her as a liar, a bully, and a hypocrite –as one who is utterly unscrupulous in using her personal fascination to make men give her what she wants. To him she is "something for which there is no polite name." She has something of a coquette in her as she keeps up a flirtation with Octavius though she has marked Tanner as her victim. Tanner beware Octavius for he was in the lioness's mouth, "You are half-swallowed already in three bites – bite one Ricky, bite two Ticky, bite three Octavius, and down you go." Mr. Eric Bentley sees her as a black spider out to trap the male, use him for her purposes, and then devour him. She is anything but the thoroughly *average* woman at heart and her methods are more virile than feminine.

Shaw created such a character with a purpose, a programme in this comedy, which is also a philosophy. Ann is an archetype of the Vital Woman. If Jack preaches vitality, Ann practices it. She is not only Vital but also Vital Genius. The great mission of her life is to find the right father for her children. She feels that she has the responsibility to create a superior race for the future. She manages to fascinate even her severest critic, Jack Tanner who finds her to be a kind of female Machiavellian, using any and all means to fulfill her destiny.

Despite the fact that she is a temptress, she is not wicked as Shaw makes her an instrument of the Life Force and she plays her role beautifully and that is the reason why most of the characters in the play are deceived by her. She is totally dedicated to her role of the Vital Woman with a mission. She tells him “All timid women are conventional, Jack, or else we are so cruelly, so vilely misunderstood.” She exhibits great determination and intelligence, which makes her have her heart’s desire. If one considers that the basic theme of the play is the theory of creative evolution as its title also indicates, then Ann is the typical female and feminine character who does not “see any sense in destruction.” It proves that Ann is actually unselfish who believes in the future of mankind, which is at stake and for that she will not mind sacrificing the fortunes of a few individuals caught in the present time. Shaw, through her character has demonstrated that if there can be ‘everyman’ at the centre of the play then why should not ‘every-woman’ too occupy a similar place. She can be the wooer and the winner. Shaw has created an outstanding character through her who is a type and an individual at the same time. Hence, it can be stated that, “Every woman may not be Ann; but Ann is Every Woman.”

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. Shaw’s characters often represent conflicting _____, allowing philosophical debates within the plot.
2. Rather than relying on external action, Shaw develops characters primarily through extended _____.
3. In *Pygmalion*, Professor Higgins is a complex character who is both brilliant and _____ in social interactions.
4. Shaw often subverts expectations by giving female characters strong _____ and intellectual independence.

Answer Key

1. ideas
2. dialogue
3. insensitive
4. agency

(b) Jack Tanner

G.B. Shaw describes the protagonist of the play, *Man and Superman*, as “a big man with a beard, a young man of Olympian majesty more like Jupiter than Apollo.” He is decently dressed not from vanity but from a sense of sophistication in everything he does. He is “prodigiously fluent of speech” sensitive, restless and excitable; an earnest man who would be lost without a sense of humour. Perhaps it is his playful nature, which prompts him to talk constantly— something that often makes him an object of laughter. Tanner is the most recognizably typical of Shaw’s heroes. If some of the critics like A.C. Ward regard him “a timeless and ageless figure” other critics have called him “the conventional fool in an intellectual disguise.” In the play Tanner is the mouthpiece of Shaw’s philosophy and the entire action of the play is seen from his point of view. It is he who expounds Shaw’s philosophy of Life Force and is Ann’s proper counterpart in all respects.

Jack Tanner embodies the Shavian concept of Don Juan, the sixteenth century libertine, but Shaw treats the concept dramatically and unlike the Don Juan of tradition does not make his character vulgarly a libertine and a ravisher of woman. Rather he is a Don Juan in the philosophical sense who preaches the morality to repent and to reform. As Shaw himself explained his Don Juan “is a man who, though gifted enough to be exceptionally capable of distinguishing between good and evil, follows his own instincts without regard to the common statute, or cannon law; and therefore, whilst gaining the ardent sympathy of our rebellious instincts, finds himself in mortal conflict with existing institutions.” To prove that his hero is a great prophet far ahead of the ordinary mortals, Shaw provided as an appendix to his play Tanner’s *The Revolutionist’s Handbook*. But, in the play he is

neither heroic nor a genius; he never turns his words into actions; it appeared as if Shaw wished to criticize many characters and ideologies through the persona of Tanner. He judges the false conventions and beliefs, traditions and institutions and finds them actually fading away. In this sense Shaw uses Tanner to purify the intellectual air by clarifying the complex issues related to gender, Victorian smugness, hypocrisy, including shallow romanticism. If he is represented as a revolutionary, he is specially so about the institution of marriage, cult of respectability and the romantic adoration of woman which he finds false and utterly meaningless. Thus, Tanner represents what Shaw believes to be the true moral sense. It is clearly revealed in the first long dialogue between Jack and Ann in Act 1. Shaw manages to expound his theory related to the advancement of the race through ‘eugenics’.

Tanner reveals his intellectual strength through his wit and humour. Apparently, he remains cool and unperturbed in the face of the insults and accusations imposed on him by Ramsden and his sister but at a ripe moment he manages to “beat off five reactionaries at once with his wit. He frankly exposes Ramsden by stating that if he is ashamed of anything, he should first be ashamed of accusing him without reading his book. When Ramsden says, “I grow advanced every day”, Tanner retorts, “More advanced in years, Polonius.” When the leader of brigand, Mendoza boasts about himself stating “I am a brigand, I live by robbing the rich,” Tanner replies, “I am a gentleman, and I live by robbing the poor.” It earns him the respect and friendship of the chief of brigand.

However, there are two significant occasions when he falls short of the expectations and cuts a sorry figure: First, when he fails to perceive that Violet is already married and second, when, despite being extremely clever and practical, he ironically does not realize his own state of affairs. It is his chauffeur Straker who has to tell him “he was a marked down victim.”

Shaw identifies Jack Tanner as high Priest of Vitalism and Life Force. Being a man of superior intellectuality, Tanner is considered to be the father of the Shavian Superman. In Shaw’s philosophy it is the marriage of the highly gifted man with a vital woman like Ann, who is urged on by the blind fury of creation that would lead to the birth of the Superman. As he is the proper man, Ann Whitefield rejects Octavius and chases Tanner. It is significant to note that Jack holds friendship with idealistic Octavius and even Ramsden does not protest when his engagement to Ann is announced.

13.4 GLOSSARY

Personified – Represented as having human qualities.

Archetype – A typical example of a certain person or thing.

Emancipated – Free from social, traditional, or legal restrictions.

Unscrupulous – Having no moral principles; not honest or fair.

Libertine – A person who behaves without moral restraint, especially in sexual matters.

Prodigiously – Extremely or impressively great in extent or degree.

Perturbed – Disturbed, anxious, or unsettled.

Vitalism – The belief in a life force that guides development and evolution.

Coquette – A woman who flirts to gain attention or admiration.

Vitalism – The belief that life is driven by a special vital force that cannot be explained by physical or chemical laws.

13.5 LET US SUM UP

Man and Superman by George Bernard Shaw is a comedic play that satirizes societal expectations, exploring the battle of the sexes and the clash between individual desires and conventional norms. The protagonist, Jack Tanner, embodies Shaw's witty and intellectual humor as he grapples with the pursuit of love and autonomy. Filled with sharp repartee, philosophical discussions, and comedic situations, the play challenges traditional romantic ideals in a lighthearted and thought-provoking manner.

13.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Which character in *Man and Superman* serves as a comic foil, offering comic relief through his practical outlook on life?
A. Jack Tanner B. Roebuck Ramsden
C. Octavius Robinson D. Henry Straker
- What does Ann Whitefield represent in the play's philosophical and romantic context?
A. The embodiment of the Life Force
B. A symbol of societal norms
C. Jack Tanner's sister
D. A representative of the working class
- Who is Jack Tanner's chauffeur in the play, playing a crucial role in the plot?
A. Mendoza B. Henry Straker
C. Octavius Robinson D. Hector Malone
- In "Don Juan in Hell," a dream sequence within the play, what classical character appears alongside Don Juan and Jack Tanner?
A. Medea B. Faust
C. Don Giovanni D. Manfred
- What is the subtitle of *Man and Superman*, indicating its connection to the Don Juan legend?
A. A Comedy of Manners B. The Revolutionist's Handbook
C. The Devil's Disciple D. A Romantic Comedy

Answer: 1d, 2b, 3a, 4b, 5b.

13.7 SUGGESTED READING

Jain, S. *Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw*. Discovery Publishing House, 2006.

Pathak, Dayananda. *George Bernard Shaw: His Religion and Values*. Mittal Publications, 2009.

"*Man and Superman Characters*." *LitCharts*, LitCharts LLC, <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/man-and-superman/characters>

T.S. ELIOT
THE FAMILY REUNION

STRUCTURE

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 14.3 Life of T.S. Eliot
- 14.4 Modern Poetic Drama
 - 14.4.1 Main Features of Poetic Drama
 - 14.4.2 Poetry and Drama
 - 14.4.3 Growth of Poetic Drama
 - 14.4.4 Prominent Poetic Dramatists
- 14.5 Eliot's Theory of Poetic Drama
- 14.6 Glossary
- 14.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.8 Multiple Choice Questions
- 14.9 Answer Key
- 14.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.11 Suggested Reading

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Eliot is a key figure of British modernism and this lesson will talk about his life, times and works.

14.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

In this lesson we will discuss the biography and the literary career of T.S. Eliot. Further in the lesson we will discuss the theory of modern poetic drama in general and Eliot's theory of poetic drama with special reference to the play *Family Reunion*.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the key features of modern poetic drama, including its focus on elevated language, symbolism, and psychological depth.
- Trace the growth and evolution of poetic drama from the early 20th century onward.
- Recognize the contributions of prominent dramatists such as T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, and W.B. Yeats.

- Explain T.S. Eliot's theory of poetic drama, particularly his views on verse as a natural medium for serious drama and his aim to revive poetic tradition.

14.3 LIFE OF T.S. ELIOT

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St Louis, Missouri, on 26 Sept. 1888. His father was in business there, and his grandfather was a Unitarian minister who had much to do with the establishing of Washington University in St Louis. His mother was also a writer, and her dramatic poems on Savonarola, edited by her son, indicates an early source of Eliot's interest in poetic drama. Afflicted with a congenital double hernia, he was in the constant care of his mother and five older sisters. Left in the care of his Irish nurse, Annie Dunne, who sometimes took him to Catholic Mass, Eliot knew both the city's muddy streets and its exclusive drawing rooms. He attended Smith Academy in St. Louis until he was sixteen. During his last year at Smith he visited the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and was so taken with the fair's native villages that he wrote short stories about primitive life for the Smith Academy Record. In 1905 he departed for a year at Milton Academy outside of Boston, preparatory to following his older brother Henry to Harvard. Eliot's attending Harvard seems to have been a foregone conclusion. His father and mother brought the family back to the north shore every summer, and in 1896 built a substantial house at Eastern Point, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. As a boy, Eliot became an accomplished sailor, trading the Mississippi River in the warm months for the rocky shoals of Cape Ann.

The Eliot family had come in the seventeenth century from East Coker, in Somerset, to New England, and for many reasons it was natural that Eliot should go to New England for his university education. He entered Harvard in 1906, when Charles William Eliot was president, distant relative but, as some glancing references make clear, not intellectually a very congenial figure to his namesake. He gave up a sense of belonging to either region, that he always felt like a New Englander in the Southwest, and a southwesterner in New England his American World. Despite his feelings of alienation from both of the regions he called home, Eliot impressed many classmates with his social ease when he began his studies at Harvard in the fall of 1906. Eliot's main academic interest was in philosophy, and though he wrote poetry and was "Class Odist" of his year, he was not especially precocious as a poet. He was caught up in the widespread interest in Oriental philosophy at Harvard, and tells us that he was stopped from going further into it by a fear of losing his sense of participation in the Western tradition. Like his brother Henry before him, Eliot lived his freshman year in a fashionable private dormitory in a posh neighborhood around Mt. Auburn Street known as the "Gold Coast." He joined a number of clubs, including the literary Signet. And he began a romantic attachment to Emily Hale, a refined Bostonian who once played Mrs. Elton opposite his Mr. Woodhouse in an amateur production of *Emma*. Among his teachers, Eliot was drawn to the forceful moralizing of Irving Babbitt and the stylish skepticism of George Santayana, both of whom reinforced his distaste for the reform-minded, progressive university shaped by Eliot's cousin, Charles William Eliot. His attitudes, however, did not prevent him from taking advantage of the elective system that President Eliot had introduced. As a freshman, his courses were so eclectic that he soon wound up on academic probation. He recovered and persisted, attaining a B.A. in an elective program best described as comparative literature in three years, and an M.A. in English literature in the fourth.

A travelling fellowship took Eliot to Germany in 1914, and it was eighteen years before he returned to America. In the fall he entered Merton College, Oxford, to read philosophy. Meanwhile he had discovered the French symbolist poets, especially Baudelaire and Laforgue, and had learned from them how to apply the language of poetry to contemporary life. "The kind of poetry that I needed" he says, "to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French." He learned much from the chief English study of these poets, Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. His major poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," appeared in 1915 in *Poetry*, a magazine recently founded in Chicago, and a main outlet for the stream of new American poetry of which Eliot's work formed part. In the same year he married

and settled in England, meeting Ezra Pound and later Wyndham Lewis and James Joyce, and contributing to the magazines and anthologies that Pound's driving energy was establishing. His prose work was an essay on Pound published anonymously in America in 1917. *Prufrock and Other Observations* also appeared in 1917, showing the influence of Laforgue, most markedly in the lunar symbolism and the use of ironic dialogue. In 1919 a second group of poems appeared, and in the same year a collection of the two books, called at first *Ara Vos Prec* and then simply *Poems* (1920). With this volume Eliot's early poetry was virtually complete.

A collection of early essays called *The Sacred Wood*, and including "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which outlined his "impersonal" theory of the poetic process, appeared also in 1920. There followed three influential essays on Marvell, Dryden and the metaphysical poets. In 1922 Eliot began his own periodical, *The Criterion*, which he edited until 1939, the purpose of which was, he tells us, to create a place for the new attitudes to literature and criticism, and to make English letters a part of the European cultural community.

The first issue of *Criterion* carried *The Waste Land*, a long poem that Eliot had been working on for some time, in its original form it is said to have run to over eight hundred lines, then in consultation with Ezra Pound, who was accustomed to editing other poets with the greatest confidence, it was cut to its present length. With his poem and its successor *The Hollow Men* (1925), Eliot found himself, somewhat to his Chagrin, the spokesman of a post-war attitude which found in his waste-land imagery an "objective correlative" for its disillusionment, or what Eliot calls its illusion of being disillusioned.

Eliot joined the publishing house of Faber and Gwyer, later Faber and Faber, in 1925, and remains a director of the company. He returned to the United States in 1932 as a Professor of Poetry at Harvard, in which office he delivered the lectures called *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. These were followed by a more doctrinaire series given at Virginia in 1933 and published as *After Strange Gods*. During the nineteen-thirties Eliot's critical writing became increasingly concerned with what he calls "the struggle against Liberalism." His later social criticism is represented by two essays, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1940) and *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (1948), the former reflecting much of the spirit of that miserable time between Munich and Dunkirk.

During the nineteen-thirties also Eliot wrote *Four Quartets*, so far the summing up of his non-dramatic poetry. The first Quartet, "Burnt Norton", was published in 1936; the last, "Little Gidding", was completed while the Nazi bombs were falling in London. Meanwhile his interest in drama, which began with *Sweeny Agonistes* (1927) and continued in *The Rock*, had led to the writing of *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), a tragedy on the murder of Becket, and the *Family Reunion* (1939), with a countryhouse setting in which the Furies of Aeschylus make a disconcerting appearance.

Since the War Eliot has continued to live in England, with occasional visits to America, chiefly of an academic nature. He has written little non-dramatic poetry, apart from a collection of children's verse, reminiscent of Edward Lear, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). "Possum" is a nickname for Eliot, derived from the preface to *For Lancelot Andrews*, and occurring in Pound's *Cantos*. Eliot returned to drama with the tragicomedy *The Cocktail Party* (1949), perhaps the most commercially successful of all his plays. This was followed by two other comedies, *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). Both were produced at the Edinburgh Festival and have had good runs, but have never equaled the popularity of their predecessors. There has also been a steady series of critical essays, most of them, as one would expect with an established writer, lectures given on special occasions. These have been collected in a volume called *On Poetry and Poets* (1956). In 1948 Eliot received two of the greatest honors a contemporary writer can obtain, the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature, and a few years later the Hanseatic Goethe Prize. In 1947 his wife, who had been ill for some time,

died and in 1957 he married Valerie Fletcher, to whom *On Poetry and Poets* and *The Elder Statesman* are dictated. Besides, *On Poetry and Poets*, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (1950), which contains the poetry and plays up to *The Cocktail Party*, and the third edition of *Selected Essays* (1951) are essential for Eliot's reader.

14.4 MODERN POETIC DRAMA

English poetic drama in the present century emerged as a revolt against naturalism or the so-called of the Nineteenth century. The word 'naturalism' may be defined as an aspect of literary realism carrying its tendency to extremes i.e. presenting the bare facts in minutest details which are most unimaginative and give us an illusion of reality. Ibsen is said to be the originator, Strindberg the father, the novelist Emile Zola, the preacher; as also Shaw, Galsworthy and H.G. Barker, the followers of dramatic naturalism. Naturalistic playwrights, in response to the scientific and humanitarian movement, introduced social themes like sex, marriage, divorce, racial antagonism, relations between the rich and the poor, in industry, in philanthropy and before law. Besides presenting a social picture in their plays, the playwrights aimed at creating an illusion of reality, and, for photographic presentation on the stage developed a technique which may be termed as 'Ibsenism in the theatre'. English poetic drama in the present century stood against the introduction of social themes and vehemently opposed the conventions of the naturalistic plays, namely, a paramount interest in social problems, photographic presentation on the stage, intellectualizing, prosaic language and artificial narrowness of theme.

14.4.1 Main Features of Poetic Drama

Modern English poetic drama includes all plays whether written in verse or in poetic prose, and presents an idealistic contrast to the drama of social criticism. The naturalistic drama had become intellectual and sophisticated because it appealed to the mind and reason more than to the heart and emotions. So, with the revival of poetic drama, the emotional medium came in to prominence. Besides the emotional quality, modern poetic drama appeared with the dominance of emotion over reason and of lyricism over naturalism.

The main traits of modern poetic drama are many but may be mentioned here briefly. The first and foremost is the element of romance, because there is in them, in general, an escape to Nature, a desire to Nature, a desire for novelty, the use of simple language, the treatment of love and the use of the verse. Besides, there is no observance of the three unities of Time, Place, and Action. Another important trait which strikes us is the use of the supernatural in the poetic plays, as "all those phenomena which cannot be explained by the known and accepted laws of Natural Sciences" and which were richly used by Shakespeare in his plays in the form of witches, ghosts, fairies, demons, prophecy, divination, dreams and astrology, frequently appear on the page and the stage. Fate element is not far from the poetic plays of to-day as there is a direct assumption that a conscious or unconscious supernatural agent is gilding and shaping our actions. The avoidance of problems is one of the essential traits of the present traits of the present poetic as "no social problems worth mentioning obscure the horizon." Modern poetic drama does not seem to offer any philosophy of society. There is disappearance of intellectual quest as the poetic dramatist tries to approach the people through the emotional medium rather than the intellectual. Symbolism is also one of the distinguishable traits of modern poetic drama as a number of poetic playwrights like Yeats, O' Casey, Bottomley, Flecker and others have made it in their plays. The most important trait of modern poetic drama is that it is written in poetry or in poetic prose. The element of dance, which is the visual element of performance and is closely associated with drama, is also getting popularity in poetic drama. All these traits are abundantly found in the prominent English poetic plays of this century, which provide a new light and delight to the people.

14.4.2 Poetry and Drama

Drama is said to be a representation of life on the stage. A dramatist does not represent actual reality, but only emotional reality, for which poetic drama is the best suited because it appeals to a deeper layer of emotional reality, whether its language be verse or prose with poetic idiom. The main purpose of the play is to move the audience by the action on the stage. A survey of poetic plays of the present century shows that the poetic dramatists aim at representing emotional reality, and so the poetic plays are full of emotional atmosphere.

In order to accomplish this aim, the language of poetry or prose with poetic idiom has been considered not only natural but also essential as a medium. The use of poetry in drama is not something new, but as old as Greek literature.

For a number of reasons, drama written in poetry will always be preferred to the drama written in prose. Prose drama concentrates itself on the outermost, whereas, poetic drama deals with the innermost reality. Preferring poetic plays to prose plays implies attaching greater importance to emotional and spiritual reality rather than to ordinary appearances. In this context it may be said that prose is dull, intellectual and the unintoxicating utterance of common experience, whereas poetry, being fermented into meter and heady imagery, is interesting, emotional and has an intoxicating utterance. The tendency of prose drama is “to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse.” Poetry is not merely formalization or an added decoration, it intensifies drama itself. Modern poetic dramatists have made use of elements such as imagery, stage, sets, dance, music, song and chorus which have helped to heighten the effect of ‘poetic language’. Poetic has, thus, evolved against the naturalistic prose drama and against the prose drama of social criticism.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. T.S. Eliot believed that poetic drama should aim for a balance between _____ expression and realistic dialogue.
2. One of the key features of modern poetic drama is its use of _____ language to explore spiritual and existential themes.
3. Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral* reflects his idea that poetic drama should deal with _____ and metaphysical concerns.
4. Along with Eliot, playwrights like _____ and Fry contributed to the revival of poetic drama in the 20th century.

Answer Key

1. poetic
2. elevated
3. religious
4. Yeats

14.4.3 Growth of Poetic Drama

The origin of modern English poetic drama may be traced from the dawn of the twentieth century. The growth of poetic drama has appeared in many countries like America, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, Ireland and England. In America poetic drama revived in the hands of Eugene O’Neill, Maxwell

Anderson, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Archibald Macleish; in Belgium Maurice Maeterlinck popularized it; in France the spirit of poetic drama was kept alive by Edmond Rostand, Paul Claudel and Jean Giraudoux; in Spain, Italy and Scandinavia poetic drama experiments started from the beginning of this century; in England Stephen Philips became the chief exponent of modern English poetic drama.

English poetic drama in Ireland revived with the establishment of a new National Theatre in 1901. Its revival took the form of a literary movement called the Irish Revival by feelings of patriotism and was characterized by Yeats. This movement also opposed naturalistic conventions and brought the remarriage of drama and poetry. In fact the revival of poetic drama has taken the form of a literary movement like the Renaissance and the Romantic Revival movements. It may be termed as the Poetic Drama Revival Movement.

14.4.4 Prominent Poetic Dramatists

W.B. Yeats is the father of the Irish Dramatic Movement and his objective was to revive the poetic drama. He believed that poetry which is a spirit and unassailable essence was present in the Irish peasants who treated common life in the same manner as the people of the age of Chaucer, of Italian renaissance, of Greece and of the Elizabethan period did. He further thought that this spirit revealed itself in the living language which they alone still spoke, and in their love of heroic and homely in legend and in daily life. His plays of allegory and mysticism, Peasant Plays, Heroic Plays, and Plays for Dancers are all poetic ones and contribute a lot to the development of poetic drama in the present age.

J.M. Synge is also a significant figure in the Irish Dramatic Movement. From him begins the growth of poetic drama in prose- a prose beautifully picturesque, expressive, emotional having poetic suggestion and other poetic qualities.

Sean O' Casey is more popular as an expressionist, a realist and a prose- writer than as a poetic playwright, and as such it may rather be seen very surprising that his name has been included among the poetic drama revivalists. His plays develop an excitement of Elizabethans and he can be called an Elizabethan reborn. Though not a poet yet he has great love for poetry and colour.

Christopher Fry is a great poet playwright, word-fancier, and poetic drama revivalist who has made a great contribution to the poetic-drama of the present century by inventing 'Comedies of Mood' and 'The Theatre of Words'. Fry has brought a breath of fresh air into poetry and into the theatre by introducing a comic spirit in poetic drama. He believes in the ornamentation of language and so has treated verse not only as the form of drama but also as its polish. He realizes the importance of words in drama as they give us larger, or deeper experience of action, also have sound value on the stage and help very much in conveying sense, feeling, tone, intention, thought and image to the spectators.

T.S.Eliot's share in the revival of English poetic drama is perhaps his greatest contribution to the literature of this century. His poems and plays are close to contemporary life and are of a very high standard. His winning of Nobel Prize for English literature in 1948 on the occasion of his 60th birthday is the international recognition of his superior literary output. He has considered verse as the most natural and suitable medium for drama. His experimentation with the chorus in *Murder in Cathedral* is praiseworthy. His plays have brought for us a return of the Renaissance.

14.5 ELIOT'S THEORY OF POETIC DRAMA

Eliot's interest in drama is almost co-extensive with his interest in poetry and criticism, the only difference being that during the early phase of his poetic career he is preoccupied with the dramatic element in poetry, while in later years he is more concerned with poetic drama as a medium of mass appeal. He found this medium best fitted to the propagation of certain Christian and spiritual themes and ideas aimed at producing a new insight in the

secular audience of the modern industrial age. His early preoccupation with the 'dramatic' was part of his crusade against romantic solipsism, subjectivity and emotional excesses, in order to clear the ground for the naturalism of the new poetry which the altered sensibility of our complex civilization demanded.

Eliot was very well aware of two crucial facts i.e. the superiority of poetic drama over prose drama; and the most insurmountable difficulties in the way of the pioneers of poetic drama in a prosaic age of surface existence. Eliot was convinced of the greatness of poetic drama as also of the 'permanent craving' for it implanted in human nature. Yet he was equally alive to the great difficulty lying in the way of its realization. As early as 1920 he wrote in an *Athenaeum* article, "The composition of a poetic drama is in fact the most difficult, the most exhausting task that a poet can set himself, and- this is the heart of the matter- it is infinitely more difficult for a poet of today than it was for a poet of no greater talent three hundred years ago".

Eliot's theory of poetic drama can be discussed under following headings:

- (a) Poetry, theatre and audience: The ideal medium for poetry and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre. He does not believe in the several levels of classification of the audience like in the plays of Shakespeare but in the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements of plot, character and conflict of character, words and phrasing, rhythm and sensitiveness all at once, though in different degrees of consciousness. He believes that poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible, and that it is the half-educated and ill- educated rather than the uneducated, who stand in his way. He himself should like an audience which could neither read nor write.
- (b) The nature of poetic drama: It is possible that what distinguishes poetic drama from prosaic drama is a kind of doubleness in action. He elaborated this point in the "Need for Poetic Drama" – to work out a play in verse is to be working like a musician as well as like prose dramatist; it is to see the thing as a whole musical pattern. The verse dramatist must operate on readers on two levels at once, dramatically with character and plot. The requirements for a good plot are just as severe as for a prose play. It is fatal for a poet trying to write a play, to hope to make up for defects in the movement of the play by bursts of poetry which do not help the action.
- (c) Nature and function of dramatic poetry: It is neither a mere decoration, nor a display of seductive ostentation to divert the attention of the reader or spectator from the more important aspects of the play. He has elsewhere analysed passages from Othello, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet to show how the most moving and beautiful verses are dramatic in significance, firmly rooted in particular situation of the play. He goes on to observe that the Elizabethans freely mingled together prose and verse in one and the same play. But because of the changed condition now it is advisable to avoid this practice and to rely on verse alone to meet all the needs of the play.
- (d) Search for the poetic medium appropriate to the modern poetic drama: Eliot was very well aware of the necessity of discovering a medium fit for the poetic drama he was striving to create for the theatre of his age. He says, "We must find a new form of verse which shall be as satisfactory as a vehicle for us as blank verse was for the Elizabethans". The problem before Eliot was twofold: avoidance of Shakespearean versification, and bridging the gulf between the language of poetry and the living speech of the people in contemporary society. But this poetry rooted in the living speech of the people must strive towards the state of music, that is, towards that intensity of expressiveness which can articulate those vague, indefinite feelings.
- (e) Character in poetic drama: According to Eliot a dramatic poet cannot create characters of greatest intensity of life unless his personages, in their reciprocal actions and behavior in their story are somehow dramatizing, but in no obvious form, an action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet.

14.6 GLOSSARY

Congenital – Present from birth; inherited.

Eclectic – Deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources.

Symbolist – Related to a literary movement that uses symbols to express ideas and emotions.

Doctrine – A belief, principle, or teaching, especially in philosophy or religion.

Tragicomedy – A play combining elements of both tragedy and comedy.

Solipsism – The theory that only the self exists or can be known to exist; extreme self-centeredness.

Versification – The art or practice of composing verses in poetry.

Musicality – Quality of being harmonious or rhythmic, often used for literary or poetic expression.

Ostentation – Pretentious display, often to impress others.

14.7 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed in detail the life of T.S. Eliot. Next in the lesson we have discussed the modern poetic drama along with its main features, the difference between poetry and drama, growth of poetic drama and the prominent poetic dramatists. Further in the lesson we have discussed Eliot's theory of poetic drama which is discussed under different headings like Poetry, theatre and audience, the nature of poetic drama, Nature and function of dramatic poetry, Character in poetic drama etc.

14.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- A. What does the TS stand for in T.S. Eliot?
- a) Tom "Senior"
 - b) Tarquin Sutton
 - c) Thomas Stearns
 - d) Thomas Sigismund
- B. Eliot began school at what prep school?
- a) Smith Academy
 - b) Washington Academy
 - c) Becky Academy
 - d) The Andrea school for the blind
- C. In what year did Eliot have a nervous breakdown and was forced to leave his job in London?
- a) 1955
 - b) 1908
 - c) 1934
 - d) 1921
- D. Eliot is cremated at what Crematorium?
- a) Golden Greens
 - b) Blue Lakes

- c) Fiery Pits
 - d) Shambly Shamble's
- E. Eliot's ashes were put interred at what church?
- a) St. Mary's
 - b) St. Bonaventure's
 - c) St. Michael's
 - d) St. Thomas
- F. T.S. Eliot, an American of a New England family adopted British citizenship in?
- a) 1927
 - b) 1910
 - c) 1915
 - d) 1920
- G. Eliot became a director of the publishing firm of?
- a) Oxford University Press
 - b) Penguin Press
 - c) Orient Longman
 - d) Faber and Faber
- H. Eliot was invested the order of Merit in the year?
- a) 1900
 - b) 1930
 - c) 1948
 - d) 1956
- I. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature in?
- a) 1890
 - b) 1899
 - c) 1920
 - d) 1948
- J. Which king of the United Kingdom awarded Order of Merit for T.S. Eliot
- a) Henry IV
 - b) George VI
 - c) Charles II
 - d) Henry II

14.9 ANSWER KEY

- A. (c)
- B. (a)
- C. (d)

- D. (a)
- E. (c)
- F. (a)
- G. (d)
- H. (c)
- I. (d)
- J. (b)

14.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the theory of poetic drama.

2. Give the main points of Eliot’s theory of poetic drama.

3. Trace T.S. Eliot as a dramatist.

14.11 SUGGESTED READING

Raine, Craig. *T. S. Eliot*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Ebook.

Murphy, Russell. *Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. Facts On File, 2007. Ebook.

“T.S. Eliot.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot>

T.S. ELIOT
THE FAMILY REUNION

STRUCTURE

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 15.3 Synopsis of the Play
- 15.4 Detailed Summary
- 15.5 Glossary
- 15.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 15.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.8 Answer Key
- 15.9 Short Answer Questions
- 15.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 15.11 Suggested Reading

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The play, *The Family Reunion*, is in two acts, each having three scenes. There are almost no stage directions. Stage setting is very simple, as Part I requires a scene of a drawing room and Part II of a library only. The originality of the play lies in introducing a theme of contemporary life, with characters of a real time living in a real world. In the play there are passages of great poetic beauty, and statements which are the fruits of a lifetime devoted to poetry. T.S. Eliot gave primary importance to solving the problem of versification, a rhythm close to contemporary speech. In this connection he says, “Here my first concern was the problem of the versification, to find a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them, in uttering the particular phrase on the particular occasion”. In choosing deliberately this theme of contemporary life, and enabling the everyday ordinary characters to speak in verse by discovering a rhythm close to contemporary speech, the playwright has rejected theory of dramatic speech as propounded by Ibsen, who considers poetry as “the language of the Gods”. Eliot thus has extended the scope of poetic drama in regard to the selection of theme, plot, and characters.

The introduction of Eumenides in the play shows the interest of the playwright in making use of the supernatural. In this respect he seems to adopt the device of Shakespeare. The Eumenides are the symbol of the ‘powers beyond us.’ They neither act nor speak, but simply appear or do not appear. These mysterious shapes called as the Eumenides are in fact ghosts. They represent the presence of the supernatural element in the play. Phrases like “The unexpected crash of the iron cataract”, “The bright colour fades”, “The bird sits on the broken chimney” show the presence of the element of superstition in the play.

The chorus in the play also reveals the mental state of characters. The chorus here is no new personage, but some characters from the play itself. The chorus contains beautiful passages of poetry and create an emotional atmosphere in the play. The element of romance is also present in the scene where Harry and Mary talk together and remember their past secret meetings in the cave by the moonlight near the river. The undercurrent of spiritual and religious suggestion in the play brings about a spiritual awakening, which is one of the objects of the revival of poetic drama in this century.

15.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

Objective of this lesson is to study in detail the story of the well celebrated play by T.S. Eliot named *The Family Reunion*, from the examination perspective. This lesson will provide a synopsis of the play and deal with all the acts of the play covering all the major incidents.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Summarize the main plot and structure of *The Family Reunion*, focusing on key events and characters introduced in Act 1.
- Identify central themes such as guilt, family legacy, psychological struggle, and spiritual awakening as they emerge in the first act.
- Recognize Eliot's blend of modern drama and classical Greek elements, such as the use of a chorus and symbolic imagery.
- Analyze the character of Harry and his initial emotional and psychological state upon returning home.

15.3 SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The Family Reunion is a famous play by T.S. Eliot. In this play he has turned from the religious theme to a domestic one. Amy, an unhappy widow of a country squire, lives with her three sisters, two brothers of her deceased husband, and Mary, a girl, whom she desired to marry her eldest son, Harry. Her object is to reunite the family and keep it living. For this she has collected her sisters, brothers of her husband, and she expects the return of her three sons- Harry, Arthur and John- on her birthday anniversary. She directs everybody to welcome her son, Harry, who returns after eight years and whom she wants to make master of Wishwood. Harry's return to Wishwood is an important event for her. It was eight years ago that he had left this place with his wife, who never wanted to live with the family. She was a lady of expensive habits and so she dragged Harry from country to country. He had begun to dislike her. One cloudless night in his voyage from New York, he pushed her in the Mid-Atlantic from the deck in order to get rid of her. Her death came to be considered as either an accident or suicide but not murder. On account of this incident, Harry returns to Wishwood in a disturbed state of mind. He feels ring of ghosts chasing him. He meets everybody in the house, feeling always restless at enquiry about the incident. Eumenides appear and make him excited and terrified. Amy sends him to his room for rest where he finds everything unchanged. She makes every effort to see that the past is forgotten and her old scheme of marrying Mary to Harry, and making him the head of the family is fulfilled. But her scheme remains unfulfilled, as Harry does not give good response even when Warburton, the family doctor, interviews him after dinner, to tell him of the ill health of his mother. Harry gets a little afraid at the appearance of a sergeant, who simply comes to inform them of the accident of his brother, John. He does not feel at home on account of the constant fear of being exposed. Ultimately he talks to Agatha, his mother's sister and confesses to her his guilt of having pushed down his wife. She then tells him of certain facts about his father, his mother, and about herself, which were kept

secret from him throughout his childhood. Harry learns from her that his father's marriage, like his own, had little of delight, that his mother felt lonely after her marriage and that in order to avoid her loneliness she invited her younger sister to live with her. Agatha further told him that she and his father had discovered one hot summer day, in a flash of ecstasy and terror, that they loved each other. He also learnt that just before he was born, his father attempted to kill his mother in order to get rid of her, but Agatha had stopped him. After that two sons were also born and then the husband and wife parted by consent. These facts help him to discover the reasons for the failure of his marriage, and rid himself of his obsessive feeling of guilt. He finds that family affection is a kind of formal obligation. The things he thought were real are shadows. Harry ultimately is changed. He contemplates on sin and expiation. He begins to feel that his obligation is not to his mother, but to God. He decides to leave all and become a missionary. Amy, Mary, and others try to stop him, but he goes away with his old servant Downing. Harry's departure causes Amy's death due to heart failure. The play ends with the prayer of Agatha for peace to the soul of Amy. What the playwright has written is not a story of the detection of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation. Harry is to expiate for his son and family curse. His departure is for his own redemption and that of the departed, who may now rest in peace.

This play is of double-pattern, the outer drama consisting of a set of modern characters grouped round a widowed lady, Amy, who, on her birthday, is waiting for the return of her eldest son, Harry, after an absence of eight years. She wishes him to marry Mary, a girl of her choice, and to settle at home as the head of the family in the ancestral mansion significantly known as Wishwood. The inner drama, which centres round Harry, Lord Monchensey, flanked by his aunt Agatha and his childhood playmate and sweetheart, Mary, is a story of sin and expiation based on the Aeschylean tragedy of the pursuit of Orestes, the matricide, by the Furies who are, in the end transformed into Eumenides, 'the good angels' or 'kindly ones.'

15.4 DETAILED SUMMARY

Part I

(The scene is laid in a country house in the North of England)

Scene I

The opening scene is laid in the drawing room of Amy, mistress of Wishwood, on an afternoon in late March. It is Amy's birthday, when her absent eldest son, Harry, heir to the estate, is expected to return home and his two younger brothers are also due to join the party. Meanwhile the younger sisters of Amy, Ivy, Violet, and Agatha with the brothers of her deceased husband- Hon. Gerald Piper, and Charles Piper- and Mary, a young lady of thirty, daughter of a deceased cousin of the Dowager, have gathered in the room at Amy's invitation. The opening speech of Amy puts her unhappy predicament in a nutshell:

I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out,
Now that I sit in the house from October to June,
O Sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was taken for granted
When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for
And the night unfeared and the day expected
And cocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured
And time would not stop in the dark!

She ends with, 'will the spring never come? I am cold'. To this Agatha returns significantly, 'Wishwood was always a cold place, Amy'. The remaining characters pick up the conversation and talk of going to the warm South, which Amy can never do, tied as she is, like themselves, to her familiar surroundings, 'to the horses and dogs and guns'. Violet comments in a strong tone on the ways of the people who go to the South in search of health, if they are old, and for pleasures if young:

I would never go South,
Simply to see the vulgarest people- You can keep out of their
way at home;
People with money from heaven knows where

Charles and Gerald discuss the younger generation of the day and the latter turns to Mary for confirmation, as she represents the younger generation. But Mary retorts in a sour tone that she belongs to no generation. She goes away and Violet rebukes Gerald for tactlessness in his behavior towards Mary, who is sore about her failure to get a husband and she is 'getting on for thirty'. To this Amy adds that Harry's marriage upset her and his expected return raised a hope which has made things more difficult for her. But they must drop the subject hoping that 'life may still go right'. It is this hope that has kept her alive and enabled her to keep the family together. They are all simply drifting on the current of time, and death will come to them bringing merely a mild surprise, 'a momentary shudder in a vacant room'. Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death. Amy is gratified to think that Arthur and John, her younger sons are sure to arrive in the course of the evening. It is really a special occasion because after eight years they are going to be together for the first time. But Agatha suggests that it will be painful for Harry to come back to Wishwood with the weight of all that has happened in the interval:

I mean painful, because everything is irrevocable, Because the past is irrevocable,
Because the future can only be built Upon the real past.

'He will find a new Wishwood'; and adaptation may be hard. Amy misses her meaning completely and tells Agatha that nothing has changed at Wishwood. Agatha, however, goes on in a teasingly obscure phraseology:

I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry. The man who returns
will have to meet.
The boy who left. Round by the stables
.....he will have to face him- And it will not be a jolly corner.
When the loop in time comes - and it does not come for everybody - The hidden is revealed,
and the spectress show themselves.

The persons around her are too obtuse to grasp the meaning of her oracular words, and though Charles refers to Harry's lost wife, he is at loss to know if the matter should be alluded to or not in the presence of Harry. Amy tells him that it is much too late to talk about the matter, and then informs the company in plain terms that the death of Harry's wife was a great relief to her, because she had never wished to be one of the family; she wanted to keep Harry to herself just to satisfy her vanity:

She never wanted to fit herself just to satisfy her vanity: But only to bring Harry
down to her own level.
A restless shivering painted shadow
In life, she is less than a shadow in death.
... There can be no grief
And no regret and no remorse.
Harry is to take command at Wishwood
And I hope we can contrive his future happiness.

The irony is that situation arises from the fact that the remorse caused by the 'painted shadow's death' upsets all Amy's plan about Harry's settlement at Wishwood.

Agatha is the mouthpiece of author and it is she who unfolds the spiritual dimension of the play. She has puzzled and tortured the mind of Harry ever since the accidental death of his wife which he is apt to regard as his doing. The uncles and aunts of Harry, however, are puzzled about past endurance and voice their confusion in a chorus:

Why do we embarrassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease,
Assembled like amateur actors who have not been assigned their parts?

Each of them is eager to withdraw into his or her private shell to avoid 'the intrusion of reality' which he or she cannot endure.

The stage is now set for the entry of Harry, who appears suddenly before them while his mother is talking about the time for the arrival of her son, John. They welcome him warmly but he seems to be a person half in trance, and his first utterance proclaims his state of mind:

How can you sit in this blaze of light for all the world to look at? If you knew how you looked, when I saw you through the window! Do you like to be stared at by eyes through the window?

Then he points out to a spot, saying, 'Look there, look there: Do you see them?', and goes on muttering half to himself: You don't see them, but I see them, And they see me. This is the first time I have seen them. They were always there. But I did not see them.

Why should they wait until I came back to Wishwood?

Then becoming normal for a moment he turns to his mother and wishes her 'many happy returns' of her birthday. Amy responds that she is glad that he has come home to take charge of Wishwood. His room is ready for his rest- Nothing has been changed. Harry gives a perceptible start at hearing the last remark and rejoins promptly, 'How can you say that nothing is changed?': 'You all look so withered and young'. His aunts and uncles now propose various schemes to make his stay at Wishwood comfortable and his mother confesses to him that they have all been very kind and considerate to her, and have suggested many changes which he has to think over, because she is an old woman nearing her end.

Harry, however, is bewildered at this talk of time and change even though they would have him believe that nothing has changed. They should come to the point, or if they want to pretend that Harry is another person that they must have conspired to invent, they should do so in his absence so that he may be less embarrassed. He speaks to Agatha who tells him point-blank that if he wants no pretences he should try at once to make them understand, what he says. Harry, however, confesses that the task is not so easy as she thinks:

But how can I explain, how can I explain to you? You will understand less after I have explained it. All that I could hope to make you understand Is only events; not what has happened Cannot understand the unimportance of events.

And when Gerald starts talking about his own tough life, Harry replied: You are all people To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact Of external events. You have gone through life in sleep, Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable you wide awake. You do not know

The noxious smell untraceable in the drains etc. In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable. As for what happens- Of the past you can only see what is past, Not what is always present.

Agatha, however, urges him to attempt an explanation in his own language without stopping to debate whether or not it will be incomprehensible to them. Harry is in the state of mind which he wished to escape by ‘pushing his wife down into the sea’, as he believes. Harry further says that in his fit of violence he was laboring under the conviction that she was unkillable and would always be with him, whatever he did. Uncle Charles requests him to get rid of such strange fancies for the sake of his mother and his own peace of mind. In his own past life there are many things which often press heavily on his chest, but he (Harry) has no reason to reproach himself; his conscience is clear.

To this Harry replies that what he is trying to explain goes deeper the ‘so-called’ conscience: ‘it is just the cancer that eats away the self’:

It is not my conscience,
Not by mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.

Two days after the event he lay ‘in contended drowsiness’ and then he began to dread sleep, for,
She is nearer than ever
And they are always near. Here, nearer than ever.

Amy is alarmed and advises him to rest for the night; he will find Wishwood brighter. Agatha, however, strikes a deeper note again; she herself is uncertain about certain points. Harry leaves to take bath and his departure sets the bewildered tongues of his aunts and uncles wagging about the nature of his sickness and the best way of curing it. At last they suggest to his mother to call in Doctor Warburton to examine Harry; Amy sounds Agatha on the point, but the latter attaches little importance to the medical aid:

It seems a necessary move In an unnecessary
action
Not for the good that it will do
But that nothing may be left undone....

As Amy goes out to ring up the Doctor, Charles proposes to question Downing, Harry’s chauffeur and personal servant. The ladies protest but Charles is resolved to find out the real source of Harry’s trouble. Downing informs him that her Ladyship’s drowning was not a case of deliberate suicide, though she frequently talked about committing it, perhaps only to frighten people. She was moody and often depressed, and during the voyage his Lordship also was in the doldrums. He seemed to suffer from repression and betrayed his nervousness about something likely to happen very soon. He was in a rare fright about the wellbeing of her Ladyship. That evening they were together as usual and Downing could see no sign of his Lordship’s hand in the tragic event.

Scene II

This scene shows Mary and Agatha conversing about flowers and the guests likely to be present at the dinner. Mary is surprised to learn that Dr. Warburton also has been invited by Amy, though it is a family dinner pure and simple. She is afraid she will have to sit between John and Arthur and put up with the latter’s Chatter as ‘a gay spark’ of the town. Mary wants to get away from Wishwood and seek Agatha’s advice on the point. Amy

has always been a domineering person and has kept her in the house simply for her son Harry, not because she was impressed by her worth, but because she wanted to have a tame daughter-in-law without money. Harry married against her will but Amy still stuck to her project and it seemed as if she killed Harry's wife by 'willing it'.

Agatha informs her that she was present at the wedding without the knowledge of Amy, and knew Harry's wife. She was a weak and timid young woman, frightened of his (Harry's) family and ready to fight them. It has all been unfortunate for Harry. Mary confides to her that it is Harry's return that has made her think of flight from the place, but Agatha, assuming prophetic gestures, insists that she must not run away because it is not the moment for making any decision:

The decision will be made by powers beyond us
Which now and then
emerge. You and I, Mary, Are only watchers and waiters:
not the easiest
role.

Agatha goes out to change for dinner, and Harry appears before Mary as if looking for something. To Mary's enquiry he says that he has been trying to see if anything in his room has changed. When Mary informs him that his mother was anxious that his room be kept in the same condition as it was when he left Wishwood, Harry expresses his disapproval of 'this arresting of the normal change of things'. But it is quite like his mother: she has not changed and this is why the changing of other people becomes so manifest at this place. Mary tells him that nothing changes here, 'and we just go on drying up, I suppose, not noticing the change'. He says that it seems he will get rid of none of the shadows he wanted to escape. At the same time other memories begin to return from his childhood. He asks Mary if she was ever happy as a child at Wishwood. Mary replies negatively and explains why she was unable to feel at home there: she did not belong to the place. And when Harry puts the next question as to why neither of them could feel happy in their childhood, she rejoins, 'because it all seemed to be imposed upon us: There was never any time to invent our own enjoyments'. Perhaps it was designed for Harry', though the nature of the design was not clear even to him. They exchange memories of childhood experiences and Mary adds that as a child she 'took everything for granted', including the stupidity of older people; but even now she 'finds them difficult to bear':

They are always assured that you ought to be happy
At the very moment
when you are wholly conscious
Of being a misfit, of being superfluous.

This is her own tragedy and she is sorry to trouble Harry with it. But Harry tells her that there is a deeper tragedy perhaps not known to her:

The sudden extinction of every alternative
The unexpected crash of the iron cataract.
You do not know what hope is, until you have lost it. You only know what it
is not to hope...

Mary warns him that what he talks of may be a deception, a mere dream. Does he not know that when one hope dies, another springs out of its death to fill vacuum? After the death of his first hope he has decided to return to Wishwood, prompted perhaps by a new hope. Harry replies:

The instinct to return to the point of departure
And start again as if
nothing had happened, Isn't that all folly?

Mary suggests that what he needs to alter is something within him, which he can change here or anywhere. But Harry exclaims that 'the something inside him' seems to be incapable of being changed, and here of all places, he has felt it most acutely in and around him:

Here and here and here- wherever I am not looking, Always flickering at the
corner of my eye,
Almost whispering just out of my earshot— And inside, too, in the nightly panic
Of dreaming dissolution. You do not know...

Mary is disappointed and offers to go, but is stopped by Harry. The next moment she turns to him and utters some home-truths: she says that the source of his disease is his own trained heart:

You attach yourself to loathing
As others to do loving: an infatuation
That's wrong, a good that's misdirected. You deceive yourself Like the man convinced
that he is paralysed.

Harry experiences a strange sensation on hearing the words of Mary, which seem to be like 'the distant waterfall in the forest, inaccessible, half-heard'. Stirrings of feeling are felt by his cold heart, like those of new life in the spring season, the time of re-birth.

Mary revives Harry's childhood, and also revives the memory of their sweet love which was nipped in the bud. Harry experiences the warmth of its ecstasy:

You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor. Sunlight and singing.

But he is suddenly interrupted by the Eumenides who appear to warn him that it is now too late to open the door to enter 'the rose garden'. Mary is not able to see what has distracted Harry: it means she cannot enter the world which has now become the home of Harry's spirit. He stares at them (his pursuers), rebukes them and utters his hopeless predicament:

When I remember
They leave me alone: when I forget them Only for an instant of
inattention
They are aroused again, the sleepless hunters
That will not let me sleep. At the moment before sleep I always see their
claws distended
Quietly as if they had never stirred.

Mary, however, assures him that he should depend on her and everything will be all right. But Harry is occupied with his own thoughts. Harry now understands that Mary cannot help because she belongs to another world and cannot enter his own. He has to face his tormentors all alone, who are all the more dangerous because they are 'stupid'.

Scene III

Harry and Mary are joined by the chorus of uncles and aunts who are arranging things for dinner. They are anxious to make Harry feel at home, and seek Mary's active co-operation in the matter. Mary says nothing and leaves the place to change for the dinner. Amy's voice is heard enquiring about Arthur and John and expressing concern at their failure to arrive. Then addressing Harry she commands him to meet Dr. Warburton, an old friend of the family who has broken an engagement for the purpose. The doctor begins to talk of the old days

of Harry's childhood and of the diseases he contracted from time to time. As they start chatting about illness and restoration of health Harry is puzzled and utters the words of deeper import:

What you call restoration to health
Is only incubation of another malady.

The doctor mildly deprecates Harry's pessimistic view, which is an insult to the medical profession, but he confesses, at the same time, that he himself has outgrown the optimism of his Cambridge days when he used to dream about discovering how to do away with some disease or other. His forty years' experience as a medical practitioner has made him wiser and more sober in his outlook:

We're all of us ill one way or the other;
We call it health when we find no symptom Of illness. Health is a
relative term.

He goes on unburdening himself of his interesting experiences as a medical practitioner, and refers to his first patient who was murderer, suffering from an incurable cancer. At this Harry goes off at a tangent into his own world:

It is really harder to believe in murder
Than to believe in cancer.
Cancer is here:
The lump, the dull pain, the occasional sickness:
Murder is reversal of sleep and waking. Murder was there. Your
ordinary murderer Regards himself as an innocent victim.
To himself he is still what he used to be
.....He cannot realize
That everything is irrevocable, The past is
unredeemable.

The doctor prudently changes the topic and they (guests) decide with the consent of Amy, to go to dinner without Arthur and John.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks (Act 1)

1. The play begins with a gathering at _____ House, marking Lady Monchensey’s birthday.
2. Harry returns home after the mysterious death of his _____, which casts a shadow over the re union.
3. The uncles and aunts in the play often speak in a chorus-like manner, echoing the influence of classical _____ drama.
4. Harry is tormented by a sense of guilt and believes he is being pursued by the _____, symbolic of his inner torment.

Answer Key

1. Wishwood
2. wife
3. Greek
4. Furies

Scene I

Part II (The Library, after Dinner)

The scene opens in the library, after dinner, and introduces Harry and Dr. Warburton, who have met, in the words of the latter, for ‘a private conversation of a confidential nature’ about the former’s mother. Harry reacts sharply to the Doctor’s disclosure, and informs him of the dictatorial role his mother has always played in his (and his brother’s) childhood. ‘The rule of conduct was simply pleasing mother: misconduct was simply being unkind to her. Whatever was wrong was whatever made her suffer, and whatever made her happy was what was virtuous’. This is why they all ‘felt like failures, before they had begun’. ‘mother never punished them, but made them feel guilty.’

Dr. Warburton interrupts him to say that the present meeting is concerned with the future of their mother rather than with her past. Harry tells him bluntly that they cannot think of the past and future as separate units of time, and so far as he himself is concerned, he is more interested in knowing about his father than about his mother. He hardly remembers him because he was kept apart from him till he (the father) went away. He never heard him mentioned, but he had felt that somehow he was always present there. Now he wants to know where his father was when he left Wishwood. Warburton is taken aback and urges Harry to leave the matter alone and stop ‘probing for misery’. His ‘father and mother were never happy together, and they separated by mutual consent, and he went to live abroad’. He was only a boy at the time of his father’s death and cannot remember him. He does, however, remember the day when the news of his father’s death arrived. It was a summer day of unusual heat when he chanced to intrude into the company of his aunts, who were conversing in whispers, ‘with sidewise looks that bring death in to the heart of a child’. Ever since then the matter has been lying ‘shrouded in misery’, and if the Doctor fails to enlighten him, he insists, he will have to ask Agatha about it.

Warburton implores him not to pursue the unpleasant matter, but to listen to what he has to tell him about his mother. Harry at last agrees and Warburton proceeds with the story of his mother’s actual state of health. She, of course, looks healthy, vigorous and alert; as vital as ever. But it is only the ‘force of her personality, her indomitable will, that keeps her alive’. ‘The whole machine has grown weak and is running down’. Her heart is feeble and she can survive for some length of time only if she is spared care and excitement. But a sudden shock

will mean the end of her life. She has kept herself alive for his (Harry's) return to Wishwood to 'take command at it'. And for this reason, it is the most essential that nothing should disturb or excite her. As an old friend of the family the Doctor advises Harry to keep in mind two important needs and act accordingly: first, to keep his mother happy for the time she has to live; and, second, to remember that the future of the family will rest upon him, as his mother thinks, because she has been sorely disappointed by Arthur and John. Her hopes are all centered upon him.

Harry surprises the Doctor by asking him abruptly if his father, at his age looked like him. And he has to answer him by saying that there was a striking resemblance between the young father and his young son. But he realizes that Harry has perhaps been sleeping and thus missed the drift of his talk about his mother. At this point the servant appears to announce the visit of Sergeant Winchell to meet Lord Harry. While the Doctor expresses his concern about the young brothers, Arthur and John, Harry assures him that nothing can have happened to them because Sergeant Winchell himself may not be real. The doctor, however, advises him to pull himself together; soon Winchell enters and greets Doctor Warburton as if he were celebrating his own birthday. All of a sudden Harry darts at the Sergeant, seizes him by the shoulders and says to Warburton, 'He is real, Doctor. So let us resume the conversation'. Winchell thinks that Harry is simply repeating the old jokes of his boyhood, but Harry's words and gestures confirm his suspicion that his lordship is not normal. Explaining his present mission to the company he says that Mr John has had an accident, because of his rash driving crashing into a lorry drawn up round a bed. Luckily he has escaped serious injuries and Dr. Warburton earnestly threatens her to abstain from risking her life and to trust him once more to attend her personal business on her behalf. Harry stands a mute witness to this foolhardiness on the part of his ailing mother. Violet, then, enquires, if he is not sorry for his brother and not aware of what it will mean to his mother. Harry replies in his usual way with what may sound callous and unusual to the person around him:

I don't think the matter can be very serious... Cannot make very much difference to John.

A brief vacation from the kind of consciousness That John enjoys, can't make very much difference

To him or to any one else. If he was really conscious, I should be glad for him to have a breathing spell.

But John's ordinary day isn't much more than breathing.

Violet protests at this seeming callousness of Harry towards his brother and his lack of consideration for his mother. Amy, who has been listening to all this, intervenes with the remark that she is coming to think how little she has ever known, yet it seems Harry is right and Violet is wrong. Amy comments interestingly, 'You looked like your father, when you said that'. The remark sharply reminds us of the Harry-Orestes parallel, even though Harry at once becomes solicitous about his mother's health and peace of mind.

As Harry retires with his mother, the uncles and aunts start talking about Harry's strange behavior, which has made them all the more considerate towards Amy. The conversation drifts to John and Arthur. Arthur is described as brilliant but a reckless driver, and Ivy contrasts the brothers by saying that in their childhood Arthur was always the more adventurous but John was the one who had the accidents, just because he was the slow one. The recklessness of Arthur is causing anxiety and they are worried on Amy's account.

Harry enters to announce, 'mother is asleep': he wonders at the promptness of old people to drop into slumber. Then, looking at his aunts and uncles, he bluntly observes that they are, perhaps, holding the usual family inquest on the characters of all the junior members or predicting minor disasters. They, however, are used

to thinking of each thing separately; make small things important so that everything that they call normal may be important. But:

What you call the normal
Is merely the unreal and the unimportant.

He was also like that so long as he thought his own life to be an isolated ruin, a casual bit off waste in an orderly universe. But he now perceives that his personal disaster is just 'part of some huge disaster which he cannot put in order'.

Then the servant enters to inform them that there was a trunk call about Arthur. They at once exclaim that it must concern some accident in which Arthur has involved himself. But Agatha addresses Harry about the problem of personal suffering as part of a general distemper and points to an effective solution:

We cannot rest in being
The impatient spectators of malice or stupidity. We must try to penetrate
the other private worlds
Of make-believe and fear. To rest in our own suffering Is evasion of
suffering. We must learn to suffer more.

Harry, however, prefers now to talk in concrete terms about the specters that are pursuing him even in his native place:

I have a private puzzle. Were they simply outside,
I might escape somewhere, perhaps. Were they simply inside I could cheat them
perhaps with the aid of Dr. Warburton-
But this is too real for your words to alter.
...You don't understand me.

It is clear that Harry is a victim of double sin, sin personal and sin general or universal. They are now interrupted by Ivy who informs that the trunk call came from Arthur in London. It seems he also has met with some accident, details of which have already appeared in the evening paper. He says that he hasn't got the use of his car so he will be coming up in the morning. The evening paper is at last found and among its contents is a brief paragraph reporting a collision resulting from reckless driving, for which Arthur has been fined fifty pound and forbidden to drive a car for the next twelve months. In selfjustification Arthur has stated that he had thought it was all open country about Abony Street. When asked why he did not stop when signaled by the police car he said, 'I thought you were having a game with me'.

The uncles and aunts now speak as Chorus about the doom hanging over the old house:

In an old house there is always listening, and more is heard than is spoken. And what is spoken
remains in the room, waiting for the future to hear it. And whatever happens began in the past, and
presses hard on the future.
And we know nothing of exorcism And whether in Argos or
England There are certain inflexible laws Unalterable, in the
nature of music.

This is another link which connects Harry's story with its Greek counterpart. And the 'inflexible law' which governs the stories is the biblical text that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon their children unto the third generation.

Scene II

The scene opens with Harry and Agatha in conversation. Harry talks of the accidents and surprises which cause only momentary ripples on the surface of the normal course of life at Wishwood. John is the only one of them who is likely to make himself at home at Wishwood, content to make a dull marriage with some woman stupider than himself':

He can resist the influence
Of Wishwood, being unconscious, living in gentle motion
Of horses, and right visits to right neighbours
At the right times; and be an excellent landlord.

Agatha, however, shocks Harry out of his complacency by telling him that she can guess about his 'past and future', but 'a present needed to connect them, is missing.' Harry expresses his eagerness to learn the meaning of his 'past' and 'future'. At the beginning of his puzzlement, eight years ago, he felt, at first, that sense of separation, or isolation, which was irrevocable, and which gives one the knowledge of eternity, because it feels eternal while it lasts. That is one hell. Then the numbness came to cover it:

That was the second hell of not being there. The degradation of
being patriot from myself,
From the self which persisted only as an eye, seeing. All this last year...

Harry is attempting a diagnosis of a guilty mind, of the murderer of his girl, who saw the world through the spectacles of his dreamy state of mind. He thought foolishly that on his return to Wishwood, everything would fall into its place. But the 'contaminating presences' prevent it, and he has still to find out what their meaning is. Agatha then informs him that his question has disturbed her deeper organization which lies below the surface of her life as the efficient Principal of a Women's college. She will, therefore, enlighten him and she hopes to have the strength necessary for the purpose. Harry has little doubt on his score:

I have thought of you as the completely strong, The liberated from the
human wheel
So I looked to you for strength. Now I think it is A common pursuit of
liberation.

Agatha now informs Harry that his father had the making of a cultivated country squire; he did his strength beneath his usual weakness, the diffidence of a solitary man. Where he was weak and Harry's mother was strong, and he yielded to her strength. Slowly and gradually his mother succeeded in making terms with Wishwood until she took his father's place and reached the point of complete identification with Wishwood, each supporting the other. 'A vacancy fell upon the house':

A man and a woman
Married, alone in a lonely country house together For three years
childless, learning the meaning
Of loneliness.

The speaker being the youngest sister of his mother came to Wishwood for a long vacation from Oxford, where she was an undergraduate. She well remembers a 'summer day of unusual heat' for this cold country when she experienced the ecstasy of first love with his father'.

He began secretly to think of plans and devices to get rid of Amy, who was bearing him (Harry), her first child, in her womb. It was Agatha who stopped Harry's father:

I did not want to kill you!

What were you then only a thing called 'life' Something that should have
been mine as I felt then If that happened, I knew I should have carried
Death in life, death through lifetime death in my womb. I felt that you were in
some way mine!

That in any case I should have no other child. The story unfolded by Agatha comes as flash of light to confused mind of Harry. Agatha, however, brings home to Harry the profound significance of his vicarious sin and suffering, and the great duty which has developed upon him:

What we have written is not a story of detection, Of crime and
punishment, but of *sin and expiation*. It is possible that you have not
known what sin You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain That of
knowledge it must precede the expiation...

It is possible that you are the consciousness of your unhappy family, Its bird sent flying
through the purgatorial flame.

Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter, Moving alone through
flames of ice, chosen

To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.

A wave of happiness surges through Harry; it is a happiness which does not arise from the fulfillment of a desire or abandonment of what is undesirable; it is born of a different vision. But a weariness steals upon Agatha, the weariness of an old person that comes at the beginning of action, distinct from the weariness of the young, which comes at the end of it. Yet she is unhappy:

There's relief from a burden that I carried, And exhaustion at the
moment of relief The burden's yours now, yours
The burden of all the family. And I am a little
frightened.

Harry confesses that he is now beginning to understand her and the other members of his family. Family affection has been a kind of formal obligation: he had only to play a part that was imposed upon him. And when he returned home after his long absence he found another part, cut out and kept ready for him. But the strength of the people designing his duty and function stifled his own decision. Now he has found out the truth and can understand and sympathize with his mother. So Harry, like Thomas, has got the better of his private shadows. Here follows the duet between Agatha and Harry, who describe, in the formal language of ritual or incantation, the different ways which they have travelled to gain liberation. Agatha, after a moment's ecstasy in the 'rose garden', walked away 'down a concrete corridor in a dead air':

I was only the feet: the unwinking eye, Fixing the movement.

Over and under.

Harry on his part, had been drifting in a desert, round and round, amid a swarm of putrescent corpses, as it were, till the chain broke and he was left under a single eye above the desert. Agatha likens her movement to 'walking through the stone passages of an immense and empty hospital, passing barred windows until the chain breaks'. The fog has cleared and a new understanding has given birth to a strong love between Mary offered and the Eumenides sternly rejected.

Agatha reminds Harry that he has to go on a long journey to fulfill his expiation. But the latter is not in a hurry to leave the place which has become so quiet. This is the first time that he has been from the 'ring of ghosts' with joined hands that used to pursue him. He feels a communication direct to the brain, a scent, quite unlike the previous odour. The Eumenides appear before him at this juncture, but he faces them bravely and tells them that they are outside him: this time they are real and therefore enduring. They are ready to leave Wishwood and he will also be going with them. They will have one journey to one destination. And should waste no more time.

The Eumenides disappear and Agatha goes to the window and steps into the place they had occupied. Then she moves back into the room and in her normal voice repeats the previous remark that Harry must go on his destined journey without further delay:

Love compels cruelty

To those who do not understand love.

What you have wished to know, what you have learned Mean the end of a relation, make it impossible.

Harry replies that he made a decision in a moment of clarity, and now he feels dull again. He is still confused but he knows this much: there is only one way out of defilement which leads in the end to reconciliation. So he must go. Agatha endorses his decision- 'you must go', Amy enters at this point. She has overheard the words of Agatha and rebukes her for her command to Harry to go away from the place where he arrived only a couple of hours ago. Harry intervenes and tells his mother that his decision to leave the place concerns neither Agatha, nor anybody else in the family:

My advice has come from a different quarter, But cannot explain that to you now. Only be sure

That I know what I am doing, and what I must do, And that it is the best thing for every body-

But at present, I cannot explain it to anyone:

I do not know the words in which to explain it- That is what makes it harder.

Amy enquires querulously as to why Agatha should know the reason for his going, while she herself should not be allowed to know it. Harry replies that he does not know if Agatha knows or how much she knows, for the knowledge she has must have come from some other source. For the whole of the last year he has been in flight from invisible pursuers, but now he has realized that all his life has been a flight and that phantoms fed upon him while he fled. He has, however, discovered at this moment the safe shelter where he can meet them. Thereupon, Amy exclaims, 'So you will run away'; and this time it is Agatha who replies in her own mysteriously suggestive language:

In a world of fugitives

The person taking the opposite direction Will appear to run
away.

Amy is displeased with Agatha's intervention, and Harry has to pacify her with his explanation:

It is very hard, when one just recovered sanity, And not yet assured in
possession, that is when One begins to seem the maddest to other
people. I is hard for you too, mother, it is indeed harder, Not to
understand.

As regards the destination of his journey, which his mother is anxious to know, he himself is still unsettled. But he can only say that his destination is somewhere on the other side of despair. His place in the family will be taken by his brother, John, who is naturally framed for domestic life. But on him the 'election' has fallen and strength enough has been given 'to follow the bright angels' to the place of sanity.

Scene III

Amy and Agatha confront each other, and this confrontation serves the dramatic purpose of lifting the veil from the obscure family life of Amy of which we have been given only a vague idea by Agatha's brief revelation to tortured Harry. From this point to the end of the play Amy remains the focus of our attention and sympathy. Amy flings her biting accusation in to the face of Agatha- 'Thirty five years ago you took my husband from me. Now you take my son.' And the latter gives the cutting home-thrust, in return that she took away nothing that Amy had, and got 'thirty years of solitude, alone among women, in a Women's college, trying not to dislike women'. This provokes Amy still further into a bitter recital of her past woes:

The more rapacious, to take what I never had;

The more unpardonable, to taunt me with not having it.

She rightly observes that she had really taken what she (Amy) possessed; she would have left her a memory to live upon. In the present case, however, she was left an empty house, which she was obliged to plant with children in union with a husband, 'a discontented ghost', kept for the purpose for seven long, miserable years. Can she imagine her 'humiliation and chilly pretences in the silent bed-room?' She forced herself to do all this for the purpose of keeping Wishwood intact even after her husband's departure: she even invited her back for visits after he had left, so that there might be no ugly rumours. She continues speaking, unmindful of Agatha's sharp rejoinder that even after the passage of thirty-five years she remains what she was before, 'just as voracious for what you cannot have because you repel it'.

Amy goes on saying that she was busy, for the sake of Harry, preparing a situation for them to be reconciled, in a bid to obliterate misery and waste of the past, so that Harry may remember only his happy childhood at Wishwood and look up to a successful future. But Agatha's 'fury of possession', strengthened by 'thirty years' abstinence, has now deprived her of Harry also. Agatha reminds her that they have 'no ground for argument' because neither of them ever had a husband or a son. Amy, however, goes complaining that it was Agatha who persuaded Harry to abandon his duty, his family, and his happiness at the moment of success when she had felt assured of this settlement and his happiness. She reiterates bitterly: 'You who took my husband, now you take my son'.

They are interrupted by Mary, who enters in a flurry to announce that Harry is going away and must be stopped. Amy points to Agatha as the woman who has persuaded him to go, against her own firm belief that Harry

was not a weakling 'as his father in the hands of any unscrupulous woman'. Mary can try to hold him back, but she will not succeed. It seems Agatha has 'some spell which works from generation to generation'. Mary desperately turns to Agatha for help in stopping Harry, because he is in a great danger.

She is urging it on the basis of something she has seen and which others do not know. Agatha tells Mary:

We must all go, each in his own direction, You, and I, and Harry.

You and I,

My dear, may very likely meet again

In our wanderings in the neutral territory Between two worlds.

Mary welcomes this offer to leave a place where she had actually led a death-in life, though 'it takes so many years to learn that one is dead'. Amy has been listening to the whole talk and in the end throws down her cards in despair:

So you will all leave me!

An old woman alone in a damned house,

I will let the walls crumble. Why should I worry... It is no concern of the
body in the tomb

To brother about the unkeep. Let the wind and rain do that.

Meanwhile Harry has entered, dressed for departure, and over heard his mother's lamentation. He tells his mother that she will always have Arthur and John at Wishwood, and John is 'the destined and perfect master of Wishwood, and the satisfactory son. So far as he himself is concerned he has his own course to pursue: 'and he is safe from normal dangers.' But he cannot account for his mission until he comes back again. Amy, however, says prophetically, 'If you go now, I shall never see you again'.

The news of Harry's departure perhaps to lead the life of a missionary has filled his aunts and uncles with surprise and anxiety. They hurry together to spot where Harry stands before his mother in all readiness for his journey. They express their solicitude for his welfare and want him to explain to them the motive behind his sudden decision to embrace the life of a missionary. Harry tells them that he never said that he was going to be a missionary. He, however, cannot explain the nature and occasion of his journey because they cannot understand even if they believe it. They have not seen what he has seen and should make as little fuss about his journey as possible. With these words he bids them good-bye and quit his place.

It is a great shock to his mother, but it brings with it, as every tragic experience does, a new insight into the reality of things. It has come too late for her to mend matters, still she is glad that she has come by it:

I always wanted too much for my children,

More than life can give. And now I am punished for it.

With these words she staggers towards her chamber supported by Gerald and Violet. The company left behind witnesses the hurried entry of Downing, Harry's chauffeur, who comes for his Lordship's cigarette case. He finds it on the table to go with it, when Mary urges him never to leave his Lordship. He informs her that his long association with his Lordship has given him an inkling into his mind and on the strength of this he believes that his Lordship will not need him very long. He always felt that whatever had happened to his Lordship was only a preparation for something else. Most of us seem to live according to circumstances, but with people like him there is something inside them that accounts for what happens to them. So he seems to know beforehand what is going to happen to his Lordship.

Agatha now warns him that he need not be upset if Harry's behavior seems to be unaccountable at times. He is every bit as sane, and sees the world as clearly, as they themselves. It is only that he has seen a great deal more than that, and they have seen them ('presences') too. Downing understands what she means because he also has seen the 'ghosts' that haunted his master. But now he is convinced that there is no harm in them (the Eumenides).

Downing hurries out and Ivy enters with a telegram from Agatha! 'Regret delayed business in town many happy returns see you tomorrow many happy returns etc.' And the full irony of the situation flashes across their minds as they hear Amy's voice, 'Agatha, Mary, come; the clock has stopped in the dark!' They are stunned with this unexpected intrusion of death and speak in a chorus:

We understand the ordinary business of living... But the circle of our
understanding
Is a very restricted area, Except for a limited number
Of strictly practical purposes
We do not know what we are doing. We do not know much
about thinking.
What is happening outside of the circle?

The play closes with a final ceremony of exorcism of the curse. Agatha and Mary walk slowly in a single file round and round a table, with the birthday cake and lighted candles upon it. At each revolution they blow out a few candles, so that the last words of their chant are spoken in the dark. They sing alternately and create a solemn atmosphere. The chant is about the curse which comes to fruition slowly and mysteriously at its desired moment, and the refrain is 'Follow follow'. The charm is completed by the final words of Agatha:

This way the pilgrimage Of expiation
Round and round the circle Completing the charm
So the knot be unknotted The crossed be uncrossed
The crooked be made straight And the curse be ended
By intercession By pilgrimage
By those who depart In several directions
For their own redemption And that of the
departed- May they rest in peace.

15.5 GLOSSARY

1. Eumenides – A name for the furies which means the “kindly ones”
2. Chorus – A group of persons singing in unison
3. Ecstasy- An overwhelming feeling of great happiness or joyful excitement
4. Contemplate- look thoughtfully for a long time
5. Expiation - The act of making amends or reparation for guilt or wrongdoing
6. Shudder – Tremble typically as a result of fear or revulsion
7. Alluded- Suggest or call attention to indirectly

8. Perceptible – able to be seen or noticed
9. Pretence- An attempt to make something that is not the case appear true
10. Noxious- Very unpleasant
11. Predicament- A difficult or embarrassing situation
12. Deprecates- Express disapproval of
13. Shrouded- Cover or envelop so as to conceal from view
14. Indomitable – Impossible to subdue or defeat
15. Callousness- Insensitive or cruel disregard for others
16. Solicitous- Showing interest or concern
17. Putrescent- Undergoing the process of decay
18. Phantom- Ghost, spirit
19. Voracious - Wanting great quantities of food
20. Obliterate- Wipe out
21. Abstinence- The practice of restraining oneself from indulging in something
22. Reiterates- Say something again or number of times
23. Chauffeur – A person employed to drive a private or hired car

15.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What was the occasion in Wishwood in the beginning of the play?
 - (a) John's welcome
 - (b) Amy's birthday
 - (c) Harry's welcome
 - (d) Harry's birthday
2. Who has love affair with Harry's father?
 - (a) Mary
 - (b) Ivy
 - (c) Agatha
 - (d) Violet
3. Who was Mr Downing?
 - (a) Wishwood's servant
 - (b) Family doctor
 - (c) Arththur's colleague
 - (d) Harry's Chauffeur

4. Mary decided to leave Wishwood because:
 - (a) She was bored of Wishwood
 - (b) Amy told her to leave
 - (c) She felt bad on her rejection by Harry
 - (d) Agatha told her she is misfit in Wishwood
5. Eumenides in the play are the:
 - (a) Supernatural waves
 - (b) Ghosts
 - (c) High beam rays
 - (d) Heavy storm
6. Amy accused Agatha of :
 - (a) Theft
 - (b) Adultery
 - (c) Incest
 - (d) Being mysterious
7. Who among the following was not Amy's son?
 - (a) Harry
 - (b) David
 - (c) Arhtur
 - (d) John
8. Who among the following was not Amy's sister?
 - (a) Mary
 - (b) Violet
 - (c) Ivy
 - (d) Agatha
9. What was Harry's final decision?
 - (a) To get married to Mary
 - (b) To become Wishwood's master
 - (c) To shift to a new place
 - (d) To follow the path of salvation
10. Who among the following did not leave Wishwood?
 - (a) Agatha
 - (b) Harry

- (c) John
- (d) Mary

15.7 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the synopsis and the detailed summary of the play, divided into two parts and different scenes. This lesson covers all the major incidents of the play along with the multiple choice questions at the end of the detailed summary.

15.8 ANSWER KEY

- 1. (b)
- 2. (c)
- 3. (d)
- 4. (c)
- 5. (a)
- 6. (b)
- 7. (b)
- 8. (a)
- 9. (d)
- 10. (c)

15.9 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What was Amy's plan and what was her strength?

Ans. Amy is the most forceful person in Wishwood, living on the plane of will alone. But will without spirit is like sensation without spirit, and Amy's attempt to will a design to which all must consent is wrecked by her inability to see beyond her own schemes. Unmoved by physical disasters, she is crumpled completely by Harry's departure, which she regards as the greatest disaster. When her clock stops, she too is still in the dark, and her party becomes her funeral. After her collapse, we are left with the inescapable inference that these representatives of English aristocracy have lost every advantage their age could confer. Deprived of even simple belief by their sophisticated secularism, and shaken from their sophistication by their simple fear, they are the hollow men and women.

2. Discuss the role played by Agatha, Mary and Downing in the play.

Ans. Occupying "the territory between two worlds" are Agatha, Mary, and Downing. All three see the Eumenides. But they have not been elected to pursue the Vision, and to his words give reluctant assent. However, because they know that revelation is possible, they can help Harry towards his election. After he is beyond their assistance, they will go each in his own direction to find what peace may be granted to those who "shall not know the one veritable transitory power." As part of the almost geometric using and re-using of patterns, there is a parallel between Mary's starting life as a teacher and Agatha's debut in that profession: disappointed in sexual love, Mary will devote herself to the enlightenment of others, while learning the attitudes of resignation that her aunt has already attained. As his name suggests, the valetchauffeur Downing is the common-folk counterpart of the two women, a demonstration that spiritual flexibility is not a matter of intellect or class. Presumably because his vision is unhampered by involvement in the tangle of loves and hatreds, Downing becomes awed of the Eumenides earlier than any of the others. Downing is to accompany his master on the first leg of his journey.

3. What were the views of Harry’s Chauffeur, Mr Downing?

Ans. To his valet, Harry is a hero. Having been most low, he becomes most high by accepting the election of the Eumenides to explore the meaning of the rose-garden experience. When first confronted by these powers, he sees them as evil eyes, but during the moment of illumination, he perceives them as the “final eye,” judicial and benevolent. Having tracked himself down, Harry leaves his homeland with his will made ready for the thousand natural shocks that an heir is heir to.

4. Discuss Harry and Agatha’s relation.

Ans. Harry’s attachment to Agatha resembles what the psychiatrist calls “transfer.” Acting as analyst, she helps Harry to free himself of loathing. During this process, he tries to release positive feelings, first with Mary, then with Agatha. In the former instance, he is incapable of developing the emotion: he has never had the chance to identify with a father figure, and therefore finds heterosexual relationships difficult to enter; and second, he has been symbolically castrated by his traumatic experience. Later, he reaches a high pitch of tenderness with Agatha, but at this time his super-ego in the form of the Eumenides, remind him that this is not the way to divine union. However, this exploration of the past cures Harry of his near schizophrenia.

5. Give the significance of Eumenides.

Ans. The Eumenides play their part in association with primitive blood-curse and modern guilt, in another aspect entirely continuous with the first two they stand for sin-consciousness. Harry becomes aware of the root of his unhappiness after their final visit. He senses that the business of his life must become ascetic purgation. Guilt vanishes but sin remains. By following the Eumenides, Harry leaves for a triple salvation: to lift the doom on himself, on the house, and on the world. Hence, what began as a primitive flight from fear is changed into a Christian pilgrimage of penance, with pagan furies at the entrance and bright angels at the exit.

15.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. In T. S. Eliot’s play, *The Family Reunion*, who are the Eumenides and what is their role and significance?

2. Give the summary of T.S. Eliot’s play *The Family Reunion*.

3. Summarise the first part of the play in your own words.

15.11 SUGGESTED READING

Eliot, T. S. *The Family Reunion. Introduction and notes by Nevill Coghill*, Faber & Faber, 2013. Ebook.

Evans, Giles. *Wishwood Revisited: A New Interpretation of T. S. Eliot's The Family Reunion*. Book Guild, 2008.

Kari, Daven M. "The Family Reunion by T. S. Eliot." *EBSCO Research Starters*, 2022,

www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/family-reunion-t-s-eliot

T.S. ELIOT

THE FAMILY REUNION

STRUCTURE

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 16.3 Chronological Table of Events at Wishwood
- 16.4 Plot of the Play
- 16.5 Structure of the Play
- 16.6 Essence of the Action
- 16.7 Critical Study of the Play
- 16.8 Defects of the Play
- 16.9 Significance of Eumenides in the Play
- 16.10 Glossary
- 16.11 Multiple Choice Questions
- 16.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.13 Answer Key
- 16.14 Examination Oriented Questions
- 16.15 Suggested Reading

16.1 INTRODUCTION

T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* blends elements of classical Greek drama with modern psychological realism, employing a structure that moves between poetic dialogue and choral commentary. The play unfolds in a single location over a short time span, adhering to the Aristotelian unities while using a chorus of aunts and uncles to reflect on the action and evoke a sense of moral and metaphysical inquiry.

16.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

Objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the descriptive questions of the play. This lesson will deal in detail with the questions like chronological table of events at Wishwood and the critical study of the play etc.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Summarize the overall plot and structural elements of *The Family Reunion*, including its use of acts and chorus-like characters.
- Identify and critically evaluate defects or limitations in the play's dramatic construction, such as character development, pacing, or clarity of action.

- Explain the symbolic and thematic role of the Eumenides (Furies) in relation to Harry's psychological and spiritual journey.
- Discuss how Eliot blends Greek tragedy elements with modern concerns to give the play both classical weight and contemporary relevance.

16.3 CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS AT WISHWOOD

1874 - Doctor Warburton was born and he claims to have had forty years of medical experience supposing him to have qualified at the age of 25, he would have been 65 by that time

1939 - This accounts for his fatherly attitude towards Harry and indicates the sort of make-up an actor playing Dr. Warburton should attempt

1879 - Amy was born. Eliot made a miscalculation about the age of her eldest son (Harry) and the date of her marriage. She accuses Agatha of having stolen her husband thirty-five years before, which brings us to 1904; she was then pregnant with Harry, her first child due in three months' time, having been three years childless before the birth of Harry

1876 - Harry's father, Lord Monchensey was born

1880 - Ivy was born

1881 - Violet was born

1884 - Agatha was born

1900-1- Amy marries Lord Monchensey, Harry's father

1904 - Agatha and Harry's father fall in love on 'a summer day of unusual heat', thirty five years before the play opens

1904 - The curse begins. Harry's father plans to murder Amy

1904- Harry born towards Christmas

1905-6- John (Harry's younger brother) born and Lord Monchensey deserted Amy after two years

1907- Arthur (Harry's youngest brother) born

1907-8- Lord Monchensey desertes Amy

1909- Agatha becomes a don at a women's college and Mary born

1910- Lord Monchensey dies abroad

1927 - Mary becomes undergraduate at Agatha's college

1929 - Harry engages Downing as his chauffeur

1931 - Last previous family reunion. It seems that Harry was still at Wishwood then, but left during the year and married a wife, who 'would never have been one of the family'

1931 - Harry abandons Wishwood and marries

1931 - Harry becomes aware of the supernatural world

1932-8 - Mary remains at Wishwood dominated by Amy

1938 - Harry's wife drowned on an Atlantic crossing

1938 - Harry thinks he pushed his wife overboard

1938- Harry begins to feel himself pursued

1939- Harry returns to Wishwood for his mother's birthday and in a hope to escape his pursuers finds them closer than ever before.

16.4 PLOT OF THE PLAY

This play is in two acts set in Wishwood, a stately home in the north of England. At the beginning, the family of Lady Monchensey is assembling for her birthday party. She is, as her doctor later explains, clinging on to life by sheer willpower:

I keep wishwood alive To keep the family alive,
To keep them together,
To keep me alive, and I keep them.

Lady Monchensey's two brothers and three sisters are present, and a younger relation, Mary, but none of Lady Monchesey's three sons. Among other things they discuss the sudden, and not to them wholly unwelcome, death at sea of the wife of the eldest son Harry, the present Lord Monchensey.

Neither of the younger sons ever appears, both being slightly injured in motoring accidents, but Harry soon arrives, his first appearance at Wishwood for eight years. He is haunted by the belief that he pushed his wife off the ship. In fact Harry has an alibi for the time, but whether he killed her or not, he wished her dead and his feeling of guilt is the driving force in the rest of the play. Lady Monchesey decides that Harry's state warrants the discreet observation of the family doctor, who is invited to join the party, ostensibly as a dinner guest. Mary, who has been earmarked by Amy as a future wife for Harry, wishes to escape from life at Wishwood, but her aunt Agatha tells her that she must wait:

You and I, Mary
Are only watchers and waiters, not the easiest role

Agatha reveals to Harry that his father attempted to kill Amy while Harry was in her womb, and that Agatha prevented him. Far from being grateful, Amy resented and still resents Agatha's depriving her of her husband. Harry, with Agatha's encouragement, announces his intention to go away from Wishwood, leaving his steady younger brother John to take over. Amy, despairing at Harry's renunciation of Wishwood, dies and Harry and his faithful servant, Downing, leave.

16.5 STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The play is partly in blank verse and partly in prose. Eliot had already experimented with verse drama in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and continued to use the form in his post-war stage works. Though the work has superficial resemblances to a conventional 1930s drawing room drama, Eliot uses two devices from ancient Greek drama. Firstly, Harry's uncles and aunts occasionally detach themselves from the action and chant a commentary on the plot, in the manner of a Greek chorus. Secondly, Harry is pursued by the Eumenides – the avenging Furies who pursue Orestes in the Oresteia; they are seen not only by Harry but by his servant and the most perceptive member of his family, Agatha.

The play is divided in two parts, each divided in three scenes. The first part takes place in the drawing room, after tea, an afternoon in late March. The first scene is used as an introduction of the persons Amy, Ivy, Violet, Agatha, Gerald, Charles, Mary and Denman. They are talking about tonight, when a dinner is being held with the entire family. They are also talking about Harry, whom they haven't seen for eight years.

Before those years, something terrible had happened to Harry's wife and he thinks he is to blame. His wife was swept off the deck of a boat. Because Harry thinks he has thrown her overboard, his family thinks he is not sane. But now, eight years later, Harry is the only one who acts sane about it, his aunts Ivy, Violet and Agatha are the ones who are making a fuss out of it. And that upsets Harry. When the others notice Harry sees 'persons' that they don't see, they really begin to think Harry has gone crazy. It appears that these ghosts are from his deceased wife, and he is haunted by them, at least he thinks he is. Scene two describes a conversation between Harry and Mary, they talk about their youth and Harry sees the ghosts again. Mary doesn't see them and she feels sorry for him. Scene three tells that everyone is preparing for dinner and that the guests are worried about John and Arthur, who haven't arrived yet. Part two takes place in the library, after dinner.

In scene I, Dr. Warburton has a conversation with Harry, at advice of Harry's uncles and aunts. It's about Harry's mother. Warburton explains that Harry's mother gets her strength to live from her determination of keeping the family together, and that she is very feeble at the moment. Then Sergeant Winchell appears with the message that John has had an accident, but that it is nothing serious, just a concussion. Later on, it appears that Arthur has also had an accident. In scene II, Harry asks Agatha for the truth behind his parents and she is strong enough to tell him. She tells Harry that his father was going to kill his mother while she was pregnant of him. Agatha stopped Harry's father just in time. When she is finished telling she sighs with relief and says that Harry is now the one who has to carry the burden. Scene III describes an argument between Amy and Agatha, Amy is very angry with Agatha for taking away her son, saying she first took her husband and now her son. Agatha explains that it was inevitable and that they have to start their lives over again and leave the past behind them. Harry realises he has to follow the ghosts and that they will lead him. Amy dies at the end because she can take no more. The play ends with Agatha, saying that the knot is unknotted, the cross is uncrossed and the crooked is made straight.

16.6 ESSENCE OF THE ACTION

Harry returns to Wishwood with a guilty of murder in his heart but his conversation first with Mary and later with Agatha changed his heart and he comes to understand that he must follow those angels, not flee from them. That change of heart is the action of the play.

The play opens with a portrait of Wishwood, the dead end of an old family, once wealthy and perhaps distinguished, but no longer so; except for Amy and Agatha, hardly one of the gatherings of aunts and uncles shows the flicker of a living mind; they have gathered neither in affection or dislike, but from a habit of family solidarity, in obedience to Amy. Harry's homecoming, however, not Amy's birthday, is the true cause of their assembling. Eight years have passed since they were last assembled. Eight years before, Harry had married and left; and now he was coming back, a widower, whose wife had died mysteriously at sea a year ago;

There is a purposeless torpor in the world of Wishwood. Its life has no meaning beyond itself; it lives on in order to live on, under the simple and indomitable will of Amy:

If you want to know why I never leave Wishwood That is the reason, I
keep Wishwood alive.
To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.

She knows that they will all die; death will come to them and to herself, but only as a mild surprise.

At the beginning of the scene with Mary, Harry tells her that all these years he has been longing to get back to Wishwood, it would seem, but he is really in search of his innocence, the rare happiness of moments in his childhood. Mary says that their happiness had no freedom in it; it was all planned by Amy except for the hollow tree. It was where she and Harry had fought the Red Indians, Arthur and John. But later Amy had had the tree cut down, and replaced it with a neat summer-house to please the children.

Harry feels hopeless but Mary suggests that he is still capable of hope; he must have hoped for something in returning to Wishwood. She further says if Wishwood had proved a cheat, perhaps the cheat was in himself. She says Harry needs to alter something inside him. Her words gave some hope to Harry.

But, as he speaks the Eumenides make their presence felt. Mary, pretending not to see them, draws the curtains to hide them from Harry. He was astonished to see this. The glimpse of innocence and the hope she had given him seem to have been extinguished; yet the Eumenides have signaled the first turning of the stair Harry has to climb; there will be second turning after he has spoken with Agatha. Eumenides were of no danger to Mary but they were there just to take Harry away from her. This scene with Mary concludes the first half of the essential action; it has reminded Harry of his innocence, so long threatened as to be almost lost.

The scene with Agatha concludes the second half of the action. Agatha's contribution is to show Harry the nature of love, a thing outside of his experience then; for he is cursed to bear the lovelessness of his family. The love she is able to teach him is of two kinds: the love of attachment- of man to woman- and the love of detachment- of man or woman from all created beings - that leads to divine union. It is Agatha who comes nearest to explaining their destiny; 'What we have written,' she says, 'is not story of detection - of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation'

...It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family, Its bird sent flying
through the purgatorial flame.
Indeed it is possible.

This change of heart of Harry and change of direction have happened before our eyes in these two almost love scenes; they are the action of play. What happens before is a preparation for them, what happens after is a rounding-off. Harry takes his departure from Wishwood once more, and it kills Amy.

16.7 CRITICAL STUDY OF THE PLAY

Poetry is the most dominant and attractive part of the play and some critics have praised it generously. Apart from the points raised by Eliot about the nature of poetry which at places, ceases to be dramatic and in character, we may also notice that in many of the poetic speeches, especially of the protagonist himself, the feeling expressed is in excess of what the theme or the situation demands.

Harry has this tendency of hasty generalization and by the capacity for discovering even in ordinary things food for deep, melancholy and morbid reflection. When this tendency appears in Harry, the reader is forced to realize the core of truth embedded in Eliot's criticism. Harry is a young man of the modern age, when man lives and suffers in isolation from the rest of the universe, and though he talks of 'election' he is not a saint like Thomas. So, Harry expresses the emotions generated by his consciousness of his 'supposed' sin, we cannot but feel that his emotion is in excess of the situation or of the object which has aroused it. 'Voice' of Harry is not the 'third voice' of Eliot; he is simply the mouthpiece of creator.

Harry is also aware of her (his dead wife's) constant presence, and his own 'deadness' to the world around:

The partial anesthesia of suffering without feeling
And partial observation
of one's own automatism.

While the slow stain sinks deeper though the skin
Tainting the flesh and
discoloring the bone.

Commenting on the nature of theme in this play Agatha has said: What we have written is
not the story of detection,
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.

This has given a Christian overtone to the play under which the sin of Harry's father has become a symbol of the original sin, and Harry himself a Christ-like figure who has been 'elected' to redeem the family through personal suffering and sacrifice. Agatha has already explained this to him:

You are the consciousness of your unhappy family, The bird sent flying
through the purgatorial flame. Indeed It is possible, you may learn hereafter,
Moving alone through the flames of ice, chosen
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.

The fundamental theme of old myth and ritual is death and re-birth, a theme which is easily traceable in the play. Thus, Wishwood, the doomed house has become dead and its deadness is suggested by the pointed reference to its 'coldness'; and Amy, who has identified herself with the house, has been leading a kind of 'death in life', from which she is released by her actual death in the end. Harry himself is half dead and walks about pursued by 'ghosts': 'In an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts'. His explanation marks at once the renewal of his tainted self, the purgation of his family and the transformation of the 'grim spectres' into 'bright angels'.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. The structure of *The Family Reunion* is inspired by ancient Greek tragedy, particularly through the use of a _____.
2. The Eumenides, or Furies, in the play symbolize Harry's inner struggle and inherited _____.
3. One common criticism of the play is its lack of clear _____, making the psychological tension difficult to follow at times.
4. The Eumenides eventually transform from avengers into guides, symbolizing the possibility of _____ and renewal.

Answers

1. Chorus
2. guilt
3. action
4. redemption

16.8 DEFECTS OF THE PLAY

This play has been criticized on several counts and Eliot himself has analysed its limitations with a liberal frankness that is disarming. In "Poetry and Drama" he has referred to two serious structural defects of the play. The first was that he had employed far too much of the strictly limited time allowed to a dramatist, in presenting a situation, and not left himself enough time and material, for developing it in action. He had written what was, on the whole, a good first act; except that for a first act it was much too long. When the curtain rises again the audience is expecting that something is going to happen. Instead, it find itself treated to further exploration of the grounds what must seem to the audience an interminable time of preparation, the conclusion comes so abruptly that audience is not ready for it. This was an elementary fault in mechanics.

Secondly, the author has failed to make proper adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation. In this respect the most glaring symptom is the appearance of the Furies, which cannot be properly presented on the modern stage, and whose appearance makes little contribution to the dramatic interest, except to suggest the link between the modern story and the story of the matricide, Orestes, in Aeschylus.

According to Eliot, a more serious evidence is that audience is left in a divided frame of mind, not knowing whether to consider the play the tragedy of mother or the salvation of his son. The two situations are not reconciled. He find a confirmation of this in the fact that his sympathies now have come to be all with the mother, except perhaps for the chauffeur, the only complete human being in the play; and the hero now strikes as an insufferable prig. Many readers of the play will endorse the preference of Eliot. Amy is long-suffering pathetic figure, a victim of cruelty of her husband and of the irony of fate which changes her birthday into her death-day, and which foils her desperate effort to bring about the reunion of her family by holding the two sons back from the party, and driving the eldest one away from his inheritance. In many respects she resembles her counterpart in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the story of a tragic woman who makes a deliberate and concerted effort to obliterate the dark past by keeping her son immune from its contagion, but who finds in the end that the ghost of the past can be laid to rest only by the sacrifice of her dear one, whose assured future has been the most cherished desire of her heart.

Eliot confesses that by giving so much attention to versification he was not able to do justice to plot and character. He dispensed with the 'Chorus' in the conventional sense but employed the strange device of using four minor figures, representing the Family, sometimes as individual character parts and sometimes collectively

as Chorus. The device is unsatisfactory because the transition from the individual to the collective part is difficult to accomplish.

16.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF EUMENIDES IN THE PLAY

The main dramatic action deals with the gradual and progressive liberation of Harry Monchensey from his sense of guilt and defilement in a private, curse-haunted universe. This liberation is brought about by the presence of certain mysterious forces represented by the Eumenides. They appear to Harry on three separate occasions; each time Harry perceives them with increasing clarity, the appearances of the Eumenides coincide with the successive steps in Harry's liberation, marking out as it were the stages of his progress. Harry sees the Eumenides as concrete entities for the first time when he returns to Wishwood. Whatever hope he had of finding release from his sense of guilt is reduced to despair under the gaze of his pursuers. This realization puts Harry in a state of isolation which makes the entire universe seem corrupt and corrupting. This deranging isolation breaks his contact with reality and projects him into a private world without direction, purpose, or principle of conduct. Haunted by hallucinations, Harry has no one to cheer him up. His family expects him to take up routine as head of the household as though nothing had happened. Annoyed by their pretense, Harry accuses his family of insensibility and tries to awaken them to his suffering, without success. Thus, his first encounter with the Eumenides finds Harry holding the hope that he can forget at Wishwood, and leaves him with the despairing realization that he cannot.

During the next stage of his liberation, Harry gropes his way up from despair towards freedom and illumination. He starts by fastening upon a question he had asked himself earlier: why should the Eumenides wait until his return to Wishwood to show themselves? His aunt Agatha, who does not believe his condition of mind can be explained by his professed crime, encourages him to explore the past as the path to freedom. From this point on, Harry becomes pursuer and pursued. Where his cousin Mary removes the illusion that he had once been happy at Wishwood, she confirms his stirring suspicion that his present misery is somehow linked to the house. The possibility of a romantic relationship glimmers for a moment in his mind as a means of escape from his guilt and loneliness. At this moment, the Eumenides appear to him again, this time to warn him away from his contemplated evasion. When Mary pretends that there is nothing to see, Harry withdraws his confidence. But now he is convinced that Wishwood holds part of the secret he seeks, and he decides to stay. This decision to face the Furies and not to run from them is the second stage of his liberation.

The third and final stage begins during his conversation with Dr. Warburton and ends during his final duet with Agatha. Dr. Warburton provides fragments of the puzzle, and Agatha fills in the missing links. She recalls her affair with his father and his plans to murder the wife he hated. Harry asks, "In what way did he wish to murder her?" This is apparently the overwhelming question. Up to this point, whether or not Harry actually pushed his wife overboard is left vague. Now when Agatha forces Harry to focus upon the event, to strip himself of his compulsive habit of self-immolation, he begins to understand that he has imagined the murder and then he accepted the objectification as true. Harry believes he has pushed his wife. He does not call for help, or attempt to rescue her in any way. His recollection of this extraordinary behavior—the event itself he has buried deeply in his unconsciousness—convinces him that he is guilty. The wish has become the overwhelming reality.

Agatha helps him to understand that his father's desire to kill his wife has repeated itself in him as a kind of mysterious family curse. The inheritance for which he has returned turns out to be the knowledge of the past, and the knowledge that the past may be redeemable. The truth frees him from his guilt. As Agatha responds, Harry is carried away by his mounting excitement, expressed in images of encounter. But the encounter is brief. Harry does not comprehend her meaning until the Eumenides appear for the third time. Now Harry does not deny them. His rose-garden experience raises him to a state of spirit. Surrounded by a sense of grace, Harry intuits the higher function of the Eumenides by connecting their appearance with what Agatha has been trying to tell him: "relief

from what happened” comes not through evasion, but through quest; not through rejection, but through the “awful daring of a moment’s surrender.”

Illumined by this insight, Harry is released for action and suffering on a higher plane; he accepts without fully understanding Agatha’s paradox, “To rest in our own suffering/Is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer more.” When Harry announces his decision to depart from Wishwood on the trail of the Eumenides, his mother concludes that Agatha has persuaded him to become a missionary and asks him to change his mind. Harry refuses the request, and departs with Downing in pursuit of salvation. Soon after his departure, his mother collapses, and the play ends as Agatha and Mary, in circular procession around the cake intended for her, gradually extinguish the candles in a tenement service for both of the departed.

The presence of these silent agents is felt by every member of the family as a strange force working behind the scenes, assembling the group almost against its will, exerting peculiar powers on Wishwood, appearing at strategic moments. But only the characters with capacity for belief have the vision to recognize the higher function of these spirits. These members of the family actually see what they sense. They respond only to the tangible: and they feel the supernatural only as something which troubles sleep. They try to avoid the reality that lies behind appearance in Eliot’s haunted universe.

16.10 GLOSSARY

1. Crypto-Christian – Secret practice of Christian religion
2. Pagan – a term used by early Christians for populations of the Roman empire who practiced polytheism
3. Expiation – the act of making amends for guilt or wrong-doing
4. Cramping – inhibiting the development of
5. Benevolent – well meaning and kindly
6. Crass – showing no intelligence or sensitivity
7. Spiteful – showing or caused by malice
8. Fugitive – person who is fleeing from custody
9. Incarnation – descent from heaven of god, or divine being in human/animal form on earth
10. Hasty – done with excessive speed or urgency
11. Morbid – unhealthy interest in disturbing and unpleasant subjects
12. Doomed – likely to have an unfortunate and inescapable outcome
13. Jostled - pushed
14. Grim – very serious or gloomy
15. Spectre – a ghost
16. Matricide – the killing of one’s mother
17. Prig – a self-righteously moralistic person who behaves as if they are superior to others
18. Glimmer – shine faintly with a wavering light
19. Evasion – the action of evading something

16.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. To whom Harry wanted to become the master of Wishwood?
 - (a) Downing
 - (b) Arthur
 - (c) John
 - (d) Charles
2. Amy was:
 - (a) A Rich lady
 - (b) A Dominating lady
 - (c) A Selfless lady
 - (d) A Weak-willed lady
3. Agatha was:
 - (a) A sensible and supportive lady
 - (b) A selfish lady
 - (c) A poor lady
 - (d) A weak-willed lady
4. Harry came back to Wishwood after how many years?
 - (a) Nine years
 - (b) Ten years
 - (c) Five years
 - (d) Eight years
5. Harry was feeling_____ for his wife's death.
 - (a) Relieved
 - (b) Joyful
 - (c) Guilty
 - (d) Angry
6. What was the reason for Harry to leave Wishwood?
 - (a) He wanted to live an independent life
 - (b) His wife did not like his family, so they left
 - (c) His mother told him to leave the house
 - (d) His brother told him to leave the house
7. Who was Monchensey's family doctor?
 - (a) Dr. Warburton
 - (b) Dr. John
 - (c) Dr. Charles
 - (d) Dr. Arthur

8. Who decided to kill Amy while Harry was in her womb?
- (a) Agatha
 - (b) Charles
 - (c) Ivy
 - (d) Mr. Monchensey
9. Who rescued Amy when she was about to get killed?
- (a) Ivy
 - (b) Violet
 - (c) Agatha
 - (d) Mr. Monchensey
10. *The Family Reunion* consists of _____ element.
- (a) Humorous
 - (b) mythical
 - (c) Supernatural
 - (d) gothic

16.12 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed in detail various aspects of *The Family Reunion*. Lesson begins with the chronological events in the Wishwood followed by critical study of the play which covers the questions of theme, root idea, defects etc of the play. Further, in the lesson we have given multiple choice questions for a deeper and clear idea of the play.

16.13 ANSWER KEY

- 1. (c)
- 2. (b)
- 3. (a)
- 4. (d)
- 5. (c)
- 6. (b)
- 7. (a)
- 8. (d)
- 9. (c)
- 10. (c)

16.14 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How does the feeling of guilt play an important role in the play?

Ans. Eliot's interest in present time is reflected in the play's examination of the nature of psychological guilt, its effect upon people in general and an individual in particular living in the modern world. The concrete embodiments

of the guilt- sense, the Eumenides reveal themselves for the first time at Wishwood because it is the locus of the guilt. The origin of wretchedness lies in the unhappy bondage of Harry's parents. Guilt about his homicidal wish drives Harry's father into exile, while her feelings of guilt separate Agatha from the family. Harry is left to the care of a mother who clutches and dominates him. Out of his position as the possessed, he develops a strange morality- being good is pleasing mother, being bad is hurting her. He feels guilt for resisting her and out of his guilt, feels a desire to be punished; therefore, he misbehaves in order to be chastised and therefore purged of his guilt. The chastisement in turn intensifies his hostility, which culminates in an act of open defiance: he marries a girl instead of the woman whom his mother intends for him. The mother feels strong homicidal impulses towards the intruder. To punish herself for these impulses, the mother devotes her life to the purposes of Wishwood and eventually becomes strong. Harry is affected by these tragedies. Never having known love, he expresses the opposite impulse towards his wife, who has become a surrogate for his hostility towards all women. Dependent himself, when he finds her to be the same, his hostility deepens into a desire to get rid of her. He quite readily holds himself guilty in the accident, for he has come to regard himself as an outcast predestined to crime. This fantasy so absorbs him that he loses contact with reality. In these terms, the Aeschylean curse may be interpreted as a streak of family neuroticism which Harry inherits: the desire of both parents to kill somehow descends upon the son with such intensity that need becomes indistinct from deed.

2. What is the purpose of the play?

Ans. This play has three major purposes of writing: To restore poetry as the natural language of drama; to renew through drama a sense of reader's involvement with Good and Evil; and so with religious experience and intuition. The vision of reality that Eliot wished to show was a Christian vision, as his whole development as a poet and thinker proves; yet he also wished to avoid the direct mention of Christianity. *The Family Reunion* was designed to be a crypto-Christian play, with unfamiliar spiritual symbols and pagan overtones, to convey his veiled Christian messages that could not be discounted as Christian in advance. To find a basis for his crypto-Christian theme, Eliot turned from Chekhov to Aeschylus, the first of the great poets of the Athenian stage. In his splendid trilogy, the *Oresteia*, there were to be found in the things which poetry, the religious vision of guilt and expiation, man's involvement, through a family curse, with the forces of Good and Evil, and a spiritual way out of a cycle of murder, by the discovery of a supernatural dimension and the intervening of gods. Eliot took a family curse with a double murder as his central image, and expiation at the end. The curse seem to arise from natural causes and yet lead towards a supernatural solution. The spiritual violence in the guilt of murder would naturally call for a heightened excitement of language.

3. Give the root idea of the play.

Ans. This play is a kind of living death in Wishwood and its cramping routine, in which nothing is ever to be changed, and over which there hangs an unspoken curse. It is one aspect of England in little; its highly respectable occupants are the landed gentry, whose males are benevolent, but crass (Uncle Gerald and Uncle Charles) and whose females (Aunt Ivy and Aunt Violet) are spiteful and sinisterly. Faced with reality in terms of their nephew Harry and his deep trouble of soul, they can only write him down as mad, in utter incomprehension. The picture offered in the play shows plainly that the meaning has gone out of life. A listless and exhausted society can find nothing to do but go on as before through endless cycles of time, with all vision of reality and purpose extinguished. Arising from this basic idea, there comes a gradual sense of remedy for it, faint at first, but growing stronger and more painful with the development of the play. It is the remedy of withdrawal from the love of world and of giving up your will into the will of God. In the play Harry's father mediated the murder of his wife Amy; and their son Harry, believes himself to have killed his wife and actually does kill his mother at the end of the play by leaving Wishwood, the family home. Harry like Orestes is pursued by the Eumenides and almost his first remark in the play is taken from the mouth of Orestes: Can't you see them? You don't see them, but I see them, and they see me.

This play shows the inevitability of a man's wish to murder his woman:

I knew a man once did a girl
Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.

Harry's father had sought to murder Amy, his wife; Harry's wife disappeared overboard on an Atlantic crossing; Harry could not rid himself of the obsession that he had pushed her over. The remedy for the nightmare, for the murderous spiritual fugitive, does not lie in flight but in detachment. It means surrendering self to the will of God. It is the meaning that will drive Harry out into the wilderness at the end of *The Family Reunion*; but what first gave that meaning to mortal human life was the Incarnation.

Harry Monchensey at an earlier stage is in the spiritual development when readers meet him in *The Family Reunion*; for here we are not witnessing a martyrdom but a conversion. He was full of guilty before arriving to the Wishwood and at Wishwood he catches a glimpse of a long-lost innocent happiness again in his talk with Mary, and of a life of self-denying love in his talk with Agatha, and these are the catalytic agents that change the fugitive from guilt in to the follower of a vocation and set him on the hard path of detachment that leads into the 'wilderness'. It is the crisis of life that we are shown, the redirection of his will; martyrdom and even sanctity may lie before him; but they are not shown in the play.

4. Give the significance of Eumenides in the play *The Family Reunion*.
5. Critically analyse the play *The Family Reunion*.

16.15 SUGGESTED READING

Dwivedi, Amar Nath. *T. S. Eliot: A Critical Study*. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2003.

Tiwari, Shubha, and Maneesha Tiwari. *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2007.

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T.S. ELIOT
THE FAMILY REUNION

STRUCTURE

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 17.3 Flow Chart of the Characters
- 17.4 Female Characters in the Play
- 17.5 Male Characters in the Play
- 17.6 The Chorus
- 17.7 Eumenides
- 17.8 Glossary
- 17.9 Multiple Choice Questions
- 17.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.11 Answer Key
- 17.12 Examination Oriented Questions
- 17.13 Suggested Reading

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The Family Reunion is a verse play by T.S. Eliot that centers on the aristocratic Wishwood family. The main character-Harry returns after many years, burdened by guilt over his wife's mysterious death. Amy, his strong-willed mother, dominates the household and represents authority and control. The aunts and uncles-Agatha, Violet, Charles, and Gerald reflect conventional social attitudes and provide contrast to Harry's inner conflict.

17.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

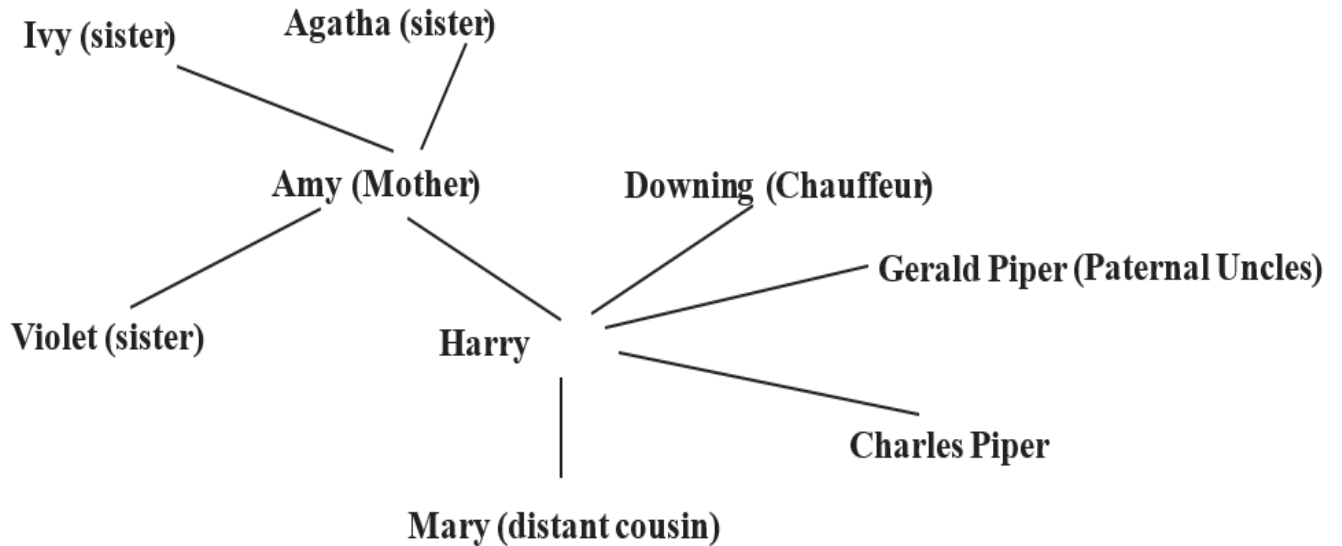
The objectives of this lesson are to acquaint the learners with the major and minor characters of the play. The art of characterization of the play will be observed through the detailed study of the characters. There are some fourteen characters in the drama and we will attempt to discuss all of them.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Describe the key male and female characters in the play, focusing on their roles, personalities, and symbolic significance.
- Analyze the relationships and emotional dynamics between family members, especially between Harry and the women in his life.

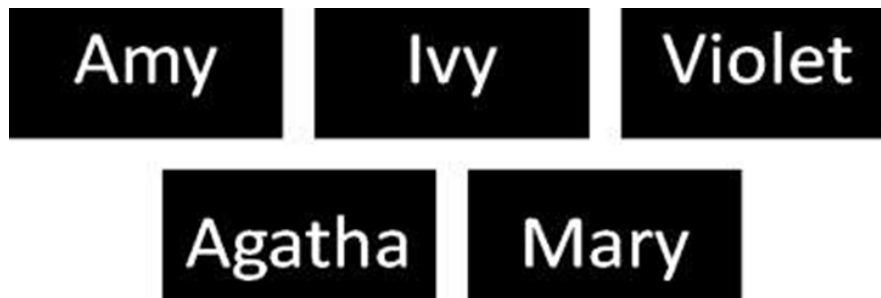
- Evaluate the function of the chorus (the uncles and aunts) as a narrative and moral commentary device within the play.
- Discuss how Eliot uses characters and the chorus to reflect themes such as isolation, tradition, guilt, and spiritual awakening.

17.3 FLOW CHART OF THE CHARACTERS



- 🚚 **Dr. Warburton** – Family Doctor
- 🚚 **Wishwood** – Monchensey’s house

17.4 FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY



Amy

- Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey, an old member of the English aristocracy.
- She is determined to preserve the family estate, Wishwood, as it has always been and use it as a means to keep the family together.
- Like most people who are used to giving orders, she believes that her desires eventually will be fulfilled, in this case her wish that her oldest son will return to take over the estate and marry her ward.
- As she dies, she begins to see that she has been living in an unreal world; some of the things happening around her then begin to make sense.

Agatha

- Agatha, Amy's sister.
- Many years prior to the action of the play, Agatha fell in love with her sister's husband but convinced him that he must not murder Amy because of her pregnancy.
- At the time of the play, Agatha is making her first visit to Wishwood in thirty years.
- She is the only one of the characters who wants to make peace.
- She initiates Harry into the spiritual awakening or consciousness of his election.
- Agatha is like a guardian angel who constantly guides him against worldly temptations.
- She protects Harry from his mother's well-laid trap to have him as the future head of the family.
- She has the clearest understanding of the course of action in which they are all involved.

Ivy

- The eldest of the Wishwood Aunts.
- She is very conscious of the reduced circumstances in which she has to live- the family money being mainly spent on Wishwood- but determined to maintain her dignity and reserve, and even to assert authority and opinion- Harry ought to get a new gardener: Mary does not know how to arrange flowers. Disapproval is perhaps her favorite emotion.
- She likes to think that the younger generation is undoubtedly decadent.
- Eliot has managed to make her both comic and colourless, a faded, spinsterly mob, not without a certain inner pathos, if one considers the death-in-life she must have lived.
- Her chief dramatic purpose is to show her utter incomprehension.

Violet

- She is more genteel and opinionated than Ivy.
- She believes herself more intelligent than Ivy however, and this appears in so far as she is 'more malicious in a harmless way,' as Amy says.
- She is ready to believe that Harry's wife had been drinking and that her death was providential.
- She is even more censorious of 'vulgarity' than Ivy.

Mary

- She is thought to be 'getting on for thirty' and feels she has missed her life and belongs to no generation.
- A remote cousin of Amy's, she has been brought to Wishwood by her as a wife of Harry.
- They suited Mary, but in vain. This has not embittered her; she seems kind, intelligent and good, though at heart deeply unhappy; she has remained at Wishwood because there seemed nothing else to do.
- Now, at Harry's return she revives; her arranging of the flowers is symbolic of this.
- Her scene alone with Harry rises lyrically in to a love-scene, and Harry's feelings for her as a woman are awakened; but he is not to be let off so easily.

- Mary is left alone, disconsolate but understanding, at the end of the play, and faces the drear possibility of life as a female don, so vividly described by Agatha.
- She asks Agatha to help her to become one, though she fears it is the most sympathetic character in the play.
- Harry injured himself by marrying a woman unsuited to him, whom he did not love. He married her to escape Amy and her plots for his future, particularly her plot to marry him to Mary. This was bitter for Mary and helps us to understand why she must leave Wishwood at last.
- She cannot face being in the same house as a man she loved who cared so little for her. Agatha tells her not to run away.
- She says her courage is no more than fear and pride.

17.5 MALE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Gerald
Piper

Charles
Piper

Downing

Harry, Lord Monchensey

- Harry, Lord Monchensey, Amy's son.
- Having returned home for the first time in eight years, he finds his family still trying to deny any change in the world.
- While he was gone, he had murdered his wife, and he is currently searching for some satisfactory way of life.
- In the few hours that he spends at Wishwood, he finds that the ghosts that have been following him are not his at all, but his father's, and that he is really pursuing them.
- He soon leaves to seek out the deeper reality that he has just glimpsed.
- He is a sick soul, who passes through a paroxysm of instantaneous conversion. He has a mysterious nervous inheritance from his father's un-love for, and the attempts to murder his wife; certainly he sees the world and himself saturated with moral evil, and certainly he departs at the end of the play to seek out some form of asceticism.
- He remains graceless and dislikeable, thinking only of himself and his family guilt and his sense of defilement.
- His sin of pride is as monstrous as lack of love; he sneers at his uncles and his brothers; he is brutally lacking in imagination for the rest.

- There is never a word of sympathy from him for the wife he claims to have murdered, or for the pitiable horror of her death, her last instants of sinking alone and helpless, in the cold Atlantic night; he feels no sorrow, he expresses no repentance, asks no forgiveness; he remains under the curse of lovelessness, of hardness of heart.

Charles Piper

- The warmest, kindest and least stupid of the chorus of Aunts and Uncles.
- A bachelor clubman of the old school like horses, dogs and guns in the country.
- He believes that younger generation neither knows nor cares what it is drinking and eating, he thinks he can help Harry to restock his cellar.
- He has considerable worldly wisdom and some true self-knowledge.
- He understands that it was Harry's wish to get rid of his wife that makes Harry believe he killed her.
- He understands that Violet is worried about her status as Amy's sister.
- As for Harry's strange behavior, he thinks he might be able to understand it, if it were explained to him; but he isn't sure that he wants to do so. Some fancies are dangerous and it is bad to indulge in them.
- He prides himself on being capable of being shocked, but at the end admits he does not feel safe, and confesses he is still capable of feeling surprise.
- This is a sign that his imagination is still alive, and it fits in with this general benevolence.
- He is certainly surprised that Harry should want to become a missionary; no member of the family had ever been a missionary before.

Gerald Piper

- A retired Anglo-Indian Colonel who prefers the East where there are better servants and an incomparable climate.
- Like Violet he despises commerce and those who draw their livelihood from aeroplane shares, but unlike her he approves of the younger generation.
- He has some kindly-intended conventional wisdom; the family should be cheerful and make Harry feel what has happened doesn't matter, after all Harry has taken his medicine; let him marry again and better.
- According to him, if Harry is to become a missionary in the tropics, there is nothing wrong with tropical climates and nothing wrong with missionaries. He himself has had an eventful life, in tight corners on the North-West Frontier; he can cope with the dangers he feels able to understand; but Harry's behavior alarms and mystifies him.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks

1. The central male character, _____, returns to Wishwood burdened by guilt and spiritual confusion.
2. Lady Monchensey, Harry's mother, represents control, family pride, and emotional _____.
3. The chorus in the play is formed by Harry's aunts and uncles, who often express collective thoughts like a traditional Greek _____.
4. Mary, one of the female characters, contrasts the older generation through her sensitivity and quiet _____.

Answer Key

1. Harry
2. repression
3. chorus
4. understanding

Downing

- He combines stolidity with imagination, and efficiency with devotion; he prefers attending to Harry's car, that it may be ready for his departure though he has only just arrived, to a friendly gossip with Mrs. Packell in the kitchen.
- He is one of the sane and trustworthy characters.
- Downing's account of what happened on the liner is instinctively accepted by them.
- He is one of the three who, apart from Harry, is privileged to see Eumenides; the others are Mary and Agatha.
- Downing sees them even before Harry does; these three love Harry; if then the Eumenides are only seen by the eyes of love.

Arthur and John

- These characters never appear, but are useful invention for the creation of a touch or two of a comedy and minor suspense.
- Their witless irresponsibility freshens up the play and creates a kind of eagerness for their entry.

Doctor Warburton

- He was family doctor of Monchensey family.
- He was concerned about Amy's health.
- He tried to convince Harry to not to leave Wishwood.
- He was ignored by Harry.

17.6 THE CHORUS

- The chorus is collectively more self-aware and imaginative than anyone of its components.
- They know themselves to be deeply embarrassed, on the edge of experience beyond their capacities at Amy's command, confronted by the unfamiliar.

- They know a feeling of incompetence and of guilt at a moment when what is private may be becoming public.
- They know themselves to be afraid of all that has happened and of what may be about to happen.
- They even know that the past is about to happen and future has been long since settled.
- They know, in short, that they can insure against fire, but not against the act of God.

17.7 EUMENIDES

- Eliot used the once-famous myth of Oresteia as the basis of his play in respect of four of its main ideas.
- There is the idea of a protagonist (Orestes) bearing the guilt of his family, and contributing to it by the murder of his mother; he is then driven by the Eumenides to seek the gods for help.
- There are the Eumenides, who in Aeschylus also change their character; they begin as Furies, thirsty for vengeance upon the blood-guiltiness of Orestes.
- The first element that Eliot has taken over from the classics for his own Eumenides.

17.8 GLOSSARY

Dowager – A widow holding a title or property derived from her late husband.

Disconsolate – Extremely sad; unable to be comforted.

Paroxysm – A sudden outburst of emotion or activity.

Providential – Happening at a favorable time; suggesting divine intervention.

Stolidity – The quality of being unemotional, impassive, or dull.

Censorious – Severely critical; fault-finding.

Aestheticism – Devotion to beauty and art, valuing artistic form over practicality.

Eumenides – Mythical Furies in Greek mythology who pursue wrongdoers; used symbolically in Eliot's play.

Emancipated – Freed from traditional social or legal restrictions; independent.

Vitality – Life force or energy; essential strength of life.

17.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the name of the house of Monchensey?
 - (a) Wishfort
 - (b) Wishwell
 - (c) Wishwood
 - (d) Wishness
2. How is Mary related to the Wishwood House?
 - (a) She is the daughter of Wishwood house
 - (b) She is Harry's distant cousin

- (c) She is the mistress of Wishwood
 - (d) She is the maid-servant of Wishwood
3. Who is the Chauffeur of Harry?
- (a) Arthur
 - (b) John
 - (c) Warburton
 - (d) Downing
4. Who among the following is not a member of Wishwood?
- (a) Amy
 - (b) Violet
 - (c) Downing
 - (d) John
5. Lord Monchensey was in love with:
- (a) Agatha
 - (b) Amy
 - (c) Ivy
 - (d) Violet
6. Harry's wife has died :
- (a) By Consuming poison
 - (b) By Drowning in the sea
 - (c) By Hanging herself
 - (d) Of fever
7. At the end of the play Harry decided to:
- (a) Become the Lord of Wishwood
 - (b) To start a new job
 - (c) To get married to Mary
 - (d) To go on a path of salvation
8. Why John and Arthur did not come to Amy's birthday party?
- (a) They were not interested in coming
 - (b) They were not invited
 - (c) They met with an accident
 - (d) They fell ill
9. Mary, a distant cousin of Harry was a:
- (a) Shy girl

- (b) Spinster
- (c) Greedy girl
- (d) Dishonest girl

10. Mary was in love with:

- (a) Harry
- (b) John
- (c) Arthur
- (d) Downing

17.10 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed many characters which describe the intended reunion of the family living in Wishwood. We have a flow chart of characters to give a clear picture to the learners about the character's relation to one another. We have also differentiated the male and female characters of the play. Further we have discussed the chorus and the supernatural element that is, the Eumenides in the play. This is followed by the multiple choice questions on the characters of the play.

17.11 ANSWER KEY

- | | | |
|-------|--------|---------|
| 1.(c) | 5. (a) | 9. (b) |
| 2.(b) | 6. (b) | 10. (a) |
| 3.(d) | 7. (d) | |
| 4.(c) | 8. (c) | |

17.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the character of Amy and Agatha.

2. Elaborate the character of Mary.

3. Discuss the role of Eumenides in the play.

4. Compare and contrast the character of Charles Piper and Gerald Piper?

5. How are the characters Agatha, Harry and Mary related to one another?

6. Discuss the character of Amy as a dominating lady.

7. What is the role of Ivy and Violet in the play?

8. What is the role of the chorus in the play *The Family Reunion*?

17.13 SUGGESTED READING

Chinitz, David E., editor. *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Ebook.

Sarkar, Subhas. *T. S. Eliot: The Dramatist*. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2006.

Kumar, Dr. Radha Krishna. "Use of Myth in T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*." *International Journal of Advance Study and Research Work*, vol. 3, no. 11, Nov. 2020, pp. 12–15, www.ijasrw.com/pdf/Nov20/ij98.pdf

SAMUEL BECKETT
WAITING FOR GODOT

STRUCTURE

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 18.3 Samuel Beckett's Life and Works
- 18.4 Glossary
- 18.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 18.7 Suggested Reading

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett is famous for his concept of Theatre of Absurd. This lesson will introduce the learners with his life, technique and works.

18.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint learners with the life and works of Samuel Beckett.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- Outline key events in the life of Samuel Beckett, including his education, influences, and major life experiences.
- Identify Beckett's most important literary and dramatic works, and their contributions to modern literature and theatre.
- Explain Beckett's association with the Theatre of the Absurd and his unique style, including minimalism, dark humour, and existential themes.
- Discuss how Beckett's personal experiences, especially during World War II and his time in France, shaped his worldview and creative output.

18.3 SAMUEL BECKETT'S LIFE AND WORKS

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989) was born at Foxrock, near Dublin (the capital city of Ireland). He was the second son of a quantity surveyor. Although Ireland is predominantly Catholic, Beckett was brought up as a Protestant by a mother whom he himself later described as "profoundly religious." He received his education

at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen. After his school education, he joined Trinity College, Dublin, where he read English, French, and Italian languages. After completing his college education Beckett taught for two terms in Belfast (a famous city of Northern Ireland). Around the year 1928 he moved to Paris (capital of France) where he worked as *lecteur d'anglais* (lecturer in English) at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. It was during the same year of 1928 that Beckett met James Joyce (the most famous novelist of Ireland during the Modern Period between 1914 and 1945). He formed with Joyce a lasting friendship. His first published work was an essay he wrote on Joyce in 1929. Beckett also assisted Joyce with the translation of the “Anna Levia Plurabelle” section of Joyce’s famous novel (his last), *Finnegans Wake*, into French language.

Beckett’s first short story, “Assumption,” appeared in *Transition* (1929). The very next year, in 1930, he returned to Ireland and took up a job as lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin. However, he resigned after four terms. He soon embarked on five unsettled, solitary years in Germany, France, Ireland, and England, before settling permanently in France. During this period, aided by a small annuity, Beckett reviewed, translated, and published poems in various periodicals. Around the same time he also wrote a study of *Proust* (1931). In 1934 came out Beckett’s first collection of short stories under the title *More Pricks than Kicks*, which are interconnected and are derived from the episodic novel called *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written in 1932, but published posthumously in 1992). Then came out a number of full-length novels. One of these, *Murphy* (1938), is a grimly entertaining Irish evocation of London life. Beckett’s famous trilogy (a sequence of three novels, namely *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, was in every sense the most radically innovative fictional statement of the 1950’s. The edition bore the announcement that the three novels had been “translated from the original French by the author.” All the three novels of the famous trilogy are interior monologues or soliloquies, desolate, terminal, obsessional, irradiated with flashes of last-ditch black humour. For instance, *Malone Dies* opens with the characteristic sentence “I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all.” Similarly, the last volume trails away with “... where I am, I don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.”

Beckett’s highly distinctive, despairing, yet curiously exhilarating voice reached a wide audience and public acclaim with the Paris performance in 1953 of *En attendant Godot* (published in 1952). The English version, *Waiting for Godot* (1955), also made a great impact. From this time onward Beckett became widely known as a playwright associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, whose use of the stage and of dramatic narrative and symbolism revolutionized drama in England and deeply influenced later playwrights, including Pinter, Fugard, and Stoppard. It seems imperative at this stage to speak of what came to be known at the time “the New Theatre,” carrying associate names such as the Theatre of the Absurd, the epic theatre, etc. Let us first acquaint ourselves with more important “Theatre of the Absurd,” with which is also associated the name of Edward Albee, an American dramatist whose play *Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* has been very popular in the entire English-speaking world.

The Theatre of the Absurd, as a term, is generally used to describe the work of a number of European and American dramatists of the 1950’s and early 1960’s. As the term itself indicates, the function of this theatre was to give dramatic expression to the philosophical notion of the “absurd”. This notion received widespread diffusion following the publication of Albert Camus’s *Le Mythe de syphe* in 1942. To consider the world as something absurd is to acknowledge its fundamentally mysterious and indecipherable nature. This acknowledgment is frequently associated with the feelings of loss, purposelessness, and bewilderment. To these feelings the Theatre of the Absurd gives extensive expression, often leaving the observer baffled in the face of disjointed, meaningless, or repetitious dialogues, incomprehensible behaviour, and plots which deny all notions of logical or realistic development. This recognition of the fundamentally absurd nature of human existence also provided dramatists with a rich source of comedy, well illustrated in two early plays—Ionesco’s *The Bald Prima Donna* (1958) and Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1955). Significantly, Absurd drew abundantly on popular traditions of entertainment, on mime, acrobatics, and circus clowning. By seeking to redefine the legitimate concerns of serious theatre, it played an important part

in extending the range of contemporary drama after World War II. Amongst the dramatists associated with the Theatre of the Absurd are Arthur Adamov, Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Gene Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter.

As mentioned earlier, Beckett's reputation soared with the staging of his *Waiting for Godot* at the small Arts Theatre (in London) in August 1955. The play's success in London cannot simply be put down to a yearning for innovation on the part of a theatre-going intelligentsia. The play contained clear echoes of a truly alternative, but often despised, British theatrical tradition, that of music-hall comedy. Beckett's contribution was that in his hands the tradition had been transformed by a sparse, but definite, musicality and by a dialogue rich in literary resonance. Beckett's reputation was strengthened by his later work for the theatre. Some of the plays of the later period include *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1960), and *Happy Days* (1962). He wrote some innovative plays for the radio also, and had one foray into cinema as well. Novel or drama, radio or cinema, the peculiar mark of Beckett's genius—innovation—always came out as the most striking feature of his compositions. He had, indirectly, discarded the old theatre, and demolished it, too. The theatre in Europe could not remain conventional after him. He made the play something altogether different, which, they universally acknowledged, expressed the postmodern, contemporary spirit. Beckett became a symbol of postmodernism. Let us have a close look, now, on what Beckett had done with the theatre in Europe.

Beckett was consistent in his use of drama as an extension activity of his wider interest in the gaps, the jumps, and the lurches which characterize the functioning and the malfunctioning of the human mind. When Freud came in the beginning of the twentieth century, he had questioned reason and rationality, logic and logicity as the basis for the functioning of the human mind. He had declared outdated the Greek concept of mind. But his psychological theory still retained some room for cause and effect sequence in human conduct, in the functioning of the human mind. For instance, if an emotion is repressed, it (logically) gets released in distorted or violent form. The conscious, subconscious, and unconscious, too, stand in relation to each other, which is not less than a logic. But when Beckett came in the mid-century, he took us beyond Freud and showed, through his dramatic as well as narrative compositions, that the functioning of the human mind was totally illogical, without having even the kind of relationship Freud established between conscious and unconscious or subconscious, between Id and Ego, etc. He took us further into the dark abyss of the human mind and showed us something worse.

In his plays much as in his novels—Beckett emphasizes that ideas, phrases, images and minds overlap. We find that voices both interrupt and inherit trains of thought begun elsewhere or nowhere. We also find, in his dramatic as well as narrative works, that separate consciousnesses both impede and impress themselves on one another. Beckett's dialogue, for which *Waiting for Godot* is particularly remarkable, is the most energetic, densely layered and supple. No other writer of the time has been able to make his dialogue so overloaded with meaning and significance. He made it a perfect idiom for the expression of the true spirit of his times. Beckett's comedy, whether visual, verbal, ritual, or even, at times, slapstick is amongst the most subtle and surprising. The set of *Waiting for Godot* may, for example, require simply the suggestion of "a country road" and "a tree", *Endgame* may take place in a "bare interior"; and the designer of *Happy Days* may be instructed to aim for a "maximum of simplicity and symmetry" in the representation of an "expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound." However, the static baldness of these visual statements serves both to counterpoise and complement the animation of his verbal ones. When Beckett uses blindness, as he does with Hamm in *Endgame*, his suggestion there is that one kind of deprivation may alert audiences to the force of alternative ways of perceiving. This technique or method of reducing scenery to the bare minimum and present character just with one dimension is called reductionism or minimalism. However, he does not play with minimalism or reductionism simply for the sake of the aesthetic effects. In parallel to the work of certain Modernist architects and composers, Beckett is actually exploring in this method the radical potential of the idea that "less is more".

Beckett's concept of time, and its use in drama, was another striking innovation he made for the New Theatre of his time. In Beckett's dramatic presentations, time-present is broken, inconsistent, and inconsequential. However, in each play he allows for the intrusion of a past which is oppressively rich in the larger inconsistencies of private and public history. He gives prominence in his plays to the presence in the human mind of the involuntary, the untidy and the quirky. And even memories negate linear concepts of time and of ageing as much as they disturb old assumptions about "plot". The structural principles on which Beckett built both his plays and novels can be traced back to the pattern of ideas he expressed in his critical essay on Proust, written in 1931. In that essay Beckett insists, among other things, that Proust had contempt for a literature that "describes". He also affirms that "there is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us." But who had ever denied the role of past in shaping the present? Neither Freud nor the Greeks, nor anyone in-between, had ever denied the interference of the past in the present. Shakespeare's ghost in *Hamlet* or Ibsen's ghosts in his *Ghosts*, are glaring examples of this "affirmation." Also, is there no logic involved in this concept? Where goes Beckett's illogicality, then, on which he relies so much as an essential trait of the human mind? One cannot deny the presence of logic in the way Beckett insists on the "must" role of the past into the present. There is, indeed, a logic of sorts in his affirmation.

Beckett was also highly fascinated by what he saw as Proust's concern with the protective significance of habit: "Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence." Beckett's own dramatic repetitions and all reiterations, his persistent echoes and footfalls, emerge not from a negative view of human existence, but from an acceptance of "dull inviolability" as a positive, if minimally progressive, force. As his inviolable and unsentimental Krapp also seems to have discovered, there is a path forward available for exploring the resonances of the circumambient darkness. From Homer to Shakespeare to Milton to Wordsworth to Arnold to Eliot, no one has ever denied the presence in the human mind of this "circumambient darkness". The only difference one can clearly discern between the great writers of the past and the gifted writers of the present is that while the former, even as they gave expression to the real dark or the negative, also offered the ideal light or positive, the latter stop at the mere expression of the dark and negative.

Check Your Progress (CYP) – Fill in the Blanks (Beckett's Life)

1. Samuel Beckett was born in _____, Ireland in 1906.
2. He studied at Trinity College, where he focused on languages such as French and _____.
3. Beckett spent much of his adult life in _____, where he later wrote many of his works in French.
4. During World War II, Beckett was involved in the _____ Resistance, an experience that deeply influenced his outlook.

Answer Key

1. Dublin
2. Italian
3. Paris
4. French

Beckett's *Endgame* is also considered next only to his *Waiting for Godot*. Published in 1958, this one-act play gives dramatic expression to frustration, irascibility, and senility. It is done through the play's central character, Hamm, a blind man, and his attendant Clov, and Hamm's "accursed progenitors," who spend the action askance. His *Krapp's Last Tape*, staged in 1958, published in 1959, was actually written for the Irish actor Patrick Magee. It is a monologue in which the shabby and aged Krapp attempts to recapture the intensity of earlier days by listening to recordings of his own younger self. Another important work of Beckett is his play entitled *Happy*

Days, which was staged and published in 1961. It portrays a character named Winnie, who is buried to her waist in a mound, but who is still attached to the carefully itemized contents of her handbag. Equally typical of Beckett's style is his *Come and Go*, which was staged in 1966, but was published in 1967. It is a stark "dramaticule" with three female characters and a text of only 121 words. Even more minimal than this play of a few words is Beckett's *Breath* (1969), which is a play that lasts only for 30 seconds. It consists only of a pile of rubbish, a breath, and a cry. Very similar to these highly experimental plays is his *No I*, acted and published in 1973. It is a very brief, fragmented, disembodied monologue delivered by an actor of indeterminate sex of whom only the "Mouth" is illuminated.

As mentioned earlier, Beckett also wrote for radio and television. Of course, he more frequently wrote for the radio than for the television. Perhaps he liked the audio more than the video. This preference may have been based on his keen interest in speech and silence as habits of the human mind, as well as ingredients of the human psyche. His television play, *Ehjoe*, remains one of his memorable contributions. Versatile as Beckett was, he wrote not only novels and plays; wrote only for theatre and print, for radio and television; but also poetry. His *Collected Poems* was published, as usual, both in French as well as in English in 1977. Beckett was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. He did, of course, make contributions to novel and drama, if not to poetry and criticism, of great historical significance. We cannot, however, help saying that his contribution is largely technical. Unfortunately for European literature, the tendency among writers after Flaubert has been to make a mark in technical innovations. Flaubert's dream to write a novel without a subject has insisted, like the ghost in *Hamlet*, on the implementation of its own text, a text without content, a text without context. The classical ideal, which was last insisted upon by Arnold and Yeats, of writing literary works on grand subjects or themes was declared dead and buried by the Modernist writers and critics.

No writer in our time has more insistently refused to comment on, or explain, his own work than Beckett. Yet no writer in our time has provoked a larger volume of critical comment, explanation, and exegesis in such a short time. Why Beckett chose not to talk about his own work, he makes a disclosure in one of his letters to Alan Schneider, which, quite unusually, found their way into print in the *Village Voice* in March 1958. The relevant portion of the letter in question reads as under:

...We have no elucidation to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the over-tones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated *nec tecum nec sinete* [neither with you nor without you] in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.

Beckett's reticence is, indeed, no mere whim. There exists, perhaps inevitably, an organic connection between his refusal to explain his meaning and the critics' massive urge to supply an explanation. Thinking of this situation relating to Beckett's silence as to the meaning of his writings, one is reminded of a scene from his own *Endgame*. The scene under reference shows Hamm asking Clov, "We're not beginning to...to... mean something?" To this query Clov retorts, with a burst of sardonic laughter, "Mean something! You and I, mean something! Ah that's a good one!" It might be argued that in the said correlation between the author's silence and the critics' verbosity can be found one of those keys that unlock the whole phenomenon of Samuel Beckett, his oeuvre, and its impact.

Beckett has made a few rare utterances about general considerations underlying the work of creative artists in our time. The most important of these rare utterances is probably a set of three dialogues on modern printers.

These dialogues may or may not be a true record of conversations that took place between Beckett and Duthuit, but they owe their published form to Martin Esslin's collection of critical essays, *Samuel Beckett*, in the Twentieth Century Views Series. In discussing the work of painters, another time, who refuse to look at the world "with the eyes of building contractors," Beckett speaks of an alternative as under:

...An art...weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road...and preferring the expression that there is nothing to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express....

Such is, therefore, the dilemma, the inescapable paradox of the artist in a world that lacks a generally accepted—and to the artist acceptable—metaphysical explanation that could give his creation meaning and equip him with immutable standards of truth and beauty. The problem of the artist in the present time is that he does not have the benefit of faith, religious or secular, his predecessors had. Consequently, he is left to fend for himself, without intelligible purpose in a world that has been discovered to be meaningless or purposeless. And yet the artist feels the urge, a compulsive urge, to express himself. His problem is about the subject of his expression. If the world is a void, an empty space, a nothing, then what should the artist express? Hence, the artist in our time faces a situation which is as absurd as it is tragic. At the same time, it is a challenging situation, in which the artist can make a heroic attempt to face this challenge of nothingness, and make, to quote Beckett, "of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion...and of the act, which unable to act, obliged to act, [the artist] makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation." Why, we have to ask, if there is nothing to express, no power to express, no desire to express, is there yet this inescapable obligation to express?

Beckett, in the general remarks that precede his film script for *Project I*, does throw a slight hint as to the possible direction from which a glimpse of the answer to this question can be elicited. Beckett takes a cue from his countryman, George Berkeley, and reiterates:

Esse est percipi [To be is to be perceived]. All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self perception maintains in being.

Search of non being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down inescapability of self-perception.

In simpler language, self-perception is a basic condition of our being. We exist because, and as long as, we perceive ourselves. Further, if it is true that for the artist perception leads to the obligation to express what he perceives, it follows that for the artist the compulsion to express his intuition of the world is a condition of his very existence. As long as he exists he suffers the predicament of the voice that drones through *Cascando*:

...story...if you could finish it...you could rest...you could sleep... not before...oh I know...the ones I've finished...thousands and one... all I ever did...in my life...with my life...saying to myself...finish this one...it's the right one...then rest...then sleep...no more stories...no more words...and finished it...and not the right one...couldn't rest... straight away another...to begin...to finish....

The artist, to be true to his vocation, must confine himself to the faithful reflection of his changing self. Agreeing with Schopenhauer, Beckett defines the artistic procedure as "the contemplation of the world independently of the principle of reason...."

18.4 GLOSSARY

Profoundly – Extremely; deeply felt or experienced.

Annuity – A fixed sum of money paid to someone periodically, usually from an investment.

Evocation – A calling forth or bringing into mind; a vivid representation of something.

Soliloquy – A speech in which a character speaks their thoughts aloud, often when alone.

Exhilarating – Making one feel very happy, animated, or elated.

Contrivance – A device, scheme, or plan, often showing ingenuity.

Minimalism – Artistic style that uses the fewest and simplest elements to create maximum effect.

Inescapable – Impossible to avoid or evade.

Circumambient – Surrounding; encircling; enveloping on all sides.

Vocation – A strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation, especially one regarded as a calling.

18.5 LET US SUM UP

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) was an Irish playwright, novelist, and poet, best known for his influential works in the Theater of the Absurd. Born in Dublin, Beckett spent much of his life in France, where he wrote his most celebrated play, *Waiting for Godot*. His literary contributions, characterized by existential themes, linguistic innovation, and a bleak yet humorous outlook on the human condition, earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969. Beckett's work has left a lasting impact on modern literature, influencing a wide range of writers and playwrights.

18.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Where was Samuel Beckett born?
A. Paris, France B. Dublin, Ireland
C. London, England D. Berlin, Germany
- In which literary genre did Samuel Beckett achieve international acclaim?
A. Romantic Poetry B. Realist Fiction
C. Theater of the Absurd D. Historical Drama
- What is Samuel Beckett's most famous play, known for its existential themes and minimalist setting?
A. *Endgame* B. *Krapp's Last Tape*
C. *Waiting for Godot* D. *Happy Days*
- Which prestigious literary award did Samuel Beckett receive in 1969?
A. Booker Prize B. Pulitzer Prize
C. Nobel Prize in Literature D. Man Booker International Prize

5. Where did Samuel Beckett spend a significant part of his life, particularly during the period when he wrote some of his major works?
- A. New York, USA B. Berlin, Germany
C. Dublin, Ireland D. Paris, France

Answer: 1b, 2c, 3c, 4c, 5d.

18.7 SUGGESTED READING

Ackerly, C. J., and S. E. Gontarski. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought*. Grove Atlantic, 2007. Ebook.

Bair, Deirdre. *Samuel Beckett*. Simon & Schuster, 2016.

“Samuel Beckett.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/samuel-beckett>

SAMUEL BECKETT
WAITING FOR GODOT

STRUCTURE

- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 19.3 The Beckett Protagonist
- 19.4 Glossary
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 19.7 Suggested Reading

19.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce the learners to Beckett's concept of the hero.

19.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with Beckett Hero.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of Beckett's protagonists, particularly Vladimir and Estragon.
- Analyze how existential themes are expressed through the protagonists.
- Evaluate the significance of inaction, waiting, and dialogue in constructing character and theme.
- Compare Beckett's protagonist style with that of traditional tragic or heroic figures.
- Interpret the characters' roles in conveying the absurdity of the human condition.

19.3 THE BECKETT PROTAGONIST

In order to discover the Beckett Protagonist, the character that stands at the centre of his novels as well as plays, one has to go back to his first published fictional work. This work is a collection of short stories called *More Pricks than Kicks*. In this work we find the image that figures almost continuously in the novels as well as the plays, we find the character round whom the Beckett world moves. The work in question relates the adventures of Belacqua, and opens with the story called "Dante and the Lobster". The story's opening is very significant for our present purpose, which is as under:

It was morning and Belacqua was stuck in the first of the canti of the moon. He was so bogged that he could neither move backward or forward.

Here is an image of perfect stasis that was to pursue, or pin down, those creations that were to stand out in a remarkably individualized manner. It is also not for nothing that the hero of the story is named Belacqua. The Dante in the first story's title provides the clue. This name comes directly from the *Purgatorio* (a section of Dante's great poem *Divine Comedy*). Not much is known about this man in real life except that he was a friend of Dante and was famous for making lutes as well as for his indolence and apathy.

Beckett, being a keen student of Italian, for sure, knew Dante as well as many. Besides, he seems to have been fascinated by this character in Dante's poem. Some of Dante's lines are apparently reflected in the position taken up by Beckett's hero close to the end of the story called "A Wet Night." The hero's following utterance states his position: "[he] disposed himself in the knee-and-elbow position on the pavement." It is interesting to note here that even though Belacqua as a surname translates in English as Drinkwater, the hero of Beckett's story is just the opposite. The story's title "A Wet Night" has the double implication: It reflects the Night's weather condition as well as the opposite of "dry" in public house parlance. As the story goes, Belacqua had been to a party where he knew that all he could expect by way of drinks would be a selection from a symphony of soft drinks. So the hero braced himself in advance with stronger fare, for which he pays the penalty on his journey back home. He comforts his aching feet by throwing away his boots and walking bare-foot in the wet streets. He is then assailed by stomach pains, forcing him double up more and more till finally he creeps with his poor trunk parallel to the horizon. Here is the mode of low motion that would be later repeated by Beckett's heroes in the subsequent novels and plays. In his latest work, *Comment c'est*, we are introduced to a painful cyclical crawl, which seems to symbolize, among other things, the slow progression of mankind.

In "A Wet Night," however, Belacqua is shown to desist, out of weariness, from this method of self-propulsion. Instead, he prefers the position mentioned earlier, disposing himself in the knee-and-elbow position on the pavement. It was in this very pose that Botticelli depicted Belacqua in his drawing to illustrate this particular canto of the *Purgatorio*. The character from Dante's poem is shown in this drawing with his head between his clasped knees and with one eye fixed on Dante and Kirgil. Belacqua's pose in the painting suggests that he is too weary to raise even his head or to join his indolent companions in their mockery of the two poet visitors. The resemblance is stressed again in another story called "Ding Dong:" "Being by nature...sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence, asking nothing better than to stay put." As is depicted in Dante's great poem, the weary, apathetic Belacqua says to Dante, "what use is there in climbing?" He prefers to stay put. In the story by Beckett, the indolent Belacqua, fixed in his purgatory of indifference, goes even further than his Dante prototype. He consents to buy himself two seats in heaven. These seats are offered to him in a public house by a shabby female with a face "brimful of light, serene, serenissime." "Seats in heaven," she said in a white voice, "tuppence a piece, four for a tenner."

In the *Purgatorio*, the poet asks Belacqua whether he is waiting for a guide to show him the way to heaven or whether he is still given to his old laziness. In reply to this question, Belacqua points out that since he omitted to repent in time before he died, the heavens must wheel around him for the whole length of his life before Peter would admit him. We find that Dante's lines are echoed by Beckett's shawlie. Referring to the seats, Belacqua asks, "have you got them on you?" Her answer is, "Heaven goes round." She indicates this by whirling her arm, "Round and round and round." To this Belacqua responds, "Yes, round and round." But she modifies; she drops the *as* and makes it, "Rowand, rowan, rowan, an' rowan." In Beckett's penultimate story, Belacqua dies on the operating table. The volume is concluded with a cynically humorous account of his burial and the feelings of his wife and friend towards the departed.

Belacqua as a Beckett creation may have breathed his last, but the genius remains. As the story proceeds, we find, that Belacqua is not wholly dead. He lives again in his friend Hairy who takes over, as it were, part of the Belacqua character. In a way, it is a foretaste of what Beckett does in confusing his characters, or rather fusing

them into one character. Thus, Belacqua turns up again, not as a living character, but as a term of reference in Beckett's next novel, *Murphy*. We find that the Dantesque figure rises up in the hero's mind when he has been derided by the chandlers as a possible "smart boy" in their emporium and has looked in vain for somewhere to sit down:

Murphy would willingly have waived his expectation of Ante-purgatory for five minutes in his chair, renounced the lee of Belacqua's rock and his embryonal repose, looking down at dawn across the needs to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north as it rose, immune from expiation until he should have dreamed it all through again, with the downright dreaming of an infant, from the spermarium to the crematorium. He thought so highly of this post-mortem situation, its advantages were present in such detail to his mind, that he actually hoped that he might live to be old. Then he would have a long time lying there dreaming, watching the dayspring run through its zodiac, before the toil uphill to paradise.

Belacqua is not mentioned in Beckett's next novel, *Watt*. But the genre is very much there in the novel's hero. The weary Watt who would not show any regret at a spit in the eye any more than if his braces had burst or he had been bombed in his nether parts. But in his weariness he must rest. We find ourselves back again to the familiar position:

The feeling of weakness was such that he yielded to it and settled himself at the edge of the path, with his hat pushed back and his bags beside him, and his knees drawn up, and his arms on his knees, and his head on his arms.

The embryonal repose, typical of Beckett hero, we now know, stems from Belacqua couched in the lee of his purgatorial rock. This repose shows itself once more in *Waiting for Godot*. Rather tired with the game of trying on his boots, Estragon tries to go to sleep. In this context, the stage directions read as under: "His head between his knees." The characters in this play indulge in games to pass the time. In his subsequent novels, however, Beckett leaves behind his humour we have seen in abundance in *Waiting for Godot*. His interest in his game playing characters also declines. His protagonists in these later works concentrate on their *penible* task of dying. In the opening passage of *Molly*, for example, the narrator says that what he wants to speak of are the things that are felt, "say my good byes, finish dying." He remembers "in the tranquility of decomposition the long confused emotion that was my life." Here one can hear the cynical echo of Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility. He sees in the gathering night a lonely old man:

He hadn't seen me.... The rock he probably saw. He gazed around as if to engrave the landmarks on his memory and must have seen the rock in the shadow of which I crouched lik Belacqua, or sordello, I forget.

As we have noticed, work after work, Beckett cannot rid himself of Belacqua. It is in character that Molloy is confused, that he may not rely on his memory. There is no doubt of its persistence. However, it is equally clear that there is an evolutionary process from Dante's Belacqua to that of *More Pricks than Kicks*. With every hero of Beckett there takes place a further evolution. The embryo has haunted him to such an extent that in the final novel of his famous trilogy, he tries, in a serious attempt at self-examination, to find out who these heroes of his are: In the process he ranges over the characters he has created— Murphy, Watt, Malone, Molloy, Mahood—and picks on a new one whom he calls Worm. He wants to reduce them all to silence. He wants to reduce himself also to silence. He even finds, for a moment, solace in the thought of Worm. To be Worm means to be away from the world, away from also all the other characters who have taken possession of him and at last to think nothing, to feel nothing. For this is himself, himself in embryo—literally in embryo. Several pages are devoted to the description of womb

life, that is life in the womb, if you can call it life. He would rather not call it by that name. In that secure place he cannot even stir though he suffers as a result. With his typical Beckettian irony he declares that “it would be to sign his life-warrant to stir from where he is.” It is once again Belacqua’s weary phrase: “What is the use of going up?”

The evolutionary process, too, in the case of Beckett heroes is as strange as this stasis of being unborn. The normal process of evolution, associated with progression, with a series of biological, or psychological, or philosophical changes, does not take place in these characters. For there is no improvement in the preceding position. In the world of Beckett’s work the hero, who began his fictional creation as Belacqua, with his head on his knees, ends in *Comment e’est* with his face in the mud. Beckett’s heroes are not always immobile like the one in *L’Innommable* who is permanently fixed in a contraption that turns him into a menu-holder outside a restaurant. Sometimes, we find, they do move. In fact, we see them, at times, setting out on journeys. Their pilgrimages are, however, rather painful. Progress is very, very slow. Then, there are such handicaps as lameness, blindness, even general debility to retard the pace of locomotion. Molloy, for instance, sets out with the express goal to reach his dying mother, but his movement is balked by his physical infirmity. He carefully attaches his crutches to the frame of his bicycle which is to carry him to his destination. But his machine fails him, leaving him with no choice but to crawl on his belly, propelling himself by those very crutches which had been intended to maintain his human uprightness.

Thus, not movement, but non-movement, or stasis, is an outstanding mark of Beckett’s heroes. “*Cette inertie immortelle*” is how Beckett himself makes obeisance to human beings immobilized. Yet the febrile (feverish) argumentation of his characters distinguishes them by a dynamic quality. It is not, in fact, less than a delirium with these characters. For example, Malone, lying on his death bed, his brain battling with the encroaching paralysis of his body, translates his terror to the reader when his only contact with the outside world—his stick, on which he depends for whatever little movement he can make—falls from his bed. Beckett’s characters reveal themselves in such moments of agony. They do not, of course, suffer happily. But they do suffer inevitably. They accept their ignominious situation, the very insult of being in that situation, and turn more and more to the haven of their minds. They find their being as much in the mind’s solace as in its *souillures*. Just as Molloy sets out on a journey, so there is a voyage of sorts in Beckett’s novel *Comment c’est*. The journey is of sorts because the movement is reduced to the pace of a crawl. It looks a miracle that the author can always find a fresh point of departure. He seems to have probed existence to a brinkmanship of nothingness, not only in bareness of plot, action, and language, but of morbid human endurance, only to poise in his next work even more precariously over the chasm of chaos.

Here, in this novel, we are in a world devoid of norms of life. But it is a world with sufficient life to make us aware of the human anguish, of human pathos. The book is divided into three parts: “Before Pim,” “With Pim,” and “After Pim”. A simulacrum of human being crawls in the mud towards an unprescribed destination. The indication is that it is crawling to reach Pim—an equally wretched creature. He comes up with him in the novel’s second part, “With Pim”. The sole possessions of the narrator are a tin-opener and a bagful of fish and sardine tins which are dragged along on the journey. Pim is stabbed in the back with the tin-opener, and the narrator writes words in blood with his nails on his body, hits him to make him sing, to make him talk, or to make him stop talking. He leaves Pim and painfully moves on to reach him with his face still in the mud. The world pictured here is a world of tormentors and tormented in which characters lose their identity as they move in the dark, in the vicious circle of attacker and attacked. One can easily see in this drab symbolic dark the Beckett perception of the wretchedness of the human race intent on wounding each other as they move on murderously with their faces in the mud. Beckett sees them as condemned characters, like those in Dante’s *Purgatory*, whose thoughts are occasionally shifted from the limbo in which they have their being by broken memories of another world that would appear to exist above in the light. Doesn’t it remind us of our “simple” Wordsworth, who speaks

of “what man has done to man” and who shows us glimpses of the “other world,” the world of light? In Beckett, as it does with every age, the method and manner, the tone and tenor have changed. The subject is the same as in Wordsworth, or anywhere in the masterpieces of world literature. Beckett, too, has earned a place on that count, just as Wordsworth did, or Shakespeare did.

Check Your Progress

1. The two main protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* are _____ and _____, who spend most of their time waiting for a man named _____.
2. The play reflects _____ philosophy, particularly the idea that life lacks inherent _____ or _____.
3. Unlike traditional tragic heroes, Vladimir and Estragon are notable for their _____ and _____ rather than decisive action.
4. The protagonists often engage in repetitive _____ and _____, which emphasize the cyclical and meaningless nature of their existence.
5. The act of waiting in the play can be interpreted as a metaphor for the human search for _____ in a world where there may be none.
6. The fragmented and circular nature of the dialogue between the protagonists contributes to the overall theme of _____.
7. Despite the hopelessness of their situation, Vladimir and Estragon continue to _____, which can be seen as both tragic and darkly _____.

Answer Key:

1. Vladimir, Estragon, Godot
2. existentialist, meaning, purpose
3. inaction, indecision
4. dialogue, routines
5. meaning
6. absurdity
7. wait, comic

So much has come out in criticism about the ambiguity of Beckett’s work. To his plays the critical reaction has generally been one of puzzled dismay. Much of the confusion, of course, is to be credited to the critics themselves, for it is their conflicting interpretations, sometimes too ingenious to digest. No doubt, the bare looks of Beckett’s language, its utter simplicity, is often disarming. In fact, at first sight, it sounds quite incompatible with the serious import of the situations it depicts. In a sense, the medium and the matter seem at loggerheads with each other. However, if one persists with the Beckett text, it soon becomes clear that the sparse, bare vocabulary itself gives profundity to the statement on the subject. For instance, if there are many meanings read into *Waiting for Godot*, there is more to say which is the inevitable one. The very fact that the text lends itself to a religious interpretation that spells hope, the eternal expectation of a messiah, or its opposite the futility of such an expectation, surely reflects the ambivalence of the human situation. Nothing is clear cut. Nothing can be known absolutely. Now, if that is the matter for the medium, the language, which is the medium, has to be, in consonance with its matter. It has to be perforce, ambivalent. Hence the language of *Waiting for Godot* is apt.

If one wishes to know the philosophical foundation of Beckett's work, which it decidedly has, one shall have to go even beyond Dante. Dante reveals the seeds of the melancholy brood in Beckett's work. Dante's Belacqua explains it all. But if we want to know the source of Beckett's world-view, we shall have to go as far back in history as the Sicilian rhetorician and sophist who lived from 483 to 375 B.C. His name was Gorgias of Lentini. His teachings, which *Encyclopedia Britannica* sums up, are as under:

1. That there is nothing, which has any real existence.
2. That even if anything did exist, it could not be known.
3. That supposing real existence to be knowable, the knowledge would be incommunicable.

In his argument about the last of these propositions Gorgias of Lentini says that language is inadequate to convey ideas and that it is impossible for any idea to be the same in different sounds. The above propositions of the philosopher could be further simplified in a more popular idiom than the one used in the above summary. In that case, the propositions would read as under:

1. Nothing is.
2. If anything is, it cannot be known.
3. If anything is, and cannot be known, it cannot be expressed in speech.

In Beckett's work, we find, that the writer is engaged with the third proposition of the ancient Sicilian philosopher. Speech, the written word, is Beckett's medium. It is the inadequacy of language, his medium, that haunts him. How should one express the inexpressible is the question. He makes the task more difficult for himself by opting to write about the suffering creatures. His job is not to open windows on glorious dawns. Beckett's characters imply that so clearly. We can recall here just one of them—the one who is only the simulacrum of a man with his head firmly fixed in an iron collar. His function is to work as a signboard for a restaurant. His vision is limited to the establishment to which his frame invites attention. As a matter of fact, he does nothing, and he knows nothing, but he exists all the same. Beckett underlines all along the inadequacy of language, its inefficiency in communicating the feeling or thought he is eager to express. Again and again, he challenges the value of his own verbal descriptions, alleging their inaccuracy, offering another adjective, or another verb, and finally dismissing them all declaring them as worthless as the thoughts of which they are supposed to be carriers.

Beckett's hero in *Watt*, a serio-comic novel, remains an enigma. His journey to the house of Mr. Knott remains a mystery. One can notice the novelist's tendency towards pun in the very names of these two characters. Watt and what, Knott and not, not only sound similar, they are meant to carry the meanings of the words with similar sounds as well. The unfortunate hero, like Fielding's Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*, suffers all sorts of humiliations and indignities on his journey to the house of Mr. Knott. The purpose of his quest, however, remains unstated and unknown, perhaps unknowable. The same is the case in *Waiting for Godot*. Both the works can be interpreted in religious terms. In both, there is a man seeking (let us say) God but never succeeding in finding him, though he wanders through his mansions. The interpretations of both *Watt* and *Waiting for Godot* sound more convincing if we look at them in terms, not of religion, but of the philosophy of Gorgias. From that angle, Mr. Knott becomes the Novent or nothingness of the philosopher's first proposition. Should it happen to exist then he cannot be known, conforming to the second proposition. The third and final proposition makes it clear that his existence cannot be expressed in speech or language. That is why Watt's language finally breaks down. He inverts the order of words, the order of letters, but ends in incoherence.

The subject of reality is perennial in Beckett's work. He understands how Dante can condemn sinners to a limitless stagnation. To this Beckett adds the bewilderment of his heroes when they become the victims of ill-luck that brings them suffering. In *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, the same character, Lucky, who has earlier in

the play burst into incoherent eloquence when commanded by Pozzo to “think,” has now become totally dumb. “Dumb?” asks Vladimir, “since when?” and Pozzo replies:

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 like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we’ll die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more.

In a lighter mood in *Waiting for Godot* itself Estragon says he is hungry:

Vla. Do you want a carrot?

Est. Is that all there is?

Vla. I might have some turnips.

Est. Give me a carrot. (Vladimir rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon who takes a bite out of it. (Angrily) it’s is a turnip.

Vla. O pardon. I could have sworn it was a carrot.

As is clear from the above, there is uncertainty of identification on all sides. Estragon’s boots were black when he threw them away, but they are now brown. Are you sure they were black, he is asked. “Well they were a kind of grey.” “And these are brown?” queries Vladimir. “Well they are a kind of green,” comments Estragon.

Examples of the unreality of the real are abound in the work of Beckett. If anything exists, it cannot be known. The Cicilian sophist of the fourth century B.C. can be said to have found in Beckett a disciple who has given his philosophy concrete expression in literary terms, who has given it an illustration in human terms. Beckett has done it not merely in drama, nor in novel alone, but also in mime. It seems the writer turned to this form of art to establish Gorgias’s third proposition that “if anything is and cannot be known it cannot be expressed in speech.” Beckett seems to ask us to think of *Waiting for Godot*, as not an isolated piece of inaction, or non-movement, in a corner of France, or if you like Ireland, but as a cosmic state, a world or life condition in which all humanity is involved. The author’s personality is reflected in his heroes. It is obvious from his work that Beckett feels the cosmic anguish and writes in pity. He does not hesitate to use irony and humour to rub the reader’s nose into the mud in which he makes his creatures crawl.

19.4 GLOSSARY

Stasis – A state of inactivity or equilibrium; lack of movement.

Indolence – Habitual laziness or avoidance of activity.

Apathy – Lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern.

Embryonal – Relating to an embryo; in an early or undeveloped stage.

Simulacrum – A representation or imitation of a person or thing.

Cynical – Believing that people are motivated purely by self-interest; distrustful of human sincerity.

Novent – A term used metaphorically here to signify nothingness or nonexistence.

Purgatorial – Relating to purgatory; a state of suffering, waiting, or cleansing.

Contraption – A mechanical device or gadget, often unusual or complicated.

Cicilian – Referring to Sicily or its inhabitants; here, it denotes the sophist Gorgias of Lentini (Sicily).

Sophist – A philosopher, teacher, or thinker, often associated with subtle reasoning or rhetoric.

19.5 LET US SUM UP

Samuel Beckett's protagonists are often characterized by their existential struggles, marked by a sense of isolation, uncertainty, and a search for meaning in a seemingly absurd world. These characters, such as Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, grapple with the human condition, reflecting Beckett's exploration of the futility of existence. Beckett's protagonists frequently engage in philosophical dialogue, mirroring the author's preoccupation with the absurdity of life and the complexities of human consciousness.

19.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who are the two central characters in *Waiting for Godot* who spend the play waiting for someone who never arrives?
A. Vladimir and Pozzo B. Estragon and Lucky
C. Vladimir and Estragon D. Pozzo and Lucky
2. Which character in *Waiting for Godot* often struggles with memory loss and has difficulty recalling past events?
A. Vladimir B. Estragon
C. Pozzo D. Lucky
3. In *Waiting for Godot*, who is the authoritarian figure who controls and mistreats Lucky?
A. Vladimir B. Estragon
C. Pozzo D. Godot
4. What is the nature of the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*?
A. Father and Son B. Brothers
C. Master and Servant D. Companions and Friends
5. What is the significance of the character of Godot in the play?
A. Godot is a symbol of hope and salvation
B. Godot is a metaphor for death
C. Godot is a representation of authority and power
D. The play intentionally leaves Godot's nature ambiguous

Answers: 1c, 2b, 3c, 4d, 5d

19.7 SUGGESTED READING

Weiss, Katherine. *The Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

McMullan, Anna. *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama*. Taylor & Francis, 2003. Ebook.

Bernar, G. B. "Beckett's Characters." *Lingua LNU*, lingua.lnu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/9Characters.pdf.

SAMUEL BECKETT
WAITING FOR GODOT

STRUCTURE

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 20.3 New Theatre and Beckett
- 20.4 Glossary
- 20.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 20.7 Suggested Reading

20.1 INTRODUCTION

Beckett's concept of theatre was modern. He and other dramatists of his kind felt that there is something seriously wrong with the world. This lesson will introduce the learners to Beckett's concept of new theatre.

20.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the concept of New Theatre.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define the characteristics of New Theatre (Theatre of the Absurd).
2. Identify how Beckett's style reflects the ideas of New Theatre.
3. Recognize the use of minimalism, absurdity, and non-traditional structure.
4. Describe how Beckett's work challenges conventional drama.
5. Explain how *Waiting for Godot* represents key themes of the absurd.

20.3 NEW THEATRE AND BECKETT

There seems much madness in the "modern" or "new" theatre, which is associated with the name of Samuel Beckett. But there is also much method in this madness. There is something seriously wrong with the world, feels Beckett as well as the other dramatists of his kind, in which the modern man is born.

Not that the world has changed. It has been the same as ever. But the view of the world has changed, and changed drastically. The view has always been changing. Man has been an explorer. He has been discovering one fact after another about the world in which he is born. More discoveries have been made, more radically the view of the world has changed. From the ancient Homeric world-view to the medieval Chaucerian world-view to the Elizabethan Shakespearean world-view to the neo-classical Johnsonian world-view to the romantic

Wordsworthian world-view to the Victorian Arnoldian world-view to the modernist Eliotic world-view to the Absurdist Beckettian world-view, there have been radical and rapid changes in man's perspective on life and world in which man is destined to live between birth and death.

Jung, a post-Freudian psychologist, speaks of a class of schizophrenic and neurotic patients (those suffering from a certain disorder of the mind, a form of madness) whose illness "seems to lie in their having something above the average, an overplus for which there is no adequate outlet." He continues to elaborate on this to say, "We may then expect the patient to be consciously or – in most cases– unconsciously critical of the generally accepted views and ideas." The impression one gets in such cases is that somehow, as in the case of Hamlet or Herzog, there is more wisdom in their madness than in the kind of sanity in which the most men feel safe and secure. These patients are unable to find a foothold in life unless they are able to integrate those ideas (or notions) which can constitute the medium for their self-expression. As long as they have not reached this point, they tend to vacillate (or swing) between moods of inflated rebellion and of deep despair (or sense of failure). Their disorientation seems to be an unconscious compensation for what has been called a contemporary threat to the uniqueness of the individual. This threat of collectivization (or standardization or uniformization, or globalization) has been described as the "illness" of our time, of the period after World War I and thereafter.

In a letter to the drama critic George Steiner, Eugene O'Neill (an American dramatist in the first half of the twentieth century) wrote that the dramatist of the modern age has to reveal the root of the sickness of his time. In his own words, this sickness of his (or our) time is "the death of the old god and the incapacity of science and materialism to give a new god to the still living religious instinct." In O'Neill's view, the task of the dramatist of the present times was "to find a new meaning of life" with which to allay man's fear of death. This and other statements of the kind that came out in a large number in the period after the end of World War I in 1918, has to be viewed against the background of historical development in recent times. A very brief account of this historical development is: on one hand, there has been the collapse of old values and notions; on the other hand, there have been sparkling discoveries and inventions. These two opposing phenomena have driven modern man away from his psychic roots. There has been thus, a sort of levelling down and hollowing out of man's mind, which has become a widespread phenomenon. It is to this phenomenon that the modern dramatist like O'Neill had to respond, to respond in his writings.

We have to further link up this phenomenon with certain philosophic thought that developed in the recent times. For this development in the field of ideas has had as much of bearing on the literature of the age (especially on the writers like O'Neill and Beckett) as the phenomenon just described. Ever since the warnings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (both German philosophers of the recent times), a small minority in the field of art, literature, and philosophy has been deeply influenced by an increasing feeling of urgency about man's self-estrangement in the modern world. Now, combined with the psychology of Freud and Jung, this philosophic view of modern man came to have a tremendous impact on Western literature. Of course, the reaction did not start in the field of drama. The beginning was made by certain European novelists, such as Dostoevsky, Kafka and Camus. A host of other writers, such as the more prominent Jean-Paul Satre, Jaspers and Heidegger, who presented this "condition humane" of our time, came to be labeled as "existentialists".

What Jaspers says about Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, regarded by these existentialists their spiritual ancestors, is equally true of Beckett and other dramatists of his dispensation. Jasper's statement in question is as under:

Their common effect to enchant and then disillusion, to seize and then leave one standing unsatisfied, as though one's hands and heart were left empty – such is only a clear expression of their own intention: that everything depends upon what the reader by his own inner action makes out of their communication... they deny every satisfaction.

This same technique, although in different degrees, can be said to be characteristic of the most challenging contemporary dramatists, the most outstanding of whom has been Samuel Beckett. Despairing of the validity of any romantic, moralistic, sentimental, or philosophical interpretation of the facts of existence, these dramatists present these facts to their audiences in a deliberate nakedness and without any hints at truths or values in which they may or may not believe. Thus, all of these authors, more so Beckett, by refraining from committing themselves to any definite standpoint, created a new style in the long tradition of dramatic art.

Although there has been, in the dramatic art, a great variety of subjects, modes, and styles, it has always remained concerned with man's relation to the great archetypal powers which can determine his attitude to life. In times of settled religious or moral beliefs, it has shown man as protected, guided, and at times even punished by these forces. However, in other epochs it has shown the visible and tangible world, in which man fulfils his destiny, as permeated by the demonic essences of his invisible and intangible being. In what is called contemporary or post-modern drama (of the period after World War II), a new, third orientation has crystallized in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected. Man is shown instead all alone in a world with which it does not have any positive or negative relationship. The world in this drama is rather alien. Man finds it totally indifferent to his own destiny. It is projected only as a sort of void, a vast nothingness.

The new form of drama forces the audiences out of their familiar orientation, their routine complacency, of watching a tragic or comic story with a sad or happy ending, expecting a catharsis of their emotions. In the new theatre, the dramatist creates a vacuum between the story on the stage and the audience in the seats. The idea is to compel those sitting comfortably in their seats to experience something of their own, be it reawakening of the awareness of archetypal powers or reorientation of the ego, or both. One of the contemporary dramatists, Bertolt Brecht, has given this method or technique the name of "alienation effect." What it means is that the audience, the men in the seats, are made to experience themselves the separation between them and their surroundings, made to feel how indifferent the world is in which they are living.

By far the most daring and profound dramatist associated with this new theatre is Samuel Beckett. He has gone much farther than most of his contemporaries in showing this new development or consciousness on the stage or in the theatre. Instead of merely showing human existence in its unadorned nakedness, he strips his figures so thoroughly of all those qualities in which the audience might recognize itself that, to start with, an "alienation effect" is created that leaves the audience mystified. That is to say, the vacuum between what is shown on the stage and those sitting in the seats has become so unbearable that the audience are left with no alternative but either to reject and turn away or to be drawn into the enigma of the play's world in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him. Significantly, all the novels of Beckett are mainly monologues, or rather musings, of a solitary person, an unknown person. Similarly, the various figures that Beckett puts on the stage in the theatre are also not really persons but figures in the inner world.

Each of Beckett's play or novel is an epitome of the absurd. True, but at the same time, the author has chosen to present the absurd in a language that also denies the absurd even as it expresses it. To show that the world is absurd, that man is alone and in despair, automatically implies the possibility of reason, companionship, and hope. Beckett, of course, avoids this by following every affirmation with the corresponding negative. He also does it by placing them both in the realms of *humour noir*. The slow decomposition of Molly and Moran (two characters of Beckett in the novel *Murphy*) is conveyed through a narrative that destroys itself. In the process, a literary work, being a monument to language, results in the negation of analysis difficult. Any attempt to interpret the author's intention or the work's meaning is almost impossible. If we force an interpretation, it will have to be by ignoring a great deal else of what we have read or watched. In other words, our interpretation in that case can only be a misinterpretation.

Check Your Progress

1. New Theatre is also known as the Theatre of the _____.
2. Samuel Beckett's plays often avoid clear _____ and logical plots.
3. A key feature of New Theatre is the use of minimal _____ and vague settings.
4. In *Waiting for Godot*, characters engage in meaningless _____ to pass the time.
5. The feeling of confusion and lack of resolution reflects the theme of _____.

Answer Key:

1. Absurd
2. narrative
3. stage design (or just sets)
4. dialogue
5. existentialism

A key, or rather a method of approach, to a Beckett work can be found in the author's own work, *Murphy*. It is one of his early works which passed unnoticed when it was published. In this novel, the hero ties himself to a rocking chair (In Joyce's *Dubliners* also there is a similar story). He does it in order to escape from the world in which, as he fondly hopes, he does not belong. He goes to work in a mental home (a symbol to designate the world). He finally dies by accident. He leaves behind instructions that his remains are to be flushed down a privy. Molly and Moran are paralytics (a symbolic position to designate the condition of human existence). They live in a world where dreams, imagination and reality mingle, and where no decisions are required of them. They need not kill themselves, for they are not perhaps alive. In a sense, they are death-in-life figures (the kind of characters we come across in Eliot's *The Waste Land*). They are perhaps no more than shadows drifting across the mind which creates them and which hardly belongs to anyone, not even to the creator, the author. They may be driven by an iron necessity. But their necessity is only the reverse of absolute freedom, of total absence of meaning. In short, it hardly matters what they are or what they do, what they remember or what they imagine. "And whether I say this or that or some other thing, truly it matters little." Beckett seems to say, "Let's say I have said nothing." For indeed, strictly speaking, he has said nothing.

Since Beckett is trying to say nothing, it is possible to repeat the same or similar story, the story of meaninglessness. Pick up any play or novel of Beckett and you read or watch the same or similar story. All of his works tell or show the same story of men in quest of they know not what. They are only doomed to wander. *Waiting for Godot* is the best illustration. We do not know who is Godot. Nor do those who are waiting for Godot. One of Beckett's works, *The Expelled*, ends: "I don't know why I've told this story. I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some time I'll be able to tell another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are." The reality that Beckett has tried to apprehend and which is perhaps inexpressible, is the region of the perfect indifference and undifferentiatedness of all phenomena (the third of those explained in the *Murphy*). One is reminded of Lautreamont: "He who is about to sing the fourth song is either a man or a stone or a tree."

Of course, it does not mean that because negation is inevitably succeeded by affirmation, Beckett proceeds dialectically. In fact, he is one of those writers who are not out either to prove or to disprove or to even describe anything. He belongs rather to the class of those humourists who spend their time making "a knife without a blade that has the handle missing." In any case, what colour is the void? What is the scale of values there? Are there any values there at all? In Beckett, we seem to be dealing with a builder of ruins who undermines his edifice at the very same time as he raises it. He does it so thoroughly that we are left with nothing at all that can be seen, or heard, or touched. What we are handed over is, in fact, no better than simply the impression of a curve on the retina, the trajectory of disaster. Every work is, in a sense, the story of a disintegration – either of the hero, or of time, or of life. Here disintegration precedes all story – hero, time, and world appear in it but as waves on the sea. No one has

ever ventured so far in search of an absolute that is a minus quality. Only Beckett and his contemporaries have been engaged in the presentation of such a quest. And that has become the distinct mark of the “New theatre.”

The technique that Beckett adopted for his drama was indeed unique. It became the trade-mark of the New theatre. Note, how it works: we are in the theatre. The curtain rises. We see a set that conveys nothing. No scenery, no drawing room. There is only a road. Just “out of door,” rather. The only specific object is a tree, and not much of a tree either. It is a skeleton tree, stunted and without a single leaf. Two men are on the stage. They are without age or profession, or family background. They have no home to go to. Tramps, one may say in short. They seem, physically, rather unscathed. One takes off his boots. The other talks of the Gospels. They eat a carrot. They seem to have nothing to speak to each other. They only address each other by two words, Gogo and Didi, which do not indicate any identifiable names. They look first to one side, then to the other. They pretend to go, away from each other. But they always return to each other in the middle of the stage, to the only spot on the entire spread. It seems, they cannot go away. It seems they are waiting for someone called Godot. We are told nothing about this entity, except that whoever he/it is, it/he would not come. They may wait for any length of time. This entity is not going to oblige them. This is made clear to these two as well as to us in the seats right from the opening of the play.

So we are not surprised when a boy arrives. Didi is of the opinion that it is the same boy who came yesterday. The boy, of course, arrives with a message, which is : “Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won’t come this evening but surely tomorrow.” Then the light suddenly fails. It is night. The two tramps decide to go away. But they appear at the same spot the next day. As earlier, they show no sign of any movement. The curtain falls. Earlier, two other characters have appeared on the stage. The idea is to provide a diversion. One of these two is named Pozzo, of flourishing aspect. The other is named Lucky, who is Pozzo’s decrepit servant. Pozzo always drives along Lucky, his servant, in front of him by means of a rope tied around his neck. Pozzo sits down on a camp stool, eats a leg of cold chicken, and smokes a pipe. On the word of his master’s command, Lucky executes a few shambles by way of a “dance”. He also gabbles an incomprehensible speech, which is made up of stammering and stutterings and disconnected fragments. This scene of diversion or digression is enacted against the background of a twilight, which was delivered to us by Pozzo in a highly coloured description. So much for the first act. The opening act, conventionally meant for exposition, reveals actually nothing. It, on the contrary, mystifies everything, all that we get to see on the stage.

Act II. The next day. But only technically. For it is in no sense a “next” day. It is only another “tomorrow” of Macbeth’s “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” in a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. At any rate, the decor is the same, except for one detail: the tree now has four or five leaves. Didi sings a song about a dog that comes into the kitchen and steals a crust of bread. He is killed and buried and on his tomb is inscribed: a dog came in the kitchen and stole a crust of bread...and so on ad lib. Gogo puts on his boots, eats a radish, etc. He doesn’t remember having been here before. Pozzo and Lucky return. Lucky is dumb, Pozzo blind and remembers nothing. The same little boy comes back with the same message: “MR. Godot won’t come this evening but he’ll come tomorrow. No, the boy doesn’t know the two tramps, he has never seen them before. Besides, perhaps, a mock-heroic or farce on Shakespeare’s heroic “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” there also seems a similar treatment of Yeats’s “Second Coming,” expecting to arrive at the fall of a civilization. Hence, once more it is night on the stage of Beckett’s new theatre. Gogo and Didi would like to try to hang themselves – the branches of the tree ought to be strong enough. Unfortunately they do not possess a suitable bit of rope. They decide to go away, as before, to come back again the next day. But as earlier, they do not move. Once again the curtain falls.

The play, we know, is called *Waiting for Godot*. It lasts nearly three hours, as the convention goes in the theatre. This in itself is astonishing. The play holds for the whole three hours without a hiatus, although it is made up out of nothingness. It also holds without faltering, although it might seem to have no reason either for going

on or for coming to an end. The spectators are caught from beginning to end. They may feel disconcerted at practically nothing, have no other property but that of being there. Beckett's play, no doubt, is not the first attempt in the history of drama to dispense with the conventions of bourgeois theatre with regard to action. But this play, decidedly, marks the culmination of those attempts. No one, for sure, had taken so great a risk before Beckett. For what *Waiting for Godot* deals with is the essential, without any beating about the bush. Also, the means employed to deal with the essential had never been so pared down, nor the margin for misunderstanding so narrow. As for the plot of the play, that is summed up in four words, which occur over and over again like a refrain: "We're waiting for Godot." But it is a senseless and wearisome refrain: no one is interested in this waiting: as such it has no theatrical value. It represents neither hope nor longing nor even despair. It is merely an excuse.

Until the advent of the New theatre it sounded reasonable to suppose that if an artistic medium like the novel, for example, could free itself from many of its traditional rules and adjuncts, the theatre at least had to be more careful. A play, in fact, can only come into its real existence by entering into an understanding with some sort of public. It was supposed, therefore, that the public must be wooed, presented with unusual character, kept interested by intriguing situations, caught up in the meshes of a plot, or jolted out of itself by a perpetual verbal inventiveness related either to poetry or, on occasion, to mere frenzy. What does *Waiting for Godot* offer to these expectations? To say nothing happens in it would rather be an understatement. Besides, the absence of plot or intrigue of any kind had been met with before. But here *less than nothing* happens. It is as if we were watching a sort of regression beyond nothing. As is generally the case with a Beckett play, the little we are given to begin with, and which we thought so meager at the time, soon decays under our very eyes. It disintegrates like Pozzo, who comes back bereft of sight, dragged by a Lucky who is bereft of speech. It also disintegrates like the car-rot, which as if in mockery has dwindled by the second act into a radish.

We see the same happening with the dialogue. Like the plot, this too disintegrates. From beginning to end the dialogue is dying, agonizing, at the end of its tether. It can be standing all the time on those frontiers of dissolution inhabited by all Beckett's heroes. Attempts are made to create some sort of speech or dialogue, but each time the attempt flounders: after a few uncertain exchanges they peter out, give up, admit failure.

20.4 GLOSSARY

Drastic – Extreme or severe.

World-view – A particular philosophy or perspective on life and the universe.

Schizophrenic – Experiencing a split or conflict in perception or thought; mentally divided.

Neurotic – Emotionally unstable or anxious.

Overplus – Excess; an amount beyond what is needed.

Vacillate – To waver between choices, opinions, or moods.

Collectivization – The act of grouping individuals together, often reducing individual autonomy.

Alienation effect – A theatrical technique that makes the audience aware of the separation between themselves and the play, provoking critical reflection rather than emotional immersion.

Negation – The act of denying or nullifying something; in Beckett, the repeated refusal or destruction of meaning in language or narrative.

20.5 LET US SUM UP

Waiting for Godot is a play by Samuel Beckett centered around two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who engage in existential discussions while waiting for someone named Godot, who never arrives. The characters pass the time with philosophical dialogue, encounters with other characters like Pozzo and Lucky, and comedic interactions, creating a sense of absurdity and uncertainty. The play explores themes of existentialism, the futility of human existence, and the complexities of waiting for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world.

20.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Who are the two central characters waiting for Godot in the play?
A. Vladimir and Pozzo B. Estragon and Lucky
C. Vladimir and Estragon D. Pozzo and Lucky
- Which character often struggles with memory loss and has difficulty recalling past events?
A. Vladimir B. Estragon
C. Pozzo D. Lucky
- Who is the authoritarian figure in *Waiting for Godot* who controls and mistreats Lucky?
A. Vladimir B. Estragon
C. Pozzo D. Godot
- What is the nature of the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon?
A. Father and Son B. Brothers
C. Master and Servant D. Companions and Friends
- What is the significance of the character Godot in the play?
A. Godot is a symbol of hope and salvation
B. Godot is a metaphor for death
C. Godot is a representation of authority and power
D. The play intentionally leaves Godot's nature ambiguous

Ans: 1c, 2b, 3c, 4d, 5d.

20.7 SUGGESTED READING

Kapoor, Jaya. *The Dramatic Journey of Eugene O'Neill and Samuel Beckett*. Partridge Publishing India, 2020. Ebook.

Fletcher, John. *About Beckett: The Playwright and the Work*. Faber & Faber, 2014. Ebook.

“The New Theatre: John Osborne, Christopher Fry, Samuel Beckett, John Arden, Arnold Wesker.” *Haaconline.org.in*, <https://haaconline.org.in/attendance/classnotes/files/1586489494.pdf>

SAMUEL BECKETT
WAITING FOR GODOT

STRUCTURE

- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 21.3 The Play in Perspective
- 21.4 Godot's Identity
- 21.5 Glossary
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- 21.7 Multiple Choice Questions
- 21.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 21.9 Suggested Reading

21.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will introduce the learners to the perspective of the play and the identity of Godot.

21.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the story of the play.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize the key events and structure of *Waiting for Godot*'s plot.
2. Identify the cyclical and repetitive nature of the play's action.
3. Analyze how the lack of traditional plot progression contributes to the play's meaning.
4. Explain how time, waiting, and uncertainty shape the plot.
5. Discuss the effect of ambiguity and minimal action on the audience's experience.

21.3 THE PLAY IN PERSPECTIVE

When *Waiting for Godot* came out in the mid 1950's it created a great stir, raised a fierce controversy as to its merit as art and its significance as representation. The play was intriguing to the audiences as well as readers. The reason for such a response was that in this play of Beckett practically nothing happens, nothing is done, no development seems to take place, and there is no beginning and no end. The entire action comes down to this: At a site where there is nothing but a tree, two tramps dawdle away their time waiting for a rescuer from misery. Two strangers, consisting of a cruel master and his half-demented serf, cross their path and leave again. At the end of

the first act, a messenger from the rescuer arrives. The message he brings is that the rescuer cannot come today and will come tomorrow. In the second act, the same situation of waiting continues. The other pair pass by once more. This time, while the master has gone blind, the slave has gone dumb. Both stumble and fall. The tramps help them on their way. The messenger, too, comes again, and comes with the same message. Thus, everything remains as it was at the beginning.

It is a play, one must notice, without a woman. The reader or the audience look for some satisfaction, some turn of events, for the good or for the bad, comically or tragically. But Beckett denies all satisfactions. Like the pair of characters on the stage, perhaps the audience, too, are expected to suffer in the very process of waiting. As waiting is the cause of suffering on the stage, so it is in the seats. The two destitutes on the stage, Vladimir and Estragon, are incapable of anything more than mere beginnings of impulses, desires, thoughts, moods, memories, and impressions, and almost everything that arises in them and sinks back into oblivion before it arrives anywhere. Appropriately, they live in a state of twilight. Although Vladimir shows greater awareness than Estragon, both remain in a state of inertia. They belong to a category of people well-known in Paris as *clochards*, people who have known better times and have often, as in the present case, originally been educated and cultured. They make a point of being rejects of destiny, in love with their own position as outsiders.

We are shown how this pair of characters on the stage pass their time, waiting for Godot. Comparing the past with the present, speaking of losing heart, hinting at suicide, Vladimir Says at the very opening of the play the following:

We should have thought of it when the world was young, in the nineties.... Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up.

It becomes clear to us in no time that these two characters have the capacity neither to live nor to die. Thus, opening and concluding theme of the play is linked with their love of helplessness and of wishdreams which they make no attempt to realize. All in all, their wish dreaming and their playfulness blot out whatever serious moods come over them. A glimpse of the dialogue between them would establish the point:

Vladimir. Suppose we repented.... Do you remember the gospels?

Estragon. I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The

Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. There's where we'll go,

I used to say, there's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

Vladimir. You should have been a poet.

Estragon. I was. (Gestures towards his rags) Isn't that obvious.

They are full of frustrations and resentments. They cling together with a mixture of interdependence and affection. They ease their situation by calling each other childish names, Gogo and Didi. In these respects, as well as others, they are like an old married couple who always want to separate and never do so. Note, for instance, the following:

Vladimir. I didn't get up in the night, not once!

Estragon(sadly). You see, you do better when I am not there.

Vladimir. I missed you...and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a queer thing....

Estragon. And now?

Vladimir. Now? ... (Joyous) There you are again... (indifferently) There we are again... (Gloomy) There

I am again.

Estragon. You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone too.

Vladimir(piqued). Then why do you come crawling back?

Estragon. I don't know.

This uninspiring symbiosis seems to show a concept of relationship (friendship) which Beckett attributed to Proust; he "situates friendship somewhere between fatigue and ennui."

Thus, through this twilight world where these two clochards spend their days occasionally remembering that they are waiting for their rescuer Godot who never comes. The other two character move as a pair of eerie passersby. They come from nowhere and are going nowhere. Also, they leave no trace of their arrival. One of these two, the master, named Pozzo, looks like a brazen idol. He is massive, smooth, and rigid. Always walking ahead of Pozzo, at the far end of a long rope which Pozzo holds in his hands, is his emaciated and anaemic slave who even has to carry the whip with which Pozzo beats him. His name, ironically, is Lucky. Although they are apparently antithetical characters, they do have one thing in common. Both of them are driven by a desperate attempt to evade panic which would grip them if they lost their belief in what Pozzo stands for. Pozzo, we may recall, lives by monosyllabic orders hurled at Lucky, without ever looking where Lucky is. No other will than his own exists for him. Whatever he says or does means : The Universe is Me. He destroys whatever might grow in time by not listening. He ignores urgency by taking time to fidget with his pipe or his mouth spray. In the first act, we see him indulging with relish in an almost impressive display of pessimistic philosophy. But when we see him in the second act, his pessimism turns poetic, although for a moment.

Lucky's name carries a meaning with it. He is in the hands of a master who is highly cruel to him, but he also masters his life, organizes it for him. As we get to know, Lucky could once amuse and inspire Pozzo by dancing and thinking. But his state of slavery has gradually put an end to all that. His spark of spontaneity has died away. He has nothing left of his original dancing except a slouch and a tooter. As for his thinking, it has deteriorated into the endless repetition of meaningless words reminiscent of the "worldsalad" of schizophrenics. Pozzo, it seems, is the gruesome product of the industrial society (more so of the post-industrial). This "small bundle of subjective feelings and responses" may, at times, indulge in self-pity. But he represses its fear with narcissistic pomposity: "Do I look like a man who can be made to suffer?" Interestingly, and that is what Beckett wants to underline, deep down beneath his mask of hardness there lies in the person of Pozzo an unconscious nostalgia for lost values. He says the following about Lucky:

Pozzo. But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things.

(Pause. With extraordinary vehemence) Professional worries! *(Calmer)* Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me....

As against Pozzo, we can see in Lucky the destroyed contact with the creative energy or spring of his being. As we go along, it becomes more and clear that Lucky takes it for granted that only within the pattern of a sado-masochistic relationship between them (Pozzo and Lucky) lies his safety. In the very first act, Pozzo reveals to us the dynamics of this relationship.

I can't bear it...any longer *(groaning, clutching his head)* the way he goes on...you've no idea—it's terrible!...he must go...*(he brandishes his arm)*...I'm going mad...*(he collapses, his head in his hands)*...I can't bear it...any longer....

And then a little later *(sobering)*:

He used to be so kind...so helpful...and entertaining...my good an- gel...and now...he's killing me!

It is a sort of fixation between the two. They are a torture to each other. And yet they cannot live without each other. For this mutual fixation it is Lucky who has to sacrifice everything. He has sacrificed even his soul and creativeness. What is more appalling is that he has accepted this misery rather abjectly. He has accepted his slavery as a matter which concerns nobody but Pozzo and himself. This is made clear by a minor incident in the first act. Commenting on the voluntary slavery of Lucky, Pozzo says the following:

Pozzo. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his backside, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such crea- tures away. The best thing would be to kill them. (*Lucky weeps.*)

Estragon. He's crying.

Pozzo. Old dogs have more dignity.

In the usual Beckett reversal of reader or audience expectation, when Estragon tries to wipe Lucky's tears away with Pozzo's handkerchief, Lucky instantly kicks him in the shinbone.

Sartre seems to be helpful here for our understanding of the peculiar relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. In Sartre's writings, plays and novels, this relationship between master and serf is quite prominently portrayed. In his view, the sadist attempts to make the other person totally dependent on him, whereas the masochist sees basis of his own freedom in the freedom of the other. Here, in Beckett's play, while Pozzo is a sadist, Lucky is a masochist. In this equation, each one is object to the other, and there is no thou. It is not without significance that in the second act of *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo has become blind and Lucky dumb. In fact, this is the only change that has taken place among the four characters from act one to act two. We find that Pozzo's hysterical moments culminate later in his shouts for help. However, he never realizes that he is defeated. Neither does Vladimir, nor Estragon. It seems the essence of the play lies in the fact that it has no climax, but only an inexorable leveling down. Pozzo and Lucky get gradually drawn closer to the state of the two tramps. Note, what Pozzo says in the first act:

I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin...

Godet...Godet...anyhow, you see who I mean, I'd wait till it was black night before I gave up....

But in the second act, when the blind Pozzo and dumb Lucky leave, Vladimir asks Pozzo : "What do you do when you fall far from help?" Pozzo's reply is : "We wait till we can get up. Then we go on."

The play seems to make clear that the couple or pair of Pozzo and Lucky is comparable to the collective pseudo-ego (in Freudian terms). The play also seems to make clear that the couple or pair of tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, represents features of the lost value. This value is hidden in those who have "something above the average, an overplus for which there is no adequate outlet." The tramps seem to represent what the "civilized" world in our time has rejected, that which will have to come to the rescue of a no longer valid normality. It is very well evidenced by their role in the play. We can recall here the scene from second act in which the blind Pozzo falls down and is not able to get up on his own. He calls out for help. The two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, make attempts to assist him but all in vain. While they make these attempts in between also keep forgetting that the matter concerns them at all. However, in a flash of perception, Vladimir suddenly realizes the human significance of the situation. What he says at the moment is pertinent.

To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ring- ing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not –

This momentary awareness of the ego (“all mankind is us”), however, slides back into what can be termed a dominant slogan: “In this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come.” Such utterances in the play are deliberate. The author seems to endorse them, too. As early as 1931, Beckett, in his essay on Proust, had made a similar sort of assertion: “Lazily considered in anticipation and in the haze of our smug will to live, of our pernicious and incurable optimism, it [the future] seems exempt from the bitterness of fatality: in store for us, not in store in us.”

Check Your Progress

1. The play is divided into two _____, both of which follow a similar pattern.
2. The central action of the play is the act of _____ for someone who never arrives.
3. The characters Vladimir and _____ spend most of the time talking and passing time.
4. The plot is often described as _____ because little actually happens.
5. The play ends in the same way it begins — with the characters deciding to _____, but not doing so.

Answer Key:

1. acts
2. waiting
3. Estragon
4. circular (or static)
5. leave

21.4 GODOT’S IDENTITY

As the title of Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* suggests, the play’s theme centers on Godot. But who this Godot is, remains amenable to various interpretations. All sorts of explanations have been offered as to the identity of Godot. Whatever be the case, its significance is underlined all along the play’s action. Let us see what happens with regard to this rather mysterious figure of Godot! Right from the opening the play’s action is focused on this figure. The only thing that happens in the first two acts is that the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, keep waiting for Godot. They receive his message at the end of each act saying that he is unable to come today but he would come tomorrow. One of the important things in these two acts is that the tramps wait for Godot in the state of twilight. It is only occasionally lit up by a fleeting vision of a saviour. The tramps experience vague fantasies of being taken to Godot’s farm and being able to “sleep, warm and dry, with a full stomach – on straw.” But who is this Godot, the saviour? He seems to be a kind of distant mirage. At the end of each day (also, each act), a boy-messenger arrives in his place with the promise that he will come tomorrow. We do get some information on this mysterious figure in bits and pieces. To begin with, we are told that Godot does not beat this boy-messenger, who is a goatherd, but that he beats his brother, who is a shepherd. The tramps feel uneasy about him. Whenever their meeting can take place with him, they will have to approach him, they fear, “on their hands and knees.” They also cannot stop waiting for him, because in that case, they fear, he will punish them. We are given to understand a little more about the mysterious Godot in the next act. At the end of the second act we hear two more items about him: Godot does nothing; his beard is, probably, white.

From all these bits and pieces of information about the mysterious Godot, one can easily conclude that the reference is to God. If we compare the image of Godot created in the play with the image of God in the Bible, the

reference becomes all the more clear. His white beard identifies him with the old-father aspect of God in the Bible. His irrational preference for one brother recalls Jehova's treatment of Cain and Abel. So does Godot's power to punish those who would dare to drop him. The discrimination between goatherd and shepherd is also reminiscent of the Son of God as the ultimate judge. As a saviour for whom Christians wait and wait, he might well be meant as a cynical comment on the second coming of Christ. Similarly, Godot's aspect of doing nothing might be an equally cynical reflection on man's forlorn state. God, in any case, is supposed to do nothing. It is for man only, according to the Bible, to earn by the sweat of his brow. Besides, these remarks are called "comical" by those who believe in God. Those men of reason who do not believe in anything unknown, unseen, only heard, would take these remarks as perfectly legitimate, proved by the facts of life. The comment on the Christian civilization is very clear. Beckett's satire is directed against the western world, also against the whole of mankind, that keeps nourishing, despite all the progress of science, its faith in something that is neither here nor there. He, perhaps, takes it as a symptom actually of man's fear of death. Man wants to believe, desperately, that he is not born for death. Hence, his creation of fictions about life after death. Religion, so to say, are fictions, man's own creation. It is, perhaps, also a social necessity, to make living together of men possible, to make them fear wrong doings. When no other fear works, the fear of God does.

But this is not all. We can go back to the discrimination between goatherd and shepherd. Whereas Matthew (25, 35) says: "And he shall seat the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left," in the play it is the shepherd who is beaten and the goatherd who is favoured. What the two tramps, the only permanent characters on the stage in *Waiting for Godot*, except from Godot is food and shelter. Since goats are motherly, milk-providing animals, like the cow in India (buffalo was not there in ancient India), the goatherd is to be favoured. In ancient times, even the male goat among the deities, like Pan and Dionysus, have their origin in the cult of the great mother and the matriarchal mysteries, only later to become devils. We are told that once (there was a time) when Vladimir and Estragon had *seen* Godot. But during their life span in the play they do not remember quite clearly. The vague promises he seems to have given them (at that time) are now treated with facetiousness born of doubt. In fact, Beckett seems to make it appear as if, to these two tramps, God, Godot, and Pozzo were sometimes merging into one blurred picture. Also, since these two had seen the ancient times of faith and are now living in the times of doubt, they are obviously meant to be taken as archetypal, and not real, characters.

When in the second act, Vladimir and Estragon are talking about God, Pozzo appears and is mistaken by Estragon for Godot. Here, the play may be making a comment on the modern man's relation to God, suggesting that today religion is altogether based on indistinct desires in which spiritual and material needs remain rather inextricably mixed up. Godot is explicitly vague, merely an empty promise, corresponding to the lukewarm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. *Waiting for Godot* has become a habit for these two (and, by implication, for all men). Beckett calls this habit a "guarantee of dull inviolability..." an adaptation to the meaninglessness of life. "The periods of transition," he continues, "that separate consecutive adaptations...represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the *boredom of living* is replaced by the *suffering of being*." At times, one suspects the possibility of such moments of transition in the play, but Beckett takes great care never to let a transformation take place. In a moment of lucidity, Vladimir tries to make Estragon participate in his own fears about the question of salvation, damnation, or mere death. However, Estragon remains unmoved by all these fears. Vladimir even talks of the example of two thieves who were crucified beside the saviour. He then ponders over the fact that only one of four Evangelists mentions that one of the thieves was going to be saved. This is an obvious reference to St. Augustine: "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned." There are passages of dialogue in the play that bear out this particular thrust of Beckett's presentation in the play. Clearly, he seems to present us with a state in modern man in which fear and fixation with an ancient deity are mixed with doubt and bitterness on the one hand and with tired indifference on the other. This looks highly probable when we remember other attempts in modern literature (notably of T.S. Eliot) to confront modern man with the awareness of a spiritual void. This

theme has been central to the works of the existentialists. The passages expressing this mood belong to the most poetic parts of the play. For instance, the following from second act, when blind Pozzo is about to leave, Vladimir asks him to let Lucky sing and think once more:

Pozzo. But he is dumb.

Vladimir. Dumb? Since when?

Pozzo. (suddenly furious). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? It's abominable. When? When? One day, isn't that enough for you? One day like any other he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, isn't that good enough for you?

And then, suddenly, comes a reference to the feminine. Pozzo, turning visionary, adds: "They give birth astride of a grave. The light gleams one instant. Then it's night once more."

Towards the end of the play, Vladimir sinks into a reverie in which Pozzo's vision re-emerges with significant additions. He rhetorically asks himself:

Was I sleeping while the other suffered? Am I sleeping now? To-morrow, when I wake or think I do, what shall I say of this day? That with Estragon, my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed with his carrot, and talked to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?... *(Pause)* Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingering-ly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadner. At me, too, someone is looking, of me, too, someone is saying: he is sleeping, he does not know that he is asleep. *(Pause)* I can't go on! *(Pause)* What have I said?

Here, quite clearly, Vladimir becomes aware of two possible ways of existence in this world. One awake. The other in a state of twilight. He further realizes that he cannot go on – with what? With an existence in which womb and tomb seem to fit together like two hemispheres which are moved apart only for a moment to let in a ray of light. However, very significantly, at this very moment of realization, when Vladimir is just about to wake up to the reality of human existence, Godot's boy-messenger appears. His interruption destroys (like the caller on Coleridge destroys his vision of "Kubla Khan") the process that was just about to take place in Vladimir. Here, one of the functions of Godot that becomes clear is that this mysterious figure must keep his dependents unaware, unconscious, or ignorant. Interestingly, Godot's messenger is equally ignorant. He, too, knows nothing about Godot. The reference is obviously to the churchmen who pose as messengers of God, more so the prophets and godmen who proclaim to be so.

Carl Gustav Jung, we may recall here, speaking about God, gives us a thesis that finds its echo in Beckett's portrait of Godot in his play. Jung's thesis is: "The fact of God's 'unconsciousness' throws a peculiar light on the doctrine of salvation. Man is not so much delivered from his sins...as delivered from fear of the consequences of sin...." The hopelessness of Vladimir's situation, after the arrival of the messenger, is as grim as that of Pozzo's vision of life as a flash between the womb and the tomb. His flash of consciousness ends between his question "What have I said?" and his relapse into the reliance upon the arrival of the saviour, Godot. Thus, Godot of Beckett's play remains as mysterious and undefinable as the religions' God is. The similarities between the two figures are obvious enough. In his invisibility, in his unknownability, in his arbitrariness, in his all-powerfulness, Godot is, decidedly, meant to act as God of mankind. Through the relationship between Godot and the creatures in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* the author has depicted not only the history of mankind but also the *condition*

humane. The largest theme for any literary work, more so for a play which perforce has to be of shorter length, is dramatized by Beckett through the simplest of plot, through smallest number of characters, through the simplest form of language.

Like Hemmingway's prose, the beauty of Beckett's style is that the simpler it seems, the subtler it gets. The only difference is that meaning in Beckett's play has to be worked out very much in the manner of a metaphysical conceit, for apparently the comparison, or comparisons, is indirect and intriguing. The play, in the process, gains allegorical dimensions. We do need to look into this aspect of *Waiting for Godot* as well.

21.5 GLOSSARY

Dawdle – To waste time or move slowly.

Clochards – Homeless, destitute people; tramps.

Twilight – A state of uncertainty or inactivity; here, a metaphor for existential limbo.

Inertia – Inactivity; inability to act or change.

Symbiosis – A close and interdependent relationship.

Sado-masochistic – A relationship involving domination and submission, deriving pleasure from pain or control.

Monosyllabic – Using very short, often one-syllable words; curt or minimal speech.

Narcissistic – Self-centered; excessive focus on oneself.

Faceiousness – Treating serious issues with inappropriate humor or flippancy.

Allegorical – Symbolic; representing deeper moral, spiritual, or philosophical meanings.

21.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the synopsis and detailed summary of the play *Waiting for Godot*. The lesson covers all the major aspects of the play and various critical perspectives associated with the play. Further the lesson throws light on the various prospects associated with the identity of Godot.

21.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. As they wait for Godot, what does Vladimir become unsure of?
 - (a) what Godot looks like
 - (b) if they are in the right spot
 - (c) whether Godot actually exists
 - (d) if it is the right day
2. What is the name of the mistreated man who serves Pozzo?
 - (a) Fortunato
 - (b) Bingo
 - (c) Blaze
 - (d) Lucky

3. What does Estragon decide to leave for someone else?
 - (a) his boots
 - (b) his Bible
 - (c) his hat
 - (d) his pipe
4. How does Vladimir wish he and Estragon has committed suicide when they had the chance?
 - (a) jumped from the Eiffel Tower
 - (b) stepped in front of a train
 - (c) taking all the pills in the house
 - (d) hung themselves
5. Where does Pozzo intend to sell his captive?
 - (a) at a farm
 - (b) to a slave ship
 - (c) at the fair
 - (d) in the town square
6. What idea sounds appealing to both Vladimir and Estragon?
 - (a) to part company
 - (b) robbing someone
 - (c) committing suicide
 - (d) to cease waiting
7. What message from Godot does the boy deliver?
 - (a) he has been delayed indefinitely
 - (b) he will not be there this evening, but surely tomorrow
 - (c) he will arrive before nightfall
 - (d) he no longer plans to come
8. What makes Estragon feel unwanted?
 - (a) Vladimir's singing
 - (b) Pozzo's dismissiveness
 - (c) Not having a job
 - (d) Godot's delay
9. What is Vladimir's opinion of people?
 - (a) they are ignorant apes
 - (b) all are touched in the head in the same way

- (c) most are good hearted
- (d) well meaning but misguided

10. Who or what are “clochands”?

- (a) cultured people who have come to hard times
- (b) a type of inedible fruit
- (c) people who are easily duped
- (d) who encampments

Answer Key

- | | | |
|--------|--------|---------|
| 1) (b) | 5) (c) | 9) (a) |
| 2) (d) | 6) (c) | 10) (a) |
| 3) (a) | 7) (b) | |
| 4) (a) | 8) (a) | |

21.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Who is Godot?

2. Explain *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd drama.

3. Explain the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.

4. Discuss the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky from the post-colonial perspective.

5. Estragon repeats “Nothing to be done”. Why?

6. In *Waiting for Godot*, what would Beckett determine is the meaning of human life?

7. Is *Waiting for Godot* a successful and complete play?

21.9 SUGGESTED READING

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. Grove Atlantic, 2011. Ebook.

Pawar, Gautami. *Major Concerns of Selected Absurd Dramas*. Lulu Press, 2018.

“Samuel Beckett + *Waiting for Godot*.” *The Kennedy Center*, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/theater/samuel-beckett--waiting-for-godot/>

“Godot (Character Analysis).” SparkNotes, SparkNotes LLC, www.sparknotes.com/lit/godot/character/godot/

BERTOLT BRECHT
LIFE OF GALILEO

STRUCTURE

- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 22.3 Bertolt Brecht's Life and Works
- 22.4 Glossary
- 22.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 22.7 Suggested Reading

22.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce the learners to Brecht, his life and important works.

22.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the life and works of Bertolt Brecht.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Outline key events in Brecht's life and their impact on his work.
2. Identify the historical and political context in which Brecht wrote.
3. Describe Brecht's contributions to modern theatre, especially Epic Theatre.
4. List major works by Brecht and briefly explain their themes.
5. Explain how Brecht's beliefs influenced his style and purpose as a playwright.

22.3 BERTOLT BRECHT'S LIFE AND WORKS

Bertolt Brecht was born in Ausberg, Germany, near Munich in 1898 to a comfortable middle class family and he enjoyed a fairly normal childhood. His father was a Catholic who worked in a paper factory and his mother was a Protestant. Often sickly and inattentive in school, he found early inspiration in the works of writers such as Villon, Rimbaud and Wedekind and as a result produced a number of poems, songs and play fragments during his youth. During these years he became friends with Casper Neher who later designed many of the stages for Brecht. Later he served as a medical orderly in a German military hospital during the First World War. Then a stint at the University of Munich in 1919 where he wrote his first play *Baal*. He was largely based in Munich till 1924, making important trips to Berlin in between where he came into close contact with Herbert Ihering, a renowned theatre critic and Helene Weigel, a Jewish–Austrian actress whom he later married. During this period he wrote *Drums in the Night* (1919), *In the Jungle of the Cities* (1922) as well as developed material for *A Man's*

A Man (1926). *Drums in the Night* was his first play to be produced on the stage in September 1922 at the Munich Kammerspiele. It was also staged in Berlin in the same year and proved to be a turning point in Brecht's career.

Brecht moved to Berlin in 1924 and stayed there till 1933 during the golden age of the Weimar Republic where his reputation as a playwright reached international fame. The Weimar Republic was the name given to the political society of Germany between the end of World War I (1918) and the rise of Hitler (1933). "The Weimar Republic, similar to the French revolution of the eighteenth century, is both a primer and cautionary tale about a Western, democratic and capitalist culture that extends itself too far and descends into decadence, chaos, hyperinflation, and ultimately totalitarian dictatorship."(xv) It was during this period that Brecht turned politically and intellectually to Marxism and published a ground breaking collection of poems *Hauspostille*. In 1928, he wrote *The Threepenny Opera* which premiered at the Theatre at Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin which became the home theatre of Brecht's theatre collective, The Berliner Ensemble (BE) after World War II. The tremendous success of the play catapulted Brecht to national and international fame. With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 the Weimar Republic disintegrated and Hitler and his Nazis rose to power, with Hitler becoming the Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Brecht, with pronounced Marxist leanings was on the short list of Nazi enemies and fled into exile. In exile Brecht took up residence in various countries; Denmark, 1933-1939; Sweden, 1939-1940; Finland, 1940-1941; and the United States, 1941-1947. Operating without a native language, stage, culture or audience, Brecht nevertheless produced theoretical, theatrical, and poetic work that hugely impacted his later career. It was in 1938-39 with the beginning of World War II with the invasion of Poland by Hitler, Brecht produced his great, mature works- *Galileo*, *Good Person of Szechwan*, *Mother Courage and her Children*, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. After the end of the World War II he stayed in the United States for an additional two years, waiting to see what would the situation be in Germany and whether he would succeed in the American theatre and film industry or not. In October 1947, he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which was investigating Communist and anti-American activity. To the dismay of many, he did not invoke his right to testify, and instead performed an ambivalent piece of political theatre, which in the end left everyone confused. This was his swan song in America and he embarked the following day for Switzerland.

Check Your Progress

1. Bertolt Brecht was born in _____ (country) in 1898.
2. He developed a new form of theatre known as _____ Theatre.
3. Brecht believed that theatre should encourage the audience to _____ critically.
4. One of his famous plays is *The _____ Opera*, written with composer Kurt Weill.
5. Brecht used techniques like direct address and placards to create _____, a distancing effect.

Answer Key

1. Germany
2. Epic
3. think (or reflect)
4. Threepenny
5. Verfremdungseffekt (also accept alienation or distancing effect)

Mother Courage premiered to great applause in Berlin and the publication of *A Short Organum for the Theatre* in January 1949 reintroduced Brecht successfully back into the orbit of the European theatre scene. Germany was now a divided nation, the symbolic centre of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, a situation that would not be resolved till 1990 (when Germany became a unified nation with the fall of the Berlin Wall). Brecht settled in East Berlin, eventually founding his own theatre company, the Berliner Ensemble

in 1949. In the last years of his life he worked to bring all his theatrical work to the postwar audience, and at the same time attempted to negotiate the ambivalence of the Cold war. Beginning in 1954, the BE undertook a series of guest residencies throughout Europe, and it was these tours that thrust the BE and Brecht's theatrical work back into the international scene. He died in August 1956. In the Introduction to the classic Penguin edition of *Life of Galileo* Norman Roessler's opinion is important in the context of Brecht's oeuvre.

Over the last fifty years, Brecht has continued to play the Socratic gadfly, fascinating and irritating us at the same time. Epic theater, alienation effects, *gestus*, anti-Aristotelian, mimesis, empathy, illusion, psychological / social, dissonance- all these terms (and more) comprise the aesthetic philosophy of Brecht... the Dialectical theatre in short- a term Brecht used more and more at the end of his career. In short, dialectical theatre resists absolutes, essentials, and identifications, and instead seeks out contradictions, diversities, and multiplicities. Nothing is eternal, all is fluid, and so, ultimately, all is changeable. In dialectical theatre, the writer, actor and spectator are consciously and cognitively involved in the performance they are collectively creating. This position stands in contrast to the main tradition of Western performance, what Brecht referred to as the Aristotelian tradition, in which one is asked to identify, empathize, and lose oneself to the illusion and mystery of the performance. In his theatrical works, especially his theoretical writings, Brecht explored this idea of dialectical theatre... Brecht left behind extensive aesthetic writings, contained in seven volumes in the standard edition of his complete works in German, yet these writings do not form a systematic, or even consistent expression of an aesthetic theory. What Brecht gives us in his theoretical and theatrical writings are political and aesthetic puzzles, which are meant to stimulate awareness and critical thinking, and which Brecht believed were necessary and pleasurable endeavors within the human condition.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, as the terrible landmarks of the previous century (holocaust, world wars, the nuclear age) lose their immediacy and power, and the new century brings new monuments to our world (9/11, Ethnic cleansing, global warming), we find Brecht, who seemed so absolutely determined by the twentieth century and hence rendered null and void by the end, to be even more relevant. For Brecht, although a product of the "dark times" of the twentieth century, nevertheless was not imprisoned by the era that he lived in. Brecht mediated his times through the grander lens of western history, philosophy, and aesthetics; hence Brecht provides not just a conversation with the twentieth century, but a dialogue that reaches back through Nietzsche, Ibsen, Marx, Shakespeare, Aristotle, Sophocles, and Socrates and forward to our current postmodern epoch. Moreover it is not a simple conversation Brecht provides, but rather an elegant puzzle that includes the constant sting of the irritating gadfly.

22.4 GLOSSARY

Oeuvre – The complete works of an artist, writer, or composer.

Stint – A short period of time spent doing something.

Golden Age – A period of great achievement, prosperity, or cultural development.

Dialectical – Involving dialogue or reasoning through contradictions to reach a higher understanding.

Gadfly – A person who provokes or challenges others to stimulate thought or action.

Ostensibly – Apparently or seeming to be true, but not necessarily so.

Mimesis – Imitation or representation of reality in art or literature.

Inviolability – The quality of being secure from violation or infringement.

Epoch – A significant period in history or a person's life.

Ennui – A feeling of boredom, dissatisfaction, or listlessness.

22.5 LET US SUM UP

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was a German playwright, director, and poet who played a significant role in the development of modern theater. Born in Augsburg, Germany, Brecht’s works, such as *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, are characterized by his distinct style of epic theater, marked by political themes and audience engagement. Exiled during the Nazi era, Brecht’s innovative approach to drama and his commitment to Marxist ideals left a lasting impact on theater and literature worldwide. His theories, outlined in works like “The Epic Theatre,” continue to influence contemporary performance arts.

22.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Where was Bertolt Brecht born?
 - A. Berlin, Germany
 - B. Vienna, Austria
 - C. Augsburg, Germany
 - D. Prague, Czech Republic
2. During which historical period did Bertolt Brecht go into exile due to his opposition to the Nazi regime?
 - A. World War I
 - B. Interwar Period
 - C. World War II
 - D. Cold War Era
3. What was the genre/style of theater associated with Bertolt Brecht’s innovative techniques, emphasizing social and political critique?
 - A. Romantic Drama
 - B. Realist Theater
 - C. Epic Theater
 - D. Absurdist Drama

Answers: 1c, 2c, 3c.

22.7 SUGGESTED READING

Parker, Stephen. *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. Ebook.

Glahn, Philip. *Critical Lives: Bertolt Brecht*. Reaktion Books, 2014. Ebook.

“Revision 1.” *BBC Bitesize*, BBC, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwmvd2p/revision/1

Brand, Gerhard. “Bertolt Brecht.” *EBSCO Research Starters*, 2021, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/bertolt-brecht

BERTOLT BRECHT
LIFE OF GALILEO

STRUCTURE

- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 23.3 The Theme of the Play
- 23.4 Glossary
- 23.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 23.7 Suggested Reading

23.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce the learners with thematic concerns of the play *Life of Galileo*.

23.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with various themes of *Life of Galileo*.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify key themes in *Life of Galileo*, such as conflict between science and authority.
2. Explain how Brecht presents the struggle between truth and power.
3. Analyze Galileo's moral dilemma and the theme of responsibility in science.
4. Discuss the impact of censorship, dogma, and intellectual freedom.
5. Relate the play's themes to contemporary issues in science and society.

23.3 THE THEME OF THE PLAY

Galileo was born into an era of great cultural ferment, scientific discoveries, religious upheavals and discovery of new lands. It was a period of the zenith of the Italian Renaissance- which was a revival of the classical art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance literally meaning rebirth saw a reintroduction of classical art following the 'dark ages' of the medieval period. The Renaissance saw a revolution in the sciences, medicine, philosophy and geography. The Renaissance produced some of the greatest works of art, Italy being the vibrant centre of the revival. It was home to the greatest of the geniuses of the humanist spirit- Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Petrarch and many more.

The Reformation- Martin Luther King (1483-1546) and later John Calvin (1509-69) had already led a movement to purge the Church of its corrupt and unchristian practices. Luther King, a former monk, attacked Catholicism for having become too worldly and the clergy for having slipped into moral decadence and for obscuring the tenets of Christianity with Paganism. Also the individual's experience of faith and God became more important than the ritual of the church or the role of the clergy.

The New World- Ferdinand Magellan by circumnavigating the globe had proved that the earth was round and not square with precipice on its edge as thought earlier and Christopher Columbus' discovery of America had ushered in a new era of movement of people across the Atlantic. Inveterate travellers sent back reports of new sights they saw, the new continents they discovered, and new cultures they came across. Europe's idea of the world changed dramatically as it came in contact with new worlds and new ways of thinking. Also more commercial transactions and trade overseas began.

The New Science- In 1543, Copernicus argued that the universe was heliocentric with the sun at the centre of the universe as opposed to the Ptolemaic theory which supported a geocentric universe, a theory endorsed by the church. This meant that the earth was not the most important sphere in the universe. Discoveries of new heavenly bodies and their motions upset the established thinking of the crystal spheres as given by Aristotle. Francis Bacon encouraged empirical research while Rene Descartes explored the forms and processes of human thinking. The discovery of the circulation of blood by William Harvey and more detailed dissections revealed new truths about human anatomy.

Quest for knowledge- Reading ancient Greek and Latin texts, scholars of this period began to think extensively about human nature and what we now know as 'The Humanities' emerged during the Renaissance in man's quest for more knowledge about the human mind and the way we think. Thinkers developed theories in philosophy, psychology and medicine to define the meaning of being 'Human'. Love for art and its aesthetics was seen as the highest expression of culture and civilization. The invention of printing made books easier to circulate thus leading to a more enlightened people.

The Counter Reformation- In response to the Reformation, the Catholic counter reformation, called into being by the Council of Trent, Emphasizes orthodoxy and fidelity to the true church. A new religious order, called the Jesuits or the Society of Jesus arose to act upon these principles, and stood at the vanguard of the battle with what they considered as Protestant heresy. The Counter Reformation reinvigorated the Church and incited a great wave of theological and religious energy. The Popes became more powerful and influential: not just as leaders of the Roman Catholic Church but also as secular leaders, controlling much of central Italy around their seat in Rome. The Renaissance Popes, a colourful group, presided over an era of corruption and worldliness within the Church and put an end to the liberality and leniency of the Renaissance; its emphasis on religious orthodoxy, rigidly enforced by the Inquisition engendered a clash between the Church and the emerging scientific and astronomical revolution.

Galileo, with his telescope and study of astronomy figured at the centre of this clash. The play sketches episodes from the life of Galileo Galilei (1564- 1642) from 1609 on through to 1637. "Standard Western history presents Galileo as the quintessential Renaissance figure (born in the same year as Shakespeare) and the Father of Modern Science who risked life and career to stand up to the political authority of the day and usher in the Scientific Revolution." (*Life of Galileo*-Ed. Richard Foreman). The opening scene shows Galileo in Padua in the Republic of Venice, where he earns a meagre living through his teaching obligations and devotes most of his time to research corroborating Copernicus' theory of the heliocentric universe through his observations of the celestial bodies using a newly made telescope. In 1619 he publishes his findings in *The Starry Messenger*. *The Starry Messenger* would confirm in concise, accessible, scientific form Copernicus' theory given in 'On the Revolutions

of the Celestial Spheres' of a heliocentric rather than a geocentric universe, the latter of which was supported by the authority of Aristotle and Ptolemy and the Roman Catholic Church. Brecht traces Galileo's career from this groundbreaking moment through his arguments with the mathematicians and philosophers in Florence trying to convince them with arguments based on reason and precise mathematical observations done by him. Asked to devote his time to less dangerous endeavours by the papal authorities he keeps silent for eight years. "The papal authorities accepted the heliocentric model, but asserted that the Church had the power of when and how to disseminate this knowledge to the broader public, and hence counselled Galileo to continue his work but keep his ideas to himself." When he learns in 1623 that the new Pope is now Cardinal Barberini, a mathematician who had supported his theory earlier he believes that more enlightened times have returned and he resumes his astronomical research into the forbidden area of sun spots. During the next decade his doctrine spreads among the common people undermining the earlier belief systems and faith. In 1632, with official papal sanction he publishes his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*; yet the reception of the text leads to a heresy trial in 1633, and he is forced by the Inquisition to recant his findings. The final scene shows an embittered half blind Galileo under house arrest closely supervised by the Inquisition and cared for by his unmarried daughter Virginia, who once engaged to be married to Ludovico, suffers a broken engagement because of Galileo's heretical discoveries. His former disciple Andrea, disillusioned by what he believes to be Galileo's betrayal of science, visits him and on finding that Galileo has secretly written the *Discorsi*, praises him recanting for the sake of science. But Galileo mercilessly condemns himself confessing that he recanted because he was afraid of physical torture and he could have played his role as a true scientist by facing the punishment. The play ends on a positive note as Andrea crosses the border into a more liberal Holland with the *Discorsi* safe with him.

The central theme of the play is not only the historical Galileo but the rational man and his new ideas and the cultural, political and social challenges they presented to the dominant authorities and what eventually led history to call it 'The Galileo affair.' The play can be analysed on three levels: 1) Conflict between faith and reason. 2) The socio-political considerations. 3) Its significance in Brecht's time.

1. Conflict between Faith and Reason—Brecht's Galileo dramatizes the warfare between faith and scepticism born out of reason. Faith is the foundation of religion while doubt is considered the gateway to scientific truth. But theologians and thinkers of Galileo's time believed that the ultimate way to truth was through faith. But Galileo found a new way to truth- through the way of doubt and skepticism. He gave birth to a rational, experimental and inductive method of making an inquiry and to prove through rigorous investigations and observations the ultimate way to scientific truth. The telescope helped him to corroborate what Copernicus had said that the universe was heliocentric and not geocentric. Aristotle, Ptolemy and champions of the Biblical faith had long believed that the universe was perfect and spotless and man was the centre of all creation. Galileo sought to give an explanation of the limitations of the Ptolemaic- Aristotelian- Christian world view. Ptolemy had worked out a geocentric system of brilliant geometric precision- but his system of interlocking orbits grew more complex and confused as astronomers strained to make their more modern observations fit into a mistaken theory and in the 16th century the theory began to fall under attack. The first to question it was Nicholas Copernicus, a Polish astronomer, whose work 'On the Revolution of the Heavenly Orbs' (published after his death in 1543) proposed a heliocentric universe, in which the planets, including the Earth- orbited the sun (Helios). This more mathematically satisfying way of explaining the solar system did not gain many supporters because the available data could not wholly disprove the Ptolemaic system. But by the end of the 16th century astronomers like Johannes Kepler had begun to embrace it and once Galileo began to observe the celestial bodies through his telescope the Ptolemaic system was severely undermined. In the play in scene one an excited Galileo tells Andrea his apprentice disciple, "For two thousand years people have believed that the sun and all the stars of heaven rotate around mankind. Pope, cardinals, princes, professors, captains, merchants, fishwives and school-kids thought they were sitting motionless inside this crystal sphere. But now we are breaking out of it, Andrea, at full speed. Because the old days are over and this is a new time.... Our cities are cramped, and so are men's minds." He further states that "what is written in the old books

is no longer good enough ... because a vast desire has sprung up in man to know the reasons for everything-why a stone falls when you let it go and why it rises when you toss it up.” In scene three the caption reads: 10 January 1610. Using the telescope, Galileo discovers celestial phenomena that confirm the Copernican system. Warned by his friend of possible consequences of his research, Galileo proclaims his belief in human reason.

January ten, sixteen ten

Galileo Galilei abolishes heaven.

Sagredo: Ten years ago in Rome they burnt a man at the stake for that. His name was Giordano Bruno, and that is what he said.

Galileo: “Exactly. And that is what we can see. Keep your eye glued to the telescope. Sagredo, my friend. What you are seeing is the fact that there is no difference between heaven and earth. Today on 10th January 1610. Today mankind can write in its diary: got rid of Heaven.” (22)

On witnessing the moons of Jupiter Galileo concludes that Jupiter is not attached to some crystal sphere as supposed by Aristotle.

“Sagredo: What about the crystal sphere Jupiter is attached to?

Galileo: Yes, where has it got to? How can Jupiter be attached if other stars circle around it? It’s not some kind of prop in the sky, some base in the universe. It’s another sun.”(25)

In the Court of Florence Galileo puts forth his theory before Cosimo, the Grand Duke of Florence and other theologians and mathematicians:

“Galileo: As your highness no doubt realises, we astronomers have been running into great difficulties in our calculations for some while. We have been using a very ancient system which is apparently consistent with our philosophy but not, alas, with the facts.” Galileo then explains how the planets and stars perform certain motions that cannot be explained by the Ptolemaic system. The philosopher sitting there argues that “the universe of the divine Aristotle, with the mystical music of its spheres and its crystal vaults, the orbits of its heavenly bodies, the slanting angle of the sun’s course, the secrets of the moon’s tables, the starry richness catalogued in the southern hemisphere and the transparent structure of the celestial globe add up to an edifice of such exquisite proportions that we should think twice before disrupting its harmony. “(p.37) When Galileo says that “To believe in the authority of Aristotle is one thing, tangible facts are another.” The philosopher’s rejoinder is: ‘Philosopher (grandly): If Aristotle is going to be dragged in the mud-that’s to say an authority recognized not only by every classical scientist but also by the chief fathers of the church- then any prolonging of this discussion is in my view a waste of time. I have no use for discussions which are not objective. Basta.(Brecht’s use of dramatic irony is manifest in the use of the word ‘objective’. It is the philosopher who is not open to new ideas but biased in his favour of Aristotle).

Galileo: Truth is born of the times, not of authority...”

Even when the Collegium Romanum has approved of his observations The Holy Congregation does not bother to go into the details of Galileo’s findings. He is given the liberty to take his research further and treat the doctrines in question mathematically in the form of a hypothesis because in the words of Bellarmine, “Science is the rightful and much-loved daughter of the Church, Mr. Galilei. None of us seriously believes that you want to shake men’s faith in the Church.” but Galileo believes otherwise. When in an experiment he puts a needle on paper and instead of sinking it floats his friend and lens grinder, Federzoni is wonder struck.

“Federzoni: The needle’s floating, Holy Aristotle, they never checked up on him!

Galileo: One of the main reasons why the sciences are so poor is that they imagine they are so rich. It isn't their job to throw open the door to infinite wisdom but to put a limit to infinite error. Make your notes."(71)

These new truths, radically different from the conventional truths established by theologians and traditional Christian astronomers came as an iconoclastic blow because Galileo declared that reason and scepticism rather than faith could lead mankind to better destinations. The Christian Inquisition felt Galileo's claim to be a painful insult to the stronghold of Christian dogma. They could not accept a scientific assault on its own theories of the universe. The pressures of the age set in motion the historic confrontation between science and religion, which culminated in the disastrous trial of Galileo in 1633. His recantation brought an unprecedented halt to the progress of science but reason did not die and scepticism and the spirit of scientific inquiry could not be eliminated.

In the words of John Willett "first of all this (the play) is not only a hymn to reason, but one that centres specifically on the need to be sceptical, no doubt. The theme is one that recurs in others of Brecht's writings of the later 1930's – for instance the poems "The Doubter" and "In Praise of Doubt"... the notion of Brecht that doubt and even self-doubt can be highly productive- that "disbelief can move mountains " as he later put it in the Short Organum-is deeply engrained in the play..." Galileo's theory of Reason is reflected in the strong enlightenment metaphors and the light/darkness dichotomy throughout the play. One has to do with 'seeing' in the sense of understanding, in contrast to mindless' staring. Mindless seeing is illustrated by the scientists in this Aristotelian tradition, who refuse to look through Galileo's telescope for fear of upsetting their own doctrines so firmly ingrained. Such an attitude is representative of the old order and blind belief; and it stands in opposition to unbiased observation and fruitful doubt. To the wondering remarks of some philosophers and mathematicians where all this might be leading, Galileo's rejoinder is "Jupiter's moons may not bring down the price of milk. But they have never been seen before, and yet all the same they exist. From this the man on the street can conclude that a lot else might exist if only he opened his eyes..."

Does Brecht portray Galileo as a pragmatic rationalist or a coward? – After the first world premiere of the play at Zurich Schauspielhaus, played soberly by Leonard Steckel, one critic called the play "a Lehrstück or a play for reading" because of its lack of dramatic effect. What is not clear is whether Galileo recanted out of cowardice or as part of a deliberate plan to complete his life's work on behalf of human reason and smuggle it out to the free world. This ambiguity was part of the first version of the play, where Galileo has already been conspiring with the stove-fitter to send his manuscript abroad in the penultimate scene even before Andrea appears. It was only in the spring of 1944 that it again underwent a re-consideration by Brecht. He noted in his diary; ' Just because I was trying to follow the historical story, without being morally concerned, a moral content emerged and I'm not happy about it.g. can no more resist stating the truth than eating an appetising dish; to him it's a matter of sensual enjoyment, and he constructs his own personality as wisely and passionately as does his image of the world. actually he fails twice. The first time is when he suppresses or recants the truth because he is in mortal danger, the second when despite the moral danger he once again seeks out the truth and disseminates it. he is destroyed by his own productivity. and it upsets me to be told that I approve of his publicly recanting so as to be able to carry on his work in secret. that's too banal and too cheap....g. threw all real progress to the wolves when he recanted."(xxxii) Brecht himself had underlined two points in connection with the play.

Check Your Progress

1. The play explores the conflict between _____ and religious dogma.
2. Galileo is forced to _____ his scientific beliefs under pressure from the Church.
3. A major theme is the responsibility of the _____ to use knowledge wisely.
4. Brecht uses Galileo's story to criticize the suppression of _____.
5. The play questions whether truth should be compromised for personal _____.

Answer Key

1. science
2. recant
3. scientist
4. free thought (also accept truth or reason)
5. safety (also accept comfort or gain, depending on interpretation)

2. The Socio political considerations- Some critics are of the opinion that Brecht, though he adheres closely to the biographical facts and the general course of the events covered in the years 1609 to 1637, he deliberately attributes some motivations and beliefs to his main characters as unhistorical and draws an anachronistic picture of Italian society of the 17th century. In scene six the very old Cardinal (a character in the play) is of the opinion that 'this Mr Galilei moves mankind away from the centre of the universe and dumps it somewhere on the edge. Clearly this makes him an enemy of the human race. We must treat him as such. Mankind is the crown of creation, as every child knows, God's highest and dearest creature...' Galileo has proved that the earth is just another star and man is not the centre of the universe as supposed. The truth of the Copernican system means not only an astronomical but also a social revolution. In the traditional belief the Pope was the fixed centre of the social hierarchy, now everybody is of equal importance ...and the earth is rolling cheerfully around the sun, and the fishwives, merchants, princes, cardinals and even The Pope are rolling with it. The universe has lost its centre overnight, and woken up to find it has countless centres, so that each one can now be seen as the centre, or none at all.' This has also metaphysical consequences, since the revaluation of the individual causes a devaluation of God's authority... when his friend Sagredo asks him where God's place might be in this new solar system, Galileo's answer is : "within ourselves and nowhere." In scene ten too the ballad singer sings during the carnival procession:

Up stood the learned Galilei

(Chucked away the Bible, whipped out his telescope, took a quick look at the universe.)

And told the sun 'stop there. From now the whole creation dei Will turn as I think fair

The boss starts turning from today His servants stand and stare'

Galileo's truths have subverted the old social order and the idea of a gentle Jesus. Doing as Jesus bid to turn the other cheek to your enemy for a blow will not help now because:

"Obedience isn't going to cure your woe

So each of you wake up, and do just as he pleases!" (81)

Galileo earns a new sobriquet- Galileo Galilei, The bible-buster! In scene eight Galileo's conversation with the little Monk is very interesting. The Monk highlights the plight and everyday struggles of the common man but says that even their misfortunes imply a certain order...His parents can bear the toils because 'They have been assured that God's eye is always on them- probingly , even anxiously-: that the whole drama of the

world is constructed around them so that they, the performers may prove themselves in their greater or lesser roles...”(62) He further asks, “what would my people say if I told them that they happen to be on a small knob of stone twisting endlessly through the void round a second- rate star, just one among myriads?”(62) And Galileo retorts, “Why does order in this country mean the orderliness of a bare cupboard, and necessity nothing but the need to work oneself to death? When there are teeming vineyards and cornfields on every side? Your Campagna Peasants are paying for the wars which the representative of gentle Jesus is waging in Germany and Spain..... If your people were happy and prosperous they could develop the virtues of happiness and prosperity. At present the virtues of exhaustion derive from exhausted fields, and I reject them. Sir, my new pumps will perform more miracles in that direction than all your ridiculous superhuman slaving...” (63) Galileo very clearly shows that the categorical opposition of the popes and the feudal classes to change is motivated by their interest in maintaining the privileges of the ruling class. One way to maintain the status quo is to keep the masses in a perpetual state of fear and ignorance. Galileo’s work has brought him into daily contact with the draughtsmen, instrument makers, lens grinders who are open to new ideas and use their common sense. And accept new approaches. It is only the bigoted clergy and the ruling class –people like Ludovico- who are not willing to accept new ideas. “In Galileo’s opinion, however, the evils not teleological, but arbitrary and man- made. It could be easily eliminated if the social hierarchy were changed and the scientific inventions applied to the benefit of all rather than being exploited by a select few. The Church, as a paradigm of secular power, is quite aware of the explosive social implications. It successfully prevents the potential consequences of Copernicus’ writings by first placing them on the index of forbidden books, then by forcing Galileo to recant his confirming scientific observations.” (Gaby Divay)

The Inquisitor convinces the Pope cleverly of Galileo’s responsibility in the development of social awareness because he writes in the language of the vernacular. “The people doubt everything... They start by wondering if the Sun stood still over Gideon, then extend their filthy scepticism to the offertory box... (He is afraid of losing the earnings through the offertory) with machines they hope to work miracles...The abolition of top and bottom, for one. They are needed no longer. Aristotle, whom they otherwise regard as a dead dog, has said- and they quote this- that once the shuttle weaves by itself, masters would need no apprentice and the lords no servants. And they think they are already there. This evil man knows what he is up to when he writes his astronomical works not in Latin but in the idiom of Fishwives and wool merchants.”(88) He thus shows why it is necessary for Galileo to recant publicly. Galileo’s recantation is in Federzoni’s words ‘as if night fell again in the morning’ ; however in Galileo’s final encounter with Andrea in the last scene there is a prospect of light, in Virginia’s words, which allow hope for better times.

3. Relevance of the play in modern times- in the Introduction of the play *Life of Galileo* (Penguin Classics) John Willett and Ralph Manheim thus opine, “Not just one, but three crucial moments of our recent history helped to give it its multiple relevance to our time: Hitler’s triumphs in 1938, the dropping of the first nuclear bomb in 1945, the death of Stalin in 1953. Each found Brecht writing or rewriting his play. Brecht all along was writing about attitudes which he could understand and even sympathise with; it is a play which contains very little element of caricature. This does not turn his Galileo into the self- portrait it is sometimes alleged to be particularly by those who wish to present Brecht as a ‘survivor’ ... Nor does it bear out the late Issac Deutscher’s interpretation of the first version as an apologia for those who, like Brecht himself, supported Stalin whilst disliking many aspects of his regime. ... What matters here is the overlaying of the original message, about the need at all costs to establish and communicate the truth in defiance of authority. ..By turning it back, finally into something on the meditation on the notion of a ‘new time,’ Brecht reemphasised another general theme of particular significance to himself. Between 1929 and 1933, the German Communists thought that the Revolution was around the corner, and men like Brecht were stimulated much as he describes in his Foreword – The new age- that is something and is something that affects everything, leaves nothing unchanged... Glorious is the feeling of beginning, of pioneering; the fact of being a beginner inspires enthusiasm....At the end of 1930, however, he wrote “Terrible is the disappointment, says Brecht in the Foreword, when the new time fails to arrive and old times prove stronger

than anyone thought. For what had actually arrived was the ‘dark times and the confused notion of the old and the new.’ And in this hope he was determined to hold on to his old belief in the New, writing to Karin Michaelis in March 1942, when the war was still going Hitler’s way, that ‘the time we live is an excellent time for fighters. Was there ever a time when Reason had such a chance?’ It sums up Galileo’s opening aria ‘Reason is not coming to an end but beginning.’ (First version of the play). The first version of the play is about science and political repression, progress and retardation. The overall tone is optimistic. Galileo’s case is proof that progress cannot be upheld, that it can be only temporarily suppressed. Galileo’s final monologue reinforces the progress optimism and stresses science’s beneficial contributions to mankind, “I still believe that this is a new age. It may look like a blood stained harridan, but if so, that must be the way new ages look.” The second version of the play put together in 1944-45 was a joint effort with Charles Laughton. This is what Brecht wrote: “The atomic age made its debut at Hiroshima in the middle of our work. Overnight the biography of the founder of the new system of physics read differently. The infernal effect of the great bomb placed the conflict between Galileo and the authorities of his day in a new, sharper light. We had to make only a few alterations- not a single one to the structure of the play.” All changes made endeavour to place the scientist’s responsibility concerning his inventions and their application to the better or worse of mankind into the centre. Now it is not the conflict between the progressive and reactionary forces, but the question of the annihilation or existence of mankind that dominates the final scene. The third version of 1953 was spurred by the atomic escalation and Brecht’s increasing concern of its possible misuse. The development of the hydrogen bomb and the Korean war led Brecht to make more revisions to the play where the theme of ‘responsible science ‘ as opposed to ‘pure science’ is further strengthened by the following important addition to Galileo’s dialogue. “As a scientist I had a unique opportunity. In my day astronomy emerged into the market place. Given this unique situation, if one man had put up a fight, it might have had tremendous repercussions. Had I stood firm, the scientists could have developed something like the doctors’ Hippocratic Oath, a vow to use their knowledge exclusively for mankind’s benefit. As things are, the best that can be hoped for is a race of inventive dwarfs who can be hired for any purpose... I handed my knowledge to those in power for them to use, fail to use, misuse... whatever best suited their objectives.”

4. The Recantation appears now in an entirely negative light and stresses Galileo’s betrayal not only of science but also of a scientist’s social commitments: It is the beginning of separating science from its responsible applications. Brecht illustrates this danger in a draft for a preface to the play: “The bourgeois single out science from the scientist’s consciousness, setting it up as an island of independence, so as to be able in practice to interweave it with their politics, their economics, their ideology. The research scientist’s objective is “pure” research; the product of that research is not so pure. The formula $e=mc^2$ is conceived of as eternal, not tied down to anything. Hence other people can do the tying down, and suddenly the city of Hiroshima has become very short- lived. The scientists are claiming the irresponsibility of machines.” The dilemma and the debate still goes on.

23.4 GLOSSARY

- Ferment – A state of agitation, excitement, or intense activity.
- Zenith – The highest point or peak.
- Upheaval – A sudden, violent, or significant change or disruption.
- Inveterate – Long-established; habitual.
- Heliocentric – A model of the solar system with the sun at the center.
- Geocentric – A model of the universe with the earth at the center.
- Iconoclastic – Challenging or overturning established beliefs or traditions.
- Recant – To formally withdraw or renounce a belief or statement.
- Anachronistic – Belonging to a different time period; outdated.
- Paradigm – A typical example, model, or pattern of something.

23.5 LET US SUM UP

Life of Galileo explores the tension between scientific discovery and established religious and societal beliefs, illustrating the conflict between reason and traditional authority. The play delves into the ethical implications of scientific knowledge, raising questions about the responsible use of information and the consequences of progress. Galileo's choices and compromises underscore the theme of social responsibility, emphasizing the impact of scientific endeavors on society and the moral choices individuals make. The narrative also addresses power dynamics, portraying how political and religious authorities control knowledge and how individuals navigate these structures

23.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary theme explored in *Life of Galileo*?
 - A. Romantic Love
 - B. Scientific Inquiry
 - C. Political Intrigue
 - D. Supernatural Forces
2. What historical figure is the central character in the play?
 - A. Leonardo da Vinci
 - B. Galileo Galilei
 - C. Isaac Newton
 - D. Johannes Kepler
3. In *Life of Galileo*, what does Galileo's telescope represent symbolically?
 - A. Spiritual Enlightenment
 - B. Scientific Progress
 - C. Political Authority
 - D. Superstition
4. What is the main conflict in the play?
 - A. Love vs. Duty
 - B. Science vs. Religion
 - C. Individual vs. Society
 - D. War vs. Peace
5. What ethical theme is explored in *Life of Galileo* regarding the use of scientific knowledge?
 - A. Exploration of Nature
 - B. Responsibility of Knowledge
 - C. Pursuit of Fame
 - D. Consequences of Curiosity

Answer: 1b, 2b, 3b, 4 b, 4b

23.7 SUGGESTED READING

McNeill, Dougal. *The Many Lives of Galileo: Brecht, Theatre, and Translation's Political Unconscious*. Peter Lang, 2005.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Life of Galileo*. Translated by John Willett, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. Ebook.

Chemmanam, Mariam Roy. "A Critical Analysis of 'Life of Galileo'." *Medium*, 16 May 2021, [mariamroy.medium.com/a-critical-analysis-of-life-of-galileo-df25019d050d](https://www.medium.com/a-critical-analysis-of-life-of-galileo-df25019d050d)

BERTOLT BRECHT
LIFE OF GALILEO

STRUCTURE

- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 24.3 The Structure of the Play
- 24.4 Glossary
- 24.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 24.7 Suggested Reading

24.1 INTRODUCTION

Life of Galileo is based on the life of Galileo Galilei. This lesson will introduce the learners to the adaption of Galileo's life in fiction.

24.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUCTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the structure of the play.

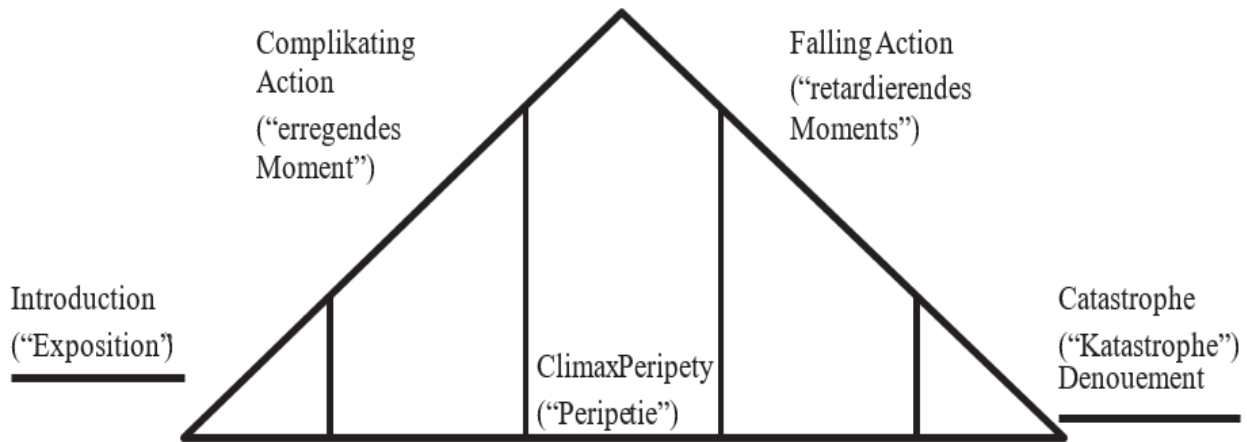
By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the episodic structure of *Life of Galileo*.
2. Identify key dramatic techniques used by Brecht, such as alienation and narration.
3. Explain how the structure supports Brecht's goal of encouraging critical thinking.
4. Analyze the use of songs, placards, and projections in shaping audience response.
5. Evaluate how Brecht's techniques differ from traditional Aristotelian drama.

24.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Life of Galileo by Brecht is based on the real life of the seventeenth century astronomer and physicist Galileo Galilei. The play is not in the classical tradition because it does not follow any conventional norms. Brecht's theory of theatre is known as the 'Epic Theatre' which is an anti-illusionist theatre that runs counter to the classical Aristotelian 'Theatre of Illusion'. Older plays traditionally aimed at conveying a sense of cohesiveness and unity and one of the classical poetic laws to achieve this cohesiveness was through the three unities: unity of time, unity of plot or action and unity of place. In the Aristotelian concept the unities meant that a play should have only one single plot line, ought to take place in a single locale and within one day (one revolution of the sun). The idea behind the concept was to make a plot more plausible and to support Aristotle's concept of 'Mimesis'

i.e the attempt to imitate or reflect life as authentically as possible. This mimetic effect would make an audience succumb easily to the illusion of the play as reality or at least something that could occur ‘like this in real life’. This Classical concept was explained by the German writer Gustav Freytag in his book ‘Die Technik des Dramas’(Technique of the Drama 1863), wherein he describes the classical five act structure in the shape of a pyramid, attributing a particular function to each of the five acts. Freytag’s pyramid can be illustrated as follows:



Act I contains all introductory information and thus serve as ‘Exposition’. The main characters are introduced and by presenting a conflict the play prepares the audience for the action in subsequent acts. The II act usually propels the plot by introducing further circumstances or problems related to the main issue. The main conflict starts to develop and the characters are presented in greater detail. In act III the plot reaches its climax. A crisis occurs where the deed is committed that will lead to the catastrophe, and this brings about a turn (peripety) in the plot. The IV act creates new tension in that it delays the final catastrophe by further events. The V act finally offers a solution to the conflict presented in the play. While tragedies end in a catastrophe, usually the death of the protagonist, comedies are simply resolved, traditionally in a wedding or another type of festivity. A term that is applicable to both types of ending is the French’ denouement. Prior to this Goethe and Schiller had jointly presented this point of view in an essay ‘On Epic and Dramatic Poetry’. Goethe and Schiller said that the epic poet presents the event as totally past while the dramatic poet presents it as totally present. The epic poet relates what has occurred in calm contemplation. The actor, on the other hand, represents himself as a definite individual and the spectators participate in his action, partake of vicariously of the sufferings of his soul and his body, share his vicissitudes and forget their own personalities for a while. So involved is he in the action that his imagination gets silenced and he is not allowed to rise to thoughtful contemplation. It was against this theory that Brecht offered his counter theory. Brecht found the drama of illusion with its catharsis through pity and terror, abhorrent and fraudulent. He, the rationalist, demanded a theatre of critical thoughtfulness. Catharsis, Brecht argued, would purge the audience of its emotions but it would leave the theatre uninstructed and unimproved. The audience, according to him should not be made to feel emotions; it should be made to think. But the audience cannot think because of its emotional involvement with the actors on stage. “At the centre of Brecht’s poetics is the idea of alienating the audience from the actors presented on stage in order to impede people’s emotional involvement in and identification with the characters and conflicts of the story (alienation effect or estrangement effect).

Instead, spectators are expected to gain a critical distance and thus be able to judge rationally what is presented to them.”(Stephanie Lethbridge and Jarmila Mildore). This estrangement or ‘Verfremdung’ emphasises reason and objectivity rather than emotion. This effect aims at making something strange, foreign, alienated, distant from us and the present moment; therefore the epic theatre is strictly historical- it constantly reminds the audience that it is merely getting a report of past events. Brecht’s epic theatre was also an antithesis of Stanislavsky’s

Realism and also Expressionism. Brecht believed that both these concepts in theatre were incapable of exposing human nature and thus incapable of provoking any change in society. Brecht's intention was to make the audience ruminate over, with critical detachment, the moral dilemmas presented before them. The opposite of identification would be the maintenance of a separate existence by being kept apart, alien and detached from the illusion on stage.

Plot- *Life of Galileo* is a montage of independent incidents. It moves from scene to scene by curves and jumps. There is a sudden shift in scenes. Scene one starts in 1609 in Padua; then there is a gap of one year and Scene Three starts in 1610; Scene Six starts in 1616 after a lapse of six years. Eight years have passed by Scene Nine where Galileo is kept silent for eight years, Scene Eleven starts in 1633 and it is followed by Scene Fourteen after a period of nine years in 1642. Scene Fifteen uses the technique of flashback (analepsis) which opens in 1637 where an embittered Galileo half-blind mercilessly condemns himself for betraying science. The sudden shift in scenes also brings out the human relations and social settings and social order of the time. For instance, in scene Four Galileo is seen explaining his discovery of the motion of planetary bodies and in the next scene we find him concerned about the safety of his daughter Virginia and his housekeeper Mrs. Sarti because there is an outbreak of plague in the city. The individual episodes are loosely knit and despite the gaps in years there is an underlying unity by means of the repetition of the theme, settings and motifs. Brecht tells in advance how the play will end through the caption in the beginning of each scene, thus freeing the mind of the audience from the distraction of suspense.

Characters- Brecht's characters are morally divided beings neither heroes nor villains but anti-heroes; we condemn them even as we approve of them. The characters are too complex to be wholly admired or wholly blamed. They cannot be categorised as black or white but rather have a greyness that is typically Brechtian. In the epic theatre there is no attempt to create fixed, highly individualized dramatic characters. Neither is their weaknesses projected as the tragic flaw or Aristotle's 'hamartia' which leads to the catastrophic downfall of the tragic hero. Rather the character emerges from the social function of the individual and the specific set of circumstances in which they are placed. Brecht's Galileo is condemned for he betrays the tenets of science by recanting what he has established as scientific truth. In scene Thirteen we find Virginia praying that her father would recant before the Inquisition because she does not want her father to die the way Bruno did but an exultant Andrea and Federzoni embrace each other when the bell that was supposed to have proclaimed Galileo's recantation does not toll on the stipulated time.

“Andrea: He's holding out.

The Little Monk: He's not recanting. Federzoni: No. Oh, how marvellous for us! They embrace. They are ecstatically happy.

Andrea: So force won't do the trick. There are some things it can't do. So stupidity has been defeated, it's not invulnerable. So man is not afraid of death.

Federzoni: This truly is the start of the age of knowledge. This is the hour of its birth. Imagine if he had recanted.” (93)

Even as they think that Man, so tormented, is lifting his head and saying 'I can live', the bell of Saint Mark begins to toll and the crier proclaims Galileo's recantation. A petrified Andrea says loudly 'Unhappy the land that has no heroes.' And when he sees Galileo just then he calls him a 'Wine-pump! Snail-eater!' Did you save your precious skin?' referring to Galileo's epicurean nature. Suddenly Galileo from a champion of scientific truth has become a most odious villain. Then in scene fifteen a grown up Andrea after almost nine years comes to inquire after Galileo's health because Fabricius in Amsterdam had commissioned him to do so, and still without any warmth for his former master, realizes the enormity of the research that Galileo has done secretly with the results expounded in his 'Discorsi' and his surprised reaction is-

“Galileo: I finished the ‘Discorsi’.

Andrea: What? The Discourses Concerning Two New Sciences: Mechanics and Local Motion?

Here?”

When Galileo allows Andrea to take the manuscript that he has hidden inside a globe Andrea reads it, Galileo urges him to ‘Stuff it under your coat’ does Andrea realize that his master had not deserted science. That alters everything for him because in recanting Galileo hides the truth from his enemies, the clergy, and Andrea says: “Even in matters of ethics you were centuries ahead of us.” Galileo’s hands though stained were ‘Better stained than empty.’ Galileo’s rejoinder is:

“Galileo: better stained than empty. Sounds realistic. Sounds like me. New science, new ethics.” And Andrea changes his opinion about his master. He says that ‘Science makes only one demand: contribution to science.’ But Galileo in a long speech indulges in self-condemnation and tells Andrea that this new science will be used to suppress people by new impositions by the ‘princes, landlords, and priests.’ He further laments, ”Had I stood firm the scientists could have developed something like the doctors’ Hippocratic oath, a vow to use their knowledge exclusively for mankind’s benefit..... What’s more, Sarti, I have come to the conclusion that I was never in any real danger. For a few years I was as strong as the authorities.” (105)

Some critics are of the opinion that in the delineation of Galileo’s character Brecht wanted the audience to condemn Galileo for his cowardice and that Brecht thought that science had suffered from Galileo’s recantation. Galileo is Brecht’s anti-Christ, the god who failed humanity. He is not the hero of the traditional drama where the protagonist faces death with fortitude. Brecht portrays Galileo as a man who is afraid of physical torture, an ordinary human being who is slave to his bodily pleasures and his physical safety and not a larger than life character who is an ideal hero. But in the opinion of Lionel Abel there was no need for Galileo to have become a martyr, since his ideas, if true, would eventually be accepted. Brecht’s Galileo is a genius and a rogue- a man interested in eating, drinking and thinking. Thought to him is a physical activity- he has thinking bouts-The mind according to Galileo ought to serve the body- “I don’t understand a man who doesn’t use his mind to fill his belly.” In the words of A. Robert Lauer “ What Brecht affirmed was the body, the human body in its warmth, its weaknesses, its susceptibility, its appetites, its longing and its thought. Brecht’s best characters are mainly passive, morally inconsequential, and inconsistent. They live by lies, fraud and occasionally, by feats of thought.”

Check Your Progress

1. The play is divided into a series of separate scenes, known as an _____ structure.
2. Brecht uses the _____ effect to stop the audience from becoming emotionally absorbed.
3. Information is sometimes presented to the audience using _____ or signs before a scene.
4. Brecht often avoided suspense by revealing key events in _____.
5. Unlike traditional plays, Brecht wanted the audience to _____, not just feel.

Answer Key

1. episodic
2. alienation (or Verfremdung)
3. placards
4. advance
5. think

Dramatic Technique-The epic theatre uses long speeches, long pauses, harsh lights, episodic plots, placards announcing the change of scenes, and narrative forms which do not conform to the traditional narrative forms. Galileo uses narrative form that takes past events as a material for dramatization. Brecht's dramatic technique is intended to create an effect of estrangement – a cold, clinical sort of a detachment with the characters on stage. As Richard Foreman in his foreword of *Life of Galileo* (Penguin Classics) mentions “Brecht's message was to believe in a kind of theatre in which the viewer never abandons himself in a wash of feeling .This approach is echoed, of course, in Galileo, where Galileo himself, under attack, urges men not to abandon themselves to established habits of tradition or seemingly logical thought when that logic is based on convention rather than freshly observed fact.” Various elements like setting, costuming, props, blocking (the arrangement of characters on stage), movement, gestures, intonation and pacing (the tempo and coordination of performance) etc. make up the total spectacle.” The Aristotelian drama can only be understood as a whole, while the epic drama can be cut into slices which would continue to make sense and give pleasure. Decor, music and choreography maintain their independence. They are autonomous elements which instead of pulling in the same direction as the words, enter into a dialectical contrapuntal relationship with them. The music does not merely express the mood of the words: it often stands in contradiction to them, comments on them, or reveals the falsity of the sentiments that express. The epic theatre does not use décor and music to produce a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk (a total work of art or an ideal work of art) with its diabolically strong narcotic and hypnotic effect and concerted onslaught on the sense, but to destroy the illusion of reality. The spectator of the dramatic theatre says “Life is like that.” The spectator of the epic theatre says “Life does not have to be like that. There are options.” According to A. Robert Lauer, another Brechtian technique of the epic theatre was not to allow the identification of the actor also with the character; since the actor does not intend to allow his audience to enter a world of illusion, he too must keep himself away from that world. Therefore he must remain loose limbed and relaxed and in control of his actions and his emotions. His way of speaking is free from rhetoric or parsonic sing-song and all those cadences which lull the spectators into a trance. The characters acting and reacting upon each other form the basic unit of Brechtian theatre. The study of human relations takes precedence over the study of human nature. And this is achieved through Gestus -the correct stance, movement and tone of voice – as well as the deportment, intonation and facial expressions of the actors on stage which assumes greater importance than the inner turmoils of the characters.

As an epic play *Life of Galileo* is rich in arguments. Both Galileo and the other characters particularly the men of the cloth make arguments to corroborate their ideas. In scene four Galileo argues thus with the mathematicians:

“Galileo: Gentlemen, to believe in the authority of Aristotle is one thing, tangible facts are another. You are saying that according to Aristotle there are crystal spheres up there, so certain motions just cannot take place because the stars would penetrate them. But suppose those motions could be established? Mightn't that suggest to you that those crystal spheres don't exist? Gentlemen, in all humility I ask you to go by the evidence of your eyes.”(38)

Unlike traditional drama with its rhetorical outbursts or emotional dialogues the arguments are presented with rationale and logic. It turns the spectator into an observer and encourages him to ratiocinate.

Brecht also makes use of explanatory captions to tell the readers what the scene that followed would be all about. Narrators are important to fill the missing action. In the play *Life of Galileo* Brecht uses captions in a way that invites the reader to consider the events involved and then to make their own evaluation. Scene three, for example, begins with ‘January ten, sixteen ten: Galileo Galilei abolishes heaven.’

Dramatic Irony- Dramatic irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant; in the situation the literary character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the

actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way the character intends.” (*A Handbook of Literary Terms*-M.H. Abrams). Dramatic irony in the play is manifest when Virginia, Galileo’s daughter says, “I need another astronomer other than my father Galileo to cast my horoscope for my forthcoming marriage with Ludovico.” And it is because of her father’s discoveries as an astronomer that Ludovico, afraid of societal repercussions breaks off his engagement to Virginia, who later becomes a nun. Another example of dramatic irony is seen the way Cardinal Barberini, himself a mathematician, who initially supports Galileo’s findings, cannot bring himself to defend Galileo, when he, Barberini, becomes Pope VIII in Vatican. The way they spar with each other in scene seven in Cardinal Bellarmin’s house in Rome where a ball is in progress:

“Galileo: The Scriptures....’He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him.’ Proverbs of Solomon.

Barberini: ‘a prudent man concealth knowledge. ‘Proverbs of Solomon.. Barberini: ‘He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.’

Galileo: ‘But a broken spirit drieth the bones.’(Pause) ‘Doth not wisdom cry?’(54)

Another example of irony is seen in Galileo’s remark in scene thirteen; after his recantation a disillusioned Andrea expecting Galileo to become a martyr to the cause of science rather than betray it, says. “Unhappy is the land that has no heroes.” And Galileo answers, “Unhappy is the land that needs heroes.”

Brecht’s stage technique makes copious use of light on stage, the use of only half- curtain and, unlike a Wagnerian performance, putting the orchestra on stage. Titles appear before songs are sung. The musical items stripped bare the conventional corpus of ideas. In scene ten in Galileo the caption reads ‘During the next decade Galileo’s doctrine spreads among the common people. Ballad singers and pamphleteers everywhere take up the new ideas. One such song subverts the social hierarchy through the following song:

“So the circles were all woven
Around the greater went the
smaller
Around the pace setter the crawler... Up stood the
learned Galileo

(Chucked away the Bible, whipped out his telescope, took a quick look at the universe.)

And told the sun stop there...” (*Life of Galileo* 79)

The use of such songs interrupt the action and give the audience an opportunity to reflect. These songs sort of comment on the given social realities.

In the epic theatre the stage designer gets considerable freedom as he no longer has to give the illusion of a palace or a forest. But just to copy reality is not enough. Reality needs not only to be understood but also recognised. So stage settings need to convey to the audience that it is in a theatre and not the forest of Arden. The best approach is to show the machines, the ropes and the paraphernalia. Everything is provisional in an epic theatre. “The epic theatre is thus chiefly concerned with the attitudes which the people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant. The concern of the epic theatre is thus eminently practical. Human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them. The spectator is given a chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history.”(A. Robert Laeur) This is not to say that the epic theatre is not didactic; moral arguments are there but they take a second place. Its aim is less to moralize and more to observe. In the words of A. Robert Laeur, “The Brechtian theatre is a theatre designed to arouse indignation in the audience, a dissatisfaction, a realization of contradictions. It is a theatre supremely fitted for parody, caricature, and denunciation, therefore essentially a negative theatre. That is why Brecht’s plays conspicuously lack positive heroes, why the good characters are invariably crushed and defeated.”

24.4 GLOSSARY

Anti-illusionist – Opposing the creation of an artificial sense of reality in theatre.

Mimesis – Imitation or representation of real life in art or literature.

Estrangement – Creating a sense of distance so the audience can think critically rather than get emotionally involved.

Montage – A sequence of scenes or images arranged to convey ideas or show the passage of time.

Analepsis – Flashback; a scene that interrupts the chronological order to show past events.

Epicurean – Devoted to pleasure, especially physical pleasures such as food and drink.

Ratiocinate – To reason logically and methodically.

Copious – Abundant; in large quantity.

Corpus – A body or collection of work; here, refers to established ideas or texts.

24.5 LET US SUM UP

Dear learner, this lesson has shown how *Life of Galileo* exemplifies Brecht's Epic Theatre through its rejection of Aristotelian theatrical conventions and use of techniques such as episodic structure, alienation, narration, songs, and placards. Brecht breaks illusion and emotional identification and encourages the audience to think critically rather than passively empathize. Overall, the play's structure and techniques work together to reflect on the relationship between knowledge, power, and responsibility.

24.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What power dynamic is emphasized in the play, particularly in relation to Galileo's discoveries?
A. Economic Inequality B. Gender Discrimination
C. Political Authority D. Religious Tolerance
2. What compromise does Galileo make in the play to avoid persecution?
A. Renouncing his scientific findings
B. Fleeing the country
C. Collaborating with the church
D. Rejecting reason and embracing faith
3. What is the overall tone of *Life of Galileo*?
A. Tragic
B. Comic
C. Satirical
D. Epic

4. Who are the antagonists opposing Galileo's scientific views in the play?
- A. Fellow Scientists B. The Pope and the Church
C. Political Rebels D. Galileo's Family
5. In what historical context is *Life of Galileo* set?
- A. Renaissance Italy B. Victorian England
C. Ancient Greece D. Enlightenment France

Answer: 1c, 2a, 3a, 4b, 5a

24.7 SUGGESTED READING

Squiers, Anthony. *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht: Revolution and Aesthetics*. Brill, 2016. Ebook.

O'Regan, Keith. *Towards a Productive Aesthetics: Contemporary and Historical Interventions in Blake and Brecht*. Brill, 2021. Ebook.

Lopez, Mark. "Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo – The Meaning in a Nutshell." *Tutor English.com.au*, Tutor English, 2021, tutor.english.com.au/bertolt-brecht-life-of-galileo-the-meaning-in-a-nutshell/.

BERTOLT BRECHT
LIFE OF GALILEO

STRUCTURE

- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Objectives and Outcome
- 25.3 Scene-Wise Summary of the Play
- 25.4 Glossary
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- 25.6 Self-Assessment Questions
- 25.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 25.8 Suggested Reading

25.1 INTRODUCTION

Life of Galileo is a historical play that traces the life of physicist Galileo. It also brings in the Renaissance context of the conflict between doubt and faith.

25.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with scene wise summary of the play.

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize the key events of Acts 1 and 2 of *Life of Galileo*.
2. Identify the main characters and their roles in the development of the plot.
3. Describe Galileo's motivations and early conflicts.
4. Explain how Brecht introduces central themes (science vs authority, truth, curiosity).
5. Trace the evolution of Galileo's character from a hopeful thinker to a conflicted figure.

25.3 SCENE-WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa, Italy, on February 18th, 1564, to a family of aristocratic lineage but average wealth. When he was seventeen his father, a wool merchant and a noted musician sent him to study medicine at the University of Pisa. Galileo, however, soon turned to a career in mathematics. In 1589, he obtained a position of lecturer in mathematics at the University making discoveries that challenged the then dominant theses in physics, most notably the one that two objects, dropped from the same height, fall at the same rate regardless of their weight. In 1592, he moved to the University of Padua, where he would remain for more than fifteen years. Meanwhile in the world of astronomy a great debate was raging between the ancient system of Ptolemy, which

placed the earth in the centre of the universe;(it was also supported by what Aristotle had said as well as the Holy Church) and the heliocentric universe of Copernicus which posited the sun at the centre and the earth moving in an orbit around it. Galileo with his own version of the telescope, already invented in Holland, started making his observations and gathering proofs that advocated strongly the Copernican theory. The Catholic Church, however, did not approve of a heliocentric theory because it went against the scriptures and subverted God and his glorious creation. In 1616, the Church warned Galileo to refrain from publishing his theories as they were a denial of the Christian doctrine. Galileo remained quiet for almost a decade but continued his research and the ascension of a new liberal Pope, Urban VIII. Himself a mathematician, encouraged Galileo to publish the Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems in 1632 which openly argued for the Copernican system. The Catholic Church, so far secure in its Authority, could not accept a scientific assault on its own theories and summoned Galileo before the Inquisition where he was forced to recant his earlier statements and findings publicly and submit to the Church. Galileo lived under house arrest for the last eight years of his life and still continued to write; in 1638 he published his last work- a compilation of all his research in physics and it was published in Germany. Galileo died in 1642 after having gone blind in 1638.

The experimental play *Life of Galileo* traces the life of the historical Galileo but also brings in the Renaissance context of the conflict between doubt and faith, between Church and free scientific inquiry and orthodox dogmas and free thinking. Through fifteen scenes framed in an episodic structure Brecht beautifully brings out the features of the epic theatre through the play.

Scene 1 shows Galileo with his young disciple Andrea in his ‘wretched’ study in Padua where he experimentally proves to Andrea how the earth moves around the sun and not otherwise. Elatedly he explains the theory of the motions of the planets to him, “For two thousand years people have believed that the sun and all the stars of heaven rotate around mankind. Pope, cardinals, princes, professors, captains, merchants, fishwives and school kids thought they were sitting motionless inside this crystal sphere. But now we are breaking out of it, Andrea, at full speed. Because the old days are over and this is a new time. For the last hundred years mankind has seemed to be expecting something.” (6) Mankind according to Galileo has a vast desire to know the reason of everything. The discovery of new continents had reduced the vast oceans to ‘a little puddle’. People found that what was written in the old books was no longer good enough. Galileo then expounds on the flaws of the old ways thinking because a new age of scepticism had started doubting the old doctrines. “for where faith has been enthroned for a thousand years doubt now sits... That most solemn truths are being familiarly nudged; what was never doubted before is doubted now.” An excited Galileo tells Andrea.

This scepticism has created a social upheaval as well because the prelates and princes are found to have the same ‘fat legs’ as the masses beneath their aristocratic skirts and hauteur. An optimistic Andrea sings from a poet:

“O early morning of beginnings O breath of wind that
Cometh from new shores!”(8)

Mrs. Sarti, Andrea’s mother reprimands Galileo for teaching her son blasphemies. The scene also introduces Ludovico Marsili who has been sent by his mother ‘to have a looksee in the sciences’ because that is fashionable among the scions of the aristocratic classes although all he is interested in is horses. He mentions the new tube that is being sold in Amsterdam and that magnifies things five times. Galileo, hugely interested, confirms the convex and concave lenses used in the tube and immediately sends Andrea to the spectacle maker to fetch him the lenses. The Procurator of the University arrives in the meanwhile and informs Galileo that he cannot recommend his application for a raise in his salary because mathematics does not attract many students. Galileo is reluctant to take more tuitions as it doesn’t leave him time to pursue his research.

“Galileo: I teach and I teach, and when am I supposed to learn? He also highlights the fact that his branch of knowledge is still avid to know. The greatest problem still finds us with nothing but hypotheses to go on” (P.13). The Procurator also eulogises about how in Padua even Protestants are admitted to lectures and how as far as Holland, Venice is known for its generosity even to astronomers who speak contrary to what is mentioned in the scriptures. Galileo retorts by saying that it was the Venetian republic that had handed over Bruno to the Church to be burnt at the stake for heresy and “You make up for your attitude to the Inquisition by paying lower salaries than anyone.” The Procurator informs Galileo that the citizens of Venice have greatly benefitted by his discoveries in mathematics of calculating compound interests or in geometry in land surveys and nobody would create any difficulties for Galileo in his research. To which Galileo’s retort is that he doesn’t get time to follow his intuitions and hunches which are very important for his branch of science. “That way you muzzle the threshing ox. I am 46 years old and have achieved nothing that satisfies me.”(6)

In scene 2 the telescope is brought in full regalia on a velvet cushion in a crimson leather case in the great Arsenal of Venice in front of the Doge and the senators where Galileo dedicates his spy glass to the Venetian Republic although all that bowing and scraping to him is sheer waste of time. The Procurator highlights the wartime usage of the tube which would help the Venetian Republic spy its enemies much before the enemies did them which brings a loud applause from the citizens. (Brecht underscores the irony that while a researcher scientist wants his inventions to be put to the use of benefitting mankind the rulers or prelates want to use it for defeating their enemies).

Scene 3- Galileo and his friend Sagredo are discussing the bright spots visible on a crescent moon and Galileo opines that they are mountains. Sagredo is incredulous. He questions: “On a star?” Galileo:.. “What you are seeing is the light spreading down into the valleys from the topmost peaks.”(This light is symbolic of the dispersal of Ignorance and spreading of the light of truth and knowledge. Twice in the play we find reference to light.) Galileo further expounds the theory that both the moon and the earth give off light but both of them are lit by the light of the sun.

“Galileo: What the moon is to us, we are to the moon. It sees us sometimes as a crescent, sometimes as a half moon, sometimes full and sometimes not at all.

Sagredo: In other words, there is no difference between the moon and earth... Galileo: Apparently not..What you are seeing is the fact that there is no difference between heaven and earth. Today is 10 January 1610. Today mankind can write in its diary: got rid of heaven.” (22) Sagredo warns him of the consequences of proclaiming such a heretical finding stating that in Rome the Ecclesiastes had burnt Giordano Bruno for saying the same thing. Galileo is quite aware of it and then gets extremely excited when he spies the moons of Jupiter and concludes that if other bodies revolve around it, it cannot be attached to a crystal sphere. This explanation leads him to conclude that Copernicus and his lot were right while the whole world was against them. Galileo has jeopardised the theory that the earth is the centre of the universe and when Sagredo questions him “Then where’s God?” Galileo answers, ”Within ourselves or nowhere.”

Sagredo points out that for seventeen long years Galileo had patiently taught the Ptolemaic system proclaimed by the Church to his students in Padua even when he was sceptical about its authenticity. Galileo replies: “Because I couldn’t prove anything.” Sagredo (incredulously): “And do you imagine that makes any difference!”

Galileo: a tremendous difference. “Look Sagredo, I believe in Humanity, which means to say I believe in human reason. If it weren’t for that belief each morning, I wouldn’t have the power to get out of bed.”(27) But Sagredo doesn’t believe that human beings are open to reason because if you scare them they would believe you “But try making one rational statement to them, and back it up with seven proofs, and they’ll just laugh at you.” Galileo contradicts him saying that the common sense that human beings use in times of crises proves that they go

by reason ... and then he drops a pebble and says that no one can gainsay that it doesn't fall. "The lure of a proof is too great. Nearly everyone succumbs to it; sooner or later we all do. Thinking is one of the chief pleasures of the human race." (27)

Galileo then informs his friend that he is moving to the more affluent court of Florence so that he doesn't have to waste his time in earning a meagre livelihood in Padua and there he would find more time for research and for assembling the proofs for the Copernican hypothesis. Sagredo warns him that Florence is run by monks to which Galileo says that even monks are not immune to the seduction of proof. Sagredo tells him that whenever he watches his friend gazing through the telescope he imagines that his friend is standing on blazing faggots ... "I smell burnt flesh." (He is afraid that Galileo would be burnt for heresy just as Bruno had been). Galileo writes in very flattering terms an application to the House of Medici stating that he wants to call his new stars 'The Medician stars.'

Scene 4 finds Galileo in Florence where he is visited by Cosimo, the nine year old Duke of Florence, his Chamberlain, a mathematician, a philosopher. Since Galileo is still at the University an inquisitive Cosimo climbs up to his study and Andrea and he get into a scuffle. Upon Galileo's arrival a disputatious argument ensues among Galileo, the mathematician and the philosopher. In vain does Galileo try to convince them that the old Ptolemaic system was full of faults and hence astronomers could not locate the celestial bodies where in principle they were supposed to be? When the philosopher tries to give his explanation in Latin Galileo insists that he use the vernacular since Federzoni his lens grinder who in Galileo's estimation is a worthy scholar as well can understand what they are discussing. (Galileo knew that only the use of the vernacular would open the doors of truth backed by science, to the people). They are sceptical about the tube and what it shows and even hint that Galileo is a fraud because they believe that he has the stars painted on the telescope and he should not taint the great Medici family by naming the stars after that illustrious family of Florence. Much to Galileo's dismay they leave without looking through the telescope and confirm his findings because they would not mistrust what the divine Aristotle had said.

Scene 5 opens with the scare of the plague epidemic spreading like wild fire. But Galileo, undeterred even by the plague, carries on with his research although the Duke has sent a carriage for him to leave the city. Galileo is afraid that if he leaves all his observations of the past three months and the resultant proofs and notes would go in vain. He entreats Andrea, Virginia and Mrs. Sarti to leave although a reluctant Mrs. Sarti leaves too late for the plague has claimed her but she survives the plague. A distraught Andrea, after having walked for three days enters and Galileo shows him the phases of Venus and through a demonstration proves that it is yet another planet with no light of its own.

Scene 6 opens six years later in the Hall of the Collegium Romanum in Rome in the year 1616. The high Ecclesiastes, monks and scholars are all assembled and mocking at Galileo's findings in a deprecating manner.

"A Monk, (play acting) I'm getting giddy. The earth's spinning round too fast. Permit me to hold on to you, professor." (He pretends to lurch and clutches one of the scholars).

The scholar: (following suit) Yes, the old girl has been on the bottle again. (He clutches another)." (47) They are astounded and scandalized that Christopher Clavius, Italy's and the Church's greatest astronomer has stooped down to Galileo preposterous proposition that he look through the telescope and watch the movements of the celestial bodies himself and confirm that the universe was heliocentric. The very thin monk is angry because he says that these doctrines 'degrade humanity's dwelling to a wandering star.' And man himself is nothing but another animal. The very old Cardinal declares Galileo to be the enemy of the human race because he has moved mankind from the centre of the universe and 'dumped him somewhere on its edge.' He then pompously strides to and fro in an excited state and uses vituperative words for Galileo, "You want to debase the earth even though you live on it and derive everything from it. You are fouling your own nest. But I for one am not going to stand for

that ... I am at the centre and the eye of the Creator falls upon me and me alone. Round about me, attached to eight crystal spheres, revolve the fixed stars and the mighty sun which has been created to light my surroundings... In this way everything comes visibly and incontrovertibly to depend on me, mankind, God's great effort, the creature on whom it all centres, made in God's own image, indestructible and...(he collapses)." (Note the ironical use of the word indestructible). Clavius enters and utters just two words, "He's right." Leaving the others confounded and dumbfound. For Galileo it is not his personal victory but the triumph of Reason.

The caption on scene 7 reads: "But the Inquisition puts Copernicus's Teachings on the Index" (March 5th 1616).

A masked ball is in progress in the house of Cardinal Berberini where Virginia is hailed as a great beauty and all the great aristocratic families have gathered to have a nice time after the scare of the plague. Bellarmin is willing to concede to those findings of Galileo that would help the mariners navigate the unknown seas but "We only disprove of such doctrines as run counter to the Scriptures."

Galileo: The Scriptures... 'He that withheld corn, the people shall curse him.' Proverbs of Solomon (Meaning thereby that one should not hold back knowledge that is useful to people).

Berberini: 'A prudent man concealeth knowledge.' Proverbs of Solomon." (54)

Cardinal Berberini draws an extremely complicated elliptical course and questions Galileo that if God had made such complicated motions of the celestial bodies then how Galileo would justify his calculations. Galileo replies that God would have constructed the human brain likewise, 'so that they would regard such motions as the simplest. I believe in men's reason.'

Bellarmin: Men's reason, my friend, does not take us very far. All around us we see nothing but crookedness, crime and weakness. Where is truth?

Galileo (angrily) I believe in men's reason."(55)

Bellarmin further puts forth the argument that since men cannot fathom the complex vicissitudes of life, it is the onus of the Church to help men understand them and therefore the Church and its advocates attribute such occurrences to God and his greater plan. But now Galileo has put the very existence of God into peril. Galileo now doubts that mankind may not only get the motion of the stars wrong but the Bible as well. Bellarmin warns him that interpreting the Bible is the responsibility of theologians and since the Holy Office had decided that the doctrine put forward by Copernicus was 'foolish, absurd, heretical and contrary to our faith' he must abandon his views of a heliocentric universe. Galileo defies his hypothesis by stating that the Collegium Romanum had approved his observations. Bellarmin wholeheartedly agrees with it but says that The Church has permitted Galileo to explore but not to know. "You are also at liberty to treat the doctrine in question mathematically, in the form of a hypothesis. Science is the rightful and much-loved daughter of the Church, Mr. Galilei. None of us seriously believes that you want to shake men's faith in the Church." (57) (His reference to the mask highlights the bigotry and hypocrisy of the advocates of the Church). The scene ends with the Cardinal Inquisitor Quizzing Virginia about her knowledge of astronomy to which she replies she is grossly ignorant. He then launches forth into an elaborate explanation justifying the Ptolemaic universe and hints that her father might need her when he would be required to confess before their Father Confessor.

Scene 8 highlights a very scholarly and intense conversation between Galileo and Fulgiano, the Little Monk wherein has decided to give up astronomy because the decree of the Church has drawn his attention 'to the potential dangers for humanity in wholly unrestricted research' and it is not the instruments of torture that the Church could use but other motives that he sees that he wants to renounce the study of mathematics, much as he

is fascinated by the moons of Jupiter. He draws Galileo's attention to the trials and tribulations of the common peasants like his parents. "They are badly off, but even their misfortunes imply a certain order." And it is through the Bible that the common folk derive their strength to face the struggles of life uncomplainingly. "They have been assured that God's eye is always on them – probing, even anxiously- that the whole drama of the world is constructed around them so that they, the performers, may prove themselves in their greater or lesser roles. What would my people say if I told them that they happen to be on a small knob of stone twisting endlessly through the void round a second- rate star, just one among myriads?" They have been brought up to believe that their poverty and their struggles, their patience, their sweat is all justified by the Bible as virtuous and they would feel betrayed and forsaken if they lost faith in an omniscient compassionate and just God. A confounded Galileo brings home to him the fact that their penury is the result of the wars 'that the representative of gentle Jesus is waging in Germany and Spain.' Virtues in Galileo's opinion are not an offshoot of poverty. The Little Monk says that he keeps quiet so that he does not disturb the peace of mind of the less fortunate who accept their hard lot because they believe that God has ordained it. Galileo tells him that the Church is showering him with gifts to keep his mouth shut but he would not stoop to accept it. He then quotes the eighth satire of Horace and says that truth cannot be twisted to suit the convenience of the Vatican. Truth will win only through reason and reason will win only through people who are prepared to reason. Galileo's bundle of manuscript tossed to the Little Monk proves irresistible and the physicist in him triumphs over the priest- an indication that ultimately the Church might give in. But does it?

Scene 9 opens with Virginia and Mrs. Sarti preparing her wedding trousseau while Andrea is making preparation for an experiment on floatation. Mucius Fillipo, a former pupil of Galileo who because of the fear of the Church has condemned the Copernican theory enters, and expresses his desire to justify his condemnation to his master but Galileo turns him out by calling him a liar and a crook. He says he doesn't blame Mucius for obeying the Holy Congregation's decree of 1616. But someone who knowingly denies truth is not a fool but a crook. Mrs. Sarti wants Virginia to have her horoscope cast by an astronomer and Virginia informs her that she has already done so but ironically it is not Galileo who has cast it. Galileo is so obsessed with his research that his daughter's happiness doesn't figure much in his life. Such is the eminence that Galileo now enjoys that even the Rector of the University, Mr. Gaffone who has brought an important book for Galileo is reluctant to disturb him. He feels that 'every moment stolen from that great man is a moment stolen from Italy.' (68). And the book which he has brought for Galileo has the dedication: 'To the greatest living authority on physics, Galileo Galilei.' Andrea, Federzoni and the Little Monk are discussing the forbidden topic of sunspots – a topic forbidden in Venice but being discussed intensely in Holland, Paris and Prague. For the past fortnight Andrea has been conducting experiments on sunspots and asks his teacher why they are not investigating sunspots. Galileo replies that it is because he has kept quiet that Rome has allowed him to get a reputation and he doesn't want to go the way Bruno did – roasted over a wood fire like a ham. Investigating the forbidden topic would mean opening the heretical topic of the heliocentric universe. Galileo carries on with his experiment on floatation and proves the theory of Aristotle erroneous that 'Everything lighter than water floats and everything heavier sinks.' by making an iron needle float on water by putting it on a sheet of paper. Ludovico, long engaged to be married to Virginia enters, informs Galileo that his mother is happy that Galileo is no longer venturing into forbidden areas of research, 'those sunspot orgies the Dutch have been going in for lately.' Because the Pope fears that it would start the debate of Ptolemaic versus Copernican theory again. Galileo learns from him that the Pope is on death bed and that Cardinal Berberini was most likely to succeed as the new Pope. Galileo expresses his optimism that if a mathematician were to become the new Pope then, "Federzoni, we may yet see the day when we no longer have to look over our shoulders like criminals every time we say two and two equals four (72). He then puts a blunt question to Ludovico whether he would marry Virginia without expecting Galileo to renounce his profession. Ludovico replies that Virginia would have to take her place in the Marsili Family pew in the Church and Galileo cannot go back on his word of never discussing the doctrine of heliocentricity again. But Galileo now wants to go back to his research on the sun spots because there wouldn't be a reactionary Pope any longer. Ludovico tells

him, “IF His Holiness does die, Mr. Galilei, irrespective who the next pope is and how intense his devotion to the sciences, he will have to take into account the devotion felt for him by the most respected families in the land.” He fears that the peasants working in his fields would be upset if they found that the ‘frivolous’ attacks on the sacred doctrines of the Church go unpunished. Galileo’s retort is that Ludovico is afraid that Galileo’s findings might ‘stir up his peasants to think new thoughts. And his servants and his stewards.’ Because now he is going to write in the language of the vernacular and it is these people who work and toil day and night who would understand ‘that nothing moves unless it has been made to move.’ And not the people who only see the bread on their tables but do not bother to find out how it is baked. An angry Ludovico leaves breaking off his marriage to Virginia. Galileo, unperturbed, decides to go ahead with his observations of sun spots and tells Andrea that even if they have to move at a snail’s pace and go over their experiments again and again they would not lose hope and would establish the truth from all angles. “So we shall approach the observation of the sun with an irrevocable determination to establish that the earth does *not move*. Only when we have failed, have been utterly and hopelessly beaten and are licking our wounds in the profoundest depression, shall we start asking if we weren’t right after all, and the earth does go round. But once every other Hypothesis has crumbled in our hands then there will be no mercy for those who failed to research, and who go on talking all the same.” (76)

Check Your Progress

1. In Act 1, Galileo tries to explain the _____ theory to his pupil Andrea.
2. The _____ model, which Galileo challenges, places Earth at the center of the universe.
3. Galileo is inspired by news of a Dutch invention — the _____.
4. In Act 2, Galileo presents the telescope as his own invention to the _____ of Venice.
5. Galileo hopes that his discovery will gain him _____ and financial support.

Answer Key:

1. heliocentric
2. Ptolemaic
3. telescope
4. Republic
5. recognition

In scene 10 we find that a decade has elapsed and during that decade Galileo’s doctrine has spread among the common people gaining widespread acceptance so much so that ballad singers and pamphleteers everywhere sing of the new ideas. Many Italian guilds choose the theme of astronomy for their processions during their carnivals. One Ballad singer sings about how in the Bible it is said that God made the universe and then how He bade the sun to go round the earth and how all creatures were to move round in their hierarchy in obedience to the Bible. But:

Up stood the learned Galilei

(chucked away the Bible, whipped out his telescope, took a quick look at the universe.)

And told the sun ‘Stop there. From now the whole
creation dei Will turn as I think fair:

The boss starts turning from today His servants stand and stare’.(79)

Galileo’s truths have undermined the social hierarchy and created an upheaval in the orders. And they sing that “Obedience isn’t going to cure your woe. So each of you wake up, and do just as he pleases.” Galileo is called the ‘Bible- buster!’

In scene 11 the year is 1633 and the Inquisition has summoned Galileo to Rome. An interminable wait in the Medici Palace where the Grand Duke Cosimo was supposed to have received Galileo and Virginia, makes Virginia anxious and the cold shoulder that Gaffone gives him forces Virginia to ask Galileo whether what he has written in his book is thought to be heretical. Vanni, the iron founder for whom Galileo has designed a furnace enters and warns Galileo that his name is being discussed upstairs in not too favourable a light. He is being blamed for all the anti-Biblical pamphlets that are circulating all over the place. But he ensures Galileo that all the manufacturers are in support of Galileo. "I'm not the sort of fellow that knows much about the stars, but to me you're the man who's battling for freedom to reach what's new." Vanni represents the new manufacturing class who want to throw off the tyranny of the Scriptures and understand the mechanisms of everyday work through the new found doctrines of motion. All over Europe, he says, a new enlightenment has changed the course of how people think and how machines work, and how human anatomy functions, how money markets have come up, how commercial schools have been founded and printed papers circulate news. It is only In Italy that such freedom is curbed. But Galileo should not worry. "If anybody ever tries launching anything against you, please remember you've friends in every branch of business (83). When Galileo assures him that nobody is launching anything against him Vanni is not so sure. He even offers Galileo his travelling coach and horses should the need arise for him to escape because he thinks Venice is a much safer place with fewer clerics to indict his work as heretical. Galileo has confidence in the Grand Duke who is his former disciple and the new Pope who is his friend. But when the Grand Duke does not receive him he is not very hopeful now. He confides in his daughter his desire to accept Sagredo's invitation to spent a few days with him in Padua. A puzzled Virginia asks him what the Cardinal Inquisitor is doing in Florence and when Cosimo leaves without accepting Galileo's books Galileo now is not so sure of the confidence he has shown in Cosimo and Berberini. Just when he tells Virginia of his plans to escape in a cart of wine barrels out of Florence a high official summons Galileo to be interrogated by the Inquisition in Rome. "The coach of the Holy Inquisition awaits you, Mr. Galilei." (86)

Scene 12 opens in a room in the Vatican where an argument ensues between Pope Urban VIII (formerly Cardinal Berberini) and the Cardinal Inquisitor. (Brecht use of the noise of many shuffling feet is indicative of how the advocates of the Church try to overwhelm the Pope). The Inquisitor is afraid that the Pope will confront the gathering of learned doctors from every faculty, representatives of every order and the entire clergy and express his doubts about what the Scriptures say. And when the Pope confirms this The Cardinal Inquisitor tells him that it is not the multiplication table that is the root cause of all doubt but that 'a terrible restlessness has descended on the world.' He is worried that people now doubt everything. "Are we to base human society on doubt and no longer on faith?" He brings home the fact to the Pope that he has made powerful enemies in Europe ... "And at this moment, just when Christianity is being shrivelled into little enclaves by plague, war and the Reformation, a rumour is going through Europe that you have made a secret pact with protestant Sweden in order to weaken the Catholic emperor." And it is because of this 'wretched' Florentine that everyone is gossiping about the phases of Venus and doubting the 'incontrovertible' texts (in the Inquisitor's opinion) being taught in schools. "Given the weakness of their flesh and their liability to excesses of all kinds, what would the effect be if they were to believe in nothing but their own reason, which this maniac has set up as the sole tribunal?" The Cardinal Inquisitor is more worried about this doubt being extended to the offertory box in the Church. If the common man started finding logical explanations for everything who would then fear God or hope for miracles? (The Protestant movement was against the Papal indulgences and the money squeezed out of the common people in the name of miracles or expurgation of their sins). Navigators everywhere are demanding the star charts of Galileo. The Pope's argument is that the star charts are based on planetary motions that Galileo has proved and it would be impossible to use the charts without accepting his theories. "You can't condemn the doctrines and accept the charts." When the Cardinal Inquisitor tells Berberini that he is answerable to all the scholars waiting outside "Are all these people to leave here with doubts in their hearts"? That he as their Pope is supposed to resolve. The Pope answers that "After all the man is the greatest physicist of their time, the light of Italy, and not just any old crank." He has

friends all over Europe to support him and if they ask him to retract his truths the Church would be accused of being a 'cesspool 'of decomposing prejudice' and bigotry. No one should dare touch him. But the Cardinal Inquisitor persists arguing that it wouldn't require much efforts to push Galileo to surrender to the Church. "He is a man of the flesh. He would give in immediately" (p.89). The Pope rejoinder is that since Galileo has not written anything out of keeping with what he had promised that 'the last word lay with faith, not science.' The Cardinal Inquisitor tells him that the book shows an argument between a stupid man, representing Aristotle and a clever one, representing Galileo the Pope ultimately agrees that Galileo be shown the instruments of torture and made to surrender to the Church and the Cardinal Inquisitor says "that will be enough your Holiness. Instruments are Mr. Galilei's speciality."

Line 4 of the epigraph in scene 13 begins on a note of reproach and regret: "Of all the days that was the one

An age of reason could have begun." (91)

Galileo after being interrogated by the Inquisition has been languishing in prison for the past twenty four days. On the day of his hearing Federzoni, Andrea and Fulganzio, the Little Monk are discussing whether Galileo would recant before the pressures of the Inquisition or not. Andrea is worried that The Inquisition would condemn Galileo to death and his Discorsi would never get finished because Galileo would never recant. Virginia is fervently praying that Galileo would not recant and thus be spared by the Inquisition. An individual from the grand Ducal palace announces that "it is expected that Mr. Galilei would recant around five o'clock at a full sitting of the Inquisition. The great bell of St. Mark's will be rung and the text of his recantation will be proclaimed in public" (p. 93). Andrea unable to bear this proclaims in a loud voice that it was Galileo who had showed the world the truth about the celestial bodies and Fulganzio says, "And no force will help them to make what has been seen unseen." It is five o'clock and Andrea cannot endure any longer. "I can't wait any more. They are beheading the truth." The bell has not tolled yet and they all embrace each other Andrea saying that force cannot do the trick. "So stupidity has been defeated, it's not invulnerable. So man is not afraid of death" (93). Federzoni: "this truly is the start of the age of knowledge. This is the hour of its birth. Imagine if he had recanted." Galileo, they think, has agreed to face death gladly rather than betray science and truth. The Little Monk falls on his knees thanking God and at this juncture the bell of St. Mark's tolls proclaiming to all and sundry that Galileo had recanted. The crier proclaims in public thus, "I, Galileo Galilei, teacher of mathematics and physics in Florence, abjure what I have taught, namely that the sun is the centre of the cosmos and motionless and the earth is not the centre and not motionless. I foreswear, detest and curse, with sincere heart and unfeigned faith, all these errors and heresies as also any error and any further opinion Repugnant to Holy Church" (94). A dazed and confounded Andrea is only able to say, "Unhappy the land that has no heroes." Only Virginia is happy that her father has not been condemned to death. (Brecht here shows the stage in darkness indicating the triumph of ignorance over knowledge). Galileo enters but has undergone such a shocking change after the trial as to be almost unrecognisable. When his pupils back away from him and Andrea hurls abuses at him and asks for help to walk and a broken Galileo answers, "Unhappy the land where heroes are needed."

Scene 14 covers almost nine years from 1633 to 1642. Galileo old and half blind lives under house arrest in the country near Florence looked after by Virginia- a prisoner of the Inquisition till he dies. A monk keeps close supervision on him and questions Virginia about everything Galileo does. He confiscates whatever Galileo writes and calling Galileo an old fox doesn't believe when Virginia tells him that Galileo is not doing anything contrary to instructions. Virginia writes down all the correspondence that Galileo has with the archbishop who keeps asking for Galileo's opinion every week on sundry matters. Galileo dictates everything according to what the Bible says, 'Especially as it seems wiser to encourage their (the rope makers') faith rather than their acquisitiveness,' (irony lies in every line he has dictated and he asks his daughter whether the archbishop would read a suspicion of

irony in it and Virginia says the archbishop, a practical man, would be delighted. Their dictation is interrupted by the entry of Andrea, now in his middle years, who has come to inquire after Galileo's health as the Dutch have asked him to do so because he is leaving Italy and moving to a more liberal Holland for research. Galileo having recognised Andrea's voice sits motionless and when Virginia asks him if she should send Andrea away tells her to bring him in. Andrea does not answer when he questions him about his work on hydraulics but says that Fabricius in Holland has commissioned him to inquire after Galileo's health. Galileo asks Andrea to tell Fabricius that he lives in 'Corresponding comfort' and the depth of his repentance has earned him enough credit with the Church that they allow him 'to conduct scientific studies on a modest scale under clerical supervision.'

Andrea: "That's right. We too heard that the church is more than pleased with you. Your utter capitulation has been effective. We understand that the authorities are happy to note that not a single paper expounding new theories has been published in Italy since you toed the line" (99). Even in countries not under the dominion of the Church his recantation has caused such a setback that Descartes in Paris 'shoved his treatise on the nature of light in a drawer.' Andrea informs Galileo that Fulganzio too has given up science and 'gone back to the bosom of the church.' Galileo then questions Andrea why he had come to see him. Was it to unsettle him? Because even after living wisely according to the Holy Church he still has an itch—a strong desire to pursue his research in astronomy. Andrea answers that he has no wish to arouse Galileo. Galileo then informs him that he has been writing again and has finished the "Discorsi". An astounded Andrea questions him "Here?" To which Galileo replies that his masters are not stupid. 'They realise that deeply ingrained vices can't be snapped off just like that.' So Galileo is allowed pen and paper but whatever he writes is confiscated by them. Andrea is disturbed and disappointed that the Discorsi in the hands of the monks while the whole of Europe is slaving for it. Galileo then tells him that for the past six months he has been risking the last pathetic remnants of his own comfort and squeezing every moment of light that he can get to write a transcript of the Discorsi. He then tells an astounded Andrea that the transcript is hidden in the globe in his room and gives it to him saying that he knows it's the height of folly to part with it; 'However, as I haven't managed to keep clear of scientific work you people might as well have it.' Andrea cannot believe his eyes when he leafs through the manuscript of the Discorsi. Suddenly his attitude towards his former teacher undergoes a tremendous transformation. He says, "This alters everything. Everything." When Galileo questions, "Really?" Andrea answers, "You were hiding the truth. From the enemy. Even in matters of ethics you were centuries ahead of us" (102). When Galileo asks him to elaborate he says that Galileo chose to have stained than empty hands. Andrea: So in 33 when you chose to recant a popular point in your doctrine I ought to have known that you were simply backing out of a hopeless political wrangle in order to get on with the real business of science." He thus absolves Galileo of any crime in recanting. But Galileo confesses that he recanted because he was afraid of physical pain and says that there was no scientific work that can only be written by one particular man. He welcomes Andrea to the gutter calling him a brother in science and cousin in betrayal. Galileo is now the seller and Andrea the buyer. One look at the manuscript and all his curses turn into blessings. Galileo then launches into a long discourse about science. "It deals in knowledge procured through doubt. Creating knowledge for all about all, it aims to turn all of us into doubters." But the feudal lords keep the masses in ignorance and a haze of superstition for their own selfish ends. The new scientific truths revealed the true colours of the tormentors to the masses and these tormentors who had exploited science for their ulterior motives, found themselves exposed and resorted to threats and bribery to keep the masses quiet. "But can we deny ourselves to the crowd and still remain scientists?" he questions Andrea. He further states, "To what end are you working? Presumably for the principle that science's sole aim must be lighten the burden of human existence. If the scientists, brought to heel by self-interested rulers, limit themselves to piling up knowledge for knowledge's sake, then science can be crippled and your new machines will lead to nothing but new impositions." Galileo voices his fear and concern about the chasm between scientists and the common people becoming so wide that "your cry of triumph at some new achievement will be echoed by a universal cry of horror." (Brecht here indicates the horror of the atomic bomb during the II World War). He then chides and berates himself for having betrayed science. "Given this unique

situation, if one man had put up a fight it might have had tremendous repercussions. Had I stood firm the scientists could have developed something like the doctors' Hippocratic oath, a vow to use their knowledge exclusively for mankind's benefit" (p.104-105). He regrets that he has handed over his knowledge for those in power to misuse it. "I betrayed my profession. A man who does what I did cannot be tolerated in the ranks of science." Galileo refuses to shake hands with Andrea when he extends his saying, "You're a teacher yourself now. Can you afford to take a hand like mine?" Contrary to what Andrea says Galileo believes that a new age has started because Andrea is going to escape into Germany with the truth under his coat. The last word about it being a clear night symbolises the dispelling of darkness and the triumph of light.

Scene 15 describes how Andrea crosses into Germany with the 'Discorsi' by leaping through it right under the noses of the guards. The guards believe that if he had anything to hide he wouldn't put it right under their noses. The 'Discorsi' crosses the Italian frontier into liberal lands and Andrea's last words to the boys discussing a witch and her spells is "There are a lot of things we don't know yet, Giuseppe. We're really just at the beginning." Portending a new dawn for science. The play shows the coming of a new age.

Praise or condemnation of Galileo- Some physicist believed that Galileo's recantation of his teachings was sensible on the principle that this recantation enabled him to carry on with his scientific work and to hand it down to posterity. 'The fact is that Galileo enriched astronomy and physics by simultaneously robbing these sciences of a greater part of their social importance. By discrediting the Bible and the church, these sciences stood for a while at the barricades on behalf of all progress. .. The church, and with it all the forces of reaction, was able to bring off an organised retreat and more or less reassert its power.' (Gaby Divay)

Galileo after his recantation (notes on the character of Galileo – Texts by Brecht) – 'His crime has made a criminal of him. When he reflects on the scale of his crime he is pleased with himself. He defends himself against the outside world's impertinent expectations of its geniuses. What has Andrea done to oppose the Inquisition? Galileo applies his intellect to solving the problem of the clergy, which these blockheads have overlooked. .. his appetite for knowledge feels to him like the impetus that makes him twitch. Scholarly activity for him is a sin: mortally dangerous, but impossible to do without. ..Andrea's readiness to revise his damning verdict as soon as he sees the book means that he has been corrupted. As to a lame and starving wolf, Galileo tosses him a crust, the logical scientific analysis of the Galileo phenomenon. Behind this lies his rejection of the moral demands of a humanity which does nothing to relieve the deadlines of that morality and those demands.... Once Galileo knows that the book has set out on its journey towards publication he changes his attitude again. He proposes that the book should be prefaced by an introduction sharply condemning the author's treachery. Andrea passionately refuses to pass on such a request, pointing out that everything is different now; that Galileo's recantation gave him the chance to finish his immensely significant work. What needs to be altered is the popular concept of heroism, ethical precepts and so on. The one thing that counts is one's contribution to science, and so forth. At first Galileo listens to Andrea in silence then cuttingly and contemptuously contradicts him drowning himself in a diatribe of self-abasement. Brecht ended up blaming Galileo for having committed "the original sin of modern sciences" 'By recanting, he states: "From the new astronomy, which deeply interested a new class- the bourgeoisie – since it gave an impetus to the revolutionary social current of the time, he made a sharply defined special science which- admittedly through its very purity, i.e. indifference to modes of production- was able to develop comparatively undisturbed, The atom bomb is both a technical and social phenomenon, the classical end- product of his contribution to science and his failure to contribute to society.'" (126)

"Brecht all along was writing about attitudes which he could understand and even sympathise with: it is a play that contains very little element of caricature ... what matters here is the overlaying of the original message, about the need at all costs to establish and communicate the truth in defiance of authority." (xiii)

25.4 GLOSSARY

Aristocratic – Belonging to a noble or privileged class.

Heliocentric – A model of the solar system with the Sun at the center.

Heretical – Contrary to established religious beliefs.

Inquisition – A Church tribunal that punishes heresy.

Pompously – Acting in a self-important or arrogant way.

Vicissitudes – Changes or fluctuations, often unpleasant, in life.

Capitulation – Surrender or yielding under pressure.

Feudal – Relating to the medieval system of lords and vassals.

Abjure – To renounce or reject formally, often under oath.

Discourse – A formal discussion or written treatise on a subject.

25.5 LET US SUM UP

Life of Galileo traces the life of Galileo Galilei, the great scientist highlighting his struggles between scientific inquiry and religious orthodoxy. Through fifteen episodic scenes, Brecht presents Galileo's discoveries and his efforts to prove them despite opposition from the Church. The play explores the conflict between reason and faith, showing how Galileo navigates the dangers of heresy while pursuing knowledge. The play is a celebration of the triumph of reason and knowledge while acknowledging the personal and social costs of scientific progress.

25.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Brecht's theatre is known as _____.
2. The alienation effect is also known as _____.
3. Catharsis is _____.
4. Brecht lived in the United States from _____.
5. Peripety in Freytag's pyramid refers to _____.

25.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Define Catastrophe and Denouement.
2. What is meant by the term Gestus in the Epic theatre?
3. How does Brecht define 'Responsible science' and 'Pure science'?
4. Does Brecht make Galileo a hero or a criminal?
5. Why is the Holy Church offended with Galileo's findings?
6. What are the social implications of Galileo's findings?
7. What was the Ptolemaic theory of the universe? How had Copernicus disproved it?
8. Is Andrea justified in Galileo's condemnation after he recants?
9. What in your opinion, is the real reason behind Galileo's recantation?
10. Describe the argument between Pope Urban VIII and the Cardinal Inquisitor.

11. Why is Galileo optimistic when Ludovico informs him that Cardinal Berberini would be the new Pope?
12. What arguments does the Little Monk give that justifies the blind faith of people in the scriptures?
13. Explain why Galileo believes that Reason will defeat faith.
14. Why does Andrea revise his earlier condemnation of Galileo in scene 14?
15. Elaborate upon the conflict between faith and reason in the play.
16. In the light of Bruno's burning at the stake for heresy describe the power that the Holy Church yielded in the seventeenth century.
17. Describe the role of Andrea and the Little Monk in the play.
18. In the light of the dialogue among Galileo, the philosopher, and the mathematician in scene 4, trace the bigotry of the age.
19. Trace the socio-political conditions of Europe in Galileo's time.

25.8 SUGGESTED READING

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