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Rajiv Gandhi University



MAENG-406

Modern English Drama

MA ENGLISH

2nd Semester

Rajiv Gandhi University

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Modern English Drama

MAENG406
II SEMESTER



**RAJIV GANDHI
UNIVERSITY**

Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found

placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

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UNIT II: *Man and Superman* by G. B. Shaw

UNIT III: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett

UNIT IV: *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne

UNIT V: *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter

UNIT 1 ENGLISH DRAMA: THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD TO THE MODERN WORLD

English Drama: The Elizabethan Period to the Modern World

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Elizabethan age refers to the reign of Queen Elizabeth of England, who ruled from 1558 to 1603. The genre of drama thrived during her reign. This was because the spirit of the Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had given birth to a rich and varied literature in Europe. There was a general interest among the public in reading about real life situations and an inquisitive curiosity in the personal experiences of individuals other than themselves. Drama was the only medium which combined the brilliance of poetry with the thrill and passion of real life situations. It was fused with the exuberant energy that characterized the Elizabethan Age. The reign of Queen Elizabeth saw renowned playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. However, undoubtedly, the master playwright of the Elizabethan Age was William Shakespeare. Whether it was his tragedies, comedies or his historical plays, few authors have been able to match Shakespeare's universal appeal and his lyrical prose. Shakespeare's plays continue to be performed and enjoyed today with as much gusto as they were when they were written in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries for a small repertory theatre.

*Self-Instructional
Material*

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Braine, John Wain, and Alan Sillitoe. However, by the 1960s these writers began to concentrate on distinctive themes and were no longer part of the original Angry Young Man group.

Amis' works include the satire on academia *Lucky Jim*, *That Uncertain Feeling*, *Take a Girl Like You*, *One Fat Englishman*, *Stanley and the Women* and the *Old Devils* which won the Booker Prize in 1986. Wesker's significant contribution to the genre is his trilogy *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots* and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*. One of Sillitoe's major works was *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* which was also adapted into a film. His other works are *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *The Flame of Life*, *The Open Door*, *Leonard's War*, and *Snowdrops*.

1.8.8 Ritual Drama

A drama that follows the pattern of ceremony is called ritual drama. Jerry Grotowski introduced the concept of ritual drama in the twentieth century. During the middle ages, drama evolved from religious ceremonies and interludes known as 'mystery plays'; the twentieth century form of ritual drama was different from its ancient form.

The ritual drama form insists on the active participation of the audience, unlike other forms of drama where the audience are passive viewers. In ritual drama, actors address everyone in the audience, breaking the 'fourth wall' and also ask the audience to perform with them as fellow performers. Grotowski's intention was to create a more secular and interactive form of drama. *The Ancestors* by Mickiewicz was directed and presented by Grotowski as a ritual drama.

1.9 DRAMA AS A PERFORMING ART

Performance is an indispensable aspect of human life. It is a result of several unconscious and conscious reasons. The performing arts include dance, music, drama and magic. Drama is that branch of the performing arts which relates to the performance of a narrative in the presence of an audience. The narrative can take many forms including tragic, comic, tragic-comic, absurd, epic, farce making drama the most expressive of all the performing arts. Apart from simply delivering the dialogue, plays can also appear in other forms. These forms include musicals, opera, ballet, comedy, pantomime, illusion, mime, classical dance, kabuki, mummers' plays, improvisational theatre, stand-up and non-conventional or art-house theatre.

In a drama, the dramatist or playwright uses a combination of movements and techniques like speech, dance, sound, gesture, music, and spectacle to enact his or her plays for the audience. The audience's mind, with the aid of sensory organs, helps build up mental imagery. Dramatic performance is a result of this capacity. When an audience views a drama, they share an imagery that is similar to the one that is taking place in the minds of the actors performing it. This is called 'shared imagery'. Drama thus requires the suspension of disbelief in the minds of the audience. A drama can only be enjoyed if the audience imagines that the stage where the drama is being performed is a world in and of itself. As the Chorus of William Shakespeare's *Henry V* states, the audience watching a play must learn to 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts'. Dramatic performance thus revolves around shared knowledge and mental images. With each performance, the drama is reinvented; a drama is only recognized in relation to its performance.

Chorus. O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide on man, And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

Prologue of Henry V by William Shakespeare

limited scholarly study of drama that sees it only as something written and to be performed. The performance of drama leads to its expansion, cannot be exploited only by verbal and theoretical means. Dramatic performance to a confluence between verbal and visual representation of the art and its performance. When a performance takes place the director and the actors work together building up a unique imagery of the drama they are staging. Every performance creates a specific association with the audience, so much so that the audience starts to identify the drama to the performance.

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The director of a drama plays an important role in staging a performance. The dramatic performance is the vision of the director who is directing it. Therefore, the director is responsible and accountable for the meaning it conveys to the audience. In most plays, the audience views the drama through the vision of a director. The actors perform according to the thought processes of the director. However, this is not always the case. Plato in his *Ion* made the director dispensable. For him God was the ultimate source of inspiration, as it was he who passed on an idea to the writer, the writer wrote it and the actors who performed, passed it on directly to the audience. This implies that it is the duty of the playwright to take care of the fact that the performance is consistent with the play written, the actors are compatible with the concept and the other artistic elements are coordinated with the performance. Disharmony in any of these areas will affect the unity of the dramatic performance.

Through performance and acting, drama is adorned with actual, and not imagined, emotions, thus placing actors in a very significant position in the dramatic mimesis. Any performance devoid of emotion is never appealing to the audience. The structure and content of the dramatic medium carries information of which the actors are aware. That is why it is important for the actor to know what emotion is, the nature of various kinds of emotions, how to induce it and how to perform it in a manner which will be appropriate to the nature of drama that is being performed. By understanding and controlling the emotional requirement of a role during the rehearsal, an actor prepares the sensory and nervous mechanisms in such a way that he or she is able to trigger the right emotion at the appropriate moment.

Aristotle says that drama evolves from those who put effort in drawing inspiration and involving creativity. But performance relates to spontaneity. The repeated rehearsals liberate the performer from the dilemma of what to perform providing him or her with the scope to perform at ease.

1.10 DRAMA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CRITICISM

Although it is true that drama is meant to entertain an audience, it is also meant to inform, teach and make an audience think. The use of drama as a tool of social criticism and commentary is almost as old as the history of drama itself. In the 15th and 16th century, European secular drama focused on giving moral lessons to the audience through the use of allegory and personifications. These 'morality plays' consisted of a everyman protagonist, i.e., a character that is supposed to represent humanity as a whole, who is met by personifications of moral characteristics who try to convince him to either choose a life of godly virtue or evil. One famous morality play was *Everyman*. The play used allegorical devices to examine the question of salvation. In the Renaissance drama *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, considered by some critics to be also a part of the morality play tradition, the protagonist Faustus sells his soul to the devil to gain power and knowledge. Marlowe used the play to comment on the conflict between the Renaissance man and his thirst for unlimited knowledge and a society which kept heavenly virtue and spiritual knowledge on a pedestal.

In the nineteenth-century, with the advent of naturalism in the literary tradition, false romanticism and theatrical heroics paved way to more natural, believable and credible characters on stage. The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, considered the father of realism, spearheaded this trend. Literary realism essentially was the belief of depicting objective reality that focused on showing the everyday activities of a social

class without overt dramatisation. Ibsen's most famous play *Doll's House* underlined and criticised the roles played by a man and a woman in a marriage in the nineteenth century. The 19th century was a period when marriage was considered to be one of the most sacred social institutions. Ibsen's portrayal of a family who had departed from the traditional norm earned him criticism as well as accolades. The playwright George Bernard Shaw stated that Ibsen's plays are 'stories of lives, discussion of conduct; unveiling of motives, conflicts of characters in talk, laying bare of souls, discovery of pitfalls - in short, illumination of life.' In England, Sir Arthur W Pinero (author of *Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Thunderbolt*) and Henry Arthur began following Ibsen's footsteps and started writing about the evils and hypocrisies of the society. Writers like Galsworthy too made an important contribution in terms of drawing our attention towards the ills of society. His *Strike* is about a strike that takes place in a small factory in South Wales. It was an unofficial strike, because the workers were not supported by the union in their demands. The play focusses on the relation between employers, the workers' union and workers, and questions the validity and utility of this structure. Another important writer whose drama was a vehicle for social criticism was Shaw. His *Joan of Arc* reflected the way a woman's ideas were rejected and condemned in medieval times. Though Shaw was accused of having distorted history, he himself did not take any position; he merely presented information. In his latter works like *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) Shaw continued to highlight and register his strong views about some or other form of evil.

Candida represents Shaw's New Woman; by depicting Candida as an independent and strong woman in contrast to her idealistic and conventional husband Morrell, he has given support to the feminist cause.

In the twentieth century, playwrights like Bertolt Brecht took social criticism towards a different direction. Brecht was a practitioner of political theatre and developed the style known as 'epic theatre'. A reaction against popular forms of theatre, epic theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Thus, it could be stated that the objective of epic theatre was to make the audience aware that they were watching a play and thus alienate the audience from the actions presented in it. Brecht hoped that highlighting the fact that play was a representation of reality would help communicate to the audience the constructed nature of their own reality, which according to Brecht, was changeable.

Despite the popularity of Brecht, traditional forms of theatre continued to remain dominant throughout the twentieth-century and were used as the main outlets for social critique by playwrights. The American playwright Arthur Miller, through his play *The Crucible*, criticized the persecution of artists and activists living under the fear of McCarthyism. The British playwrights JB Priestly and Jacquetta Hawkes, in the experimental *Dragon's Mouth*, discussed some important aspects of society. George Kaiser's play *Gas* emphasized the war between man and machine. Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) dealt with a theme similar to Kaiser's play, highlighting the problems machines caused in the life of man. JM Synge, one of the proponents for the revival of Irish Drama and Theatre usually highlighted the plight of the peasant community in his plays. His *Riders to the Sea* is a tragic story about the life of fishermen. Sean O'Casey, in his play *The Plough and the Stars* depicted the struggle for Irish liberation under the garb of humour.

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The impact that the two World Wars had on society was also to influence playwrights. After the World Wars, society was in a state of disintegration and isolation. Lord Dunsany through his plays pointed out this void which had engulfed the world after the Second World War. In Dunsany's play *The Glittering Gate*, two thieves are shown to enter Paradise, but are surprised to find nothing. One important theatrical tradition that came out of the Second World War was the Absurdist theatrical tradition which was based on the idea that life is irrational, illogical, incongruous, and without reason. The most famous of all Absurdist plays, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, through its dialogue between the two main characters captured the anxiety of the Cold War world.

It is said that drama is a medium of reflection on society. Thus, playwrights have always used this medium to make constructive criticisms of their societies in the hope of affecting some positive changes for the better. Thus, drama apart from being a source of entertainment is also a vehicle for various agendas and can be used as a mirror to showcase the wide range of social evils that surround us.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

19. Define the 'Theater of the Absurd'.
20. Trace the etymology of the phrase, 'Angry young Man'.

DID YOU KNOW

Elizabethan theatres were quite a bit different to today's modern theatres. They were mostly open air and looked like an O from above. The stage came out into the centre of the O and the audience stood all around it in an area called the yard or the pit. The rich could sit in covered galleries around the edges of the yard. A building was built to the back of the stage. This was brightly painted and used by the actors in scenes of the play they were performing.

1.11 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The genre of drama developed quite rapidly in England during the last quarter of the sixteenth century.
- The Elizabethan drama is a genre that managed to establish its own place in the English literary tradition. It included all sorts of elements- wit, learning, vulgarity, love of combat and bloodshed, affectation, songs and dances- along with simple and natural poetic power of delineating human character, and of eloquent declamation and rapid action.
- In Elizabethan drama, every subject is made use of – popular legends, the history of Greece and Rome, Italian novels, English chronicles, contemporary domestic tragedies – anything and everything that will bring a London audience that composed of men from all classes of society to the theatres.

- One can simply describe 'tragedy' as a play with an unhappy ending. The word 'tragedy' has its origin in Greek 'tragodia', meaning 'goat song', which accompanied the ritual of offering goats to Dionysus, the Greek god of vineyards and wine.
- Tragedy deals with the serious aspects of life and is essentially a tale of suffering ending in death.
- Unlike Aristotle's concept of a tragedy having unity of time and place, Elizabethan tragedy compressed time and jumped from location to location for different scenes. Elizabethan tragedy also used a whole range of imaginative narratives as tragic subjects.
- Shakespearean tragedy mainly conforms to the definition given by Aristotle but it violates the principles of the Greek philosopher in one important respect; its action is not all serious; its seriousness is often relieved by the comic.
- Shakespeare's tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person. The story ends with - and includes - the death of the hero. According to the famous English Shakespearean scholar A.C. Bradley, a Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a tale of suffering and calamity concluding with death.
- Shakespeare wrote thirty-seven plays, although there are two or three works which do not seem to be entirely his. His activity as a dramatist covered over twenty-four years, from 1588 to 1612. These twenty-four years have been subdivided into four periods of about six years each.
- Shakespeare shows equal aptitude for the tragic and the comic, the sentimental and the burlesque, lyrical fantasy and character-study, portraits of men and women, of kings and clowns. No other dramatist possesses such diverse gifts or has given such various and colourful scenes of life.
- It was Ben Jonson who said about Shakespeare that 'he was not of an age but of all time'.
- Shakespeare's universality is due to the breadth and impartiality of his vision of life, which is revealed in the complexity of his characters. Shakespeare does not merely represent his characters within the short span of a crisis. He shows his heroes at various moments of their lives, in changing, situations and in contact with different persons.
- One can simply describe 'tragedy' as a play with an unhappy ending. The word 'tragedy' has its origin in Greek 'tragodia', meaning 'goat song', which accompanied the ritual of offering goats to Dionysus, the god of vineyards and wine.
- In his *Poetics*, Aristotle stated tragedy is 'the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each of artistic ornaments... in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.'
- Aristotle then goes on to say that a tragedy should be 'well-proportioned'. By well-proportioned, Aristotle means it should have a proper beginning, rising action, and dénouement. He compares the plot construction with the body of an animal.
- Aristotle's concept of a tragedy having unity of time and place, Elizabethan tragedy compressed time and jumped from location to location for different scenes. The greatest of all Elizabethan tragic playwrights was William Shakespeare.

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- Comedy is usually associated with a performance which is a representation of life, moving around humour, courtship and matrimony; it has hilarious characters, frivolous moments mostly arising out of the complications related to love, and ends in a joyful way.
- The word Comedy is derived from Greek '*komos*' meaning 'revelry' and '*oide*' meaning 'song'. Aristotle explained comedy as 'an imitation of persons inferior' who possess 'one defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive.'
- Dramatic Comedy grew out of the rowdy choruses and dialogues of the fertility rites associated with Greek god Dionysus.
- A tragi-comedy has the thematic seriousness of a tragedy but does not end in a catastrophe but rather on a happy note like that of a comedy. The term was coined by the Roman dramatist Plautus in the second century BC. Plautus' *Amphitryon* is an example of such a work.
- The English word farce has its roots in Latin '*farcire*' which means 'to stuff' or Old French farce meaning 'to show'. In contemporary times, any play which relies on buffoonery, crude funny situations and such low brow devices to create comedy is labeled as a farce.
- Setting usually refers to the exact geographical and temporal location of the characters or the story. However, in theatre, setting also refers to the external aids that are used to create the scenery. Settings are classified as realistic, functional, abstract or suggestive.
- A plot of a play is the logical, rational and coherent arrangement of the incidents that have a causal effect relationship and which help in building the story of the play. Aristotle considered the plot to be the soul of the drama and stated that a good plot should have a beginning, middle and an end.
- The word character is derived from the Greek word '*karakter*' meaning 'stamp' or '*kharassein*' meaning 'to engrave'. In drama, a character is identified as 'the differentiation of one agent from another.' In a play there could be many types of characters.
- The structure of a drama relates to the construction of the plot. For Aristotle, the plot structure needed to have a beginning, a middle and an end. This three part view of plot was popular until Renaissance dramatists started using the five-act structure. In the 19th century, the German playwright Gustav Freytag gave what has come to be seen as the most definite study of the five-act play. The structure that Freytag gave came to be known the Freytag's pyramid. It can be classified into exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, conclusion or resolution.
- The term audience comes from Latin '*audentia*' meaning 'a hearing'. The word implies the act or action of hearing and a congregation of hearers. In theatre, audience implies the collective gathering of people who have come to watch the performance. In plays, the audience is part of the fourth wall, i.e., the imaginary wall at the front of the stage through which the audience sees the action of the play.
- The words exchanged by the actors while conversing in a performance is known as dialogue. The dialogues of a play are not merely words, a dialogue is a significant, economical use of words which builds up the atmosphere, highlights the intonations, defines the gestures and movements to carry forward the plot in a play.

- During Shakespeare's time, the success of the plays depended entirely on the dialogues. Hardly any importance was given to props. Change of scene was always indicated through language/dialogue/script.
- In 1962, Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* used the term for the first time. Esslin states in his book that the Theatre of the Absurd 'strives to express the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach, by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.'
- The Theatre of Cruelty relies heavily on excessive gesticulation and sensory reactions of the actors so that a psychological correspondence with the audience is established.
- Brecht's epic theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage.
- Feminist theatre came into prominence in the charged atmosphere of the mid-to-late-1970s, where the women's movement began to take the centre stage in socially relevant theatre.
- Drama is that branch of the performing arts which relates to the performance of a narrative in the presence of an audience. The narrative can take many forms including tragic, comic, tragic-comic, absurd, epic, farce, making drama the most expressive of all the performing arts.
- The director of a drama plays an important role in staging a performance. The dramatic performance is the vision of the director who is directing it. Therefore, the director is responsible and accountable for the meaning it conveys to the audience.
- In most plays, the audience views the drama through the vision of a director. The actors perform according to the thought processes of the director.
- Although it is true that drama is meant to entertain an audience, it is also meant to inform, teach and make an audience think. The use of drama as a tool of social criticism and commentary is almost as old as the history of drama itself.
- In the nineteenth-century, with the advent of naturalism in the literary tradition, false romanticism and theatrical heroics paved way to more natural, believable and credible characters on stage. The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, considered the father of realism, spearheaded this trend.
- In the twentieth-Century, playwrights like Bertolt Brecht took social criticism towards a different direction. Brecht was a practitioner of political theatre and developed the style known as 'epic theatre'.
- A reaction against popular forms of theatre, epic theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage.
- Despite the popularity of Brecht, traditional forms of theatre continued to remain dominant throughout the twentieth-century and were used as the main outlets for social critique by playwrights. The American playwright Arthur Miller through his play *The Crucible* criticised the persecution of artists and activists living under

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the fear of McCarthyism. The British playwrights JB Priestly and Jacquetta Hawkes, in the experimental *Dragon's Mouth*, discussed some important aspects of society.

- It is said that drama is a medium of reflection on society. Thus, playwrights have always used this medium to make constructive criticisms of their societies in the hope of bringing about some positive changes for the better.

1.12 KEY TERMS

- **Irony:** Is the use of words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning
- **Renaissance:** Is the revival of art and literature in Europe under the influence of classical models in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries
- **Puritan:** A member of a group of English Protestants of the late sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church of England under Elizabeth as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship
- **Epoch:** Is the beginning of a distinctive period in the history of someone or something
- **Imitation:** The action of using someone or something as a model
- **Amorousness:** Is a feeling of love or fondness
- **Dionysus:** Is the Greek god of grape harvest, winemaking and wine. In Greek mythology, he is the son of Zeus and Semele
- **Restoration comedy:** English comedies written during the restoration period, i.e., 1660—1710, were known as restoration comedies. Such plays were characterized by witty dialogue and sexually explicit content. One of the first professional women playwrights was a restoration comedy playwright named Aphra Behn
- **Elizabethan tragedy:** Elizabethan tragedy refers to the genre of theater during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1558-1603. Unlike Aristotelian tragedy, the feature of Elizabethan tragedy was not the 'unity of time and place' but rather the compression of time and jumping from location to location. The foremost playwright of the Elizabethan age was William Shakespeare
- **Existentialism:** Essentially, a twentieth-century philosophy that believes that the Universe is without meaning and as such an individual must take ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad. The philosophy of existentialism found a voice in the theatre of the absurd, most notably, the play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett
- **Morality plays:** Morality plays were fifteenth and sixteenth century allegorical dramas in Europe that became the forerunners to Renaissance dramas. Morality plays usually contained a protagonist that represented mankind who faced moral questions while meeting characters that personified moral qualities like charity or vice or abstractions like death or youth. An example of a famous morality play is *Everyman*
- **Breaking the Fourth Wall:** A technique of theatre or a movie where a character speaks directly to the audience or viewer watching the play or movie

- **McCarthyism:** Refers to 1950s America where during the Cold War artists, actors, directors, and other prominent people were accused of being 'Communist agents' by Senator McCarthy

1.13 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. It included all sorts of elements—wit, learning, vulgarity, love of combat and bloodshed, affectation, songs and dances- along with simple and natural poetic power of delineating human character and of eloquent declamation and rapid action.
2. The underlying sentiment and a direct result of the Reformation movement was the perception of the personal answerability of the individual soul to God. The implicit value system of the Renaissance supported that the world is a beautiful place and that sensuous enjoyment of the beautiful is a rational and commendable act.
3. The drama of the period is written in the representative form, and in many of the plays, the interest lingers not so much on the plot or story as in the representation of human will in vigorous action. The characters are, in many cases, profoundly conceived as active agents, sometimes of exaggerated will and energy. This is in response to the theory of the dignity and self-sufficiency of the individual soul which characterized the Puritan belief system. Again, the love of luxurious ornamentation and variety which marked the Renaissance art can also be observed in many of the Elizabethan dramas.
4. According to the famous English Shakespearean scholar A.C. Bradley, a Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a tale of suffering and calamity concluding with death.
Bradley also writes that 'tragedy with Shakespeare is concerned always with persons of high degree: often with kings or princes: if not, with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus, Antony; at the least, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, with members of great houses, whose quarrels are of public moment.' Shakespeare's conception of tragedy is medieval. Unlike the moderns, he is not concerned with the fate of the common man, their sorrows and sufferings. The exalted personages suffer greatly; thus Hamlet's soul is torn within. Their suffering is contrasted with their previous happiness. The hero is such an important personality that his fall affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire, and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of the powerlessness of man and omnipotence of fate. This is one of the ways in which the playwright introduces an element of universality in his tragedies.
5. The tragic hero is not only a person of high degree but he also has an exceptional nature. He has some passion which attains in him a terrible force. He has a marked one-sidedness, a strong tendency to act in a particular way. They are all driven in one direction by some peculiar interest, object, passion or habit of mind. Bradley refers to this trait as the 'tragic flaw.' Thus, Macbeth has 'vaulting ambition', Hamlet 'noble inaction', Othello 'credulity and rashness in action', and Lear 'the folly of old age'.
6. In Shakespeare's plays also, there are two or three or four plots running together. Shakespeare's supreme skill lies in weaving these different plots into a harmonious

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design. He did not tie himself down to any theory. His first concern was to acquire a story.

7. Shakespeare's empiricism is revealed in his treatment of the clown or the fool. Instead of contemptuously rejecting the fool, Shakespeare undertook his instruction and changed a necessary evil into good. Shakespeare allowed the fool figure to appear in his comedies and even in his tragedies so long as he spoke 'no more than is set down'. Shakespeare makes the fool a king of popular philosopher who says many wise and practical things in the garb of stupidity. As the novelist Isaac Asimov put it, 'That, of course, is the great secret of the successful fool - that he is no fool at all.' One of the most famous fool characters in Shakespeare is the 'Fool' in *King Lear*. Among all the characters in *King Lear*, only the Fool criticizes King Lear. He is wise enough to perceive the wrongs being done to Cordelia and throughout his appearance in the play reproaches his master Lear for being 'foolish' in his treatment of his youngest daughter. The fool takes various forms in Shakespeare's plays. Sometimes he is a craftsman like Bottom, the weaver; sometimes he is a policeman like Dogberry or like Verges. It is a sign of Shakespeare's tolerance and sweet humanity that he transforms the fool and makes him indispensable for the play in which he is introduced.

8. One can simply describe 'tragedy' as a play with an unhappy ending. The word 'tragedy' has its origin in Greek 'tragodia', meaning 'goat song', which accompanied the ritual of offering goats to Dionysus, the Greek god of vineyards and wine.

9. Catharsis is the essential meaning purification through pity and fear.

10. Aristotle put emphasis on the logical development of the play. He believed that the beauty of a particular art lies in a proper relation between the whole and its parts. A tragedy encourages plot construction which establishes the relationship between part and whole. The plot becomes significant because of this aesthetic stance as suggested by Aristotle.

Aristotle then goes on to say that a tragedy should be 'well-proportioned'. By well-proportioned, Aristotle means it should have a proper beginning, rising action, and dénouement. He compares the plot construction with the body of an animal. Next, he emphasises the importance of unity of plot. The dramatist must imitate one action for the hero. The plot must have unity of time, place and action.

11. The word Comedy is derived from Greek 'komos' meaning 'revelry' and 'oide' meaning 'song'. Aristotle explained comedy as 'an imitation of persons inferior' who possess 'one defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive.' The counterparts of English 'comedy' are Greek 'komoida', Latin 'comoedia' and French 'comédie'. One major difference between tragedy and comedy is that tragedy involves intense emotions and sympathies; on the other hand, comedy strives to entertain by ridiculing man's customs and institutions. During the Middle Ages, comedy was associated with colloquial speech and a happy ending. The term comedy was also used for Dante's non-dramatic but religious poem *The Divine Comedy*.

12. A tragi-comedy has the thematic seriousness of a tragedy but does not end in a catastrophe but rather on a happy note like that of a comedy. The term was coined by the Roman dramatist Plautus in the second century BC. Plautus' *Amphitryon* is an example of such a work.

13. The word is derived from the Greek word 'melos' meaning 'song' and French 'drame' meaning 'drama', translating into musical drama. During the eighteenth-century, French playwrights composed plays which were full of spectacle, music and happy endings. But by the nineteenth-century, the use of music gradually receded. Initially, melodrama represented the encounter of good and evil, but gradually it referred to any play of excessive emotional nature.
14. In a monologue a single person carries on the conversation, unlike a dialogue which requires the presence of at least two people. A monologue differs from a soliloquy because a monologue implies the presence of one or many listeners whereas a soliloquy implies a private conversation with oneself, without any listeners. Monologues help in defining and shaping the atmosphere of the drama. An extreme example of monologue is Strindberg's one-act play *The Stranger*. In the play the lines are spoken entirely by one person. On the other hand, the most prominent example of soliloquy is Hamlet's "To be or not to be..." soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
15. In a play there could be many types of characters, such as: extraordinary, stock, representative, narrator, dominant and minor.
16. The structure of a drama relates to the construction of the plot. For Aristotle, the plot structure needed to have a beginning, a middle and an end. This three part view of plot was popular until Renaissance dramatists started using the five-act structure.
17. After the unfolding of complications, resolution of conflict takes place. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the lovers' decisions are accepted. In *King Lear*, Cordelia comes back to Lear in his madness and the evil characters get proper punishment.
18. Theme is commonly misinterpreted to mean the subject of a drama. However, theme relates to the underlying meaning and tenor for which the play is written. A play can have multiple themes. For example, the themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* include madness and revenge, mortality. The themes of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* include power, principles, honour and family.
19. The term usually refers to a body of plays produced by a group of dramatists around World War II, the popularity and prominence of which continued till the 1950s. In 1962, Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* used the term for the first time. Esslin states in his book that the Theatre of the Absurd 'strives to express the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach, by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.'
20. This phrase is taken from Leslie Paul's autobiography which was published under the same name in 1951. The term became popular after the publication of John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back In Anger*. The play had Jimmy Porter, a first-of-his-kind hero, who became the epitome of an angry young man who, dissatisfied with the social and political attitudes around him, reacts against the middle class.

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1.14 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How can Shakespeare's literary career be classified into different periods of his dramatic activity? What was the nature of his works in each of these periods?
2. How did the Renaissance influence the themes and motifs seen in Elizabethan drama?
3. What are the chief characteristics of a Shakespearean tragedy?
4. Write a short note on tragic flaw.
5. What were the main features of Elizabethan drama?
6. Write a short note on the evolution of comedy in theater.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Bring out the differences between comedy and tragic-comedy? Give one example of each.
2. Examine the Aristotelian conception of plot.
3. What is the Freytag's pyramid? Discuss.
4. Discuss the various types of setting a play can have.
5. What is the theatre of the absurd? Give one prominent example of an absurdist play.
6. Write short notes on (i) Theatre of Cruelty; (ii) Poor theatre
7. When Brecht re-introduced the term 'epic theatre' in the twentieth century, he used it to signify something that was non-dramatic, something that was devoid of emotional involvement. Discuss.
8. What is feminist theatre? List some characteristics of feminist theatre.
9. Drama is that branch of the performing arts which relates to the performance of a narrative in the presence of an audience. Explain.
10. How is drama used as a tool for social criticism?
11. Shakespeare's universality is due to the breadth and impartiality of his vision of life, which is revealed in the complexity of his characters. Discuss.
12. Analyze Aristotle's conception of tragedy in his treatise 'Poetics'.

1.15 FURTHER READING

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*English Drama: The
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UNIT II: *Man and Superman* by G. B. Shaw

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Unit Objectives
- 6.2 Background of the Playwright
- 6.3 Shaw's Method and Technique
- 6.4 Plot Overview
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Terms
- 6.7 Answer to 'Check Your Progress'
- 6.8 Questions and Exercises
- 6.9 Further Reading

6.0 INTRODUCTION

People look upon George Bernard Shaw as a prime writer who struggled to be recognized. He had written five novels in his 30s but not even one managed to make a mark. Undeterred, he carried on. Then, when he was 38, in 1856, he managed to make his debut with his dramatic work and with his plays some time later on.

Even though he mostly penned comedies, he was of the opinion that a play was capable of influencing those who read or viewed it. He spent his time writing more than 60 plays for the theatre. Shaw's play *The Apple Cart* got him the Nobel Prize for Literature and his *Pygmalion*, as a film, got him an Academy Award.

Shaw's plays, since he believed they could influence the general population, were geared to address various and a huge array of social issues.

For the larger part of his life, Shaw remained a bachelor. As a result, he has portrayed some characters (comical ones) in his plays as bachelors (Henry Higgins and Jack Tanner, for example). He was a fan of letter writing and wrote thousand of them to his fellow theater-lovers, colleagues and friends. From these correspondences it appears that for actresses he had an extremely devout passion.

In Ayot St. Lawrence, England, you will find George Bernard Shaw's final home named Shaw's Corner. It is a beautiful manor though only as big as a writer would require. His work room is tiny and unique as it is created to be mobile so that it can catch lots of sunlight. In this very room, Shaw penned letters and many of his plays.

This unit focuses on one of G.B Shaw's well-known plays *Man and Superman*.

6.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the life of George Bernard Shaw
- Discuss the techniques employed by Shaw
- Summarize and analyze the play *Man and Superman*

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6.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July, 1856 in Dublin. He was an Irish playwright. Shaw is known to be a writer of short stories, novels and essays. His writings addressed the social problems of the contemporary scenario and incorporated the elements of humour and comedy. Shaw addressed issues like class privilege, health care, government, marriage and education. He co-founded London School of Economics.

His anger was acute when he felt that the working class was being exploited. Shaw was a passionate socialist, and he is even known to have written a number of speeches and brochures for the Fabian Society. In addition, he was an accomplished orator who furthered the cause of the society. Some of the issues addressed by him were promoting healthy lifestyles, withdrawing private ownership of productive land, alleviating abuses of the working class and equal rights for men and women. Shaw served on the London County Council and was also active for a brief period in local politics.

George Bernard Shaw was wedded to Charlotte Payne-Townshend in 1898. She was also a Fabian. Shaw is the sole individual to have got both the Oscar (1938) and Nobel Prize in Literature (1925). Not wanting a public honour, Shaw wished to decline the Nobel Prize yet agreed to accept it at the behest of his wife saying it was a tribute to Ireland. He did not accept the associated cash component and displayed his wish that it be utilized to translate to English from Swedish the writings of August Strindberg.

Life of George Bernard Shaw

The birth place of George Bernard Shaw is Synge Street, Dublin. His mother was Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw a singer by profession and his father was George Carr Shaw who was not only a successful merchant of grains and was also a onetime civil servant. George Bernard Shaw was the third and youngest child and the only son of his parents.

For a short period of time, Shaw studied at the grammar school Wesley College in Dublin, which was under the Methodist Church in Ireland. Then he joined a private school located close to Dalkey from where he moved to Dublin's Central Model School. His formal education was completed at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. During his school days, he disliked schools and teachers. To quote Shaw, 'Schools and schoolmasters, as we have them today, are not popular as places of education and teachers, but rather prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents.' He has depicted his own schooling experience through the caustic prologue he wrote for *Cashel Byron's Profession* where he describes young Byron's educational experience. In his *Treatise on Parents and Children*, he provides meticulous details of why he had such aversion towards formal education. He was of the opinion that it was useless to implement standardized curricula as it dulled the intellect and suppressed spirit. Shaw strongly opposed corporal punishment that was practised at that time.

When Shaw was nearly 16 years of age, his mother, with both her daughters, left and went to London, following George Vandeleur Lee, her voice teacher. Shaw stayed back with his father in Dublin. When he completed his formal education, he began to work in an estate office as a clerk. Though he was unhappy there, he worked with efficiency for a number of years. Shaw moved to London, in 1876, to live with his mother, his sister Lucy and Vandeleur Lee. Shaw was given a pound each week by his

mother. He utilized his time writing novels and studying hard in the reading room at the British Museum and other public libraries. Shaw's novels were not accepted for publication and he had negligible literary earnings till the year 1885, and then he became a critic of drama which earned him enough money to support himself.

His reading turned him into a Socialist. He also became a Fabian Society charter member. Established in 1884, this was a middle class organization for slowly and peacefully spreading socialism. It was during this time that he became active in politics and came in contact with Charlotte Payne-Townshend. She was a fellow Fabian who was also an Irish heiress. In 1898, the two tied the wedding knot. They never consummated their marriage, at the insistence of Charlotte.

The couple moved, in 1906, to a house which has now become famous as Shaw's Corner. The house is in Ayot St. Lawrence which is just a tiny village in Hertfordshire.

While Shaw refused to contest for MPship, as a Progressive he got elected to the post of local councillor to the London County Council. This happened in the year 1897.

It was in the 1880s, that Shaw's plays began to be staged and before that decade came to a close, he was an established and celebrated playwright. Shaw authored sixty-three plays. He has left behind a huge volume of private correspondence, essays, critiques, pamphlets and novels. Shaw is credited with having composed over two lakh fifty thousand letters. In 1895, Shaw founded the London School of Economics and Political Science with members of the Fabian Society, Graham Wallas, Beatrice Webb and Sidney. It was funded by private philanthropists. Of the libraries at LSE, one is named in Shaw's honour. In this library are housed collection of his photographs and papers. *New Statesman*, left-wing magazine was established in 1913 and Shaw helped in the process as did the various prominent Fabian Society members and the Webbs.

In 1885, William Archer sponsored Shaw and he joined the reviewing staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. This is when he became an arts critic. He authored pieces using the pseudonym 'Corno di Bassetto' meaning 'basset horn' for the explicit reason that no one knew what it meant and it did sound European. He used the byline 'GBS' in various other periodicals, such as *Our Corner* (1885-86) and *Dramatic Review* (1885-86.) As a drama critic from 1895 to 1898, with the *Saturday Review*, which was owned by his friend Frank Harris, Shaw used the opportunity to campaign for removing the Victorian hypocrisies and artificialities with a theatre of thought and actuality.

Following is a quote from one of the reviews by George Bernard Shaw where we find him criticizing the practice of and holding Sir Henry Irving for clipping parts of plays written by Shakespeare to make their 'acting versions':

'In a true republic of art, Sir Henry Irving would ere this have expiated his acting versions on the scaffold. He does not merely cut plays; he disembowels them. In *Cymbeline* he has quite surpassed himself by extirpating the antiphonal third verse of the famous dirge. A man who would do that would do anything—cut the coda out of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or shorten one of Velázquez's Philips into a kitcat to make it fit over his drawing room mantelpiece.'

He is, therefore, credited with the cause for this 200 year old editing practice for creating 'acting versions' of Shakespearean plays. This accolade was showered on him by John F. Matthews, a Shavian scholar.

In most of the critique of music done by Shaw, whether they are his short comments or the book sized essay titled *The Perfect Wagnerite*, Shaw praises the work done by Richard Wagner, a German composer. Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which is a

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musical dramatization that comprised four volumes was looked upon by Shaw as a work of genius. Shaw performed a detail review of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Outside the realm of music he looked upon it as an allegory of social evolution. Wagner was sympathetic towards the working classes this perspective has been highlighted by Shaw. On the other hand, Shaw belittled Brahms and scoffed *A German Requiem* opining that, 'it could only have come from the establishment of a first-class undertaker'. According to him, there was no intellect in Brahms- there was certainly a huge amount of musicality, saying '...nobody can listen to Brahms' natural utterance of the richest absolute music, especially in his chamber compositions, without rejoicing in his natural gift'.

The music related writing done by Shaw became hugely popular as, opposed to the other critics' writings of those times, since it was easily understood by the general well-read audience. *Shaw's Music* contains all the critical analysis that he did. In his role as a drama critic in *Saturday Review*, Shaw greatly supported the playwright Henrik Ibsen who appalled the Victorian public with his realistic plays. Shaw passed away in 1950 at the age of 94.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. On whose insistence did Shaw agree to accept the Nobel Prize and why?
2. Where was Shaw born?
3. What major event occurred in the life of Shaw when he was sixteen years of age?

6.3 SHAW'S METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

About *Man and Superman*, Shaw is known to have 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 married.' From this we can glean that *Man and Superman* is a comedy of manners which is filled with farcical elements, and it is not an actual deviation from the usual Victorian theatre. The play has rather familiar melodramatic and romantic components like capture by brigands, seemingly fallen woman, a love triangle and a will. Various common and much familiar comic types are part of the play and some of these are a mother bent on getting her daughter married, a servant who is impertinent and brash and is more aware than the master, and also some caricatures like the one of the American millionaire Malone. When it comes to character portrayal, Shaw more often than not leans towards overstatement, a form of exaggeration which is attributed traditionally to satirists and comic writers.

Like various other writers, in *Man and Superman*, the situations that Shaw develops are with the help of a trail of misunderstandings that we can refer to as being 'mistaken awarenesses.' This gives him the ability to generally create both exciting and amusing climax to every act. To take an example, quite early in the first Act, Ramsden is depicted as being confident of being Ann Whitefield's sole guardian and he is bent upon keeping Jack Tanner, a revolutionist, away from her. On Jack's appearing, Ramsden gets to know that Jack, much against his will, is to be the young lady's co-guardian. An audience is always satisfied by such dramatic irony. In Act One itself, a sub-plot takes off, that of Violet Robinson-Hector Malone and it serves as the main action's counterpoint.

In keeping with the main plot, this sub-plot too develops the theme of sex, depicting woman to be the partner who is dominant in the game of love. Before Violet makes her entry, everyone is of the opinion that she has disgraced herself. At this point, Shaw has developed and carried through very finely the modern drama's dramatic irony. He has handled with great finesse and expertise the counter-discovery, or the correction of mistaken awareness: the lady, Violet, turns out to be a respectable and married woman. This and other such situations play a vital part towards a character's development. Jack gets a chance to speak out his modern day thought, beliefs and ideas, which are much in contrast to those of the old-fashioned liberal Ramsden. This is done by Jack when the latter shows dissent toward the unsolicited and new responsibility thrust upon him and more so when he defends her expressively and gets rebuke from her. All of this is not as though irrelevant as far as the play's main theme is concerned, as it depicts Violet as well as Ann to be young women who in their own ways are determined to have their way.

With the unfolding of the play we see how Shaw carries on putting dramatic irony to effective use. Jack Tanner and Starker's initial conversation reveal to the viewers that Tanner who is blissfully ignorant is the one who will become prey to Ann's prey and not young Octaves. When Ann enters, she does not know that the note from Rhoda specifying the actual reason for the younger sister's disability to accompany Tanner on the motor trip has been received by Jack. Hector Malone makes his entry. He is the only one aware that Violet's husband is no other than Violet herself. The comic possibilities that this situation possesses are not lost as Shaw uses them to his advantage to balance it well with the earlier situation involving Violet and Jack. Jack is profuse in defending Hector who only becomes indignant with Jack.

In the second Act, a melodramatic story element is introduced by Shaw. While brigands in the Spanish Sierra capture the protagonist along with his chauffeur, the audience gets to know that the leader of the brigand, Mendoza, was pushed into his ways due to the fact that love for a young lady went unrequited. However, as coincidence would have it, the lady turns out to be Louisa Starker and she is the sister of the captive chauffeur.

The Don-Juan-in-Hell interlude also holds both mistaken awareness and coincidence. The old crone who makes inquiry to the first soul she meets turns out to be Dona Ana and learns that she is conversing with her father's 'murderer' and her one-time lover.

The fourth Act is chockfull of instances of mistaken awareness. Malone thinks his son to be chasing a married woman only to get to know that she is married to Hector. This incident creates a balance with the episode in Act One. Away from the sub-plot, the main plot reveals that Ann finally refuses to Octaves and Jack becomes aware that he is now caught and stuck will prove to be supreme examples of mistaken awareness and subsequent discoveries.

Inversion is employed by Shaw extremely masterfully. And he was an innovator when looked at in the light of nineteenth century drama, specifically Victorian drama. Shaw has adroitly used the character of Henry Starker, to depict a servant more aware than his master. In Mrs Whitefield's characterization as done by Shaw, there is a comic inversion. She is a mother in popular drama and is bent upon getting her daughter married. She is devoted to Octaves like he is her best son but she cannot let him fall victim to Ann so she should be matched with Jack. The Don-Juan-in-Hell interlude too has sterling Shavian inversions. While heaven is boring, hell is a place of enjoyment. Hell houses the

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Seven Deadly Virtues in whose names most of the world's misery has been caused. The Devil is a would-be gentleman and democrat, acclaims beauty and love and wishes happiness for all. In the play, Don Juan cannot be held to a murderer and condemned sensualist. In fact he is a high-thinking individual who is of pure reason and idealistic.

Man and Superman is full of farcical incidents, comic reversals and is highly melodramatic with the use of type characters. According to Shaw, 'This pleasantry is not the essence of the play.' The play is a comedy as well as a philosophy. It is even great theatre.

Deftly, Shaw brings variation in each character's manner of speaking. Shaw is known to have said, '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.' If we make a comparison of the speech delivered by Tanner and the one delivered by Ramsden we will see how Shaw works with the voice of his characters. Ramsden's words make him appear to be 'a president of highly respectable men, a chairman among directors, an alderman among counsellors, a mayor among alderman.' However, the brash remark by Tanner has scandalized him and he then appears to be like a dignified Member of Parliament who is accustomed to success through the 'withdrawal of opposition and the concession of comfort and precedence and power.' On the other hand, the style attached to Jack much like an orator who makes his speeches at street corners and public parks. His talk is intense and exciting apt for a person who takes pride in being an iconoclast and much like Shaw has understood that to attract attention one has to shock and startle. In the play, Tanner has been made master of aphorisms, epigrams, jests and sallies. Unhesitatingly he calls Ann 'a boa constrictor,' and Ramsden 'an old man with obsolete ideas', even declaring that 'morality can go to its father, the Devil.' All this pleases the audience.

Violet wanted a rich husband and has got one, and she articulates in much different a manner than Ann Whitefield. Her words are always to the point and direct. When Jack Tanner, after being crushed, tries to defend her, her terse words are, 'I hope you will be more careful in the future of things you say.' Her practical counsel to Hector is, 'You can be as romantic as you please about love, Hector; but you must not be romantic about money.' Ann, who is superior to Violet in intellect and is the Vital Woman, is capable of and actually does utter such words as to appear as a dutiful daughter, helpless and weak. She finds no difficulty in fooling Granny Ramsden and in making Octaves think of her as the model Womanly Woman. On Tanner confessed gloomily that he also has to be her guardians, Anne is overjoyed, 'Then we are all agreed; and my dear father's will is to be carried out. You don't know what a joy that is to me and my mother!' then, when she and Jack are alone (she knows that Jack understands her act) she has a new style of discourse and easily matches wits with him.

The play is also operatic in yet another way. Jack Tanner's longer speeches, as also some made by others, are pieces of exceptional brilliance much like grand opera arias. Some examples are found in Tanner's defense of Violet, and his denunciation of the tyranny of mothers and of the institution of marriage, Don Juan's memorable discourse in which he makes the announcement that he intends to leave Hell and move to Heaven.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What are some of the techniques used by Shaw?
5. Which element is introduced by Shaw in the second Act?
6. What kind of mistaken awareness takes place in the fourth Act?

6.4 PLOT OVERVIEW

Man and Superman by
G.B. Shaw

Act I

Man and Superman opens in a study in Portland Place, London. Roebuck Ramsden, elderly man who looks to be of affairs and affluence is present onstage. The maid announces a young poet, Octaves Robinson. Octaves Robinson enters clad in an elegant mourning suit. Through the consolation that Ramsden provides to Octaves Robinson, it is revealed that Mr Whitefield, Octaves' friend and benefactor, has passed away. It is shown that Ramsden is completely certain and confident of being guardian to Ann and Rhoda, Whitefield's daughters. He also goes on to say he is hopeful of a marriage between Octaves and Ann. There is, Octaves believes, nothing else that could bring him such happiness. During the conversation, Octaves receives a warning from Ramsden regarding Ann's friend John Tanner who has authored the infamous volume *Revolutionist's Handbook*. Tanner is looked upon by Ramsden as being of low morals. Ramsden himself takes pride in being both liberal and of advanced thought. In case Ramsden will be made Ann's guardian he wants to ensure that Tanner gets nowhere near her.

This very moment sees the entry of Jack Tanner, the very object of Ramsden's disapproval. He is attractive as also, quite clearly, a man who is superior. He appears to be panicking. Excitedly, he tells Ramsden that Whitefield's will has made both Ramsden and himself the guardians of Ann. The irony is that Ramsden had provided advice to Mr Whitefield to team him with a man who was younger and he never expected that Mr Whitefield would choose Tanner. Tanner begs Ramsden to help him escape from this situation with the argument that Ann might appear to be but is not a dutiful and weak young woman. Tanner opines that she is both hypocritical and willful and he goes on to say that, she would 'commit every crime a respectable woman can.' On the other hand, Ramsden makes it crystal clear in no uncertain terms that he will not be co-guardian along with Tanner. At this point, Tanner makes a prediction that they will never get away from the responsibility that has been thrust upon their shoulders. It is appalling for Octaves to hear Tanner talking of Ann in such unflattering terms and making her out to be a siren, and an unscrupulous one at that. Octaves looks upon her as being a goddess, and Tanner's words will not make him believe otherwise. Octaves is naive and for him, Anne is 'reality of romance.'

Ann enters at this point. She is described by Shaw as being, 'perfectly ladylike, graceful, and comely, with ensnaring eyes and hair.' She is filled with vitality, the trait that makes her different from other women who are also beautiful. She is accompanied by her mother, Mrs Whitefield. She is a little, lacks vitality and carries an expression which is of 'muddled shrewdness.' Ann is acting the helpless and dutiful daughter. She hears Ramsden out while he informs her that he and Tanner are named as co-trustees and co-guardians for her and her sister. Now the prophesy made by Tanner comes true. Ann will not go against the will of her father. So, Jack and Ramsden (she calls him "Granny") will have to serve.

When Jack and Octaves were busy putting forth their personal, and contrasting, views regarding Anne, Ramsden had gone off stage. Now he enters carrying some 'terrible news.' Violet is Octaves' sister. She is going to become an unwed mother. Everyone is shocked, except Tanner. He says that Violet needs to be congratulated for achieving 'the fulfillment of her highest purpose and greatest function — to increase,

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multiply, and replenish the earth.' Everyone, especially Ramsden put forth their conventional views: Violet has fallen victim to 'a rascal . . . a libertine, a villain worse than a murderer' who is in their very midst! Ramsden says he suspects Tanner, describing him as 'a man of notoriously loose principles.' Skillfully, Tanner makes it clear that Ramsden, too, is not above suspicion.

Jack and Ann are shown alone on the stage for the first time and they are in conversation. It is brought out that they have been acquainted since childhood and Ann has had Jack express his love to her once. Ann confesses that at one time when Jack had made a pretence of being in love with some other girl, she had violated his confidence; Anne had informed the girl that Jack already had told her about the attachment. At this point, Tanner declares that this caused him to believe that the only real passion was moral passion; he no longer wants romance. This exchange is full of Shavian ideas that are extremely interesting. This conversation also makes it evident that in the game of love, Ann is the active one. In Tanner's words, 'I never feel safe with you: there is a devilish charm — or no: a subtle interest.'

There is re-entry of Miss Ramsden, Octaves and Ramsden. Miss Ramsden is a spinster who is extremely hardheaded. She is resolute to immediately have Violet leave the house as she seemingly wants to again meet the person who betrayed her. Enter Violet, an impenitent and self-possessed individual. Tanner is profusely approving of her and in return she turns upon him, fiercely rejecting the compliments he has given. In the process Violet ends up telling that she is already married, secretly.

Act II

This Act opens in the carriage drive of the park in the house near Richmond. Tanner is on stage and is attired in the contemporary motoring costume. He is looking at Henry Starker, his chauffeur, who is busy fixing the vehicle. Their verbal exchange brings out that Enry (Henry Starker) falls in the category of the new type of servants, those who are fully conscious of their superiority, in the case of Enry it is machines. Rightly so, Jack Tanner makes an observation that he, the master, is now a slave to both the chauffeur and the car. Enry is informed by Tanner that Octaves is being driven down by Mr Malone, in a new American steam car. Mr Malone is an American gentleman. The chauffeur shows his frustration at being unable to race them yet finds consolation in the fact that the group will be using both cars as transportation. The group comprises Jack, Rhoda, Ann, Violet and Octaves.

Octaves enters at this point. At this point in the play there is a humorous discussion with Tanner describing the status of Enry as being of a New Man, belonging to the group of engineers who are class conscious. Enry is not disrespectful even though he is fully conscious of the fact that he has more knowledge of machines than his master Tanner.

When Octaves and Tanner are alone, Octaves seeks sympathy from Tanner. He had proposed to Ann but his proposal was rejected. Jack is insistent that Ann has not rejected him; it is just that she is still not done teasing him. According to Jack, while Ann is the pursuer, he, Octaves, is her chosen victim. Octaves is lovesick and quick to discard what Jack advocates as according to him, Jack is again wallowing in 'eternal shallow cynicism.' As soon as Tanner gets to know that Octaves was reproached by Ann only because he did not seek permission before approaching her, Jack blesses the two with happiness. He does add that Ann and Octaves are both equally free to choose. An argument ensues between Octaves and Tanner regarding the views they hold about love. With the re-entry of Starker, there is a shift in conversation and the discussion now is about the preoccupation that Enry's has with motor racing.

Jack has Rhoda Whitefield's note handed over to him by Octaves. The note says that Rhoda has been forbidden by Ann, her elder sister, from taking the motor trip where Tanner will be there. She has even forbidden Rhoda from ever being with Tanner, since Tanner is 'not a fit person for a young girl.' Octaves' views match those of Ann, in that the views that Jack holds are not right for the growth of character and mind of a young girl.

Ann enters at this point. She gives the information that Rhoda is having a headache and is unable to join them. This hugely amuses Jack; Ann has been trapped by him in a lie from which she, according to him, cannot get out. But she does. She send off Octaves for taking care of Mr Malone and then informs Jack that she only did her mother's bidding as the dutiful daughter. This, of course, is just another one of her lies. Here Jack gets an opportunity to burst out against the tyranny of mothers and to throw a challenge to Ann for making her independence evident by accompanying on a continental motor trip. He is mortified when she does not hesitate to agree. Her explanation is that since Jack is her guardian and stands in her father's place, there will not be any impropriety.

Enters Hector Malone in the company of Mrs Whitefield. They are followed by Octaves and Ramsden. Jack is hopeful that Ann will be forbidden by Mrs Whitefield to undertake the trip with him. He learns that she has no — what reason could there be for her to object? She goes on to say that she wanted to speak with Jack and ask him to occasionally take Rhoda riding. Jack again gets to know that Ann told a lie. Jack exclaims, 'Abyss beneath abyss of perfidy!' To avert further outburst, hurriedly, Ann introduces Jack and Hector. In the conversation between Hector, Octaves and Tanner, Hector's devoutness to Violet becomes evident. He is warned of her being married though who her husband is still remains a mystery. Chivalrous Hector declares that he intends to respect her wishes but wonders why a husband would not want his wife to reveal his identity. The conversation trails to the subject of marriage and womanhood, with orthodox views being aired by Tanner. Hector expresses his wish to hold a short private conversation with Violet.

Hector and Violet are alone on stage and exchange kisses. This reveals the fact that he is Violet's husband. The reason due to which they kept their marriage a secret was that Hector's father, a millionaire, wished Hector to marry into an aristocratic family so that the bride would have 'a handle to her name.' Violet is pushed by Hector to allow him to publicly announce the marriage even if this disclosure gets him disinherited from his father's fortune. Violet is against all such 'nonsense.' She tells Hector that there is no reason to get romantic when it comes to money and does not wish to battle with poverty and a life of struggles. On his saying that he could borrow money and go to work, Violet displays shock responding with: 'Do you want to spoil our marriage?' Young Hector continues to worry the lie they have told, and more so since Jack Tanner's argument that the unknown husband of Violet was not ennobled by marriage. As far as Violet is concerned, Jack is no more than a hateful beast. To Hector, the tolerant young American, all that Jack needs is a good woman's love.

Starker and Tanner return while Violet and Hector head off for a steam car inspection. A discussion takes place between Enry and Jack regarding the continental trip. While the conversation is under way, the insightful Enry tells Tanner that Ann will never marry Octaves and it appears she is after Jack. This appalls Tanner for it makes him 'the bee, the spider, the marked-down victim' that Ann is going all out to capture. Wanting to escape, Jack beseeches Enry to create a new record in motoring and go across the Continent far away from the reach of Ann.

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Act III

The third Act is set in the evening time in the Spanish Sierras and the stage is a natural amphitheatre. Around a campfire which is nearly out, about a dozen men recline. One man is seen at the adjacent rise of ground playing the role of a lookout. The men are an international band of brigands who rob the occupants of motor cars 'to secure a more equitable distribution of the wealth.' Mendoza is their leader. He is a man of ready wit and fine voice. His group has a drink ruined bullfighter, some Americans, cockney Englishmen and at least one Frenchman. They appear to be on the right side of their 30s while one of them is 10-20 years older than them and is attired like a broken-down English gentleman; his description is that of the group's respectable member.

As they sit in wait of victims, they continue with their evening debates, subjects being Social-Democrats and Anarchists. In the group there are three Social-Democrats and one Anarchist which makes the discussion lively. Others say they are Christians and gentlemen. The discussions are presided over by Mendoza with his characteristic skill and wit, smoothly controlling the excited and intense speakers. There is the sound of a motor car approaching and the debate halts. The brigand is ready: road is strewn with nails to cause punctures while a rifled brigand is standing in wait in case the nails do not work. Nails prove useless. Forcefully, the car is stopped and Jack and Enry are taken as prisoners.

With good humour, Tanner gives in to his capture. On the one hand, Mendoza makes his introduction as the President of the League of the Sierra who makes a living by robbing the rich, on the other Jack says he is a gentleman who lives by robbing the poor. Hence, the two of them have a common bond. The exchanges that take place between the brigands and Enry Starker make Enry undecided about whether Jack and he are in a Socialist meeting or taking a joyous mountain trip.

Mendoza the courteous and dignified, makes an announcement that Spain one puts off business until the next day and also dismisses the group. It is now possible for everyone to relax; ransom will not be mentioned. Responding to the question posed by Tanner and the occasional remarks made by Enry, Mendoza begins by speaking about Socialism and moves on to narrate the story of his life. He was once a waiter who was very successful, failure in love made him a brigand. She was not the daughter of an earl and was far more attractive than ladies of the English aristocracy. Had not she been 'a woman of the people,' she would have been scorned by him. He had had to face rejection for being Jew. Having been employed with a Jewish family convinced her that Gentiles, specifically the English Gentiles, were looked upon by the Jews as being of dirty habits. At this point, Enry remembers his sister as having cooked for a family of Jewish. This unfolds a dramatic coincidence. Enry's sister Louisa is Mendoza's beloved. The leader of the brigand has heard a lot about his beloved's favourite brother Enry. Yet, Enry is displeased with the idea of brigand talk of the love he had for Louisa. So much so that once even Tanner has to prevent physical violence by his intervention. With things under control and quiet, Enry sleeps with the other brigands. Jack and Mendoza carry on discussions and the brigand's tendency to paraphrasing Shakespeare and poetry becomes visible. In a solemn tone, Tanner urges him to stop thinking of Louisa and let go of the romantic pose, saying that all that this is, is 'sacrificing his career to a monomania.' Tanner's advice will not be taken by Mendoza because the mountains create dreams of beautiful women; certainly 'this is a strange country for dreams.'

As Tanner lies down to sleep, the brigand narrates to him an original love poem addressed to his beloved, and before it finished, Jack has fallen asleep.

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There is a further deepening of the darkness. At a place there is visible the start of a pallor. A man, accompanied by music which is eerie, is identified. He is visible but ghostly. The man lifts his head to the Mozartian strains of the music. However, the strains die out, killed by wind instruments uncannily wailing and, the man is seen to slump dejectedly. The man is a fifteenth-sixteenth century Spanish nobleman — Don Juan. It might appear odd but he looks a lot like Tanner. They also have similar names - Jack Tanner - Juan Tenorio. A lost looking old crone strays into the void. Their conversation reveals her to be a newcomer, a person who passed away that very morning. She is both shocked and disbelieving, when she is informed by Don Juan that it is Hell that she has entered. She was confident to get Heaven or at least to be sent to Purgatory. She lives neither as a lady nor as a faithful daughter of the Church, attending confession regularly. She is assured by Don Juan that Hell has many good people, too. When she asks about him, she gets to know, to her dismay, that he was a murderer. He does later say it was self-indictment, as the man died dueling with him. Again when she is told by Don Juan that she is actually in Hell, she is lamenting for having let slip many opportunities for doing wicked. She is still not ready to believe. There is no pain that she feels, why? She is told by the Spaniard that in Hell there is comfort for the wicked and that she is here is no mistake. The Spaniard confesses of his discomfort in Hell as it bores him completely. He does go on to imply that he was never really wicked and reveals the duel's circumstances. The dueling partner he had was an enraged father out to defend the honour of his daughter and attempted to kill Don Juan. Actually he fell foolishly in love with the girl who screamed when he proclaimed his love.

The new soul in Hell is insistent that Don Juan, same as all other men, was but a murderer and libertine. She confesses that it was the same scenario that took her father's life. It was her duty to scream while the honour of her father required that he attack the prospective lover. It is explained by Don Juan that Hell is attained as duty's reward. Here lies the home of justice, duty, honour and all seven of the deadly virtues, since wickedness on earth is performed in the name of all these virtues.

Post discussion about her being the Devil's subject, she is informed by Don Juan that she can choose to be as old as she desires. Her age of choice is twenty-seven and it makes her a radiant beauty so attractive that she could have been taken to be Ann Whitefield. Don Juan is amazed and addresses her as Dona Ana de Ulloa, the cause of his dual. At this point, Ana exclaims, 'You who slew my father! even here you pursue me.' Yet Don Juan is insistent that he did not slew her father. It makes her delighted to me.' Yet Don Juan is insistent that he did not slew her father. On being asked by know that there is a possibility of her paying a visit to her father. On being asked by whether or not he had been in love with her, Don Juan becomes impatiently and tells her to refrain from mentioning love. Those in Hell keep speaking of the spirituality, holiness and beauty of love but have no clue what love actually is.

Music is heard playing in the background. It is evident to Don Juan that this is the music of the statue of Mozart. He tells Ana that soon her father will appear. At a former time he had informed Ana that bored of Heaven her father often visited Hell. Enter the Commander of Calatrava's living statue. He chose to remain in the form of a statue the form in which he had gained more admiration. Ana he cannot recognize; he is even unable to recall his daughter's name and tells not to look upon him as her father but rather a fellow creature. The fact does stand that while she died at eighty he had died at just sixty-four. It horrifies Ana that her father is all praises for life in Hell: his conclusion is 'Hell . . . is a place where you have nothing to do but amuse yourself.' These words draw a sigh from Don Juan. The Statue makes up its mind to reside in Hell, giving up Heaven discomfort and dullness. He waves a hand and music begins to play - Mozartian

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chords mingle grotesquely with strains from Gounod's *Faust*. A dramatic appearance is made by the Devil. His appearance resembles Mendoza, the brigand leader. The Statue is welcomed by him as he enthusiastically talks of the infernal preoccupation with beauty, happiness, love and joy. While the statue is awed by it all, Don Juan feels sickened. It elates the Devil that the statue has permanently left Heaven. As the Devil and Don Juan cannot stand each other, the Devil first tells Ana and then the statue to make Don Juan move to Heaven. He gives a long explanation of the gap between Hell and Heaven and he talks from firsthand experience as he has lived in both. While in Hell happiness is pursued and tender emotion cultivated, in Heaven remains intellectual and therefore cold. To Don Juan, those residing in Hell are just full of romantic illusions. Don Juan desires to give himself up to contemplation, more specifically to help life struggle upward as he holds enduring faith in the potential of humanity. He praises humanity, calling it the greatest miracle of organization reached by life with only a little bit still to develop. The Devil looks upon humans to be creatures that cause destruction and bungle with peace. This does not trouble Don Juan. His argument is that the Devil makes the mistake of considering us at our own evaluation of ourselves. Don Juan gives a long speech regarding the destiny of humanity, and says that Life Force's greatest object is intellect — the philosophic man's progression. It has been seen that great ideas have moved man — as seen in the force of Christianity. We must be moved by the Life Force to reach the ideal of the philosophic.

Don Juan is just as empathic on Ana's bringing up the topic of women relative to men. Don Juan provides an explanation that in the eyes of woman the role of man is to ensure the children are provided for. By instinct, a woman is aware of her great mission, which is bearing children: 'Sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way.' Don Juan concludes by saying that the numerical strength of man and his excess energy makes him dissatisfied with self-reproduction alone: So, civilization is created by him, but not in consultation with Woman. An unflattering view of the civilization created by man is put forth by the Devil. Don Juan is in agreement that man's civilization is in no way a success, yet the point he puts forth is that as Life makes a 'continual effort not only to maintain itself but to achieve higher and higher organization and complete self-consciousness,' battles are all that have been lost, the larger conflict still remains. The force called Life always attempted and is still making efforts to make higher individuals on its attempt toward godhead. It is Life that is 'driving at brains' which man uses for obtaining self-understanding and self-consciousness.

Brains are not respected by the Statue as he feels that thinking is not needed for majority of his pleasures. Don Juan gives this as the reason for intellect not being popular and adds that it is essential for Life Force's survival. While all are tiresome failures, the philosophic man is happy as well as respected universally. Don Juan backs up the argument using examples of the Artist who gives us enchanting paintings and loves lyrics, doctors of divinity and doctors of medicine. Don Juan confesses that the Artist (romantic man) is the reason he worships Woman though his wealth and social rank have saved him from falling victim to romantic illusions. He did learn that women relentlessly pursue men when motivated by instinct.

Don Juan's personal experiences had made him feel that marriage is recognized by the Life Force just for the purpose of ensuring the most children possible without a care for 'honor, chastity, and all the rest of your moral figments.' He proposes that marriage is popular as it is humans' most immoral institution and this shocks Ana and her father. Ana defends marriage saying that this institution, and not wickedness, populates

the world. Don Juan says that the day is not far when those who are prudent will seek sterility and prior to this there will be reaction. The key reason for breeding human kind to 'heights now deemed superhuman: that purpose now hidden in a mephitic cloud of love and romance and prudery and fastidiousness, will break through into clear sunlight as a purpose no longer to be confused with the gratification of personal fancies, the impossible realization of boys' and girls' dreams of bliss, or the need of older people for companionship or money.' In the following discussion between the Statue and Don Juan there is amusing illustration of the dreams and fancies referred to previously.

Don Juan and then informed by the Devil that in Hell he has got none of what he was repelled by but all of that which he sought. Don Juan says it has given him just disappointment: 'I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life.' To put it another way, within him works the Life Force providing 'incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, more intense self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding,' which clearly point towards Superman's ultimate emergence.

Don Juan, already disgusted by the Devil's repetitive talk of religion of beauty and love, gets to know of the fact that Heaven has no artistic beings, he wishes to leave. When he asks directions for reaching there, he is told by the Statue: "The frontier between Heaven and Hell is only the difference between two ways of looking at things; any road will take you across." At this point, Don Juan makes his way out.

A warning is given to the Statue by the Devil to not start pursuing Superman as it is a dangerous thing to do and will cause 'an indiscriminate contempt for the human.' On being asked by Ana where Superman can be found, she is told he does not exist yet. She replies, 'Then my work is not yet done. I believe in the Life to come.' Talking to the universe, she says: 'A father, a father for superman.' With this Ana is gone. The scene moves back to the Sierra.

The setting is the morning after. The sanctuary wakes up the brigands telling them that an automobile is coming towards them along with a couple of armored cars carrying soldiers. Enter Ann, Violet, Hector Malone, Ramsden, and after a pause Octaves. On entering Ann directly goes to Jack Tanner. Jack is informed by Hector that Ann tracked him at every stopping place — 'She is a regular Sherlock Holmes. The Life Force! I am lost,' Tanner exclaims. The Brigand is not arrested, all thanks to Tanner who says they are not his captors but escorts. The brigands show him gratitude, except the Anarchist. He folds his arms in defiance to the State.

Act IV

The scene is set in Granada, in the garden of a pretentious and expensive villa. Enter Enry Starker and an elderly Irishman. Enry was given the task of delivering a note to Hector at the latter's hotel. Enry remains confused as this Irishman is being said to be Hector Malone but had given in to bring him to the villa on being informed that 'it's all right.' He now learns that stranger is not even aware of the name of Violet Robinson. Violet enters at this point. The Irishman says he is Hector Malone, Sr. (now on he will be called Malone and his son Hector, Jr.). Enry and Malone have amusing exchanges regarding their respective dialects. An apology is made by Violet regarding any rudeness Enry might have committed: 'But what can we do? He is our chauffeur.' The mechanical skills make Enry indispensable.

Malone did understand that his son was deeply interested in a woman he did not know. Now he gets to know that Violet is whom Hector wishes to marry. Malone

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informs Violet that from Hector 'will not have a rap' if they marry as he has other plans. It is granted by Malone that though Violet is an excellent and amiable young lady, both she and his son are romantics unconcerned with money. He is surprised to hear Violet say she is not as foolish and money must be given to Hector. Malone says Hector will need to work for it and Violet says calmly if one has to work then it is useless to have money. Violet nearly goes out of control on hearing Malone say she should not wed on this belief. Her question is if her position is not as good as his sons. Malone says the Hector's social position will remain just what he wishes to purchase. The father amply clarifies that he will wed Hector to an aristocrat's daughter. Malone confesses that there would have been no objection from his side if Hector had decided to wed barefooted Irish girl since his grandmother was one too. Then Hector would have received financial help from Malone as this spending would have been concerned with 'social profit.' Now, his wedding with Violet would leave things 'just like they are' keeping Hector remain middle class.

Malone begins to respect Violet and considers her 'a pretty straightforward downright sort of young woman.' But stays firm: 'I want no middle class properties and no middle class woman for Hector.' Hector's entry interrupts the discussion between Malone and Violet regarding what the father should and Violet could do for him. This annoys Violet as she wanted to turn Malone to her side and it needed some time. Behaving like a man of honour, Hector appears indignant at his father for opening a letter addressed to him: 'That's disavnerable.' Fearful of a scene, Violet tells him not to be unreasonable. The letter was opened as the envelope carried Malone's name.

Muted glares are exchanged between father and son. Enter Ann, Octaves, Ramsden and Tanner. When asked by Violet to introduce his father, Hector refuses bluntly: 'He is no father of mine.' Astonished, Octaves and Ann withdraw and Violet implores father and son not to create a scene. There is nothing Violet can do while 'in helpless annoyance as her husband soars to higher and higher moral eminences without the least regard to the old man's millions.' Complication is added to the situation by Tanner when he reveals the fact that Violet is married. This make Malone believe that Hector has pursued a woman who is married. 'You've picked up the habit of the British aristocracy, have you?' he nearly screams into Hector's ear. Now, Hector reveals the truth and Malone is crushed. He says, 'She's married a beggar.' Hector reveals the fact that as of that afternoon he has become a working man. He will accept no remittances from one who is insulting his wife. This declaration of independence makes the romantic Octaves tearful. He begs to shake Hector's hand. Tears have welled in Violet eyes, but due to rage. 'Oh, don't be an idiot, Tavey, says the vexed Violet.

Octaves and Tanner generously offer Hector support to make a good beginning. Malone feels jealous that others should not help Hector. Malone apologizes to Violet and asks Hector to take no rash step. Malone says Violet is the right wife for Hector. It seems to have gone fine for Hector and Violet. However, Hector wants to remain independent. Malone tells Violet to make him see sense. He even agrees to take no step till he consults her and hands him a bill of thousand-dollar, Hector's 'bachelor allowance.' Tanner who has observed the change in behaviour of the Irish multimillionaire, 'one of the master spirits of the age,' begins to think if a woman will ever force him to become so. At this point, Ramsden opines that the sooner it happens the better it will be for him.

Exit Violet. Malone is extremely happy. 'That'll be a grand woman for Hector. I wouldn't exchange her for ten duchesses.' The Ramsden, Tanner and Malone conversation makes it evident Malone is in Granada on account of his investment in Mendoza. Malone is told by Jack that Mendoza is completely a commercial man. Jack

promises Malone to take him to Mendoza. Exit Malone and Ramsden. Octaves and Ann are walking in the garden. Jack calls to Octaves, and says that the father-in-law of his sister is 'a financier of brigands.' Then, he rushes after the two men who had just exit the scene.

Octaves again makes an attempt to win the hand of the one he worships. She informs him that her mother wishes her to wed Jack. Tavy for an instance is of the belief that his friend has been false while pushing him not to wed Ann. Ann is insistent that this is not true, and goes on to say that Jack is unsure of what he wants. Ann informs Tavy of the fact that while her mother is insistent that she wed Jack and this was also her father's wish. This makes Ann out to be a dutiful daughter in the eyes of Octaves. A little pity is felt by Ann for the romantic Octaves which makes her gentle towards him. Ann reminds him that she can never attain the idea he had of divinity and he would forever worship the ground she walked. He needs to stay a sentimental bachelor. Octaves vows suicide but Ann says that it would be an unkind act. She tells Tavy not to inform Jack of the marriage or he will again run away. This shocks Tavy. Will she wed a man who is unwilling? Ann tells him that the man is no more unwilling when a woman is really after him: 'The only really simple thing is to go straight for what you want and grab it.' She tells Tavy it is best to just dream of women and in actuality stay away from them. She tells Tavy that Violet is "hard as nails." Ann enters the villa after saying goodbye to Tavy and patting his cheek.

Enter Mrs Whitefield. She runs to Tavy who is crying. She is told that Ann will wed Jack, as per the wishes of her mother. Though Mrs. Whitefield tells him the truth, he is sure Ann will not lie to him. Enter Tanner. He informs that he has left Malone and Mendoza in each other's company. Seeing the state Tavy is in he asks what the matter is. In a sad tone, Tavy requests Mrs. Whitefield to inform Jack of her wishes. Then he leaves. This puzzles Jack. Mrs Whitefield talks of the complications like now-a-days: 'Nothing has been right since that speech Professor Tyndale made at Belfast.' Jack is in agreement and wishes to know what it is she wants him to do. Mrs Whitefield says that he will wed Ann but must not put the mother at fault for it. Emphatically Tanner says he does not intend to wed Ann. Mrs Whitefield wishes they marry as then Ann will meet her match. Jack calls Ann a liar with a hypocrite, a bullier of women, a croquette, a liar with no scruples. Mrs Whitefield is in agreement and goes on to say she is fond of Tavy and would not want him to suffer at the hands of Ann while Jack is well capable of looking after himself. She goes on to say that it is not as though she has no love for Ann just because she does know what faults her daughter has.

Enter Violet and Ann. Ann says that she has heard what has happened between Jack and her mother. Violet is there to bid goodbye. Violet tells Jack he should get married quickly. He knows that time is running out and says probably by day close he will be wed. Mrs Whitefield is tearful at seeing Violet go.

Tanner and Ann are alone. Jack moans that he is treated by all as though his marrying Ann is a matter that is settled completely. To this Ann replies gently that she did not propose and if he so wishes he need not marry. A sparring match ensues between Ann and Tanner. Finally, Jack takes Ann in his arms declaring his love for her and that the Life Force enchants him. As he makes a final attempt to be free of her embrace, Ann swoons.

Enter Violet, Octaves, Mrs Whitefield, Malone, Ramsden, Mendoza and Starker. Everyone is worried for Ann's wellbeing, who is enough revived to declare Jack's promise to marry her. Tavy bravely congratulates Jack. Jack tells him he was trapped even when

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he did not propose. It is a relief to Ann to hear from Violet that nothing had been said by Jack. Ann seems to swoon again but bounces back to announce her happiness. Malone finds Jack 'a rough wooer,' and is impressed by him. Jack is congratulated by all. In his last speech of length, Jack describes his status as not being a happy man. Ann and Jack have both knowingly given up tranquility, freedom, happiness and above all 'the romantic possibilities of an unknown future.'" Violet says that Jack is a brute, yet Ann's eyes have fond pride for him. Ann caresses Jack's arm. 'Go on talking,'" she says. 'Talking!' exclaims Jack, and there is universal laughter as the play folds.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Where does the play *Man and Superman* open?
8. Who is Octaves Robinson?
9. The third Act is set in the evening time in the Spanish Sierras and the stage is a natural amphitheatre. (True/False)

ACTIVITY

Read the play *Candida* by G.B Shaw and draw a character sketch of the protagonist. Contrast it with the character of the protagonist of *Man and Superman*.

DID YOU KNOW

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics.

6.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July 1856 in Dublin. He was an Irish playwright. Shaw is known to be a writer of short stories, novels and essays.
- Shaw was a passionate socialist, and he is even known to have written a number of speeches and brochures for the Fabian Society.
- The birth place of George Bernard Shaw is Synge Street, Dublin. His mother was Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw a singer by profession and his father was George Carr Shaw who was not a successful merchant of grains and was also a onetime civil servant.
- Shaw's novels were not accepted for publication and he had negligible literary earnings till the year 1885, and then he became a critic of drama which earned him enough money to support himself.
- It was in the 1980s, that Shaw's plays began to be staged and before that decade came to a close, he was an established and celebrated playwright. Shaw authored 63 plays.

- Shaw is, therefore, credited with the cause for this 200 year old editing practice for creating 'acting versions' of Shakespearean plays. This accolade was showered on him by John F. Matthews, a Shavian scholar.
- *Shaw's Music* contains all the critical analysis that he did. In his role as a drama critic in *Saturday Review*, Shaw greatly supported the playwright Henrik Ibsen who appalled the Victorian public with his realistic plays. Shaw passed away in 1950 at the age of 94.
- About *Man and Superman*, Shaw is known to say 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.'
- Like various other writers, in *Man and Superman*, the situations that Shaw develops are with the help of a trail of misunderstandings that we can refer to as being 'mistaken awarenesses.'
- With the unfolding of the play we see how Shaw carries on putting dramatic irony to effective use.
- *Man and Superman* is full of farcical incidents, comic reversals and is highly melodramatic with the use of type characters. According to Shaw, 'This pleasantry is not the essence of the play.'
- The play is also operatic in yet another way. Jack Tanner's longer speeches, as also some made by others, are pieces of exceptional brilliance much like grand opera arias.
- *Man and Superman* opens in a study in Portland Place, London. Roebuck Ramsden, elderly man who looks to be of affairs and affluence is present onstage.
- The second Act opens in the carriage drive of the park in the house near Richmond. Tanner is on stage and is attired in the contemporary motoring costume.
- The third Act is set in the evening time in the Spanish Sierras and the stage is a natural amphitheatre. Around a campfire which is nearly out, about a dozen men recline.
- In Act four the scene is set in Granada, in the garden of a pretentious and expensive villa. Enter Enry Starker and an elderly Irishman.

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6.6 KEY TERMS

- **Protagonist:** The main character in a drama or other literary work
- **Comedy of Manners:** Is a comedy that satirically portrays the manners and fashions of a particular class or set
- **Brigand:** A robber or bandit
- **Orator:** An eloquent and skilled public speaker

6.7 ANSWER TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. He agreed to accept the Nobel Prize when his wife called it a tribute to Ireland.
2. The birth place of George Bernard Shaw is Synge Street, Dublin.

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3. When Shaw was nearly sixteen years of age, his mother, with both her daughters, left and went to London, following George Vandeleur Lee, her voice teacher.
4. Shaw makes use of dramatic irony, comedy of manners and other farcical elements.
5. In the second Act, a melodramatic story element is introduced by Shaw. While brigands in the Spanish Sierra capture the protagonist along with his chauffeur, the audience gets to know that the leader of the brigand, Mendoza, was pushed into his ways due to the fact that love for a young lady went unrequited.
6. The fourth Act is chockfull of instances of mistaken awareness. Malone thinks his son to be chasing a married woman only to get to know that she is married to Hector. This incident creates a balance with the episode in Act One.
7. *Man and Superman* opens in a study in Portland Place, London.
8. Octaves Robinson is a young poet
9. True

6.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on what Shaw thought of his schools and teachers.
2. What are the main techniques that Shaw uses in his writings?
3. List the names of some of Shaw's novels.
4. What is the ploy employed by Ann to trap Jack into marriage?
5. What does the concept 'mistaken awareness' suggest? Give an example of how it is used in the play.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a detailed note on the life and background of G.B Shaw.
2. Summarize the first Act of the play *Man and Superman*.
3. What are the thoughts of the Devil about heaven and hell?
4. What are the thoughts of the Spaniard about heaven and hell?
5. Why do you think Shaw introduced the Don Juan scene into the play?

6.9 FURTHER READING

Shaw, G.B.; (1903). *Man and Superman*, The University Press, Cambridge.

UNIT III *Waiting For Godot* by Samuel Beckett

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Unit Objectives
- 7.2 Background of the Play
- 7.3 Beckett's Intuition: Nothing Really Ever Happens in Man's Existence
- 7.4 Beckett's Use of Language
- 7.5 Beckett's Dramatic Technique
- 7.6 Summary
- 7.7 Key Terms
- 7.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 7.9 Questions and Exercises
- 7.10 Further Reading

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett can deservedly be called the father of the Absurd as his play *Waiting for Godot* was to become the defining text of the theatre of the Absurd. He has inspired well-known Absurdist playwrights like Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter who have created powerful texts of the form of the Absurd. *Waiting for Godot* changed the vocabulary of drama when it first appeared in the 1950s and since then continues to be read as a defining landmark in modern theatre.

The most interesting aspect of *Waiting for Godot* is its plot. There is no story, unlike other plays, and there is no development or denouement whereby one can identify a plot. The plot has no single story, no tension and therefore no resolution. The essential situation remains the same: that on a given day, at a given place, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for someone named Godot. The absence of a plot is symbolic of the meaninglessness of life itself. Because it is impossible to view and explain life in a linear manner, the plot is non-linear and random. The entry of characters on stage is abrupt and so is their exit. This is a reflection of modern life, one without a centre.

This unit discusses the play *Waiting for Godot* from a critical perspective.

7.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the genre of Absurd in *Waiting for Godot*
- Describe the plot and dramatic technique of *Waiting for Godot*
- Analyze central characters in *Waiting for Godot*
- Appreciate Beckett's use of language in *Waiting for Godot*

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7.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

In the early 1950s, a number of dramatists came forward – Ionesco, Adamov and Genet among them – whose works can be put within the theoretical structure of what has been termed as the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’. These dramatists did not regard themselves as a coherent group or school but all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of man in the universe, a stranger in an inhuman universe. Essentially they were those summarized by Camus in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which diagnoses humanity’s plight as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings. Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do – the situation of Sisyphus, forever rolling a stone up a hill, forever aware that it will never reach the top, is a perfect metaphor here – produces a state of metaphysical anguish which is the central theme of writers in the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’. In their work, as distinct from the plays of Camus himself, for instance, the idea is allowed to shape the form as well as the content: all semblance of logical construction, of the rational linking of idea with idea in an intellectually viable argument is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage.

Recognizing such ‘strangers’ in stage characters in the 1950s, Martin Esslin published his influential work, *Theatre of the Absurd* in 1961. He defined the plays which belong to this genre as presenting man’s metaphysical absurdity in aberrant dramatic style that mirrored the situation. The Theatre of the Absurd was never a formal movement and remained confined to post-war France mainly but with the arrival of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, it soared to international acclaim. Esslin’s main ‘absurdities’ are Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco and Genet with less attention to Albee and Pinter. As the Cambridge guide puts it:

The techniques are of the disruptive kind associated with farce but there is no presiding context of harmony to give reassurance to an audience. Instead there are stage images of extraordinary concreteness dissociated from the milieu that normally defines them.

Historically speaking, *Waiting for Godot* accomplished what had not been accomplished for many decades, what even T. S. Eliot’s impassioned dedication did not accomplish: it gave the theatre a new point of beginning. When Samuel Beckett began to write *Waiting for Godot*, he could not predict that he was sounding the clarion call of contemporary drama. The play opened new avenues in the history of twentieth century drama. It was performed in Paris in 1953 and inspired a great variety of interpretative criticism, much of it centered on the character of the cryptic Godot. The play’s allusiveness has drawn a wide variety of interpretations and speculations. But it has been commonly agreed that the real subject of the play is not God but the act of waiting. A curious sense of the passage of time and the wretchedness of man’s uncertainty about his destiny has been communicated by Beckett out of the very unpromising material.

The two principal characters in the play are Vladimir and Estragon, two tramps who are waiting endlessly for a Mr. Godot, though they do not know who he is or why they are waiting for him or when and where they will meet him. In the meantime, they get a message, apparently from Godot, that he has postponed his visit and will come the next day. Vladimir and Estragon consider hanging themselves but do not. The sub-plot involves the character of Pozzo, a sadistic master and Lucky, his mercilessly tyrannized

servant. These two characters epitomize the master-servant relationship. Everything can be understood as a metaphor for the human situation: Godot could be anything or nothing, and in Vladimir's and Estragon's journey through time it is pointless to consider whether it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, because arrival is never seriously in question and even hope is scarcely possible. May be it is marginally better to travel than not to travel, to keep on keeping on because there is nothing better to do but even that is arguable. On the other hand, while these are associations the action of the play undoubtedly carries for most spectators, and it is not illegitimate to read it in this way, the play is not limited by such interpretations, it cannot be confined neatly and completely to them.

Indeed, Beckett himself has made gentle fun of spectators eager to know what his plays mean: in his third full-length play, *Happy Days*, written in English and first produced in New York in 1961, he has his heroine, Winnie, who is throughout the play largely buried in a mound of earth, first up to her waist, then up to her neck, take exception to the comments of a couple of passers-by who want to know:

What's the idea?....stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground?

What does it mean? What's it meant to mean?

To herself obviously, she does not mean anything, she just is. And in all Beckett's plays we find a similar avoidance of exact definition, no doubt because Beckett himself does not know, or is not willing to define for himself, who Godot is, what Winnie means, what is the significance of the master-servant relationship sketched in *Waiting for Godot* and fully developed in *End Game* or any other of the questions which arise while watching his plays. And there is, anyway, something that tends to get overlooked in Beckett's plays: a teasing sense of humour which makes even the blackest of them often very funny. Beckett himself seems to be forbidding us to take him quite as solemnly as we are inclined to.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name some of the popular Absurdist playwrights of the 1950s.
2. Define 'absurd plays' as per Martin Esslin.
3. What is the real subject of the play *Waiting for Godot*?

7.3 BECKETT'S INTUITION: NOTHING REALLY EVER HAPPENS IN MAN'S EXISTENCE

The important fact that every writer had to face in the first half of the twentieth-century was that the society in which he was living had lost its meaning and had simply ceased to make sense – previously held certainties had dissolved the firmest foundations of hope and optimism had collapsed. Their works are essentially a product of the European predicament during and immediately after the World Wars. The world which can up to us is one in which all values have collapsed, all beliefs corroded, a world which only generate despair and a feeling of meaninglessness. It is the picture of a world in which, as Yeats wrote:

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

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And suddenly, man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical, in a word, absurd. All assurance of hope, all explanation of ultimate meaning has suddenly been unmasked as nonsensical illusions. Even language has lost its communicative function and has been reduced to empty chatter whistling in the dark.

Better even than the existentialist philosophers like Sartre, Beckett may be said to have incorporated all the features of the void which confronts man in his present compromise with the world. Beckett's works clearly show that he is not a didactic author concerned with putting across a message in literary form. Such 'truths' as he does enunciate are the simple observations about the human condition that have been common since Job and Sophocles. Though he is obsessed by the loneliness of modern man, he has been able, like other great writers, to express his dominant theme in a series of works which surprise us by their variety. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is the most apt dramatic image yet created of our situation in a world without God, deprived of the transcendent confidence that belief in the existence of God confers. For just as man cannot live by bread alone, he now realizes that he cannot continue to live by mere thinking or hanging on in vain for a salvation which does not exist. *Waiting for Godot* becomes, for those in need of uncertainty, a bible of pessimism.

Waiting and not sure what you were waiting for – deliverance, a disaster, or simply for something to happen – it was understood that the texture of contemporary experience was like that. *Waiting for Godot* is a dramatized metaphor for the most general existential experience of humanity, the experience of something which we feel ought to have meaning, ought to reveal its meaning, but which, from one day to another, always fails to produce that meaning. *Waiting for Godot* depicts a world without any divinity but a kind of malignant fate, a world in which man waits and hopes for something to give a meaning to his life, and relieve him of the absurdity of a death that irrevocably terminates all. But he waits in vain, and so our life is as meaningless as our death. There is little to choose between man's life and a mayfly's: hence Pozzo's remark, 'the light gleams an instant', an instant only. It is, after all, a monstrous paradox that, for the individual, life is an eternity while it lasts, but that it is less than an instant with regard to the cosmic time, just as a man's six foot is nothing compared with the immense distances between the galaxies.

Man is held in a two-dimensional prison: time. In this prison, only forward motion is possible but man deludes himself that he is progressing on his own free will to some sort of goal. As Beckett puts it:

We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment.

In Beckett's best-known play, that nullity is named 'Godot'. Birth, for him, is a 'calamity' because it launches us on our one dimensional way, from which the only release is death. *Waiting for Godot* is therefore, quite simply, a picture of the antics of man as he tries to distract himself until 'Godot' comes. But Godot is only death. He is not, however, seen as death because man flatters himself with groundless hopes; thus Godot becomes anything the expectation of which helps man to bear his existence. Or as Estragon puts it:

We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

Waiting for Godot presents the total condition of man. The play is, as Jacques Dubois remarks, a microcosm of the macrocosm which is our universe:

.....one day we were born, one day we shall die,

.....we have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries.....

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In the play, different characters enact Beckett's intuition that nothing really ever happens in man's existence. The play ends as it began, with two tramps waiting in vain for Godot. The dialogue continues on its doleful repetitive course, the 'nothingness' of everything becomes nauseating. There is nothing left for them but to try and hang themselves – but alas, we know that they cannot even succeed in doing that. The idea of *Godot* as a play in which 'nothing happens twice' is understood by no one so sharply as by the tramps – Vladimir and Estragon – nothingness is what they are fighting against and why they talk. Vladimir and Estragon ask questions and they make statements. But they do so as though they expect to get answers or to establish facts. So all they ever do is pass time with their words. To get anywhere, they would have to make that quantum jump of realization that the words we have never really 'mean' only ever 'say'. Granted every day the chance and the materials of a new start, Vladimir and Estragon cling doggedly to old patterns, old habits and old masters. Although Biblical images abound as the common currency of hope, prayers go unanswered – and when characters pray, the effect is bitterly parodistic:

Nothing doing! The Bastard! He doesn't exist!

So, life has no transcendental meaning. 'We are alone'; and socially defined aspirations are no less illusory than religious justifications. On a universal scale, civilization is reduced to debris, while material circumstances are irrelevant to the human condition. Death is seen as an avenue of escape, a line leading away from the condition of nothingness. Birth and death are the defining facts of existence, diminishing the variables of individual experience to insignificance:

The essential doesn't change....Nothing to be done.

For Pozzo, human existence is like the infinitely small fleeting instant:

They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant,

then its night once more.

But Vladimir, who takes up the image, counters that life is long and infinitely large because there is too much time to grow old and suffer:

*Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole,
lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps.*

We have time to grow old:

The air is full of our cries.

In *Waiting for Godot*, salvation or purpose, equaling thematic resolution as well as meaningful significance for the characters' actions, is indefinitely postponed: promised for a tomorrow that can never be reached because the present is always today. Even the negative ending of suicide proves impossible; and its tragic connotations are deflated by the slapstick crudity of Estragon's over-sized trousers falling round his ankles. As Vladimir says:

In this immense confusion one thing alone is clear.

We are waiting for Godot to come –

What does Godot represent? What does the message contain? The same mystery but also a comparable hope of salvation. Godot is what his name implies: just another diminutive God like all the other little Gods – some divine, some political, some intellectual, some personal – for whom men wait, hopefully to solve their problems and bring point to their pointless lives, and for whose sake they sacrifice the only real gift they have, their free will. But alas! Godot continues to postpone his visit. The two tramps continue to

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believe the young messenger who appears each time to announce that Godot will come not that day but the next day. The image of man, always deceived in his dreams and ideals, nevertheless perseveres in his illusions and utopias.

It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that *Waiting for Godot* is the fullest statement of the problem that has bedeviled Beckett, as it bedevils nearly everyone else: how do you get through life in which nothing really ever happens? His answer is simple and not encouraging: by force of habit, by going on despite boredom and pain, by talking, by not listening to the silence, absurdly and without hope. We can see quite clearly what Beckett wants to express: human beings waiting for the arrival of someone or something with whom they may or may not have an appointment. Are we not all born into this world without knowing what our purpose is, are we not all, now that we are here, assuming that perhaps we have a purpose and that the next day will bring the moment of revelation – and then night falls and we are told to try again the next day and so on forever after? Are we not all, whether we just hang around waiting like the two tramps Vladimir and Estragon, or rushing about madly like Pozzo, trying to give our life some purpose, trying to while away time in some fashion, knowing full well that without that final knowledge about what we are here for, all our activities are merely futile antics? Are we not all, like Pozzo and Lucky, subject to the most violent reversal of fortunes, hale and hearty one day, blind and helpless the next? Are not all our most clever attempts at thinking and theorizing, like Lucky's ultimately reducible to an empty rust of meaningless words, and shall we not all end, like Lucky, be struck dumb? And are we not all, social beings, irrevocably tied to each other, however much we might loathe each other's company, simply because one human being cannot live in isolation and yet all contact between human beings produces friction – as between Vladimir and Estragon – or dominance and subjection – as between Pozzo and Lucky?

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett has employed intensely poetical, immensely expressive images, as most of the Absurdist do, to bring out the fragmented, meaningless and irrational character of the human condition in post-war Europe. Like the existentialists, he believes that the human condition does not fit into neatly packaged concepts. He does employ apparently unconnected expressionistic images and motifs as the surrealists do, but his work is far from being a nihilistic gospel of despair. But as Kay Boyle has observed, in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett began the construction of a bridge across the abyss, offering through unremitting work, sometimes despairingly, sometimes with wry humour, a way back for man's stricken, paralyzed will. Although Godot was in many ways – structurally, stylistically, thematically – a new development in Beckett's writing, it expressed his basic concerns as faithfully and sincerely as his novels. If there had never been a play about waiting before, that was because no dramatist before Beckett ever thought of attempting such a thing. It is this that makes *Waiting for Godot* one of the seminal works of post-war European drama, setting a mode, a tone, a style that was echoed and imitated by younger dramatists like Pinter, Albee and Stoppard from the late fifties to the early seventies.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. How does Beckett portray the world in *Waiting for Godot*?
5. What does Godot represent?

7.4 BECKETT'S USE OF LANGUAGE

*Waiting for Godot by
Samuel Beckett*

Hugh Kenner has called Beckett 'the clearest, most limpid, most disciplined joiner of words in the English language'. Like music, his language is shaped into phrases, orchestrated and cunningly repeated. Beckett's prose is never solemn and he has written some of the funniest lines in the English and French languages. Over the years, he has pared down plot, probed to the core of his characters and experimented with syntax, from the periodic sentences in his early stories to floating phrases, incantatory repetitions and simple questions or statements. Beckett is, as Dina Sherzer observes:

....a great manipulator of, exploiter of, and performer with the manifold resources and possibilities of language.

For, the use of banal, everyday conversations mixed with literary language, the slang, puns and modified clichés, the importance granted to talking (to make time pass), and the careful creation of rhythms and use of repetitions are all ways of demonstrating the exuberance of language and Beckett's ability to play with it and to manipulate it, result in a new and powerful dramatic expressiveness.

Beckett was writing in the post-world war years in which all values had collapsed, a world in which all assurances of hope, all explanation of ultimate meaning had suddenly been unmasked as nonsensical illusions. Even language had lost its communicative function and had been reduced to empty chatter whistling in the dark. In this world of absurdity, where meaning either vanishes or proliferates beyond understanding, language itself plays a double role. It is the only instrument with which the characters can hope to know or control the world outside them but it can offer no true knowledge at all. Whatever they say about the world makes no difference. Reality remains outside the grasp of the language they have learned. And yet they go on speaking, for words are all they have. *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, is a play in which literally nothing happens, a play designed to show that nothing can ever happen in human life. It is a play with very little action. Here we seem to have a maximum of words because nothing at all is going on except waiting. The characters talk to kill time, talking for talking's sake. Vladimir knows the answers he wrings out of Godot's boy are empty of meaning: "Words, words". Yet after a pause, he adds: 'Speak'. This is the paradox on which all Beckett's work is built. Language is a poor, faulty instrument but there is nothing else to work with. Beckett's genius is to turn words against themselves, making them show up their own emptiness. His characters' misery comes from taking words at their face value. Vladimir and Estragon are reluctant to admit that the words are not so much their key to freedom as the stones of which their prison house is made.

Vladimir and Estragon rely on language to see them through their daily life. Time and again, it comes to pieces in their hands. They try hard to use language as they should, with the precision and clarity which the academic tradition teaches. It isn't pure desire for knowledge that drives them but need. Vladimir feels he needs certainty. He labels a tree a tree, not a bush or a shrub (and as an extra flourish names it a willow) because he needs to convince his partner and himself that their anonymous space is the particular place of appointment with Godot. Estragon needs to eat, and he distinguishes between a carrot and a turnip and a pink radish or a black one because not all, for him, are edible. Unlike Vladimir, he feels no need for extra flourishes. Vladimir's solicitous 'How's the carrot?' gets a laconic answer: 'It's a carrot'. Language that really works will satisfy authentic need and then fall silent. Vladimir has to go on spinning words because he is

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hoping to satisfy his need – Godot’s coming – which is only make-believe. It can never be satisfied, so he can never shut up. In the absence of anything else, trying to be precise is better than nothing. It fills in the silence, passes time and stops things from sliding into grey, undifferentiated chaos. Estragon puts it graphically:

Everything oozes...It's never the same pus from one second to the next.

Words can't fix meaning totally but they can at least be used to make some slight discrimination out of the ooze, so the tramps go on practicing:

Our exercises...movements...elevations...relaxations...elongations.

As the drama runs its second round, in Act II, the critical intellect is increasingly aware of the lie, the confidence trick that is language. So, as Estragon bustles towards a new diversion, delighted to have found something else 'to give us the impression we exist', Vladimir's comment is ironic: 'Yes, we're magicians'. The language of the pair have inherited is a vehicle of illusion. It is a collection of techniques not for telling the truth but for inventing and deceiving. When the conjurers are only second rate, or when the gap between lie and reality becomes too wide, language has to own up to its trickery: and this is what this drama sets out to make it do. If the characters could see through language, they could also see through all those power structures it props up. They, of course, don't; but the audience, sitting at a distance, has a better chance. While the characters are only dimly aware of the dangers of language, the audience sees their plight with painful clarity. Much of the dramatic pleasure – and unease – that the play produces is in the feeling of the language – ground shifting underfoot, sudden estranging gulfs opening in the words and phrases that are the small change of everyday life. Mrs. Rooney draws attention to the same problem in Beckett's radio play, *All that Fall*:

Do you find anything...bizarre about my way of speaking? [Pause]

I do not mean the voice. [Pause]. No, I mean the words. [Pause more

to herself]. I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes

find my way of speaking very...bizarre.

The language of Beckett's characters is pruned down to the minimum and backed up only where necessary by equally pruned down and stylized mime. Simple phrases stand stark naked in all their triteness. Pauses and silences are rarely hesitations. As in poetry, they are carefully placed at sense points, to create more coherence, not less. Colloquial jerkiness is smoothed out into lyrical or dramatic rhythms by judicious placing of commas, or subtle repetitions and balances, or the addition or subtraction of 'and'. For example, the sentence, 'I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing' could have been more roughly expressed as 'I'd have stopped you doing whatever it was'; the lengthier version is better balanced and more symmetrical. Pozzo's unintentionally comic account of twilight mixes the prosaic and the lyrical, the learned and the vulgar, elaborate rhetoric and simple onomatopoeia, building to the climax when night bursts on us too, 'pop! Like that!' Tricks of rhetoric embellish the most ludicrously inappropriate situations. Vladimir and Estragon mourn softly and sympathetically over the fit of Estragon's boots, building up to the plangent 'Perhaps you'll have socks some day'. Estragon's lyrical musing by the struggling heap of the fallen is rudely interrupted: 'I've always wanted to wander in the Pyrennes – who farted?'

But the comic finds on the rubbish-dump of language can have a cutting edge. Rhetoric can be dangerous. Vladimir's speech on the nobility of humane action holds up the action it urges. In Lucky's speech, the display of the rotting fragments of cultural style turns everyone's stomach and drives them to murderous rage. What self-

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consciousness the characters have about their language develops in Act II, where the initial focus is on the art and the use of conversation. Two different kinds of conversation are set against each other.

The first is a demonstration of the emptiness of language, used not to probe a real problem but simply to fill the silence with elegantly structured sounds. Vladimir and Estragon are trying to talk 'calmly', to turn the panic of living and dying into manageable words, to ward off the fear of the silent, unspeakable unknown:

It's so we won't think....it's so we won't hear.

When they speak this way, what they summon up are 'dead voices', dry and sterile as sand and ashes, not communicating, only rustling like leaves in the wind. Such conversation brings more fear, insinuating the return of the insatiable dead. Possessed by that past that lives on through language, the conversation goes nowhere, turning round and round on itself, and has only one possible outcome:

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.

When they try again, immediately, they do better. 'That wasn't such a bad little canter', Estragon says complacently at the end. This time they don't plan to be calm. They simply want to start and so, the future of their conversation is wide open:

You can start from anything.

No doubt, what you hear are still the 'dead voices' of corrupt language and corrupt experience, but this time they brush that obstacle aside. Instead of circling on the old, dead, known terrain, they move forward, establishing the conditions of conversing:

Let's contradict each other...let's ask each other questions.

to which in a later exchange they add interruptions and insults. Vladimir brings the subject matter back to the unavoidable topic of the traces of death that corrupt all life ('A charnel house! A charnel house!'), but this time Estragon manages politely to defeat him:

You don't have to look.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the language veers between two characteristic extremes: soliloquy, and the form of dialogue normally used by Vladimir and Estragon, which is constantly in danger of drying up for the lack of any real communication between them, but is kept going by in-built repetitive patterns which substitute for logic and even, at times, for sense. This is the more or less neutral mode of waiting itself, dispassionate, avoiding extremes of pessimism and optimism, mainly concerned with passing time. As an audience, we are entertained by the characters' rhetorical responses to the tragicomic dilemma of waiting: we are not involved in it as a personal experience. We appreciate the witty and elegant artificiality of the language, while half our attention is elsewhere – wondering what external resolution can be found to their perplexities, since it is increasingly self-evident that they cannot find one for themselves. Thus, we too are vicariously waiting for Godot. And it is within the frame of this act of waiting that the real subject of the play emerges: the unfolding of speech. Beckett transformed a stage where nothing happens into the fascinating place where the loneliness of language was revealed.

Silence is an integral part of Beckett's language and has a wide range of meanings of its own. Beckett uses silence in all the conventional ways. He illustrates, for example, the breakdown of speech with the mime Vladimir uses to get across his question about Lucky and his bags, or the frightened silence when the tramps confront the enigma of

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their relationship to Godot, or in Vladimir's final lonely, despairing monologue over the sleeping Estragon. Beckett also offers a reinterpretation of the entire nature of silence. In Beckett's writing, silence expresses the sheer unknowableness of everything that is not ourselves, and our lack of power to pierce through to that unknown. Learning to discover and respect the meaning of this silence is an important part of the experience of watching any Beckett play.

The language of Beckett has purity, simplicity, a style which is a dimension away. In this theatre of style and language, Beckett approaches Eugene Ionesco. As the American dramatist, William Saroyan, has remarked:

*It certainly took tired Europe to make them, an
Irishman and a Romanian in Paris.*

Ionesco is entirely unlike Beckett, but together they may be said to be the exponents of antitheater. And *Waiting for Godot* is, as Eric Bentley says:

*...not...a tombstone but a landmark. If the form of the dialogue
is derivative, there is freshness and originality in the application
of that dialogue to these purposes. Behind the mordant flippancy
of the clowns we are made to hear – if in the distance – another voice:
Beckett's own perhaps, or that of the lamentations of Jeremiah, desolate
and dolorous, a voice of cosmic doom not untouched by
human dignity.*

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

6. What does Hugh Kenner call Beckett in the context of his use of language?
7. How does 'silence' make an integral part of Beckett's language?

7.5 BECKETT'S DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE

Modernism arrived in the British theatre with Beckett. In 1955, when *Waiting for Godot* reached the English stage, the standard drama of the time was Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan, or the later quasi-poetic comedies of T. S. Eliot. The common features of these plays were the naturalistic technique, drawing room dialogues, well-made plots and socially situated characters: a form of dramatic representation that had remained unchanged since the turn of the century. Beckett's play heralded a revolution and the impact was immense. Barely a decade later, its principles had become an accepted part of theatre language and *Godot* was soon acknowledged as a classic.

What makes Beckett one of the greatest dramatists, not only of our century but of all times, is that his contribution is fundamental and original in a way few others' have been. Like Moliere in the 17th century and Ibsen in the 19th century, he perceived instinctively the way things were going and helped them along. Few critics and theatre people would, therefore, be surprised if Beckett is considered by posterity to rank in importance with the three masters, Shakespeare, Moliere and Ibsen. Beckett has done much to extend and modify the resources of the stage, to adapt its millennial arts to the expression of the concerns and anxieties of the age. Just as Shakespeare explored the political and moral dilemmas of the Renaissance, or Moliere adjusted the anarchic world

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of comedy to neo-classical and rationalistic norms, or Ibsen created and transformed patterns of naturalism to give perfect expression to the psychological ghosts that haunted the bourgeoisie in the age of imperialism and capitalism, so Beckett has found the means of setting out the metaphysical doubts that torment man in forms that, like all radical innovations, surprise at first and then in a short space of time begin to seem natural and inevitable.

Beckett was one of the main exponents of Absurd Drama. Hence in his plays, he flouted the conventions of conventional drama and the concepts of the well-made play. A well-made play is expected to have a beginning, a middle and a neatly tied-up ending; Beckett's plays often start at an arbitrary point and seem to end just as arbitrarily. By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of drama, these plays are not only abominably bad, they do not even deserve the name of drama. But Beckett's drama aims to hold up a vision of the post-war world – a world devoid of all meaning, all spiritual coherence. The basis of the well-made play is the implicit assumption that the world does make sense, that reality is solid and secure, all outlines clear, all ends apparent. Beckett's plays, on the other hand, express a sense of shock at the absence, the loss of any such clear and well-defined systems of beliefs or values.

In *Waiting for Godot* there is no plot, in the sense of a narrative with a beginning, middle and end; exposition, twists and turns of intrigue, crisis and unraveling. Vladimir and Estragon do their best to invent a plot, 'waiting for Godot', but it hardly gets off the ground. There is simply a situation: two men loitering with intent, under a tree. But Godot, for whom they are waiting, continues to postpone his visit. The play ends as it began with the two tramps waiting in vain for Godot. 'Messy' and 'not well thought out' is what Beckett impatiently said of his own play that is now considered a model of form.

There is no structure, in the sense of a neat carving-up of the action into three or five acts, with scenes advancing in logical sequence, entrances and exits motivated and the whole wrapped up at the end and 'finished with a bow'. There is, as Jennifer Birkett says:

....a string of tableaux with gaps between them, that lurch into movement haphazardly, grind to a halt like rundown clockwork, and stop altogether when the light goes out.

Ruby Cohn has in fact, listed the incidence of doubling in *Godot*. There are two acts, two days and two similar sets of incidents within them. There are two couples, one contrasting with the other. Within the acts, within the couples, symmetries and oppositions recur. A resume of either acts yields a parallel pattern. Two friends meet by a tree at twilight to wait for Godot. A burdened menial and his master arrive, dally a while and then leave. When the friends are alone again, a messenger arrives to inform them that Godot will not come that day but the next. The moon rises as the boy departs. Although the friends agree to go, they have not gone when the curtain falls.

Godot is a very carefully structured play though critics have assailed it as obscure and incoherent. Its fundamental mode is not revelation but repetition, or rather repetition-with-a-difference; asymmetry rather than symmetry. The play relies for its structural cohesion not on a forward movement but on the return of leitmotifs that weave in and out through the work. The most obvious of these is the phrase "We're waiting for Godot", which recurs in different guises a dozen times, but there are others like "Nothing to be done".

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Apart from the leitmotifs, Beckett also relies on an elaborate system of counterpoint between the two acts. Nearly everything in Act I has its echo or parallel somewhere in Act II. The spectator may not hear every note in a symphony, but there are so many of them that he will sense the unity of it before long.

The dynamics between Beckett's characters too help to give the play its underlying unity and its unique quality of equilibrium by which everything balances out. The characters interlock, in fact, with almost Racinian precision. At the extremes of the poised poles are Vladimir and Pozzo who are divided both by their name-lengths and their temperaments and the same applies to Estragon and Lucky, who even cause each other physical injury. Estragon's fear of 'being tied' is reflected by Lucky's being tied in real fact. This kind of balance is characteristic of the play. As Beckett once said, "It is the shape that matters". He is an artist for whom the shape is all important, and the 'shape' of the relationships in *Waiting for Godot* between the four main characters is of more interest to him than the characters themselves.

The most essential feature of Beckett's technique in *Waiting for Godot* is his use of symbols. Perhaps the clearest of the symbols is the road. It offers a clear alternative to the characters' condition. Hugh Kenner points out that the tree suggests not only crucifixion, but also the Tree of Life. There is a suggestion that because of its pronounced axial properties, it may also be related to the 'World tree' of Norse mythology. The tree likewise gives tentative evidence of chronological stability and, hence, links between one point in time and another. In Act II, the tree which was previously bare has produced leaves, a change which implies a refutation to the understood hypothesis of the play that "nothing happens". The rope and the whip with which Pozzo threatens, are symbols of authority, indispensable because custom, the normal bond of authority, seems to have broken down. The rope represents the symbiotic bond between Lucky and Pozzo. Hats and boots are two of the major symbols of the play. Vladimir, the 'thinker' of the two, is associated with the hat; the more prosaic Estragon is identified with the boots. The hat exchange is a shuttle and symbolically, demonstrates one of the key considerations of the play, pointless activity and the ultimate negation of movement. The assumptions of the game 'All Fall Down' are both tragic and comic; Pozzo down epitomizes all fallen men (he answers to both Cain and Abel, and Estragon remarks that he is "all humanity").

The core of the Beckett play is emptiness, a nucleic area of dead space at its absolute centre. It is this encapsulated space which is the basis of the theatre images most often associated with Beckett. In *Godot*, it is seen in the recurring sequence of containers and circles – hats, boots, the low grave-like mound on which Estragon sits; in Lucky's dance, 'The Net'; and in the circular structure of the play itself. Echoing the thematic paradox of the play, the circle is simultaneously endless and constricting, infinity and a cage.

The crucifixion imagery is deeply embedded within the play. The bodies of Pozzo and Lucky after their fall lie in the shape of a cross. There are several tableaux of Lucky and Pozzo supported between the two friends – recalling, in Ruby Cohn's words, "the many paintings of a crucified Christ between two thieves". Estragon and Vladimir often stand on either side of the tree and Estragon, in particular, stretches out his arms – in John Donne's words, "mine own cross to be" – even passing through the cross, as he takes up the yoga position of the tree.

According to Peter Griffith, *Waiting for Godot* belongs to a unique category in that it not only uses discourse but is about discourse. He observes that–

It explores a paradox at the heart of language: that this is something which generates meaning only through its abstract systematicity, but achieves thematic relevance through the strictly material means of printing or of acoustic events.

He further goes on to add that much of the characters' dialogic interchange and stage business is derived from the conventions of the music hall and their speech is carnivalesque. In fact, *Waiting for Godot* owes a great deal to the circus. Pozzo is a kind of ringmaster who cracks his whip and commands the show and Estragon's dropping of his trousers is pure clowning. Other popular forms of entertainment, too, are affectionately alluded to in this play. The silent film comedy, which so delighted Beckett's generation, has bequeathed its bowler hats to the actors: that Laurel and Hardy lie to some extent behind Vladimir and Estragon is certain.

The stagecraft in *Waiting for Godot* enhances its position as a drama of technique. The setting must evoke a universe that offers very little. As Simpson says:

In Waiting for Godot the objective of the producer should be to create the feeling that these four characters are isolated in Eternity.....The vast emptiness about their world serves to emphasize their dependence on one another and their isolation within the enormity of the universe.

The characters' costume is very important. Though their behaviour is clownish, they should not dress as clowns. Usually, Vladimir and Estragon appear as tramps in cast-off formal clothes. They are run-down versions of the conventional people who live at the centre of society, the same in kind, but tattered and living on the margins. The deceptive dignity of ordinary modern clothes leaves it to the play of words and action to disclose the man under the mask.

To call *Waiting for Godot* obscure and unintelligible is to underestimate Beckett's resources and unceasingly inventive technique which has enabled him to make art out of material that in the hands of someone less gifted would seem to have been wasted. Beckett's theatre has always startled and impressed by its barrenness but the final impression that the plays leave is not bare but rich; they spark off such a host of associations, images, echoes that it seems one would never come to the end of them. Beckett works within his 'modern' tradition as a great original and it would be difficult to name a single important playwright of the younger generation – from Albee to Stoppard – be it in Britain, America, France or Germany, who has not been deeply affected by Beckett's example or influenced by his practice. Whatever posterity's verdict about his intrinsic worth and stature as a dramatist is, there is no doubt that it will concede, at the very least, that he is one of the most important innovators in the history of the modern stage. This is to some extent because his contribution came at precisely the right moment; as one contemporary playwright, John Spurling, put it:

Samuel Beckett was waiting for the theatre as the theatre was waiting for Samuel Beckett.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

8. Do you agree that *Waiting for Godot* does not have a plot?
9. State one of the most unique features of Beckett's technique in *Waiting for Godot*?

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3. The real subject of the play *Waiting for Godot* is the act of waiting.
4. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett depicts a world without any divinity but a kind of malignant fate, a world in which man waits and hopes for something to give a meaning to his life, and relieve him of the absurdity of a death that irrevocably terminates all.
5. Godot is what his name implies: just another diminutive God like all the other little Gods – some divine, some political, some intellectual, some personal – for whom men wait, hopefully to solve their problems and bring point to their pointless lives, and for whose sake they sacrifice the only real gift they have, their free will.
6. Hugh Kenner has called Beckett 'the clearest, most limpid, most disciplined joiner of words in the English language'.
7. Silence is an integral part of Beckett's language. He uses silence in all the conventional ways. The dramatist illustrates, for example, the breakdown of speech with the mime Vladimir uses to get across his question about Lucky and his bags, or the frightened silence when the tramps confront the enigma of their relationship to Godot, or in Vladimir's final lonely, despairing monologue over the sleeping Estragon. Beckett also offers a reinterpretation of the entire nature of silence.
8. In *Waiting for Godot* there is no plot, in the sense of a narrative with a beginning, middle and end: exposition, twists and turns of intrigue, crisis and unraveling. Vladimir and Estragon do their best to invent a plot, 'waiting for Godot', but it hardly gets off the ground.
9. One of the most unique features of Beckett's technique in *Waiting for Godot* is his use of symbols.

7.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What did *Waiting for Godot* accomplish that had not been accomplished earlier?
2. Who were the two principal characters in *Waiting for Godot*?
3. In what forms is language used in the play?
4. Give an example of the use of symbols in the play.
5. How is silence used in the play?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write in detail about the Theatre of the Absurd with special reference to Samuel Beckett.
2. Discuss the appropriateness of the title *Waiting for Godot*.
3. How does Lucky's speech help in understanding Beckett's view on language?
4. Write a note on the two central characters in the play — Vladimir and Estragon — the two tramps who wait endlessly for Mr. Godot.
5. How has death as a theme been dealt with in *Waiting for Godot*?
6. Discuss Beckett's dramatic technique in *Waiting for Godot*.

7.10 FURTHER READING

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- Dobree, Bonamy; *Restoration Comedy*. England: Clarendon Press.
- Kenner, Hugh; *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. United States: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
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*Waiting for Godot by
Samuel Beckett*

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UNIT IV *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne

Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Unit Objectives
- 8.2 Biography of John Osborne
- 8.3 Historical Background
- 8.4 Appreciation and Synopsis
- 8.5 Imagery and Symbolism
 - 8.5.1 Dramatic Techniques
 - 8.5.2 Characters
 - 8.5.3 Themes
- 8.6 Summary
- 8.7 Key Terms
- 8.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 8.9 Questions and Exercises
- 8.10 Further Reading

8.0 INTRODUCTION

John Osborne was the original 'Angry Young Man' of the post war British literary scenario. His play *Look Back in Anger* brought a force and vigour to the British stage that was missing after the Second World War.

Look Back in Anger (1956) is a play about a love triangle involving an intelligent but estranged young man (Jimmy Porter), his upper-middle-class, impassive wife (Alison) and her arrogant best friend (Helena Charles). Cliff, a friendly Welsh resident, attempts to keep the peace. The play was a success on the London stage, and initiated the term 'Angry Young Men' to portray Osborne and those of his generation who used severity and practicality in the theatre as opposed to the more escapist works of the past.

The play was a strongly autobiographical piece based on Osborne's unhappy marriage to Pamela Lane, the first wife of the playwright, and their life in an overcrowded house in Derby, UK. While Osborne looked forward to a career in theatre, Lane was more practical and materialistic. She did not take Osborne's ambitions seriously. It also contains much of Osborne's earlier life—the wrenching speech of seeing a loved one die is a replay of the death of Thomas, Osborne's father. What it is best remembered for, though, is Jimmy's outbursts against the mediocrity of middle-class English life, which is characterized by his hated mother Nellie Beatrice. In the play, you also see Jimmy pining for his lost love, Madeline, who is based on Stella Linden, an older actress who first encouraged Osborne to write. After the first production in London, Osborne began a relationship with Mary Ure, who played Alison, and in 1957, he divorced his wife to marry Ure.

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8.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Recall important aspects of Osborne's biography
- Discuss Osborne's historical background
- Summarize the different acts of the play
- Identify and interpret the play's use of imagery and symbolism
- Explain the different dramatic techniques used in play
- Discuss the different themes used in the play

8.2 BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN OSBORNE

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

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

John Osborne was one of the first writers who questioned and criticized Britain's position in the post-imperial age. He was also the first who questioned the point of the monarchy on an important public stage. Osborne's most productive years were from 1956 to 1966, during which he was successful in making contempt an acceptable and now even clichéd onstage emotions.

Osborne also argued about the cleansing wisdom of bad behaviour and bad taste, and combined generous truthfulness with devastating humour. Due to these reasons, his works are considered to be modern emblems and therefore post-War British theatre history owes much to them.

Osborne was born on 12th December 1929 in London. His parents were Thomas Godfrey Osborne, a commercial artist and an advertising copywriter of South Welsh extraction and Nellie Beatrice, a Cockney barmaid. Osborne loved his father but despised his mother, who he later wrote taught him, "The fatality of hatred ... She is my disease, an invitation to my sick room".

Osborne described her as 'hypocritical, self-absorbed, calculating and indifferent' woman. When his father died in 1941, he left his young son an insurance settlement, which was utilized by him to finance a private education at Belmont College—a minor public school in Devon. In 1943, Osborne entered the school but was expelled in the summer term of 1945 as he had hit the headmaster, who had struck him for listening to an illegal broadcast by Frank Sinatra, the twentieth century American singer and actor.

After completing his school, Osborne went back to London to his mother where he took up trade journalism for some time. He was introduced to the world of theatre when he was tutoring a touring company of junior actors. Soon he got involved in theatre

as a stage manager and started acting after joining Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company.

Osborne, along with his mentor Stella Linden, started off with writing plays, co-writing his first, *The Devil Inside Him*, which was then directed by Linden in 1950 at the Theatre Royal in Huddersfield. During this time, he tied his knot with Pamela Lane. Along with Anthony Creighton, a twentieth century British actor and writer, he wrote his second play *Personal Enemy*, which was staged in regional theatres before he submitted his most famous work *Look Back in Anger*. With Creighton, he also later wrote *Epitaph* for George Dillon, which staged at the Royal Court in 1958.

Osborne greatly admired Max Miller and saw parallels between him and Max Miller. He said the following about him:

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

Osborne made a significant contribution towards the revival of British theatre by making it more challenging, audacious and experimental. He helped throw off the formal constraints of the previous generation, and turned the attention towards language, theatrical rhetoric and emotional intensity.

Osborne saw theatre as a weapon, which would enable the ordinary people to break down the class barriers. He wanted his plays to be a remembrance of actual pleasures and pains. Osborne also brought about a significant change in the world of theatre, influencing playwrights such as Edward Albee and Mike Leigh. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.

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

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

In Volume 1 of his autobiography *A Better Class of Person*, Osborne depicts his feeling of an immediate and intense attraction towards his first wife, Pamela Lane. Both of them were members of an acting troupe in Bridgwater.

She had just recently shorn her hair down to a defiant auburn stubble and I was impressed by the hostility she had created by this self-isolating act... her huge green eyes which mock or plead affection, preferably both, at least... She startled and confused me. There was no calculation in my instant obsession.

Although Alison Porter, the female protagonist in *Look Back in Anger* was based on Pamela, Osborne described her parents as 'much coarser'. He explained how at one point they appointed a private detective to follow him after a fellow actor was seen 'fumbling' with his knee in a teashop. However, he did accept the fact that the actor in question did have a homosexual crush on him.

I began to feel surrounded and outflanked by hostility... I had set off a crest of anger that had not been much more than drowsy before my arrival... It was scarcely important. Pamela was the battlement I was determined on.

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

I was unable to take my eyes off her. I watched her eating, walking, bathing, making-up, dressing, undressing, my curiosity was insatiable. Seeing her clothes lying around the floor (she was hopelessly untidy, in contrast to my own spinsterish habits). There was little doubt in my otherwise apprehensive spirit that I had carried off a unique prize.... Perhaps I interpreted what might have been bland complacency for the complaisance of a generous and loving heart.

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

Osborne started having a relationship with Mary Ure shortly after meeting her in 1956 when she was cast as Alison in *Look Back in Anger*. The affair progressed swiftly and the two moved in together in Woodfall Road, Chelsea.

Mary was one of those unguarded souls who can make themselves understood by penguins or the wildest dervishes... I was not in love. There was fondness and pleasure, but no groping expectations, just a feeling of fleeting heart's ease. For the present, we were both content enough.

According to Osborne, contentment began to be replaced with jealousy and slight contempt for Ure's stable family background, the trivialities of her communication with them and a somewhat withering regard for her acting abilities.

I had stopped concealing from myself, if I ever had, that Mary was not much of an actress. She had a rather harsh voice and a tiny range. Her appearance was pleasing but without any personal sweep to it.

Like most actors, she was hysterical when unemployed and resentful when appearing every night to full houses. She also entertained the common belief that a writer is only working when he can be seen head down at his desk. Why are you drinking/dreaming/farting/fornicating instead of making typewriter noises?

Both of them were not loyal towards each other, and following the beginning of an affair with Robert Webber, Mary Ure left Osborne finally.

'The fact that my coltish liaison with Francine had been pre-empted by Mary's conduct with Webber explained her oddly restrained behaviour in New York... Betrayal might end in the bedroom but I found it naive to assume it necessarily began there.'

After Mary Ure, Osborne met his third wife to be—writer Penelope Gilliatt—initially through social connections.

In his autobiography *Almost a Gentleman*, Osborne says:

It was not so much chastity that troubled me, but the withdrawal of feminine intimacy. And now, here I was, giving a routine interview to a young, animated woman, seemingly very informed and quick to laugh... I was already engaged in the prospect of mild and easy flirtation. I hadn't marked Penelope down in any appraising way as a future sportive fancy, but I had always been addicted to flirtation as a game worth playing for itself. One main attraction Penelope held for Osborne was her red hair I took red hair to be the mantle of goddesses.

Despite her being married and Osborne knowing her husband, Gilliatt; he set out to seduce Osborne and succeeded in doing so.

Penelope's behaviour and my own during the weeks that followed were probably grotesquely indefensible.

Osborne and Gilliatt were married for five years, during which time she gave birth to his only natural daughter, Nolan. However, Osborne had an unpleasant relationship with his daughter. He threw her out of his house when she was seventeen and they never spoke again. According to Osborne, his marriage with Gilliatt suffered because of her unnecessary obsession with her work, which was writing film reviews for *The Observer*.

I tried to point out that it seemed an inordinate amount of time and effort to expend on a thousand-word review to be read by a few thousand film addicts and forgotten almost at once.

He also observed in her a growing pretentiousness.

'She was to become increasingly obsessed with fripperies and titles ... She took to calling herself "Professor Gilliatt".'

The strains in their marriage were further worsened by Gilliatt's alcoholism and her spiteful behaviour, which was deeply felt by Osborne. This resulted in Osborne having an affair with Jill Bennett. This affair was also followed by a swift marriage.

Their marriage lasted in an unstable form for nine long years, which was reduced to mutual abuse and insult with Bennett provoking Osborne, calling him 'impotent' as well as 'homosexual' in public as early as 1971. This was cruelty which Osborne reciprocated, turning his feelings of bitterness and resentment about his declining career onto his wife.

Bennett's suicide in 1990 is generally believed to have been a result of Osborne's rejection of her. He said of Bennett 'She was the most evil woman I have come across', and showed open contempt for her suicide.

... she was a woman so demoniacally possessed by Avarice that she died of it. How many people have died in such a manner, of Avarice? ... This final, fumbled gesture, after a lifetime of glad-rags borrowings, theft and plagiarism, must have been one of the few original or spontaneous gestures in her loveless life... During the nine years I lived beneath the same roof with her, she spent half the day in bed. There was a short period when she took dressage lessons, that most intensive course in aids to severe narcissism.

Osborne seemed to relish in reading through obituaries of Bennett and disagreed with any points of merit, which were pointed out by journalists in her.

... sounding like a puppy with a mouthful of lavatory paper. I did everything I could to scrub up her diction, but it never improved. Indeed after we separated and she was consigned to lesser parts it became even worse. During a television series... even by the pier-end standards of sit-com, she was quite incomprehensible and cried out for sub-titles.

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Osborne signed off the chapter on Bennett with perhaps some of his most damning prose committed to print.

Adolf [Osborne's nickname for her] has left half a million to Battersea Dogs' Home. She never bought a bar of soap in all the time she lived with me. Always, she cried poverty... It is the most perfect act of misanthropy, judged with the tawdry, kindless theatricality she strove to achieve in life. She had no love in her heart for people and only a little more for dogs. Her brand of malignity, unlike Penelope's went beyond even the banality of ambition.... Her frigidity was almost total. She loathed men and pretended to love women, whom she hated even more. She was at ease only in the company of homosexuals, who she also despised but whose narcissism matched her own. I never heard her say an admiring thing of anyone... Everything about her life had been a pernicious confection, a sham.

He finally concluded with a detestable image stating that his only regret is that he was unable to defecate in her open coffin.

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

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

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

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

Some of the important works of John Osborne were as follows:

- *The Entertainer* (1957)
- *The World of Paul Slickey* (1959)
- *A Subject of Scandal and Concern* (1960)
- *Luther* (1961)
- *Plays for England* (1962)
- *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964)
- *A Patriot for Me* (1965)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who was John Osborne?
2. What contribution did Osborne make towards the revival of British theatre?
3. Name the sequel to *Look Back in Anger*.

8.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Look Back in Anger by
John Osborne

During the times when John Osborne wrote *Look Back in Anger*, the following incidents were taking place in the outside world:

Cold war

Post World War II, the western world got divided into two major power blocks: the US and the USSR. The former was identified with the ideology of capitalism while the latter was a socialist state. Between these two blocks, England could at best manage to secure a secondary position as a pawn of the US. This proved harmful to the confidence of the nation's spirit and gave a blow to the English pride.

Independence of colonies

Following India's independence in 1947, many African nations also began to gain independence one after the other. Therefore, people like Colonel Redfern in the play found themselves in a peculiar situation with nowhere to go. The land they had ruled till then had forced them to leave, and the land they had left many years ago, seemed strange and different.

People like Colonel Redfern were people who felt out of place everywhere, and through the character of Alison's father, the playwright has drawn attention to such pitiable yet annoying characters.

Political situation of England in the 1950s

In all, the English nation was battling external blows and internal turmoil. The successive Conservative as well as Labour regimes could not do much to solve the problems of a nation that found itself powerless in the middle of the twentieth century.

The glorious dream of colonization was over and England had to wake up to an unpleasant reality. The problems of corruption, unemployment, class system and unequal development remained.

Angry young men

David Hare said about Osborne at his memorial service:

It is, if you like, the final irony that John's governing love was for a country which is, to say the least, distrustful of those who seem to be both clever and passionate. There is in English public life an implicit assumption that the head and the heart are in some sort of opposition. If someone is clever, they get labelled cold. If they are emotional, they get labelled stupid. Nothing bewilders the English more than someone who exhibits great feeling and great intelligence. When, as in John's case, a person is abundant in both, the English response is to take in the washing and bolt the back door.

Post World War II British drama is characterized by what later came to be known as the generation of the Angry Young Men. John Osborne is one of the most important voices of this generation because the intensity of his anger reflected in his political commitment and a keen sense of social injustice.

The position of England was peculiar after the Second World War. In the international political scenario, where the 'sun had never set on the British Empire', it was beginning to lose colonies rapidly, India being one of the most recent one (1947). Following India was a series of erstwhile colonies coming onto their own.

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The British common man soon realized where his country stood and a sense of betrayal began to set in. Moreover, England was faced with many internal crisis of its own. An unrelenting class divide was realized by writers like Osborne to be a residue of feudalism that still persisted in the minds of people. As much as Britain took pride in being a democracy, the divide between the elite and the working-class persisted.

In the education system, it was more apparent than in other places. This was the period when the white tiled institutions as they were referred to came up. These were the universities meant for the common people unlike the prestigious red brick institutions restricted to the elite few. For individuals graduating out of these colleges, life became even more difficult. In the first place, the state dared them to dream and then squashed that very dream for them. Having secured a degree, a common young boy or girl could aspire to white collar jobs, but at the time of reckoning, they had the 'red brick' graduates to compete against. Comfortable and rewarding jobs had always been the privilege of the aristocratic, and things still remained the same. These young man and women had to struggle against a monstrous class divide that often led to frustration and therefore pessimism.

Jimmy porter's anger is a result of this pessimism. He is a frustrated young man, who is educated, but runs a sweet shop. These are the men Osborne chose to represent in his writings.

The important characters in the play are as follows:

- Jimmy Porter
- Alison
- Cliff
- Helena
- Colonel Redfern

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. List the incidents that were taking place in the world during the time when the play *Look Back in Anger* was written.
5. How is Post World War II British drama characterized?

8.4 APPRECIATION AND SYNOPSIS

The story of this play concerns mainly Jimmy Porter and his wife Alison and their marriage. It is the story of a young unfortunate couple whose love is called upon to stand the test of class divide time and again.

The play opens with a fairly simple domestic scene with the wife at her ironing table and the men of the house reading the Sunday newspapers. However, Osborne introduces this impression of domestic peace only to challenge it immediately afterwards. From the first conversation between Jimmy and Alison, tension is apparent. The plot develops through marital tension to the entry of an outsider—Jimmy's second woman. Helena's entry into Jimmy's bed coincides with Alison's exit from the house. In the second act, Alison returns as a changed woman and Helena exits from the house.

The plot is centered on Jimmy, and it concerns all the people in his life who are affected to some or the other extent by his unyielding anger. The play ends with the union of Jimmy and Alison, and a suspect promise of peace between them. The conclusion is reached with Alison's return at which point structurally, the second woman is made to quit.

The other important character in Jimmy and Alison's life is Cliff, who acts as a counter to Jimmy with his warmth and friendship towards Alison. The plot involves action in the Porter household, with Jimmy as the centre and the two women entering and exiting it at different times. A central feature of the plot is domestic tension that involves all other characters such as Cliff, Helena and Colonel Redfern—Alison's father.

The sequence of events is linear with the plot maintaining causality. In the tradition of naturalistic theatre, characters are well defined and explained together with their physical features and behavioural traits. One event follows another and the movement of time is teleological. As in the play *Look Back in Anger*, the two acts begin as parallels to each structurally, with the same set of two men lounging in their chairs reading the papers and a woman engaged in domestic chores. In the plot, dramatic tension is introduced in the beginning and is heightened at the end of Act One and throughout Act Two. In the end, the dramatic tension is resolved, though the symbolism suggests it is probably short lived.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

6. Who is the protagonist of the play *Look Back in Anger*?
7. Who is Cliff?

8.5 IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

Imagery is anything that appeals to any of the five senses, like touch, smell or vision. You might see the object or at times just imagine it whereas symbolism is representation of anything with the help of an example.

8.5.1 Dramatic Techniques

Dramatic techniques are used by the playwright for enhancing the meaning and understanding amongst the audience. Some of the dramatic techniques used in the play *Look Back in Anger* are as follows:

- **Animal imagery:** In their conversations, Jimmy and Alison refer to each other as bear and squirrel respectively. Bear stands for male strength and aggression while the squirrel represents female flightiness and charm. In their conversations, Jimmy and Alison often resort to this imagery, especially at the moments of dramatic tension. Jimmy's anger is associated with his masculine aggression and Alison's silence can be interpreted as her submission. The play reverberates with sexual violence that is also suggested by this imagery.
- **Symbolism:** There were many objects that were symbolic. Some of them were as follows:
 - **The ironing board:** The play opens with the scene of Alison at the ironing board and with Helena at the same in Act Two. The ironing board is representative of domestic space with the woman involved in chores.

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While Alison is seen to be ironing clothes at the opening, the men are seen as reading the newspapers. There is a clear demarcation of space between the genders that is also representative of conservatism of British society. The only scene where Alison appears to be at peace is when she is seen ironing clothes. Inhabiting female space gives her a sense of comfort and security in this set up of gender discord. Also, the difference between the papers and the iron is the contrast between male intellect and female domesticity.

- o **Trumpet:** In the play, the playing of the trumpet is never seen but heard from another room. Jimmy's playing of the trumpet is symbolic of protest. When Jimmy is absent from the scene, his presence is asserted by the sound of the trumpet. When Alison and Helena are on stage, they discuss Jimmy whose absent presence is asserted by the sound of the trumpet from the adjoining room.

8.5.2 Characters

In this section the major characters of the play *Look Back in Anger* have been discussed in detail:

- **Jimmy Porter:** Jimmy Porter is the protagonist of the play. He is an angry young man who rails at everything from the upper class women to retired Colonels and homosexuals. He is dissatisfied with the political, social and cultural system around him and is critical of everything. Not a likeable character, Jimmy Porter has an important place in the history of post War British theatre. Osborne made Jimmy stand up for all the discontent of his generation, and made him into a peculiar and an unbearable character.

Jimmy is capable of verbal and emotional violence that he inflicts almost constantly on his wife. He insults her parents, provokes her repeatedly but is somewhere dependent on her emotionally himself. He reveals his childhood experiences of being alone with his dying father and his mother's betrayal instills a sense of universal betrayal from the female sex into him. This Oedipal instinct can be seen to be manifested in his relationship with Alison as well as Helena. He checks Alison's personal belongings in her absence as he constantly suspects her of betraying him to her mother.

Helena, the other woman in his life, emotionally satisfies him temporarily with her mothering. Jimmy appears to be a very unhappy and unfortunate man, and the audience feels pity towards him at times and disgust and anger at other times towards him. However, one may like or dislike Jimmy but one cannot ignore his anger, which is the heart of the play.

- **Alison:** Alison is Jimmy's wife who serves as the punching bag for Jimmy's anger throughout the play. From the opening scene to the last, Jimmy rants at Alison. His love and emotional attachment to her get affected by their difference of class and their relationship gets complicated in many ways. Alison stands in contrast to Jimmy's railings with her quiet yet stubborn resistance. Her silence is powerful and it hurts Jimmy who constantly tries to get some response from her by provoking her.

Alison's silence can be read in many ways. It could be the silence of someone who is tired of yelling but has not given up, and therefore has chosen another medium of hitting back. From a woman's point of view, this seems a logical choice as an instrument of resistance when the man will not give up shouting

even for a moment. For Jimmy, Alison's silence represents the indifference of the people of her class who are so caught up in their self-satisfied worlds that they refuse to acknowledge the trouble of others.

Alison's character undergoes much pain and suffering in the play as she loses her child in her womb. On her return after her miscarriage, Alison acknowledges to have felt what Jimmy always talks about—loss and suffering. In the end, Jimmy and Alison appear to unite at a deeper emotional level than before.

- **Cliff:** Cliff is Jimmy's friend and partner in running the sweet stall and lives with them in their house. He is close to Alison, and shows her sympathy and warmth when Jimmy hurts her. His position is peculiar in the Porter household as he acts like a foil to Jimmy and as a protector to Alison. He admits that he finds the menagerie unbearable but is unable to leave it because he loves Jimmy and Alison very much.

Cliff is seen to be pulled into marital discord and is generally made to receive Jimmy's sarcastic punches, yet he seems to be happy in the middle of it all. Jimmy and Cliff engage in role playing and sing and dance together, also hit each other in a typical man to man friendly manner. His emotional closeness to these two is revealed at different points in the play.

With Helena's entry into the household, Cliff becomes upset as he sees the unsuitability of it all in Alison's absence. His character is important as he is a counter to Jimmy's aggression with his friendliness and warmth. He is also the neutralizing factor in the Porter household that is filled with acidic anger because of Jimmy.

- **Helena:** Helena is Alison's friend in the play, who also becomes the second woman to Jimmy in her absence. Helena as a woman is different from Alison in many ways. While Alison belongs to the conservative upper class in society, Helena is an actress who is independent in her earnings and her thought.

Helena is sexually more assertive than Alison and unlike her, rails back at Jimmy. Her personality is a counter to Alison's and perhaps explains her replacing Alison in Jimmy's bed. However, Jimmy's relationship with her is short-lived and with Alison's reappearance, Helena feels a heavy sense of moral guilt and leaves.

- **Colonel Redfern:** Colonel Redfern is Alison's father in the play. Jimmy refers to him as the leftover of the British Empire who cannot understand why the sun is not shining for the British Empire anymore. For him, Colonel Redfern represents futile reminiscence about a past that is dead forever.

As a post war young man, Jimmy is able to see what the old men like Colonel Redfern are not able to. Jimmy can see the end of the British Empire and the declining place of Britain in world politics. He can see the traces of colonialism and feudalism in modern English society, but his father-in-law cannot even relate to the present completely.

All his life, Colonel Redfern was posted in India where he and his people set up a mini England and ruled over the natives, and coming back to England after 1947 made everything unreal for him. He had left an England that was high on its rule over one-fourth of the world, and he came back defeated from India, an erstwhile colony of England.

The England the Colonel came back to was trying to come to terms with the loss of colonies and the destruction of the Empire. It was also no longer important in the Western international political scenario. Therefore, people like him were out of place

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everywhere and chose to live in nostalgia. It was this class of people that Jimmy had no tolerance for and he says he pities people like him.

Colonel Redfern's character is important in the play for understanding the position of people like him who are the fallouts of imperialism. Also, his background explains Alison's difficulties in adjusting with Jimmy's class of people. Her upbringing had been narrow while Jimmy's life was out in the open. Colonel Redfern refers to his wife's interference in Alison's married life and shows himself as an understanding and sensitive father.

8.5.3 Themes

The basic themes discussed in the play *Look Back in Anger* are as follows:

- **Class divide:** Jimmy and Cliff are shown to be individuals who are very conscious of their class. Helena and Colonel Redfern are the other characters that represent a class of people different from Jimmy's. Helena is the new woman of liberalized west who chooses her own moral codes.

The Redferns are the elite who seem to be indifferent towards Jimmy's class of people and their problems. The playwright has drawn in characters from different backgrounds and thrown them into situations of conflict and tension that reveal their essential differences. The web of human relationships is woven around 'class' in the play and the dramatic tension is sustained on these differences and incompatibilities. Through this play, Osborne is also commenting on the feudal mindsets of English people for whom class is a reality that cannot be erased from the society and the one that is instrumental in shaping the identities of people.

- **Anger:** Anger, as much as it is a mode of release for Jimmy is also an important theme of the play. Anger is important not just for the object it is directed against but in itself too. Anger is a negative emotion that feeds into the one possessing it.

Look Back in Anger has mostly been interpreted for its title that reflects on past, nostalgia and reasons for resenting it. However, the character of Jimmy Porter cannot merely be seen as an instrument of anger at things social and political, but his is a psychologically complex and emotionally devastated character. Jimmy's anger is as important as the reasons for it. His anger makes him inflict violence of many kinds on the people around him: verbal, emotional and psychological.

Jimmy's character is powerful but repulsive because of his anger. Osborne has given the modern stage a character that can stand for his generation and times but has at the same time given a case study in psychology. Jimmy's childhood, his mother's leaving his father and his frustrations at securing a respectable job for himself are some of the reasons that make him an emotionally hurtful, vulnerable and selfish person.

Osborne's play also explores the many facets of anger and the fact that anger can itself be an escapist route for frustrated people like Jimmy. In the end, the audience can ask the following questions:

- o Does railing change things, or walking out into the streets?
- o Isn't anger that does not translate into action impotent and wasted?

Therefore, in the end, the nature, strength and effects of the anger remain intriguing questions to be delved into.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

8. How do Jimmy and Alison refer to each other affectionately?
9. State the themes that are discussed in the play *Look Back in Anger*.

ACTIVITY

Watch the 1959 British adaptation of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Pay close attention to the ways in which Jazz has been used in the film (to intensify Jimmy's angst).

DID YOU KNOW

Look Back in Anger was re-made as a film 1989, directed by Judi Dench for Thames Television.

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8.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is a play about a love triangle involving an intelligent but estranged young man (Jimmy Porter), his upper-middle-class, impassive wife (Alison) and her arrogant best friend (Helena Charles). Cliff, a friendly Welsh resident, attempts to keep the peace. The play was a success on the London stage, and initiated the term 'Angry Young Men' to portray Osborne and those of his generation who used severity and practicality in the theatre as opposed to the more escapist works of the past.
- John James Osborne was a distinguished English playwright. He was also a screenwriter, actor as well as a vocal critic of the Establishment—the 'Angry Young Man' of British theatre. His play *Look Back in Anger* brought about a revolution in transforming English theatre and enthusing new dynamism in English drama.
- Osborne saw theatre as a weapon, which would enable the ordinary people to break down the class barriers. He wanted his plays to be a remembrance of actual pleasures and pains. Osborne also brought about a significant change in the world of theatre, influencing playwrights such as Edward Albee and Mike Leigh. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.
- Details of Osborne's disturbing personal life are important as they are strongly reflected in his writings, particularly in the play *Look Back in Anger*. In this play, the character of Jimmy Porter seems autobiographically inspired with ranting, suspicion and general contempt for all.

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- The sequence of events is linear with the plot maintaining causality. In the tradition of naturalistic theatre, characters are well defined and explained together with their physical features and behavioural traits. One event follows another and the movement of time is teleological.

8.7 KEY TERMS

- **Distinguish:** Make oneself prominent and worthy of respect through one's behaviour or achievements
- **Clichéd:** Showing a lack of originality
- **Libertarian:** A person who believes in the doctrine of free will
- **Reconciliation:** The action of making one view or belief compatible with another
- **Turbulent:** Characterized by conflict
- **Misanthropy:** A disposition to dislike and mistrust other people
- **Detrimental:** Tending to cause harm
- **Prerogative:** A right or privilege exclusive to a particular individual or class
- **Semblance:** The outwards appearance or apparent form of something, esp. when the reality is different
- **Demarcation:** The action of fixing the boundary or limits of something
- **Complacent:** Showing smug or uncritical satisfaction with oneself or one's achievements
- **Liberalize:** The act of making less strict
- **Facet:** A particular aspect or feature of something
- **Rant:** Speak or shout at length in a wild and impassioned way
- **Lament:** A passionate expression of grief or sorrow
- **Zeal:** Great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective

8.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. John James Osborne was a distinguished English playwright, screenwriter, actor and a vocal critic of the Establishment—the 'Angry Young Man' of the British theatre. His play *Look Back in Anger* brought about a revolution in transforming English theatre and enthusing new dynamism in English drama.
2. Osborne made a significant contribution towards the revival of British theatre by making it more challenging, audacious and experimental. He helped throw off the formal constraints of the previous generation, and turned the attention towards language, theatrical rhetoric and emotional intensity.
Osborne saw theatre as a weapon, which would enable the ordinary people to break down the class barriers. He wanted his plays to be a remembrance of actual pleasures and pains. Osborne also brought about a significant change in the world of theatre, influencing playwrights such as Edward Albee and Mike Leigh. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.

3. *Dejavu* is the sequel to *Look Back in Anger* and it was published in 1991. This was Osborne's last play. In it, Osborne visits the life of the Porters twenty years later. Jimmy's anger is still there, but like Osborne's own zeal that seems to have cooled off with age, Jimmy's anger is at best powerful in its nostalgic appeal.
4. During the times when John Osborne wrote *Look Back in Anger*, the following incidents were taking place in the outside world:
 - Cold war
 - Independence of colonies
 - England going through internal turmoil
5. Post World War II British drama was characterized by what later came to be known as the generation of Angry Young Men. John Osborne is one of the most important voices of this generation because the intensity of his anger reflected his political commitment and a keen sense of social injustice. The position of England was peculiar after the Second World War. In the international political scenario, where the 'sun had never set on the British Empire', it was beginning to lose colonies rapidly, India being one of the most recent (1947).
6. The plot of the play *Look Back in Anger* unfolds around Jimmy, and concerns all other people in his life who are affected to some or the other extent by his unyielding anger. The play ends with the union of Jimmy and Alison, and a suspect promise of peace between them. The end is reached with Alison's return at which point structurally, the second woman is made to quit.
7. Cliff is the character who acts as a counter to Jimmy with his warmth and friendship towards Alison. The plot involves action in the Porter household, with Jimmy as the centre and the two women entering and exiting it at different times. A central feature of the plot is domestic tension that involves all other characters such as Cliff, Helena and Colonel Redfern, Alison's father.
8. With affection, Jimmy and Alison refer to each other as bear and squirrel. Bear stands for male strength and aggression while the squirrel represents female flightiness and charm. In their conversations, Jimmy and Alison often resort to this imagery, especially at moments of dramatic tension. Jimmy's anger is associated with his masculine aggression and Alison's silence can be interpreted as her submission. The play resonates with sexual violence that is also suggested by this imagery.
9. The themes that are discussed in the play *Look Back in Anger* are as follows:
 - Class divide
 - Anger

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8.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What questions did Osborne raise through his works?
2. Write a short note on the concept of 'Angry Young Man'.
3. Give a brief overview of the play's historical backdrop.
4. Discuss the character of Jimmy Porter.
5. Give a character sketch of Colonel Redfern as a man emblematic of England's past.

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the dramatic techniques used in the play *Look Back in Anger*.
2. Discuss the role of Colonel Redfern—Alison's father.
3. Comment on the play's autobiographical element.
4. Discuss the importance of the play's historical setting with special emphasis on the Cold War period coterminous with the waning English pride.
5. Discuss the animal imagery and the significance of the game with which the play ends.
6. Comment on Jimmy Porter's tag as 'the Angry Young Man'.

8.10 FURTHER READING

Heilpern, J.; *John Osborne: A Patriot for Us*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2006.
Osborne, J.; *Almost a Gentleman: An Autobiography*. UK: Faber & Faber, 1991.

UNIT V: *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Unit Objectives
- 9.2 Background of the Author
 - 9.2.1 Important Events
- 9.3 Works by Harold Pinter
 - 9.3.1 The Theme of Pinter's Early Plays
 - 9.3.2 Reception
- 9.4 Summary and Critical Comments
 - 9.4.1 Act I
 - 9.4.2 Act II
 - 9.4.3 Act III
- 9.5 The Theme of Protest and Subversion
 - 9.5.1 Language, Silence and Pause
 - 9.5.2 Language and Structure: Dashes and Pauses
- 9.6 Society and the Individual
- 9.7 Summary
- 9.8 Key Terms
- 9.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 9.10 Questions and Exercises
- 9.11 Further Reading

9.0 INTRODUCTION

The Birthday Party was Harold Pinter's first commercial production as a playwright. It was a full-length play. He started to write this after his work as an actor, in a theatrical tour. Those were the times during which, his lifestyle was in 'filthy insane digs' (as described by him). Later, he described his acquaintance with 'a great bulging scrag of a woman' and a man who lived in the sordid place. This cheap place of living became a prototype for a shabby boarding house for the play, the woman and her tenant, the models. It also housed the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber.

His previous piece of work, *The Room*, was a play that had a single act. In *The Room*, Pinter's work was based on themes and motifs that he had also planned to use for *The Birthday Party*, in addition to a few of his subsequent plays. Part of these themes are the failure of language to function as a satisfactory tool of communication, the use of place in the form of a sanctum that is desecrated by intimidating impostors and strange uncertainties that shroud or warp fact.

This complete full-length play was also directed by Pinter. Its premier show was launched in Cambridge, England, at the Arts Theatre, on 28 April 1958. It achieved a lot of success there and also in its tour to Oxford. However, when Peter Wood ordered for it be moved to London and then be opened at the Lyric Opera House in Hammersmith, it was reviewed harshly. This resulted in it closing down within a week. Of all the reviewers, Harold Hobson of the Sunday Times was the only one who felt that the play was promising. In his view, Pinter's work was very original and was 'the most disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London.' However, the timing of his review was not

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sufficiently quick to benefit the production in any way. The show had already stopped due to feeble spectatorship, which comprised one matinee audience of six and continuously aggressive reviews. A large number of critics were of the opinion that Pinter was struggling in darkness and was negatively affected of Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Eugene Ionesco (*The Bald Prima Donna*) and other avant-garde writers.

Soon after, Pinter was awestruck when in London the play was given a thoroughly ruthless treatment by critics. However, he was aware that this was the first instance when he had received negative reviews and it failed to dim his passion for writing. Actually, his work became the dramatist's first full-length 'comedy of menace'. A group of protagonists held Pinter's status as a leading playwright who thought ahead of his time. The productions that followed were reviewed more positively. These included the play's 1964 revival at London's Aldwych Theatre and its 1968 Broadway premier at the Booth Theatre in New York. By the mid-1960s, the growing admiration of drama and the success of other plays by Pinter, including *The Dumbwaiter* (1959) and *The Caretaker* (1960), had made up for negativity directed at *The Birthday Party*. Then, *The Birthday Party* gained repute as a classic in the genre of drama, a genre that was defined as Theatre of the Absurd by literary critic Martin Esslin.

9.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Harold Pinter
- Comment on the works of Harold Pinter
- Summarize and critically comment on Acts I, II and III of *The Birthday Party*
- Discuss the theme of protest and subversion

9.2 BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Harold Pinter was born in Hackney, in a neighborhood of working people in the east end of London. His father was a tailor. His parents were Jews, who were born in England.

During his childhood, Pinter was close to his mother. However, he was not comfortable with his father, who was a domineering person. When World War II broke out, Pinter was moved from the city to Cornwall; he suffered a great deal of trauma when he was separated from his parents. His literary works comprised twenty-nine plays, which included: *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming* and *Betrayal*. He had twenty-one screenplays to his credit. These comprised *The Servant*, *The Go-Between*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, etc.

Pinter also directed twenty-seven theatre productions, which included *James Joyce's Exiles*, *David Mamet's Oleanna*, seven plays by Simon Gray and many of his own plays including his latest, *Celebration*, paired with his first, *The Room at The Almeida Theatre, London in the spring of 2000*. Pinter began to write plays in 1957. He had spoken about his idea about a play to a friend who was an employee of the drama department at Bristol University. This friend found the idea to be so good that he asked Pinter to send him the play. The only hurdle was that for the university to perform the play, the script had to be prepared in one week. Pinter replied to his friend's letter asking him to reject the whole idea. Later, he sat down and wrote the play in four days.

His hard work resulted in a one-act play which was titled *The Room*. This play had a large number of constituents that would portray Pinter's subsequent works, namely routine circumstances which progressively featured menace and mystery. These circumstances deliberately omitted the justification or motive for action. Further, in the same year, Pinter built his style in another one-act, *The Dumb Waiter*. This was about two contract killers who worked for a secret organization. They are assigned to kill an unknown person. In this second play, Pinter introduced humour, generally in the form of vibrant trivial conversation. The increasing nervousness of both the men is concealed within this humour. Their conversation on whether it would be correct to say 'light the kettle' or 'light the gas' is full of crazy humour and terrific absurdity. The debut performance of *The Dumb Waiter* was at the Hampstead Theatre Club in London, in 1960. Pinter continued writing many absurdist works of art. These comprised *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *Betrayal*, *Old Times* and *Ashes to Ashes*. He even composed several radio plays and many books of poetry. His screenplays comprise *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Last Tycoon* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Many awards were conferred upon him. These awards included the Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear, BAFTA awards, the Hamburg Shakespeare Prize, the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, the Commonwealth Award and the Nobel Prize for Literature. His rare approach and knack for building suspense and thrill without being flamboyant earned him utmost respect among the playwrights of his day. Harold Pinter passed away on 24 December 2008, when he was 78. He had been battling cancer since a long time. He is survived by his wife, Lady Antonia Fraser.

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9.2.1 Important Events

Harold Pinter was born on 10 October 1930. His father's name was Jack and that of his mother was Frances. He first experienced war in 1939. This was World War II. The early times spent by him at Hackney Downs Grammar School are significant because:

- He came in contact with an English teacher, Joe Brearley.
- He portrayed the character of Macbeth in an amateur school production, which attracted reviews in the *News Chronicle*.

These events took place from 1944 to 1947, which was the most receptive age for Pinter. Thereafter, he enrolled himself in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, during the autumn of 1948. In the early years of his life two incidents stood out distinctly, his deep interest in English as a language and drama as an art and his power of resistance. When Pinter was selected for National Service, he refused to enlist and declared himself as a conscientious objector. This incident took place in October 1948. As a result of this, in 1949 he was summoned before the military tribunal and arrested and fined twice.

Following this, he quit the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and focused completely on reading and writing. His career got boosted with small roles on BBC radio. In 1950, his first professional performance came in the form of *Focus on Football Pools* and two of his poems also got published in the August number of *Poetry London*. At one point of time Harold Pinter got completely pre-occupied with learning the art of speech. He attended two terms at the Central School of Speech and Drama, from January to July 1951. This was the time that gave Pinter the break that his career was in need of. Anew Mc Masterto engaged him to play Shakespeare and other classical drama in Ireland. For six months Pinter was engaged in acting, writing, reading and consolidating his position in the world of literature and drama. He launched on his first book, *Dwarf*, with simultaneously shifting between dramatic companies. His stage name became David

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Baron and he married Vivien Merchant, who was his costar in *Bournemouth*. This was on 14 September 1956. Since 1957, after the production of Pinter's 'The Room' at Bristol University Drama Department, he never looked behind. Since this production, Pinter has been played all over Europe, in the United States and in Russia too. Pinter was the actor, director and producer for his own plays and also for those written by others. Films were made, based on his plays and his association with production and acting on BBC, Radio as well as television, had been a close one. His was astoundingly versatile.

9.3 WORKS BY HAROLD PINTER

Pinter's complete collection that includes Radio, TV and stage plays is available in the four Play Collections, published by Faber and Faber. A list of their publications sufficiently contains all his works. The only play, which is not part of this list, is *Celebrations of the Year 2002*. The publications also comprise his poetry and prose, *Celebration and the Room* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays I* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays II* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), *Collected Screenplays III* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001) and *The Dwarfs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).

Plays 1: *The Birthday Party, The Room, The Dumb Waiter, A slight Head Ache, The Hothouse, A Night Out, The Black And White* (short story), *The Examination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991)

Plays 2: *The Caretaker, The Dwarfs, The Collection, The Lover, Night School, Trouble in the Works, The Black and White, Request Stop, Last To Go, Special Offer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996)

Plays 3: *The Homecoming, Tea Party, The Basement, Landscape, Silence Night, That's your Trouble, That's All, Applicant, Interview, Dialogue for Three, Tea Party* (short story), *Old Times, No Man's Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997)

Plays 4: *Betrayal, Monologue, One For The Road, Mountain Language, Family Voices, A Kind of Alaska, Victoria Station, Precisely, The New World Order, Party Time, Moonlight, Ashes to Ashes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998) *Poems and Prose, 1949-1977* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), *The Proust Screenplay* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) *The Trial* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993) *Various Voices: Poetry, Prose and Politics 1948 - 1998* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998)

9.3.1 The Theme of Pinter's Early Plays

The Caretaker gave Pinter the break his career needed. After this play, Pinter got serious attention, which a playwright of his stature deserved. Pinter could present his theme in a more distinct way. Batty found a theme that was common in all his plays. He says; *The Caretaker* was a refined form of the thematic concerns that was the driving force behind most of Pinter's writing. It was possible to precisely examine human impulse to dominate, to define areas of territory and the ability to intercede in such things. All Pinter's early work, his plays, *The Birthday Party, The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, as well work of prose, *Kullus* and *The Examination* are all different expressions of his fascination for violating presence and an intruding force. All these works, space and environment have prominent marks of his identity. Similar to all his previous plays, *The Birthday Party*, rotates around this simple premise. This premise involves a tug of war

for superiority, between inhabitants and intruders of the territory. Goldberg and McCann have invaded Meg's and Petey's territory as they have come to keep them away from Stanley. Similarly, they are also invaders for Stanley, since they have come to take away his refuge. The main highlight of the tug of war between the individual and society is the manipulation of space and violation of territory.

9.3.2 Reception

When *The Birthday Party* came to fore in 1958, all critics united against it. The play shocked reviewers, when they first saw it in London. 'What all this means only Mr Pinter knows' (Manchester *Guardian Review*, 29/5/1958). The majority of senior critics inclusive of Kenneth Tynan spoke on the play. Tynan defined it as 'a clever fragment grown drop-sically, with symbolic content, a piece.... full of those paranoid overtures that seem inseparable from much of the avant-garde drama'. This observation featured in *The Observer* of 5/6/1960. After two years, Tynan, accepted his failure to recognize the quality and promise of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

Harold Hobson stood out against the flow of opposing criticism; he acknowledged the dramatic power of Pinter, announcing, 'Mr Pinter, on the evidence of his work, possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London'. Herber spotted a unique vagueness and unconformity in Pinter's plots. The feature which people regarded as ambiguity was the highlight of Pinter's success and charm. Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler, who worked in close association with Pinter, as directors of the production of his play recollect their first response to Pinter. 'Michael Godron sent me *The Birthday Party* when it was first going to be done. I didn't know who Harold Pinter was but I liked the play immensely'.

Peter Raby has traced change in the reactions of the public and the critics towards Pinter. To begin with the response of the academia, Raby says, 'If Pinter was embraced warmly and relatively early by the academia, he had been treated a little more erratically by theatric critics. *The Birthday Party* foxed them in the 1950s with the striking exception of Harold Hobson, who had the benefit of seeing *The Room* in Bristol. *The Birthday Party* was a new type of theatrical literature that was a challenge for the director, actors and the audience. Audience at Cambridge and Oxford were not affected by any critical lead and their response was positive. As years passed by, the reviewer's response got adjusted to both, early Pinter and successive shifts and developments in his work.

Batty remembers that *The Caretaker*, received later in 1960s, was received very positively. It was portrayed as a fascinating and uncompromising work of art and was an indication of a kind of masterpiece. He says that the reason that responses to *The Birthday Party* earlier were negative was the shock with which it was received. The shocks stemmed from its allegorical structure and enigmatic characteristics. He also remembers that *The Birthday Party*, which signified Pinter's first major entry into the theatres of London West Ends, was a recipient of critical backing and snobbishness.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name any two plays written by Harold Pinter.
2. How was '*The Birthday Party*' treated, when it appeared in 1958?

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9.4 SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

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9.4.1 Act I

The play opens in a living room set-up of a house, in a seaside town. The room is almost without any furniture or any artificial look. As seen by us, the room has a table and chairs and opens into the kitchen. The kitchen has a hatch, which Meg, the lady of the house, uses not only for transferring things but also to converse. The first scene introduces the following two characters, Petey, the husband and Meg, his wife. She talks to Petey through the hatch, as he comes into the room, sits on the chair and starts read the paper that he has got with him. The start of talks between Meg and Petey is about cornflakes, fried bread and the news in the paper. This conversation is pretty dull and routine. They live in harmony and are not persistent in their thinking. The blending of the difference between the awful food they have and the silence of serving it, is funny. Questions from Meg like, 'Are you back?' and 'You got your paper?' indicate that she is willing to start a conversation. She has seen Petey walk in and read the paper, still she begins questioning, although aware that he will not be answering them; the conversation is as routine as cornflakes and bread. Petey's answers to Meg are generally in the form of 'yes, the cornflakes is nice; outside is nice'. The next question from Meg asking if Stanley was up, also lacks relevance as she is aware that Petey has not seen him, since, he had just walked in: Meg tries to catch Petey's attention, she desires his appreciation of the breakfast served by her and shows no hesitation in appreciating him for having read some nice bits from the paper, yesterday.

Her ignorance in comparison to Petey is evident with her 'Oh!', when he tells her that 'it gets light later in winter'. When she picks up socks to mend them and other simple chores carried out by both of them confirms how simple the family is. The first scene shows some of the methods that Pinter uses for creating the atmosphere of his choice. According to John Russell Brown, the play had succeeded because of the language and silence used by Pinter. 'The play starts with silence and the twice repeated question of Meg, who is far behind the stage is answered by Petey only in line 6.' Meg's initial three questions sounded repetitive at first. However, progressive changes to the tone disclose their actual motive.

Meg shows that she is curious about the name of the girl, who has given birth to a baby. She also exhibits her immature worry at her having a baby girl. Her wish to have a little boy is also evident. Her way of conversing makes her an amiable comic character. In the meanwhile, Meg and Petey have talked about Stanley, who lives with them and whom Meg is concerned about. It is worthy to consider Nigel Alexander's observations about their simple household:

'The opening sequence opens a gap between the aspirations of the characters and their behaviour that is maintained in increasingly painful fashion until the end of the play.... What it establishes is a domestic routine of almost killing boredom yet Meg's enquiries about the cornflakes and her interest in the girl baby that the newspaper announces has been born to Lady Mary Splatt indicate great expectations that somehow with stood the withering of age and the staling of custom. One of the reasons that she sounds like a silly old woman is that her vocabulary is still that of a bride enjoying providing breakfast for her husband and looking forward to the baby that she hopes will be a boy. Her unquenchable folly and Petey's resigned acceptance of her good intentions have a quality of heroism, which survives even the laughter of the audience.'

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Petey says that two men came to him on the beach, the night before, to ask if they could stay in their house for two days. When Meg's asks what he had told them, he says that he said nothing and that they will be coming again to find out. The repetitive questions and short answers indicate Pinter's manipulation of language as he wills. Meg's anxiety and avid desire to be socially approved are evident in the conversation that follows:

Meg: Are they coming?

Petey: Well, they said they would

Meg: Had they heard about us, Petey?

Petey: They must have done.

Meg: Yes, they must have done. They must have heard this was a very good boarding house. It is. This house is on the list.

Irrespective of the fact, it is obvious that Meg wants the house to be on the list. She also fantasizes of succeeding as an enterprising boarding house owner. The irony is visible when it is known that there is no one besides Stanley Webber who is staying at the guest house. 'The house on the list' also has other implications. Meg is prepared for visitors. She has room ready for them. This was not expected because earlier, there were no guests at the boarding house and Meg had no clue of them either. Her willingness for Goldberg and McCann also shows that the house is destined for what follows. Meg then says, that she was going to wake Stanley. Her words show her concern for him. When Petey talks about a show, coming to the town, she immediately thinks of Stanley. She reacts that Stanley could have been in it, had it been on the pier. When Petey tells her that Stanley had no role to play in it because it was a show without dancing or singing, she is completely shocked. How could a show be without singing or dancing?

Meg had liked to hear Stanley playing the Piano. As she remembers Stanley, she decides to call him down. Petey's asks if she had taken him a cup of tea and if he had drunk. This shows that this is Meg's daily routine, so is her routing of waking him up. Her style of calling and warning sufficiently establish a deeper affection in Meg for Stanley, than a landlady would generally have.

Petey: Did he drink it?

Meg: I made him. I stood there till he did. I am going to call him. Stan! Stanny! Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you.

Finally, when Meg reaches Stanley's room, she exhibits no formality. Stanley's shouts and Meg's laughter inform us of her being informally physical. (When she returns, she is breathless and arranges her hair). Petey has a quiet disposition and would never rebuke Meg; he greets Stanley with a good morning and remains calm all the while. The character of Stanley is unsuccessful, unshaven, undisciplined and shabbily dressed. He is wearing a pyjama jacket and glasses. It is not easy to judge Meg's feelings for Stanley. She reproaches him all the while and he is impudent with his negative responses.

Meg: So he has come down at last, has he? He's come down at last for his breakfast. But he doesn't deserve any, does he Petey? Did you sleep well?

Stanley: I didn't sleep at all.

Meg: You did not sleep at all? Did you hear that Petey? Too tired to eat your breakfast. I suppose? Now you eat up those cornflakes like a good boy. Go on.

Meg reprimands him like a child. Stanley teases her like a friend.

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Meg: What are the cornflakes like, Stan?

Stanley: Horrible.

Meg is disgusted. Petey had praised the same flakes some time back. Even the advertisement said that they were revitalizing.

When Stanley recommends that he go to the second course, Meg instantly responds. Noted that when Meg criticizes Stanley, she always addresses him in the third person, as 'he', even when she is talking to him. The dialogue between Stanley and Meg has a very delicate comedy, griping you though the situations and the characters are dull.

Stanley: No breakfast. All night long I have been dreaming about this breakfast.

Meg: I thought you said you didn't sleep.

Stanley: Day dreaming. All night long.

He cautions Meg that he would go and have breakfast at one of the elegant hotels on the front. Her instant response is that he wouldn't get a better breakfast there.

Petey gives no opinion about food, weather or people. When Stanley questions him about the weather, his simple response is that there was a good breeze blowing, without calling it cold or warm. He supports Stanley when Meg refuses to give him breakfast and goes back to work, without tea or any word of complaint. Stanley criticizes sour milk and holds Meg responsible for Petey going away without having tea.

The conversation between Stanley and Meg is pleasant and affectionate.

The scene where Stanley and Meg are alone reveals a bit of their relationship. Nigel Alexander describes it as normal concern assorted with Meg's sexual awareness of him as a man.

'What is unusual is the use of this comedy to provide information. This information helps the audience to predict the relationship between Meg and Stanley before his appearance. Her frustrated maternal sexuality is clear, dangerously unstable and likely to explode. Stanley's frantic flare-up has been predicted although its form will be unexpected'.

Stanley carries on rebuking Meg. He even taunts her about the boarding house.

Stanley: Visitors! Do you know how many visitors you have had since I have been here? **Meg:** How many?

Stanley: One.

Meg: Who?

Stanley: Me! I'm your visitor.

The sentence from Meg is a significant repetition of the house being 'on the list.' Meg's does not have to try to draw Stanley's attention to her. It is natural. Her objection to Stanley using the word 'succulent' for the bread, suggests her own physical properties, conveying that he could not reach for her. She was married and Stanley had to speak discreetly; yet her remark 'you're bad' sounded more loving and indicative.

The following conversation discloses a clandestine nearness, not seen before. Meg ruffles Stanley's hair as she passes, while Stanley throws her arm away. However, immediately after rebuking her, Stanley admits his dependence on her by saying, 'I don't know what I'd do without you Meg. You don't deserve it though.' Then he says 'Get out of it. You succulent old washing bag.'

Meg: I'm not! And it isn't your place to tell me if I am!

Stanley: And it isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and wake him up.

These lines show how Stanley was woken up by Meg. Meg's is not satisfied with only her housekeeping and cooking being praised. She desires to be courted and pursued too. She wants Stanley to praise the cup of tea and also say that she was desirable. She ignores Stanley's attempts to oppose her and she tries to get him to respond. Try to get the hidden meaning of the following conversation.

Meg: Stanley! Don't you like your cup of tea of the morning- the one I bring you?

(and later)

Meg: (shyly) Am I really succulent?

When Stanley says that he would prefer her to a cold in the nose, she dares him to do that.

Meg: You're just saying that.

Stanley's declining patience and Meg's increasing sensuality ultimately ends with Stanley's eruption of disgust. He discards Meg's tea as horrible. Obviously, he is tired with Meg's overtures. He suddenly becomes a formal guest and reminds her that he was only a boarder.

Stanley: (violently) Look why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room.

Meg: (Sensual, stroking his arm) Oh! Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons there.

Stanley irritatingly recoils from her. He goes out and quickly comes back with a cigarette. Meg continuously pursues Stanley erotically. Stanley's anger is clear when she asks for a cigarette and tickles the back of his neck. The sinister inclination of the guests, whom Meg refers to, is clear as she announces their chances of coming. Stanley's fear of being found and hunted down is clear when he does not want to believe Meg. He is also anxious to know their names and more about them. Stanley seems to know them when he wants to keep them away from the house. His nervousness is extreme when he asks, 'why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?' It was possible that he was temporarily relieved thinking that they may not come at all.

When he addresses Meg as Mrs Boles his breakdown is evident. He becomes weak and all his responses are grunts. He groans, falls forward and holds his head with his hands.

Meg is kind and skillful with Stanley. She commends his Piano skills and coaxes him to play it again. She tries comic, when he is depressed and sad. Mark Batty believes that Stanley's fears are related to some guilt of his past life, which he is evading. As Meg and Stanley talk about his past, we know about his career as a pianist and about an aborted concert. Surprisingly during this conversation,

Stanley is so much affected by the fear of the two mysterious men coming to his safe haven.

As Stanley is intrigued by the new visitors, we wonder what was troubling him. Meg fears Stanley going away.

Meg: But you wouldn't have to go away if you got a job, would you? You could play the piano on the pier.

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His past success and failure are connected with his piano skills. Stanley's reference to his career as a pianist is both, comic and pathetic. The drama lies in the sequence in which Stanley makes these statements. Later Meg, says that she enjoyed watching him play the piano, she repeats his story about the concert and is funny in getting the details wrong. She dents status still further when she gives him a toy drum for his birthday.

Stanley's daydream of his success in the past can be considered tragic, because now it is lost. Nigel Alexander finds Stanley's frenzied outburst logical to Meg and his relationship with his own parents. 'His relationship with his parents has been uneasy. As he talks of his 'great success' (the concert at Lower Edmonton). 'My father nearly came down to hear me. Well I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it, No I lost the address that was it.'

Surely, he does not want to recognize himself as the son and lover of Meg's desire. His fury has always been part of his history. Stanley has no precise answers to Meg's questions. He has no specific reply about the place and payment. 'At Berlin, it is a fabulous salary and all found. Then to Constantinople, Zagreb, Vladivostok, it is world tour with flying visits to what's its name. What is the name is the question.' Stanley keeps Meg spell bound by the narration his concert at Lower Edmonton. Everyone had champagne that night, the whole lot of them. So far, Stanley's ascension suggests a rise, towards a throne, but this is immediately followed by a fall. Stanley talks of being crowned the King of Artists and then, a victim of a conspiracy. Stanley's father could not see the great splendour and adoration. Was it because the father did not turn up? Was there any impact of his father's absence? Why did Stanley initially say that he had sent him a card when he had lost his address? Did he even have the address or was there no contact between them, before the concert. There are no answers to these questions, still the play is enjoyed.

Stanley now confides in Meg. He wants to talk about their bad treatment. He was appointed to play in another concert, of which he does not remember the location. The space is now vague and unidentified. When he went to play, the place was deserted. They wanted to subdue Stanley. He hates the whole thing; he wants to know their identity to settle his score with them. He tells Jack that he can collect that information, but we are not told who that Jack is.

Stanley's coarse words to Meg, 'You're just an old piece of rock cake,' and her cracking words of fear suggest a threat. Meg's entreating words 'Don't you go away. Stan. You stay here, you'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg', are words of concern as well as fear for Stanley. Stanley stubbornly rejects his fear, about the visitors who were supposed to arrive, or any enemies of the past.

His joke about their arrival today, with a wheel barrow is strange. It diverts our attention away from the men who are coming. The suspense persists though Stanley has tried to nullify Meg's fear.

Lulu comes when Meg is getting ready for her shopping. Lulu is a neighbour and part of the extended family of Meg and Petey. We find out that she had bought something that was kept a secret. All through Mrs Boles and Lulu's conversation, Stanley sidles to the door, trying to listen to what they say.

The conversation between Lulu and Stanley after Meg's departure is informal but not simple. Lulu's remark that the room was stifling gets an absurd response from Stanley when he says that he had sanitized it that morning. Stanley carries on cheating and baffling people with small lies. His story to Lulu about being at the sea at half-past

six in the morning, before his breakfast, was a lie. Stanley knows that Lulu knows about his lies and Lulu knows that Stanley was aware of it.

Lulu's nearness with the Boles family is ascertained when she enters the play. She tells Stanley that he should shave and change. She indirectly tells us that Stanley never goes out.

'Don't you ever go out?— I mean what do you do, just sit around the house all day long— hasn't Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?

Stanley shows his presence of mind as well as a turn of phrase. The second retort, after ' I ——in the room this very morning, I always stand on the table—when she sweeps the floor is followed by the 'where' and 'no-where game of words between them.

When Lulu goes out, Stanley inspects himself in the mirror. When he looks at himself and washes his face, it shows that he was affected, though he does not show it.

McCann and Goldberg arrive when Stanley is all alone. He sidles behind the door and avoids as far as possible. Goldberg and McCann come in through the rear door. Goldberg has a briefcase while McCann has two suitcases. Stanley has by now sneaked out. Mystery and suspense rise when McCann asks Goldberg if they were in the right house for he saw no number on the gate. 'I wasn't looking for a number', says Goldberg, which means that he had found what he was looking for. Goldberg's clearly commands McCann, which is evident from his speech. He has brought McCann for a holiday. He tells McCann how to relax, 'The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose?'

Goldberg knows that McCann's is uneasy tries to restore his confidence. He remembers Uncle Barney, who is his ideal. He nostalgically recollects his visits to the sea-side resorts, Brighton, Canvey Islands, Rottingan where he went with his uncle, every second Friday of the month, Goldberg finds words insufficient to describe the enormity of the man and adds, 'he was a cosmopolitan'.

Three things emerge in the scene between Goldberg and McCann. The first, that Goldberg had a son 'who used to carry a few coppers, for a newspaper, probably, to see how the M.C.C was getting on overseas'. He himself never carried any money; he only carried a good name, as per the advice of his grand uncle Barney. The second thing we learn about Goldberg is the enormity and power of his position. We also learn about the trust between McCann and Goldberg. Goldberg has done a lot for McCann and McCann has proved his trustworthiness.

Goldberg's formal attitude and address in the nature of their present occupation gives a professional look to the entire situation.

Goldberg points out the similarities and differences between his current and previous businesses. Goldberg continues to speak when Meg walks in. He is polite and well-mannered with her. Goldberg asks Meg what her husband did. The question seems irrelevant since Goldberg has met Petey earlier and asked him about staying in their boarding house.

Meg: Very pleased to meet you.

Goldberg: We are pleased to meet you too.

Meg: That's very nice.

Goldberg: You are right. How often do you meet someone its pleasure to meet?

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advantage of Mr and Mrs Boles. He is persistent in defending himself, telling them that there was nothing for them in that house from any angle and that as for him they were just a dirty joke, they did not matter to him.

Stanley's defiance of them and his attempt to get an advantageous position fail. Stanley is first graciously asked to sit, when he declines; McCann and Goldberg turn slightly firm till he finally gives in to McCann and sits. Their attitude gradually turns more intimidating, infecting the viewers with Stanley's nervousness. An interesting thing in Pinter's novel method of portraying characters is the concern it can gather for the non-hero protagonist, despite all his flaws. Stanley can neither be trusted, nor be hated and yet no one wants to see him harmed. Everyone wants him to be safe.

Stanley does not get intimidated by Goldberg and McCann. He is daring and does not hesitate to reject Goldberg's authority when Goldberg tries to dominate him. Stanley tries everything to frustrate them. But Goldberg and McCann are unyielding; they are determined and use every tactic to control Stanley.

Stanley's test begins on the most chimerical base. He is blamed with getting on everybody's wick; he is accused of treating the young lady Lulu, like a leper. He is asked to explain why he forced Petey to go out to play chess and drive Meg crazy. Irrelevant questions, such as where had he gone yesterday and the day before? What did he wear last week? And where did he keep his suits? Follow. These are meant to intimidate and weaken him. The comedy gradually transforms into a crime thriller. Why did Stanley abandon their organization? Goldberg's mention of the 'old mum' and a 'personal hurt' hint that he may have known Stanley more closely, or may be related to him. However, Stanley's response indicates his carelessness. After a ridiculous exchange of words, meant to keep ridiculousness of the play intact, the dialogue is restricted to short sentences as in the case of a pursuit. They are hunting Stanley and the words are like darts to injure and weaken him.

Stanley is accused of his wife's murder, then of escaping from the wedding itself. The beginning of the conversation looks like a hide and seek of words;

Goldberg: Where did you come from?

Stanley: Somewhere else

Goldberg: Why did you come here?

Stanley: My feet hurt

Goldberg: Why did you stay?

Stanley: I had a headache

Goldberg: Did you take anything for it?

Stanley: Yes

Goldberg: What?

Stanley: Fruit Salts

Goldberg: Enos or Andrews?

Stanley: En-AN—

Goldberg: Did you stir properly? Did they fuzz?

Stanley: Now-now, wait you

Goldberg: Did they fuzz? Did they fuzz or didn't they fuzz?

All questions end with the verdict that Stanley had been disloyal to the organization. Goldberg asks one last question which confirms that Stanley was part of their group. Stanley is caught, when McCann takes his glasses away. More questions evoke memories and confirm the places Stanley is linked to. Stanley had washed the last cup at Lyon's Corner house at Marble Arch on the Christmas before last and his old mom was at the sanatorium.

What was the reason for Stanley leaving the girl he was about to marry, why did he not come to the Church? Goldberg and McCann try to trap Stanley with their words. Stanley is being victimized by words that are weakening his will. They are targeting his sensory nervous system and diminishing his power to resist.

What was the reason for Stanley to change his name? They do not find Stanley's answer to be funny. He had changed his name because he did not remember the other one. The answer sounds like a lie. Joe Soap is his new name, which he gives them. Goldberg calls him a sinner.

The most critical question asked is if Stanley recognized 'the external force' qualifying the external force with 'responsible for you', 'suffering for you'. When Stanley breaks down, Goldberg and McCann consistently bog him by strange and confusing possibilities and ask him to solve problems that have no solution. One such weird question was whether number 846 was a possibility or a necessity, or both.

McCann's job is to contain and force people to toe Goldberg's line and to endorse Goldberg's ruling as well as implement it. Goldberg's ultimate declaration of what he has been trying to assert is revealed by his words, 'Right! We are right! And you are wrong. Webber, all along the line. McCann supports him with an endnote, 'all along the line.'

Stanley is now being morally accused; he is called the root of contamination of womankind and also a lecher. He will be avenged for this. The following questions increase Stanley's nervousness to the level of incoherence. The continuous questions: 'Why don't you pay the rent? Why do you pick your nose and what's your trade?', become rapid and more frantic. He is questioned about history, cricket and gossips and end up with the typical riddle about whether the chicken came first or the egg.

Goldberg and McCann bank on Stanley's failing senses and nerves with expletives of 'he doesn't understand! He doesn't understand! He was a traitor to the cloth (the one he uses as pyjamas) and that he had manipulated his birth sheet (sin of incest). Stanley's punishment was due for betraying the country, deserting or killing his wife, sins with women, etc. Stanley's seems helpless, at utter loss and in extreme need of help.

Stanley's abrupt outbreak when he kicks Goldberg in the stomach is followed by his running with a chair on his head to protect himself, with McCann on his heels. Goldberg remains calm. They try to look normal only when Meg arrives. She looks ridiculous when she asks McCann how she looked in her party dress. Her enthusiasm looks imbecile. Goldberg's words reflect his culture; he praises her superficially. He is equally well-mannered to Petey and Lulu and is rude to Stanley only when needed and inevitable. Goldberg's naughtiness in admiring Meg reflects his hypocrisy. Initially, Meg was a tulip, now she seems a gladioli. Meg's has astounding appetite for admiration and the experienced Goldberg knew it immediately. He asks for every light to be turned out and tells McCann to switch his torch on, to create an aura like that of a dream.

Goldberg's mesmerizing voice and kind words, though a deception, are effective. He is able to comfort people and make them confident. He coaxes Meg to raise a toast and when she is nervous, he tells her to speak from the heart. He overcomes her to

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reveal her real feelings when she looks at Stanley. Goldberg also deals with the stage. Just as Meg is about to start her speech, he tells McCann to shine the light on the birthday boy, instead of Meg.

Though there is simplicity in Meg's speech, it not only reveals her feelings for Stanley but also shows her womanliness. As her speech is spontaneous, the words are liberal and sincere. She describes her long connection with Stanley. She openly praises him, 'he is a good boy, although sometimes he is bad'. Her affection for Stanley is undivided and no one in the world knows Stanley better than her, although Stanley does not believe it. She publicly announces her absolute love for him; she could do everything for him. Meg's emotional sobs, when Stanley is there on his birthday reveal her gentle feelings for him.

She shows that she is glad because of everyone's (Goldberg and McCann) presence there that night. This is an irony in context with the incidents that follow. When Lulu comes to the party, enthusiasm is added to it. Stanley is made to sit as Goldberg speaks on how valuable true feelings are in the life of a man. He exhibits regret on missing the age when he could express love, feeling of cheerful friendship and affection without being ashamed or self-conscious. He shows that he is happy at having heard Meg's toast to Stanley, which was not common in today's world, with its sincerity and deep sentiments. He was happy to see that love is still alive in a few hidden corners. He again speaks about the things he cherished in life. Goldberg believed that life should have quality and not just be long. His belief is in living close to everything offered by nature and enjoying the plain joys of man's labor and toil. His definition of recreation is good humour, a day of fishing and some gardening. He had even constructed a greenhouse. Goldberg abruptly moves to the other joys of life in a town. Although by chance but deeply linked to the theme of the play, Goldberg talks about the same places that Stanley had earlier talked about to McCann. He had also asked him whether he was aware of these places. The two places spoken about by Stanley are Tea in Fullers and Boots Library. When Goldberg refers to the same places, it casts suspicion on Stanley's credentials. Then, Goldberg begins to speak about Meg's speech again. Her speech was really sentimental and heart rending for him.

Goldberg is awestruck by Meg's complete commitment to Stanley and congratulates Stanley for it. Lulu focuses her attention on Goldberg, whose speech, she says, was superb. Meg returns to Stanley kissing and patronizing him.

When Lulu asks Goldberg from where he had learnt to speak so well, He tells them that his first speech was at the Ethical hall in Bays water and the speech was on 'The necessary and the possible'. The reader would remember that previously when Goldberg was interrogating Stanley, he had asked him the same question about 'Necessary and Possible'. Lulu and Goldberg paired with each other. Meg and McCann can be seen drinking together. The event that follows can be visualized a drunken revelry, almost close to an orgy. There are simultaneous overtures between Meg and McCann. Lulu perches herself on Goldberg's lap after he has praised her for being a bouncy girl. She says that she could bounce up to the ceiling and indeed does so. Lulu's physical closeness to Goldberg is evident when Goldberg's remarks, 'Mind how you go, you're cracking a rib'. Lulu is captivated, she responds with the same compliment in her eyes. She is happy that Goldberg's has appeared out of nowhere and soon after meeting him, surrenders herself to him. When Lulu's questions him about his wife his answer is the same as was about his mother. The adaptation has been altered to some extent; instead of the canal, it is the park and the young girl he had kissed in the first episode is missing. He also

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remembers to mention the little boys and girls clarifying that he has not differentiated between them. Although Nat is his real name, his wife also addressed him as Simey. She always served the nicest food to him and urged him to eat it while it was hot. Lulu asks Goldberg if he knew her when she was a girl. This hints at an identity crisis, knowing links and a telepathic quest. Identity is lost as a result of missing roots. Meg speaks of her father, who had promised to take her to Ireland, but had finally left alone.

Meg and McCann are now talking about their childhood memories. Their retreat to childhood is a refuge into the peace and comfort of the past, into a world of fantasy. Half of the things they talk about are either overstated or completely invented.

Meg talks about a pink room, with pink curtains and a pink carpet and musical boxes all over the room. She never fell sick because her father was a doctor. Meg's magical world is not yet over. Her nanny sung for her. All of them appear completely drunk now. Meg compliments McCann about his voice. When he is asked by Goldberg to give them a love song, he begins to sing a folk song about the lovers, Paddy Reilly and Bally-James-Duff. After the song Lulu suddenly says that she wants to play a game. They agree to play blind man's bluff. Meg plays blind first, since McCann shows that he does not know the game. Lulu explains it to him. In the middle of the game, Goldberg is seen patting Lulu and

Meg is seen touching McCann.

When Stanley plays the blind man, McCann breaks his glasses and puts the drum in his way. Stanley's foot is caught in the drum and he falls. Stanley tries to throttle Meg and vitiate Lulu. As the lights go out and McCann loses his torch Stanley tries to get even with the women. He also dislikes men who are self-indulging with other men and drinks. This shows Stanley's increased annoyance about Meg's pleasure-seeking attitude towards him. Stanley is seen bending over Lulu whom he has placed on the table. When McCann and Goldberg see him in the torchlight, he simply chuckles. He chuckles louder as McCann and Goldberg come closer to him.

9.4.3 Act III

The following morning, Petey as usual, walks in with a newspaper. Meg's question from the hatch indicates that it was Stanley and not Petey who she was expecting. Once she is aware that it is Petey, at once she tells him that she has nothing for breakfast. She pours some tea for Petey and informs him that she was going to shop for something nice for the two men. She says that she has a bad headache and Petey tells her that her sleep was deep.

Meg's behaviour shows that she was so drunk last night that she noticed nothing. Meg's speech that follows later reveals the risk to Stanley, although she herself does not understand what she had seen. In the morning, when Meg had taken a cup of tea to Stanley's room, the door was opened by McCann, who said that he had already made tea for Stanley. She is astonished that they were awake and wonders why Stanley was awake so early. She feels strange and slightly uncomfortable. Did Stanley know them? Since Stanley had many friends, his acquaintance with Goldberg and McCann does not surprise her. She wonders why Goldberg and McCann had come down for breakfast in the morning. Why did Stanley not come? However, she consoles herself with the thought that he must have slept again.

As Meg gets ready to go shopping, she hears the sound of a door being slammed upstairs and stops, wondering whether Stanley was coming down. She is concerned

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about his breakfast because there were no cornflakes. To Meg's surprise, it is Goldberg who comes down. When Meg asks if Stanley was coming down and his reply hints at Stanley's fate.

Goldberg: Down? Of course he's coming down. On a lovely sunny day like this he shouldn't come down? He'll be up and about in next to no time.

Goldberg's comment indicates that he does not consider Stanley better than himself.

Now Meg is in love with by Goldberg's car. She goes for shopping with a slightly uncertain state of mind, concerned about Stanley's breakfast. Petey enquires about Stanley, which Goldberg does not give a clear indication about. He again talks about his reluctance to comment on Stanley's state. He had doubted the authenticity of his diagnosis since he had no certificate. We know now that Stanley was being attended on by Dermot, because he had a nervous breakdown.

To answer Petey on the reason for the sudden nervous breakdown, Goldberg replies judiciously. He refers to Stanley's nervous breakdown as a foregone conclusion.

The previous night's incidents are a perplexing mystery for Petey. When he reached the house, there were no lights. This was weird. It was even stranger that the lights came back as soon as he inserted a shilling in the slot. Goldberg rejected the whole incident as a minor breakdown of fuse.

Petey's concern about Stanley increases and he says that he would have to call a doctor in case there was no improvement in Stanley's condition. However, McCann tells him that everything has been taken of and he did not need to worry about Stanley because he had been 'treated' by him. When McCann said that 'Stanley was absolutely quiet now' creates a morbid atmosphere. Things that were grotesque have now turned completely horrific.

Dermot is not known to anyone. No one besides Petey has met him. His power is compared to that of a demon: hideous and unspoken. McCann has prepared the suitcases and is awaiting Goldberg's signal. He enquires if Stanley was ready and is told to go and see for himself. Eventually, McCann tells Goldberg that he has returned Stanley's spectacles. Goldberg asks him if Stanley was glad to have them back. Goldberg and McCann succeed in tricking Petey and promise him that if Stanley's condition does not improve, they will take him to Monty.

Petey is still not completely aware of their motives. Goldberg does not want him to interfere. Goldberg informs Petey that they will not come back for lunch and forces him to go back to the seaside. Petey leaves them alone. Goldberg turns serious now. His distress can be clearly seen, he shouts at McCann for his tendency of tearing the paper into strips and for asking too many irritating questions.

Goldberg admits to his restlessness, in the operation of the present 'thing', in his words. He surprises himself, because rarely did he lose his calm. Goldberg's conversation with McCann discloses a new angle about them. McCann is curious about Goldberg's reality and uses his name, 'Simey', to find the facts. Goldberg warns McCann, not to use that name and gets violent when McCann goes up. Is Goldberg is emotionally disturbed because he doesn't want Stanley to suffer?

When he talks to McCann about life and his principles, he says that he has followed 'the line'. Goldberg repeatedly speaks about his parents. Goldberg was a self made man. In school, he was good in every subject and he learnt everything by heart. More importantly his physical fitness was at its peak. Goldberg recalls his father's words before his death. Note that his father called him Benny and not Simey. Two of the many

principles that he learnt from his father were: to forgive and let live and to go home to the wife. Goldberg's father told him that all his life he had served others. He taught Goldberg to perform his duty and avoid being judgmental. He had also told him to look after people who were socially backward. The courtesy of wishing 'good morning' to the neighbors was also considered significant. Nevertheless, the most important principle was to keep the family united. The family is the base of one's existence and should never be ignored. Goldberg disperses his thoughts into the past in an attempt to trace his family tree. His thinking goes out of control for a while but later, regains control after a short silence. He again admires his fitness. He expresses the importance of his motto, 'work hard and play hard— and respect thy father and thy mother.' The irony is that immediately after he declares fit, he is breathless and asks McCann to give him mouth-to-mouth respiration.

Lulu enters as soon as McCann has helped Goldberg to breathe normally. McCann is shrewd to leave them alone.

When Goldberg and Lulu are left alone, they blame each other for being taken in. Lulu accuses him of ravishing her innocence. She expresses doubt at his intention of walking into her room at night, with his briefcase. Goldberg remarks that she too was not innocent. Pinter's use of repartee is at its best when Goldberg and Lulu are talking.

Goldberg: A girl like you, at your age, at your time of health and you don't take to games?

Lulu: You're very smart

Goldberg: Anyway, who says you don't take to them

Lulu: Do you think I'm like all other girls?

Goldberg: Are all the other girls like that too?

When Lulu accuses Goldberg of using her, he straight away refutes her by asking 'who used who?' Lulu replies that a boy 'Eddie' was her first love. She forgets to say that he was the last one too.

Her complaint turns funny and hilarious indeed. 'You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things a girl shouldn't know before she's been married at least three times.' Goldberg's calling her Schumulu and Lullalu shows his contempt for her. The implications of McCann, being attached to the Church is necessary for understanding Pinter's view on the Church and the Clergy. When he dismisses Lulu by accusing her kind of spending 'too much time in bed', he preaches what everyone does but no one practices. He advocates Goldberg's attitude because Lulu herself had asked for it.

McCann catches hold of Lulu and starts terrorizing her with a torrent of questions. Lulu is not able to comprehend all this at first, but when she does, she quits the room. Stanley is now wearing a dark well-cut suit. He has shaved and is holding his broken spectacles. Goldberg and McCann seem satisfied in the way they have changed Stanley. He not only looks better, but is 'a new man.'

In the last scene Stanley is totally submissive. He does not react to Goldberg and McCann's 'relish' in their victory. Their savage misbehaviour and festivity of Stanley's trampled spirit enlivens the demon within them. Their delight with their win on Stanley frightens the audience. They tell Stanley that they have saved him. He had many ailments and was cockeyed. He was in a mess and had turned from bad to worse. He looked pale and rheumatic. He was also shortsighted epileptic. They had saved him from falling over the edge.

They had a way to cure him, a place for him to recuperate. They would give him a new pair of spectacles, season tickets and discount on inflammable goods. In short,

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they will care and treat him. The advantages and perks promised by them are usually identified with the life of a successful man. 'Club Bar' reserved table, a free pass. They promised to care for his spiritual as well as physical well-being. Stanley will conform to the physical, socio-economical and religious pattern of society. They will be proud of him.

Stanley is unable to control his body as well as his mind. This can be seen in his response to Goldberg's and McCann's last questions. He is not able to talk and he only makes incoherent sounds; he clenches and unclenches his fists till they start to tremble.

In the end, he is completely paralysed. Goldberg and McCann consider him fit to be taken away now. When Petey enters the house, Stanley is completely defenseless. He has now turned into a vegetable in the hands of Goldberg and McCann, who will control him the way they want.

They ignore Petey's protests and Goldberg threatens Petey that if he tries to stop them, they may take him along with Stanley.

Petey is not strong enough to fight them but he does not want Stanley to surrender. Finally he tells Stanley, 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do.'

The play ends with many questions and controversies. Meg is not aware that Stanley has been taken away. Even, Petey does not tell her about it.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

3. Which two important events does Act II comprise?
4. How does Pinter make his comedy successfully comic and menacing at the same time?

9.5 THE THEME OF PROTEST AND SUBVERSION

Pinter's introduced protest and subversion in his plays. In his interview to BBC, in the programme 'Omnibus', Pinter reiterated the importance of protest and subversion in his drama. He repeated the same to Mel Gussow after two months, in 1988.

'The Birthday Party' can be visualized as a drama full of protest and subversion from different angles. Although outwardly, Goldberg and McCann seem like intruders, but Stanley is also one of them. Goldberg and McCann blame him of depravity, violation and sabotaging their organization to which he too belonged.

Stanley protests as the key protagonist, who is afflicted, exploited and finally destroyed by oppressors. It does not matter what these oppressors stand for, which is a bigger problem. The play is a show of angry reaction and physical assault by Stanley. Stanley kicks Goldberg in the stomach and his patience ends in a comic but evasive manner.

According to Batty, the reason for man's weak position is his uncertain future and his lack of knowledge of external forces, social or other. Though the play criticizes organizations and social arrangements that symbolize submission and obedience, yet it is not geared for communicating such a message.

The resistance within the play presides over the dramatic energies of Pinter's early plays. They successfully convey both, existent and implicit political suggestions. Irving Wardle used the 'comedy of menace' to describe Pinter's works.

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Other writers like Michael Scott, perceive in Pinter's plays, a deeper focus on the victim than the invader. However, in 'The Birthday Party', Goldberg and McCann are the dominating characters. According to Michael, the play showcases Stanley's existence and his vulnerability. Both, the language and the characters of the play are dislocated. Stanley the victim becomes the aggressor when it comes to Meg. Take the following as an example:

Look at her. You're just an old piece of rock cake, aren't you? That's what you are, aren't you? When there is no centre of stability, no foundation for one's existence, a victim can be an aggressor, an aggressor a victim, and words such as 'good' and 'evil' become meaningless. These divisions don't exist in Pinter's characters: "It's rather ridiculous to try to understand people in those kinds of terms. Evil people. What the hell does that mean? Or bad people. And who are you then if you say that, and what are you?"

The point of focus is not morality but relationships among people and how people deal with each other within 'a territorial struggle'. In this context, Francesca Coppa discusses three chief issues in his essay— 'The Sacred joke: comedy and politics in Pinter's early Plays'. These issues are political concerns of Pinter, responses of the audiences and Freud's joke theory in context of Pinter's plays. The fact that the characters of Pinter cannot be forgiven and Pinter tries to create sympathy for them, makes it difficult to decide how audiences would respond in such situations.

Pinter creates such situations in which the audiences are almost forced to support either the victim or the joke teller. If the audiences choose to laugh, it would be equivalent to take the aggressor's side and not to laugh would mean that they are supporting the victim. Thus, the comedy of Pinter works as a test to find out whom the audiences support.

According to Francesca Coppa, Freud's joke theory is a valuable key to understand Pinter's plays which he wrote in the beginning of his career as a playwright. In this context, Christopher Innes says that the plays written by Pinter are 'variations on the subject of dominance, control, exploitation, subjugation and victimization. They are models of power structures.' It is also said that the jokes used in Pinter plays are capable of creating moments which can cause dramatic crisis.

5.1 Language, Silence and Pause

In 1962, while delivering a speech at Bristol University, Pinter said, 'A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression'. This statement is enough to understand how Pinter uses language in his plays. Pinter does not like to use language that is dead and stale. The quote given below shows what kind of words and language leaves him or saddens him:

'I have mixed feelings about words myself. Moving among them, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page, from this I derive a considerable pleasure. But at the same time I have another strong feeling about words, which amounts to nothing less than nausea. Such a weight of words confronts us day in, day out, words spoken in context such as this, words written by me and by others; the bulk of it a stale dead terminology, ideas endlessly repeated and permuted become platitudinous, trite, and meaningless. Given this nausea, it's very easy to be overcome by it and step back into

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paralysis. But if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt, to move through it and out of it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has even been achieved...'

The language arises when we are not able to express ourselves, when we are trying to hide something or when we are not willing to express ourselves. In the characters created by Pinter, silence speaks louder than the spoken word. In order to express this point of view, Pinter says, 'There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen that keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness.'

He also says, 'I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.'

9.5.2 Language and Structure: Dashes and Pauses

The most striking feature of Pinter's comedy is that his comedy is successful as well as menacing. In order to achieve both these opposite effects, he uses a high-level comic technique. To create the specific effect as per his wishes, he uses a structured and cut-to-size language. The use of this kind of language is appreciated even by Pinter's critics. Questions asked by Goldberg-McCann from stressed Stanley Webber 'Is the number 846 possible or necessary?' and 'why did the Chicken cross the road?' is able to maintain comic facade of his play as well as complicate Stanley's life.

The fact that these questions are not reasonable creates laughter among the audiences and at the same time makes them worrisome as they are not aware of the intention of the speaker in posing these questions from Stanley. Francesco Coppa says, 'Behind Pinter's comedy one can perceive something more serious, alarming and disturbing, yet not fully exposed in the words that have been used.' Another comic device used by Pinter is that of repetition. For instance, repetitive use of the word 'nice' by Meg in the play titled,

'The Birthday Party'.

The reason behind Pinter's comedy is not only to create pleasurable situations but to map the themes of the play.

The tendentious joke structure, used by Pinter, works at macro level as well as micro level. If the audiences do not laugh during the final event, it does not mean that his work is not funny. It means that the audiences have taken the side of victim and not the victimizer.

The form of communication used in Pinter's plays is that of absence of direct explanation. The drama in his plays is created not by the apparent meaning of the words used in the play but by the subtext of the play. There are two layers in Pinter's subtexts. These layers are the hidden meaning/intention behind the words and meaning of words when a character does not utter any word. According to Michael Scott, Pinter, within the subtext, uses 'the strategy of pause and silence which in Pinter's plays are as important as the tense dialogue or the comic repartee or the long monologue.'

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Another peculiar feature of Pinter's writings is 'Pinter pause'. Under this feature, he uses three trail dots, silence and indication pause, all at a time when the audiences are waiting to hear the dialogues of character. Some critics feel that Pinter uses these pauses for his convenience. To this, he answered, these pauses are 'not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action'. He adds that if actors play his characters properly, they would realize that all the pauses given in his plays are inevitable.

To justify his point of view, he also says, 'The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters and a silence equally means that something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time- until they can recover from whatever happened before that silence.'

Thus, these pauses are an important part of his play which guides the actors and director about the tempo and rhythm that they have to follow while enacting his plays.

While talking about the use of dots and dashes in his plays, Pinter ironically says,

'I've had two full-length plays produced in London. The first ran a week and the second ran a year. Of course, there are differences between the two plays. In 'The Birthday Party' I employed a certain amount of dashes in the text, between phrases. In 'The Caretaker' I cut down the dashes and used dots instead. So that instead of 'Look, dash, who, dash, I, dash, dash, dash,' the text would read: 'Look, dot, dot, dot, who, dot, dot, dot, I, dot, dot, dot, dot.' So it's possible to deduce from this that dots are more popular than dashes and that's why 'The Caretaker' had a longer run than 'The Birthday party'. The fact that in neither case could you hear the dots and dashes in performance is besides the point. You can't fool the critics for long. They can tell a dot from a dash a mile off, even if they can hear nothing.'

In addition to 'Pinter pause', he also uses sounds like caahhs and uh-gug to express love, coquette, domesticity, external danger, solace, threat and internal fear.

What words say and beyond

Pinter is popular not only for his use of language but also for his great sense of timing. He creates climax and tension at appropriate places in his play. His use of language at the appropriate time is capable of revealing more than the apparent meaning of the words. For instance, he says:

Yes, he's....still asleep

Let him....sleep

These lines are spoken perhaps to hide Stanley's regression in a foetal position as if he is in a womb. Thus, we are not sure what the speaker intends to speak by using the word 'sleep'. Thus, this word speaks more than its apparent meaning.

The way Pinter manipulates rhythms is rather difficult to describe. Speeches follow a particular kind of phrasing till there is lengthening of subtextual pressure, shortening or quickening of utterance. Therefore, the sound itself gives a clue about the change of engagement.

An example of this is seen in the last episode of *The Birthday Party*:

(Meg comes past the window and enters by the back door. Petey studies the front page of the paper) Meg (coming downstage): The car's gone.

Petey: Yes.

Meg: Have they gone?

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Petey: Yes.
Meg: Won't they be in for lunch?
Petey: No.
Meg: Oh, what a shame. (she put her bag on the table.) It's hot out. (She hangs her coat on a hook) What are you doing?
Petey: Reading.
Meg: Is it good?
Petey: All right.
(She sits by the table) Meg: Where's Stan? (pause) Is Stan down yet, Petey?
Petey: No....he's...
Meg: Is he still in bed?
Petey: Yes, he's...still asleep.
Meg: Still? He will be late for his breakfast.
Petey: Let him...sleep.

9.6 SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Let us look at Goldberg, McCann and Stanley Webber in 'The Birthday Party'. Each one of the four plays by Harold Pinter ends in the virtual annihilation of a person. In 'The Birthday Party', it is Stanley who is virtually annihilated. He is taken for special treatment from where he had taken refuge. Pinter is not able to properly define the system that he is trying to personify through the two characters of Goldberg and McCann. How Pinter asserts humanity is quite puzzling since he makes the very institutions that are responsible for structuring human morality and welfare, the agents of immorality and destruction.

The hero, who is also the victim, is not free from blame either because it is not easy to link him with humanity. Although he manages to gain the readers' sympathy, he does not really get our approval.

Stanley

Pinter portrays Stanley as an obese, shambling and unpreventable individual who is residing in a rundown boarding house near the sea. He is the lone guest in that dilapidated house and get the opportunity to boss over the adoring lady who owns the property. He is recognized as an accomplished pianist.

However, even this convenient and protected atmosphere is intruded upon. He is unable to forget the memory of him arriving for a recital only to discover the hall all locked up. He is surrounded by foes, who when they actually land, they seem to be in the form of a fluent Jew accompanied by an Irish henchman. They appear to be the characters from Stanley's nightmares.

He falls fast. At the end he is taken away in a state of trance, all scrubbed, and cleaned and bundled into shapeless trousers. It is not easy to describe the tragic-comedy of his characters in the existing pattern of society. Stanley's life at the boarding house and the visit by Goldberg and McCann on holiday is far from realistic although all of it seems socially recognizable.

Goldberg

*The Birthday Party by
Harold Pinter*

This character is definitely ruthless in showing and exerting his power. However, he does not use his power to please himself. He acts as the crusader and is there to confront Stanley who has betrayed the organization they all worked for and vanished after committing fraud. Goldberg is said to represent threat to the individual's freedom in the name of care and social responsibility. He is a semi-educated Jew who is able to flannel well. However, the pattern and the total effect of his speeches that the play is dominated by, reflect the culture of a person who is successfully heading a family and a business.

In Act II, Goldberg's speeches clearly praise the pleasures associated with boyhood, how the fit man enjoys his walk in the sunshine, etc., all of which tantamount to verbal torture for Stanley. However, by the time we reach Act III Goldberg's patterned loquacity becomes more arbitrary. Goldberg's speeches, in particular, when he is alone with McCann have no role to play other than 'creating a scene' and drawing attention to the lack of culture in Goldberg by forcing him to utter slogans.

At this point, we do not respond to the parody of institutionalized caring. The description of the same is quite a farce, restricted only to the image of the helpless victim and how he is rendered speechless.

The way Goldberg seduces Lulu by engaging her emotionally is characteristic of any man of position in society. It also contradicts Goldberg's claim of self-control.

The gap between what he preaches and practices is clear in the contrast between the Sunday school teacher, whom he only kissed and his present behaviour.

His speech about how the youth of his day and age whose hallmark was temperance differed from today's youth who are perverted appears jarring.

"When I was a youngster, of a Friday, I used to go for a walk down the canal with a girl who lived down my road. A beautiful girl. What a voice that bird had! A nightingale, my word of honour. Good? Pure? She wasn't a Sunday school teacher for nothing. Anyway, I'd leave her with a little kiss on the cheek — I never took liberties — we weren't like the young men these days in those days. We knew the meaning of respect."

This speech is in contrast with his dialogues with Meg and Lulu where he is at his flirtatious best and proves what a rascal he is.

"Walk up the boulevard. Let's have a look at you. What a carriage. What's your opinion, McCann? Like a Countess, nothing less. Madam, now turn about and promenade to the kitchen. What deportment!"

Goldberg is a shrewd man who can identify the weakness of a woman the moment he meets them. He is able to gauge Meg's liking for good clothes, simple pleasures, partying and of course her love for Stanley.

Goldberg is capable of satisfying all of Meg's desires without letting her doubt his intentions even once. He also knows that Lulu is not only younger but far more vulnerable as compared with Meg. Lulu has less inhibition than Meg and is completely knocked down by Goldberg. She falls for him in a short span of time and trusts him completely within minutes of meeting him.

She expects seriousness from Goldberg when she meets him in the last Act but is hurt by his casual demeanour. She ends up accusing him of taking advantage of her.

Goldberg's off-hand manner with Lulu, in this scene reflects how capable he is of relaxing in even the most critical or serious circumstances.

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Goldberg: Who opened the briefcase, me or you? Lulu, schmulu, let bygones be bygones, do me a turn. Kiss and make up.

Lulu: I wouldn't touch you.

Goldberg: And today I am leaving.

Lulu: You are leaving?

Goldberg: Today.

Lulu: (with growing anger) You used me for a night. A passing fancy.

Goldberg: Who used who?

Lulu: You made use of me by cunning when my defences were down.

Goldberg: Who took them down?

Lulu: That's what you did. You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things girl shouldn't know before she has been married at least three times!

Goldberg: Now you are a jump ahead! What are you complaining about?
Enter McCann quickly.

Lulu: You didn't appreciate me for myself. You took all those liberties only to satisfy your appetite. Oh Nat, why did you do it?

Goldberg: You wanted me to do it, Lulula, so I did it.

Goldberg draws the blue print, commands as well as commissions and McCann carries it out. They are the culprits and they have assigned different roles to themselves. Goldberg keeps his civility as well as good manners while McCann does his dirty jobs.

In the previous scene with Lulu, it is McCann who gets her going. Other than Stanley, she is the only other person in the play who gets subjected to interrogation by McCann. It is done to keep her out of their way.

McCann: Your sort, you spend too much time in bed.

Lulu: What do you mean?

McCann: Have you got nothing to confess?

Lulu: What?

McCann: (savagely) Confess!

Lulu: Confess what?

McCann: Down on your knees and confess!

Lulu: What does he mean?

Goldberg: Confess. What can you lose?

Lulu: What, to him?

Goldberg: He's only been unfrocked six months.

McCann: Kneel down woman and tell me the latest!

Lulu: (retreating to the back door) I've seen everything that's happened. I know what's going on. I've got a pretty shrewd idea.

McCann: (advancing) I've seen you hanging about the Rock of Cashel, profaning the soil with your goings on. Out of my sight!

Lulu: I'm going. Goldberg is like almost all of Pinter's characters, a liar. So are McCann, Stanley and Lulu. It is difficult to count the lies they tell, they not only revert to them, and they plan them for calculated ends and purposes.

Stanley, McCann and Goldberg studied in the light of Guido Almansi's essay *Pinter's Idiom of Lies* emerge as confirmed liars, perverted humanized animals who have no grain of truth left in them.

'But although the Pinterian hero is often as hesitant as a pig, stumbling pitifully on every word, covering a pitifully narrow area of meaning with his utterances, blathering through his life he does not, like any honest animal seem to complain or grunt or giggle or grumble to give an outlet to his instincts, desires, passions of fears.

He mumbles in order to hide something else. Even when he grunts, his grunt is a lie. Pinter's characters are often hopeless, stupid, vile and aggressive, but they are always intelligent enough in their capacity as careful and persistent liars, whether lying to others or to themselves, to hide the truth if they know truth's truthful abode. They are too cunning in their cowardice to be compared to noble animals. They are perverted in their actions and speech: hence human.

He rejects Pinter's language as it is based on a policy of reciprocal misunderstanding and misinformation. It spurns sincerity, honesty; linguistic generosity and openness in favour of the diabolical game of hide and seek.

It is true of the language used by all the characters in *The Birthday Party* except Petey. Their sojourns into the past are lies, lies and only lies. Stanley's success story as a pianist, Goldberg's as an orator, a beloved son and husband and Meg's pink room in her father's house have been woven on the spot. None of the characters except Petey is trustworthy.

The presence of uncertainty in the language of the characters is not due to the indeterminacy of their thoughts or intentions; it is elusive and disruptive by intention, as a weapon of attack and exploitation. The rhythms of words are used for enhancing the effect of ritual and litany. The cross-examination of Stanley Webber is held in the manner of a ritual with the speech that is completely dehumanized: resulting into an incoherence of the logic of the exercise. Matter has already been settled, the ritual serves only as a catalyst to the final catastrophe.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. How can *The Birthday Party* be visualized from different angles?
6. What do you learn about Goldberg's character from his interaction with Lulu and Meg?

ACTIVITY

Read another play by Harold Pinter and draw a contrastive analysis with *The Birthday Party*.

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DID YOU KNOW

In 2005, Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

9.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Pinter's complete collection that includes Radio, TV and stage plays is available in the four Play Collections, published by Faber and Faber. A list of their publications sufficiently contains all his works. The only play, which is not part of this list, is *Celebrations of the Year 2002*. The publications also comprise his poetry and prose, *Celebration and the Room* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays I* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), *Collected Screenplays II* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), *Collected Screenplays III* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001) and *The Dwarfs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).
- *The Caretaker* gave Pinter the break his career needed. After this play, Pinter got serious attention, which a playwright of his stature deserved. Pinter could present his theme in a more distinct way. Batty found a theme that was common in all his plays. He says; *The Caretaker* was a refined form of the thematic concerns that was the driving force behind most of Pinter's writing.
- Harold Pinter's dramatic piece, *The Birthday Party* was dedicated to cinema in 1968 by prospective Exorcist director, William Friedkin. It is showcased in a squalid British beach-resort rooming house.
- The property-owner (Meg) holds a cheerless birthday party for Stanley (her tenant), which is invaded by two shady characters named Goldberg and McCann. No one knows why they're there except for Stanley. Stanley, after being continually disgraced by the appalling pair is taken away by them to an unknown destination. *The Birthday Party* culminates with 30 seconds of a totally blank screen.

9.8 KEY TERMS

- **Playwright:** A person who writes plays for the theater, television, or radio
- **Spectators:** People who are watching an event, especially a sports event
- **Awestruck:** Impressed by something
- **One-act play:** Having only a single act
- **Criticism:** The act of expressing disapproval of someone or something and opinions about their faults or bad qualities
- **Impudent:** Having no showing respect for other people
- **Daydream:** Pleasant thoughts that make you forget about the present
- **Menacing:** Likely to cause you harm or danger
- **Misgivings:** Feelings of doubt or anxiety about what might happen, or about whether or not something is the right thing to do
- **Overhauling:** An examination of a machine or system, including doing repairs on it or making changes to it

9.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. *The Dumbwaiter* (1959) and *The Caretaker* (1960) are two of the plays written by Pinter.
2. *The Birthday Party* was treated with almost unanimous critical hostility, when it appeared in 1958.
3. Act two comprises the interrogation and the birthday party.
4. Pinter makes his comedy successfully comic and menacing at the same time with a high-level comedic technique.
5. The *Birthday Party* can be visualized as a drama full of protest and subversion from different angles.
6. Goldberg is clearly a charmer who is able to give a woman exactly what she wants. He knows what every woman's weakness is and is able to behave with them in the manner that appeals to them. This is evident in the manner in which he treats Lulu and Meg who have very different personalities. He is also capable of making serious situations appear casual.

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9.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What were the important events in Pinter's life?
2. List some of the works of Harold Pinter.
3. What are the two key events in Act II of the play *The Birthday Party*?
4. Who is Goldberg?

Long-Answer Questions

1. How was *The Birthday Party* received?
2. Explain the use of language, silence and pause in *The Birthday Party*.
3. Write a detailed note on: the theme of protest and subversion.
4. Discuss how society and the individual are depicted in the play.

9.11 FURTHER READING

- Burkman, Katherine H.; *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual*, University of Ohio Press, 1971.
- Dukore, Bernard F.; *Where Laughter Stops: Pinter's Tragicomedy*, University of Missouri Press, 1976.



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