

## TERMS/CONCEPTS BACKGROUND TOPICS PART I

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## 1.0. OBJECTIVES

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This unit will make the students aware with:

- The 20<sup>th</sup> Century literary movements.
- The literary genres, trends, and literary movements of Britain in the 20th Century.
- The linkages between social and historical contexts and literary texts.
- The various literary movements and theoretical approaches.

With this knowledge the students will be equipped with comprehensive understanding of literary genres, trends and movements in 20th Century British Literature; thereby, enabling them to understand the valuable co – relation between the sociocultural, economical and historical contexts; behind the literary production. Students will acquire the discipline to become reflective and imaginative thinkers through a close, critical and analytical reading of the prescribed texts.

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## 1.1. MODERNISM

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### 1.1.1. What is Modernism?

The term modernism is a period, style, genre or the combination of all. More predominantly, the term ‘modern’ has been frequently and repeatedly used to attribute to the avant-garde, although since the **Second World War**, this sense has been popular by the term ‘contemporary’ while ‘modern’ has shifted from the meaning ‘now’ to ‘just now’. **The Modern movement** in the arts, however, delineated as being almost synonymous with the advent of the twentieth century, in fact, goes back to the last decades of the nineteenth century when the foundations and base of the high Victorian culture were facing serious menace from various agencies. Being a cultural phenomenon, **Modernism** saw the exodus from pre-existing modes of aesthetic engagement to the sphere of art.

**The term Modernism applies and refers** to the literature, music, painting, film, and architecture and also to some works before and after this period. In poetry, Modernism is linked and connected with moves to break from the iambic pentameter as the basic unit of verse, to introduce *vers libre*, i.e. free verse, symbolism, and other new and various forms of writing. In prose, **Modernism** is associated with the endeavours to render human subjectivity in more accurate and authentic ways than that of realism such as, to represent consciousness, perception, viewpoint, emotion, feeling, meaning and the individual’s relation and alliance with the society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness, non-linear narratives, rhythm, imagery and themes, and various other techniques. Hence, **the Modernist** writers endeavoured and refers to, Ezra Pound’s brief phrase, ‘Make it New’. Therefore, the modernist literature generally focuses on the individual, rather than the society as a whole.

### 1.1.2. History of Modernism.

The term '**Modernism**' was first used in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century merely to indicate trends and **characteristics of modern times**, whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century its meaning encompassed a sympathy with modern viewpoints, ideas, thoughts, styles or expressions. In literature, Modernism surfaced and appeared in the English novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy's novel, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* (1891), to indicate what he called a general and unwanted and unwelcomed creeping industrial "ache of Modernism". It was in the 1960s that the term modernism became extensively used. Its literary roots have been said to be in the work of the French poet, essayist and art critic, Charles Baudelaire and the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, in the Romantics, or in the 1890s fin de siècle writers such as Thomas Hardy, George Moore and Arthur Symon, whereas its climactic stage, culmination or the pinnacle possibly occurred and appeared before World War I, by which point radical experimentation had impacted and influenced on all the arts, or in 1922, the **annus mirabilis** of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob Room*.

Its historical and social background of Modernism, incorporates and comprised the emergence of the New Woman, the pinnacle and decline of the British Empire, unprecedented technological change, the upsurge of the labour party, the appearance of factory-line mass production, war in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Modernism has thus, almost universally been considered and regarded as a literature of not just change but also a literature of crisis. The foundations of faith were also decrepit and debilitated by the onset of **Darwinism**. The challenge to faith, is one of the principal features in modern literature. For example, in the early poetry of T.S. Eliot, the anxiety and restlessness of modern living, the experience of chaos apprehend this loss of centre, such as Eliot's *Prufrock* Joyce's *Dedalus* are questers without direction. Writers such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway are some of the important and significant writers of the modernist movement.

### 1.1.3. Characteristics of Modernism

- **Individualism**

Modernist literature, typically focuses on the individual rather than the society. Particularly, modernist writers were captivated and enamored with how the individual adapted to the changing world. In various cases, the individual succeeded over hardships and hindrance. To a large extent, the Modernist literature presented such characters who just kept their heads above water. Writers of this movement exhibited the world or society as a challenge to the honesty and integrity of their characters. Ernest Hemingway is chiefly remembered for the intense and powerful characters who accepted and acknowledged their circumstances at face value and persevered.

- **Experimentation**

Poets rejected and relinquished traditional rhyme schemes and started writing in free verse. Novelists defied and challenged all expectations. Writers mixed the images from the past with modern languages and themes, creating a collage of styles. The inner workings of consciousness were a common subject and theme for modernists. This common subject and theme led to a new form of narration, which was called stream of consciousness and in this narration, the point of view of the novel drift and meanders in a pattern resembling human thought. The eminent authors such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, including the poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, are some of the notable and renowned modernists best known for their experimental Modernist works.

- **Absurdity**

The massacre of the two World Wars very deeply affected and stirred the writers of this period. Numerous excellent and skilful English poets died or were wounded and bruised in World War I. And simultaneously, the global capitalism was reorganizing society at every level. For several writers, the world was becoming a more absurd and senseless place every day. The mysteriousness of life was being lost and disoriented in the rush of daily life. The irrational and senseless violence and brutality of World War II was though more evidence that humanity had lost its way. Modernist authors have portrayed this absurdity and senselessness in their works. Franz Kafka's allegorical novella, "The Metamorphosis," in which a traveling salesman is transformed into an insect-like creature, is one of the best instances of modern absurdism.

- **Symbolism**

The Modernist writers imbued people, places, objects, images and events with significant meanings. Modernist writers envisaged a reality with multiple layers, many of them hidden or in a form of code. Symbolism was not a new concept in literature, but the way the Modernists' use symbols in their works was an innovation and change. As compared with the earlier writers, they left much more to the reader's imagination leading to open-ended narratives with numerous interpretations. For instance, James Joyce's "Ulysses" embodies distinguishing, open-ended symbols in each chapter.

- **Formalism**

For the writers of the Modernist period, literature was more as a craft than a flowering and blooming of creativity. According to them, the poems and novels were constructed from smaller parts rather than the organic, internal process that the earlier generations had delineated. The idea of literature as craft fed the Modernists' craving and desire for creativity and originality. Modernist poetry generally comprised foreign languages, dense vocabulary and invented words. For instance, the poet Edward Estlin

Cummings relinquished and rejected all structure and spread his words all across the page.

#### 1.1.4. Examples of Modernist Poetry, Fiction and Drama.

T. S. Eliot wrote numerous plays which are noteworthy to mention. Plays such as **Murder in Cathedral**, **The Family Reunion**, **The Cocktail Party**, **The Confidential Clerk** etc.

**The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**, by T.S. Eliot is as an example of trademark modernism. In this he chronicles the experience of Prufrock using the stream of consciousness technique developed by his fellow modernist writers. The poem is delineated as a 'drama of literary anguish' is a dramatic interior monologue of an urban man, who is afflicted with the feeling of isolation, confinement, and an inefficiency and incompetence for decisive and forceful action that is said 'to epitomize frustration and impotence of the modern individual' and 'embody thwarted desires and modern disillusionment.'

In his classic work titled, **The Waste Land**, Eliot presents the angst, anxiety, agony, corruption, and materialism of modernist society enclosed by the frame of a quest that draws on varied cultural structures. Eliot's "**Four Quartets**" which is a collection of four poems deals with the complexities and complicatedness of religious experience in the modern world.

The poetry of Stephen Spender is organized to exhibit his concern and solicitude for the contemporary scene, and from his first collection **Poems to Dolphins**, Stephens emanates a sober sophistication.

Italian painter, sculptor, and the theorist of the futurist movement like Umberto Boccioni used the concept of motion which came from the placement of subsequent photographs, particularly those by the English photographer Eadweard Muybridge, well-known for his pioneering work in photographic studies of motion. "Dynamism of a Soccer Player" a futurist painting by Italian artist Umberto Boccioni is a trademark **futurist painting** and a **modern art**.

The Norwegian playwright and theatre director, Henrik Ibsen is often regarded and considered as the first modernist in the history of European theatre. He was also considered as the father and pioneer of the modern realistic drama.

Although the plays of the English playwright, Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones the English dramatist, predated the inventive and ingenious theatrics of modern drama, some of their plays do exhibit the potential of a serious engagement with the problems and the difficulties of modernity. For instance, the play by Wing Pinero titled, 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' in the year 1893.

The Irish playwright, poet, writer and collector of folklore, John Millington Synge, is another notable playwright who left a mark on the

modern stage. Millington Synge plays such as, **Riders to the Sea**, **The Shadow of the Glen**, **The Playboy of the Western World**; **Deirdre of the Sorrows**, and **The Well of the Saints (World Classics)**, move through the terrains of heightened pessimism.

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## 1.2. IMAGISM

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### 1.2.1. What is Imagism?

Imagism a sub-genre of modernism was an early twentieth century poetic movement that accentuated clear imagery with sharp and direct language. Imagism was considered as a reaction to the traditions of Romantic and Victorian poetry, which asserts and underscores florid ornamentation of language. The Imagists, on the contrary, were succinct and to the point. Language could be symbolic and allegorical, although it also had to be succinct and concise. However, if the essence and significance of an object, setting, or cultural movement could be reduced and shortened to a few words, then a verse of Imagist poetry requisite only those few words and nothing more.

### 1.2.2. Origins of the Imagist Poetry Movement.

Literary scholars trace the origins of Imagism to the poetry of the English critic, and poet Thomas Ernest Hulme. Two particular and definite poems by T.E. Hulme, such as “Autumn” and “A City Sunset,” are considered and regarded as the basis for Imagists. These two poems by Hulme, which are published in 1909, exhibits an economy of language that was rare and uncommon for the time period. Above is the Hulme’s verse, “A City Sunset” in its entirety.

Alluring, Earth seducing, with high conceits  
is the sunset that reigns  
at the end of westward streets. ...  
A sudden flaring sky  
troubling strangely the passer by  
with visions, alien to long streets, of Cytharea  
or the smooth flesh of Lady Castlemaine. ...  
A frolic of crimson  
is the spreading glory of the sky,  
heaven's jocund maid  
flaunting a trailed red robe  
along the fretted city roofs  
about the time of homeward going crowds  
— a vain maid, lingering, loth to go. ...

T. E. Hulme’s verse is synchronously florid, with the phrases like “heaven’s jocund maid” that perhaps may have been lifted from a Tennyson poem and economical, with only fourteen lines and limiting itself to a single depiction. The poem bridges the divide between the broad and comprehensive, sentimental poetry of nineteenth century.

### 1.2.3. Essential Characteristics of Imagist Poetry.

Imagist poetry is defined and detailed by directness, economy of language, avoidance and restraint of vague notions, and a hierarchy of precise phrasing over adherence and fidelity to poetic meter. The imagist movement and the imagist poetry became so prominent and crucial primarily because of Richard Aldington and Ezra Pound.

It was Ezra Pound's anthology, which came first, titled 'Des Imagistes' was published in the year 1914. The concept of what and which poems are "Imagist" to a great extent springs from the poems contained in the anthology titled, Des Imagistes. The most well-known and renowned poets were Aldington, Aldington's wife Hilda "H.D." Doolittle, and Ezra Pound himself. Whereas, the other notable imagists were Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, John Cournos, Ford Madox Ford, F. S. Flint, Skipwith Cannell, Allen Upward, and James Joyce.

Earlier, Ezra Pound had put forward certain specific aesthetic points in the Poetry magazine of March 1913 issue, which was founded by the American editor, scholar, and literary critic Harriet Monroe. In essays titled, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste and Imagisme', and it was Ezra Pound who laid out some key rules or commandments for what an Imagist poem should contain:

- Direct treatment of the subject or 'thing', whether subjective or objective; the poem should talk directly about the subject of what is being talked, and not to use any fancy words or phrases while talking about it.
- Use no word that does not contribute to the presentation, try to use as less words as possible.
- In terms of rhythm, don't write in regular metre but in regular rhythms as in music, and try to create new rhythms as well.

### 1.2.4 Examples of Imagist Poetry.

#### • In a Station of the Metro by Ezra Pound

The leading and the most eminent Imagist poet who is still actively and vigorously well-read in the twenty first century is Ezra Pound. However, his poetry withstands in the English-language canon. This is certain and evident by his two line and fourteen words poem titled, "In a Station of the Metro."

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd:  
Petals on a wet, black bough."

This poem by Ezra Pound packs immense meaning into just fourteen words. In just two lines, Pound chronicled both a setting and an unspoken mood, and also the speaker's point of view. Symbolist language and resolute honesty delineate Pound's verse.



- **Oread by Hilda Doolittle**

Another renowned and eminent imagist poet is Hilda Doolittle, better known by her pen name H.D. was one of the leading members of imagism. Hilda's most notable poem is 'Oread'. Let's look at the text of the poem 'Oread';

Whirl up, sea—

Whirl your pointed pines,

Splash your great pines

On our rocks,

Hurl your green over us—

Cover us with your pools of fir.

The poem is just like how Ezra Pound commanded about the three tenets, it can be seen that there is no extra words and phrases in the poem. And just like the other imagist poem, this poem also focuses on the image and doesn't talk about any irrelevant things. The Oread, who is the speaker of the poem exhibits her wish that the sea should unite with the land. However, from the very first line it can be seen that the sea is addressed, whereas the second line counters this notion with the "pointed pines" of a forest. The anaphoric connection and association among the first two lines and the use of epistrophe in the second and third lines improves and embellish the connection and association between the two domains and much the same might be said about the expression "pools of fir" in the last line.

- **A Lady by Amy Lowell**

"You are beautiful and faded  
Like an old opera tune  
Played upon a harpsichord;  
Or like the sun-flooded silks  
Of an eighteenth-century boudoir.  
In your eyes

Smoulder the fallen roses of out-lived minutes,

And the perfume of your soul

Is vague and suffusing,

With the pungence of sealed spice-jars.

Your half-tones delight me,

And I grow mad with gazing

At your blent colours.



My vigour is a new-minted penny,  
Which I cast at your feet.  
Gather it up from the dust,  
That its sparkle may amuse you.

‘A Lady’ by Amy Lowell is just a two-stanza poem. The poem is written in free verse consisting of end words, line lengths and two stanzas of very distinct length. The speaker of the poem is a younger man, who uses the text to depict the appears of an older woman. The first stanza of the poem is about the young speaker’s impressions and impacts of the old listener, whereas the second paragraph characterize the actions the speaker would like to take after seeing this old woman. The depiction and the images used in the poem points out that the poet is referring to a old woman.

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### 1.3. SYMBOLISM

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#### 1.3.1. What is Symbolism?

The term Symbolism is a literary device that refers to the use of symbols, be they words, object, people, marks, action, locations, character or abstract ideas to embody something which is beyond the literal meaning and significance. Symbolism is not just confined to the works of literature, but also the symbols inhabit every corner of our daily life and experience. A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something else, for example, the colours red, white, and blue typically symbolize patriotism, which is why they’re the favoured tinge of political yard signs. Colours like orange and brown connote fall, which is why they grace and embellish so many thanksgiving decorations. Road signs, logos, and emojis are some of the other instances of symbolism. Following are some common examples of symbolism which are used in day-today life;

- Rainbow symbolizes hope and promise
- Green traffic light symbolizes ‘go’ or proceed further
- Red rose symbolizes love and romance
- Red, white and blue symbolizes American patriotism
- Tree blossoms symbolizes spring season

In literature for instance, in Robert Frost’s poem titled, “Fire and Ice,” Frost employs symbolism to imply to the readers how the world may be destroyed and devastated;

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favour fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

In the above poem by Robert Frost, the fire symbolizes devastating, harmful and consuming emotions such as envy, jealousy, desire for power, anger, annoyance, and hasty. Whereas, Ice, in the poem, symbolizes devastating, pernicious and withholding emotions like animosity, hate, disdain, loneliness, desolation and isolation. Indeed, the poet points out to the reader that the literal meanings of fire and ice make them adept of destroying and ending the world. However, it is the symbolism of fire and ice that enhances and embellishes the meaning and importance of the poem.

### **1.3.2. How has the Symbolism been used throughout the History?**

Writers employ many different types of symbolism, both as a way to convey meaning to their overall readership, as well as a method of allowing and permitting individual readers to make their own interpretations and explore meaning. Besides that, different types of symbols create different effects for readers, however, as a matter of fact the overall goal of symbolism as a literary device is to improve and embellish the reader's experience with literature.

- The earliest recorded forms of human storytelling such as the cave paintings and hieroglyphics are the literally symbols representing more complex narratives or beliefs.
- Ancient Greek theatre, which is the foundation for much of today's narrative artforms, used symbolic props including phallic objects to represent Dionysus, the god of fertility.
- The greatest English playwright, poet and actor, William Shakespeare used symbols to represent inner conscience for instance, blood in *Macbeth*; then Edgar Allen Poe used symbol convey dread and mortality in eponymous bird in "The Raven"; and William Blake used religious symbols (including Jesus himself) to represent human emotion and desire for instance in "The Everlasting Gospel".

### **1.3.3. Types of Symbolism in Literature**

Throughout history, there are several types of symbolism that have enjoyed particular favour from authors, poets, playwrights, and lyricists and those are as follows;

- **Religious symbolism.** This has been possibly the most consistently “acceptable” form of symbolism throughout literary history. This type of symbolism is used to respect faith and help and support to unite the people of common faith and traditions. Religious symbolism it is generally been sanctioned by religious authorities who have held strong influence over society for much of human existence. Religious symbolism traces back to the earliest human civilizations, but highlights of literary religious symbolism which comprise *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, which itself is retelling of the Genesis story; and *The Brothers Karamazov* by the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky.
- **Romantic symbolism.** The second form of symbolism is romantic symbolism and has permeated wide swaths of world literature. Poetry, from the sonnets of Shakespeare to the modernist stanzas of Edna St. Vincent Millay, are some of the famous examples of romantic symbolism.
- **Emotional symbolism.** In emotional symbolism most of the authors and the poets use physical symbolism to depict metaphysical emotions. French language symbolists like Stephane Mallarme and Paul Verlaine are some of the notable writers of emotional symbolism, whereas the English language symbolists such as William Butler Yeats and Seamus Heaney are the well-known writers for this form of symbolism.

#### 1.3.4. Examples of Symbolism in Literature

- ***The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams***

In the play, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams's, the character Tom, frequently goes to the movies to escape the boredom, tedium, stress and pressure of his life at home with his mother and sister. Hence, the movies offer Tom both a literal and figurative escape from his home, despite the fact, that it is a passive escape in darkness with no true experience of adventure. The movies symbolize Tom's dreams and fantasies as well as their difficulty, unattainability and manufactured reality.

- ***The Lesson by Toni Cade Bambara***

In Toni Cade Bambara's short story, *The Lesson*, the well-known New York City toy store F.A.O. Schwarz is a symbol for economic wealth and trivial and frivolous spending. Miss Moore's character, by bringing a group of deprived, indigent and impoverished black kids to the toy store, also wants F.A.O. Schwarz to be viewed and considered as a symbol of systemic racial and social division in America as well as monetary separation. By unmasking and disclosing this group of kids to such an outrageously and disgraceful expensive toy store, Miss Moore contemplates to teach them a lesson and imbue a deeper concept of failed American opportunity and equality through the symbolism of F.A.O. Schwarz.

- ***The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

In the novel, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the colour green is a central theme, which is used frequently to augment and strengthen the theme of money, wealth, and materialism. The green light through the water from Gatsby's home does play a role in this colour motif; however, Fitzgerald uses the green light at the end of Daisy's dock as symbolism in the novel. The light not only represents and depicts Gatsby's future hopes, dreams, and desires especially in terms of his love for Daisy, but eventually the green colour of the light symbolizes, to Gatsby, permission to follow, pursue and aspire these hopes and dreams. Despite of knowing the fact that Daisy is a married woman, Gatsby views the green light as guidance and a signal to proceed with his hopeless and pointless quest to win Daisy.

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## **1.4. WAR POETRY**

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### **1.4.1. What is War Poetry?**

In war poetry, the poets have written about the experience and the struggle of war since the Greek, however, the young soldier poets of the First World War established war poetry as a literary genre. The combining voice of this poets has become one of the defining and significant texts of twentieth century Europe. It was in the year 1914, when the hundreds of young men in uniform took to writing poetry as a way of attempt to exhibit extreme and the utmost emotion at the very verge of their experience. Hence, the work of a handful of these poets, such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg has endured to become what Andrew Motion has called 'a Sacred National text'.

Despite of the fact that 'war poet' tends traditionally to attribute to active combatants, the war poetry has been written by many 'civilians' who were caught up in conflict and struggle in other ways. For instance, the war poets such as, James Fenton in Cambodia, Margaret Postgate Cole and Rose Macaulay in the First World War, Cesar Vallejo and WH Auden in the Spanish Civil War etc. It was the global, 'total war' of 1939-1945, that saw the holocaust, the devastation and the widespread destruction, the blitz and Hiroshima, virtually no poet was untouched or unaffected by the experience of war. And, the same was true for the civil conflicts and revolutions in Spain and Eastern Europe. However, that does not mean, that every poet responded to war by writing directly about it. For some of the poets, the appropriate response of a poet was one of consciously (conscientiously) keeping silent.

As a matter of fact, war poetry is not necessarily 'anti-war'. War poetry is however, about the very large questions of life: identity, innocence, guilt, remorse, loyalty, courage, bravery, compassion, humanity, duty, desire, death etc. Its response to these questions, and its relation of immediate personal experience to moments of national and international crisis, gives war poetry an extra-literary significance. The leading poet of the First World War, Wilfred Owen once wrote that, even Shakespeare seems

‘vapid’ after Sassoon: ‘not of course because Sassoon is a greater artist, but because of the subjects’.

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War poetry has become part of the mythology of nationhood, and an expression of both historical consciousness and political conscience. The way we read – and perhaps revere, admire, appreciate – war poetry, says something about what we are, and what we want to be, as a nation.

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#### **1.4.2. Theme of War Poetry**

The theme of war is used in almost all the poems of war poetry. The theme of war has been depicted in lots of distinct ways by different poets. Some poets exhibit anger, annoyance and sadness whereas the others express happiness and contentment, by portraying that war is good and dying for your country is good and something to be proud of. The theme of war is stronger and powerful in some poems than the others, however, in general, the theme has been portrayed and presented in lots of divergent ways. Some other important themes of war poetry are as follows;

- The loss of innocence
- Brotherhood and Relationship
- The Horror of war
- Irrationality of war
- Disillusionment with religion
- Nature
- Emotion and feelings

#### **1.4.3. Purpose of War Poetry**

- The poets felt that poetry is the best way to express someone’s emotion and expression during the war.
- The purpose and the major reason for writing war poetry is to exhibit the true picture and depiction of war.
- It also helps to spend time and express their emotions through writings.
- It also creates a sense of honour because, the war poets tell us to honour and respect what these men had done even though they all died, the soldiers are being celebrated as mighty heroes.

#### **1.4.4. Characteristics of War Poetry**

- It used awful, appalling and showing imagery.
- It signed a break off from the contemporary poetic tradition.
- It uses the actual language of the men engaged and involved in war.
- Realistic documentation of war with all its savagery and brutality.

### 1.4.5. List of War Poets in English Literature

A War poet is a poet who participates in a war and writes about their experiences or non-combatants who writes poems about war. These war poets are also called trench poets. The term war poetry predominantly represents and symbolize the poetry that were written under the direct impact of World War I. It is also called anti-romantic. Earlier also we had war poets, however, after the World War I these kinds of poet and poetry came under the genre called 'War Poetry'. Most of the war poets of that time considered themselves as soldiers as well as poets. The poets used to write poetry in their leisure time and express their feelings, emotions, desires, happiness, grief and sorrow through writings. Below are the list of some major war poets;

- **Rupert Brooke** (3 August 1887-23 April 1915)

He was an English poet, and was known for his idealistic war sonnets written during the First World War, especially 'The Soldier'.

- **Siegfried Sassoon** (8 September 1886 – 1 September 1967)

Siegfried Loraine Sassoon was an English war poet, writer and soldier. He was adorned for the bravery on the Western Front, and he became one of the leading poets of the First World War.

- **Wilfred Owen** (18 March 1893 – 4 November 1918)

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was an English poet and soldier. Owen was one of the leading and prominent poets of the First World War.

- **Robert Graves** (24 July 1895 – 7 December 1985)

Robert Von Ranke Graves was a British poet, historical novelist and critic. Robert Graves developed an early reputation as a war poet and was one of the first poet to write realistic poems about the experience of frontline conflict.

- **Edward Thomas** (3 March 1878 – 9 April 191)

Philip Edward Thomas was British poet, essayist and a novelist. Edward is considered a war poet, despite the fact that, few of his poems deal directly with his war experiences, and his career in poetry came after he had already been acknowledged as a successful writer and a literary critic.

- **Isaac Rosenberg** (25<sup>th</sup> November 1890-1<sup>st</sup> April 1918)

Isaac Rosenberg was an English poet and artist. His poems from the 'Trenches' are perceived and recognized as some of the most outstanding poetry written during the First World War.

- **Sidney Keyes**

Sidney Keyes was one of the most renowned English poet of World War II. The poem 'War Poet' was written by Sidney Keyes.

#### 1.4.6. War Poems in English Literature

One of the greatest English romantic poet William Wordsworth reminds us, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", and there can be no area of human experience that has generated a wider dimension and aspect of powerful feelings than war: hope and fear; elation and humiliation; hatred – not only for the enemy, but also for generals, politicians, and war-profiteers; love – for fellow soldiers, for women and children left behind, for country (often) and cause (occasionally). Above are some of the most notable war poems in English literature:

- **Christ and the Soldier by Siegfried Sassoon**

It was on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, when Siegfried Sassoon saw the carnage and massacre of the opening of the Battle of the Somme and, a month later, he wrote this scintillating but savagely anti-Christian poem (which, significantly, he never published)

- **Break of Day in the Trenches by Isaac Rosenberg**

According to Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg was considered to be one of the three poets of importance whom we lost during the World War I. 'Break of Day in the Trenches' is perhaps Rosenberg's most notable poem, and the poem exhibits his taut, no-nonsense style which he shares with Owen (and extreme, to a degree). Rats, poppies, the 'torn fields of France': Like Wilfred Owen, Rosenberg puts us amongst the action, painting a stark, realistic scene of warfare and the daily day-today lives of the soldiers.

- **Strange Meeting by Wilfred Owen**

Not the most flawless of Owen's poems, but the most visionary, this reaches back to the heroic epics of Homer and Virgil and forward to voice in its last lines a compassionate humanity in striking contrast to the last speech of Byrhtnoth, the doomed warrior in The Battle of Maldon.

- **Aristocrats by Keith Douglas**

Keith's Aristocrats is an excellent elegy for fellow officers who were killed in the Battle of El Alamein, and it again acknowledges and appreciates both ancient and modern traditions of war poetry.

- **Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen**

'Dulce et Decorum Est' is one of the most notable of all war poems, which was written in response to the jingoistic pro-war verses being written by people like Jessie Pope. Indeed, Jessie Pope is the 'friend' of Owen, whom he addresses directly in the closing lines of the poem. However, the poem is also a harrowing and intense account of a poison gas attack, with a number of details which immediately stick in the memory, and haunt our dreams as they haunted Owen's, showcasing how naive and damaging and harmful outlooks like Jessie Pope's really were. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is



an excellent example of Owen's superb craftsmanship as a poet and this poetry is as a window onto the horrors of the First World War.

- **MCMXIV by Philip Larkin**

No poem written since MCMXIV (Latin numerals for 1914, as found on first world war memorials) speaks so eloquently, powerfully, poignantly, and so painfully of the future awaiting the children at play, "the men leaving the gardens tidy, the thousands of marriages", all seen as in a fine-grained sepia photograph.

- **The Soldier by Rupert Brooke**

Rupert Brooke wrote a very different type of war poetry from Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Brooke was such a man, who did not live to enjoy much of his fame, but this poem – patriotic and stirring as it is – played a crucial and essential role in the early days of the War in helping to bring England together in uncertain and difficult times. In fact, the poem was read aloud in St Paul's Cathedral in Easter 1915, shortly before Brooke's death.

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## 1.5. LET'S SUM UP

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The unit extensively discusses terms, critical theories, and points of view that are commonly used to classify, analyse, interpret, and write the history of works of literature. In this unit we have discussed in detail about; Modernism- a term which is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914-18).

Imagism- a sub-genre of modernism was an early twentieth century poetic movement that accentuated clear imagery with sharp and direct language. Imagism was considered as a reaction to the traditions of Romantic and Victorian poetry, which asserts and underscores florid ornamentation of language; Symbolism- The Modern Period, in the decades after World War I, was a remarkable era of symbolism in literature. Many of the major writers of the period exploit symbols which are in part drawn from religious and esoteric traditions and in part invented; War poetry- the poets have written about the experience and the struggle of war since the Greek, however, the young soldier poets of the First World War established war poetry as a literary genre.

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## 1.6. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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- What is modernism? What were the main influences of modernist literature?
- What are the main characteristics of modernist literature?
- Write in detail about the history of modern literature.
- What is the main idea of modernism in literature?

- What are the examples of modernist poetry, fiction and drama?
- What are the main ideas of imagism?
- What was social realism influenced by?
- How is social realism applied in literature?
- Write about the origins of the Imagist poetry movement.
- What are the main characteristics of Imagism in English poetry?
- What is the importance of symbolism in Literature?
- What are the three types of symbolism in literature?
- How has the symbolism been used throughout the history?
- What are the important ways to use symbolism in literature?
- What are the major themes in war poetry?
- What is the purpose of war poetry?
- What are the main characteristics of War poetry in literature?
- Who are the war poets in English literature?
- Give examples of war poems in English literature.

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## TERMS/CONCEPTS BACKGROUND TOPICS PART II

### Unit structure:

#### 2.0 Objective

#### 2.1 Movement Poets

##### 2.1.1 What is Movement Poets?

##### 2.1.2 Movement Poets of 1950's

##### 2.1.3 Important features and characteristics of the Movement.

##### 2.1.4 contribution of the Movement poets

#### 2.2 Poetic Drama

##### 2.2.1 Introduction

##### 2.2.2 Definition of Poetic Drama

##### 2.2.3 Difference between Poetic Drama and Prose Drama

##### 2.2.4 History of Poetic Drama

##### 2.2.5 Essential Characteristics of Poetic Drama

##### 2.2.6 Poetic Drama Examples

#### 2.3 Social Realism and its Impact on English Drama

##### 2.3.1 What is Social Realism?

##### 2.3.2 Social Realism in Literature

##### 2.3.3. Impact of Social Realism

#### 2.4. The Theatre of the Absurd

##### 2.4.1. What is Theatre of the Absurd?

##### 2.4.2. A brief history of the Theatre of the Absurd

##### 2.4.3. Characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd

##### 2.4.4. Characters in the Theatre of the Absurd

##### 2.4.5. Plot

##### 2.4.6. Six Remarkable Absurdist Plays

#### 2.5. Let's Sum up

#### 2.6. Important Questions

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVE

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This unit will make the students aware with:

- The 20<sup>th</sup> Century literary movements.
- The literary genres, trends, and literary movements of Britain in the 20th Century.
- The linkages between social and historical contexts and literary texts.
- The various literary movements and theoretical approaches.

With this knowledge the students will be equipped with comprehensive understanding of literary genres, trends and movements in 20th Century British Literature; thereby, enabling them to understand the valuable co – relation between the sociocultural, economical and historical contexts; behind the literary production. Students will acquire the discipline to become reflective and imaginative thinkers through a close, critical and analytical reading of the prescribed texts.

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## 2.1 MOVEMENT POETS

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### 2.1.1 What is Movement Poets?

In literature the term ‘movement’ stands for a new development or epoch in literary activity or interest of some particular period. The term ‘Movement Poets’ was not applied to any literary school as such, but it was applied to a group of notable poets of the 1950’s. The literature of the 1950’s was a reflection of misery, pain, suffering, disappointment, frustration, class struggle and animosity and anger of common man. This literature was not a literature of the elite class but it was of a lower-middle of the society. The movement poets portrayed the life in provincial region of that period.

### 2.1.2 Movement Poets of 1950’s

The title Movement for the group of famous writers was coined in the year 1954, by the literary editor of the spectator, J.D. Scott, who referred this new movement of the fifties. In the Movement, J.D. Scott describe a group of eminent writers including Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, George Macbeth, John Holloway, Anthony Thwaite, Vernon Scannell, John Wain, Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, D.J. Enright and Robert Quest. The movement was substantially English in character as poets from other parts of the United Kingdom were not involved in this movement.

After the end of World War II (1939-1945), the British public started to have a normal affluent and robust life. The World War II took a toll on everything, it has disrupted communities and the families, and the lives of the people were affected very badly during the war. After the end of the war, almost after five years later, people started to have a normal and a tranquil life. The problem of food ration was ended, medical healthcare was improved, the economical welfare was almost at hand. Hence, after so much pain and misery, eventually the life of the people started healing and curing from the pains, sorrow, and sufferings of the war and people were

in the process of forgetting the cruelty and atrocities of the war, which the war gave them. They were about to put the sorrow and suffering of the war behind and make a fresh new start.

Although the life started improving and developing on many levels, the arts, however, and literature and theatre in particular, were in a gouge. The literature produced at that time was dominated by the ideas, affection, emotion, and the sentiments of the pre-war times and neither poetry nor novel could reflect the change that took place due to the war. Poets, novelists and dramatists showcased a reluctance and disinclination to let go of Britain's imperial past and an obsession with class held sway. A radical shake-up was needed and the Literature needed to get angry

The Movement – were Oxbridge-educated, white, mostly male (Jennings was the only woman in the group, and also, she was a late arrival), middle-class, Europhobic and for the most part heterosexual. Yet, they caught the mood of their time, and Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis in particular are undeniably and unquestionably important figures in English literature. The Movement produced two anthologies, Enright's Poets of the 1950s (1955) and Conquests New Lines (1956).

### **2.1.3. Major features and Characteristics of the Movement.**

The important characteristics of The Movement Verse are as follows:

- The movement poetry stayed away from the charm and spell of Thomas Stearns Eliot and Ezra Pound and the high emotion and verbal effusion of Dylan Thomas.
- The movement poets rejected not only the Romantic tradition but also, they reacted against the experimentation of the modernist poets.
- The movement poetry lacked spontaneous and instinctive outburst of feelings, affections, emotions and sentiments. The poetry pleased and attracted more to the head than to the heart of the readers.
- The movement poetry was a group of famous poets who were realist, potent, robust, vigorous and sceptical. They gave vent to their pent-up feelings in ironic vein.
- It is ironical, practical, realistic, down to earth, unsentimental and rooted in a nostalgic idea of English identity. Realism is the basis and essence of the Movement poetry, that, at times makes the works sluggish, insipid, tedious, tiresome and dry.
- The movement poets experienced the world as materialistic, banal and nefarious. The poets did not bemoan over the loss of glory and weep for the horror of the wars and boredom like 'Tiresias' in T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land', despite, they believed in facing grotesque and awful reality with bravely.
- The Movement poetry was less sentimental and more intellectual in nature.
- The Movement poetry was anti-romantic, witty, humorous, amusing, laconic and ironic.

- The poets of the 1950's abominated over-experimentation in form and over-use of figurative language in poetry. The main stress was on simplicity, coherence and clarity of expression in poetry.
- The movement poets abhorred the evocative, reminiscent and mythical nature of T.S. Eliot's poetry which demands greater knowledge and understanding on the part of the reader. It was too complicated, and arduous to be understood by the ordinary man.
- European sympathies were considered as unmistakable signs of intellectual pretentiousness and moral turpitude. For few critics and readers, the poet's perspective and point of view understandably evokes a narrow-minded Little Englandism.

#### 2.1.4. Contribution of the Movement Poets

Philip Larkin, was one of the key pillars of the Movement poetry. He expressed his disgust, hatred and animosity for figurative language and experimentation in modern poetry. While a number of modern poets were under the spell of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound in the first half of the twentieth century, it was Philip Larkin who was not much influenced and affected by their spell.

Larkin accentuated the use of traditional metrical forms, precision, rigor, and plain diction in poetry, rather than experimentation in poetry. His first collection of poetry, 'The North Ship' came in the year 1945, which clearly indicates influence of W.B. Yeats.

The most notable collection of poetry by Larkin is "The Less Deceived" that established Larkin in the literary field. This poem 'the less Deceived' by Larkin was published in 1955. The poem was filled with pessimism and grim humour that without any doubt point out that the poet was highly influenced by Thomas Hardy. Larkin's collection of poetry 'The Less Deceived' was followed by another two volumes named 'The Whitsun Weddings' in 1964 and 'High Windows' in 1974. The acute, pungent and bitter tone of his poetry points out his alliance and association to the Movement poetry of the 1950's.

Robert Conquest, one of the one of the acclaimed and well-known writers of the Movement of the 1950's edited an anthology named, 'New Lines', and which was published in 1956. The anthology was comprised with the principles of ideology of the Movement.

It is essential to wrote that, it was Robert Conquest who has criticized the obscurity and metaphorical nature of modern poetry in the preface of the anthology, "New Lines". He considered Dylan Thomas's style as 'diffuse and sentimental verbiage and pirouettes'.

Robert Conquest's poetry dealt with the pain, misery, disillusion, disenchantment, annoyance, frustration, and suffering of man of the prevalent period. There is a fine blending of colloquial speech and irony in his poetry which vividly present hollowness and hypocrisy of modern age.

Robert Conquest in his poetry, has portrayed man as a central and essential part of nature. The tone of his poetry is intellectual rather than emotional and sentimental.

The eminent and the remarkable poet and a novelist, Kingsley Amis was also associated with the group of 'angry young men' of the 1950. In his notable Campus novel, 'Lucky Jim', Kingsley has introduced a hero, Jim Dixon, who is against the established values, pretensions and elite art and craft art with defiant, disregarding, and rebellious attitude, mindset and belief. The hero, Jim Dixon, in 'Lucky Jim', expresses his anger, frustration, alienation and disillusionment in sardonic tone and grim humour in the novel. Jim Dixon, the hero of 'Lucky Jim' is a representative of the Angry Young Men and he belongs to the lower-middle-class of society.

The titles of Elizabeth Jennings collection of poems, 'A Way of Looking' and 'A Sense of the World' clearly reflected the principles of The Movement of 1950's. The collection of poems vividly indicates a new and a distinct way of The Movement of perceiving, observing, and experiencing the world.

Thomas Gunn's poetry can be deemed and regarded as the meeting point of the American Beat Movement and the English Movement poetry. Thomas Gunn was highly influenced by a critic named, Yvor Winters. Gunn's first volume of poetry, 'Fighting Terms' came into view in the year 1954, which established him in the literary field of poetry. The second volume of Thomas Gunn's poetry, 'The Sense of Movement' was published in 1957 and it clearly exhibits Yvor Winter's influence. Gunn has very adroitly and cleverly observed, rationalistic precision, clarity and lucidity while handling a subject matter of his poetry.

Dennis Joseph Enright, played a significant role in the development of the Movement of 1950's. His first volume of poems 'The Laughing Hyena and Other Poems' was published in 1953. Dennis Enright has ingeniously handled various themes through his poetry. It is essential to note here that, he produced an anthology of the Movement named, 'Poets of the 1950's' in the year 1955, which later became a primary source for the anthology 'New Lines' by the famous poet Robert Conquest in 1956.

Donald Davie, one of the key members of the Movement, conveyed his anti-Romantic and anti-bohemian principles in his noteworthy work, 'Purity of diction in English Verse'. The 'Purity of Diction in English Verse' was published in the year 1952. Donald Davie also produced some volumes of poetry such as 'Brides of Reason' in 1955, 'A Winter Talent' in 1957, 'Events and Wisdom' in 1964 and 'Essex Poems' in 1969. Davie's poems are tinted with speculation and philosophy. He is time and again charged with obscurity and complicatedness of his verse.

John Wain, is a remarkable novelist and critic, and he was associated with the group Movement poets of the 1950s'. Much of his works were



published in 'New Lines'. John Wain has been charged with insipid and prosaic style of his writing. He also produced a collection of poems 'Mixed Feelings' in 1951, and 'Weep Before God' in 1961.

Hence, the Movement poetry was against over-experimental nature of the modernist poetry and it also reacted against the romantic vein of the poetry of a group of Wystan Hugh Auden and Dylan Thomas. The Movement poets and their poetry put emphasis on simplicity of form and speech and clarity and precision in expression. In short, it can be said that the Movement poetry was against all that was romantic, figurative, allusive and mythical.

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## 2.2 POETIC DRAMA

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### 2.2.1. Introduction

The eighteenth and the nineteenth century contributed little to the development of poetic drama because of the unfavourable and detrimental circumstances. The main reason behind this was, that most of the dramatists of this period were intrigued in realistic drama. A change was noticed with the passage of time. T. S Eliot gave the theatre a workable dramatic verse and has done more than any other playwright of this century to get audience to accept this verse without prejudice and bias. And it was T.S. Eliot who rigidly and strongly established it. Poetic drama is a mixture and combination of both high seriousness and colloquial element. It is symbolic and difficult. The verse form of poetic drama is blank verse or free verse. In short, its vehicle is verse, its mechanism is imagery, its substance is myth and its binding force is musical pattern.

Poetry is always considered and regarded as something that is higher than that of prose, which indicates high and intensified emotions and sentiments of man, and philosophy of human life. Poetic form has been regarded the biggest and greatest natural presentation of artistic feelings and emotions. Whereas on the other hand, drama is meant to exhibit the communication of imaginative experience. The great thinker and philosopher Aristotle has accentuated the need of heightened, enhanced and embellished style in tragedies to accomplish the universal human demand.

### 2.2.2 Definition of Poetic Drama

Poetic drama is a combination of both poetry and drama. It has the qualities of both poetry and drama which to a great extent give profound impact and influence of dramatist's emotions on the readers. As a matter of fact, the poetry combined with drama increases seriousness in tragedy and actors feel complacent as well as comfortable to learn poetic dialogues. This eminence, intensity and greatness of verse **drama** has now been well acknowledged because in this chaotic world, the poetic dramatist does not bring the characters near to us nor he endeavours to impress and inspire us but in fact, he ventures to make a great distance between us and realities of the world. He wishes and desires to cut us

away from our realistic world and bereave us from seeing the replica of the world on the stage to raise us to some unfamiliar associations which can be obliging in detaching and disengaging the individual from his fellow and make us feel in him the flow of inner life. The poetry in verse drama is intrinsic and immanent in the structure of the play itself.

### 2.2.3. Difference between Poetic Drama and Prose Drama

- In verse **drama**, characters talk in verse while in prose drama characters talk in prose.
- Prose drama focuses its imitation on the outermost reality whereas the verse drama on the innermost reality of life
- Poetic drama induces profound sense of amusement and delight in life and firmly and powerfully reminds its witnesses that they have the power of being conscious of their own lives, whereas in prose drama, simple description wrapped in reality is presented.
- Through its poetic equipment, poetic drama gives us voluptuous joy, whereas prose drama gives a detailed description of events happened in the drama.

### 2.2.4 History of Poetic Drama

- **Poetic drama** reached its top in **Elizabethan England** due to the fact, all through this time, poetry came to be recognized as the medium of drama. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote great **poetic plays** which were saturated with powerful and vehement emotions. The intrepid spirit of the age can nowhere be seen more clearly than in dramatic poetry.
- Though the heroic couplet was used by William Shakespeare in his play, '**A Midsummer Night's Dream**', the popularity of blank verse was also rigidly and strongly established. The greatest playwright and the poet, William Shakespeare started his literary career as a poet but when he was engaged in writing plays, he did not renounce and discard poetry, in fact, he brought out a fine combination of drama and poetry.
- After William Shakespeare, there came a steady decline in poetic drama. It was only Webster who touched the pinnacle and thought his verse could have great power, it was often faulty. The English poet and intellectual John Milton also wrote verse drama named '**Samson Agonistes**' that combined poetic and personal appeal with intensity unequalled and incomparable except in Dante's.
- It was during the eighteenth century, when the verse drama became an almost homely waif and numerous reasons became the cause of its decline and downturn. It had to face sheer rivalry and contention with another genre of literature called novel. It was only Dryden who wrote drama in verse form, whereas the other dramatists wrote in prose. Even though, nineteenth century was also not so strong in dramatic

writings, nevertheless, William Wordsworth's 'The Borderers' and P.B. Shelly's 'The Cenci' are noteworthy to mention.

- In the late nineteenth century, poets such as Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Swinburne and Matthew Arnold produced extremely bad literary sense through their works and relatively all of their works were imitation of Greek classic drama. But during the twentieth century, **verse drama** came to bloom through certain literary minds. The two notable poetic dramatists who had extreme and immense theatrical success are Stephen Phillips and Elroy Flecker.

- Stephen Phillips, John Millington Synge, T. S. Eliot, James Elroy Flecker, John Masefield, Wilfred Wilson Gibson, John Drinkwater, John Davidson, Thomas Hardy, Arthur Symonds, WB Yeats, Laurence Binyon, Christopher Fry, W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender are the key and essential dramatists writing in verse.

### 2.2.5 Essential Characteristics of Poetic Drama

- The descriptive quality and expressive sensuousness of poetic drama is vivid and intense. In Macbeth, we are moved by Macbeth and his wife haunted by guilt and fear. We are also moved by Hamlet desperately endeavouring to see his mother in sin and disloyalty. The images and language presented in a poetic drama make it profoundly vivid and serves as the total image and the sense of distilled and fermented human reality we observe in it.
- Close association and alliance between dramatist and character is the heart of poetic drama. As long as the dramatist's imagination and creativeness warms the actor's imagination, no theatrical experience can come out because then, nothing remains to share with the audience.
- Poetry introduces and presents sensory experience into drama which usually remains abstract and along with that it interprets and defines the action by setting it in a large context and framework of moral and spiritual world.
- The poetic dramatist must unite whole drama in a manner of analogous with music.
- The symbolic system of Ibsen's prose style is mutually exclusive and the poetic world of Shakespeare's plays, although they have different atmosphere, they belong to same planetary system.
- Religious attitude to human life is important for writing a true verse drama. Other than Auden and Isherwood, all the crucial and significant poetic drama of the last thirty years have been religious to the core. The important and essential phase of poetic drama began when drama retreated to its origin inside the church. Then, from church, it moved to commercial theatres.

- Like other types of drama, poetic drama should aim and focus on entertaining the public. The Elizabethan drama aimed at general public which only wanted entertainment of a simple kind. However, in the present times, the problems of contemporary life ought to be the leitmotif of poetic drama.

### 2.2.6 Poetic Drama Examples

- **W.B. Yeats:**

William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge established the Abbey theatre in Dublin to embolden the poet and the playwrights. At the Abbey theatre, W.B. Yeats attempted to resuscitate poetic drama. Even though Yeats wrote about twenty-six plays in verse, Yeats was more of a poet than dramatist. His plays are rich in poetical intensity. Yeats's essential and significant plays are on 'Baile's Strand, The Resurrection and Deirdre'.

- **T.S. Eliot:**

Thomas Stearns Eliot proffered the theory of the poetic drama. It was T.S. Eliot who established its tradition in 20th century. Eliot's 'The Murder in the Cathedral' is his first full-length poetic play. The family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk and the Elder Statesman are his other significant and essential poetic plays. Through these plays, Eliot has evolved and developed an appropriate poetic mode of expression for the poetic drama. He rejected the use of traditional blank verse. Eliot conscientiously avoided any echo of Shakespeare. He traversed the dramatic possibility of verse and extended the scope of poetic drama.

- **Auden and Isherwood:**

Auden wrote two plays alone and three plays in collaboration with Isherwood. Auden's play, 'The Dance of Death' is an essential and significant poetic drama. Isherwood's play 'Ascent of F6 and Across the Frontiers' are the crucial plays. Isherwood's plays deal with symbolic situation and cartoon characters.

- **Stephen Spender:**

Stephen wrote, 'Trial of a Judge'. However, it can't be considered to be a poetic play of permanent value. John Masefield, Drinkwater, Macneice, Duncan, and Ridler are the other dramatists that have enriched the field of the poetic drama.

- **Christopher Fry:**

Christopher Fry's, 'The Lady Is Not For Burning' is a significant experiment in verse and technique. In the play 'Venus Observed' written in blank verse, Fry uses simple poetic language.

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## 2.3. SOCIAL REALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGLISH DRAMA

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Terms/Concepts Background  
Topics Part II

### 2.3.1. What is Social Realism?

The term, Social realism is a style of art, fiction, movies and plays. Social realism depicts and portrays the daily life of workers and poor people. Social realist artists endeavour to showcase people and their day-to-day lives in a very realistic way. This means that they often exhibit things which are not beautiful or alluring. They may show people who are elderly, sick, sad, heartbroken, insane, irrational or have a disability. This doesn't imply that a Realist work of art or literature is ugly or grotesque. It can be made beautiful and alluring by the way that the artist or writer creates it.

The term "social realism" is a label that is derived from the Russian stimulated principles which were merely based on the representation of revolutionary socialist society. Socialist realism predates the description and depiction of the shared reality not as it is, but as it is supposed to be in an idealized society. The ideology of Socialist realism was represented by the upper house of Soviet authors in 1934 and they were permitted by Stalin, Nickolai Bukharin and were guided by Gorky and Andrey Zhdanov.

The main roots of Socialist realism can be associated to neoclassicism and its civilizations can be linked with realism from Russian prose of the 19th century. It can be highlighted and featured from the days of early people. This ideology was demonstrated by the aesthetic thinking of Gorki. The Russian writer and a political activist, Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, popularly known as Maxim Gorky, Gorky, novel 'Mother' which was written in 1906, about the revolutionary factory workers, is his notable novel and is often considered as a starting point of socialist realism. Gorky was besides a dynamic figure. Whereas Feodor Gladkov's novel and Mikhail Sholokhov's epic, named, 'And Quiet Flows the Don' are considered as some of the best works in the history of social realism

### 2.3.2. Social Realism in Literature

The earliest forms of social realism in literature can be seen in the works of Charles Dickens, with his portrayal of work-houses, the homeless, and down-trodden workers. It was the Russian novelist, short-story writer and a playwright, Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoyevsky chronicled the lives of low-level government functionaries, and Victor Hugo, the French poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, and dramatist of the Romantic movement, wrote elegiacally about the lower classes struggling and excruciating for survival and humanity. Not only these authors, but hundreds of other playwrights, wrote to emphasize to the conditions of the working class and poor. Social realism in literature grasps a glaring and a blatant spotlight on the lives of these characters as a means of criticizing the social structures that keep them in 'their place.'

For instance, Charles Dickens's harsh portrayal of the lives of the Cratchit family in the ghost story named, 'A Christmas Carol' provides them a spiritual glow, a humanity that is lacking in Ebenezer Scrooge despite his great wealth. However, in much of the literature of social realism which came later, this kind of recognition was more frequently and repeatedly created in the reader, rather than in the central character.

### **2.3.3. Impact of Social Realism**

The impact and the effect of the socialist realist art can nevertheless be seen decades after it ceased being the only state-supported style. However, before the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the government had been reducing and abbreviating its practices of censorship. After the death of Stalin in the year 1953, first secretary of the communist party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, commenced to decry the previous regime's practice of exorbitant restrictions and constraints. This freedom, allowed the artists to start experimenting with new techniques, however the shift was not immediate and prompt. It was not until the ultimate fall of Soviet rule that artists were no longer restricted by the deposed Communist Party. Hence, many socialist realist tendencies prevailed until the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s.

It was in the 1990s, when many Russian artists used the characteristics and attributes of socialist realism in an ironic fashion. This was completely and entirely distinct from what existed only a couple of decades before. Once artists broke from the socialist realist mould, there was a significant power shift. The artists began to include subjects that could not exist according to Soviet ideals. In view of the fact that the power over appearances was taken away from the government, artists achieved a level of authority that had no longer existed since the early 20th century. In the decade, soon after the fall of the USSR, artists depicted and pictured socialist realism and the Soviet legacy as a traumatic and appalling event. As a result, by the next decade, there was a unique sense of detachment.

The Western cultures usually do not look at socialist realism positively. Democratic countries view the art produced during this period of repression as a lie. Non-Marxist art historians generally tend to view communism as a form of totalitarianism which smothers artistic expression and thus hinders and slow down the progress and development of the culture. In the past few years there has been a reclamation of the movement in Moscow with the addition of the Institute of Russian Realist Art (IRRA), a three-story museum dedicated to preserving 20th-century Russian realist paintings.

In *Strife*, Galsworthy makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act mere puppets. They have very little independent existence. Even when they are individualized; they are intensely typical. They represent common human lapses and weaknesses. All of them show their weakest spots in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer from internal schisms and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone.



Their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Hence, it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy's play, *Strife* which strongly stresses this type of injustice. One fully realizes how utterly hopeless the life of workers is. They simply cannot raise their hands and walk like free and equal species of mankind. In *Strife*, Galsworthy makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act mere puppets. They have very little independent existence. Even when they are individualized; they are intensely typical. They represent common human lapses and weaknesses. All of them show their weakest spots in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer from internal schisms and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone. Their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Hence, it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy's play, *Strife* which strongly stresses this type of injustice. One fully realizes how utterly hopeless the life of workers is. They simply cannot raise their hands and walk like free and equal species of mankind. In *Strife*, Galsworthy makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act mere puppets. They have very little independent existence. Even when they are individualized; they are intensely typical. They represent common human lapses and weaknesses. All of them show their weakest spots in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer from internal schisms and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone. Their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Hence, it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy's play, *Strife* which strongly stresses this type of injustice. One fully realizes how utterly hopeless the life of workers is. They simply cannot raise their hands and walk like free and equal species of mankind.

The impact of social realism can also be seen in the play 'Strife' by Galsworthy. John Galsworthy in his three-act play 'Strife' which was



produced in the year 1909, makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act mere puppets. They hardly have independent existence and even when they are individualized, they are profoundly typical. They embody common human lapses and weaknesses. This altogether shows their weakest points in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer and undergo internal separations and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone. Their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Therefore, it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy's play, 'Strife' which strongly and powerfully emphasizes this type of injustice. One completely realizes that how utterly hopeless and pointless the life of workers is. They simply cannot raise their hands and walk like free and equal species of mankind.

The English writer John Galsworthy's three-act play, 'Strife' is based on the social conflicts and struggles of industrial life and hindered production between John Antony, the Chairman of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, and David Roberts, the Strike leader of the workers through whom Galsworthy wants to exhibit the unyielding, stiff, and rigid attitudes and psychological struggle and conflicts of his contemporary people. Through this text, Galsworthy wants to shed a new light on the revolutionary passions of the common workers against their ruling class for their rights and also the privileges and advantages of the early 20th century, England. Galsworthy also intends to reveal and disclose the mysterious truth of his social reality. Galsworthy as a realistic dramatist, has very considerably depicted the impact of social realism in his play, 'Strife', and its significance as well.

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## 2.4. THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

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### 2.4.1. What is Theatre of the Absurd

The term Theatre of the Absurd is coined by the Hungarian-born British producer, dramatist, journalist, adaptor and translator, critic, academic scholar and professor of **Martin Julius Esslin** in his essay "Theatre of the Absurd." The term is widely used for the work of a number of playwrights, which were mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s, written mostly by the number of European playwrights in the late 1950s. The playwrights work merely exhibits the thought of human existence that has no meaning or purpose. If a problem and difficulty come, some logic is given on a matter, it simply makes the situation worse and awful, and further it leads to silence.

### 2.4.2. Theatre of the Absurd Examples

The Theatre of the Absurd exemplifies the philosophy of **Albert Camus** in the philosophical essay, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' that speaks of life with no innate and immanent meaning in it. For Camus, the world was beyond the understanding of man, so he asserts that it will always remain absurd and we should accept this fact. For Martin Esslin the four

playwrights i.e. **Samuel Beckett**, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and Jean Genet were the chief and essential playwrights of the movement. After a passage of time, **Harold Pinter** was also incorporated to this group and some of the works of Tom Stoppard, Edward Albee and Jean Tardieu were also classified and categorized as belonging to **Absurdist Theatre**. Though, peculiarly, these writers were most of the time not comfortable with the label and hence, sometimes preferred to use terms such as “**Anti-Theater**” or “**New Theatre**”.

### 2.4.3. A brief history of the Theatre of Absurd

The movement, Theatre of the Absurd which was influenced by **existentialism**, began in the form of experimental theatre in Paris and resultantly, after the spread of the absurd form in other country, absurdist plays were written in French. It was after the rise of the Greek drama when the **Absurd elements** first came into existence in the plays of **Aristophanes** in the form of wild humor and buffoonery of old comedy.

Further, the **morality plays of the Middle Ages** can also be called a precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd, which was dealing with common man's struggle and effort with allegorical and existential problems. It was during the Elizabethan period, when the dramatists like John Webster, Cyril Tourneur, Jakob Biederman and Calderon depicted and portrayed the world as mythological archetype.

### 2.4.4. Characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd

Following are some of the essential **characteristics of the Theater of Absurd**, but it is important to note here that, all these characteristics cannot necessarily and inevitably be found in all the absurdist plays as it is not necessary that the playwright must have used all **the characteristics of Absurd plays**;

- **Questions of Existence**

Absurd plays raise some basic and general questions of existence such as why we are alive, or why we have to die and why there is injustice, prejudice, suffering and pain.

- **Distrust and disbelief in Language**

According to the absurdist playwrights, language is only a meaningless communication and stereotyped exchange of ideas because words fail to express essence of human existence.

- **Illogical Speeches and Meaningless Plots**

The Absurdist playwrights by using illogical speeches and meaningless plots, wish to establish a feeling of freedom to make their own worlds.

- **Re-establishment of man's communion with Universe**

The absurdist's endeavours to bring back the significance of myth and rituals in the life of man and make them aware of the ultimate realities of their life.

- **Accentuate on Abstract Values of Life**

Absurdist's pressurize and force us to look at our abstract values of life like love and family. Hence, we may hope to accept the absurdity of life and try to find values in a world devoid and bereft of them.

- **Vagueness about Time, Place and Character**

Absurdist have no time, place and character in their plays as they feel that there is no past or future, only the repetition of the present.

- **Lack of communication among characters**

Each character lives an egoistic life and endeavours to get another character to understand him and as a consequence this results in more alienation.

#### **2.4.5. Characters in the Theatre of the Absurd**

**The Characters in the Theatre of the Absurd**, ambit from one-dimension to multi-dimensions with no feeling but still with a very sensitive feeling. Mostly the characters are floating, buoyant, stereotype, archetype and flat because they have to deal with the absurd universe and time and again discard and renounce rational and logical devices. The characters speak in cliches and realism is their key principle, but often they are distorted and perverted at many points.

It is very difficult for the Complex characters to go with this theatre because eventually they have to deal with the incomprehensive universe. As a result, the complex characters cannot go with the Absurd theatre. The characters in Harold Pinter's plays are trapped in a confined space which is menaced by some force, and that force is incomprehensible and unimaginable to them. For instance, in the play, '**The Room**', the central character Rose, is menaced by Riley where the real source of menace remains a mystery.

#### **2.4.6. Plot**

The Theater of Absurd discards and rejects the traditional pattern of plot construction. It is comprised of repetition of cliches and routine as in the play Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett. Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are the major characteristics of most Absurdist plots.

- Absence
- Emptiness
- Nothingness
- Unresolved
- Mysteries

For instance, in Samuel Beckett's play '**Waiting for Godot**', the **action** centers round the absence of a character Godot, who is long awaited but never arrives. **The plot** of the play also revolves round unexplained metamorphosis. For instance, in Eugene Ionesco's play, '**How to Get Rid of It**', a couple is dealing with a corpse that is growing large steadily and firmly, but Ionesco never unveils and reveals the identity of the corpse and eventually, the corpse floats away unidentified in the unknown. The plots are generally and repeatedly cyclical too as occurs in **Endgame**, the play begins where it ends and the theme of routine and repetition keeps on moving.

### 2.4.7. Six Remarkable Absurdist Plays

Some of the best-known absurdist plays are:

- ***Waiting for Godot***

Waiting for Godot is a play by an Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, theatre director, poet and a literary translator, Samuel Beckett. The play is arguably the most well-known and acclaimed work of absurdist theatre. In *Waiting for Godot*, the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, spend the entire play waiting for the arrival of a titular Godot, who never arrives. They deliver dialogue frequently, and though they try to leave their situation, they are stuck in the same place in the end.

- ***Endgame***

The *Endgame* is another play by Samuel Beckett. This play is an absurdist, tragicomic one-act play, about a blind, paralyzed, arrogant and domineering elderly man, his old aged parents and his servant waiting for "the end"—which could mean the end of their relationship, end of life or the end of the play itself. The tragicomedy, 'Endgame' delves into the existential agony, anguish and hopelessness when one realizes that the human condition is meaningless.

- ***The Bald Soprano***

The Bald Soprano is Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco's first play. This play by Ionesco is about two families in London who engage in a meaningless dialogue with the stories and conversations that go nowhere. They never communicate anything meaningful, make a connection, or even truly listen to each other. In the end, the characters

of the play, *The Bald Soprano*, recite dialogue from the beginning of the play.

- ***Rhinoceros***

**Rhinoceros is Eugene Ionesco's** other noteworthy absurdist play. *Rhinoceros* is set in a small provincial French town where the inhabitants slowly turn into rhinoceroses, and eventually the only human character who does not succumb to this mass metamorphosis is the main and the principal character named, Berenger. The play is commonly read as a response and criticism to the suddenupsurge of Fascism and Nazism during the Second World War. The play scrutinizes the themes of culture, conformity, fascism tension between mob mentality and conformity and human morality andthe stories and conversations that go nowhere.

- ***The Balcony***

**The Balcony is a play by the French dramatist Jean Genet.** The play takes place in anupmarket brothel in an unnamed city that is experiencing a revolutionary uprising in the streets. When most influential and powerful members of society are killed in a revolutionary uprising in the streets, the brothel patrons take on those roles. Jean Genet's play scrutinizes power and exhibits that even when faced with unrest, the status quo will always reaffirm itself.

- ***The Birthday Party***

*The Birthday Party* is Harold Pinter's first full-length play. This play is about a birthday party that is disrupted, disturbed and turned into a nightmare by the arrival of two menacing strangers who arrive unexpectedly. The characters are unreliable, deceitful and repeatedly contradict themselves, and it's never clear why the two sinister strangers arrive unexpectedly to terrorize the main character during his birthday party.

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## 2.5. LET'S SUM UP

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The unit extensively discusses terms, critical theories, and points of view that are commonly used to classify, analyse, interpret, and write the history of works of literature. In this unit we have discussed in detail about the Movement Poets which deals with the literature of the 1950's, which was a reflection of misery, pain, suffering, disappointment, frustration, class struggle and animosity and anger of common man. Poetic Dramawhich is comprehensively a new phenomenon in the history of English drama and a literary revolution of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has the qualities of both poetry and drama which to a great extent give profound impact and influence of dramatist's emotions on the readers. Social Realism and its impact; the term is often used by Marxist critics for the novels which, they claimed, reflected social reality—that is, novels that accorded with the Marxist view that the struggle and conflict between economic classes is the essential dynamic of society and Theatre of the Absurd; which is

applied to a number of works in drama and prose fiction which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd.

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## 2.6. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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- What is known as movement poets?
- Who are the movement poets of the 1950's?
- What are the important features and characteristics of the movement?
- What are the contribution of the movement poets?
- What are the features of Poetic drama?
- What is the difference between poetic drama and prose drama?
- Write about the history of poetic drama.
- What is social realism in drama?
- What are the impacts of social realism?
- How is social realism applied in literature?
- What are the characteristics of Theatre of the absurd?
- What is the main purpose of Theatre of Absurd?
- What are the characters of Theatre of the Absurd?
- Mention some of the remarkable absurdist plays.
- Write about the history of Theatre of Absurd.
- What makes a play absurdist?

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## CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN OSBORNE'S LOOK BACK IN ANGER PART I

### Unit Structure:

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Kitchen Sink Drama
- 3.2 Angry Young Men Movement
- 3.3 Life of John Osborne
- 3.4 Historical context of the play
- 3.5 Summary of the play
- 3.6 Characters
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 References

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES:

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1. To introduce students to Angry Young Men Movement and Kitchen Sink Drama.
2. To examine John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as a critic and representation of the 1950's English social, political and economic structure.
3. To study the characters, important themes, and other literary elements in the novel.

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### 3.1 KITCHEN SINK DRAMA:

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The 1950's witnessed the development of one of the most important movements in modern British theater: the Kitchen Sink drama. Plays composed under this movement had several characteristics that distinguished them from other theatre forms before them. Kitchen Sink drama can be compared with theatrical movements like avantgarde theater or the theater of the absurd.

The most notable characteristic of Kitchen Sink dramas was the way in which they portrayed a particular social message or ideology. This ideology was most often leftist and the settings were almost always of working class. This new trend was in contrast to the previous trend in Victorian theater that had often represented the lives of the wealthy members of the ruling classes who were often conservative in their politics and ideologies. This was not the case for Kitchen Sink Theater. The Kitchen Sink drama attempted to bring the real lives and social inequality of ordinary working class people to the stage. The lives of these people were caught between struggles of power, industry, politics, and social homogenization.



Another chief characteristic of the Kitchen Sink drama was the way in which its characters expressed their undistorted emotion and dissatisfaction with the ruling class. This is clearly evident in the play considered to be the standard bearer of this Kitchen Sink genre: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. In Osborne's play, Jimmy Porter plays the role of the Angry Young Man. He is dissatisfied and angry at a world that offers him no social opportunities and emotional fulfillment. He longs to live a "real life." He feels, however, that the trappings of working class domesticity keep him from reaching this better existence. As a result, his anger and rage are channeled towards people around him. Osborne's play is a study on how such piled up frustration and social anger can wreak havoc on the ordinary lives of the British people.

Though Kitchen Sink dramas gained infamous status in twentieth century British culture for their constant anger and criticism directed towards the social, political, and economic establishment, the plays were also significant for the way they presented the most intimate aspects of domestic life. This was in contrast to popular classical or Victorian dramas and comedies which largely centered on and around the public and personal lives of socially established characters. Before the Kitchen Sink dramas, critics have observed that in the mid-twentieth century, British theater still produced plays as if it were the nineteenth century. The Kitchen Sink drama, in contrast, moved the action and emotion of the theater from depictions of the public space of people's lives into the most intimate of settings. The kitchen was considered to be the realm of the domestic, of females and servants, and Victorian drama often excluded any mention of it. Kitchen Sink dramas, however, turned this notion around and made the kitchen the center of familial and social life. In the case of the Porter's attic apartment, the kitchen and living spaces were all one room on the stage. The boundaries of intimate domestic life and public life were blurred and created a realism not seen before in British theater.

Whether social or domestic, the Kitchen Sink drama changed the course of British theater. Though many of the authors considered to have written in this genre such as Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney, and John Arden never claimed the title of Kitchen Sink dramatist, these author's plays contained themes of common life that deeply resonated with British culture of the period. These types of plays signaled a determined shift of British theater into the 20th century.

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### 3.2 ANGRY YOUNG MEN MOVEMENT:

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The "angry young men" were a group of, mostly working and middle class, British playwrights and novelists who became prominent in the 1950s. The group's leading members were John Osborne and Kingsley Amis. The phrase was originally coined by the Royal Court Theatre's press officer to promote John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*. Following the success of Osborne's play, the label was later applied by British media to describe young British writers who were characterized by disillusionment with traditional English society. Their impatience and

resentment were especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes.

The Angry Young Men were a new breed of intellectuals who were mostly of working class or of lower middle-class origin. Some had been educated at the postwar red-brick universities at the state's expense, though a few were from Oxford. They shared an outspoken irreverence for the British class system, its traditional network of pedigreed families, and the elitist Oxford and Cambridge universities. They showed an equally uninhibited disdain for the drabness of the postwar welfare state, and their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change.

The trend that was evident in John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) and in *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Kingsley Amis was crystallized in 1956 in the play *Look Back in Anger*, which became the representative work of the movement. By the time Sir Laurence Olivier played the leading role in Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer* (1957), the Angry Young Men were acknowledged as the dominant literary force of the decade.

Their novels and plays typically feature a rootless, lower-middle or working-class male protagonist who views society with scorn and sardonic humour and may have conflicts with authority but who is nevertheless preoccupied with the quest for upward mobility. A major concern in Angry Young Men Movement writings is the dissatisfaction of the lower-class towards the established socio-political system which inequitably valued the middle and the upper classes and fiercely criticised their hypocrisy. Another frequent subject in this age is the depiction of hopeless position of the youth in society. The writers often portrayed the central hero being disillusioned with the life and dissatisfied with their job and a society where he is unfit and deprived of normal rights. Angry Young Men literature strongly revolted against all the accepted norms and ideals. Typically the hero is a rootless, lower-middle or working-class male psyche with a university degree. He expresses his dissatisfaction towards social ills with excessive anger and sardonic humour. He often indulges into adultery and inebriation to escape from complexities of life. In fine, he is the very epitome of a frustrated post-World War II generation.

John Wain (1925–1994), English poet, novelist, and critic, portrayed the repressions of society in lively comic situations. He is assumed to have showed Angry Young Men temperament in his first novel *Hurry on Down* (1953). It is a comic picaresque story about an unsettled university graduate who sought to reject the standards of conventional society.

Kingsley Amis (1922–1995) English novelist, undertakes a humorous critical survey of the post-World War II British society. Amis's first novel was *Lucky Jim* (1954), which according to many reflects the Angry Young Men temperament. This particular book influenced a number of British playwrights and novelists, including John Osborne and Alan Sillitoe.

John Osborne (1929–1994), is an English playwright and motion picture screenwriter, whose plays enact sharp criticism of post-World War II British life through outbursts of abusive language. It was Osborn's debut play *Look Back in Anger* (1957) that made the Angry Young Men Movement authoritatively established. In this sense, John Osborne was the most fortunate literary artist to have an age started on the basis of a single literary work.

Among the other writers embraced in the term are the novelists John Braine (*Room at the Top*, 1957) and Alan Sillitoe (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1958) and the playwrights Bernard Kops (*The Hamlet of Stepney Green*, 1956) and Arnold Wesker (*Chicken Soup with Barley*, 1958).

This literary Movement brought a fresh concept which was totally complied with the then socio-political context. Though lasted only for a short span of time, it exerted a profound impact in the field of British literature. Like the Beat movement in the United States, the impetus of the movement was exhausted in the early 1960s.

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### 3.3 LIFE OF JOHN OSBORNE:

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John Osborne was born in London in 1929 to Thomas Osborne, an advertisement writer, and Nellie Beatrice, a working class barmaid. His father died in 1941. Osborne used the money from a life insurance settlement to send himself to a private boarding school, Belmont College. Osborne was expelled after only a few years for assulting the headmaster. He received a certificate of completion for his upper school work, but never attended a college or university.

After returning home, Osborne did several odd jobs before finding a niche in the theater. He began working with Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company where he was a stage hand, actor, and writer. Osborne co-wrote two plays - *The Devil Inside Him* and *Personal Enemy* - before writing and submitting *Look Back in Anger* for production.

The play, written in a short period of only a few weeks, was summarily rejected by the agents and production companies to whom Osborne first submitted the play. It was eventually picked up by George Devine for production with his failing Royal Court Theater. Both Osborne and the Royal Court Theater were struggling to survive financially and both saw the production of *Look Back in Anger* as a risk. After opening night, the play received mixed reviews. It did receive a handful of glowing reviews from several influential theater critics, however, and Osborne was soon pronounced to be one of the most promising young playwright's in British theater.

In the late 1950's, Osborne was approached by Lawrence Olivier, the famous actor, about writing and producing a play for him. Osborne wrote *The Entertainer*, a play that metaphorically explores the decline of the British empire through the lens of a failing music hall. Olivier played the lead role in the production and the play received critical acclaim.

Osborne would continue to write for the stage through the 1960's. He produced a number of critical and commercially successful works including *Luther*, a play based on the life of Martin Luther. In 1963, Osborne won an Academy Award for his screen adaptation of *Tom Jones*.

Osborne continued to work in the artistic and entertainment worlds through the 1970's and 80's. He wrote plays, but also ventured into writing screenplays, television adaptations, and autobiography. Osborne made several appearances as an actor during this period. He starred in several popular Hollywood films including *Get Carter* and *Flash Gordon*. Later in life, he received numerous awards for his work including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writer's Guild in Britain. Osborne died at the age of 65 from complications related to diabetes.

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### 3.4 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PLAY:

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Britain faced the task of rebuilding their infrastructure, which had been decimated by German bombs, and propping up a struggling economy after the end of World War II. Partly as a result of these difficulties, Britain withdrew from their colonies in India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar in 1947. The 1956 Suez Crisis, in which Britain invaded Egypt and eventually withdrew due to political and economic pressure, led to a humiliating recognition that the country was no longer a world power. Further changing the social context in the country, the 1944 Mass Education Act in Britain had made secondary education free, opening of the possibility of higher education to the working classes. This created more class mobility in the post-war era than had existed before it, and economic recovery in the 1950s extended this trend. At the same time, British class structure remained somewhat static, resulting in a generation of educated children of the working class who found it difficult to put the education they had received to good use.

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### 3.5 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY:

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*Look Back in Anger* presents a young husband and wife, Alison and Jimmy Porter, as they attempt to steer through class conflict and deal with a deteriorating marriage in 1950s England. Alison comes from a traditional upper class background and Jimmy comes from a working class background, though he is highly educated. The couple lives with Cliff Lewis, a jovial working class man and Jimmy's longtime friend. The scene opens on a Sunday morning in the apartment. Alison irons clothes while Cliff and Jimmy read the newspaper.

The play's first act largely consists of Jimmy's angry outbursts against upper class complacency and his wife's lack of "enthusiasm." Jimmy thinks that suffering is the only way to experience true human emotion, and that Alison and other upper class people are therefore less "alive" than he is. He also seems to have some nostalgia for a past age in Britain when the country had more power. Jimmy's attempts to shock his wife into some display of emotion escalate as the act progresses – he insults her family and complains that all women are out to destroy men. Cliff,

attempting to cheer Jimmy up, begins to banter and roughhouse with his friend. The two fall against Alison's ironing board, and she burns her arm. Jimmy apologizes, but she yells at him to leave, and he exits.

Cliff helps Alison treat the burn, and she reveals to him that she is pregnant with Jimmy's child. She hasn't told Jimmy yet, because she is afraid that he'll feel trapped and angry. Cliff comforts Alison, and tells her that Jimmy loves her. He kisses her. Jimmy enters while they are kissing, but doesn't acknowledge or object (the three live in a non-traditional set-up that would have been shocking to audiences at the time). Soon after, Cliff leaves to get some cigarettes, and Alison and Jimmy share a tender moment. They play their "bear and squirrel" game, which allows them to escape into affection while pretending to be animals. Then Cliff returns and says that Helena Charles, one of Alison's upper class friends, is on the phone. Jimmy's mood immediately darkens. When Alison says that Helena wants to stay with them, Jimmy explodes. He says he wishes that Alison would have a baby that would die so that she could experience true suffering.

The second act begins with Helena and Alison sharing the womanly duties of the home while Jimmy plays his trumpet off stage. Alison tells Helena about her first months with Jimmy. They lived with his working class friend Hugh Tanner, and spent time going on "raids" to parties of Alison's upper class friends. She says that she felt like "a hostage from those sections of society they had declared war on." Helena asks why they got married, and Alison says that it seemed to be largely because Alison's mother and her father Colonel Redfern disapproved. That made Jimmy want to marry her no matter what.

Jimmy and Cliff come in to eat. When he hears that Helena and Alison are going to church together later that day, Jimmy also becomes convinced that Helena is out to take Alison away from him. He lets fly a series of outrageous insults against Alison's mother. Helena tries, and fails, to reason with him, and Jimmy asks whether she has ever watched someone die. He tells the story of watching his father die from wounds received fighting in the Spanish Civil war when he was ten years old, and claims that this taught him more about life than Helena and Alison know even now. Near the end of the scene, Jimmy leaves to go get the telephone. While he's gone, Helena tells Alison that she has sent a message to Colonel Redfern asking him to come pick Alison up. Alison doesn't protest. When Jimmy returns, he says that Hugh's mum, the working class woman who set him up in his candy stall and for whom he harbors deep affection, is dying of a stroke. He asks Alison to come to the hospital with him. Instead, she goes to church. Jimmy is left alone on stage.

In the next scene, Colonel Redfern helps Alison pack to leave. He reveals that he thinks he and Alison's mother reacted too strongly to her marriage with Jimmy, and that Jimmy might have been right to be angry with them. He says he thinks that Jimmy could be right that he, Redfern, is a relic of an old version of England that has ceased to exist. He also says that he and Alison have a tendency to stay neutral and not take a strong stand on



things. She is surprised to hear this from him, and as she finishes packing she briefly re-considers her move. Then Helena enters, and Alison decides to go. She says goodbye to Cliff. Helena stays behind because she has a work meeting the following day. Alison and Colonel Redfern exit, and Cliff, angry that Helena has disrupted their life, leaves before Jimmy comes back. Jimmy returns a few moments later, furious, having seen Alison leaving with her father on his way home. Helena gives him a letter that Alison wrote explaining her decision. Jimmy is angry at her polite, restrained language. Helena tells him that Alison is going to have a baby. He says that he is not overcome with emotion at this news, and insults Helena, who slaps him. This causes Jimmy to collapse in despair. Then Helena “kisses him passionately,” and the act ends.

The scene opens several months later, looking very similar to the beginning of Act 1, except that it is now Helena who is ironing. Jimmy and Cliff joke and discuss newspaper articles. They roughhouse, and Cliff dirties his shirt. Helena leaves to clean it, and while she is off stage, Cliff tells Jimmy that he is moving out. Jimmy wonders why he always chooses women over male friendship, even though he values Cliff's company more highly than he values Helena's. Helena comes back with the shirt, and Cliff leaves to dry it in his room. Helena tells Jimmy that she loves him, and he asks her desperately to never leave him. Then Alison appears at the door, looking sick and disheveled.

The next scene opens a few minutes later, with Jimmy playing his trumpet off stage. Alison tells Helena that she is not angry with her, and is not trying to break up the new couple. Helena, however, says that Alison's presence has reminded her that what she is doing is wrong. Alison has also had a miscarriage, and Helena considers this a “judgment” on her relationship. She calls Jimmy back, and tells him that she is leaving. Jimmy says that he always knew Helena wasn't strong enough for true love, which requires “muscle and guts.” Helena leaves.

Alison apologizes, and Jimmy says that she should have sent flowers to Hugh's mum, and remembers his first meeting with her, when he thought that she had a “wonderful relaxation of spirit.” This turned out to be just complacency, he says. Alison lets out a cry, and tells him that the loss of their child has made her understand the depth of emotion that he wanted her to have all this time. She tells him that she wants to be “corrupt and futile,” and collapses at his feet. Jimmy can't bear to see her this way, and kneels to help her. Then, “with a kind of mocking, tender irony,” he launches into their bear and squirrel imaginary game. “Poor squirrels,” he says to Alison, and she responds, “poor, poor, bears.”

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### 3.6 CHARACTERS:

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#### Jimmy Porter

Jimmy is the “angry young man” of the play, usually found spouting tirades against the complacency of the British upper classes, and especially against his wife Alison and then his lover Helena. Born working

class but highly educated, like his friend and roommate Cliff, but has an ambivalent relationship with his educated status, seeing himself mostly as a working class man and yet frustrated that his education can do nothing to affect his class status. "He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty." Jimmy "alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike," and his "blistering honesty, or apparent honesty...makes few friends." Jimmy is a frustrated character, railing against his feelings of alienation and uselessness in post-war England. He can also be considered a villain for the ways in which his anger proves to be destructive to those in his life.

### **Alison Porter**

A woman from an upper class background, and Jimmy's wife. She is drawn to Jimmy's energy, but also exhausted by their constant fighting. Jimmy accuses her of being too complacent and lacking "enthusiasm," and her own father, Colonel Redfern, agrees that she has a tendency towards too much neutrality. She feels stuck between her upper class upbringing and the working class world of her husband. Alison eventually leaves Jimmy, but returns to him later in the play after she loses their child to a miscarriage. This suffering changes her, and causes her to commit more fully to the intense emotion inherent in Jimmy's world.

### **Cliff Lewis**

Cliff is a friend and roommate of both Jimmy and Alison. Cliff lives with them in their attic apartment. He is a working class Welsh man and Jimmy makes sure to often point out that he is "common" and uneducated. Cliff believes this is the reason that Jimmy keeps him as a friend. He is quite fond of Alison and they have a strange physically affectionate relationship throughout the play.

### **Helena Charles**

Helena Charles is Alison's best friend. She lives with them in their apartment while visiting for work. Helena is from an upper class family. She is responsible for getting Alison to leave Jimmy. She and Jimmy then begin an affair. Her sense of morality leads her to leave. She can be considered the play's moral compass.

### **Colonel Redfern**

Alison's father, a former colonel in the British army stationed in the English colony of India (back before 1947, when India still was a colony of England). He is "gentle" and "kindly," but also "brought up to command respect." After leaving his post in India, "he is often slightly withdrawn and uneasy" because he lives "in a world where his authority has lately become less and less unquestionable." Jimmy says that the Colonel is stuck in a past version of England, and the Colonel himself agrees with this. When the Colonel comes to help Alison pack to leave Jimmy, he shows himself to be self-aware and incisive, commenting that



both he and Alison like to stay neutral and avoid showing emotion, to their detriment.

### **Hugh Tanner**

Jimmy's friend, who took Alison and Jimmy into his apartment in the first months of their marriage. He was Jimmy's partner when they went on "raids" against Alison's upper class friends at fancy parties, and Jimmy saw him as a co-conspirator in the class struggle. Then Hugh decided to leave for China to write a novel, and Jimmy felt betrayed. This reveals Jimmy's deep traditional values (he was angry that Hugh abandoned his mother, Mrs. Tanner) and his sense of patriotism.

### **Mrs. Tanner**

The mother of Hugh Tanner, called "Hugh's mum" by Jimmy, she helped set Jimmy up with his sweet stall. Jimmy loves her, and Alison thinks this is just because she is lower class and "ignorant." In the middle of the play, Jimmy learns that Hugh's mum has had a stroke, and Jimmy goes to visit her in the hospital. In one of his few expressions of true vulnerability, he asks Alison to come with him. She refuses, and leaves him shortly thereafter. Jimmy is offended that Alison seems to see Hugh's mum only in terms of her class, and not as a person. He thinks that society in general ignores the humanity of working class people, and that Alison's and other's treatment of Hugh's mum is a prime example.

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## **3.7 QUESTIONS:**

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1. Describe historical socio-political context of *Look Back in Anger*.
2. Discuss the play look back in anger as a social document that depicts the post war British society.
3. Critically analyze the character of Jimmy Porter as a Marxist critic of the society.
4. Trace the elements of kitchen sink drama in the play.
5. What is the purpose of Cliff's character in the play?
6. Why or why not is Helena Charles the moral compass of the play?
7. What does Jimmy and Alison's playful game of bear and squirrel represent?

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## **3.8 REFERENCES:**

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## CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN OSBORNE'S *LOOK BACK IN ANGER* PART II

### Unit Structure:

#### 4.0 Objectives

#### 4.1 Major Themes in the Play

#### 4.2 Major Symbols in the Play

#### 4.3 Questions

#### 4.4 References

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES:

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1. To introduce students to Angry Young Men Movement and Kitchen Sink Drama.
2. To examine John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as a critic and representation of the 1950's English social, political and economic structure.
3. To study important themes, major symbols and other literary elements in the play.

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### 4.1 MAJOR THEMES IN THE PLAY:

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#### Class and Education:

*Look Back in Anger* was published in the post World War II period in England, in 1956. In 1944, The British Mass Education Act had made secondary education free for everyone in the country. This meant that whole new swaths of British society were now equipped to write about their lives. John Osborne was one of these. His play broke into a world of British theater that had previously been a polite, upper class environment, and brought a new angry energy and previously unencountered point-of-view to the stage that startled some theatergoers. We see evidence of that new class mobility, and the new reality it created, in the play. Jimmy Porter comes from a working class background, but has been highly educated. He went to a university (though not one of Britain's finest— his upper class wife, Alison, notes that it was “not even red brick, but white tile.”) And though Jimmy went to a university, he is still stuck running a sweet stall. He has in some ways left his background behind, but he also doesn't feel fully comfortable and hasn't been accepted into the upper classes. He uses big words and reads the newspaper, but he sometimes has to look those words up in a dictionary, and he says that the Sunday papers make him feel ignorant.

Alison and Jimmy's relationship is the main place where class tension unfolds. Alison comes from an upper class background very different from Jimmy's. Both portray the struggle between the classes in military terms, focusing on the ways that these two sectors of society fail to blend. Jimmy and his friend Hugh see her as a "hostage," and they spend time in the early years of Alison and Jimmy's marriage going to upper class parties to "plunder" food and drink. Though Alison and Jimmy try to make their relationship work in the end, we get the sense that it's built on shaky ground, and that they might fall back into the cycle of anger and fighting that they enact throughout the play. Alison and Jimmy may make their relationship work for now, but the divisions between them run too deep to ever fully heal. In *Look Back in Anger*, truces across class boundaries are ultimately brief and inadequate.

### **Suffering and Anger vs. Complacency:**

Suffering and anger are highly associated with lower class-ness in the play, and complacency with upper class-ness. Jimmy believes that lower class people, who have suffered as he has, have an insight on the world that upper class people lack. He berates Alison for lacking "enthusiasm" and "curiosity." He suggests that her complacency makes her less human, less connected to life than he is. He sees this suffering and anger as an important part of his identity. At a climactic moment in the play, Alison says of Jimmy, "don't try and take his suffering away from him—he'd be lost without it."

In the end, Alison finally experiences the suffering that Jimmy thinks she has been lacking: she loses their child to a miscarriage. This, she believes, forces her to experience the fire of emotion that Jimmy had always wished she had. But the play leaves us unsure whether their suffering will actually lead to any redemptive knowledge. The circular structure of the play – the beginning of the first and third acts mirror each other – undermines the sense that Jimmy's life is really as dynamic as he suggests that it is. He seems to be stuck in a routine. Osborne's voice in the play, seen in his stage directions, also tells us that Jimmy's fiery energy can be self-defeating. In his first stage direction describing Jimmy, Osborne writes, "to be as vehement as he is to be almost non-committal." When Alison finally breaks down and tells him that she wants to be "corrupt and futile," Jimmy can only "watch her helplessly." The play ultimately suggests that Jimmy's anger is an expression of his social discontentment and suffering, but not an answer to his problems. He doesn't channel it in any political direction, joining a party or holding meetings or organizing his similarly angry friends, or even conceive of any way that it can be channeled. Though it springs from a moral fervor, it dissolves into a diffuse attack on many fronts, rather than pointedly targeting and taking down any oppressive systems.

### **Disillusionment and Nostalgia:**

*Look Back in Anger* is the archetypical play of the "angry young men" movement in British theater, which was marked by working class authors

writing plays about their disillusionment with British society. In Osborne's play, we see this in Jimmy's sense of political emptiness. Jimmy complains that, in the Britain of the 1950s, "there aren't any good, brave causes left." Helena observes that he was born in the wrong time—"he thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution." Jimmy's angry fervor is out of place in modern society, and this leaves him feeling useless and adrift. Other characters also feel a sense of nostalgia for the past, but for different reasons: they long for an era characterized by a leisurely life for rich Britons and greater worldwide power for the British Empire. Many of these themes of nostalgia revolve around Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, who had served in the British army in colonial India. Jimmy says that Colonel Redfern is nostalgic for the "Edwardian" past — early 20th century England, before World War I, when things were supposedly simpler and more peaceful.

In the end, the play argues that the characters' disillusionment is legitimate. Post-war Britain was marked by a stagnant economy and declining world power, partly due to the fact that it no longer had many lucrative colonies around the world (India, where Colonel Redfern served, gained its independence in 1947). The play argues that these factors have left the country's young people adrift and disempowered. Jimmy's anger is therefore justified. Both Jimmy and Colonel Redfern, from their different places in society, have nostalgia for a time when Britain was more powerful on the world stage. The passing away of Britain's imperial power is thus painted in a negative light – and though *Look Back in Anger* voices a revolutionary social critique of class conditions in England, it stops short of criticizing Britain's exploitation of its colonies. Instead, it argues that the decline of the empire has led to the disenfranchisement of the men of Osborne's generation, and gives those disenfranchised citizens a strong and angry voice in Jimmy Porter.

## Gender

During World War II, many British women had stepped into new roles in the labor force. After the war ended, most were expected to move back into their traditional roles in the household, but many still held jobs outside the home. The play takes a conflicted view of gender that parallels these shifting dynamics. On the one hand, Jimmy's angry, destructive, and typically masculine energy drives much of the action and dialogue. On the other hand, women are given agency, and female characters act in their own interests, independently of men (most notably, both Alison and Helena leave Jimmy).

Femininity in the play is highly associated with upper class-ness, and masculinity with lower class-ness. This leads to clashes between the genders that also have an economic dimension. Sticking to conventional gender roles means sticking to the propriety and politeness of British society (which also means acting along with your class role). For example, in stealing Alison away from her family to marry her, Jimmy took on the traditional male role of a "knight in shining armor." But, Alison says that "his armor didn't really shine much," subverting this traditional gender

role by adding a class dimension to it. Jimmy was *almost* heroic, but not quite. There is clearly something attractive in Jimmy's virile, lower class masculinity, as first Alison and then Helena are drawn to him sexually. Yet there is something destructive in it as well, as both also end up leaving him. Further complicating the gender dynamics, women, too, are portrayed as having a destructive power over men. Jimmy says he's thankful that there aren't more female surgeons, because they'd flip men's guts out of their bodies as carelessly as they toss their makeup instruments down on the table. He likens Alison's sexual passion to a python that eats its prey whole. At the end of the play, he says that he and Cliff will both inevitably be "butchered by women."

The muddled gender roles in the play add to the sense of realism that made it such a sensation when it was first performed. Characters defy social convention. Alison disobeys her parents to marry Jimmy. Helena slaps Jimmy at the very start of their affair, and later walks out on him. An unmarried man (Cliff) lives with a married couple. He flirts with Alison, but Jimmy doesn't particularly mind. The fluid and shifting gender roles in the play reflect the more fluid realities of post-War British society, portrayed for the first time in the traditionally staid and upper-class medium of theater.

### **Love and Innocence:**

Jimmy believes that love is pain. He scorns Cliff and Alison's love for each other, which is a gentle sort of fondness that doesn't correspond to his own brand of passionate, angry feeling. When Helena decides, suddenly, to leave him at the end of the play, Jimmy reacts with scorn and derision. Love, he says, takes strength and guts. It's not soft and gentle. To some extent, Jimmy's definition of love has to do with the class tensions between Jimmy and Alison. Alison tells her father that Jimmy married her out of sense of revenge against the upper classes. In asking her to leave her background, he laid out a challenge for her to rise to, and their passion was partly based on that sense of competition between classes. This subverts a traditional love story – Jimmy's anger at society overshadowed his feelings for Alison, at least in her eyes.

It's clear that Jimmy and Alison's relationship isn't characterized by much tenderness. However, the two do manage to find some when they play their animal game. Jimmy and Alison as the bear and squirrel are able to express more simple affection for each other, but only in a dehumanized state, when they leave their intellects behind. In the final scene, Jimmy describes their game as a retreat from organized society. They'll be "together in our bear's cave, or our squirrel's drey." Jimmy and Alison are not able to enjoy love as a simple human pleasure. Their relationship is buffeted by class struggle, anger, and suffering. Only when they remove class markers and withdraw from society in their animal game are they able to reach some level of innocence.

This reflects a broader loss of innocence in a generation of post-war Britons that had seen the hydrogen bomb dropped on Japan and 80 million

soldiers and civilians die during World War II. Their parents and grandparents were able to grow up with some measure of peace of mind, but these characters (and the real Britons of their generation) cannot. This affects them even in fundamental parts of their domestic lives, like love and marriage. They have trouble experiencing these things as simple pleasures, because the world surrounding them is so difficult and complex. Only by leaving their society, their human-ness, behind, can they find the innocence to enjoy simple love.

### **Loss of Childhood:**

A theme that impacts the characters of Jimmy and Alison Porter is the idea of a lost childhood. Osborne uses specific examples -- the death of Jimmy's father when Jimmy was only ten, and how he was forced to watch the physical and mental demise of the man -- to demonstrate the way in which Jimmy is forced to deal with suffering from an early age. Alison's loss of childhood is best seen in the way that she was forced to grow up too fast by marrying Jimmy. Her youth is wasted in the anger and abuse that her husband levels upon her.

Osborne suggests that a generation of British youth has experienced this same loss of childhood innocence. Osborne uses the examples of World War, the development of the atomic bomb, and the decline of the British Empire to show how an entire culture has lost the innocence that other generations were able to maintain.

### **Real Life:**

In the play, Jimmy Porter is consumed with the desire to live a more real and full life. He compares this burning desire to the empty actions and attitudes of others. At first, he generalizes this emptiness by criticizing the lax writing and opinions of those in the newspapers. He then turns his angry gaze to those around him and close to him, Alison, Helena, and Cliff.

Osborne's argument in the play for a real life is one in which men are allowed to feel a full range of emotions. The most real of these emotions is anger and Jimmy believes that this anger is his way of truly living. This idea was unique in British theater during the play's original run. Osborne argued in essays and criticisms that, until his play, British theater had subsumed the emotions of characters rendering them less realistic. Jimmy's desire for a real life is an attempt to restore raw emotion to the theater.

### **Sloth in British Culture:**

Jimmy Porter compares his quest for a more vibrant and emotional life to the slothfulness of the world around him. It is important to note that Jimmy does not see the world around him as dead, but merely asleep in some fundamental way. This is a fine line that Osborne walks throughout the play. Jimmy never argues that there is a nihilism within British culture.



Instead, he sees a kind of slothfulness of character. His anger is an attempt to awaken those around him from this cultural sleep.

This slothfulness of emotion is best seen in the relationship between Alison and Cliff. Alison describes her relationship with Cliff as "comfortable." They are physically and emotionally affectionate with each other, but neither seems to want to take their passion to another level of intimacy. In this way, their relationship is lazy. They cannot awaken enough passion to consummate their affair. Jimmy seems to subconsciously understand this, which is the reason he is not jealous of their affection towards one another.

### **The Rise and Fall of the British Empire:**

The character of Colonel Redfern, Alison's father, represents the decline of and nostalgia for the British Empire. The Colonel had been stationed for many years in India, a symbol of Britain's imperial reach into the world. The Edwardian age which corresponded to Britain's height of power, had been the happiest of his life. His nostalgia is representative of the denial that Osborne sees in the psyche of the British people. The world has moved on into an American age, he argues, and the people of the nation cannot understand why they are no longer the world's greatest power.

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## **4.2 MAJOR SYMBOLS USED IN THE PLAY:**

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### **Newspapers:**

Jimmy and Cliff read newspapers throughout Act 1 and Act 3, and they are a major visual feature in the apartment. Jimmy uses the newspaper as a symbol of his education. They are a way for him to mimic the habits of the upper class, university-educated elite. He repeatedly comments on what he is reading, sometimes using erudite vocabulary. He also uses newspaper articles as a way to belittle the intelligence of Cliff and Alison, which is one of the tactics he employs to make himself feel smarter and more worthwhile. Yet, Jimmy's relationship with newspapers also shows his ambivalent relationship to his educated status. He says that the newspapers make him "feel ignorant," and he often mocks "posh" papers, which, in his mind, are out of touch with the real concerns of working class men like him. The newspapers in the apartment also form a "jungle," showing that, in a working class environment, this status symbol becomes something that upper class characters like Alison would consider chaotic and dangerous. This reflects the way that greater social mobility has caused social upheaval in Britain.

### **Pipe:**

Jimmy's pipe is another example of an upper class symbol that Jimmy uses instead to reflect his working class status. Pipes call to mind old, educated, university professors. Jimmy's pipe is a way for him to dominate the scene and assert himself as a rebellious force in the world (and he uses his force largely to rail against upper class norms). His pipe



smoke fills the room, and creates a smell that other characters come to associate with him. Alison says in the first act that she has “gotten used” to it, reflecting the way that she adapts her values and sensibilities depending on the context that she is in. Helena later says that she has grown to “like” the smell, reflecting the attraction that she feels to Jimmy, and also the fact that she retains more of a sense of self than Alison does in the same situation – Helena positively likes the smell, while Alison is merely “used” to it. While living with her parents in the third act of the play, the smell of pipe smoke reminds Alison of Jimmy, and soon after, she comes back to him. Once in the apartment, she absentmindedly cleans up the ashes from the pipe, reflecting the fact that she retains her upper class sense of respectability and order, even as she returns from her parents’ home to live in Jimmy’s world. The pipe thus becomes a litmus test of Helena and Alison’s relationship with Jimmy throughout the play.

### **Bear and Squirrel:**

Alison and Jimmy’s bear and squirrel game gives them a way to access a simple affection for each other that they cannot achieve in normal life. The bear is associated with Jimmy, and the squirrel with Alison. The animals symbolize the fact that social norms and conventions interfere with the love that these two characters have for each other. Their relationship is a site of class and societal conflict, and this means that their love becomes fraught with anger and fighting. When they act like animals, whose only concerns are food, shelter, cleanliness, and sex, they can forget that conflict and feel a simpler version of love for each other. The fact that they keep stuffed animal versions of the bear and squirrel in the apartment reflects a childlike innocence that these characters find it difficult to maintain in their troubled world, but that they still hope for.

### **Church bells:**

The church bells symbolize a respectable middle class morality that Jimmy finds oppressive. Helena subscribes to this version of morality, which posits that some things are clearly right, while others are wrong and “sinful.” Jimmy, on the other hand, believes that the rules of respectable society are something to struggle against. In his mind, it is moral to act in allegiance with his oppressed class, and to feel emotions as keenly and intensely as possible. The church bells chime from outside the window at various points in the play, reflecting the fact that these middle class rules are a fact of life in most of the world, and that they often intrude into the apartment, and into Jimmy’s life. He curses and yells when he hears them, reflecting his anger at this system of morality. Alison leaves for church with Helena in the middle of act 2, following Helena back into a middle class world.

### **Trumpet:**

Jimmy’s jazz trumpet can be heard off stage at various points in the play. Jazz has traditionally been protest music, and is associated with the working classes. It symbolizes Jimmy’s desire to be a voice of resistance in society, but it also shows the futility of that dream. It serves largely to

annoy and antagonize those around him, not to call a movement to attention. Like Jimmy's pipe smoke, the trumpet also allows Jimmy to assert his dominance non-verbally. He disrupts his domestic scene (playing the trumpet only inside), but makes little headway truly disrupting the world around him.

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### 4.3 QUESTIONS:

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1. Critically examine Jimmy's anger in psychological perspective.
2. Discuss the play look back in anger as a social document that depicts the post war British society.
3. Examine the underlying issues behind jimmy's anger and discontentment in the play "Look Back in Anger".
4. What are the elements of kitchen sink drama in the play.
5. Comment on the marital conflict between Jimmy and Alison in the play Look Back in Anger?
6. Show how look back in anger critiques class – ridden establishment
7. How is the theme of the play look back in anger relevant to the present times as well?

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### 4.4 REFERENCES:

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## CRITICAL STUDY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S *SAINT JOAN* PART I

### Unit Structure:

5.0 Objectives

5.1 George Bernard Shaw

5.2 Background of the play

5.3 Plot

5.4 Characters

5.5 Themes

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES:

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This unit discusses George Bernard Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*. It deals with a short introduction of the playwright, G. B. Shaw and explicates briefly the play—its background, content, Characters, themes and criticism about play.

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### 5.1 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW:

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George Bernard Shaw is a great Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist. He was Born on July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland, and died on November 2, 1950. He got very less education but he had intellect of creativity due to which after going through many ups and downs, he set himself as a playwright. He wrote more than sixty plays. Archibald Henderson, official biographer of his subject, entitled his work, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* completed his work before Shaw's death, this famous dramatist and critic had become an institution. William Archer, the distinguished dramatic critic, editor and translator of Ibsen inspired Shaw a lot. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) brought him success as a playwright. In the same year Shaw wrote *Mrs. Warren's Profession* which did not get sanction from censor board as it deals with prostitution. His play, *Candida* (1895) was a huge success. In 1903 he published *Man and Superman*. Some of the well plays penned down by him are *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Heartbreak House* (1919), and *Saint Joan* (1923). He denied position in the royal court but in 1925, he did accept the Nobel Prize for Literature.

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### 5.2 BACKGROUND:

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*Saint Joan*, staged in 1923, dramatizes of the life of 15th-century French military icon and religious martyr, Joan of Arc. The play is based on the

historical records of her trial in 1431. Shaw published a lengthy preface with the play. The canonization of Joan of Arc in 1920 by Catholic Church after so many years of her martyrdom inspired Shaw to write the play. *Saint Joan* is one of Shaw's most popular plays.

Shaw tells fictionalized story of *Saint Joan*. It is considered as a celebration of Joan's life and the person she really was. The play includes six scenes and an epilogue. The play doesn't follow a typical three-act structure. Shaw explains Joan as a Protestant martyr, an early feminist, and a champion of nationalism. He underlines reason church punished Joan. He suggests as she challenged patriarchal society as well as church's authority and their idea that God spoke through men.

Shaw provides the information related to the historical, social and political contexts of his play in his preface. Through his Preface to *Saint Joan* he expresses his views of the personage of Joan from a more objective point of view. The Preface is divided into forty-one sub-sections, every section deals with one of the area of Joan of Arc's life. He deals with views of Joan in sections 1-16. He highlights misrepresentations about Joan in literature regarding Medieval Society and the Medieval Church in sections 17-21. He comments on Joan's death in relation to Modern Acts of Inhumanity in sections 22-34. In the last sections from 35 to 41 he explicates the nature of historical drama and Saint Joan as a tragedy.

Shaw considers Joan, ironically, the first Protestant martyr and as a forerunner of equality for women. According to him, Joan was burned as a heretic, thus martyred. He explains the two primary reasons—firstly, Joan never denied the Church and although she constantly turned to it for solace. She was the first Protestant because she listened to the dictates of her own conscience and her own reasoning rather than blindly following the authority of the Church. Secondly, she was "the pioneer of rational dressing for women," which was criticized as unwomanly for which she was burnt at the stake. Shaw tells how "her voices and visions." Is her won intelligence and imagination to analyze a situation with which she managed the military affairs. He sympathizes her ignorance to understand how cunning conspiracy of about her burning.

Many authors write about Joan, her qualities, interpretation of her actions. They recreate the medieval society and Joan's life. From Shakespeare through Voltaire, from Schiller to Mark Twain, and from Anatole France and others, Joan and her trials have been the source for writers to interpret her fate unsuccessfully as they fail to understand her and her environment. Shaw tells how at that it was impossible for anyone to talk about country and its national boundaries, only the Universal Church, and the Church could not tolerate anyone questioning its authority.

Shaw marks how the medieval Church would not tolerate Joan's individualism. He criticizes that today's the modern world also will not tolerate a person who denounces the authority of whoever happens to be in power. The world today also punishes a genius or a saint as it happened in Joan's time.

Shaw brings to light the problems and stage limits of writing a historical play by comparing his plays with Shakespeare's methods and efforts of writing historical dramas. He finds Shakespeare does not talk much about law and religion and patriotism. Shaw talks about history and politics. *Saint Joan* is a tragedy without any villain. His characters put in their historical period. Shaw's epilogue provides lots information.

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### 5.3 PLOT SUMMARY:

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*Saint Joan* is set in 1429, in the French castle called Vaucouleurs. There Robert de Baudricourt, a nobleman does not enjoy the cool and pleasant whether because he runs a farm and the hens won't lay any eggs. Meanwhile, a girl called Joan also known as The Maid wants to be a soldier arrives. She asks horses and armor to go to the Dauphin of France and to release Orleans, a city held captive by the English. She reveals how the voices of Saints Margaret and Catherine have told her what to do. Robert laughs at her because at that time girls do not participate in war. Joan tells Robert that God speaks to her. She says that she has been assigned a task to crown the Dauphin of France King. She plans on crowning him herself. Now, Robert thinks she is mad and he tells her to leave. He gives the idea that how these voices are connected with her sanity and will and finally become the reason of her death at the stake. Joan convinces Robert's friend, Poulengy to support her. Robert agrees to help as he believes that the Dauphin "might swallow" Joan's conviction and her dedication; maybe even the Dauphin might take courage from Joan's determination. At least, it is worth a try. He tells Joan that the Dauphin lies trapped somewhere and she'll never find him. Joan shows believes in God that He will guide her. When she leaves, Robert's servant informs him that there are eggs everywhere in the henhouse.

Shaw opens next scene in March 1429. The Dauphin is very careless and spoiled who eats and drinks too much, and does not possess any quality to be king. He is indebted and on the verge of poverty. He doesn't want to fight any wars. When the letter of Sir Baudricourt is delivered the Archbishop and the Chamberlain advise the Dauphin not to meet Joan. Sir Bluebeared takes Joan's test to know her ability and her claimed guidance from the God. according to his challenge he will pretend to be the Dauphin, and if The Maid cannot recognize the royalty from common blood, then she is a pretender. But wins the challenge and then she makes the Dauphin to realize that there's no choice for him. If he doesn't claim his crown, he'll end up homeless and humiliated. She also assures him that as God is supporting him, he will never fail. Joan promises him that the English will be defeated and France will become holy and the Dauphin will rule. Everyone in the court including Dauphin gets inspired and impressed with Joan. The Dauphin declares that he has given the command to Joan so she can take decisions regarding the fights as she likes.

Joan helps Dunois, the commander of the French forces and the heir to Orleans to regain the city from the English and by doing so, French can his coronation. Dunois advises her for waiting to change the wind's

direction but Joan does not follow changes her decision of attack and wins the fight. Dunois believes that she's succeeded due to her luck and not because God with her. He doubts one day, her luck will run out. Joan thinks Dunois is hopeless and pessimist. Joan and Dunois seize Orleans. Sometime later, the English start considering Joan must be a witch because there is no other way than sorcery to defeat English.

Joan's victory also increases the tension of Roman Catholic Church as it will make people to believe that God speaks through a woman which can create a problem to its authority. She removes church's role as a mediator between God and king. Joan's simple pleas can possibly destroy the entire feudal system. At that time, the Church rules Europe. Hence, there is no chance for Nationalism. Because it is considered that the church should be the only authority, powerful than king and nation. Joan appeals to French nationalists which stress the senior clergy conspire together and plan to execute her as a witch.

Further, the Dauphin crowns at Reims Cathedral. He is now officially King Charles VII of France. King Charles respects and believes Joan but his negotiation of a peace treaty with English-occupied Paris does not like by Joan who wants to win Paris back. The king does not want further bloodshed whereas Joan attempts to seek permission for attacking on Paris. Commander Dunois too does not want to start another campaign after all of the recent successes. The Archbishop takes the opportunity of this chaos. He supports the king and he berates Joan for pride. He makes very one considers Pride is a deadly sin, and she'll destroy France by fighting. Joan has been told that she will not be rescued from the enemies by military, state and church, if she will be caught. Joan clarifies she works as per God's will and it's His will to seize Paris. Still she continues to remain determined. At last, King puts her in prison for nine month. In her imprisonment she has been questioned about the validity of God's voice from which she gets commands. In May, 1431, church decides either to execute her or to leave her imprisoned forever. Joan warns by opposing her, they are opposing the God. So, the church tortures her. She feels if she will accept that she lied about God's instructions to her, the church will set her free. But the church plans to imprison her forever. Hence, she renounces her entire confession and asks her execution. The Church burns her at the stake. After her death, the Executioner announces that Joan's heart would not burn which makes the noblemen and priests wonder if God really spoke through her after all.

The time then moves to 1920, when Joan is declared to be a saint by the Church. Shaw sets epilogue in King Charles' bedchamber, twenty-five years after the last scene. Charles (the former Dauphin) puts aside his book, calls servant, Ladvenu enters. Ladvenu carries the same cross which he held when The Maid was burnt at the stake. He announces that twenty-five years later, at the court of inquiry for rehabilitation. Joan has been declared innocent of all charges for which she was burned as a heretic. Her judges have been declared "full of corruption, cozenage, fraud, and malice." Shaw highlights Charles' interest in removing the troublesome rumor that he was crowned by a witch.



The king again rings for his servant, this time the candle goes out and a silhouette is seen and the voice of Joan is heard. She assures Charles that he is dreaming, and she eagers to know the happenings of last twenty-five years. Charles happily informs that he is the Victorious not only that even today she will get the justice and her judges will be punished. Cauchon appears and complains the dishonors done to him. He was excommunicated and his body was flung into the sewer — all in order to praise Joan. Cauchon praises himself as pure-hearted, merciful, and faithful. Joan does not believe English are gone, and Dunois appears to assure Joan that he kept his words. He tells Joan that the French won by using Joan's fighting strategies. He apologizes for his inability to save her.

As the clock strikes, a rough, strange voice is heard and ruffian-like English soldier appears. He claims that he has come from Hell. He informs that he gets one day off each year because he gave Joan two sticks tied together as a cross when she was about to be burned. The soldier explains that Hell is not so bad. He informs about the presence of popes, kings and aristocrats in Hell.

Again the door opens, and an old, white-haired priest, de Stogumber, who has never recovered from witnessing Joan's burning at the stake enters. He constantly advises people to be kind. He fails to recognize Joan because he thinks Joan is burnt and dead, the Executioner appears and announces that Joan is more alive than de Stogumber because Joan's heart would not burn. Warwick enters to congratulate Joan on her rehabilitation and explains that her burning was nothing personal, but only a purely political necessity.

Suddenly, time moves and a stranger dressed in the fashion of 1920 appears. Everyone laughs for his comic dress. He ignores them reads from a recent proclamation that Joan The Maid has now been canonized and elevated to sainthood. He also reads memorial service will be celebrated every thirtieth of May, on the anniversary of her burning. Suddenly, statues of Joan are seen in front of cathedrals, and all kneel to offer Joan praise; then, one by one, each of them informs how he is praised in a various sectors of society.

Joan interrupts them by saying that she is declared as a saint now so, she can perform the miracles. Therefore, she asks them whether or not she should come back to life as a living woman and return to them. Everyone leaves with excuses and apologies as they prefer that she remain dead. All leave only Joan and English soldier remains. The soldier comforts Joan. He too leaves and at the end, Joan questions God that how long the will be ready to accept the saints.

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## 5.4 CHARACTER LIST

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### Joan of Arc

Joan of Arc, also known as The Maid Joan is the protagonist of the play, *Saint Joan*. This character is based upon the historical character. She is a strong-willed person straightly follows her heart. Shaw showcases her as a



sixteen- or seventeen-year-old, simple, uneducated but intelligent country girl. He in his preface explicates how Joan offers her ideas in terms of voices from heaven which guide to her. From the beginning of the play, she practices her superiority in terms of military tactics and strategy. Her military strategy is flawless. Throughout the play, she remains honest and innocent who simple believe in God's mission. She does not care about the hypocrisy of the others. The church and judges try to trap her and sentence her to the death, her clear and innocent answers make them feel guilty. She is inexperienced about the medieval society and the jealousies of the feudal system. Her belief in her own conscience and her refusal to yield to the authority of the Church establishes her as the first Protestant to be martyred by the Catholic Church.

### **Captain Robert de Baudricourt**

Robert de Baudricourt is a squire, a shield bearer who attended a knight from Joan's district, Lorraine. He is a "handsome and physically energetic" man with "no will of his own." He owns a farm but concerns about the hens non productivity of eggs. He is the first person who supports The Maid's plans. He offers Joan her first armor and her first chance to show her military skills. He is also the first one who criticizes her for her voices:

Sir Robert introduces the first skepticism about the voices:

JOAN: . . . you must not talk to me about my voices.

ROBERT: . . . How do you mean? Voices?

JOAN: I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.

ROBERT: They come from your imagination.

### **Bertrand de Poulengey (Polly)**

Bertrand de Poulengey is Joan's first follower who believes in her. He aids Joan in getting support from Robert de Baudricourt, and he accompanies her in the Battle of Orleans. He believes the Dauphin is trapped "like a rat in a corner" by the English and Burgundians.

### **The Archbishop of Rheims**

At first, the churchman, the Archbishop of Rheims senses Joan as a pious and innocent. He also believes that she is in close service with God. Continuously, Joan proves herself right. She successfully carries the responsibility of crowning the Dauphin king which disheartens the Archbishop and, ultimately, sides against her. during her trial, he realizes the church's cruelty but he keeps his mouth shut and continues to push Joan towards death.

### **Monseigneur de la Trémouille**

Monseigneur de la Trémouille, the Lord Chamberlain in the court of the Dauphin and also the "commander-in-chief" of the French forces. He has

been accustomed to bullying the Dauphin, and, therefore, he deeply resents Joan when she is given command of the French forces.

### **Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard)**

Gilles de Rais is a captain in the army and a devoted follower of The Maid even though he is not a religious person.

### **The Dauphin**

The Dauphin later crowned Charles VII in the Rheims cathedral. He is weak, weeping, and careless about his court and country. Joan forces him to behave like a king and claim authority. Charles is "quiet and sensible," and he doesn't "want to kill people." He simply wishes to be left alone to live peacefully.

### **Dunois (The Bastard)**

Dunois is the young, popular, and efficient leader of the French forces. He recognizes Joan's military genius after Orleans victory but in the final battle of Paris, he does not support her.

### **The Earl of Warwick**

The Earl of Warwick is the English earl in charge of the English forces and Joan's most bitter opponent. He sees Joan's simple opinions that the people should give their allegiance directly to the king as being a threat to the loyalty that the feudal lords demand from their serfs. He demands Joan's death as a way of retaining the status quo of the feudal system.

### **John de Stogumber**

John de Stogumber is the Earl of Warwick's chaplain. He is a vicious and ferocious accuser of Joan's. He thinks her as a witch who should be burned without delay. He does not understand the most complicated and subtle arguments concerning Joan's threat to the Church and to the aristocracy. Joan's death brings the dramatic change John de Stogumber as a person. After he has witnessed the burning of Joan, he becomes a weak and broken man. Throughout his life he does good deeds for others in order to lessen his guilt opposing The Maid.

### **Peter Cauchon**

Peter Cauchon is the academic theologian. He represents the rules and regulations, concerns related with the Church. He considers Joan as a direct threat to the Church's authority. He claims that he always respects the Church's opinion. He does not believe on Joan's claim that she directly communicates with God without church's help. For him, church is the highest authority after God.

### **The Inquisitor**

The Inquisitor looks kindly and sweet elderly gentleman. He represents the institutions of the Church. He gives lots of importance to church's

disciplines. He always considers the church is always right and its justice is correct. Always defends church and its decision. He esteems his complete belief in church's wisdom than individualism.

### **D'Estivet**

D'Estivet is the prosecutor against Joan. He is very impatient. His argument purely based on legalism.

### **Courcelles**

Courcelles is a young priest helps to compile some sixty-four charges against Joan. Some of his charges are lie but he still does not like that many of the charges like stealing of the Bishop's horse by Joan are dismissed by the court.

### **Brother Martin Ladvenu**

Brother Martin Ladvenu is a sympathetic young priest who wants to save Joan. He showcases his concerns about Joan's inability to understand that the charges are made against her to trap her. He feels her only sin is her ignorance. He finds ok if she will be imprisoned forever than sentenced executed. However, he holds up the cross for Joan to see while she is on her funeral stake. He is instrumental in Joan's restoration.

### **The Executioner**

The Executioner represents the horrors of the stake. His other importance is that he reports that The Maid's heart would not burn which makes the noblemen and the judges to feel guilty and fear about what they have done.

### **An English Soldier**

An English Soldier is the common soldier who makes a cross out of two sticks and gives it to Joan. For this deed, he receives one day a year out of Hell. His deed and reward which he gets due to which strongly stress the martyrdom of Joan and her close relation with God.

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## **5.5 THEMES:**

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### **Power**

Shaw's *Saint Joan* moves around some major power clashes. Joan is proved threat to the Catholic Church and the English feudal lords. She helps many people but especially, the King, Charles too leaves her for fear of losing the power. In the end, all conspire against her and she is proven as a witch and burnt in order to protect their power and authority. King Charles also feels her threat once, he is declared as the King of France. But he too feels jealous for Joan's popularity and power. Hence, he wants her to return to her family than fighting for him. The Catholic Church realizes Joan as a threat because she does not give importance to the church's authority and power. People Warwick considers that, "It is the

protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God." Cauchon tells that The Maid instills a sense of national pride into the common people toward their national origins: "France for the French, England for the English, Italy for the Italians . . . and so forth"; this is against to the current state of affairs in which the Church's rule is a universal rule-one realm — one kingdom of Christ — and not several divided nations with different rulers and different allegiances.

## Religion

Shaw through *Saint Joan* chronicles the life of a Catholic saint, Joan of Arc. Religion is a major theme. In the play, he talks about the clashes of Protestantism and Catholicism. There's also much discussion of popular religious topics such as faith, heresy, martyrdom, and repentance. Shaw pictures the rise of Protestantism with Joan. He highlights how the Catholic Church finds Joan as a threat to its authority and power. As church palys the role of mediator between God and people, Joan directly communicates God without mediator, church. In this way, the possession of the church is challenged by her. Hence, religious people like the Archbishop, Cauchon and the feudalists come together and conspire against Joan and finally burn her on stake. The Archbishop already guesses Joan's fate as she strictly follows religion. He says, "Child: you are in love with religion. [...] There is no harm in it [...] But there is danger." Joan is punished only as she does not follow the church's authority, as Cauchon says, "She is not a witch. She is a heretic."

## Women and Femininity

Shaw presents Joan as an early pioneer of women's equality. She wears men's clothes, becomes a soldier, and advises the most powerful men of her day, as Saint Joan details. She leads the wars and wins and helps the king to get his crown. She sets an example for all women to follow. Joan, dresses as a soldier and with crops hair. La Hire believes her to be an "angel dressed as a soldier." During her trial, the Archbishop says that she is not a respectable woman because "she does not wear women's clothes," and, thus, she is unwomanly." She clarifies the reason behind her men clothing. She says, "If I were to dress as a woman they would think of me as a woman; and then what would become of me? If I dress as a soldier they think of me as a soldier." She highlights the necessity of dressing as a soldier because if she will not, she will be raped. The issue of Joan's clothes becomes central to her trial and plays major role in her condemnation. Her participation in the war is also criticized as war always is the business of men. In comparison with Joan he Dauphin is no "manly" man — that is, he needs someone to order him about, as Joan will do. In this way, Shaw presents Joan as a powerful woman who is equal to male gender and sometimes, proves better than them.

## Society and Class

Shaw presents in his play, *Saint Joan* Medieval society which was rigidly divided in class and position. He investigates workings of intricate

structure of society. He tells that how in the society, the church is the considered the highest authority more powerful than king and nation. He also tells that how the king also can be indebted by the church. He showcases the power and the possession of the Catholic Church. He highlights the political relations of the church, kings and feudal lords, and the lot of common peasants and soldiers. He projects that everyone needs to follow this structure any one who tries to break it gets the punishment. Joan of Arc is punished because of the same.

### **Warfare**

*Saint Joan* is set in medieval France which was divided among the powerful forces like English, Burundians and Armagnacs. In the play, Joan is assigned a mission from God, to make war and unite France and heir to the French throne, Charles VII. Hence, she fights war as a soldier with a great leadership, methods and strategies she wins all the wars. Dunois comments that Joan loves war. But she lives with only purpose of completing God's command. Hence, she fights the war and unites France.

### **Pride**

Everybody in *Saint Joan* accuses Joan of pride but there is always a thin line between the pride and confidence which makes it unclear whether she's guilty of this or not. Despite the opposition, she always takes correct decision gets success. She also believes her God directs her. so she insists that idea that everyone should listen to her and do what she says. The rich and powerful, however, consider this as her pride.

### **Admiration**

Joan is able to inspire such admiration. She starts a movement of uniting country, shifting its entire power structure in France. She is admired by La Hire as a soldier. But many a time, she gets criticism instead of admiration. Eventually, admiration for her grew so much that the Catholic Church made her a saint. Saint Joan chronicles the life, death, and legacy of this inspirational figure.



## CRITICAL STUDY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S SAINT JOAN PART II

### Unit Structure:

6.0 Objective

6.1 Criticism

6.2 Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

6.3 Conclusion

6.4 Questions

6.5 Reference for further study

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVE:

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This unit discusses George Bernard Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*. It deals with the critical elements of the play.

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### 6.1 CRITICISM

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#### Drama, Tragedy, Biography, Historical Fiction

Shaw's *Saint Joan* is a tragedy because Joan's choices are the cause of her own destruction. Furthermore, Shaw calls the play as a chronicle play. He documents the life of Joan. He gives detailed information about her life journey right from Joan of Arc to Saint Joan. This makes the play a biography of Joan of Arc. The play can be considered as a historical drama as Shaw gives the exact detail of history. The play is based on historical people from and past events. Shaw uses a lot of historical events and personages for dramatic effect.

#### Title

The play is titled *Saint Joan*. It's about a saint whose name is Joan. Joan is a tragic heroine who gives her life for God's will. She lives and dies for the benefits of the French people. But the king, church's authority and feudal lords conspire against her to secure their power and authority. They burn her on the stake and label her as a witch. Joan is not recognized as a saint in her lifetime. She had a lot of fans, though. Many admired her courageous leadership and even believed that she'd worked miracles.

One of the great ironies of Joan's story is that she was branded a heretic and burnt alive by the very same organization that would recognize her as a saint over 400 years later. In his book, *Contradictory Characters*, Albert Bermel suggests that the title of Shaw's play, *Saint Joan* itself is ironic.

He says, "The play asks a riddle: When is a saint not a saint? The answer is: when she's alive." The last line of the play supports this theory. Joan appeals to God saying, "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

### **Ending with Epilogue**

Shaw ends his play, *Saint Joan* with an epilogue. He makes many important characters to appear and discuss Joan's legacy on earth. He introduces King Charles who clears Joan's name after twenty-five years of her execution. Shaw makes it clear that King Charles does so for his benefit because he does not want to be called a king helped by witch. Then various characters like Cauchon, Warlike, English Soldier and Dunius appear and they praise her. Shaw shows up a guy from the future (1920) to tell them all that the Church has recognized Joan as a saint. The ending is the high mark where the tragedy turns into comedy when everyone excuses the revival of Joan.

Shaw tells the importance of the epilogue. He says, "It was necessary by hook or crook to shew the canonized Joan as well as the incinerated one" (source). Shaw felt that if he didn't address in some way the fact that Joan was later recognized as a saint, he hadn't really done the job of chronicling Joan's story. She was one of those rare people whose death had just as large an effect on the world as her life. He expresses how Joan would be executed all over again if she would come to life. He showcases the reality where the characters all praise Joan after they find out she's been canonized. But the same characters do not want her to live again on the earth.

### **Overall Political Situation**

Shaw minutely depicts the medieval society and the various situations occurred in that time. He shows how during Joan's time, France was not united but divided in many towns. He refers The Hundred Years War of 1337. Basically, there were two families to claim the French throne – the House of Valois and the House of Plantagenet. The Valois thought they should rule France, while the Plantagenets claimed both France and England.

Before Joan approach to him, the Dauphin, Charles of Valois, was in pretty bad shape. He was surrounded by enemies. First there were the Burgundians. Charles had tried a couple times to make peace with their Duke, John the Fearless. Under the pretext of "peace talk" Charles's men rose up and assassinated him. The Burgundians were understandably kind of mad about the whole their-leader-getting-butchered thing. John's son, Philip the Good, allied Burgundy with Charles's big dog enemies, the English.

A huge chunk of northern France, including Paris, was occupied by the English. Charles didn't really take any decisive action to kick them out, even though he had more soldiers.



By the time Joan in 1429, France was in total chaos. People didn't think of themselves as French. There was no nationalism at all.

### Setting

Shaw sets *Saint Joan* in Medieval period. He skillfully chooses to set the actual scenes which are remarkable—rooms in castles, the bank of a river, a room in a cathedral, and a bedroom. Shaw chooses these places in a play where giant crazy battles, a grand coronation, and a massive public execution take place offstage.

### Writing Style—Shavian

Shaw's style of writing is famous among the critics as Shavian. *Saint Joan* has all of Shaw's trademarks. Many of the characters are hyperactive. These characters are interested in high complex concepts and enjoy debating them passionately as Cauchon, The Archbishop and Warwick discuss high and complex issues. For instance, in Joan's trial, it's Joan's beliefs vs. Church doctrine. Another good example is Warwick and Cauchon's discussions of Nationalism and Protestantism. *Saint Joan* is a Shavian as it turns the stage into a forum for ideas. Another hallmark of Shavian style is wittiness. Shaw mixes intellectual discussions with humor. Joan's trial is a good example of such writing.

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## 6.2 SYMBOLISM, IMAGERY, ALLEGORY

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### The Wind

Shaw uses natural symbol, the wind to prove Joan's miracle power. The wind changes directions on the banks of the Loire as Joan orders to fight. It convinces Dunois that it's a miracle. He's sure that Joan has been sent by God. he considers it as a symbolic of God's blessing on Joan.

### Joan's Heart

Joan's heart which left undamaged and unburned is another symbol of her eternal spirit. It showcases her spirit doesn't die along with her body when she is burnt. Her memory lives on to inspire many more generations to come.

### The Eggs

Shaw uses an ancient symbol of eggs which symbolizes birth. It also symbolizes Joan is a Christ figure. She is martyred just like Jesus. Robert de Baudricourt beats his poor Steward because there aren't any eggs. The hens do not lay eggs since Robert refused to see Joan. When Robert supplies Joan with the soldiers, she needs to go see the Dauphin. Immediately, the hens lay again.

### Rise of Nationalism in *Saint Joan*

Shaw marks the rise of nationalism in *Saint Joan*. Bishop Cauchon explains nationalism when he says, "I can express it only by such phrases

as France for the French, England for the English, Italy for the Italians, Spain for the Spanish, and so forth". He mixes Protestantism and nationalism. He does not understand that Joan is not disobeying anyone knowingly. She just wants to unite France by sending English away. She inspires the king and all noblemen to believe in unite France. Before her even these people do not consider themselves French.

### **Joan and Protestantism**

Shaw depicts Joan as the first protestant because she does not give importance to the church as a mediator between her and God. She considers God is powerful than church. Due to which church considers her as a threat. Bishop Cauchon tells everybody that, "The mighty structure of Catholic Christendom [...] may be [...] brought to barbarous ruin and desolation, by this arch heresy [...] Protestantism". Warwick who represents feudal lords defines Protestantism as "the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God". Joan does not condemn church but her believe in God's voices scares church because it removes its importance as a mediator. Hence, the church along with feudal lords can't allow this symbol of Protestantism to survive.

### **Saint Joan as an Epic Tragedy**

Shaw uses a very unique structure of the play than the common structure of the tragedy. The play is fine combination of the tragic elements with epic. The heroine of the play, Joan of Arc's tragic flaw is his ignorant about the others jealous nature. She strictly follows God's words and behaves accordingly. She fails to understand the others vicious objectives and benefits due to which she gets the death punishment for her direct relation with God. Joan is a tragic heroine who suffers because of her virtues. She also inspires king, noblemen and people of France to come together and fight for the nation as per the God's command. She plants the seed of nationalism and Protestantism among French who before do not recognise themselves as French people.

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## **6.3 CONCLUSION**

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George Bernard Shaw depicts the historical character of Joan of Arc. He chronicles her journey from a village girl of seventeen year to the sainthood in 1920. His play, *Saint Joan* offers the detailed information about the middle ages, medieval society, religion and political ideas. Shaw does not just develop the character of Joan but also informs the situation responsible for tragedy and clarifies why Joan is considered saint after her death. He also brings to the light the status of woman in medieval society. He also criticizes the society for its hypocrisy, cunning and self centered attitude due to which it fails to accept the saint.

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## 6.4 QUESTIONS

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- 1 What possible meanings, real and ironic, could Shaw mean by entitling his play *Saint Joan*? Discuss Shaw's possible views toward saints and miracles and voices.
- 2 Discuss what is meant by the terms "Protestantism" and "Nationalism," as used by Cauchon and Warwick. How do each of the terms threaten either the Church or the aristocracy?
- 3 Discuss in detail the function of the Epilogue. Consider the play without the Epilogue and how its absence would change the nature of the play.
- 4 critically analyze the theme of religion and feminism in George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan*?

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## 6.5 REFERENCES

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## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF T.S. ELIOT'S 'THE HIPPOPOTAMUS' AND 'PORTRAIT OF A LADY' & W.B. YEATS'S 'THE SECOND COMING' AND 'A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER'

### Unit Structure:

7.0 Objectives

7.1 T.S. Eliot

7.2 The Hippopotamus

7.3 Portrait of a Lady

7.4 W.B. Yeats (1865–1939)

7.5 The Second Coming

7.6 Prayer for My Daughter

7.7 Works Cited

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### 7.0 OBJECTIVES:

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- i. To introduce two prominent poets of 20<sup>th</sup> century T.S Eliot and W.B Yeats
- ii. To study prescribed poems of T.S Eliot and W.B Yeats
- iii. To trace the elements of modernism in prescribed poems

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### 7.1 T.S. ELIOT (1888-1965):

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Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri. He lived 18 years in St. Louis and later attended Harvard University. T.S. Eliot after receiving his undergraduate and master's degrees left the United States for the Sorbonne in 1910. Meanwhile he had contributed several poems to the *Harvard Advocate*. He returned back to Harvard after a year to pursue a Doctorate in Philosophy but somehow he couldn't do it and he returned to Europe and settled in England. Eliot married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and began working in London as a teacher and later for Lloyd's Bank. In London Eliot came under the influence of his contemporary Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound had recognised Eliot's poetic genius and assisted him in the publication of his works. The most notable one is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in *Poetry* in 1915. *Prufrock and Other Observations* was Eliot's first book of poems published in

1917 and this made him the renowned poet of the avant-garde. *The Waste Land* published in 1922 recognised him as the single most influential poetic work of the twentieth century. Thereafter Eliot became the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism in the countries that speak English. His poems usually express his deep pain and showcase the disillusionment of man in the Victorian era. Eliot was a critic and he had a massive impact on contemporary literary taste and propounding views which were increasingly based in social and religious conservatism.

Critical Analysis of T.S. Eliot's  
'The Hippopotamus' and  
'Portrait of a Lady' & W.B.  
Yeats's 'The Second Coming'  
and 'A Prayer for My  
Daughter'

T.S. Eliot wrote numerous poems and also attained recognition as an essayist. He wrote on literary theory and criticism, social, philosophical, and theological matters as well. T.S. Eliot's other major works include: *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1943); his books of literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *After Strange Gods* (1934), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1940). Eliot was also a significant playwright, and his works include *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*.

T.S. Eliot became a British citizen in 1927 and for long connected with the publishing house of Faber & Faber, where he published many younger poets, and eventually became director of the firm. Eliot got separated from his first wife in 1933, and remarried Valerie Fletcher in 1956. T. S. Eliot is the recipient of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954 and on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1965 he bid adieu to the world.

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## 7.2 THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

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THE broad-backed hippopotamus

Rests on his belly in the mud;

Although he seems so firm to us

He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh-and-blood is weak and frail,

Susceptible to nervous shock;

While the True Church can never fail

For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err

In compassing material ends,

While the True Church need never stir

To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach  
The mango on the mango-tree;  
But fruits of pomegranate and peach  
Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice  
Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,  
But every week we hear rejoice  
The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day  
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;  
God works in a mysterious way--  
The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing  
Ascending from the damp savannas,  
And quiring angels round him sing  
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean  
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,  
Among the saints he shall be seen  
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,  
By all the martyr'd virgins kist,  
While the True Church remains below  
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

T.S. Eliot's poem '*The Hippopotamus*' makes a comparison between a hippopotamus and the Church of England. He uses metaphor and satire in this poem to express his unrest. In '*The Hippopotamus*', Eliot actually expresses his negative feelings towards the Church of England. He directly makes comparison between two objects or ideas, i.e. the Church of England and a hippopotamus. Eliot also uses satire, to present his ideas in a way that appears to be the opposite of his actual beliefs. Primarily, the hippo and the Church are completely separate entities as the hippo is



clumsy, frail and flawed, whereas the church is gracious and revered. Later we see that the hippo rises above the Church both literally and symbolically.

In the poem the speaker expresses that the hippo makes mistakes while living its life, whereas the Church never struggles to receive the fruits of 'pomegranate and peach' that 'Refresh the Church from over sea.' Here in the poem the hippo represents the common man who struggles and works hard to make a living. The speaker further points out that the church doesn't do any kind of hard work as it keeps on receiving money from its parishioners, receives support, funds, and praise from its spiritual patrons and volunteers. According to the poet, the Church is incapable of being innocent as the hippopotamus.

Eliot's true feelings are revealed in the end of the poem. Later in the poem we see that the hippo, with all its flaws and innocence, ultimately rises to Heaven, leaving behind the True Church "below wrapt in the old miasmal mist." This line indicates that the hippo can overcome all its situations and achieve a life of high value whereas the Church will always be a worldly thing that remains corrupt. He tries to convey to the people that the one who strive to be good individuals shall have the possibility of going to Heaven after their demise. They will overcome their sufferings in life and rise to a kingdom in heaven. He also warns the Church and its corrupt leaders and tells the people that they will forever be trapped into the shallow materialism of this world filled with sin.

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'Portrait of a Lady' & W.B.  
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### 7.3 PORTRAIT OF A LADY

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Thou hast committed —  
Fornication: but that was in another country,  
And besides, the wench is dead.  
(The Jew of Malta)

I

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon  
You have the scene arrange itself — as it will seem to do—  
With "I have saved this afternoon for you";  
And four wax candles in the darkened room,  
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,  
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb  
Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.  
We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole  
Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.  
"So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul  
Should be resurrected only among friends  
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom

That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room."  
—And so the conversation slips  
Among velleities and carefully caught regrets  
Through attenuated tones of violins  
Mingled with remote cornets  
And begins.

"You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends,  
And how, how rare and strange it is, to find  
In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends,  
(For indeed I do not love it ... you knew? you are not blind!  
How keen you are!)

To find a friend who has these qualities,  
Who has, and gives  
Those qualities upon which friendship lives.  
How much it means that I say this to you —  
Without these friendships — life, what *cauchemar*!"

Among the winding of the violins  
And the ariettes  
Of cracked cornets  
Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins  
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,  
Capricious monotone  
That is at least one definite "false note."  
— Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,  
Admire the monuments,  
Discuss the late events,  
Correct our watches by the public clocks.  
Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks.

## II

Now that lilacs are in bloom  
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room  
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.  
"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know

What life is, you who hold it in your hands";  
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)  
"You let it flow from you, you let it flow,  
And youth is cruel, and has no remorse  
And smiles at situations which it cannot see."  
I smile, of course,  
And go on drinking tea.  
"Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall  
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,  
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world  
To be wonderful and youthful, after all."

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune  
Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:  
"I am always sure that you understand  
My feelings, always sure that you feel,  
Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.

You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.  
You will go on, and when you have prevailed  
You can say: at this point many a one has failed.

But what have I, but what have I, my friend,  
To give you, what can you receive from me?  
Only the friendship and the sympathy  
Of one about to reach her journey's end.

I shall sit here, serving tea to friends ...."

I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends  
For what she has said to me?  
You will see me any morning in the park  
Reading the comics and the sporting page.  
Particularly I remark.  
An English countess goes upon the stage.

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A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,  
Another bank defaulter has confessed.  
I keep my countenance,  
I remain self-possessed  
Except when a street-piano, mechanical and tired  
Reiterates some worn-out common song  
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden  
Recalling things that other people have desired.  
Are these ideas right or wrong?

### III

The October night comes down; returning as before  
Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease  
I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door  
And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.  
"And so you are going abroad; and when do you return?  
But that's a useless question.  
You hardly know when you are coming back,  
You will find so much to learn."  
My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac.

"Perhaps you can write to me."  
My self-possession flares up for a second;  
*This* is as I had reckoned.  
"I have been wondering frequently of late  
(But our beginnings never know our ends!)  
Why we have not developed into friends."  
I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark  
Suddenly, his expression in a glass.  
My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.

"For everybody said so, all our friends,  
They all were sure our feelings would relate  
So closely! I myself can hardly understand.  
We must leave it now to fate.

You will write, at any rate.  
 Perhaps it is not too late.  
 I shall sit here, serving tea to friends."  
 And I must borrow every changing shape  
 To find expression ... dance, dance  
 Like a dancing bear,  
 Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.  
 Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance—  
 Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,  
 Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;  
 Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand  
 With the smoke coming down above the housetops;  
 Doubtful, for quite a while  
 Not knowing what to feel or if I understand  
 Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon ...  
 Would she not have the advantage, after all?  
 This music is successful with a "dying fall"  
 Now that we talk of dying—  
 And should I have the right to smile?

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The poem *Portrait of a Lady* written by T.S. Eliot is a three-part poem that is divided into uneven stanzas. It portrays the relationship between an insensitive young man and a sensitive older woman who craves for love. The poem takes the reader through three different meetings between the two. In each of the meetings it is observed that the older woman makes proclamations about the young man's character and her longing for genuine relationships. On the other side we witness the young man psychologically shoves his back against her. Though in the poem he doesn't announce it, but through his narration it is evident that he is an insensitive man.

The Part I has two stanzas and in the first stanza of the poem the young man is the speaker who sets the scene. He remembers how he and his female companion were in a dark room that was lit by four candles. He feels that things had come together to create a dark atmosphere and was ardently hot. In the poem "Juliet's tomb" is compared to the dark atmosphere where the older lady waited in a death-like state for her Romeo. We could see both of them had returned from a lovely concert and they get into a conversation about Chopin's performance and the divine music. Later the speaker narrates the scene as a whole and states that this was how the conversation fell and alluded to "velleities" or feelings not acted upon and regrets. In the next stanza, the lady's words are conveyed. She expresses her love and appreciation for her friends and tells

the young man how dear they are to her. She also tells him that it is rare and strange to genuine and true friends. She says life is complex and filled with insignificant trivialities but her friends help her to ease her problems. Further she stops speaking about the general friends and starts speaking about the young man. She compares him as one of her close friend and she feels lucky to have found him. The older lady knows that her life without friends will be difficult to survive. The young man doesn't believe the older lady's words as for him they are not genuine. Her words are not resembling to the sweetness of the violins for they strike a "false note". Later he steps out and shake off the trance of tobacco which indicates his repetitive efforts in finding ways to forget his boredom.

The Part II of '*Portrait of a Lady*' starts with a new scene, where the speaker regards her voice as an "out-of-tune" broken violin which indicates his attitude towards the older lady. He says, the "lilacs are in bloom", while his older female companion has some of these same flowers in her room and she swindles with them while she speaks. She addresses the young man as "my friend" and tells him that he does not realize his life. She makes an attempt to support the speaker to understand life and also points out how he's controlling it. According to the lady he is just allowing his life to "flow from you" and doesn't fully appreciate the youth that he has. The older lady advises him to take care of his youth before it's gone but the man is seen taking it lightly. She asks, rhetorically, what she has that she can give him and answers her own question saying that she can give him "the friendship and the sympathy". Further, the older lady thinks about her own youth in Paris in the spring, where she experiences "immeasurably at peace" and "wonderful and youthful, after all". The young man takes pride being "self-possessed". Later he overhears the sounds of a street musician and also smells the hyacinths in the garden that conveys the notion of love which "other people have desired". Further we can find him in the state of dilemma and wonders if these "ideas" of love and companionship are "right or wrong".

In the Part III of the poem the setting changes again and the fall is manifested. Though the season has come as usual still the young man feels a little less at comfort. The woman confesses that she can "hardly understand" why things are the way they are and her self-pity is again overlaid with the expression "I shall sit here, serving tea to friends". The young man goes to meet the woman and bid her good bye and she speaks to him, enquiring when he's going to return. She knows she will not get any response from him as she realizes that he himself doesn't know when he's returning. Further, in the poem the young man is seen worried by the thought of her dying, and surprised by his own concern. For him there is the possibility that she's going to pass away and leave him "sitting pen in hand". At the end the speaker sees that death has come and he wonders whether he still has the "right to smile"?



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## 7.4 W.B. YEATS(1865–1939)

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William Butler Yeats was the son of a well-known Irish painter, John Butler Yeats and born in Dublin, Ireland, on June 13, 1865. He spent his childhood in County Sligo, where his parents were raised, and later in London. He returned to Dublin at the age of fifteen to continue his education and study painting, but learnt that he preferred poetry than painting. Yeats involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period. The Celtic Revival pursued to support the spirit of Ireland's native heritage. Yeats poetry was influenced by the Irish revolutionary Maud Gonne, whom he met in 1889. Maud Gonne was famous for her passionate nationalist politics and her beauty. Though she married another man in 1903 and grew apart from Yeats but still she remained a powerful figure in his poetry. Eventually Yeats too got married to Georgie Hyde Lees.

Yeats was intensely involved in politics in Ireland, and in the twenties, in spite of Irish independence from England. His verse echoed a distrust about the political situation in his country and the rest of Europe. Yeats work after 1910 was strongly influenced by Ezra Pound. Though he became more modern in its concision and imagery, but Yeats never abandoned his strict adherence to traditional verse forms. His poetry continued to grow stronger as he grew older. Yeats was appointed as a senator of the Irish Free State in 1922. He is renowned as an important cultural leader, a playwright and an utmost poet. W. B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and at the age of Seventy-three he died in 1939.

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## 7.5 THE SECOND COMING

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Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

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A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

“*The Second Coming*” is one of W.B. Yeats’s most renowned poem. It is the most ambiguous poem which is tough to comprehend because of its terrifying language and scenes. The title suggests the new incarnation of God who is a destructive and has already knocked at the door. The poem is divided into two sections, the first part talks about the problems and the barrenness of the modern world, whereas the second part depicts the distressing representation of the world in the near future. This poem is derived from the inner sadness of Yeats.

The poet in the poem *The Second Coming* refers to a terrifying scene: the falcon, turning in a widening “gyre” and cannot hear the falconer.” The poet compares the civilisation to the rotating gyre, which is changing. Further the mankind is compared to a Falcon and the God to the Falconer. He asserts that the Mankind has lost touch with the falconer i.e., man is not listening to God and is roaming free. Further he describes the chaos in the world as expressed in the poem “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” The 20<sup>th</sup> century modern men have lost the centre of the universe and are so innocent that they have to bear tensions and miserable conditions. The innocent people have become silent and submissive to their fate whereas the cruel people are in power. The poet witnesses “The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned.” The wave of violence is washing over the land and the mankind is in distress. Through the poem, Yeats tries to portray the frustrations and dissatisfaction of the modern man with the world. The poet also represents the loss of moral values, spirituality, order, faith, obedience and innocence in the mankind. He not only points out the lack of convictions but also stresses on the worst people who are “full of passionate intensity.”

In the second part the poet tries to portray the terrifying picture of the world in the future. He states, the world is near to a revelation; “Surely the Second Coming is at hand.” The poet is disturbed by a vast image of the *Spiritus Mundi*, it has the body of lion, the head of man and the eyes like a sun. He envisions a giant sphinx moving in the desert. The fearful birds are flapping around casting shadows on the desert sand. The darkness drops again and the poet knows that the sphinx’s twenty centuries of “stony sleep” have been made a dreadful as the Sphinx is getting ready to be in a cradle. He says the world was sleeping for twenty years and now something terrible is going to happen. The second

assumption in the poem is of a monstrous Second Coming who is a destructor. It is not the second coming of Jesus Christ that we know written in the Holy Bible. It is the second coming of a new God, a "rough beast," who is slouching itself to take birth towards Bethlehem.

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## 7.6 PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

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Once more the storm is howling, and half hid  
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill  
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,  
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour  
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,  
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream  
In the elms above the flooded stream;  
Imagining in excited reverie  
That the future years had come,  
Dancing to a frenzied drum,  
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not  
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,  
Being made beautiful overmuch,  
Consider beauty a sufficient end,  
Lose natural kindness and maybe  
The heart-revealing intimacy  
That chooses right, and never find a friend.

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull  
And later had much trouble from a fool,  
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,  
Being fatherless could have her way  
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.  
It's certain that fine women eat  
A crazy salad with their meat  
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;  
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned  
By those that are not entirely beautiful;  
Yet many, that have played the fool  
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,  
And many a poor man that has roved,  
Loved and thought himself beloved,  
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

May she become a flourishing hidden tree  
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,  
And have no business but dispensing round  
Their magnanimities of sound,  
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,  
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.  
O may she live like some green laurel  
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,  
The sort of beauty that I have approved,  
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,  
Yet knows that to be choked with hate  
May well be of all evil chances chief.  
If there's no hatred in a mind  
Assault and battery of the wind  
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,  
So let her think opinions are accursed.  
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born  
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,  
Because of her opinionated mind  
Barter that horn and every good  
By quiet natures understood  
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,  
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;  
She can, though every face should scowl  
And every windy quarter howl  
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;  
For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
Peddled in the thoroughfares.  
How but in custom and in ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

W. B. Yeats poem '*A Prayer for my Daughter*' represents the theme of love and anxiety of a father towards his daughter. It also presents the poet's expectations and hopes for his daughter. The poets expect her to become a very beautiful woman with a virtuous soul. The opening lines of the poem '*A Prayer for My Daughter*' depicts the child sleeping in a cradle. The child sleeps innocently amidst the "howling storm" outside,

but Yeats couldn't relax due to the storm that is going on within him. The storm howling in the poem signifies destruction. The wind bred in the Atlantic has no hindrances excluding the estate of Lady Gregory, which denotes to the poet's patroness, and a bare hill. The poet is worried by the storm i.e. outside world and its impact on his daughter. The poet prays to God to protect his daughter from both the physical and political storm that are brewing across Ireland.

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In the second stanza portrays Yeats's fears about the future. He overhears the sea screaming upon the tower, under the bridge, and elms above the flooded stream which troubles him more. The word "Scream" and the "flooded stream" signify the poet's worry for his daughter. The poet envisions the future coming out of the sea and dances to the frenzied drum. It is denoting the fear of the poet associated to war and murder. Further the poet compares the "murderous innocence" with the world and his daughter.

In the third stanza, the poet prays for his daughter to be gifted with beauty and doesn't want her beauty to distraught stranger's eyes. That means he doesn't want her daughter to have that beauty which will make her mad or others mad. Neither he wants her to be dependent on her beauty for everything nor to be using it for some gain. Further, he doesn't want her to become proud of her beauty and spend her time gazing at the mirror in vain. The poet says these women lose their kind nature as well as their capability to be truly intimate and good. Beauty is the reason that they never make friends or find a romantic right partner.

In stanza four, Yeats confirms his view on beauty and also tries to prove it as a source of trouble and destruction. The poet makes reference to Helen of Troy who was considered to be the most beautiful woman on earth in Greek mythology. She was chosen to be a king's wife but she found life boring with him. Later Helen suffers in the hands of her lover, Paris. He describes about how her beauty brought the fate upon her and many others. The reference is made to the queen of Aphrodite who chose Hephaestus, a crippled blacksmith, as her husband. The poet says beautiful women waste their natural beauty by doing crazy things in life. The poet talks about the eating habits of these beautiful women and he wonders if the beautiful women eat crazy salad with their meat. The poet tries to refer this habit as a stupid decision which brings misery forever. "The rich Horn of Plenty" indicates courtesy that is no more found in these women who make stupid decisions.

In stanza five, the poet continues with what he desires his daughter to possess. He is more insisting on the internal beauty than external beauty. He wishes his daughter to learn to be compassionate. He says heart is not gifted it has to be earned. Further he refers to the men who believed to love and loved by the beautiful women faced disappointment in life. They often used to compare to those men found love in the compassionate women. Moreover, he says courteous people attract hearts than those with beauty.

In stanza six, Yeats continues to talk about his expectations from his daughter. As she grew up, he wants her to be contented in life. He wants her to grow into “a flourishing hidden tree” and her thoughts like a “green linnet”. He refers to its innocence and cheerfulness which he looks forward to see in his daughter. He wants her to be satisfied with herself, and spread her happiness with others. Further, he wants her to live like a “laurel” rooted in a particular place that signifies deep rooted in the tradition.

In stanza seven, Yeats endures to talk about women. He believes that kind, self-contained, traditionally rooted women are honest. The poet considers hatred to be the cause of all evil and prays that his daughters should not fall prey to evil. Further, the poet wants his daughter to have a mind that has no place for hatred. He says if a mind is free of hatred, then the destruction of the wind can never rip the finch from the tree branch. Further, he states just as the storm outside can't tear the green linnet from the leaf same way nothing can breakdown a strong woman.

In stanza eight, the poet appeals his daughter to ignore passion and wild feelings that are often the weakness of beautiful women. He considers the intellectual hatred the worst one. He wants her daughter to keep her opinion away and tells her that woman should be moderate because people who love deeply, could hate deeply too. The poet wants his daughter to know that hatred often destroys the lives of the people and they end up doing cruel things. He wishes his daughter to experience neither disappointment nor hatred.

In the ninth stanza the poet continues to describe the impact of hatred. He urges his daughter to concentrate on the benefit of staying away from hatred. He says once hatred is driven out, the soul could recover its innocence and only then the soul would be free to discover that it is “self-delighting”, “Self-appeasing” and “self-affrighting”. According to the poet, the ideal woman makes everyone happy, despite all odds which refers to storms of hardships that come in her voyage. The poet says if the woman has a clear mind then she will be a stronghold for people around her and her will would be that of heavens i.e. will of God.

In the last stanza, the poet expresses his ultimate wish and prays that his daughter to be married to a good husband. He should take his daughter to a home where everything is done according to the customs and ceremony. The poet elaborates that ‘Ceremony’ is a name for the rich bounty of nature, and ‘Custom’ for the growing laurel tree. The poet believes that neither arrogance nor hatred of common folks could be found in him. He desires to see morality and purity in his daughter. Further, the poet does not want her to live an immoral life and he concludes the poem by stating that his daughter would be rooted in spiritual values like a ‘laurel tree’.

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## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF W.H. AUDEN'S 'THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES' AND 'IN MEMORY OF W.B. YEATS' & WILFRED OWEN'S 'INSENSIBILITY' AND 'STRANGE MEETING'

### Unit Structure:

8.0 Objectives

8.1 W. H. Auden (1907-1973)

8.2 The Shield of Achilles

8.3 In Memory of W. B. Yeats

8.4 Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)

8.5 Insensibility

8.6 Strange Meeting

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### 8.0 OBJECTIVES:

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- i. To introduce two prominent poets of 20<sup>th</sup> century T.S Eliot and W.B Yeats
- ii. To study prescribed poems of T.S Eliot and W.B Yeats
- iii. To trace the elements of modernism in prescribed poems

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### 8.1 W. H. AUDEN (1907-1973):

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Wystan Hugh Auden was considered the greatest English poet of the twentieth century. He was born on February 21, 1907 in York, England and later he relocated to Birmingham for education at Christ Church, Oxford. He was influenced by the renowned poets such as Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Old English verse. W. H. Auden's talent as a poet was instantly apparent during his days in Oxford. He found true friendship for lifetime in Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood.

W. H. Auden's collection *Poems* was privately printed in 1928 and in 1930 another collection titled *Poems* was published that made him the leading voice of a new generation of poets. He is usually admired for his unsurpassed technical virtuosity, his intellect and his ability to write

poems in nearly every imaginable verse form. He used to write about the popular culture, current events, vernacular speech, social and political theories, scientific information variety of literatures, art forms and his travels. He is also renowned for mimicking the writing styles of Dickinson, W. B. Yeats, and Henry James.

Critical Analysis of W.H. Auden's 'The Shield of Achilles' and 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' & Wilfred Owen's 'Insensibility' and 'Strange Meeting'

W. H. Auden also served in the Spanish Civil war. In 1939, he moved to the United States, met his lover, Chester Kallman, and later became an American citizen. W. H. Auden was not only a prolific writer but also a noted playwright, lyricist, editor, and essayist. He also served as a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1954 to 1973. W. H. Auden died on September 29, 1973 in Vienna.

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## 8.2 THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

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She looked over his shoulder  
For vines and olive trees,  
Marble well-governed cities  
And ships upon untamed seas,  
But there on the shining metal  
His hands had put instead  
An artificial wilderness  
And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,  
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,  
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,  
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood  
An unintelligible multitude,  
A million eyes, a million boots in line,  
Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face  
Proved by statistics that some cause was just  
In tones as dry and level as the place:  
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;  
Column by column in a cloud of dust  
They marched away enduring a belief  
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

She looked over his shoulder  
For ritual pieties,  
White flower-garlanded heifers,  
Libation and sacrifice,  
But there on the shining metal  
Where the altar should have been,  
She saw by his flickering forge-light  
Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot  
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)  
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:

A crowd of ordinary decent folk  
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke  
As three pale figures were led forth and bound  
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all  
That carries weight and always weighs the same  
Lay in the hands of others; they were small  
And could not hope for help and no help came:  
What their foes like to do was done, their shame  
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride  
And died as men before their bodies died.

She looked over his shoulder  
For athletes at their games,  
Men and women in a dance  
Moving their sweet limbs  
Quick, quick, to music,  
But there on the shining shield  
His hands had set no dancing-floor  
But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,  
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird  
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:  
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,  
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard  
Of any world where promises were kept,  
Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,  
Hephaestos, hobbled away,  
Thetis of the shining breasts  
Cried out in dismay  
At what the god had wrought  
To please her son, the strong  
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles  
Who would not live long.

W. H. Auden's poem 'The Shield of Achilles' is the title poem published in the volume of poems entitled *The Shield of Achilles* in 1955. The poem is written in three parts and each part consists of three stanzas which sums to nine stanzas. It is a fine lyrical poem. In the poem Auden puts the classical myth of Achilles and his shield to the service of his art. He being a modern poet tries to bring out the contrast between the heroic past and the unheroic present through the poem. Auden's is renowned for his expertise in handling of the myth and underlying the despair, brutality and barrenness of the modern outlook.

The title 'The Shield of Achilles' derived its theme from Homer's epic poem *Iliad* and Auden signifies the Homeric theme in a mock-heroic way. The poem presents the combination of the classical world with the modern

world. It depicts the futility of the modern world. The poem, '*The Shield of Achilles*', makes an imaginary description of what Thetis noticed on the shield of her son. According to Greek mythology, Thetis was a sea-goddess and the mother of Achilles. Achilles was the greatest of the Greek heroes in the Trojan War. She requested Hephaestus, the armor-maker of gods to make an armor and a shield for Achilles. Hephaestus made the shield and also engraved images that reflects the futility of the war-ridden world on the shield. The poet talks about the images portrayed on the shield by Hephaestus and denotes the miserable conditions in the modern world. The poem contains several themes such as war, heroism, modernity, futility, death, destruction, and apathy of modern men. In the poem the shield of Achilles is a symbol of heroism and throws light on the hollowness of heroism.

In the opening stanza of the poem, '*The Shield of Achilles*', Thetis, one of the sea deities, according to Greek mythology, is shown looking over Hephaestus's shoulder and the shield of Achilles he is engraving images on. She expected he had engraved traditional images of ancient Greece, such as vineyards, olive woods, marble places, peaceful cities, sailed ships on wine-dark seas, etc. Hephaestus surprised her by not engraving any traditional images on the shield instead the image of the miserable world and the artificial condition of life was seen on it.

Thetis states it was under a sky that was lead-colored and domineering that she could see the plain which was dull, bare, and brown. It had no blade of grass, any sign of neighbourhood, no food and no place to sit. Further she says, there stood together a million soldiers waiting for their signals and had no expressions at all.

Thereafter, in the third stanza of '*The Shield of Achilles*', Thetis notices that just then a voice on a loudspeaker or wireless set. She hears the announcement of numerical facts to justify that action was fair and required. As soon as the soldiers heard the message, they marched away from that place. The poet refers to a place where they can mourn and express their emotions but it is sad to discover that there is no such place in the modern world.

In the fourth stanza of the poem, Thetis turns her eyes from that image and looked for images of religious rites. She wanted to have a look on images either of young cows decorated with white flower garlands or that of men offering any other sacrifice to the almighty God. Thetis was surprised to find no such image reference on the shield of Achilles which was far from her expectation. This made her disheartened.

In the fifth stanza, Thetis feels there should have been an altar but she noticed the image of a selected spot enclosed with barbed wire fences. The poet indicates the place that is illogically selected or taken away from a person. She also notices the bored officials and soldiers who are alert on the guard. Further she also witnesses an apathetic crowd of ordinary people who are observing the carrying of three pale men and binding them to the three posts for execution.

In the sixth stanza of '*The Shield of Achilles*', Thetis notices that all the people of the imagined world were in the power of their dictatorial rulers. She could sense that their humiliation was the worst possible in the situation as they had lost their self-esteem as responsible citizens. They often are found being dependent on others rather than on themselves. Moreover, they are too weak in their thoughts and could not anticipation for any help. These people are conscious of their deeds and are aware that none will come to help them as well. Thereafter, the poet describes their pride turned to dust after their death.

In the seventh stanza, Thetis then turned her eyes to gaze for an image of athletes taking part in games, merry men and women dancing together to the tune of music but, instead of them, she found a bird flying up to a place of a field overgrown with weeds. Here, the poet uses a metaphor in 'a weed-choked field', that compares field to a human being. It indicates that everywhere it is seen that the field is choking because of the overgrown weeds. Also the overgrowth of weeds denotes to the fact that humans had become insensitive with the nature.

In the stanza Eight, Thetis saw a mischievous boy dressed in ragged clothes in that empty field. She also observed a bird flying up to a safe place so as to protect from the cruel boy's aim. The poet compares the cruel boy coming from the world where crime is done every now and then. He belongs to the such a place in which girls are being raped every now and then. This boy is unaware of any noble world in which people are sensitive, sympathetic, caring, respect each other and their promises are lasting forever. This stanza portrays a true and cruel image of the modern world.

In concluding part of the poem, the poet says that Hephaestus walked away lamely, leaving the shield in his work-shop. And Thetis, cried out in disappointment as she knew that Achilles, would not live long. The poet makes use of epithets in the poem describing Achilles - 'Iron-hearted' and 'man-slaying' and it relates to modern men. He says the modern man has no feelings for anyone and they are cruelly slaughtering each other in the name of nationalism. Through this poem, Auden presents the legendary shield as a magic mirror, revealing the future as well as the present and displaying what is true rather than what is desired.

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### 8.3 IN MEMORY OF W. B. YEATS

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#### I

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,  
And snow disfigured the public statues;  
The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.  
What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness  
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,

The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;  
By mourning tongues  
The death of the poet was kept from his poems.

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,  
An afternoon of nurses and rumours;  
The provinces of his body revolted,  
The squares of his mind were empty,  
Silence invaded the suburbs,  
The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities  
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,  
To find his happiness in another kind of wood  
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.  
The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living.

But in the importance and noise of to-morrow  
When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the bourse,  
And the poor have the sufferings to which they are fairly accustomed  
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom  
A few thousand will think of this day  
As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.

What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

## II

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:  
The parish of rich women, physical decay,  
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.  
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,  
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

## III

Earth, receive an honoured guest:  
William Yeats is laid to rest.  
Let the Irish vessel lie  
Emptied of its poetry.

In the nightmare of the dark  
All the dogs of Europe bark,  
And the living nations wait,  
Each sequestered in its hate;

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Achilles' and 'In Memory of  
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Meeting'

Intellectual disgrace  
Stares from every human face,  
And the seas of pity lie  
Locked and frozen in each eye.

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,  
Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’ is a beautiful poem written by W. H. Auden in 1939. This poem is an elegy for W.B. Yeats. It is divided into three parts with six stanzas in Part I, one stanza in Part II and six stanzas in Part III. This also reflects the role and place of the poetry in the modern world.

#### **PART I:**

In the first section, Auden refers to the death of W. B. Yeats ‘in the dead of winter’. It is the time when the brooks were all frozen, airports deserted and snow disfigured the public statues. The chilling cold was unbearable and even the mercury in the thermometers dropped. The poet is hurt by the scenes of day to day life that continues to go on even though the world has lost a great poet. He says the wolves are still running through the forests and the ‘peasant river’ is untempted by the more ‘fashionable quays’. The poet describes the illness and dying state of Yeats and was saddened to see the world i.e. Ireland was normal. The poet says, ‘The death of the poet was kept from his poems’ which means the poetry Yeats has now died but the fact is his poetry remains perfect. He is referring to the human response to the Yeats’s death.

Auden stresses on the immortality of the poet W.B. Yeats. It is the readers who read and keep the poet alive. He describes Yeats’s death and also states that after his death, Yeats ‘became his admirers’: that means Yeats renewed into whatever his readers decided he was. He states that when readers meet his poems his death will not contemplate on their minds. The third stanza of the poem gives the reader a very human representation of Yeats’ death and his last moments spent around nurses in the hospital. The poet describes his last moments as he says, ‘The provinces of his body revolted’, which shows how his body was revolting against itself just like a war.



The poet praises Yeats's work and is glad that his work is 'scattered' all over the world. He says his readers find his work interesting and surprising which at times Yeats himself is not aware of it. Auden stressed on the fact that the death of the author may be a physical passing but the reader can keep him alive through his work. This also hints on the fact that the worthiness of an author lies with the reader rather than the author. The poet intends to say that Yeats' memory lived on in those who loved his written works. Further, Auden says that the words of a dead man or a poet is 'modified in the guts of the living': which means that readers can change the meaning and interpretation of the poem as per their requirements and desires.

Auden underlines the theme of life after death by speaking about Yeats in the present tense in this stanza. The poet speaks about the unfortunate image of the world and civilization. He articulates that all are in the 'cell of himself' where they are nearly 'convinced', of their own liberty. The poet mentions that Yeats' death is only one more moment of unpleasantness in the world and it passes just like everything else does.

Auden concludes the Part I of 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' by stating that the world will go on tomorrow as usual. 'A few thousand will think of this day' which means only few will remember the poet. The poet says, 'one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual' i.e. it is like a day on which one does something out of the ordinary. He expresses that nature goes on without considering that something has happened.

## **PART II:**

Auden speaks to the dead poet Yeats. He addresses Yeats calling him 'you' and says that 'your gift survived it all', it outlasted 'your' physical decay and the 'parish of rich women'. He reminds him about the 'Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry'. He says Ireland is still as mad as it was before and his poetry has made no difference in it.

He says, 'You were silly like us' which means Yeats was pointless like us. The poet initiates to think about Yeats' poetry more largely rather than thinking about the poet specifically. He states 'Ireland has her madness and her weather still', which expresses the conditions of Ireland. Auden clarifies Yeats' poetry changed nothing in the world and poetry is not thought to be something to bring about a change.

The poet says that poetry is like water which is flowing down the valley and it also enters into the 'ranches of isolation and the busy griefs'. The poet says 'poetry makes nothing happen' which points out the limitations of poetry as a tool for bringing about a social and political change in the world. Auden is satirically commenting on the failure of poetry in regards to changing things in the world. Further, the poet says, Poetry 'survives' going through a whole lot and it is itself a 'way of *happening*'.

### PART III:

The concluding section of 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' begins with Auden addressing the earth. He requests the earth to revive Yeats' body where he is laid to rest. The poet calls Yeats by his full name i.e. 'William Yeats' and addressing him as 'Irish vessel' for his poetry which is now 'Emptied of its poetry' i.e. the vessel that was once full of poetry is now empty.

The poet talks about a nightmare which is approaching and 'All the dogs of Europe bark' on it. He throws light on the World War II that 'sequestered' and separated the nations of the world from one another due to hatred. The poet points out the 'Intellectual disgrace' which is found on 'every human face.' According to the poet there is nothing pleasant is happening in this world and he turns to speak about the political climate of the time rather than about Yeats because of Yeats was interested in it.

Auden praises Yeats' ability to gaze into the 'bottom of the night' with his 'unconstraining voice'. Auden uses gloomy descriptions to mention how Yeats would have spoken about the World's disorder during the Second World War. The poet highlights the unsuccessful lives of the mankind as he says, 'sing of human unsuccess in a rapture of distress'.

Auden concludes by speaking to the shade of the dead Yeats again. He requests Yeats to 'persuade us to rejoice' and to restore us with the 'fountain' of his work. Auden advises Yeats to teach the free man to praise and celebrate his little time on earth. He describes the day of Yeats' death as 'a dark cold day' and all the instruments too agree that the day was both cold and dark. The poet uses the image of water again as the 'healing fountain' and wishes it to 'Start' in the hearts of mankind. The poem ends hopefully but also showcases the dark image of the human condition. To conclude, the poet states that life is a 'prison' and that by spending time with Yeats' poetry can enable one to praise.

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#### 8.4 WILFRED OWEN (1893–1918)

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Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born on March 18, 1893 in Shropshire, England. His family moved to Birkenhead after the death of his grandfather in 1897. Owen was educated at the Birkenhead Institute and later in 1906, he continued his studies at the technical school in Shrewsbury. Owen was interested in the arts right from the young age and soon started to write poetry.

Owen met the poet M. Laurent Tailhade in 1913, when he went to teach in France at the Berlitz School of English. In 1915, he returned from France to get recruited in the Artists Rifles. Owen was trained in England and in 1916, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment.

Owen met a poet Siegfried Sassoon in the Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh where he was being treated for his wound in 1917. Siegfried Sassoon worked as a mentor and introduced Owen to renowned literary figures such as Robert Graves and H. G. Wells.

Owen wrote many of his most important poems, including 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' at that time. The major theme of his poetry reflected the horrors of warfare, the physical landscapes, the human body, male beauty and comradeship.

Critical Analysis of W.H. Auden's 'The Shield of Achilles' and 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' & Wilfred Owen's 'Insensibility' and 'Strange Meeting'

Owen after recovering he re-joined his regiment in Scarborough in June 1918. He returned to France in August and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery at Amiens in October. Owen was just 25 years old, when he was murdered on November 4, 1918, while struggling to lead his men across the Sambre-Oise canal at Ors.

Owen's poems appeared in print during his lifetime, the collected *Poems of Wilfred Owen*, with an introduction by Sassoon, was published in December 1920 made him one of the most admired poets of World War I. The brutal, harsh and horrific truths in his poems makes him stand out as a distinguished poet in comparison to other war poets.

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## 8.5 INSENSIBILITY

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### I

Happy are men who yet before they are killed  
Can let their veins run cold.  
Whom no compassion fleers  
Or makes their feet  
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.  
The front line withers.  
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,  
For poets' tearful fooling:  
Men, gaps for filling:  
Losses, who might have fought  
Longer; but no one bothers.

### II

And some cease feeling  
Even themselves or for themselves.  
Dullness best solves  
The tease and doubt of shelling,  
And Chance's strange arithmetic  
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.  
They keep no check on armies' decimation.

### III

Happy are these who lose imagination:

They have enough to carry with ammunition.  
Their spirit drags no pack.  
Their old wounds, save with cold, cannot more ache.  
Having seen all things red,  
Their eyes are rid  
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.  
And terror's first constriction over,  
Their hearts remain small-drawn.  
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle  
Now long since ironed,  
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

IV

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion  
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,  
And many sighs are drained.  
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:  
His days are worth forgetting more than not.  
He sings along the march  
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,  
The long, forlorn, relentless trend  
From larger day to huger night.

V

We wise, who with a thought besmirch  
Blood over all our soul,  
How should we see our task  
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?  
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;  
Dying, not mortal overmuch;  
Nor sad, nor proud,  
Nor curious at all.  
He cannot tell  
Old men's placidity from his.

VI

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,  
That they should be as stones.

Wretched are they, and mean  
 With paucity that never was simplicity.  
 By choice they made themselves immune  
 To pity and whatever moans in man  
 Before the last sea and the hapless stars;  
 Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;  
 Whatever shares  
 The eternal reciprocity of tears.

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'Insensibility' written by Wilfred Owen is a complex poem. It is Owen's longest poem at 59 lines ordered into six stanzas of varying length and considered as an ode. It is written in response to the killing of troops which he has observed as an officer in the field during the first world war. Owen's warriors are something and are seen happy as the reality of war hits home. There is accumulation of unpleasant emotions in the people such as horror, anger, frustration and injustice.

The opening lines talk about the poet's happy feeling when he knows he is surrounded by death. This is the poet's unconcerned to death not only of his soldiers but also his own. It seems as if the blood in his veins has already turned cold. To survive the horrors of war, a soldier becomes a ruthless killing machine. He lacks the warmth, feeling and compassion when he is fighting in the war. The poet says that the soldiers are at their happiest when there is no compassion and when they turn into robots with no place for any emotions in their heart. The poet portrays the horrid portrait of war when the soldiers walk boldly on the cobbles of dead soldiers. Further the poet says if these happy men remain aloof, cold, and able to jeer at compassion then they won't be affected by any kind of emotions.

The poet uses the word '*withers*' and likens the soldiers to flowers which a poet might want to write about. He is also aware of the fact that the poetry about war might evoke only fake tears and gives rise to useless emotions. He thinks about what good the poetry can do to the readers. The poet talks about the front line that withers and the soldiers and troops often fade with time. Further he says 'Men, gaps for filling: Losses, who might have fought longer; but no one bothers'. The poet says the men in the front line pass away and their place is replaced by some other soldier. He says no one is bothered about their life.

In the second stanza the poet emphasizes on the idea of the soldiers being numb. They are neither having feelings nor any caring. They are also not worried whether those incoming shells will hit them or not. They are so dull that the poet feels the chances of them getting hit and killed seems easier. The poet is saddened by the ignorance of the authorities, who have no idea about how many troops are being slaughtered. This shows the insensitivity of the authorities and helplessness of the soldiers.

The third stanza the poet says the soldiers are happy for they lose their power of imagination as they are occupied with their ammunition. The poet talks about the soldiers turning cold at the sight of blood. They are used to see the red colour of blood every time and their wounds hurt them no more. The war makes the soldiers unemotional and no sensitivity can affect them. 'Their **senses** in **some scorching** cautery of battle' refers to the sustained turmoil of the battlefield. These soldiers are unconcerned about who dies and are able to laugh even as others die around them.

In the fourth stanza, the poet states that the happy soldier is one who is home, unconscious of the fact that others are still being killed somewhere. He says, it was better not to have gone through military training which has long hours of tedious work. The soldiers go on singing a song as they march. This is the march of many towards the gigantic night and the darkness descends on those who will die.

In the fifth stanza, the poet says, those who have vision in life are often thinking wrong. 'We wise, who with a thought besmirch Blood over all our soul', refers to the wise men who dirty their soul by thinking wrong. Further he says, it is the duty of the poets to be the spokesperson and they can share their feelings freely 'through his blunt and lashless eyes?'

The sixth and concluding stanza focusses on those civilians and senior army staff. They are those people who are not at the forefront of battle in war. They are often counted as '*wretched*' and cruel. The poet refers to the insensitivity of the people who ignore the sacrifices, suffering and death of the military men. 'Before the last sea and the hapless stars', the poet refers to the last journey across the sea and the fate of the men. In the concluding line the poet speaks about the stoned hearted men who are unmoved by mourning of man though they have compassion but they fail to express it during war.

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## 8.6 STRANGE MEETING

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It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.  
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;  
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,  
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
'Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn.'  
'None,' said that other, 'save the undone years,  
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,  
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something had been left,  
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:  
To miss the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,  
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

'I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now. . . .'



**Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'** is a dramatic war poem and it talks about reconciliation. Two soldiers meet up in an imagined Hell which might be an imagined landscape within the poet's mind. The first soldier kills the second one in the battle field. Though both the soldiers are enemies in the war but towards the end we see them reconciled. The poet has also used religious (Biblical) references in the poem that reflects Owen's strict religious upbringing. So his poem comes with a message of love and forgiveness. The poet tried to showcase the cruel war in the forefront and this poetry tries to portray pity in the war. The second soldier reveals at the end that he (Speaker) was the one who killed him in the war. The poem reflects on the shared humanity of these two soldiers and also displays the terrors of war. The poem also suggests that human beings will never stop fighting but also insists on reconciliation.

This poem is about a strange meeting of two soldiers who are actually enemies. The speaker of the poem who is a soldier is coming from the war and entered a tunnel that took him to a landscape which can be identified as Hell. This might be that the soul of the soldier is taken to hell after his death. He is uncertain about the upcoming encounter. He sees other soldiers who are unable to sleep or are dead. As the speaker looks at them one rises up and he too is a soldier. The soldier has recognized the speaker and moves his hands as if to bless him. The speaker identifies that he is in hell after looking at the dead smile of the soldier.

The poet shares the horrific atmosphere that might scare the readers by portraying the post-battle Hell. The speaker meets a soldier and it is evident that they know each other. Further the poet describes the dead soldier's face as extraordinary and that is having no relation to the real world. The speaker's opening dialogues is meant to dispel fear and sadness. He addresses the other soldier as friend that shows he is meeting someone of equal status and there is no more place to display enmity and hatred. The dead soldier comes to life and expresses that he too had a life full of hope. Owen wanted his poetry to be recognised as a pity poem.

The speaker tells the soldier that 'here is no cause to mourn.' The soldier answers that there is a reason to mourn as he refers to 'save the undone years' and 'hopelessness' which they see around. The soldier says his hope is the same as the speaker. Further he informs him that he once went hunting for beauty in the world and the same beauty made a mockery of time. The soldier very well understands what he has done in the past, which is 'the pity of war, the pity war distilled'. He is regretting that he can't redo his past and can't show pity in war.

The soldier says that he will not break their ranks even though 'nations trek from progress'. He recollects that he was once a courageous man full of wisdom. But He used to have courage and wisdom. He also desired to wash the blood from the wheels of chariots and wanted to be compassionate as a human being. But as a soldier he cannot do it in war. Finally, the soldier tells the speaker that 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend,'. He still remembers him though it was dark. To conclude the soldier says that 'Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed' which

means the speaker has jabbed and killed him yesterday. The soldier ends his conversion by asking the speaker 'Let us sleep now'. This shows that they have reconciled and are now they are friends.

Critical Analysis of W.H. Auden's 'The Shield of Achilles' and 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' & Wilfred Owen's 'Insensibility' and 'Strange Meeting'

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