

**TEWNTIETH CENTURY
POETRY AND DRAMA
(DEG24)
(M.A. ENGLISH)**



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LESSON – 1

BACKGROUND TO TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH POETRY

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4.1.1 A BRIEF SURVEY :

Twentieth century English Literature may be divided for convenience into two periods. Namely; *Modern and post-Modern*. A factor that is perhaps common to both these movements is war, namely World War I and World War II. The movements are also a reaction to the existing literary trends. Developments in philosophy, psychology, anthropology and science, besides the social changes that took place, all contribute to these movements. The snug Victorian spirit was shattered by the events of World War I. This War witnessed mass scale destruction and slaughter and the optimistic Victorian sense of the progress of man was seriously questioned. World War II similarly produced the atom bomb, a weapon of great destructive capacity unknown till then. It was also the time of the holocaust marking the attempt at the termination of Jews. The events of World War II led to a questioning of man's inherent nature and a distress at his leaning towards evil. It also questioned the destructive potential of scientific knowledge and the dangers of dictatorship in the political field. The war also brought about changes in world economy. There was also the change in the relationships between nations especially between Britain and other cultures.

These developments led to significant changes in poetry, which had a number of talented practitioners. In modernism T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and the War Poets namely Wilfred Owen, Sassoon, Edmund Blunden; the Georgian poets, Rupert Brooke, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, D.H. Lawrence, John Masefield and Robert Graves; the earlier work of W.B. Yeats (who covered two generations), Thomas Hardy, Hopkins are some of the significant poets. Among some of the poets of postmodernism may be mentioned poets of the *Movement*, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, Seamus Haney.

The beginning of modern poetry can be traced to a group of poets known as the Georgians. This group of poets showed skill and originality and interest in technical experiment. The poets were however, influenced by the poets of the 19th century and they only attempted to modify the influence rather than adopt a radically new approach. For example Walter de la Mare employed the romantic imagination and reached new heights rather than strike out a new path. Wilfred Owen and Isaac-Rosenberg, who were both killed in the First World War, did experiment with new techniques but their promise was cut short. John Masefield and Rudyard Kipling produced narrative work that was a combination of Chaucer and Crabbe. They may be considered more as representing the end of a tradition rather than a new beginning. Perhaps the last English poem in the Victorian tradition is Robert Bridges, *Testament of Beauty* (1929). Bridges experimented with language and meter but was not as radical as Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins's experiment with words and rhythm is remarkable. He developed a new poetic style where the meaning was conveyed not outwardly but by turning the emotion inward and thus

building a complex pattern of meaning within a poem. He exerted a great influence on many of the younger poets in their use of poetic idiom.

The beginning of the 20th century saw a revolution both in poetic taste and practice. Poetry which was symbolic and prompted the reader into thoughtfulness or reflection was favored. The theoretical framework for this attitude was the result of the writings of T.E. Hulme. He was against the romantic view of the life and insisted on discipline, precision, *'the exact curve of the thing'*. In his essay 'Romanticism and classicism', he wrote: *'I object still more to the receptive attitude. I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other.'*

The influence of Hume was more pronounced in use of language namely hardness and clarity, and also the rejection of self-expression as the aim of poetry. This led to a careful choice of vocabulary and a free use of rhythm and non-conformity to artificial metrical regularity. This is seen in the invention of *verse libre* by the Symbolists and Imagists. By the turn of the century the monotonous music of Tennyson, the gentle emotions of the romantics were rejected in favour of the more complex and intellectual poems of Donne. Great importance began to be attached to 'the unified sensibility' of the metaphysical poets.

4.1.2 SOME IMPORTANT POETS

T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) stands out as one of the leading practitioners and critics of the new poetry that came into being in the 20th century. It was T.S. Eliot, in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', that revived interest in the metaphysical poets. Eliot felt that the poetry written after Donne and upto Tennyson indulged in a sort of self pity and an extreme expression of the personality of the poet. Eliot felt that intellect and emotion should work together in poetry, what he termed 'Unified Sensibility'. He felt that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality, as he observed: *'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.* In this context he observes again: *the poet has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark....poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality "(Tradition and the Individual Talent)".*

The critical pronouncements of T.S. Eliot were in many respects, the manifesto of the new poetry. We find that Eliot considered the poet no longer as a sweet singer drawing images from nature and indulging in the expression of a personal emotion. On the other hand a poet for Eliot was an explorer of experience. The poet was expected to use language to build rich patterns of meaning. Eliot preferred the poet to use paradox and ambivalence to convey the pattern of meaning rather than communicate the apparent or surface meaning or beauty. *The Waste Land* by Eliot is perhaps the first major example of the new trend in poetry. In this poem Eliot projected through examples and symbols drawn from various sources the desolation, moral degradation, and social emptiness which reflected the social climate. The poem has a sustained and complex use of imagery which projects the pattern of experience. It is not surprising therefore as David Daiches observes, that *'no modern poem has received so much comment and explication'*.

William Butler Yeats (1865 - 1939) is representative of the English poetry during his career as a poet. The early Yeats was influenced by Spenser, Shelly, Rossetti and the contemporary esthetic movement. Another important influence was his interest in the Irish National movement in Dublin and the popular Irish folklore. Yeats was strongly against Victorian science as it had shaken the belief in 'orthodox' Christianity. Yeats therefore sought for a new religion. He searched for this faith in the poetic tradition, in the work of painters, philosophers and theologians. Eventually Yeats was influenced by the tradition of Heterodox mysticism (a combination of number of mystic beliefs). As a result Yeats', early poetry has a dreamy and exotic quality, along with some simple straightforward poems in the Irish folk tradition. The next phase of Yeats, development exhibits a simple handling of folk and fairy themes. By now Yeats had a deep sense of, 'a basic dichotomy in the universe'. (David Ditches). As a result of this dichotomy the imagery in his poems were presented in pairs of contrasts like man and nature, the human world and the fairy world, the domestic and adventurous, the temporal and the eternal. In his collection of poems *The Rose* (1893) Yeats tries to combine eternal ideas with individual characters and actions drawn from Irish history and legend. The following may be considered as an example;

*Red Rose, proud Rose, Sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways;
Cochulai battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, gray, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;...*

It was the during this period perhaps that Yeats developed the use of rhythm and imagery as a very effective tool. The following lines illustrate this aspect;

*Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usma's children died.*

Yeats poetry now tended towards symbolism, and was different from the highly romantic descriptions of his earliest poetry. Yeats himself observed.

Who can keep always to the title pathway between speech and silence, where one meets none but discreet revelations? And surely, at whatever risk, we must cry out that imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that great mind, and that great memory?

Yeats however, soon employed a new style in his poetry. This change in style brought him close to the Pound-Eliot movement, he remarks *We should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of beauty.*

His style was now ironic, epigrammatic and a powerful fusion of mythological material. For his subject matter Yeats chose the life of Aristocratic circles or the other extreme of the outcaste of society namely the fool or beggar. Yeats was perhaps convinced that the truth lay somewhere in the middle regions of this dichotomy. A fine illustrations of this can be seen in the following lines.

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil,
 O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music. O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The genius of Yeats flourished when he combined the realistic and symbolic in his poetry. The poetic diction and rhythm, which is at times ritualistic and also colloquial is perhaps unequal in modern English poetry. His two complimentary poems 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Byzantium' are perhaps the best representatives of the genius of Yeats. As an example consider the following lines:

*Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
 Spirit after Spirit ! the smithies break the flood,
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!
 Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin torn, that gong - tormented sea.*

Yeats stands out as a remarkable poetic genius and reflects the trends of English poetry in his life time. His poetry is unique for its haunting and magical quality.

The economic depression of 1930's had a strong influence on the poetry of W.H. Auden (born 1907). His early poems deal with the futility of modern English middle class. He is remarkable for the combination of contemporary colloquial speech and the language of poets like Eliot and Hopkins. The mature poetry of Auden is highlighted by a sharp sense of humour, and the themes rich with historical connotations of the contemporary world. Auden has always been considered a great wit, for he placed a premium on wit and irony. He was an excellent craftsman and could use colloquial dialogue very effectively, as follows:

*Boys trained by factories for leading
 Unusual lives as nurses, feeding
 Helpless machines, girls married off
 To typewriters, old men in love
 With prices they can never get,
 Homes blackmailed by a radio set,
 Children inherited by slums
 And idiots by enormous sums.*

Louis MacNeice (1907- 63) is one of the very pleasant and subdued poets of the twentieth century though MacNeice's, poetry does not have the intensity of Eliot's poetry or again the extravaganza of Auden, his poetry is admirably constructed; technically light and as effective as the others, but in a softer, quieter and pleasant style. MacNeice projects a highly personal

observation of the world around him. The world that Mac Neice wanted to project is well reflected in the following lines:

*All that I would like to be is human, having a share
In a civilized, articulate and well adjusted
Community where the mind is given its due
But the body is not distrusted*

Stephen Spender (born 1909) also belongs to the generation of the 1930 depression and was for some time like Auden involved in the left wing politics. Spender developed a style which was lyrical. He was an expert in finding appropriate imagery to project a mood or a moral. His poetry is remarkable for the experience which it communicates, rather than a poem as an artifact. Perhaps in this sense, Spender is a romantic projecting the unromantic phase of his generation.

One of the poets of the twentieth century who was untouched by the Eliot revolution was *Robert Graves (born 1895)*. Graves belongs to the older generation of modern poets and he followed the older English tradition in poetry, modifying it according to his own skills. The influences on Robert Graves were Robert Skelton Robert Herrick, Andrew Marvell and Thomas Hardy. Graves developed his own particular type of poetry which combined an intensity of feeling with the colloquial idiom that he used. The poems reflect a mood and sentiment that arises from direct experiences. Graves is also significant for epigrammatic expressions tinged with humour. As an illustration of Graves's poetry we may consider the following:

*Any honest housewife could sort them out,
Having a nose for fish, an eye for apples.
Is it any mystery who are the sound,
And who the rotten? Never, by her lights.*

And,

*You learned Leer's Nonsense Rhymes by heart, not rote;
You learned Pope's Iliad by rote, not heart;
These terms should be distinguished if you quote
My verses, children – keep them poles apart –
And call the man a liar who says I wrote
All that I wrote in love, for love of art.*

Dylan Thomas (1914 - 53): Introduced a new vein into modern poetry. His poetry was kind of revolution against the dry, sharp diction of the Eliot – Pound school. Dylan Thomas is significant for the daring imagery, the mingling of biblical and Freudian elements, and the projection of a world that may be described as belonging to a new romanticism. An American critic observed 'Thomas discovered poetry on his hand like blood, and screamed aloud'. However his poetry exhibits a meticulous construction and the images clearly unfold the meaning. Dylan Thomas in his poems dealt mainly with '*the relation between man and his natural environment, the problem of changes wrought by time, the relation of the living to the dead and of both to seasonal change in nature.*' (David Daiches). Though the output of Dylan Thomas is very little, yet he would be remembered as 'a poet who brought a new drive passion and to the language of English poetry.' The following lines highlight some of the qualities of Dylan Thomas's poetry:

*The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
 Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
 Is my destroyer.
 And
 This bread I break was once the oat,
 This wine upon a foreign tree
 Plunged in its fruit;
 Men in the day or wind at night
 Laid the crops low, broke the grape's joy...*

Hugh MacDiarmed (born 1892) was one of the leading figures that promoted Scottish poetry. MacDiarmed dealt with the problems and suffering of the Scottish people. Though thematically he is a regional poet, his writings have universal relevance. There were many other minor poets that wrote under Mac Diarmed's influence. The following lines illustrates his writing.

*Mine is the antipathy of the internationalist to the nationalist,
 The cosmopolitan to the Englishman.
 And
 The rose of all the world is not for me.
 I want for my part
 Only the little white rose of Scotland
 That smells sharp and sweet – breaks the heart.*

Thom Gunn (Born 1929): is a poet who is precise in his use of imagery. His poems exhibit a careful craftsmanship. The themes reflect a certain modesty and sincerity. These qualities give the reader a sense of completeness in the poem. Another poet who belongs to the younger generation is Ted Hughes (Born 1930), who employed imagery that 'is richer and more sensuous than Gunn'. In Hughes's poetry there is a sort of celebration in his art. This sense of joy coupled with the vivid imagery and a powerful imagination make Hughes a poet of considerable achievement. The following lines illustrate the sharp and evocative imagery of Hughes.

*In a cage of wire – ribs
 The size of a man's head, the macaw bristles in a staring
 Combustion, suffers the stoking devils of his eyes.
 In the old lady's parlour, where an aspidistra succumbs
 To the musk of faded velvet, he hangs as in clear flames,
 Like a torturer's iron instrument preparing
 With dense slow shuddering of greens, yellows, blues, crimsoning into the birds:*

4.1.3 IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS AND SCHOOLS

PYLON SCHOOL:

This was a nick-name given to a young group of left-wing poets in the 1930s, mainly consisting of Auden, Day Lewis, Mc Neice and Spender. The nick-name alludes to the industrial imagery that these poets employed. The phrase was coined perhaps from Spender's poem 'The Pylons' published in 1933. Again, Pylons' and skyscrapers appear in Day Lewis' poem The Magnetic Mountain (1933). Auden's poems also have a landscape of power stations arterial, roads and filling stations. Mac Neices poems have a marked use of trains and trams.

(Source: The Oxford companion to English literature.)

WAR POETS:

This term is applied to poets who took part in World War I. Their poetry usually reflected their War experience. Though there are a number of poets who have written about war, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Issac Rosenberg are most commonly thought of as 'War Poets'. The other poets include Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Edmund Blunden, and Robert Graves. An important factor in the practice of the war poets is that they turned away from the Romanticism of pre-war poetry. They adapted a language that was necessary to project the new and terrible experiences. Thus, they played a significant role giving poetic language a new turn.

SYMBOLISM:

The term is primarily associated with a group of French poets belonging to the second half of the 19th century: Baudelaire (1821-67), Paul Verlaine (1844-96), Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91), Stephen Mallarme (1842-98) the American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), and the German music-dramatist Richard Wagner (1813-83). The symbolists were concerned with the way poetry operates. They felt that poetry should not just concern itself with ideas. 'it is made not with ideas; it is made with words' (Mallarme). This meant that the artist should have respect and care for the medium in which he has chosen to work. It meant, what T.S. Eliot was to state later that they should be engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal *equivalents for states of mind and feeling*' (T.S. Eliot, *the Metaphysical Poets*). The Symbolists felt that since 'states of mind and feeling' are ultimately mysterious and elusive, care should be taken in the organization of language to overcome obscurity. The Symbolists had a profound influence on two of the most important poets of the 20th Century – T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats.

THE MOVEMENT:

The movement made its presence felt in post-war British poetry by the publication of three important anthologies: D.J. Enright's *Poet's of the 1950s* (1955), Robert Conquest's *New Lines* and G.S. Frazer's *Poetry Now* (both 1956). The members of this school were all not necessarily in the same mould, but possessed some features common to the movement. The work of these writers was 'sardonic', lucid, and self consciously ironic. Opposed to the romantic and apocalyptic tone of much of 1940 s poetry, especially that of Dylan Thomas and W.S. Graham. *Movement poetry is meticulously crafted and witty, controlled and common-sensical*'. (Prentice. Hall *Guide to English literature*). Some of the major figures of the Movement were: Kingsley Amis, Conquest and Enright, Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, Elizabeth Jemnings, Philip Larkin and John Wain.

IMAGISM:

A movement founded in 1912, led by Ezra Pound and a group of poets was an anti-romantic movement. It was quite organized and distinct in its aims. The initiator of the movement was T.E. Hulme who felt that poets should use words to clarify rather than obscure emotions. Their principles may be summarized as follows:

1. Use the language of common speech but use it exactly.
2. Create new rhythms for new moods.
3. Allow complete freedom in subject.
4. Present an image, but avoid vagueness.
5. Produce poetry that is hard and clear.
6. Concentrate on the essence of poetry.

(Source: Prentice Hall Guide to English literature)

Dr. M.S. Rama Murty

LESSON – 2

ROBERT GRAVES; RECALLING WAR, IN BROKEN IMAGES

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- 4.2.1 BACKGROUND; WRITER AND THE PERIOD
- 4.2.2 THE WRITER; HIS LIFE AND WORKS
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- 4.2.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS
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4.2.1 BACKGROUND – WRITER AND THE PERIOD:

Modernism was a movement that covered the first three decades of the twentieth century and its exponents were not only Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Joyce but also Valery, Rilke, Proust and Stravinsky. Modern poetry is a complete break with the poetry of the past. C.S. Lewis in his lecture at Cambridge University in 1954, *Description Temporan* declares that modern poetry is a greater novelty than any other 'new dimension'. T.E. Hulme in 'A Lecture on Modern Poetry' asserts that "the modern is the exact opposite of this (old poetry), it no longer deals with heroic action, it has become definitely and finally introspective and deals with expression and communication of modern phases in the poet's mind". As Malcolm Bradbury and James Mc Farlane observe, modern embraces impressionism, post-impressionism, imagism, expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, symbolism, imagism, vorticism and cubism. Morose K. Spears in *Dionysus and the City* sums up modernism under four categories:

- (1) *Metaphysical discontinuity, which emphasizes the anti-romantic tenets of man's break with nature.*
- (2) *Aesthetic discontinuity, which means that art is independent of life.*
- (3) *Rhetorical discontinuity which implies the alogical nature of a poem in its sequence in thought, and juxtaposition of images in a non-rational order, and*
- (4) *Temporal discontinuity stressing the notion of spatial forms and simultaneity.*

The group of poets that may be considered comprises Abercrombie, Robert Graves, Andrew Young, Rupert Brooke, Gordon Bottonley, John Masefield, J.C. Squire, Edward Shanks, W.W. Gibson, Walter de la Mare, W.H Davies and Edward Thomas, known as Georgian poets. The main and common features of Georgian poetry are as Geoffrey Bullough states in his *Trends and Modern Poetry*;

- (1) *A scholarly tradition going back through Tennyson and Wordsworth to Milton and the Elizabethans, refining the old themes;*
- (2) *A Catholic movement with affinities to the 'Metaphysical' and other religious poets;*

- (3) *An aesthetic tendency indebted to the Pre-Raphaelites with a romantic nostalgia and interested in verbal suggestion manifested through symbolism;*
- (4) *A tendency to realistic impressionism arising from an imaginative approach to city life*
- (5) *A 'naturalistic' approach to the simple life of the countryside, sea and open road, with a predilection for romantic natural imagery.*

Robert Graves is different from other Georgians in his production of a rapidly moving poetry, careless and vivacious as perceived in his early poems. Later his poems become cerebral, complicated and metaphysical by their preoccupation with psychological problems, 'the problem of identity, discontinuity of experience, disassociation of personality' says G. Bullough.

4.2.2 LIFE AND WORKS :

Robert Graves is a poet, novelist and critic. Graves was born in Wimbledon in 1895 and educated at Charterhouse. He took a commission in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, on the outbreak of World War I. He was severely injured and reported dead by *The Times*, in 1916. Graves married Nancy Nicholson, daughter of a painter William Nicholson, in the closing years of the war. He studied at St John's College, Oxford where he developed a close friendship with T.E. Lawrence, whose biography was written by him later. In the 1920's he formed an association with Laura Riding, living, writing and running the Seizin Press with her. His controversial memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929) ends with their departure for England following her attempted suicide. They stayed briefly with Gertrude Stein in Paris and then settled in Deya, Mallorca. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War forced them to leave and, after a brief period in Lungano, Brittany and London, they sailed for America in 1939. Their association ended and Graves returned to England, living in Galmpton, Devon with Beryl Hodge, who became his second wife. In 1946 he returned with her to Deya. He gave the Clark Lectures at Cambridge during 1954 - 55 and was, Professor of Poetry at Oxford during the period between 1961 and 1966.

His early poems, *Over the Brazier* (1916) *David and Goliath* (1916), *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917) and Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* were dominated by World War I. The subsequent volumes which made up his long poetic career show the development of a highly individual style, continually evolving yet always returning to tradition, classical literature and mythology for new inspiration. *Poems 1914 - 26* (1927) tried to describe and resolve what he called his 'pier-glass haunting' in forms and diction borrowed from nursery, nonsense verse ballads and riddles. *Poems 1926* (1931) included 'To the Reader Over My Shoulder', 'Lost Acres, Warning to Children' and 'Welsh Incident' originally called 'Railway Carriage', 'Collected Poems' (1938) included 'Time To Bring the Dead to Life', 'New Legends', 'The Terraced Valley' and 'No More Ghosts'. 'Poems 1938 - 45' printed (1946) several of his first poems, 'To Sleep, Under the Poet and The Thieves', plain in diction refusing public themes and concentrating on love. There are also elements of a new mythology in 'To Tuan at the Winter Solstices'. The later poems included in 'Collected Poems' (1975) show him attempting to be the 'real perpetually-obsessed Muse poet'.

Influenced by WHR Rivers, the neurologist, anthropologist and early follower of Freud, Graves elaborated a theory of the equivalence between dream psychology and poetic methods of associative and critical thinking in *On English Poetry* (1922). *The Meaning of Dreams* (1924), and *Poetic Unreason* (1925). His collaboration with Laura Riding resulted in a *Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1928), highly critical both of popular attitudes to poetry and of modernism in its more

fashionable forms. *The White Goddess* (1948) elaborated his mythology of poetic inspiration. Other prose works include the controversial *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* (1953) and *Junes in Rome* (1957), both written in collaboration with the Hebrew scholar Joshua Pedro, *The Greek Myths* (1955), *The Crowning Privilege* (1955), *Oxford Addresses for Poetry* (1962), *The Hebrew Myths* (1964), *Mammon and the Black Goddess* (1965), *Poetic Craft and Principle* (1967), *The Crane Bag and Other Disputed Subjects* (1969), and *Difficult Questions, to Easy Answers* (1972). His later works often assert the value of poetry and mythology over science and technology by challenging academic and popular conventions.

Robert Graves's first novel, *No Decency Left* (1932), was written in collaboration with Laura Riding. A version of Dickens's *David Copperfield*. *The Real David Copper field* (1933), was followed by *I, Claudius* (1934), narrated by the idiosyncratic Emperor Claudius, still his most popular work, it was also the first of 13 novels which solved in a highly commercial way, historical puzzles and conjectures. They include *Claudius the God* (1934), *Count Balirasius* (1938), *The Story of Mary Powell, Wife to Mr Milton* (1943), *The Golden Fleece* (1945), *King Jesus* (1946) and *Homer's Daughter* (1955).

Robert Graves also published some works for children in *The Penny Fiddle* (1960) and *Ann at Highwood Hall* (1964), two volumes of selections from his early poems illustrated by Edward Ardizzone, and *The Myths of Ancient Greece* (1961) and *The Seige and Fall of Troy* (1962). His popular translations include Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (1951), Luca's *Pharsalia* (1956), Suetonices' *The Twelve Caesars* (1957) and *The Anger of Achilles: Homer's Iliad* (1957). Graves passed away in 1985.

4.2.3 THE TEXTS

RECALLING WAR

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean
 The track aches only when the rain reminds.
 The one logged man forgets his leg of wood,
 The one armed man his jointed wooden arm.
 As much or more than once with both his eyes.

Their war was fought these twenty years ago
 And now assumes the nature-look of time.
 As when the morning traveler turns and views.
 His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No more discord of flags
 But an infection of the common sky
 That sagged ominously upon the earth
 Even when the season was the Airiest May.
 Down pressed the sky, and we oppressed, thrust out
 Boastful tongue, cleached first and valiant yard.
 Natural infirmities were out of mode,
 For death was young again: patron along
 Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

Fear made fine bed fellows, sick with delight
At life's discovered transitoriness,
Out youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.

Never was such antiqueness of romance,
Such tasty honey coming from the heart,
And old importance came swimming back-
Vine, meat, log ! Fires, a roof over the head,
A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call
Even there was a use again for God-
A word of rags in lack of meat, wine, fire,
In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith
By which the world had still kept head in Air,
Protesting logic or protesting love,
Until the unendurable moment struck
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns-
Nibbling the walls of the factory and church
Like a child, piecrust: Felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be crecalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

IN BROKEN IMAGES

He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images;

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images;
Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
When the fact fails me, I approve my sense.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.
He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

4.2.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

IN BROKEN IMAGES

The poem reflects two different attitudes in the thought process. One is that of a practical or scientific thinker – one who relies on facts as they are. The other is that of one with a poetic imagination which is not specific but given to flights of fancy and the different possibilities or meanings a fact may suggest: we may call one (he) radical and the other (I) the poet.

The radical is one who believes in facts and clearly defines the images in any context. The images however are not having a 1:1 equation but are multifold. The radical becomes dull or is not clear about the images. He, however, assumes that they are representing the whole truth. He soon finds that fact is different from the imaginative image. He continues to ponder over the limited understanding of pondering over the limited understanding of the images and is in a confused state of mind as pointed out earlier. The image and the fact do not seem to tally. The poet takes a long time in understanding as the images suggest multifarious meanings and are as he calls them 'Broken Images'. He begins to probe into the various images and their relevance. From the image the poet moves to the fact that they represent. He finds that they do not suggest a fact but create a new mood and a new understanding. The poet now is able to reach a new comprehension and a wider understanding which arises from the apparent paradox of fact and fancy.

RECALLING WAR:

Robert Graves had first hand experience of War, and this poem is a reminiscence that brings out the horrors and meaninglessness of war.

The poem is set a time, nearly twenty years after the war, describing the war-veterans and the life they lead at present. They are those who had lost a leg, or arm or have been blinded. But they carry on life with a wooden leg, or a wooden arm, or try to overcome their loss of sight with the help of other faculties of hearing and touch. These men, over the twenty years, have learned to get on in life and no longer look handicapped, but have become a part of routine life.

The poet goes on to question-then what was war? He says it was not just nations or countries at discord or disagreement. It was a sense of enmity that pervaded the whole atmosphere. The clean, healthy air of spring or life was displaced by this. It was as if the sky was pressing down on deep earth, making life breathless and intolerable. The soldiers were frenzied with war cries, and rushed forth only to die. Death was present everywhere, it was not the sick or diseased that died, but even the young and healthy soldiers, for death was present everywhere and this made one suspect everyone as life became valueless and transitory.

Recollections of a good life was never sweeter. Those wonderful days, before the war, when one had all the comforts of life-food and shelter-were cherished. But during the war and in the battle-field, the young men were in rags, lacking food and suffering from disease because of the absence of medical treatment. The only thing they had was ironically the weapon-an instrument of death rather than life.

Though people went to war for the sake of ideals like liberty, freedom and so on, during the war and on the battle field there was a total extinction of all sublime and noble thoughts. Art and cultural values had no place, and so was God and religion, they were all destroyed mercilessly; Men lost their sense of brotherhood and love, became psychologically depressed and rushed forth like maniacs to kill.

There was total destruction. The cities, art galleries, churches, schools and all those places of love and holiness were also not spared. Destruction was rampant and was done on a mass scale and swiftly. The future at least should look back on war and not boast of victories but realise the despair that war generates.

4.2.5 CRITICAL COMMENTS :

Graves, poetry belongs to a distinctively English strain of lyrical verse which has been overshadowed by the more ambitious and more massive work of the Anglo-Irish W.B. Yeats and the American born T.S. Eliot. As an older poet born in 1895, Graves had to wait until the 1950's before his stature was realized, he remained untouched by the Eliot revolution, which was one reason for the slowness of his climb to fame. Graves drew on an older English tradition, giving it new strength and meaning by adapting and modifying it to suit his own highly idiosyncratic personality. John Skepton, Robert Herrick, Andrew Marvell and Thomas Hardy are among the few English poets whom Graves recognizes as in the authentic tradition, he also accepts certain kinds of folk poetry and some of the Celtic bards.

The development of Graves's work was decisively affected by his experiences as an officer in World War I, an understanding of it is helped by a reading of Owen and Sassoon. Such poetry was partly a means of preserving sanity in the face of extreme horror, partly a desire to awaken in the reader a distrust of attitudes imposed on him by convention or adopted by himself to help him preserve his own illusions. He published his first poems during World War I, but he is not primarily one of the war poets: he extended the vision aroused by the war into the post-war world of human relations, especially those between the sexes, and to escape the realities of inner experience, especially by choosing to dull its image. He wrote lyrics with skilful and precise rhythm and often poignant or pungent rhymes, and an austere yet lively, colloquial diction.

Beginning as a more or less conventional Georgian, Graves eventually developed his own kind of quizzical, familiar, wryly humorous kind of poetry which moves between trance-like intensity and a teasing colloquialness. Freed by the success of his best-selling account of his experiences as a soldier in the First World War he was able to settle in Majorca and live as an independent writer. He cultivated his allegiance to what he called the write Goddess, the great inspirer of myth and poetry, with a willful disregard of contemporary poetic fashion.

Graves's poetry went hand in hand with a huge output of critical, scholarly and speculative studies. His poetry, which at one extreme has affinities with Hardy's and at another to that of E.E. Cummings, is sometimes epigrammatic, sometimes mischievous, sometimes simply tripping like a nursery rhyme and sometimes dryly ironical. But the tone is always his own, the utterance honest, the mood and sentiment clearly wrung from experience directly unfrosted.

The theme in the later poems of Graves largely concentrated on problems of human relations, on love between sexes and on paradoxes of marriage. He has continued unflinchingly to

go his own way, repudiating alike "The ornate academic Victorian tradition and the more recent but no less artificial Franco-American modernism". His highly individual idiom achieves its most significant purpose; Graves poems demand attention, they cannot be merely accepted and classified.

IN BROKEN IMAGES – CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

The poem deals with the sensibility of an ordinary or even a scientifically minded person and a poet with his imaginative faculty. In a broad sense it is also a commentary on the scientific way of thinking and that of the poet where the most important faculty is the imagination. For a scientist the fact is of utmost importance, what I A Richards termed as *sense* in his essay on the *Four Kinds of Meaning*. When the fact fails or is disproved the scientist is lost in confusion and this attitude would lead to disbelief. This is illustrated for example in the modern as representing facts and when these facts have been disproved, for example the history of religion, has been questioned. Matthew Arnold in his essay 'The Study of Poetry' commenting on this attitude says:

'There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact; and now the fact is falling it. But for poetry the ideas is everything; the rest is a world of illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to day is its unconscious poetry.'

As is pointed out by Arnold the future of civilized society depends upon literature. The scientific advancement has disproved and destroyed the myths on which religion is based. Poetry on the other hand is not based on any myth but the essence of poetry is to refine and edify man. The highest form of poetry is one which would make man noble.

Poetry can be placed on a higher plane because it can bring order into confusion. This is possible because the poet has the unique capability of fusing images in his mind. As T.S. Eliot points-out in his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets':

A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work. it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary.

Graves in his poem *In Broken Images* suggests the importance of poetry and the solace or satisfaction that it offers in spite of sometimes being vague and not strictly factual. After the creation or the reading of a poem, the condition of the reader assumes a new understanding and a new balance. As Graves points out: 'In a new understanding of my confusion.'

RECALLING WAR – CRITICAL COMMENTS:

For Graves, the outright ridiculousness of the Great War can only begin to be voiced through the use of irony. For him, in fact, this is not necessarily a literary technique – the grotesque foolishness of the war simply is ironic. For this reason, the over-canalization of "Recalling War" is circumspect. In one sense, such purely literal analysis only serves to incapacitate the poet further by exposing the inadequacies of literary technique and language. Still Graves' irony is brilliant and deserves mention, if only to observe him for a moment nakedly, as a Poet rather than a War Poet. Graves uses contrast-invoking total extremes and utter

opposites-in order to give some perspective to the absolute enormity of the irony of war experience. The notion of Death is especially susceptible to this form of literary expression: "For Death was young again: patron alone of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm." Through the contrasts of Death and youth, health and dying, Graves portrays the sheer absurdness of senseless slaughter. It is only through irony that the ridiculous can begin to be understood, and Graves employs it masterfully. Despite the literary merit, to dwell much longer on the actual literature of "Recalling War" would be to lose its message completely. For it is exactly this language, this haunting irony and painfully breathtaking imagery, which Graves asserts to be wholly inadequate. For, despite the valiant effort of the poet, the wounds of war are ineradicable: The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood. The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm. The blinded man sees with his ears and hands as much or more than once with both his eyes. In the end. Despite the magnitude of the Great War and its aftermath, and despite the personal, life-changing devastations accepted by Graves and those of the same generation, the war is one day reduced to mere recollection:

A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair

Not only does the poetry of the Great War then fail to describe the indiscernible, but also, according to Graves it is unable even to arouse a basic reaction in humanity which would ensure that such barbaric foolishness erases itself from human experience

The most fundamental irony of the Great War, then, is that in its passionate outburst of impetuous aggression it rendered, and continues to render, everyone and everything associated with it absolutely impotent, the survivors attempting to recall, the writers wishing to express, and finally, even the readers wanting to understand are all ultimately paralyzed by its magnitude. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of war poetry is that, by its very definition. It is destined for failure. If language is helplessly limited-and even the vivid, meaningful language of Graves is-then the poet can never truly express the cruelties of their own experience, and, in turn, they must pass their own impotence onto the reader. (Nadine Cohen).

4.2.6 SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What is Graves' attitude to War?
Or
Consider 'Recalling War' as a poem of reminiscence
2. What is Graves' attitude to poetry as reflected in 'Broken Images'?

4.2.7 REFERENCE BOOKS

Oxford Companion to English Literature
Ed. Margaret Drabble

Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature
Ed. Wynne Davies

Martin Seymour Smith, *Robert Graves*, (Longmans).

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LESSON – 3

W.H. AUDEN: IN MEMORY OF W.B. YEATS

CONTENTS

- 4.3.1 BACKGROUND; WRITER AND THE PERIOD
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4.3.1 BACKGROUND: WRITER AND THE PERIOD:

Human journey inhabits not merely a physical universe, but is an art as well. Poetry is, undoubtedly one of the principal arts of life. The development of human speech marks the beginning of civilization. Among the various manifestations of human speech, poetry has a very special place. Poetry responds to one of the deepest concerns and needs of man. Consequently, it is a distinctive product of all human cultures. Poetry is one of the most ancient of the arts, it is also one of the most universal. A poetic view of the world is distinct from the scientific and the practical view of the world. Poetry is an emotional embodiment of experience and we respond to the emotion sensorially and intellectually. T S Eliot has pointed out that there is a perfect fusion of thought and feeling, of the intellect and the emotions, in other words, a unification of sensibility in the greatest kinds of poetry.

Twentieth century English poetry is divided into four main divisions, namely, Edwardian (1900 - 1910) Georgian poetry (1910 - 1935) and the poetry of the Second World War (1939 - 1945) and the poetry of the Post-War period. Each of these four divisions can be further divided according to trends and movements.

Edwardian poetry can be divided into four sections, namely that of *'The Decadents'* *'The Realists'* *the Pessimists'*, and the *Traditional Poets*. Earnest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons were the chief of the Decadents. They stood not for 'art for arts' sake; but for art for life's sake. Wilfred Blunt, William Earnest Henry and Rudyard Kipling kept alive the claims of Realism. The two great pessimist poets were Thomas Hardy and A.E Houseman. Robert Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Butler Yeats, Francis Thomson and Gordon Bottomley were the main transitional poets who paved the way for Georgian group of poets.

Georgian poetry (1910 - 1935) covers the period of King George V. The poets of this period are Rupert Brooke, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, John Drinkwater, James Flecker, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden. The poetry of this period can be subdivided into that of 'The Imagists' 'The Soldier poets', 'The new country poets' and 'The Metaphysical'.

In the 1930's with the rise of W.H Auden and poets associated with him known as pink poets or communists are Louise Mac Neice, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis. According to

Michael Roberts they are 'The New country Poets. They rejected the politics of the left, flirted with anarchism and revolted against the intellectualised, poetical manner of Eliot and his associates'.

The Second World War period produced little verse and that too was obscurely phrased. The Movement of early 1950's including poets like Donald Davie, Thomas Gunn and Philip Larkin are known as Movement poets. They are also known as 'The New Lines Poets' as also 'The university wits' and 'The New Academics' because they were mainly of Oxford and Cambridge and doing academic jobs.

The poets of 1930's faced a world of economic depression, of spiritual dessiccation, and they turned from contemplation of the symbolic wasteland to the portrayal and diagnosis of a literal one. Freud and Marx were brought in to assist the diagnosis, which was expressed in a style incorporating influences by Eliot, Hopkins, Owen Skelton. It is in the context of such influences that W.H. Auden first broke on the English poetic scene.

In an extraordinary and ever-changing career, W.H. Auden created one of the largest, richest, and most varied bodies of work of any poet of the twentieth century. In shorter and longer forms, he combined a vigorous wit and a searching but often playful intellect with a passionate, moral sense, in a lifelong engagement with the issues of human imperfection, sin and redemption and the zest for both social and spiritual justice. He studied the life of the common man and the social problems confronting him in the postwar world. He worked for a revolution on communistic lines for the regeneration of the downtrodden and miserable masses. His poetry became extremely class conscious and was dominated by the Marxian view of society.

4.3.2 W.H. AUDEN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS:

W.H Auden a poet and dramatist is one of the recognized writers of the twentieth century. He was born in 1907 in York. He spent much of his childhood in Birmingham. He was educated at Gresham's school, a public school with liberal ideas about education, in Norfolk and later at Oxford University. He was influenced by the landscape of the industrial Midlands throughout his life. Auden began writing poetry early and twice edited the journal *Oxford Poetry* when he went to Oxford in 1925. he became the central figure in the 193 group of left-wing intellectuals, which included Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis Mac Niece and Christopher Isherwood. As he belonged to a middle-class intellectual family, he evidenced a sense of social responsibility and a strong didactic tendency in his poetry. He worked as a teacher both in an English school and in English and American Universities. Although Auden was a homosexual, he married Erika Mann, daughter of Thomas Mann, an anti-Nazi in 1938, so that she could obtain British citizenship. He emigrated to the U.S.A in 1938, became an American citizen in 1946. He was professor of poetry at Oxford in 1956, and died in 1973 in Australia.

Auden's first book, *Poems* was published in 1930, during the great economic crisis which originated in the U.S.A. The first publication was followed by *The Orators* in 1932, *The Dance of Death* in 1933, *Look Stranger* in 1936, *Letters from Iceland* in 1937, *Journey to a War* in 1939 and *Another Line* in 1940. As a dramatist / playwright, he wrote *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, *The Ascent of F6*, and *On the Frontier*.

Auden's early poems are an examinations of the contemporary English situation in a tone combining the farcical and the tragic. His poetry explored a variety of new and provocative ways of illustrating the futility of modern English middle-class existence. His verse is full of topical

references to the social and international crises of the time. Auden's concern in poetry reflect the anxieties of contemporary intelligentsia as perhaps no other writer has done. He employed cadences that fell with a disturbing new sound in English poetry deriving sometimes from Eliot, Hopkins, Owen and Skelton, sometimes from contemporary colloquial speech and sometimes from Anglo-saxon poetry. He was interested in Freud and psychoanalytic theory and also absorbed Marxism. He disciplined his wit and ordered his precariously darting movements from himself to society, from private to public, from Freud to Marx, from present to past, into a richly thoughtful verse. After 1940 he gradually became committed to Anglo-catholic Christianity. He gradually became less concerned with the social problems of the modern western world and more involved in a personal and religious solution to contemporary ills. There has always been an element of personal questioning for a psychological or religious 'heater' in his poetry. Auden published long poems after his emigration to America. His poems, *New Year Letter* published in 1941, *For the Time Being* (1945), and *The Age of Anxiety* (1948), his short poems; *Noses* published in 1952, *The Shield of Achilles* (1955) and *Homage to Eliot*. He wrote criticism: *The Enchafed Flood* (1951) and *The Dyer's Hand* (1963) producing first characteristically quiet-spoken poems of almost quizzical reflection.

He was professor of poetry at Oxford in 1956 – 60, becoming a fellow of Christ's Church in 1962 and returning to live in his old college in 1972. Part of his later life was spent in Kirchstetten, Austria, and his life with Chester Kallman is celebrated in *About the House* (1967). Final volumes were *City Walls and Other Poems* (1969), *Academic Graffiti* and *Epistle to a Godson* (1972). He also extensively revised his early work from his later view point as a Christian, presenting his personal canon in *Collected Shorter Poems* (1966), and *Collected Longer Poems* (1968).

Towards the end of his life he became an isolated figure, so unlike the first decade of his writing where he had seemed to be the voice of a generation although perhaps, in reality, only the generation of the younger middle-class. Later works and editions include: *About the House* (1966); *City Without Walls* (1969); *Epistle to a Godson* (1972); *Thank Young Fog*; *Last Poems* (1974); *Collected Poems* (ed. Mendel son 1976); *The English Auden* (ed. Mendei son; 1977).

As a professed Christian Auden had a more stable base from which to contemplate the contemporary world, but in fact, his Christianity is recognizable in many of his poems. Auden was always a great wit poet and sometimes his wit moved over into clowning, of a most skilful sort. *Under Which Lyne*, the Phi Beta Kappa poem he wrote for Harvard in 1946, is both witty and funny. Other poems of the same period are reflective, gnomic or descriptive. He developed a use of topographical imagery very different from the wasteland urban imagery of his early poems. *In Praise of Limestone* is one of the first ones. In diction, in rhythm, in attitudes towards the reader, Auden has always shown himself inventive and exploratory. His skill, his exuberant craftsmanship, his ability to make arresting verse out of an informal observation or a chatty confession, combine to make him one of the most continually interesting of modern poets. The immense skilled verse chat of many of the poems in *About the House* are not what one expects of a distinguished poet in absolute control of his medium. The accent remains quietly colloquial, and unfocussed. His poem in memory of Louis Mac Niece is moving by its chattiness.

4.3.3 THE TEXTS

IN MEMROY OF W.B. YEATS
(d. Jan. 1939)

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. 5

Far from his illness
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,
The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable
quays ; 10

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, 15
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 20
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, 25
And the poor have the sufferings to which 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 30
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 happening, a mouth.	35
III	
Earth, receive an honoured guest: William Yeats is laid to rest. Let the Irish vessel lie Emptied of its poetry.	45
Time that is intolerant Of the brave and innocent, And indifferent in a week To a beautiful physique,	
Worships language and forgives Everyone by whom it lives; Pardons cowardice, conceit, Lays its honours at their feet.	50
Time that with this strange excuse Pardoned Kipling and his views, And will pardon Paul Claudel, Pardons him for writing well.	55
In the nightmare of the dark All the dogs of Europe bark, And the living nations wait, Each sequestered in its hate;	60
Intellectual disgrace Stares from every human face, And the seas of pity lie Locked and frozen in each eye.	65
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;	70

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

75

4.3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS :

Yeats died on January 28th; 1939. the poem can be taken as an elegy on the death of Yeats.

The first stanza describes the day of Yeats' death. The poet says it was winter and there was a sense of desolation everywhere. The weather was very cold and the rivers and the busy cities were all frozen and there was very little sign of life. The political turbulence or uncertainty of the time is suggested by the disfigurement of public statues. The temperature was very low, and it was cold suggesting the pervading of death which is cold.

The second stanza describes how the life around, however, carried on as usual. Nature was as its usual self, the animals went about their normal pursuits (reference to wolves) and in spite of the political disturbances life around was normal. Even the poet's verse seemed to be unaffected by his death as it existed independently and people continued to read them.

The third stanza describes in graphic terms the decay and death of the poet's physical body. The imagery that Auden uses is that of a city. He describes the failure of Yeat's body in terms of a town where squares (local areas) are emptied, the whole city including the suburbs slowly affected and finally the total failure. The parallel is to the brain or mind that becomes empty, the limbs that slowly fail to respond and finally the sense of feeling failing, resulting in the numbness of death. This decay and failure is paralleled to the decay and failure of faith in Europe. Finally Yeats no longer exists as a person or individual but transcends to the poet as living among his admirers.

The next stanza points out how Yeat's poetry survives him. His poetry now enjoys an independent existence and is found and enjoyed everywhere. Though Yeats was very strongly attached to Ireland and championed Irish literature, his own poetry transcends local and regional limitations and is universal.

The stanza that follows points out how the world is now dominated by business and commerce. There is political discontent and turmoil everywhere. Yet, in spite of these preoccupations, there are many who feel the loss of Yeats and would recollect with sorrow this day of his death.

Part II of the poem is "an intensely personal and compassionate address to the dead Yeats in highly controlled blank verse" (C.T. Thomas). It describes how Yeats like any other human being had his weaknesses. He was associated with aristocratic women such as lady Gregory, he was also affected and obsessed, as in his later poetry, with old age and physical decay. Yet his poetry was not affected by any of these. His poetry survived the turbulence and political upheavals of the times. Though many a political manifesto died, the poetry of Yeats survives for it is not tied to any particular idea or thing, but exists independently and is a *way of saying* rather than *saying*

Part III is a very personal summing up of Yeats' achievement. The lines pay a tribute to Yeats as the poet of Irish nationalism and the Irish literary renaissance. Though for some time Yeats was

drawn to Fascism, his poetry however leaves behind this solid poetic achievement. The intellectual atmosphere was one of mutual jealousy, hatred and alarm. It was a time when many intellectuals, unfortunately, succumbed to it. But Yeats' poetry generates joy in the reader by its excellent composition. Yeats' poetry celebrates the free spirit of man and he is a poet who deepens our sensibility and enables us to live as *human beings*.

Glossary:

1. Yeats died on 28th. January, 1939.
- 2-3. The political and physical condition of Europe.
4. A parallel to the mercury sinking and Yeats' approaching death.
5. The instruments are the thermometer and barometer. One indicating the temperature of the person, the other the temperature outside. Note that both were sinking.
- 23-24 suggest that Yeats' poetry will always be read and enjoyed.
25. A reference to the stock exchange. The speculators in the stock exchange are called 'bulls' – hence the reference to 'beasts'. Bourse- The Paris stock exchange.
33. Yeats was associated with aristocratic women. One of them was Lady Gregory, who was also interested like Yeats in Irish nationalism.
34. Yeats very strongly supported the creation of an Irish Republic.
55. Rudyard Kipling (1865 - 1936) a British novelist who supported imperialism.
56. Paul Claudel (1868 - 1955) a French poet who held extreme right-wing views.

4.3.5 CRITICAL EVALUATIONS :

*What instruments we have agreed
The day of his death was dark cold day*

The instruments that are referred to are the thermometer and the barometer. The thermometer shows the temperature of the human body and the barometer the weather outside. In the above lines the poet says that there was a fall in the temperature of both Yeats and the weather outside as it was a 'dark cold day'. Nature seems to be one with the poet. The poet employs pathetic fallacy in his narration.

*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.*

As long as he was alive Yeats lived and belonged to one place. Now that his poetry is read by people all over the world. The happiness and joy is now transferred to his readers and admirers from the artist who created it. When Yeats was living he was a strong nationalist and anti-English. But now his work has no boundaries and lives and gives pleasure everywhere. He has become universal.

*You were silly like us; your gift survived it all;
The parish of rich women, physical decay
Yourself.*

Auden says that Yeats was very human. He was ordinary with all the foolishness of an ordinary man. Perhaps, Auden is using the word 'silly' in the Shakespearean sense where it meant 'simple'. Yeats moved closely in the company of aristocratic women. The reference is to lady Gregory who was a close friend of Yeats and together they were strongly committed to the Irish National Movement. Yeats also suffered as all human beings do with physical decay; in fact his later poems reflect his obsession with old age and decay. Yet, Yeats overcame all these obstacles or hurdles in his poetry and succeeded remarkably. Auden is here suggesting that Yeats was a poet who understood human values as he himself was very human.

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

In these lines Auden describes the deplorable condition of Europe in the 1930s. There is fear and hatred everywhere. The European nations are compared to dogs that bark at each other before the fight, there in enmity and hatred in their barking-so also many intellectuals had succumbed to the hatred of war and propagated it. The nations are waiting for war, they are being bred in hatred. The values of compassion and consideration for humans have all been lost. As C.T. Thomas points out "The atmosphere of suspicion, mutual jealousy, hatred and alarm is powerfully evoked".

*With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the cause,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress*

The poet here employs a beautiful metaphor. He points out that the farmer, from ordinary soil grows the grape wine. The wine produces grapes which are sweet and are transformed in taste from the soil from which they have been produced. Similarly, the poet is able to transform his experiences into poetry and from the suffering and distress is able to produce poetry that gives joy to the reader. This is a very touching tribute that Auden pays to Yeats.

Stan Smith on Auden's poem 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'

It's quite remarkable how many alternative ideas of language occur in this poem, from reading of instruments which all 'agree', through the 'morning tongues', 'rumours' and 'Codes of conscience', the 'roaring' of brokers on the floor of the Bourse, to the honouring, worshipping, persuading, rejoicing, singing, praising and teaching, set against the pardoning, forgiving, excusing of the last section. It is not Yeats in the end who is mourned and addressed, but discourse itself. All that the individual subject can know is that the movement of distress, when 'The current of his feeling failed'. Yet it is out of this very failure and unsuccess that the succession of discourse is passed on: 'he became his admirers'. As an 'unconstraining voice', the father becomes the child of his own children, for 'The death of the poet (is) kept from his poems'... Language had moved from an original fullness of meaning to scattered rumours and then to silence, for the individual subject. In the end, even his personal death is taken up into discourse and becomes simply, for a few thousand the thought of 'a day when one did something slightly unusual'.

(Stan Smith, *W.H. Auden*, Basil Blackwell)

After Yeats and Eliot, Auden is the most influential English-language poet of the twentieth century. In his best work, he is their equal in artistry and in the complexity and profundity of his treatment of the central concerns of the human condition, and he is their superior in the range and variety of his poetry. No history of the literature of the twentieth century can pretend to thoroughness without a consideration of his contribution to it. No list of its greatest poets can be complete without his name.

(Internet: Student Resources).

Auden's influence on succeeding generations of poets was incalculable, comparable only with that a generation earlier, of Yeats (to whom Auden himself pays homage in 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', 1939). His progress from the engaged, didactic, satiric poems of his youth to the complexity of his later work offered a wide variety of models –the urban, the pastoral, the lyrical, the erudite, the publick, and introspective mingle with great fluency. He was a master of verse form, and accommodated traditional patterns to afresh, early, and contemporary language.

(*Oxford Companion to English Literature* Ed. Margaret Drabble, Oxford University Press).

His verse is full of topical reference to the social and international crises of the time', 'it gives direct expression to the anxieties of the contemporary intelligentsia as perhaps no other writing has done. Auden was interested in verse technique, and influenced by and extensive range of writing, extending from the alternative styles of Old and Middle English to T.S. Eliot and the later work of W.B. Yeats. Throughout his life he was interested in Freud and psychoanalytic theory, and the 20th century German-American theologian Niebuhr. After 1940 he became increasingly committed to Anglo-catholic Christianity.

(*Prontice Hall: Guide to English Literature*, Ed. Marion Wynne-Davies)

4.3.6 SAMPLE QUESTIONS :

1. Consider Auden's poem 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' as an elegy.
2. Bring out Auden's pasteurization of the world around and the world of the poet.

4.3.7 REFERENCE BOOKS :

Fuller, John	–	<i>A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden</i>
Hoggart, Richard	–	<i>Auden: An Introductory Essay</i>
Smith, Stan	–	<i>W.H. Auden</i>

Dr. G. Chenna Reddy

LESSON – 4

DYLAN THOMAS; POEM IN OCTOBER, THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER

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4.4.1 BACKGROUND: WRITER AND THE PERIOD:

Certainly World War II was a watershed in British life, and in Charles Causley's words, 'the signature of murder' is scrawled across the history of writing since the War. If certain experiences, cold and macabre for Douglas, actively attract words we need to ask what manner of themes and experiences have words 'found desirable' in the post war period?

The term Apocalyptic poetry came to be applied not only to the founders of 'The Apocalypse', Henry Treece, J.F. Hendry and G.S. Fraser, but to poets more distantly associated with the group, even to Dylan Thomas, W.S. Graham, George Barker and others. J.F. Hendry and Henry Treece, who edited *The New Apocalypse* and *The White Horseman* : were the pioneers of this poetic movement. Nicholas Moore, G.S. Fraser, Tom Scott and Verson Watkins were other prominent members of this group.

It is important to acknowledge the power of this poetic movement before we can really understand the significance of the more famous and self-conscious movements of the 1950's and 1960's which were very much, in turn established in reaction to the Apocalyptics.

The Apocalyptic poets rejected the politics of the left, flirted with anarchism and revolted against the intellectualised political manner of Auden and his associates. 'The Apocalypse' describes more an attitude to the poetic vocation, than art of poetry. Thomas' verse is famous for its exuberance and verbal excess. The apocalyptic poet would ostensibly free the riches, the thickness, of language from the boundaries of rationality. Perhaps the most famous 'forties poet,' Dylan Thomas, had produced much of his most interesting and characteristic work before 1940, Yet his verve and style exemplify that of the so-called 'New Apocalypse', which was carried through into the dry, sardonic 1950's by Dylan Thomas'; disciple W.S. Graham.

The movement came into prominence at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1946 Henry Treece brought out the manifesto of the new movement in *How I see Apocalypse*. The study of this book certainly reveals the aims and objectives of the movement, J.F. Hendry Treece were considerably influenced by the book of Revelation,; Blake, Shakespeare, Donne, Hopkins; Webster and Dylan Thomas. The movement set its face against over-intellectual poetry of the

thirties, but many of its members and notably Fraser were dominated intellectually in their work. Religion received a spurt during this period and there was a revival of religious poetry in the work of Kathleen Raine, Christopher Hassal, Normal Nicholson, David Gascoyn, Dylan Thomas and Charles Williams. The Apocalyptic Movement was short lived and could not achieve much success. The members of this group were not men of genius. Vernon Watkins to some extent was an original poet influenced by W.B Yeats, T.S Eliot and Hopkins. His remarkable poetry consists of *The Death Bell*, *Cypress and Acacia*, *Affinities*, and *Lady with the Unicorn*. Dylan Thomas was recognized as the father of neo-romantic poetry striking against over intellectuality in poetry. His early poetry is deeply passionate and it often shows an uncontrolled use of the magic language. Thomas' verse has, writes A.C Ward "an exuberant poetic fervor and an abundant responsiveness to natural beauty".

4.4.2 DYLAN THOMAS: HIS LIFE AND WORKS :

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born in the Welsh town of Swansea in 1914. He was educated at Swansea Grammar school, where his father taught English. Thomas began writing poetry during his childhood and much of his work shows the impression on his early life of grim Welsh Puritanism. He left school in 1931 and worked as a reporter. Writing prolifically in his spare time, he moved to London in 1934 and his first book, *18 poems* appeared the same year. His *18 poems* (1934) and *Twenty five poems* (1936) bring together conflicting images in startling association, with pronounced and emotive verbal rhythms. His first publications attracted the attention of Edith Sitwell and other poets and critics. Thomas married Caitlin McNamara in 1937. He was rejected as unfit for military service and spent the war years in London, working as a script writer for the B.B.C. His early poetry appealed with its lively sense of word-magic Thomas first appeared, to readers now trained to regard Eliot's dry gentlemanliness as the approved poetic stance, to be a prophet of a wild new romanticism, challenging the cerebral orderliness of the fashionable poetry of the time. His breathless and daring imagery, with its skulls, maggots, hangmen, wombs, ghosts and thighs, his mingling of biblical and Freudian imagery, of the elemental world of nature in the raw with feverish internal world of human desires, human secrets, human logics and regrets was appealing. Though some of Thomas' poetry of the 1930's was clothed with over-excited imagery, a closer look at his poems revealed not only that they were most carefully related to each other and to the unfolding meaning, but also that these images were put at the service of a number of clearly conceived themes.

He publish two volumes of stories, *The Map of Love* (1939) and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940), as well as *New Poems* (1943), which together with his broadcast work, established his popular reputation. *The Map of Love* is mixed prose and poetry: it includes one of his most remarkable poems *After the Funeral* (1938), in which his striking rhythm and images cohere around the figure of the woman for whose death the poem is an elegy. *After the Funeral Elegy* in which he sees the sad shabbiness of her life and environment transfigured by love, in a triumph of compact emotional suggestion, every image having its place in building up the transition from mourning to comfort. His imagery became more disciplined, the theme of the unity of all life and of life and death as part of a continuing process in which the whole world of nature was involved, became steadily more discernible. Many of his poems of 1940's are more open worded than his early productions and sometimes possess a rhythmic fluidity that sweeps on the meaning with fine effect. Two further volumes, *Deaths and Entrances* (1946), and *In Country Sleep* (1952), were followed by *Collected Poems* (1953), which was received rapturously by both critics and the public. *Deaths and Entrances* contained most of Thomas's most famous work. The poems show the impression made on him by World War II in a *A Refusal to Mourn*; a more overt use of religious emotion is found in *The Conversation of Prayer*, and delight in natural elements.

These poems are often less obscure than earlier ones, but the method remains a strong attack on the emotions, achieved by the shock of the imagery and the sweep of the rhythm. *Deaths and Entrances* and *Collected Poems* show clearly that Thomas was capable of finely disciplined effects in both language and movement and that, in spite of a tendency to overdo favourite images and to confuse poetic gesturing with poetic achievement; he was not a shouting madman but, at his best, a highly craftsman like poet. His popular adulation followed by his early death evoked a reaction, and the charge of empty verbal posturing was brought against him by some of the younger poets of the mid-1950's who were seeking a new chastity of diction and economy of effect:

Thomas undertook extensive reading-tours of the U.S.A mainly for financial reasons, in 1950, 1952 and 1953. His readings drew large audiences and the tours confirmed Thomas's reputation both as an extraordinarily charismatic reader of poetry and as a charming but disruptive and hard-drinking Bohemian. They also took a severe toll on his already fragile health. None the less, Thomas wrote his 'play for voices', *Under Milk Wood*, in 1952 and revised in 1953. He also met Stravinsky, for whom he hoped to write a libretto. In October 1953 he returned, ill and exhausted, after a fourth visit to the U.S.A., he died of alcoholic poisoning in New York the following month.

Thomas' s wide fame derives especially from; his unashamed appeal to latent emotionalism in the common reader, on whom he made a direct impact perhaps greater than that of any other modern poet except W.B. Yeats; his remarkable talent as a public reader of verse; his personality, which became a legend during his own lifetime, especially in America. On the other hand, his exuberance ran counter, before the war, to the intellectual fastidiousness. His elaborate and often highly obscure style, influenced centrally by Hopkins and more marginally by psychoanalysis and surrealism, deploys religious, archetypal and biological imagery in elaborate rhetorical patterns to evoke a sense of exuberant, pantheistic mysticism. His poetry is romantic in its idiosyncratic individualism, its delight in emotion and its idealization of natural energies. Many of his poems offer interesting verbal texture and though some critics have found them sentimental or pretentious they retain a wide popular readership. A few at least of his poems among them *The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower*, *And Death Shall Have No Domination*, *Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night* and *Fern Hill* – seem likely to remain popular, as does *Under Mill Wood*. But though Thomas's reputation is not as high now as it was in the few years immediately before his death, his place is secure-not as the romantic whirling dervish he was once thought to be, but as a thoughtful, indeed a cerebral, poet who sought to put new drive and passion into the language of English poetry and who in his brief life left a handful of poems that will be read and remembered outside classroom and the critic's study.

4.4.3 THE TEXTS :

POEM IN OCTOBER

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
 Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
 And the mussel pooled and the heron
 Priested shore
 The morning beckon

5

With water praying and call of seagull and rook Myself to set foot That second In the still sleeping town and set forth.	10
My birthday began with the water Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name Above the farms and the white horses And I rose In rainy autumn.	15
And walked abroad in a shower of all my days. High tide and the heron dived when I took the road Over the border And the gates Of the town closed as the town awoke.	20
A springful of larks in a rolling Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling Blackbirds and the sun of October Summery On the hill's shoulder,	25
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly Come in the morning wandered and listened To the rain wringing Wind blow cold In the wood faraway under me.	30
Pale rain over the dwindling harbour And over the sea wet church the size of a snail With its horns through mist and the castle Brown as owls But all the gardens	35
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud. There could I marvel My birthday Away but the weather turned around.	40
It turned away from the blithe country And down the other air and the blue altered sky Streamed again a wonder of summer With apples Pears and red currants And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's.	45

Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
 Through the parables
 Of sunlight
 And the legends of the green chapels 50

And the twice told fields of infancy
 That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
 These were the woods the river and sea
 Where a boy
 In the listening 55

Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
 To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
 And the mystery
 Sang alive
 Still in the water and singingbirds. 60

And there could I marvel my birthday
 Away but the weather turned around. And the true
 Joy of the long dead child sang burning
 In the sun.
 It was my thirtieth 65

Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
 Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
 O may my heart's truth
 Still be sung
 On this high hill in a year's turning.

THE FORCE THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE DRIVES THE FLOWER

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
 Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
 Is my destroyer.
 And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
 My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
 Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
 Turns mine to wax
 And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
 How at the mountain spring the blowing wind
 How of my clay is made the hangman's lime

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
 Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
 Shall calm her sores
 And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
 How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

4.4.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS:

The force that that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower

Dylan Thomas feels that there is a mystic and cosmic energy that is present everywhere. He feels that this energy is what makes the flower to bloom and it also pervades as a destroyer that blasts the roots of trees, and is the worm that disfigures the flower. He feels that this universal energy is common to him and the nature around, yet he is not able to completely understand and communicate the mystery of creation.

When he sees the water rushing in the mountains and the rough rocks he is reminded of his own youth and the rush of blood in his veins. Again when he sees the drying up of the streams, he is reminded of his own blood being cold through age. He seems to wonder how the very giver of life, water, should dry up.

There are many things that man does in this life which give him pleasure, in other words, his existence becomes pleasurable through action which spells life. Again, he also participates in the action of funeral rites which suggests death and not life.

Life which is enjoyed by man, the shroud that gives him warmth, and protection from cold is again the very shroud that would finally be spread over his cold body. Death is the final point of a cycle whose beginning is life.

Time ultimately devours the fountain of youth. The rush of blood is dried up and love is torn. But then the dissolution of life leads to an ultimate peace that passeth love's turbulence.

Poem in October:

Poem in October recounts the musing of the poet on his thirtieth birthday.

The poet is obviously residing in a port town, for as he wakes up early in the morning he hears the familiar sounds of the harbour and also the sounds from the woods nearby. However, it is quiet and still as is suggested by the image of the herons standing still like priests.

There are the welcome signs of a day dawning. There is the call of the seagull and the rook. The fishermen have not yet started off and their boats which are tied to the wall are knocking against each other as the waves move them. The town is not yet awake by the time the poet sets forth.

There is an auspicious beginning to his birthday, as it begins with water the symbol of life, and he sees the birds that fly gaily in the morning above the farms and stables. He says he rose early that rainy autumn morning. He walked along enjoying the drizzle and recounting his past life. By the time the town awoke, he was past its border.

The poet passes through many scenes of nature and there is a mixing of different seasons as the poet passes to and from reality to imagination. At first he sees a springful of larks

that resemble a cloud as they fly over the hill slopes. He listens to the sweet songs of the spring birds. The weather suddenly turns to chilly winter with the cold winds blowing.

The poet then views the scene below, from the hill. He describes the church which is the size of a snail as it is viewed from afar and the castles brown in colour. Soon all this changes and is enveloped by the beautiful blooming spring and clear summer skies and the birds flying together in large numbers resembling a cloud. The poet is captivated by this beauty of spring and wishes that it should last at least the whole of his birthday. But the scene changes.

The change is from the blithe and lively spring to the clear skies of summer to Autumn full of ripe fruits like apples, pears and currents. He recalls the wonder of childhood, when his mother during their walks narrated stories of morals and adventure to him. He remembers that these were the very scenes which gave him great joy when as a boy he lay down and listened to the sweet music of nature; the trees, the fish in the river, the summer breeze and the ripple of water.

He wishes to pass his birthday again in this blissful mood. It is noon by now and the sun is beating down on the beautiful scene he had envisaged in the early morning. The cycle of childhood to manhood, spring to winter, has come full circle. The poet only hopes that again when he is older by one more year on his next birthday, he would continue to be able to sing recollecting the joys of life.

... He (Dylan Thomas) shows that in poetry as well as prose his genius was for contemplating childhood from a distance of time, or where he regrets the actual or imminent death of relations or neighbours. In those poems his images remain striking without becoming obscure. In 'Poem in October' he looks at Langhorne through a sunny shower, and the present mingles his memory with mornings long ago... In describing such exhilarating experiences as those in this poem, and in improvising a new style to suit them, Thomas showed real poetic genius. (Introduction to *Nine Modern Poets*).

4.4.5 CRITICAL COMMENTS:

Thomas is the pioneer of Neo-romantic poetry in the forties and the enemy of intellectualism in verse. Thomas' verse has, writes A.C ward , "an exuberant poetic fervour and an abundant responsiveness to natural beauty". David Daiches writes, "His poems far from being random explosions, are tightly packed patterns of meanings –so tightly packed that the expanding references in each image tend to get in the way of those of other images and clot the poems". But his best poems have a combination of concentration and violence, of rhetoric and suggestiveness, that is most impressive.

Thomas' work is famous for its exuberance and verbal excess like the later poet Thomas Gunn, Thomas often deploys syllabics to convey his sense of the natural world and himself in it rolling out of control. *Fern Hill* (1945) is perhaps typical; just as the 'I' who speaks it recalls roving and falling 'Down the rivers of the wind fall light', the poem itself runs its 'heedless ways, its wishes raced through the house high hay'; it seems to be driven, polemically and self-consciously against the repression of formal disciplines, even though Thomas himself was in fact a meticulous formal tight writer.

In surrealism obscurity takes on new powers. Dylan Thomas is nothing if not repetitive and obscure, but the surreal project is rather different in emphasis from his. Surrealism resists

rational explanation; images are peculiarly juxtaposed so as to disrupt commonsense understandings and analogies. Thomas' representativeness is different from others and his relationship with language is both more willfully erratic than that of surrealist poetry and more superficial. He wants words to seduce him, he wants to be possessed.

The range of subjects that he could explore was limited. Many of his images have a sexual significance; for instance, when he writes *The Golden Shot*, he is describing the sperm entering the words. Sex and death, two of his favourite topics became inextricably mixed. His third principal topic is religion and there he appeals strongly to those who wish to believe in a vaguely beneficent power that controls the universe.

4.4.6 SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What is the theme of the poem 'The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower'?
2. Bring out the parallel between the poet's life and nature.
3. 'Poem in October is remembered childhood'. Discuss.
4. Bring out the use of imagery in 'Poem in October'.

4.4.7 REFERENCE BOOKS:

M.L. Rosenthal, *The Modern Poets A Critical Introduction* (OUP)
W.T. Moynihan, *The Craft of Dylan Thomas* (OUP)
C.T. Thomas, Ed., *Twentieth Century Verse*.

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LESSON – 5

PHILIP LARKIN; CHURCH GOING, THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS

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4.5.1 BACKGROUND; WRITER AND THE PERIOD

4.5.2 THE WRITER; HIS LIFE AND WORKS

4.5.3 THE TEXTS

4.5.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

4.5.5 CRITICAL COMMENTS

4.5.6 SAMPLE QUESTIONS

4.5.7 REFERENCE BOOKS

4.5.1 WRITER AND THE PERIOD :

Poetry is a criticism of life. Poetry in the hands of modern poets reflected modern life. Poetry from Chaucer to the twentieth century England faces and places underwent a great change. There were Hamlets everywhere, reflecting the frustrated modern youth. This spirit is reflected both in the poetry related to the pastoral as well as the urban or city life.

One should study great masters like Thomas Hardy, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot to understand twentieth century English poetry. The French writers scrapped the time honoured rational framework of poetry, by evocative symbols and images. Imagists Ezra Pound and D.H Lawrence said that whining or moaning about something was not poetry. After these recognized writers, we come to the poets of 1930's W.H Auden, Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNiece and Dylan Thomas, who carved their niche in poetry. Many of them were influenced by G.M. Hopkins. They dealt with contemporary issues. Edith Sitwell, Edwin Muir and Robert Graves are known as poets of Inter-war period. Robert Conquest's anthology 'New Lines' is sometimes called the 'Movement' in English poetry. The poets Robert included in the anthology believed that 'poetry is written by and for the whole man, intellect, emotions, senses and all; Philip Larkin, Thomas Gunn, Donald Davies and Ted Hughes are highly intelligent and often witty.

The poetic stage of 1950's was completely dominated by this group of poets including Elizabeth Jennings, Kingsley Amis, John Holloway and John Wain. In fact the movement was really made into a coherent poetic body with the publication of three important anthologies; D.J Enright's *Poets of the 1950's* (1955), Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956) and GS Frazer's *Poetry Now* (1956). The work which is covered by these poets is sardonic, lucid and self consciously ironic. Opposed to the romantic and apocalyptic tone of much of 1940's poetry, especially that of Dylan Thomas and W.S. Graham, movement poetry is meticulously crafted and witty, controlled and common-sensical. The wry self mockery and haplessness of much of Larkin's verse is typical of the work of the movement.

4.5.2 HIS LIFE AND WORKS :

Philip Arthur Larkin was born on 9th, August 1922 at Coventry in Warwickshire where his father was a city treasurer. He was educated locally at the King Henry VIII Grammar school where he considered himself a stupid student 'Until he could concentrate on English'. Even as a child, he wrote prose – a thousand words at night after homework and poetry, which he bound up

in little books. He wrote his first poem *Ultimatum* which appeared in the 'Listener', when he was only eighteen. Some of his poems and prose pieces were published in the school magazine. It is believed that 'he worked with a fluency' that was to forsake him later.

Larkin went to St. John's College, Oxford and studied for his graduation in 1943. His Oxford days were formative days because he met and was influenced by other writers like John Wain, Kingsley Amis, John Heath-Stubbs and Sidney Keyes. Poet Vernon Watkins directed Larkin's early poetic style towards that of Yeats' but this was a temporary phase only, as he soon foresook Yeats for the more enduring influence of Hardy. He became a member of the university Jazz club and also of English Society. He organized the lecturing visits of eminent writers like Dylan Thomas, Vernon Watkins and George Orwell. During this time he also had a reputation as a writer on the University Campus. After his failure to get selection into the army he chose to stabilize his position in the university and made friends with prominent persons like Alan Ross, John Wain and Kingsley Amis. His tutor Gavin Bone, an uncompromising opponent of Eliot's modernism intensified his antipathy to "avant-garde obscurities".

The one advantage for him was that his parents had a good collection of books in the home library and he was encouraged to devour whatever books he could lay his hands on: Larkin thought that he had been lucky in staving off the enthusiasm of his classmates for Galsworthy and Chesterton, who were considered as high-priests of modernism.

After Graduating in 1943, he worked in the library at Willington in Shropshire and remained a librarian throughout his career, working at universities in Leicester and Belfast before moving to the university of Hall in 1955. Jazz music was one of his interests,. From 1961 onwards he had been a feature writer on Jazz for the London *Daily Telegraph*. He talked on the radio about Gramophone records, as also his poetry. He won the Arts Council Triennial Award for poetry from the National Institute of Arts and Letters of the United States of America.

The Universities of Belfast, Leicester, St. Andrews, Sussex and Waldwick conferred on him honorary Doctorate of Letters. He was a visiting Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford during 1970 – 71. Larkin's first individual book of poems was published in 1945.

In the 1940's he had published two mainly understated novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947). *Jill* appeared in a revised edition in 1964. Controversially, his early poems, collected in *The North Ship* (1945), gave little indication of his future distinction as a poet; written under the persuasive influence of the early Yeats, they are uncharacteristically rhapsodic and rhetorical. A privately printed pamphlet *XX Poems* (1951), marked the emergence of his true poetic voice but it was the publication of *The Less Deceived* (1955) which brought Larkin's mature work before the public for the first time and established his public persona and recurrent themes. Partly because of its title taken from the poem 'Deceptions', *The Less Deceived* left some readers with a misleading impression of unrelieved skepticism in Larkin's work. While developing many of the themes from the previous book, his next collection *The Whistum Wedding* (1964), in guardedly celebratory in nature. The magnificent little- poem, describing the poet's journey by train from Hull to London, is justly his best known work. His essays, *All About Jazz; A Record Diary*, 1961 – 68 were published in 1970. Larkin's anthology, *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse* (1973), is generally regarded as a disastrous populism; and while it certainly demonstrated his critical shortcomings it also contained good poems that more fashion conscious editors might well have ignored, for exemple, those by James Reeves and C.H. Sisson. It took another ten years for Larkin to bring out his next collection of poems, entitled *High*

Windows which appeared in 1974. At its heart are two substantial poems about ageing, illness and death; 'The Old fools' and 'The Building.' The stance is one of clear-eyed endurance; as Larkin put it in a later, uncollected poem 'Aubade', *Death is no different whined at than withstood*. There are also poems of regret for a vanished or vanishing England, 'Going' and 'Show Saturday', where the formulaic conservatism seems to come a shade too easily, but the tone of affirmation often persists.

A revised edition of this book was published in 1966 when Larkin brought out his first – book of poems *The North Ship* (1946), his inspirations were Yeats and Dylan Thomas, his inclinations lyrical and he himself a caged romantic. In these early poems, there was a bit of the countryside, full of wind and rain. There were the stars which sang 'Blow bright, blow bright', a bricked and stressed sea, 'the sounding river pouring from the cave and the morning and the birds for whom he waited. These poems spoke of the erosion of the world, the wisdom of the grave and the failure of love.

From 1961 until 1971 Larkin wrote a regular column on Jazz records for *The Daily Telegraph*; most of those reviews appear, with a teasingly polemical anti-modernism introduction, in *All What Jazz?* (1970). Similarly anti-modernist principles informed his editing of *Required Writing* (1983), which is a witty and engaging selection of his occasional articles and reviews. An edition of his collected poems by Anthony Thwaite and a biography, by Andrew Milton are in preparation. Larkin's reputation rests on what Peter Lives has called '85 perfect poems', the contents of his three nature collections. Working with traditional, often ingeniously constructed poetic forms, he simultaneously extended the territory of poetry in his generous, wry and emotionally complex treatment of contemporary English life.

4.5.3 TEXTS :

CHURCH GOING

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
 I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
 Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
 And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
 For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff 5
 Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
 And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
 Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
 My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font. 10
 From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-
 Cleaned, or restored ? Someone would know: I don't.
 Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
 Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
 'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant. 15
 The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
 I sign the book donate an Irish sixpence,
 Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I Often do,

And always end much at a loss like this, Wondering what to look for; wondering, too, When churches fall completely out of use What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep A few cathedrals chronically in show; Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases, And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep. Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?	20 25
Or, after dark, will dubious women come To make their children touch a particular stone;	
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some Advised night see walking a dead one? Power of some sort or other will go on In games, in riddles, seemingly, at random; But superstition, like belief must die, And what remains when disbelief, has gone? Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,	30 35
A shape less recognizable each weak, A purpose more obscure. I wonder who Will be the last, the very last to seek This place for what it was; one of the crew That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were? Some ruin bibber, randy for antique, Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh? Or will he be my representative,	40 45
Bored, uniformed, knowing the ghostly silt Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt So long and equably what since is found Only in separation – marriage, and birth, And death, and thoughts of these – for whom was built This special shell? For, though I've no idea What this accoutered frowsty barn is worth, It pleases me to stand in silence here;	50
A serious house on serious earth it is, In whose blent air all our compulsions meet, Are recognized, and robed as destines. And that much never can be obsolete, Since someone will forever be surprising A hunger in himself to be more serious,	55 60

And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:
Not till about
One – twenty on the sunlit Saturday
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense

5

Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence
The river's level drifting breadth began,
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

10

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
For miles inland,
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.
Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
Canals with floating of industrial froth;

15

A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
Until the next town, new and nondescript,
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

20

At first, I didn't I notice what a noise
The weddings made
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys
The interest of what's happening in the shade,
And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls

25

I took for porters larking with the mails,
And went on reading . Once we started, though,
We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls
In parodies of fashion, heels and veils,
All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

30

As if out on the end of an event
Waving goodbye
To something that survived it. Struck, I leant
More promptly out next time, more curiously,
And saw it all again in different terms;
The fathers with broad belts under their sluits.

35

And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat; An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms, The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes, The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that	40
Marked off the girls un-really from the rest. Yes, from café's And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days Were coming to an end. All down the line	45
Fresh couples climbed aboard: the rest stood round; The last confetti and advice were thrown, And , as we moved, each face face seemed to define Just what it saw departing: children frowned At something dull; fathers had never known	50
Success so huge and wholly farcical; The women shared The secret like a happy funeral; While girls, gripping their handbags tighter , stared At a religious wounding. Free at last,	55
And loaded with the sum of all they saw, We hurried towards London, shuffling gouts of steam. Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast Long shadows over major roads, and for Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem	60
Just long enough to settle hats and say I nearly died, A dozen marriages got under way. They watched the landscape, sitting side by side - An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,	65
And someone running up to bowl—and none Thought of the others the others they would never meet	
Or how their lives would all contain this hours. I thought of London spread outs in the sun, Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:	70
There we were aimed. And as we raced across Bright knots of rail Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail Traveling coincidence; and what it held Stood ready to be loosed with all the power That being changed can give. We slowed again,	75

And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow – shower
Sent out of sights, somewhere becoming rain.

80

4.5.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS :

CHURCH GOING:

The poem gives a graphic description of the poet's visit to a church and the place that it occupies in the world community.

The poet is on a sort of excursion on his bicycle when he sees a church. Finding that there is no one inside, he goes in to see the church, with due respect as he takes off his hat. The old door of the church shuts with a thud as he goes in; it is like any other church with the prayer books, flowers that have withered, and brass knobs and handles. There is the usual organ at one end, but now silent, a silence that is all the more pronounced as the organ would fill the church with music when the church is performing any ritual.

He moves forward, glancing upwards he finds the roof has been cleaned or restored recently as it 'looks almost new'. He goes on to the place from which the priest gives his sermon. This is the sanctum sanctorum, or the holiest of holy places in the church. Obviously the poet has come full circle from a bored traveller entering a deserted church to the arrival at the holiest place in the church. Significantly the verse he finds in the open book on a stand from where the priest lectures (lectern) is 'Here endeth'. He reads the words aloud (louder than he intended) and they echo in the empty church. His foray into the church is over, and he goes out donating an Irish sixpence. The 'Irish sixpence' is significant because it is a currency not recognized in England. It echoes the stepmotherly treatment England had towards Ireland which was resented by many Irish poets. For the moment he feels dissatisfied with his visit.

Then the poet muses how the church had always an attraction for him though he did not gain anything tangible. He feels that there is something, which the church offers that he is not able to identify. He wonders what will happen when people stop believing in God and religion and neglect the churches. Then will these buildings become deserted with the few valuables locked up in show-cases? These places that are holy, may turn into questionable places after dark, or will the belief and faith vanish-but superstition still make people go there secretly for remedies. The poet feels that the churches have some mysterious power that cannot be wiped out though the buildings themselves may be ruined. When these majestic churches fall into ruin what will happen? Maybe someone interested in archaic buildings would study the structure or some dealer in antiques would forage the ruin for items that could be sold in the market for great profit or someone who still believes in god and religion would go in offering his prayers and myrrh, or it maybe someone like the poet wandering aimlessly and being attracted by the ruin would step in.

Whatever may happen in the future; whether the churches would last or fall into ruins; whatever the type of people that visit it, the poet feels a certain compulsion in its vicinity. He says that this ground on, which the church stood was an attraction for many for a long, long period. It was the place of human gathering on significant occasions like marriage, birth and death. Whatever be the purpose for which it was built, the church is significant for the gathering and spirit of goodness that it propagated. Hence, the poet finds great pleasure even in the silence of the church.

The poet ends the poem with how the importance of the church may continue. He feels that the church is a sobering influence on man. It is a place that gives peace of mind and provides an atmosphere that is healing. Many a doubt about life and its complications are set at rest in the holy atmosphere of the church. This hallowdness of the church continues and never can become obsolete. For even in the future man who has problems that he feels are unsolvable or is searching for the ultimate wisdom will find it in the church. And he who enters it will come out more sober, and wiser.

Thus the poet brings out the individual as well as collective gains of faith and religions as represented by the church. However, there is a play on the title of the poem. As C.T Thomas notes 'Notice the play on the double meaning. Church going implies the act of going into a church as also the disappearance of the church as an institution'.

THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS:

The poem is a graphic description of journey by train from Hull to Lincolnshire. The two cities are separated by the river Humber. The poet is relaxed and the journey is leisurely. The train is almost empty when the poet boards it. It runs through the city with the houses and streets that cross each other. Soon it is at the far end of the city with shore of the river and smells of the fishing colony. And then the train moves on crossing the river, the cityscape and the waters meet.

He travels all afternoon and the various sights are beautifully and graphically described. They cross farms with cattle, canals in which the industrial outlets are floating like froth, then the houses with their hedges, and the sweet smell of grass drifts into the compartment which till then was smelling of upholstery. The train leaves the city and the approach is signaled by the junkyard of used cars which usually is in the outskirts.

The train halts at a station, there is some bustle and movement. At first the poet thinks it is the porters who are loading and unloading, and so does not pay any attention. But soon he realizes that it is not porters, but girls who are dressed fashionably and with all their make up, smiling goodbye to some passenger that has boarded the train.

The poet is impressed by this scene and at the next station he peers out curiously to see what it is. It is the same scene all over again. It is a marriage party bidding farewell to the bridal couple. There are the elders who are dressed formally, the father sweating after all the work and worry of the wedding, the mother who is elderly and fat shouting instructions to her daughter, the uncle who is in a jolly mood and the other youngsters dressed in bright and varying colors offering a colorful scene. All along the journey the poet saw fresh couples getting into the train, and each individual that was left behind on the platform reflected different attitudes and emotions. The fathers satisfied with the success of marriage, the women happy that the daughter is married, the youngsters bored with the proceedings which are dull and meaningless, the young girls nervous with their own future expectations, and the couple free at last and by themselves, settled comfortably in the train and watching the landscape.

The landscape soon altered as they were approaching the city of London. The green fields were now replaced by squares of buildings, the trees were only those tall ones planted on either side of the roads. The couples in the train were now together, but would soon, each one, go their own way and perhaps never meet again. The wedding season, and the train had brought them together for a brief period, only to be separated. The train finally pulled up to a halt after

going through the murkiness of the city, the temporary togetherness came to an end. The poet however felt a great surge of love for all the people and humanity that traveled with him.

4.5.5 CRITICAL COMMENTS:

Larkin was the most eminent of the group known as the 'New Lines' poets (from an anthology of that name, 1956, ed. By Robert Conquest) otherwise called movement. Many of them held posts in universities and their work is characterized by thoughtfulness, irony self-doubt, humility and the search for completely honest feeling. These qualities are in accord with the imaginative temper of Thomas Hardy's poetry; Larkin who greatly admired Hardy, has also been compared to W.H Auden though his political conservatism and concern to proclaim the pathos and humour of everyday experience rather than address the academic reader represent a tuning away from the technical radicalism of writers like Auden and T.S. Elot.

The influence of Hardy and Yeats is clearly seen in Larkin's love poetry which is pessimistic. Some poems reflect a hopeless longing for love while in some others they are cynically dismissed as a lack of sense of reality. Larkin speaks of that "much mentioned brilliance of, love" in his "*Love Songs in Age*". We do not see the total success and untainted joy in love in the love poetry of Larkin. He repeatedly contrasts his understanding of ideal love and real love. The disturbing quality of sex that is responsible for the disappointment in love is treated in some of his poems. Larkin makes use of buried sexual innuendo like the romantic poets especially John Keats. His love poetry is at once traditional and modern.

Larkin like Keats deems romanticism as the most intense aspect of a reality. We are reminded of Keats when we observe the haunting vision of joy and oblivious circumstances in his *Essential Beauty*. Regarding a sherry party Larkin says.

In a pigs arse friend
Day comes to an end
The gas fire breathes, the tree are
Darkly swayed.

Larkin's composition in *The Essential Beauty* may be a girl in an album or a real girl. As John Bayley remarks, "Yet her image is inviolable and reminds one of unattainable romance. The degradation of daily circumstances does not alter her transcendent nature or that of the poem. 'she was too good for this life' but when seen through the lens of Larkin's romantic art ordinary living appears itself just that".

Larkin keenly observes and makes use of many techniques that are to be found in Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. As Geoffrey Harvey observes Larkin uses those dramatic monologue techniques "*because for him as for Browning the scouting of quotidian reality is a strenuous and complex endeavor, sometimes requiring the poet to explore his feelings through a character very different from his own and at other times he finds himself, with one whom the reader can identify and who can occasionally, be very close to the poet himself*". The dramatic monologue has helped him to create psychological characters and evoke moral sympathy. His dramatic monologues are rich in themes and varied in the personnel through whom the themes are adumbrated.

4.5.5 SAMPLE QUESTIONS :

1. What is Philip Larkin's attitude to the church as an institution?
2. Describe Larkin's journey from Hull to London. What are the scenes *enroute*?

4.5.6 REFERENCE BOOKS :

1. Oxford Companion to English Literature
Ed. Margaret Drabble
2. Prenticehall Guide to English Literature
Ed. Wynne Davies
3. Philip Larkin; A Study of Select Poems
By. Raghavacheri and Raghavacheri
(Prakash Book Depot.)

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LESSON – 6

BACKGROUND TO TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH DRAMA

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- 4.6.1 A BRIEF SURVEY
- 4.6.2 SOME IMPORTANT DRAMATISTS
- 4.6.3 IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS AND SCHOOLS
- 4.6.4 REFERENCE BOOKS

4.6.1 A BRIEF SURVEY:

Twentieth century English literature may be divided into two phases for convenience sake, they are *Modernism* and *Post Modernism*. Both were influenced by the social changes, developments in philosophy, psychology and Science. The factors that had an immediate influence were World War I and World War II. The first World War caused destruction and desolation which led to the questioning of man's progress. The second World War reflected man's capacity for evil and the destructive potential of scientific knowledge and the dangers of dictatorship.

Drama in the early part of twentieth century was dominated by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw was influenced by the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and dealt with contemporary social and moral problems. The rise of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin was significant as it became the center of the Irish dramatic revival.

Two of the leading dramatists of this theatre were J.M. Synge; who wrote poetic dramas with Irish peasant life as the background and Sean O' Casey who wrote mainly political tragicomedies in the naturalistic tradition. Another great influence on modern drama was the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. In the 1930's and the 1950's, T.S Eliot made a significant contribution by attempting to revive poetic drama in English. W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood produced plays mixing verse and prose which reflected the expressionist work of Brecht.

In the 1950's a new generation of dramatists came to the fore. They were influenced by the European dramatists Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and Brecht. These dramatists employed colloquial speech with an expressive and symbolic power. Foremost among these dramatists was Samuel Beckett, and his play *Waiting For Godot* published in 1955 was the precursor of a dramatic movement employing existentialist philosophy and anti – realist techniques. *The Theatre of the Absurd* of Beckett and Ionesco influenced the work of another generation. Among them was Harold Pinter whose plays dealt with the ambiguities and failures of everyday communication. He employed dialogue which was compact and made use of silence. His plays suggested the fear and violence underlying ordinary experience. John Osborne and Arnold Wesker led the movement called 'kitchen –sink drama' This genre dealt with the working class life and social conflict. Since 1950 English drama has been committed to addressing public issues and has exhibited a strong political commitment with a radical tinge. These features are evident in such dramatists as Wesker, John Arden, Howard Brenton, Trevor, Griffiths and David Edgar. Most of these dramatists have performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London which has been the center for experimental drama .

4.6.2 SOME IMPORTANT DRAMATISTS:

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) is one of the outstanding dramatists of the twentieth century. Shaw had been a theatre critic for many years before he became a dramatist. Therefore he had a thorough knowledge of the theatre and his experiences helped to make use of the popular tricks of the trade. He was greatly influenced by the Norwegian dramatists, Henric Ibsen. In his book *'The Quintessence of Ibsenism'* (1891), Shaw observed that Ibsen reformed naturalism with an emphasis on social plays. Shaw felt that drama was a vehicle which could present the abuses and contradictions of society in an entertaining and provocative manner. Shaw desired that his plays should shock the reader into a new perspective. He observed *"I must warn my readers that my attacks are directed against themselves, not against my stage figures."* Ibsen's great contribution as Shaw saw it had been twofold: The presentation on the stage of life as it is really lived in contemporary society, and the introduction of discussion into drama, Shaw's plays in fact reflect both these aspects. In his preface to *Plays Pleasant* (1898), Shaw wrote: *"I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity, and all the other commonplaces of civilization which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretences that such things are progress, science, morals, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness and all the other names the newspapers call them. On the other hand, I see plenty of good in the world working itself out as fast as the idealists will allow it; and if they would only let it alone and learn to respect reality, which would include the beneficial exercise of respecting themselves, and incidentally, respecting me, we should all get along much better and faster."* In the same preface, Shaw pleaded for a "genuinely scientific natural history". Again in his preface to *Major Barbara*, he described himself as a 'professor of natural psychology'. In a sense Shaw was repeating the old cry 'Back to Nature' not the nature of a Wordsworth but the nature of man. Regarding the social theme Shaw did not go in for the seamy side of life or the grim reality which causes suffering, but rather presented the social problems that his characters suffered in a society which the audience represented. In a sense as David Daiches observed 'His audience (was) the true villein of his drama'. Thus Shaw's plays were those that were a vehicle for responsible discussion of modern problems. The success of Shaw is not just the change in outlook but the 'immense talent' and 'prodigious wit' that he possessed. He was an entertainer who with his vast experience in the theatre was very effective in staging his plays. It is difficult to classify Shaw into any particular category because of his genius, a genius that was perfectly employed.

James Mathew Barrie (1816 - 1937) followed the tradition of Shaw in technical skill and popular tradition. Though Barrie does not occupy a distinct position, he was quite effective in his plays like *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908) and *Mary Rose* (1920), which have an amount of technical competence and delicate feelings.

One of the most important and interesting development in drama during the first half of the twentieth century was the revival of poetic drama. W.B. Yeats (1865 to 1939) and T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) were the pioneers of this movement. In his plays Yeats employed Irish mythological themes. His style was fluid. He employed symbolism both in action and imagery which suggested many levels of meaning, even though they were quite clear. For example his play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) which was about an Irish martyr led to riots among the Dublin audiences. The later plays of Yeats however employed symbolism which was drawn from many sources and sometimes become rather hazy or unclear. Yeats soon left the Irish literary movement, yet as David Daiches points out:

The Irish background, the Abbey Theatre, the national consciousness, and the view of Irish and Anglo-Irish history are all important for an understanding of how Yeats came to be the kind of dramatist he was.

The Irish dramatic movement gave rise to a number of plays which depicted modern Irish life, among these playwrights John Millington Synge (1871 - 1909) stands out prominently. Synge used the Irish turn of speech and the Irish imagination which brought a new life to English Drama. In his Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*. Synge observed:

On the stage, one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by any one who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

Synge attempted in his plays to use a vocabulary that was poetic and at the same time both rich and natural. He consciously avoided the urban speech which he felt was weak. Though Synge did not fully succeed in his aims yet his plays like *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1910) were quiet successful presentations of comedy and at the same time offering a profound criticism of life. Another highlight was the 'Poetic Prose' that was based upon the musical and rhythmic speech of the Irish, that Synge employed.

T.S. Eliot (1898-1965) was one of the dramatists who tried to restore poetic drama. His plays as for example *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) attempted to restore ritual to drama. In this play for example, Eliot makes use of the Chorus and the Archbishops speech which is like a sermon. His most interesting play is *The Family Reunion* (1939) where he combines Greek mythology with a modern situation. In his plays *The Cocktail Party* (1950) and *The Confidential Clerk* (1954). Eliot tries to combine Christian and classical symbolism. Though Eliot succeeded to some extent in versification, it is debatable whether he was able to balance the ritualistic and the realistic in his plays.

Many Critics are of the opinion that the play *Look Back in Anger* staged by the Royal Court Theatre in 1956, heralded a new phase in twentieth century English Drama. The play written by John Osborne (born 1929) has a theme that is based upon the humble and upper middleclass family. The play is remarkable for a new kind of vitality or liveliness in its dialogue. The theme, which dealt with the anxieties and frustrations prevalent in the English society touched the hearts of the viewers. The frustrations of the young men who had been to Universities and who after the Second World War found themselves jobless and considered as misfits in society brought about a feeling of despondency. They felt that the 'establishment', (a word which is increasingly used in a negative sense) which represented the older generation was not able to understand their plight. This theme of the frustrated, antiestablishment young man was hinted at earlier but came to be powerfully projected in the play *Look Back in Anger*. David Daiches significantly observes: *Look Back in Anger is more important as cultural phenomena than as a work of literature in its own right. He spoke for a generation (The first generation, it might be added, to grow up in the shadow of the atom-bomb) and in doing so brought about a*

new vitality in English drama. Another Critic A.E. Dyson, in his article on 'Look Back in Anger' sums up as follows:

Look Back in Anger is a play which increases understanding both of the tormented and their torments. But it does more. It reminds us what our rebel moralists are apt to be like, and of the strange mingling of sensitivity and cynicism in their make-up that can make life terrible for those who know them, and yet offer rewards as well. In a world which usually deals with its most challenging moral misfits by first mocking or martyring them, and later venerating them for the wrong reasons, it is no bad thing for writers to remind us occasionally what such people are often really like,

A dramatist having a very different talent from Osborne is Harold Pinter (1940). Pinter was influenced by the dramatists of the *Absurd Theater*, Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. One of his very successful plays *The Birthday Party* (1958) employs a very disturbing and 'deliberately vague symbolism' (David Daiches). The dialogue is colloquial and progresses steadily to fluency as the action builds up. Dramatically it was a remarkable success, mainly because of the use of dialogue to achieve the strong effect. His other play *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* (both written in 1957, produced in 1960) continue to have the same combination of symbol and dialogue projecting the shabby environment and a sort of naturalistic atmosphere of the modern times. His play *The Caretaker* (1960) develops further the technique that Pinter produced in the earlier plays. Commenting on Pinter's achievements David Daiches observes: *One can not help having the feeling that Pinter has succeeded in using the theatre brilliantly in order to play on his audience's nerves. For all their symbolic overtones, most of his plays lack a dimension, or perhaps lack a middle level between the surface realism and the background symbolism, that middle level of credible and moving significant human action that makes great drama immediately acceptable as a memorable story while working at deeper levels to achieve further layers of meaning for the perceptive. But there is both theatrical and verbal brilliance at work in Pinter's plays, and one is left with great expectations.*

A third dramatist during the 1950's is John Arden (born 1930). His play *Sargeant Musgrave's Dance* staged in 1959 at the Royal Court Theatre created a sensation. Arden very successfully employed a language that was a mixture of the rough soldier's and miner's dialogue, and folk-song and folk-ballad. The play according to Arden 'is a realistic, but not naturalistic play'. The play in a sense forecasts the doom of the hero. The play is significant for 'its tone and technique than for the clarity of its theme'. (David Daiches). Arden himself commenting on the play observed:

I have eadeavoured to write about the violence that is so evident in the world, and to do so through a story that is partly one of wish-fulfillment. I think that many of us must have at some time felt an overpowering urge to match some particularly outrageous piece of violence with an even greater and more outrageous retardation. Musgrave tries to do this: and the fact that the sympathies of the play are clearly with him in his original horror, and then turn against him in his intended namely, seem to have bewildered many people.

We may sum up the movement of Modern British Drama in the words of John Russell Brown in his 'Introduction' to *Modern British Dramatists* as follows:

Although the new British dramatists do not want to make statements or define their aim, they are creatively involved with society and seek a full revelation in their plays of what

they find in the worlds around them and within them. They write for the theater because this is the art form, which allows them to show the complexity of those worlds: the permanent and frightening forces that are behind explosive crises and each boring, dehumanizing routine, the limitations, danger, and excitements of a personal, subjective view; the impossibility of fudging any man except in relation to others; the strength of truth and permanence of idealism. They write youthful, topical, sensational, theatrical plays because the theater can be a realistic, exploratory, complicated and, hence, responsible medium. They are promising and already important dramatists.

4.6.3 IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS AND SCHOOLS

IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE:

The Irish National Theatre owed its existence mainly to the efforts of W.B. Yeats, and the benefactress Lady Gregory along with like-minded nationalists who wanted to promote a national Irish culture through drama. The movement was supported by the Irish National Dramatic Company led by the actor W.G. Fay and the Irish Literary Theatre founded by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. The movement was further strengthened by a literary revival in Europe under the influences of Ibsen and Strindberg. All these led to the establishment of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The Abbey Theatre became the focus not only for drama based on Irish life and folklore, but also for experimental drama and was on par with the experimental theaters of the time such as Theatre Libre in Paris and Freie Buhne in Berlin. The liberal outlook of the theatre is seen in its productions of J.M. Synge's masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World* which was a reaction against Ibsen, though Ibsen provided the stimulus for Edward Martyn who was its most outstanding contributor. The prime period of the Abbey Theatre ended with Synge's death and Yeats' retirement from its management in 1909. However it remained a Theatre of distinction until 1951, when a fire destroyed its building.

THE COMEDY OF MENACE:

The term was first used by David Campton as a subtitle for his play *The Lunatic View* (1957). In a comedy of menace the comic situation evoking laughter is accompanied or followed by a feeling of some impending disaster. Throughout the play, though it is supposed to be comic, the audience has an uneasy feeling of some threat or violence that is just round the corner. The menace is shown sometimes directly or sometimes hinted at. This feeling of uneasiness and violence to follow arises from the uncertainty and insecurity that the characters face. The playwright ingeniously establishes a connection between the characters' predicament and the audiences' private anxieties to achieve his success. Thus the comedy of menace evokes laughter, which is uneasy and nervous. The effect is usually achieved by the situational control in the plot as well as dialogue.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The 'absurd' movement was a reaction and rebellion against traditional literature and traditional culture. The earlier tradition was based upon the assumption that man was inherently good and noble. That he lived in a universe that was at least partially intelligible and possessed some sort of ordered social structure. The horrors of World War II led the philosophers and writers to believe in the human creature as an isolated individual living in a universe that was meaningless. There was a strong belief in the human endeavour as moving from nothingness

whence it came towards nothingness where it must end. Hence human existence was both anguished and absurd. Some of the leading figures of this movement on the philosophic front were Jean Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. Albert Camus defines this state of anguish thus:

In a universe suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile ... this divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (The Myth of Sisyphus, 1942)

Again the French dramatist Eugene Ionesco observes:

Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" he goes on to add" people drowning in meaninglessness can only be grotesque, their suffering can only appear tragic by derision".

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) was the most influential writer of the Absurd drama. His plays *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and *Endgame* (1958) project the irrationalism, helplessness, and absurdity of life. He achieves the effect by rejecting realistic settings, logical reasoning, and well-knit plot. Another playwright that is in the Absurd mould is the French playwright Jean Genet. Eugene Ionesco's play *The Bald Soprano* (1949), *The Lesson* (1951) also employ this technique. *The Oxford Companion To English Literature* observes:

The Theatre of the Absurd drew significantly on popular traditions of entertainment; on mime, acrobatics, and circus clowning, and, by seeking to redefine the concerns of 'serious' theatre, played an important role in extending post-war drama. Amongst the dramatists associated with the Theatre of the Absurd are Arthur Adamov, Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Alfred Jarry, Harold Pinter and Boris Vian.

KITCHEN – SINK DRAMA:

This movement was in part a reaction against the drawing room comedies and middle-class drama of writers like Coward and Rattigan. It was also to some extent responsible in undermining the popularity of the verse drama of T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. Kenneth Tynan was one of the most influential critics during the 1950's. He championed the plays of Osborne, Wesker, Delaney, Simpson and Beckett. The group of writers mainly Wesker, Delaney and Osborne portrayed the working-class life with an emphasis on domestic realism. The title 'Kitchen Sink Drama' is derived perhaps from Wesker's play *The Kitchen* (1959) which first appeared at the Royal Court-Theatre. The play dealt with the stresses and conflicts of life behind the scenes in a restaurant. The play was a tragedy, Wesker employed the rhythms of working class life in a highly innovative manner.

REALISM:

"Realism" at first was associated with "social drama," for its immediate goal was to display accurately and authentically the social environment and behaviour of the day. But this association gave realism a reputation for being superficial, for getting lost in relatively unimportant surface detail at the expense of portraying the more important soul of things. That was why Ibsen resisted "Realism" for so long, preferring to go on writing obsolete heroic drama, often in verse, rather than stoop to "Mere photography". But then it dawned on this genius that the surface of life could

be used in a poetic, symbolic way, just as great photographers were learning that the surface of life could be used in a poetic, copy life's exterior but could interpret and poetically evoke the hidden depths as well. Ibsen converted to "Realism" when he found that he could use the surface to suggest the deeps and so invented what came to be called "Psychological Realism" in which the picturing of society is employed to suggest the underlying soul or psyche. And insofar as his plays penetrated mundane appearances, they were examples of "Philosophical Realism" as well, and of "Critical Realism" insofar as they saw through the humbug of the day. It was a neat trick, this elevating of what seemed a trivial and mundane in art into a high art, but so many missed the trick that Ibsen was often erroneously dismissed as a mere social realist, thus leading other dramatists to become overtly "Nonrealistic" in their expression of the psychological deeps and intellectual heights in order to separate themselves from what was thought a second-rate art.

NATURALISM:

Naturalism (sometimes capitalized in this sense) may also refer to a particular philosophy of life and/or to a the Social Darwinist idea that human beings are purely the product of heredity and environment, utterly determined in their behaviour by the shaping factors of the natural world. This philosophy may be embodied in any kind of play, realistic or nonrealistic; and a play may have characters in it who express a naturalistic view without the play itself being totally, or at all, supportive of naturalism as philosophy. Literary naturalism refers to works that attempt to embody a naturalistic philosophy in a very specific form, in which realistically portrayed characters are obviously and entirely at the mercy of environment and heredity. Typically, plays of this type (Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*) focus on a lower-class or primitive environment, where the iron laws of heredity and environment are most nakedly exposed in an elemental struggle for survival.

The reactions against realism and naturalism were various, some nonealistic dramatic forms given names from the past such as fantasia, burlesque, allegory, and extravaganza, some having names invented for them, such as symbolism, and expressionism, and some seeming to fit no particular category (most of Shaw's plays). Of the new forms, symbolism and expressionism most typified the modernist reaction against realism and naturalism, having in common that they were evocations or assertions of a reality beyond the ken of positivistic science. Symbolism pointed to a spiritual reality behind appearances, and expressionism projected outward an internal reality positivism overlooked it.

4.6.4 BOOKS FOR REFERENCE:

The Oxford companion to English Literature
Ed. Margaret Drabble

Prentice Hall guide to English Literature
Ed. Wynne Davies

A Critical History of English Literature
By David Daiches

Dr. M.S. Rama Murty

Lesson – 7

Thomas Gunn: My Sad Captains

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4.7.1 Background: Writer and the Period

'The Movement' is a loose grouping of poets who made their names during the 1950's. The term derives from an unsigned article by J.D. Scott, 'In the Movement', published in *The Spectator* on 1st October 1954. Although it can be extended to include novelists and playwrights, it has come to identify essentially those poets included in Robert Conquest's anthology *New Lines* (1956): Conquest himself, Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D.J.Enright, Thom Gunn, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, Phillip Larkin and John Wain. Conquest's introduction claimed that they shared a 'negative determination to avoid bad principles'.

The majority of the Movement belong to working class or lower middle class and all of them were educated at Oxford or Cambridge University. They were classified as University wits or New Empsonians but later on the critics called the new poets as belonging to the movement. These poets sought rather to construct than to pour themselves out in lamentation and also that whatever might be their facility of expression, they attached no inherent value to linguistic or metrical innovations. Their stance was ironic and antiromantic, their manner at times literary, and, to some tastes, academic; detractors have not failed to point out how many movement poets earned

their living in Universities. Yet no post-war anthology of new writers has included such an impressive proportion of subsequently distinguished poets as *New Lines*.

The feature that distinguishes the poetry of the 1950's from the preceding decades is that it submits to no great system of unconscious commands. Donald Davie, a prominent member of this group aims his hostile criticism at the symbolist and post-symbolist traditions in poetry and criticism. The Movement has staged a rebellion against the modern poetry of 1920's, represented by T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound. Phillip Larkin, the illustrious poet of the movement declares that he has been most influenced by the poetry which he has enjoyed that of Hardy, Owen, Rossetti and Auden. Larkin says ' I have no belief in tradition, or a common myth-kitty or casual illusion in a poem to other poem or poets'.

4.7.2 The Writer : Life and Works

Thomson William Gunn was born at Graverend, Kent, on August 29, 1929, the son of Herbert Smith Gunn, a journalist who was later to edit the Evening Standard, and Ann Thomson, who encouraged Gunn's early love of books. When he was eight, the family moved to Hampstead. He was educated at University College School, Hampstead except for a spell as an evacuee at Bedales in Hampstead. Gunn's parents divorced when he was 11, the year he wrote his first poem, and also, to please his mother, a brief novel. Four years later she blocked a door with a filing cabinet and gassed herself. She was found dead by Gunn and his younger brother Auden. It was 48 years before he produced a poem about it.

After two years of National Service and six months in Paris, Gunn went to Trinity College, Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1953. There he read English and set himself the task of writing a poem a week, which his friend Karl Miller would scrutinize. He met F.R. Leavis only once, but admired him and recalled learning a lot from the Leavisites around him. At Cambridge he was a friend of the Cartoonist Mark Boxer and met an American student, Mike Kitay. When Kitay was summoned to Texas to serve in the U.S. Air Force, Gunn sought a way of following him, and as a result ended up as a creative writing fellow at Stanford.

In 1954 Gunn's first collection appeared. *Fighting Terms* won immediate praise, particularly for the poem *The Wound* which drew upon the *Iliad* and demonstrated a muscularity and rigour in its metre which was out of teeper with the times, compared with later work, the poetry seems restrained, but it still showed an early instinct for provocation. The book has the formality of Marvell, but an updated attitude towards sexual politics. This was the age of *The Movement*, a loosely – bracketed bunch of poets centered around Phillip Larkin and Kingsley Amis.

A Second Volume, *The Sense of Movement* was published in 1957. Here, the poet summed up the spirit of his age, calling it generation of the very chance. In 1958 he joined the staff of the University of California, Berkeley, and set up home with Mike Kitay in San Francisco. The couple lived together there for the rest of his life, in spite of Gunn's ceaseless clubbing and cruising. He was still less faithful to his teaching duties, which he dropped in 1966. In 1975, he took a post as visiting lecturer at Berkeley. Two poems are suffixed by note that the poet was on acid while composing them. Where his imagery had been complex before, now that he was off his head it seemed clearer, if only because of the reader's impression that Gunn was hallucinating.

With the publication of *Jack Straw's Castle* in 1976, Gunn managed to address homosexuality in a relaxed, Whitmanesque voice. By now his metre was relaxing too, and he experimented with free verse. This proved moiré controversial than anything Gunn had to say about sex and drugs: English critics in particular were snifty about the change in form. Just when Gunn began taking pleasure in exploring his way of life in verse, it was transformed. In the 1980's many of his friends contracted the Aids Virus. He admitted he had shared needles with other drug users and had freely enjoyed adventurous forms of sex, but he did not catch the disease.

The Man with Night Sweats (1992) contains laments for his lost friends, and sounds a bemused note survivor guilt. The book won the first Forward prize. The collection also included poems about ornithology, stakeboarding and marine life. In 1999 Gunn retired from teaching. He was by then Senior Lecturer at Berkeley, and had a distinguished record as an academic, producing editions of *Fulke Greville* in 1968 and in 1974. From 1958 to 1964, he covered poetry for the *Yale Review*. He was a generous and broad minded critic, standing up for Ginsberg, and was scrupulous in his judgment.

He remained a perfectionalist in poetry and stoutly defended the English language against abuse: 'you'd be surprised at what the dictionaries say nowadays. Following new usage, they say 'lack of interest' is one of the words meaning. Good Lord; I'll be dead soon. I don't need to live in their new world'. Thom Gunn is survived by Mike Kitay, and a cat, Rose.

4.7.3 THE TEXT

MY SAD CAPTAINS

*One by one they appear in
The darkness; a few friends, and
A few with historical
Names. How late they start to shine!
But before they fade they stand
Perfectly embodied, all*

*The past lapping them like a
Clock of chaos. They were men
Who, I thought, lived only to
Renew the wasteful force they
Spent with each not convulsion.
They remind me, distant now.*

*True, they are not at rest yet,
But now they are indeed
Apart, winnowed from failures,
They withdraw to an orbit
And turn with disinterested
Hard energy, like the stars.*

4.7.4 Analysis of The Poem

This may be taken as one of the simpler poems of Thomas Gunn. In this poem he recalls the great personalities of history that he had come across or hand of them. For Most of these great men reorganization has come late. Gunn uses the parallel of the moon and the stars. The moon rises first and in the brightness of the moon and the light that in there at sunset the stars are not while. It is only when the night advances and darkness is total that the stars begin to shine and they are a permanent future or immortal. Similarly, the recognition of these great men has come only after a long time, after the study of the confusing historical accounts, and once established. They are immortal like the stars. Gunn is here very close to this Hindu belief of great personalities that have become to inspire and instruct mankind, like *Arundhati*, *Dhruva* etc., These great men had the capacity to expend their energies and down upon them for activities that were useful and production. The way they had spent their lives is a lesson even for the present generation.

These great men were not set back by the failures they encountered. They pursued their aims with a significance of purpose and did not care or with down from action even if the world did not appreciate them. Their service was what again in Hindu Philosophy is called the *nishkamakarma*. That is their service was oriented not anticipating any benefit or personal glory – but done as pure service and following of their ideals. It is by then in a sense withdrawal from the practical world of profit and benefit, that they have become immortal as the stars. Hence, the poem gives the message of selfless service which would lead, through tracing temporary isolation as those suffered by great personalities like cannot. Therefore, it is thus that would stand for all time and be immortal.

4.7.5 Critical Comments

Thomas Gunn was a very modern and flashy personality. Brendan Bernhard in his article observes, "*Thin and relatively fit despite 71 years, Gunn still looks like a hedonist. He sits in a couch in his living room dressed in ancient blue jeans, black motorcycle boots, and a T-shirt featuring a very buff male torso cut off at the neck-just where his own neck appears, in fact. His sparse gray hair is cropped about and clings a little firmly to his scalp. Naturally, to someone accustomed to viewing an author's face through the delayed chronology of black jackets photographs, he looks diminished. Still, if*

the traces of youthfulness have finally bid Gunn farewell (for a long time he looked for younger than his years), everything about him, from the fading panther tattoo on his forearm to the glimmer of gold in his ear, tell you that he once had it, and still identifies with it strongly”.

The same critic Brendan Bernhard asked Gunn how did he see himself as a poet. Gunn replied.

“I think I thought of myself as being Baudelaire or somebody (he laughs self deprecatingly) treating the urban scene with rhyme and meter. I like the slight whiff of the satanic about Baudelaire, which is not what I admire about him now. But I also liked the fact that he wrote about sleeping with whores and stuff. I thought that was great Better than T. S. Eliot, who wrote about sleeping with whores, but not as though he slept with them?”

The same critic writing of Gunn’s poetry says:

Pure minded, perhaps, but not a purist Gunn is one of the few poets of the past century who has managed to write at a high level both in meter and free verse combining the best of the two rival schools. In the 1950s, lots of poets who started out as formalists switched to free verse and never touched rhyme or meter again. As per their followers, most never learned how to write in meter at all. What makes Gunn universal is that after starting to write free verse, he continued to write in meter as well. One did not replace the other. Instead, he coaxed the two forms into complementing each other.

Thomas Gunn’s early work shows the influence of the metaphysical poets Donne and Herbert. The compactness of thought and a careful attention to details continued in his poetry. From the 1960s onward he was under the influence of drugs, LSD and the beat generation lead by Allen Ginsberg. His poems exhibit a balanced meter and delicate rhyme schemes even though the subjects are motorcyclists, truckers, drug taking and Elvis’s Presley the pop singer. The example in “The Unsettled motorcyclists Vision of his Death” he presents a fusion between nature and machine as follows:

*My human will cannot submit
To nature, though brought out of it,
The wheels sink deep, the clear sound blues.*

*Still bent on the handlebars,
I urge my chosen instrument
Against mere embodiment
.....
Around my heel which, pressing deep,
Accelerates the waiting sleep*

Again paying homage to Elvis's Presley, the pop singer:

*Whether he poses or is real, no cat
Bothers to say; the pose held is a stance
Which, generation of the very chance
It wars on, may be posture for combat*

Gunn's description for example of a leaving, orgiastic San Francisco "bathhouse" recalls in its imagery and description Dante's inferno. Gunn also employed the same rhyme scheme of Terza Rima that Dante used. One of his most controversial poems was the "Trousdor", a poem that dealt with one Jeffery Dahmer, who was a serial murderer, cannibal and necrophile.

The unifying factor of the wide range of themes and forms that Gunn employed is the rigorous mental process and the words that he finds to describe them. He was precise in the description of moulds and reluctantly examined the linguistic paradox.

I thought he was possibly the best living poet in English – Wendy Lesser, author and editor.

His poems attain a cool clarity, an ability to be morally discerning but not judgmental – amused but engaged – Robert Pinsky, former US Laureate and professor at Boston University.

He had such an affinity for the odd man out, the non-belonger, the despised, the downtrodden. He had his sympathy and insight and he really humanized these people and made them lovable in his poems – Philip Levine, poet.

Impressive for their concentration, their vigour and their effective fusion of traditional meter with contemporary idiom, these poems established Gunn as one of the most arresting voices of his generation – Timothy Steels, critic.

You know who you should get to speak? Thom Gunn. He's one of the two or three best poets writing anywhere in America right now – Susan Sontag – critic, poet.

.....a man (Gunn) of decorous, skillful, metrical verse who had for his own reasons become absorbed into an action culture that gave him when subjects (like sex), alien backdrops (like sunshine) and most vexing of all, made his strict forms melt on the page – Glyn Maxwell, young English poet.

4.7.6 Sample Questions

'Thomas Gunn effectively fuses traditional with meter' – Discuss
Summarise Gunn's views on '*The captains*' of this world.

4.7.7 Suggested Reading

Brendan Bernhard: *The Good Life and Hardlines by Thom Gunn*
Wynne Davies: *Prentice Hall Guide to English Literature*

Dr. M. Krishna Murthy

Lesson – 8

Stephen Spender: The Prisoners, In Railway Halls

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4.8.7 Suggested Reading

4.8.1 Background: Writer and Period

Poets of 1930's Auden, Spender, Louis Macneice and Day Lewis are known as the New Country Group. These poets were entirely new men endowed with an entirely new outlook. Although these poets later on separated, they remain associated in the History of English poetry as “the four Musketeers of the Oxford Movement,” which has been variously called “the modern movement” and “the country movement”. The poetry of this group was a negative feed-back or a retrograde movement, a recoil from the real modern poetry of 1920's. They fastened to ideals and founded their poetry on ideologies and were partisan in their outlook. Bullough says. *They rejected the theory of the autonomy of poetry, the mystical ecclesiasticism of Eliot, sought a central apprehension of life in an altruistic utopian idealism which though superficially Marxian, owed more to Shelley and William Morris.* Spender is the most important poet in the group next only to Auden. Spender, like Auden is also interested in the uplift of the masses and has constantly advocated social reform on communistic lines.

Spender exemplified a new range of writing poetry that took cognizance of exiting social and political realities besides being deeply reflective and intellectual in content. He was disillusioned with communism and began to regard the individual with Christian charity. He is more personal, sentimental and introspective than Auden. He observes

and broods while Auden analyses and dissects. He also composed some highly moving poems on war. He expressed beautifully his personal emotions in short lyrics and in those lyrics which are from his political view. Spender is “an artist of fine sensibilities and considerable technical accomplishment,” and his work is widely admired today for introspective insight and his advocacy of the inherent dignity and nobility of the individual.

4.8.2 Writer: His Life and Works

Spender's father E.H. Spender was a distinguished liberal journalist, editor of the liberal *Westminster Gazette*, and on his mother's side he was partly of German-Jewish descent. He was brought up in Hampstead and educated at University College School, London and University College Oxford. At Oxford, he became friendly with W.H Auden, C. Day Lewis, and Louis Mac Niece. The four, together with the novelist Christopher Isherwood, whom he met at Oxford formed an influential group of left-wing writers in the 1930s. After leaving Oxford he lived in Germany for a period, in Hamburg and near Isherwood in Berlin. His rich experience at different places, sharpened his political consciousness. A small collection of his verse *Twenty Poems* was published in 1930. Some of his poems appeared in *New Signatures* in 1932 and *Poems* including 'I think continually of those who are truly great', 'The Landscape near an Aerodrome' and the famous 'The Pylons', which gave the nickname of 'Pylon Poets' to himself and his friends. Spender is a passionately political poet, working as a propagandist for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and in *The Destructive Element* (1935), partly defending poetry's addressing of political subjects through a discussion of fellow poets W B Yeats and Eliot. As a critical work *The Destructive Element* is largely on Henry James, T.S Eliot and Yeats and their differing responses to a civilization in decline, which ends with a section called 'In Defence of a Political Subject', in which he discussed the work of Auden and Upward, and argues the importance of treating 'Politico-moral' subjects in literature.

During the Spanish Civil war Spender did propaganda work in Spain for the Republic side, a period reflected in his volume of poems *The Still Center* (1939). He

was a member of the National Fire-Service during the Second World War. As a critic he has written two studies of modern literature: *The Destructive Element* (1935) and *The Creative Element* (1953). A gradual shift in his political allegiances may be seen in his poetry and in his critical work. *The Creative Element* retracts some of his earlier suggestions, laying more stress on that creative power and resistance of the individual.

Spender gives an account of his relationship with the Communist Party in his autobiographical work *World Within World* (1951). In 1958, he became co-editor of *Encounter*, a monthly review of culture and world affairs. His interest in the public and social role and the duty of the writer tended to obscure the essentially personal and private nature of much of his own poetry, including his elegy for his sister-in-law in *Poems of Dedication*, and many of the poems in such later volumes as *Collected Poems*. He published a study of student politics, titled *The Year of Young Rebels* in 1969. In 1970, he took charge as professor of English Language and Literature at University College, London. His later works are *Love Care Relations* 1974, *The Thirties And After* (1978), and a critical study of T.S. Eliot, and *Collected Poems 1928-85* (1985). Spender is an important translator particularly in German literature. He collaborated with the painter, David Hockney in *China Dairy* in the year (1982), with an account of their trip to China.

Spender was interested in leftist political views and he pinned his hopes for the future on left wing political theories. His poetry clearly indicated the same Marxist attitude as that of Auden, and Cecil-Day Lewis. Spender emphasized on the individual consciousness in his writings. He "always stressed, in even the most political of his events, the importance of social revolution for the individual and his values." His poetry gives an expression to his views about the problems of the individual in human society. His lyrics make an appeal to the heart rather than to the intellect.

As a lover of the body and the senses, Spender composed sensuous imagery in his poetry. Spender gives importance to the body and is not in favour of sacrificing the claims of the body at any cost. He opines the value of poetry lies as much in the body as in the Fiery Soul. He is also interested in writing about the war. He shows the pity of the incidents of war in his poems like Owen. "Pity seems almost an element of Spender's

sensuousness, a constant current in his poetry". The incidents of the Spanish Civil War and his pity of the war are clearly seen in many of his poems, particularly in *Two Armies*. Spender is "An artist of fine sensibilities and considerable technical accomplishment," and his writings are widely admired by the critics for their literary talent in different directions.

Spender spent his ingenuous early years at Oxford with naturalist and self-consciously modern German youths in Hamburg, where suntans, nudity, sexual promiscuity and jazz came to form a dizzying nectar for the sensitive young poet, who already by that age was able to question: 'what happened in the hearts of these people who gave themselves so easily to so many things?' He portrays an interwar generation bereft of stable moral bearings, as if waiting for a cause to take up often wallowing in endless indulgences and facile emotional relationship. Spender later took up residence in Berlin, at Isherwood's behest, and entered into bohemian life in earnest. As a spectator during the mounting struggle between Communism and fascism, which flared out of the political and economic deadfall of the first World War, Spender was immediately repulsed by the fascists and later by communists as well.

The two absolutist ideologies became the battle ground in Spain. The Republican cause was hijacked from a universal Liberal platform by communists and the direct intervention of Stalinist Russia. Spender's involvement was, through the glass of his own memory, unclouded by the bravado common to personal account of battle, fairly prissy and irresolute. While he refused to join the international brigade and preferred to stay clear of combat, he was willing to describe the unsurprising by bloated fatuity of the Writers' Congress assembled in the nearly-encircled Madrid. In a short period after setting foot in Spain his ideal of communist righteousness was fractured after learning of concealed atrocities and willing blindness on the part of party members. He experienced the central crisis to befall intellectuals of the interwar period. Idealistic, sometimes effect, men and women, like Spender, Auden, and the famous editor Cyril Connolly, would eagerly formulate elaborate political agendas on paper and in cafes only to have them savagely mangled by the exigencies of political fact, by dispiriting internecine brutality in the hills of Spain.

Spender met Ernest Hemingway during the Spanish War. It was believed that Hemingway had arrived to test his celebrated courage in the face of war. Despite rare moments of clear-eyed literary discussion, Hemingway constantly reverted to acting out his own characters, drinking and boasting, singing peasant songs and insisting that he did not read. There are moments of decided hilarity in Spender's accounts and they contrast well with the over-acting sense of moral disaster occasioned by the war. His considerations around this time of T.S. Eliot's poetry, are among the best ever written. Spender clarifies the literary sensibilities of the. The Divided Generation makeup of politically-committed authors who sought to keep politics out of their authorial compound. Spender enlisted in the fireservice along with many intellectuals during Second World War.

4.8.3 The Texts

IN RAILWAY HALLS

In railway halls, on pavements near the traffic,
They beg, their eyes made big by empty staring
And only measuring Time, like blank clock.

No, I shall weave on tracery of pen-ornament
To make them birds upon my singing-tree:
Time merely drives these lives which do not live
As tides push rotten stuff along shore.

There is no consolation, on none
In the curving beauty of that line
Traced on out graphs through history, where the oppressor
Starves and deprives the poet.

Paint here no draped despairs, no saddening clouds
Where the soul rests, proclaims eternity.
But let the wrong cry out as raw as wounds

This Time forgets and never heals, far less transcends.

THE PRISONERS:

Far, far the least of all, in want,
Are these,
The Prisoners
Turned massive with their vaults and dark with dark.

They raise no hands, which rest upon the knees
But lean their solid eyes against the night
Dimly they feel
Only the furniture they use in cells.

Their Time is almost Death, The suted now
Of years on years
Is marred by dawns
As faint as cracks on mud-flats of despair.

My pity moves amongst them like a breeze
On walls of stone
Fretting for summer leaves, or like a tune
On ears of stone

Then when I raise my hands to strike
It is too late
There are no chairs that fall
Nor visionary liquid door
Melted with anger

When have their lives been free from walls and dark
And airs that choke?
And where less prisoner to let my auger
Like a sunstroke

4.8.4 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

IN RAILWAY HALLS:

The two poems prescribed for your study *In Railway Halls* and *The Prisoners* are a powerful evocation of the downtrodden and hopeless drifters of society. Spender's one of the major themes in Spender's poetry was his concern for these unfortunate downtrodden in society and it is powerfully evoked in these two poems.

The poem *In Railway Halls* deals with the beggars. They are found in railway halls and on the pavements at junctions where there is heavy traffic and a member of the pedestrian press passes through, from whom they can beg. There is a blank look on their faces with their eyes wide-open and staring. What are they staring at? The poet points out that they don't have a future to hope for or a new life to look forward to. Time does not change then, for they are beggars and will continue to be so. Hence time has no significance, no promise, no change – hence it is a blank clock.

The poet feels that there is nothing romantic about these watched creatures. They cannot be transposed by any stretch of imagination to something beautiful and attractive like a 'pen-ornament' or 'birds upon my singing – tree'. On the other hand they are like the dead wood and plank that the waves of the sea deposit on the shore. It reminds one of the body drowned in the sea that is used and then deposited or washed ashore.

Is there a future? There does not seem to be any future for these oppressed and exploited masses. The oppressor's merciless treatment of the downtrodden is a feature that history goes on repeating. Here Spender is giving that to his communist ideals of the class struggle.

The poet feels that just portraying the wretchedness and loss of hope of the downtrodden section of society is not enough. History repeats, and the conqueror oppresses. The cry from the suffering is only heard, but never cared for, healed – there

may the pity but what is pity without compassion or the will to relieve suffering. This is the eternal question the spender poses.

In this poem, as "In Railway Halls", Spender deals with a section of the downtrodden, namely, the prisoners. The prisoners however, present a different picture to the poet than that of the beggars, through they belong to the same class of the oppressed.

The Poet says ironically that the prisoners do not require anything. It is not because they are satisfied with life, but because they know that they have to spend their whole life in the prison. The future for them is the darkness of the prison.

The prisoners also do not protest as 'they raise no hands'. They do not protest but meekly submit to their fate. Their life in the prison is dull and routine. They have become men that move around like robots living a life that his the same everyday. For the prisoners every dawn or a new day doesn't offer any hope. Time for these people doesn't offer any change, but on the other hand the passage of time only brings death closer.

The poet feels pity for them but he cannot do anything and is '.....like a breeze on walls of stone' he cannot affectively raise his voice for the injustice done to the prisoners for nobody cares for them. His words fall 'on ears of stone'. The poet goes on to say that by the time the prisoners complete their term of imprisonment, their freedom will have no meaning. The freedom that they may get would only lead them into a world that is dark and oppressive. A world where injustice is prevalent and the oppressor holds the upper hand and the oppressed suffer.

4.8.5 Critical Comments

Spender's gift for autobiographical description is expressed so remarkably well in poetry and fiction that it encourages one to believe it inevitable that an autobiography of considerable force would have issued from Spender at some point in his career. It was an obstacle to some critics, who felt Spender had done so too soon at age of forty two years. He defended his middle-aged decision on the grounds that he was then entering

an altogether new stage of his life, at the age of forty five years and felt the need to close off this former one which was, as it were, divided both temporally and geographically, by the end of the Second World War, which he saw as the end of an dialogical age, and by his migration to America, to teach at Sarah Lawrence college at the behest of the President of the college, Harold Taylor. The most extraordinary features of Spender' include his friendship with well-known personalities and their almost Dickensian tendency to turn up repeatedly throughout his life; W.H. Auden Christopher Isherwood, Isaiah Berlin, Arthur Calder Marshall, Humphry House, David Gascoyne, Bernard Spencer, Andre Malraux, C.D. Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, W.B. Yeats, the Sitwells (Sacheverel, Sir Osbert and Dr. Edith), J.B. Priestly, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Louis Mac Niece, Edwin and Willa Muir. Spender is the sum not only of his own creative endeavours but the social activities of which he was a part, as well as the history through which he lived.

Spender's poetry is the combination of his commitment to left wing political ideology with his own personal feelings and emotions. *'Auden was the attacker of humanity'*, writes Scott James, *'Spender its defender. He too has modernized his imagery, cultivated sharpness and hardened his metrical forms; but the romantic breaks through, the personal emotion is not concealed, gentleness and pity prevail. It is his pity for individuals rather an abstract conception of justice which makes him side with his fellow poets in their political views. He is drawn out of himself into the broad highway of humanity's affairs, but is always happy to retire within himself and express his more personal emotions.*

"But do you really think I am any good?" a nervous Stephen Spender asked W.H. Auden, some six weeks after they'd met. "Of Course," Auden said. "Because you are so infinitely capable of being humiliated." Humiliation was Spender's lifetime companion. Few poets have been more savagely reviewed

(from Stephen Spender : *The Authorized Biography* by John Sutherland)

Spender is the sum not only of his own creative endeavours but the social activities of which he was a part, as well as the history through which he lived.

(John Hilbert in his Review of *World Within World*).

If not quite colossal, Spender was in 1957, at the zenith of his career. In his vigorous late-40s, he had been for four years the literary editor of the country's most influential journal of ideas, *Encounter*. He had burst, meteorically, on the literary scene in 1933 with the volume of poetry that led Eliot to hail him as "The lyric poet of his generation". (John Sutherland).

His (Spender's) poem, *The Pylons* (those pylons/Bare like nude giant girls that have no secrets'), no doubt played its part in the choice of the label 'Pylon Poets' for the new generation of writers who were happy to use the gas-works or the pistons of a steam-engine as poetic imagery. However, as Louis Macneice pointed out in *Modern Poetry* (1933), Spender himself tended to use 'stock mystical symbols-roses, crystal, snow, stars, gold' in his early verse. And his heady clarion call-

Oh, comrades, let not those who follow after
The beautiful generation that shall spring from our sides
Let not them wonder, how after the failure of banks
The failure of cathedrals and the declared insanity of our rulers
We lacked the Spring like resources of the tiger
(After they have tired)

proved less characteristic than gentler and vaguer invitations to humanity not to forget 'the essential delights of the blood' or to allow the traffic to smother 'the flowering of the Spirit'.

(Harry Blamires, Twentieth Century Literature, Macmillan.)

In Britain in 1934, but also later, many poems were written by people that identified with the proletariat. They either belonged to this class themselves or had strong left wing sympathies. The 'social' poets used their poems to reveal their political feeling and express their desire for a socialist society, and sometimes elaborated on the theme of Eliot's. *Then Wastes Land*'. Among them are four poets of middle-class background that came to the foreground with the opening of his decade: Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, Louis Mac Neice, W.H. Auden: young University men, born shortly

before the war. They represent their generation and have attracted considerable attention – *Poets of the Thirties* Drs. Jose Goris.

In Railway Halls: Commenting on this poem Jose Gurs says ‘The poem is about the poor in British industrial society after World War I. The imagery reminds of the scene in a railway station in one of our big cities: ‘eyes made big by empty staring; in the 1930s probably by hangover, today mostly because of drugs. Some people are inclined to regard this type of poverty as some thing drug users inflict upon themselves, and not as the act of’ the oppressor that starves and deprives the poor’ but the result is the same: ‘time merely drives these lives which do not live’. Our outcasts’ ‘wrong cry’ is not heard loud enough in this society bent on luxury, wealth and profit, no more than the cry of the hungry in the 1930s. Their cry is caused by material poverty, our cry by material affluence. Society has not changed in 60 years’ time, to solve the problem of the poor. (*Poetry of the Thirties*, Drs Jose Gors.

4.8.6 Sample Questions

Give a critical appreciation of Stephen Spender’s “The Prisoners”.

Comment on the political outlook of Stephen Spender as reflected in his poems.

4.8.7 Suggested Reading

Derek Stanford : *Spender and the Thirties*

Elton E. Smith : *The Angry Youngmen of the Thirties*

Dr. G. CHENNA REDDY

LESSON – 9

Synge: The Playboy Of The Western World – I

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4.9.1 Background: Writer and Period

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4.9.1 Writer and the Period:

Drama in the early part of twentieth century was dominated by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw was influenced by the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and dealt with contemporary social moral problems. The rise of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin was significant as it became the center of the Irish dramatic revival.

Two of the leading dramatists of this theatre were J.M. Synge: who wrote poetic dramas with Irish peasant life as the background and Sean O' Casey who wrote mainly political tragic-comedies in the naturalistic tradition. Another great influence on modern drama was the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. In the 1930's and the 1950's T.S. Eliot made a significant contribution by attempting to revive poetic drama in English. W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood produced plays mixing verse and prose which reflected the expressionist work of Brecht.

The Irish dramatic movement gave rise to a number of plays which depicted modern Irish life, among these playwrights John Millington Synge (1871 - 1909) stands out prominently. Synge used the Irish turn of speech and the Irish imagination which brought a new life to English Drama. In his Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*. Synge observed:

On the stage, one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the

musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by any one who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

Synge attempted in his plays to use a vocabulary that was poetic and at the same time both rich and natural. He consciously avoided the urban speech which he felt was weak. Though Synge did not fully succeed in his aims yet his plays like *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1910) were quite successful presentations of comedy and at the same time offering a profound criticism of life. Another highlight was the 'Poetic Prose' that was based upon the musical and rhythmic speech of the Irish, that Synge employed.

THE IRISH DRAMATIC MOVEMENT

W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory founded the Irish Literary Society in London in 1891, later Dublin, Ireland, in 1893. The preservation and revival of the Irish language, the study of its literature, and encouragement of a new literature to be written in Irish were the main objects of this society. The effect of the movement led to the revival of many cultural traditions, and a renewed national consciousness. This along with the 'Home Rule Movement' brought about the desire for the liberation of Ireland from the English rule among the people. The formation of the Irish literary society was followed by the founding of the Irish literary theatre in January 1898. A number of Anglo – Irish plays were staged by a company of amateur actors in Dublin. The success of the Irish Literary Theatre led Gregory to form the Irish National Theatre society in 1902. A rich and generous English woman, Miss Horniman contributed towards the construction of 'The Abbey Theatre' and the plays written by Irish writers and patriots were staged at this theatre. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* was also first staged at this theatre in January 1907. The Play was rehearsed several times before it was, finally

presented to the Dublin audience unfortunately the first staging of the play created a storm which has become almost legendary.

4.9.2 The Writer: His Life and Works

John Millington Synge (1871-1909) was born in Newton Villas, Rathfarnham, in the Country of Dublin in Geland. Rathfarnham was not busy suburb, but rather a rural countryside then. The synge family consisted of eight children of whom John was the youngest. His flatness side came from landlords of Glanmore Castle in Country Wichlow. His grandfather on the maternal side, Robert Trail, had been a rector of the church of Ireland in Schull. He was also a member of the schull Relief Committee during the bitter I wish famine. On his father's side, his grandfather John Hatch Synge, was an educationalists and established an experimental School lon the family estate. His father, also called John Hatch Synge, was a lawyer who unfortunately died of smallpox at the age of 49. Synger's mother had her own income from lands in country Galary. After Synge's father's death the family shifted to Rethgar, Dublin, next door ot synge's mother's house.

Synge had a happy childhood here. He developed an interest in ornithology (the study of birds) and spent many a happy day along the banks of the River Dodder and the farm of Rathfarnham castle (both of them close by). During holidays the Synge family went to the seaside recort at Greystones, Wichlow and the family estate at Glanmore.

Synge did his schooling at private schools in Dunlin and Bray. He studied piano, flute, violin, music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. He was very talented and won a scholarship in music in 1891. The family later moved to the suburb of Kingstown in 1888 and Synge entered the famous Trinity College in Dublin in 1889, in 1892 he graduated with a B A. At college he studied Irish and Hebrew and continued his interest in music and played with the Aeademy orchestra at consists in the Autient Concert Rooms. During this time he also joined the Dublin Naturalists' field Club and read Charles Darwin. He also developed an interest in Irish antiquities and the Aran Islands. He published his first poem during this time in a college magazine. At this time Synge began

questioning the protestant religion of his upbringing and the reading of Darwin strengthened this and he abandoned his faith.

After graduating, Synge chose music as a professional career and went to Germany to study music. However, he decided to abandon study music. However, he decided to abandon music as a career, perhaps because of his shyness to appear in public or maybe because he had doubts about his own ability. He then decided to pursue his literary interests and returned to Ireland in June, 1894 and left for Paris the following year to study literature and languages at the Sorbonne University.

During the summer holidays in Dublin he met and fell in love with Cherrice Marheson, a friend of his cousin. He proposed to her in 1895 and again the following year but was rejected; the reason being their differing religious viewpoints. This rejection affected Synge greatly and he decided to spend as much time as possible outside Ireland.

In 1896 he went to Italy to study Italian, but returned to Paris. It was during this time that he met William Butler Yeats. Yeats suggested that Synge should go to Aran Islands as spend some time there and then return to Dublin to continue his creative work. He spent some time in Paris moving about in literary circles but not identifying himself with any one of them. He also attended electives at Sorbonne by eminent scholars, noted Henri d'Abois de Jubainville.

In 1897, Synge suffered from the first attack of Hodgkin's disease and also underwent surgery to remove a gland from his neck. The following year he spent the summer at Aran Islands and met Yeats and Edward Martyn at Lady Gregory's Coole Park home. He spent the next five summers at Aran Islands, and the rest of the year at Paris. During the time he collected stories and folklore of the Gland and also learned and perfected the Irish language. He also wrote his first play *When the Moon has Set* during this period and sent it to Lady Gregory for the Irish Literary theatre, in 1900, but was rejected and not published till after his death, in the *Collected Works* in 1960.

In 1903, Synge left Paris and moved to London. He wrote two one act plays the same year. *Riders to the Sea* and *The Shadow of the Glen* were his first two plays that

met with Lady Gregory's approval. The two plays were performed in 1903 and 1904 respectively. Both the plays were based on the material Synge had collected in the Aran Islands. *The Shadow of the Glen* was about an unfaithful wife and met with strong criticism as a satire on Irish womanhood. *The Riders to the Sea* was also strongly criticized for the attitude to God and religion. Despite these attacks, today both the plays are important landmarks in English and especially Irish Drama. A third one-act play, *The Tinker's Wedding* was drafted at it, anticipating strong opposition as it had scenes like the one in which a bishop is tied up in a sack, as Synge remarked that it would probably upset a good many of our Dublin friends.

Synge was appointed literary advisor to the Abbey Theatre and soon became one of its directors along with Yeats and Lady Gregory. His play *The Well of the Saints* was staged in 1905, and again met with criticism from the nationalists. In 1906 a play was staged at the Detached Theatre in Berlin.

The Playboy of the Western World, widely regarded as Synge's masterpiece was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Jarman, 1907. The comedy centering around a hero who is supposed to have committed parricide (killing one's father) gave rise to a hostile public reaction. There were also objections to the play as being obscene and treating womanhood insultingly as for example in the line 'a drift of females standing in their shifts'; there was a riot when the play was staged and a part when the play had to be presented as a dumb show. (show is without dialogues). Yeats was very much upset at the crowd's reaction, and addressing them declared 'You have disgraced yourself again, is this to be the recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius?' However, the press opinion soon turned in favour of Synge. The next play of Synge was *The Tinker's Wedding* complicated in 1907 and staged in London in 1909. In that same year, Synge got engaged to the Abbey Theatre actress Molly Allgood. Synge died in the year 1909 on April 14. His unfinished play *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was completed by Yeats and Molly Allgood and staged in Jarman, 1910. Molly Allgood played the lead role.

Synge's plays have set the style for the plays performed at the Abbey Theatre for the following four decades. Synge's use of realism in his writings has been reflected in the writings of many others to follow. One of them is seen in O'Casey a major dramatist of the Abbey Theatre who attempted to do for the working classes what Synge had done

for the rural poor the critic Vivian Mercier pointed out Samuel Beckett's debt to Synge. Beckett was a regular member of the Audience at the Abbey Theatre and admired the plays of Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey. There are parallels between Synge and Beckett's characters namely The Tramps, Beggars and Peasants. At present Synge's cottage on the Aran islands is a tourist attraction in Ireland.

4.9.3 The Text

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD.

Characters in the play.

CHRISTOPHER MAHON - A slight young man.

OLD MAHON - The father of Christopher MAHON, he is a squatter (a person who occupies land illegally)

MICHAEL FLAHERTY - (Called Michael James) a publican (a person who owns or manages a pub. A pub is a place to which people go to drink and also meet friends. Often the pubs also serve food.) The character is fat and jovial by nature.

MARGARET FLAHERTY- (Called Peggan Mike). The daughter of Michael Flaherty. She is a wild- looking but fine girl. She is about twenty years of age.

WIDOW QUINN - A woman of about thirty.

SHAW KEOGH - Cousin of Widow Quinn, a young farmer. He is a fat and fair young man, shy in temperament.

PHILLY CULLEN - A small farmer, he is thin and mistrusting.

TIMMY FARRELL - Also a small farmer, he is fat and amorous aged about forty five.

SARA TANSEY'S -

SUSAN BRADY - Village girls

HONOR BLAKE -

A BELLMAN

SOME PEASANTS

ACT-I-SETTING.

Country public house or shebeen, very rough and untidy. There is a sort of counter on the right with shelves, holding any bottles and jugs, just seen above it. Empty barrels stand near the counter. At back, a little to left of counter, there is a door into the open air, then, more to the left, there is a settle with shelves above it, with more jugs, and a table beneath a window. At the left there is a large open fireplace, will turf fire, and a small door into inner room.

(PEGEEN, a wild-looking but fine girl, of about twenty, is writing at table. She is dressed in the usual peasant dress).

ACTION OF THE PLAY.

As given in the stage direction the play opens with pegeen sitting at a writing table and preparing a letter placing an order for the supply of material for a wedding. At this moment Shawn enters the stage and describes how the night outside is dark and still. Pegeen says that her father along with some friends are going to Kate Cassidy's wake (wake means the vigil that is kept by the side of a dead body all through the night). Shawn is surprised that the father is leaving her all alone throughout the night and says that this will not happen in the near future when they are married. Pageen jokes at Shawn wondering as to when they would get married for according to Shawn it would depend upon the consent given by the priest. This shows that Shawn is a highly religious and timid person, unwilling to be left alone even with the girl he is a going to marry. This comedy of the timidity of Shawn is further built up with the arrival of Pegeen's father Michael James along with his friends Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrell. Michael, Philly and Jimmy suggest that Shawn should keep Pageen company through the night while they go to attend Kate Casside's Wake. The whole scene is brought out beautifully by Synge in the following dialogues.

MICHAEL: If you're that afeared, let Shawn Keogh stop along with you. It's the will of God, I'm thinking, himself should be seeing to you now.

(They all turn on SHAWN)

SHAWN (in horrified confusion): I would and welcome, Michael James but I'm afeared of father Reilly; and what at all would the Holy Father and the Cardinals of Rome be saying if they heard I did the like of that?

MICHAEL : (with contempt): God help you! Can't you sit in by the hearth with the light lit and herself beyond in the room? You'll do that surely, for I've heard tell there's a queer fellow above, going mad or getting his death, may be, in the gripe of the ditch, so she'd be safer this night with a person here.

SHAWN (with plaintive despair) : I'm afraid of Father Reilly, I'm saying. Let you not be temping me, and we near married itself.

PHILLY (with cold contempt) : Lock him in the west room. He'll stay then and have no sin to be telling to the priest.

MICHAEL (to SHAWN, getting between him and the door) : go up now.

SHAWN (at the top of his voice): Don't stop me, Michael James, let me out of the door, I'm saying, for the love of the almighty god, let me out (trying to dodge past him). Let me out of it, and may God grant you His indulgence in the hour of need.

MICHAEL (loudly) : Stop you noising, and sit down by the hearth.

(Gives him a push and goes to counter laughing.)

SHAWN (turning back, writing his hands) : Its, Father Reilly and the saints of God, where will I hide myself today. Oh, St. Joseph and St. Patrick and St. Brigid and St. James have mercy on me now.

(Shawn turns around, sees door clear and makes a run for it.)

MICHAEL (catching by the coat-tail) : you'd be going, is it?

SHAWN (screaming) Leave me go, Michael James, leave me go, you old Pagan, leave me go, or I'll get the curse of the priests in you, and of the scarlet-coated bishop's. Is of the Courts of Rome.

(with a sudden movement he pulls himself out of his coat and disappears out of the door, leaving his coat in Michael's hands).

Though Shawn manages to escape leaving his coat behind he soon returns and informs Michael that he has seen a 'gueer dying fellow' near the house who is probably trying to steal hens. He immediately says that the stranger is following him and runs into the room. All the people in the house watch the door with great curiosity to see who the stranger is. Christy Mahon enters the room. He is 'a slight young man,.... Very tired and frightened and dirty'. Christy Mahon says that he is tired and hungry walking for a long time.

He then enquires whether this place is safe from the police., The dialogues that follow conjecture the crime that Christy has committed and even as the nature of the crime becomes more serious, the stature of Christy Mahon rises in the eyes if Michael and company. This is illustrated by the following dialogue.

MICHAEL: If you'd come in better hours, you'd have seen 'Licensed, for the sale of Beer and spirits, to be 'Consumed on the Premises', written in white letters above the door, and what would the polis want spying an me, and not a descent house within four miles, the way every living Christian is a bonafide, saving one widow alone?

CHRISTY: (with relief) : It's a safe house, so.

MICHAEL : Is it yourself is fearing the polis? You're wanting maybe?

CHRISTY : There's many wanting.

MICHAEL : Many, surely with the broken harvest and the ended wars. It should be larceny, I'm thinking?

CHRISTY (dolefully) : I had it in my mind it was a different word and a bigger.

PEGEEN: There's a queer lad. Where you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed.

CHRISTY(bashfully) : I am slow at learning, a middling scholar only.

MICHAEL : If you are a dunce itself, you have a right to know that larceny's robbing and stealing. Is it for the like of that you're wanting?

CHRISTY (with a flash of family pride) : And I the son of a strong farmer, God rest his soul could have bought up the whole of your old house a while since, from the butt of his trail pocket, and not have missed the weight of it gone.

MICHAEL (Impressed) : If it's not stealing, it's may be something big.

CHRISTY (flattered): Aye; it's maybe something big.

JIMMY : He is a wicked – looking young fellow. May be he followed after a young woman an a lonesome night.

CHRISTY (SHOCKED) : Oh, the saints forbid, mister, I was all times a descent lad.

PHILLY (turning on Jimmy) : You're a silly man, Jimmy Farrell. He said his father was a farmer a while since, and there's himself now in a poor state. May be the land was grabbed from him and he did what any descent man would do.

MICHAEL (to Christy mysteriously) : was it bailiffs ?

CHRISTY : The devil a one.

MICHAEL: Land Lords ?

CHRISTY (PEEVISHLY): Ah, not at all, I'm saying. You'd see the like of them stories in any little paper of a Munster town. But I'm not calling to mind any person, gentle, simple, judge or jury, did the like of me.

(The all draw nearer with the delighted curiosity.)

PHILLY : well, that lad's a puzzle-d-world.

JIMMY : He'd beat DAN DAVIES' circus, or the holy missioners making sermons on the villainy of man. Try him again Philly.

PHILLY : Did you strike golden guineas out of solder, young fellow or shilling coins itself.

CHRISTY : I did not, mister, not sixpence nor a farthing coin.

JIMMY : Did you marry three wives may be ? I'm told there's a sprinkling have done that among the holy luthers of the preaching north.

CHRISTY (Shyly) : I never married with one, let alone with a couple or three .

PHILLT : May be he went fighting for Boers, the like of the man beyond was judged to be hanged, quartered, drawn. Were you off east, young fellow, fighting bloody wars for Kruger and the freedom of the Boers.

CHRISTY : I never left my own parish till Tuesday was a week.

PEGEEN : (coming from counter)! He's done nothing so. (to Christy) If you didn't commit a murder, or a bad , a nasty thing, or false coining or butchery or the like of them, there isn't anything that would be worth your troubling for to run from now. You did nothing at all.

CHRISTY : (his feelings hurt)! That's an unkindly thing to say to a poor orphaned traveler, has a prison behind him and hanging before and hell's gap gaping below.

PEGEEN (with a sign to the men to be quite) : You only saying nothing at all. A soft lad like you wouldn't cut the wind pipe of a screeching sow.

CHRISTY (offended) : You're not speaking the truth.

PEGEEN (in mock rage) : Not speaking the truth, is it ? Would you have me knock the head of you with the butt of the broom ?

CHRISTY (twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror) : Don't strike me. I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.

PEGEEN (with blank amazement) :Is it killed your father ?

CHRISTY (subsiding) : With the help of God I did, surely and that the Holy, Immaculate, Mother may interacting for his soul.

PHILLY (retreating with Jimmy) : There's a daring fellow.

JIMMY : Oh, glory be to God !

MICHAEL (with great respect) : That was a hanging crime Mr. Honey. You should have had good reason for doing the like of that.

Michael, Jimmy and Philly go on questioning Christy to find out how he killed his father. They ask him whether he had shot him with a gun or stabbed him to death with a knife or hung him like they do to dogs. Christy replies that he killed his father by just raising the loy (a long narrow spade) and letting it fall on his skull. His father went down he says like an empty sack. He goes on to tell them that he was not detected because he dug up the field and buried him. The police did not detect the crime and for the past eleven days he has been running away from the scene of his crime. Pegeen and Philly feel that Christy would be a fit person for the post of a pot-boy (assistant) to Pegeen as he is tough and nobody would dare to attack or steal even if Pegeen is alone in the house.

Shawn does not like the idea of leaving Pegeen alone with Christy that night. He suggests that he will meet Widow Quinn and send her to keep Pegeen company. Shawn leaves the place and we have a dialogue between Christy and Pegeen. Pegeen is all admiration for Christy especially for the brave deed of killing his father.

PEGEEN : (standing beside him, watching him with delight) : You should have had great people in your family. I'm thinking with the little, small feet you have , and you with a kind of a quality name, the like of what you'd on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain.

CHRISTY: (with pride): We were great, surely with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land.

PEGEEN : Wasn't I telling you, and you a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble brow ?

Pegeen and Christy keep chating for some time. Christy asks Pegeen if she would marry Shawn and Pegeen clearly tells him that she is not interested in him and would rather prefer an interesting person like Christy. Both of them seem to like each

other and their are getting married is in the air. Meanwhile Widow Quinn arrives, obviously sent by Shawn. Widow Quinn is also interested in Christy Mahon and asks him to stay with her in her house. She also points out that it is undesirable for Pegeen who is not married to spend the night alone with a stranger in the house. Pegeen is however very adamant and literally pushes out Widow Quinn. Act I closes with Christy recalling the events of the day with satisfaction and humor in the closing lines.

PEGEEN : There's your bed now. I've put a quilt upon you . I'm after quilting a while since with my own two hands, and you'd best stretch out now for your sleep and may God give you a good rest till I call you in the morning when the cocks will crow.

CHRISTY : (as she goes to inner room) : May god and Mary and St. Patrick bless you and reward you for your kindly talk. (she shuts the door behind her. He settles his bed Slowly, feeling the quilt with immense satisfaction). Well, it's a clean bed and soft with it, and its great luck and company I've won me in the end of time-two fine women fighting for the likes of me-till I'm thinking this night wasn't I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by.

ACT II

SETTING : Same scene as before . It is morning and there is brilliant light.

The news of Christy Mohan's arrival and stay at Pegeen's place has obviously spread like wild fire. The young girls especially are greatly interested in seeing this hero. The younger generation is represented by Sara Tansey, Sunsan Brady, Nelly and Honor Blake. The girls come early in the morning braving the chill, to see their hero. At the time they arrive Pegeen is obviously attending to some work outside the house. The girls also bring gifts, which are farm products, for Christy.

SARA : And asking your pardon is it you's the man killed his father ?

CHRISTY (moving towards the wall) : I'm, God help me !

SARA : (taking eggs she has brought) : Then my thousand welcomes to you, and I've run up with a brace of duck's eggs for your food today. Pegeen's ducks is no use, but these are real rich sort. Hold out your hand and you'll see it's no lie I'm telling you.

CHRISTY (coming forward shyly, and holding out his left hand) : They're a great and weighty size.

SUSAN : And I run up with a pat of butter, for it'd be a poor thing to have you eating your spuds dry, and you after running a great way since you did destroy your da (father).

CHRISTY : Thank you kindly.

HONOR : And I brought you a little cut of a cake, for you should have a thin stomach on you, and you that length walking the world.

NELLY : And I brought you a little laying pullet boiled and all she is was crushed at the fall of night by the curate's car, Feel the fat of the breast, mister.

CHRISTY : It's bursting surely. (He feels it with the back of his hand).

While the girls are admiring Christy and giving him the gifts that they had brought Widow Quinn enters the scene.

WIDOW QUIN (coming in quickly, at door) : Sara Tansey , Susan Brady, Honor Blake ! what in glory has you here at this hour of day ?

GIRLS (giggling) : That's the man killed his father.

WIDOW QUIN (coming to them) : I know well it's the man and I'm after putting him down in the sports below leaping, pitching, and the lord knows what.

SARA (exuberantly) ! That's right, Widow Quinn, I'll bet my dowry that he'll lick the world.

Widow Quinn orders the girls to prepare Christy's breakfast and while they are doing this the conversation between Widow Quinn and Christy Mohan brings out the imaginary murder committed by Christy.

WIDOW QUIN : Don't be letting on to be shy, a fine, gamey, treacherous lad the like you . Was it in your house beyond you cracked his skull ?

CHRISTY : (shy but flattered) : It was not . We were digging spuds in his cold, sloping, stony, devil's patch of a field.

WIDOW QUIN : And you went asking money of him, or from making talk of getting a wife would drive him from his farm ?

CHRISTY : I did not , then; but there I was digging and digging and 'you squinting idiot,' says he, ' let you walk down now and tell the priest you'll wed the Widow Casey in a score of days.

WIDOW QUIN : And what kind was she ?

CHRISTY (with horror) : A walking terror from beyond the hills, and she two score and five years, and two hundred- weights and five pounds in the weighing scales, with a limping leg on her, and a blinded eye, and she a woman of noted misbehavior with the old and young.

GIRLS (clustering round him, serving him) : Glory be.

WIDOW QUIN : And what did he want driving you to wed with her ? (she takes a bit of the chicken).

CHRISTY : (eating with growing satisfaction) : He was letting on I was wanting a protector from the harshness of the world, and he without a thought the whole while but how he'd have her hut to live in and her gold to drink.

WIDOW QUIN : There's may be worse than a dry hearth and a widow woman and your glass at night. So you hit him then ?

CHRISTY : (getting, almost excited) : I did not. 'I won't wed her' says I 'when all know she did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world and she a hag this day with a tongue on her as the crows and seabirds scattered, the way they wouldn't cast a shadow an her garden with the dread of her curse'.

WIDOW QUIN : (teasingly) that one should be right company.

SARA (eagerly) : Don't mind her. Did you kill him then ?

CHRISTY : 'She's too good for the like of you, ' says he , 'and go on now or I'll flatten you out like a crawling beast has passed under a dray'. 'You will not if I can help it', says I, 'go on; says he, 'or I'll the devil making garters of your limbs tonight. 'You'll not if I can help it,' says I.

SARA : You were right surely.

CHRISTY (impressively) : With that the sun came out between the cloud and the hill and it shining green in my face. 'God have mercy on your soul', says he 'lifting a scythe. 'Or on your own', said I, raising the loy.

SUSAN : That's a grand story.

HONOR : He tells it lovely.

CHRISTY ; (flattered and confident) : He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet. (He raises the chicken bone to his Adam's apple).

GIRLS(together) : Well, you're a marvel ! Oh, God bless you ! You're the lad, surely !

SUSAN : I'm thinking the Lord God sent him this road to make a second husband to the Widow Quinn and she with a great yearning to be wedded, though all dread her here.

Pegeen enters the house at this moment and she asks the girls as to why they are here. Each one of them gives an excuse that they have come to buy something from Pegeen's store. However, their lie is exposed as none of them has brought money. The something is true of Widow Quinn as well. They are all bundled out of the house. Pegeen tells Christy that there has been a report of a young fellow who had killed his father and wrapped him in lime. And she warns Christy that if he goes on talking to all these silly girls his story is also likely to reach the papers, and his condition will be in jeopardy. Christy feels miserable and wonders whether he himself is safe. Pegeen says that if he goes on talking loosely to girls they may go about gossiping and spread the news of his murder and presence. At this moment Shawn enters and informs Pegeen that her sheep are eating the cabbage in a neighbour's field. Pegeen immediately puts on a shawl over her head and runs out. Christy feels that it would be good for him to go help Pegeen. Widow Quinn has by now entered and she closes the door informing Christy that Pegeen can take care of the problem, and she also informs him that Shawn has something to tell him. Shawn offers Christy a bribe to leave the village. The following dialogue indicates the anxiety of Shawn and Widow Quinn to get rid of Christy. They also feel that Pegeen could not be a right match for Christy. The desperation of Shawn to get rid of Christy is also reflected in the pleading with Widow Quinn to help him.

CHRISTY (looking at it): The half of a ticket to the Western States!

SHAWN (trembling with anxiety) : I'll give it to you and my new hat (pulling it out of hamper); and my breeches with the double seat (pulling it out); and my coat is woven from the blackest shearing; fort three miles around (giving him the coat); I'll give you the whole of them, and my blessing, and the blessing of Father Reilly itself, may be, if you'll quit from this and leave us in the peace we had till last night at the fall of dark Cops. Christy (with a new arrogance): And for what is it you're wanting to get shut of me ?

The dialogue between Mahon and Widow QUIN that follows brings out the true character of Christy has a meek and shy fellow rather than the fierce and brave-young man that he pretends to be. It also bring out the meek manner in which he had hit his father rather than the rough and tough manner which he has been boasting. The dialogue also exposes the tall story, which Christy had narrated regarding the quarrel between him and his father.

MAHON: Did you see the young lad?

Widow Quin (Stiffy) : What kind was he ?

MAHON: An ugly young streeler with a murderous gob on him, and a little switch in his hand. I met a tramper seen him coming this way at the fall of night.

Widow Quin: There's harvest hundreds be passing these days for the sligo boat. For what is it you're wanting him, my poor man ?

MAHON: I want to destroy him for breaking the head on me with the clout of a lay. (He takes off a big hat, and shows his head in a mass of bandages and plaster, with some pride.). It was he did that, and ann.'s I a great wonder to that I've traced him ten days with that rent in my crown?

WIDOW QUIN (taking his head in both hands and examing it with extreme delight): That was a great blow. And who hit you? A robber may be?

MAHON: It was my own son hit me, and he the divil a robber, or anything else, but a dirty, stuttering lout.

WIDOW QUIN (letting go his skull and colping her hands in her apron): You'd best be wary of a mortified scalp, I think they call it, lapping around with that wound in the splendor of the sun. it was a bad bad blow, surely, and you should have vexed him-fearful to make him strike that gash in his da.

HAMON : Is it me ?

WIDOW QUIN (amusing herself): Aye. And isn't it a greet shame when the old and her dewed do torment the young?

MAHON (raging): torment him is it? And I after holding out with the patience of a martyred saint till there's nothing but destruction on, and I'm driven out in my old age with none to aid me.

WIDOW QUIN (greatly amused) It's a sacred wonder the way that wickedness wise spoil a man.

MAHON: My wickedness, is it? Amn't I after laying it is himself has me destroyed, and he a liar on walls, or talker of folly, a man you'd see stretched the half of the day in the brown ferns with his belly to the sun

WIDOW QUIN: Not working at all?

MAHON: The devil a work, or if he did itself, you'd see him raising up a haystack like the stalk of a rush, or driving lour last cow till he broke her leg at the hip, and when he wasn't at that he'd be fooling over little birds he had – finches and felts – or making mugs at his own self in the bit of a glass we had hung on the wall.

WIDOW QUIN (looking at Christy) : What way was he so foolish ? It was running wild after the girls may be ?

MAHON (with a shout of division) : Running wild, is it ? If he seen a real petticoat coming swinging over the hill, he'd be off to hide in the sticks, and you'd see him shooting out his sheep is eyes between the little twigs and the leanes, and his two ears rising take a hare looking out through a gap. Girls, indeed !

WIDOW QUIN : It was drink may be ?

MAHON : And he a poor fellow would get drunk on the small of a pint. He'd a queer rotten stomach, I'm telling you, and when I gave him three pulls from my pipe a while since, he was taken with contortions till I had to send him in the ass – cart to the female's nurse.

WIDOW QUIN (clapping her hands) : Well, I never, till this day, heard tell of a man the like of that!

MAHON : I'd take a mighty oath you didn't, surely, and wasn't he the laughing joke of every female women where four baronies meet, the way the girls would stop their wedding if they seen him coming the road to let a near at him, and call him the honey of mahon's.

WEIDOW QUIN : I'd give the wored and all to see the like of him. What kind was he?

MAHON : A small, low fellow.

WIDOW QUIN : And dark?

MAHON : Dark and dirty.

WIDOW QUIN (considering) : I'm thinking, seen him.

MAHON (eagerly) : An ugly young blackguard.

WIDOW QUIN : A hideous, fearful Willain, and the spit of you.

MAHON : What way is he glad?

*WIDOW QUIN : Is you'll cross the hands below where the tide is out, you'll being it as soon as himself, for he had to go round ten miles by the top of the bay.
(She points to the door). Strike down by the head beyond and then follow on the roadway to the north and east.
(MAHON goes abruptly.)*

Father Mahon goes out and widow QUIN turns to Christy Mahon and addresses him with some contempt. She calls him ironically the play boy of the Western World. There follows a conversation between Christy and Widow QUIN. Christy is rather apprehensive of what the reaction of Pegeen would be when she comes to know the real story. Widow QUIN says that she is sure that Pegeen will 'Knock the head of you' and would be very angry with him for deceiving her with his story. He would no longer be a hero in the eyes of Pegeen and the other girls. Christy appeals to Widow QUIN to save him. Widow QUIN enters into a bargain to save Christy's prestige. It is brought out in the following dialogue.

*VOICES (outside, calling far away): Christy ! Christy Mahon ! Christy !
CHRISTY: Is it Pegeen mike ?*

WIDOW QUIN : It's the young girls, I'm thinking, coming to bring you to the sports below, and what is it you'll have me to tell them now ?

*CHRISTY : Aid me for to win Pegeen. It's herself only that I'm seeking now.
(WIDOW QUIN gets up and goes to window.) Aid me for to win her, land I'll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of ease, land up the floor of Heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin's Son.*

WIDOW QUIN : (looks at him for a moment) : It I did you, will you swear to give me a right of way I want, and a maintaining ran, and a loud of dung at Michaelmas, the time that you'll be master here ?

CHRISTY : I will, by the elements and stars of nights.

WIDOW QUIN: Then we'll not say a word of the old fellow, the way Pegeen won't know your story till the end of time.

CHRISTY : And if he chances to return again ?

WIDOW QUIN : We'll swear he's a manial and not your da. I could take an oath I seen him raving on the sands today. (Girls run in.)

The act closes with Susan, Sara, Honor asking Christy to come to the Sports – meet of the Village.

Dr. G. CHENNA REDDY

Lesson – 10

Syngé : The Playboy Of The Western World - II

Contents:

4.10.1.1	Text (Contd.)
4.10.2	Analysis of the Text
4.10.3	Critical Comments
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4.10.1 *The Text (Contd.)*

ACT – III

Setting – The same as act-II but later in the day.

The third act opens with jimmy and Philly, discussing about Christy. They feel that Pegeen is making too much fuss about Christy. And they have doubt whether Christy actually did the act is boasting about, as they are discussing old Mahon passes by the Widow and later to who hit him on the head. Mahon replies that it was his own son. Mahon says that he will explain the matter in detail after having a drink. At this moment Widow QUIN enters and she surprised because she thought she had left. Mahon replies that he was too tired since he has been traveling for a week and would like to rest for some time. Mahon is given a drink and while he is drinking Widow QUIN takes jimmy and Philly aside. And tells them that she had met this old man earlier. And he seems to be unsteady in his thoughts. And he is imaging that some body has cracked his skill. Widow QUIN feels that it is better that they have nothing to do with him or the police night involved them in the case against the old man. Old Mahon by now has had his drink and Philly, Widow QUIN and jimmy start questioning him.

The following dialogues are an excellent mixture of two significant actions. On one hand Christy is proving himself a hero by winning most of the races and on the other old Mahon is describing what a conceited fool, his son had been.

*PHILLY (to Jimmy) : He's not raving.
(TO WIDOW QUIN) Will you ask him what kind was his son ?*

*WIDOW QUIN (to MAHON with a peculiar look) :
Was your son that hit you a had of one year and a score may be, a great hand at racing
and lopping and licking the world ?*

*MAHON (turning on her with a roar of rage) :
Didn't you hear me say he was the fool of men, the way from this out he'll know the
orphan's lot, with old and young making game of him, and they swearing, raging, kicking
at him like a mangy cur. (A great burst of cheering outside, some way off.)*

*MAHON (putting his hands to his ears) :
What in the name of God do they want roaring below ?*

*WIDOW QUIN (with the shade of a smile):
They're cheering a young had, the champion Playboy of the Western World. (more
cheering.)*

*MAHON (going to the window) : It'd split my heart to hear them, and I with pulses in my
brein-pan for a week gone buy. It is racing they are ?*

*JIMMY (looking from door) : It is, then. They are mounting him for the mule race will be
run upon the sands. That's the playboy on the winkered mule.*

*MAHON (puzzled) : That had, is it ? If you said it was a fool he was. I'd have laid a
mighty. Oath he was the likeness of my wandering son.
(uneasily, putting his hand to his head.).
Faith I'm thinking I'll go walking for to view the race.*

*WIDOW QUIN (stopping him, sharply) : you well not You'd best take the road to
Belmullet, and not be dilly – dallying in this place where there isn't a spot you could
sleep.*

*PHILLY (coming forward) : Don't mind her. Mount there on the bench and you'll have a
view of the whole. They're hurrying before the tide will rise, and it'd be near over if you
event down the pathway through the crags below.*

*MAHON (mounts on bench, WIDOW QUIN beside him) : That's a right view again the
edge of the sea. They're coming now from the point. He's leading – who is he at all ?*

*WIDOW QUIN : He's the champion of the world, I tell you, and there isn't hap'orth isn't
falling lucky to his hands today.*

*PHILLY (looking out, interested in the grace):
Look at that. They're pressing him now.*

JIMMY : He'll win it yet

PHILLY : take your time, Jimmy Farrel, It's too soon to say.

WIDOW QUIN (shouting) : Watch him taking the gate. There's riding.

JIMMY (Cheering) : more power to the young lad!

MAHON : he's passing the third.

JIMMY : He'll lick them yet.

WIDOW QUIN : He'd lick them if he was running races with a score itself.

MAHON : Look at the mule he has, kicking the stars.

*WIDOW QUIN : There was a lep! (catching hold of MAHON in her excitement.)
He's fallen? He's mounted again ! Faith, he's passing them all !*

JIMMY : Look at him skelping her !

PHILLY : And the mountain girls hoosing him on !

JIMMY : It's the last turn ! The post's cleared for them now !

*MAHON : Look at the narrow place. He'll be into the bags ! (with a yell).
Good rider ! He's through it again !*

JIMMY : He's neck and beck !

PHILLY : Good boy to him ! Flames, but he's in ! (Great cheering, in which all join.)

*MAHON (with recitation) : What's that?
They're raising him up. They're coming this way. (with a near of rage and
astonishment). It's Christy, by the stars of God ! I'd know his way of spitting and he
astride the noon. (He jumps down and makes a run for the door, but WIDOW QUIN
catches him and pulls him back.)*

*WIDOW QUIN : stay quick, will you ? That's not your son. (TO JIMMY.) stop him, or
you'll get a month for the abetting of manslaughters and be fined as well.*

JIMMY : I'll hold him.

*MAHON (struggling) : Let me out ! let me out, the lot of you, till I have my vengeances on
his head today.*

*WIDOW QUIN (shaking him, vehemently) : That's not your son. That's a man is going to
make a marriage with the daughter of this house, a place with fire trade, with a license,
and with poteen too.*

*MAHON (amazed) : That man marrying a decent and a moneyed girl ! Is it mad you are?
Is it in a crazy – house for females that I'm landed now ?*

WIDOW QUIN : *It's mad yourself is with the blow upon your head. That lad is the wonder of the western world.*

MAHON : *I seen it's my son.*

WIDOW QUIN : *You seen that you're mad. (cheering outside.) Do you hear them cheering him in the zig – zags of the road ? Aren't you after saying that your son's a fol, and how would they be cheering a truck idiot – born ?*

MAHON (getting distressed) : *It's may be out of reason that man's himself. (cheering-again.) There's none surely will go cheering him. Oh, I'm raving with a madness that would fight the world! (He sits – down with his hand to his head.) There was one time I seen ten scarcest devils setting on they'd cork my spirit in a gallon can; and one time I seen rats as big as badgers sucking the lifeblood from the butt of my ling; but I never till this day confused that dribbling idiot with a likely man. I'm destroyed surely.*

WIDOW QUIN : *And who'd wonder when it's your brain – pan that is gaping now ?*

MAHON : *then the blight of the sacred drouth upon myself and him, for I never went mad to this day, and I not three weeks with the limerick girls drinking myself silly and parlatie from the dusk to down. (TO WIDOW QUIN, suddenly) Is my visage astray ?*

WIDOW QUIN : *It is, then, you're a suiggering maniac, a child could see.*

MAHON (getting up more cheerfully) : *Then I'd best be going to the union beyond, and there'll be a welcome before me, I tell you (with great pride), and I a terrible and fearful case, the way that there I was one time, screeching in a straightened waistcoat, with seven doctors whiting out my sayings in a printed book. Would you believe that ?*

WIDOW QUIN : *If you're a wonder itself, you'd best be hasty, for them lads caught a menial one time and pelted the poor creature till he ran out, raving and foaming, and was drowned in the sea.*

MAHON (with philosophy) : *It's true mankind is the divil when your head's astray. Let me out now and I'll slip down the boreen, and not seen them so.*

WIDOW QUIN (showing him out) : *That's it. Run to the right, and not a one will see. (He runs off.).*

PHILLY (wisely) : *you're at some ganing, Widow QUIN; but I'll walk after him and give him his dinner and a time to rest, and I'll see then if he's raving or as save as you.*

WIDOW QUIN (annoyed) : *If you go hear that led, let you be wary of your head, I'm saying. Didn't you hear him telling he was crazed at times ?*

PHILLY : I heard him telling a power ; and I'm thinking we'll have right sport before right will fall. (He goes out.)

JIMMY : Well, philly's a conceited and foolish man. How could that madman have his senses and his brain – pan slit ? I'll go after them and see him turn on philly now. (He goes; WIDOW QUIN hides poteen behind counter. Then hubbub outside.)

Christy enters the room followed by Pegeen, Mike, Sara and other girls and men. The crowd offering the prizes he has won which are all typically rural namely a bagpipe, a piper's bag that was played by a poet long ago and a flat walking stick made out of black thorn (a kind of bush from whose stems walking sticks are made). Even as the prizes are being given, there is an announcement that the last item namely tug of wars will soon be conducted. The crowd goes out with Widow QUIN following them. Christy and Piggy are left alone and there is a lot of love talk between them looking into the future when they would be married. As Pegeen has made up her mind not to marry Christy. The scene again changes when old Mahon enters followed by the crowd behind him. The crowd is now very angry against Christy. The crowd psychology is brought out beautifully by Synge when he shows that an imagined heroic deed that involves violence is appreciated by crowd, but on the other hand they reject violence especially when it transgresses moral values. The crowd now does not like the way they had been cheated by Christy with his tall stories and push Mahon into giving Christy a good beating.

Crowd (Jeeringly) : There's the play boy! There's the lad thought he'd ruled the roost in meyo! Slate him now, mister.

Christy tries to avoid fighting with his father and looks towards Widow QUIN to help him out. But all the others insist on Mahon punishing his son. In fact, up to now history had been told with ropes and the crowd wanted to hang him. But they decide that the best thing would be for Mahon and Christy to settle their score. The play finally ends with old Mahon and Christy going away from the village of Mayo and the old scene of peace is restored. Though Pegeen is sorry that she has lost the playboy whom she met. This is brought out as follows.

CHRISTY (scrambling on his knees face to face with OLD MAHON) : Are you coming to be killed a third time, or what ails you now ?

MAHON : For what is it they have you tied ?

*CHRISTY : They're taking me to the peelers to have me hanged for slaying you.
MICHAEL (apologetically) : It is the will of God that all should guard their little cabins from the treachery of law, and what would my daughter be doing if I was ruined or was hanged itself ?*

MAHON (grimly, loosening CHRISTY) : It's little I care if you put a bag on her back, and went picking cockles till the hour of death; but my son and myself will be going our own way, and we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of mayo, and the fools is here. (TO LCHRISTY, who is freed) come on now.

CHRISTY : Go with you, is it ? I will then, like a gallant captain with his heathen slave. Go on now and I'll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal washing my spuds, for I'm master of all fights from now. (pushing MAHON) Go on, I'm saying.

MAHON : Is it me?

CHRISTY : not a work out of lieu. Go on from this.

MAHON (Walking out and looking back at CHRISTY over his shoulder) : Glory be to God! With a broad smile) I am crazy again.(Goes.).

CHRISTY : Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the downing of the judgement day. (He goes out.)

MICHAEL : By the will of God, we'll have peace now for our drinks. Will you draw the porter, Pegeen ?

SHAWN (going up to her) : It's a miracle Father Reilly can wed us in the end of all, and we'll have none to trouble us when his viciously bite is healed.

PEQEEN (hitting him a box on the ear) : Quit my sight. (Putting her shawl over her heed and breaking out into wild lamentations.). Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world.

4.10.2 *Analysis of the Text*

The play is set on the wild Mayo coast of Ireland. It is evening and the daughter of Michael Flaherty, Pegeen is placing an order for the store. At this time young man who says his name is Christy Mahon enters. He says that he has been running away from the police because he had killed his father during a fight. The farmers namely Michael, Jimmy Farrel and Philly Cullen are very much impressed by the courage of Christy and assure him that he is safe from the police at the inn. Christy is very happy that he has found a safe place to stay with all the people admiring him and above all the

chance of marrying Pegeen who is described as 'a wild-looking' but fine girl, of about twenty'.

The true background of Christy is however something different. He was a meek and obedient son. He was completely dominated by his father. Christy tolerated the insults of his father for a very long time but when his father tried to force him into marrying a rich but ugly old woman he revolted in a mood of desperation he hit his father on the head with a spade. The old man collapsed, and Christy thinking that he was dead ran away from his home.

After a week, running away from the scene of his fight, Christy reached the inn. The treatment he received at the inn was something new. For the first time in his life he was respected and looked upon as a hero. The news of his story spread rapidly among the villagers (as it common readers) and they all came to the inn to see this brave young man. The young girls were particularly interested in him and brought gifts that were typically rural, like eggs, a piece of cake, and a slice of chicken. There was a middle aged widow, widow Quinn who was also interested in this young man. Christy however was attracted to the pretty Pegeen. In order to increase her admiration and enhance her opinion of him, he began to put on the pose of hero and almost believed that he had done a courageous deed.

Each year there was a festival in the village where competitions in various sports were conducted for men. Christy was naturally expected to as he was willing to take part in the sports and become a hero especially in the eyes of Pegeen. This was because Pegeen had broken her engagement to a young farmer. Shawn Keogh to whom she had been engaged before Christy's arrival.

While Christy, the 'Play Boy' as Pegeen called him was taking part in the local sports an old man came to the inn. He was in search of a young man whose description fitted Christy's appearance. Widow Quin, deliberately misdirected the stranger. The old man, however, returned after searching for his son, just in time to see him being hailed as a hero. The old man who was old Mahon (Christy's father recognized his son and flew into a rage.) He abused his son and humiliated him in front of the spectators. He insisted that Christy should go home with him.

Christy, now the Playboy, had enjoyed the thrill of being a hero and he didn't submit to his father as he had done earlier. To prove himself a hero and to his father's surprise, he struck the old man over the head, but the villagers didn't react as Christy expected, namely considering him a hero. For them killing one's father in a far off place was different from killing him in front of them, for they would also be involved in the crime as spectators.

The villagers were angry at Christy and along with Pegeen condemned the act as leading to murder. They all decided that Christy should be hung and they tied up the young man and prepared to lead him away. But old Mahon was a strong and tough fellow and recovered from the blow and gained consciousness.

As Christy was ready to be hanged, old Mahon crawled to the door on his hands and knees. The villagers were totally surprised and stood dumbfounded. Old Mahon walked over to his son and quickly untied him from the rope meant for hanging. Old Mahon was not at all angry with his son for hitting him. On the other hand he was happy to see that his son was no longer the timid weakling that he had been. The play ends with old Mahon and Christy leaving the people on the Mayo coast and walking arm in arm. Pegeen feels sorry that she has lost the play boy of the western world (Christy).

The Irish dramatic movement gave rise to number of plays. They were mainly humorous or sentimental realistic plays depicting modern Irish life. One of the major contributors was John Millington Synge (1871-1909). He set a tradition in adopting to speech and imagination of the Irish country people. They infused a new vitality into English Drama.

"On stage" he wrote in his preface to the *Play boy* "one must have reality and "one must have reality and one must have joy; and that is why the untalented modern drama has failed, and people have gone rich of the false joy of the menial comedy, that has been given to them in place of the rich joy found in only what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech is fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among the people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that

is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks". (Synge in his preface to *Play boy of the Western World*.)

Synge deplored the debilitation of urban speech, and sought a vocabulary both poetic and real, both rich and natural. His own plays are not successful in achieving this combination effectively though *The Playboy* succeeds triumphantly as a comedy which is also a profound "criticism of life"

Synge's poetic prose is based on the speech rhythms of the Irish peasantry who provided him with some of the resources of poetic drama.

4.10.3 *Critical Comments*

The Western counties of Ireland where the action of the play takes place belong to the first decade of the twentieth century. The people of these islands are far removed from the modern technological civilization. The people in the play live on the farms and their occupation is mainly agricultural, though there is one character mentioned namely father Reilly who is a priest. The landscape is marked by bogs or wet soft ground formed by decaying vegetation. The bogs are filled with turf peat which is plant material partly decomposed. This turf or peat is cut and used as fuel. Those who are not farmers are professionals like smiths and tinkers. There are also some who are friars and preachers and to this are added the beggars and idlers. One is struck by the variety of people that form the community.

Most of them lead a life of extreme poverty their normal diet is oatmeal and spuds (potatoes). Items like butter and eggs are a luxury. This is brought out when Sara and her friends come to see 'The wonder kid' (Christy Mahon), and bring gifts namely eggs, butter, cake and a hen. Obviously these are luxury items and therefore given as gifts. The typical village atmosphere is brought again when widow Quin demands as bribe a ram and a load of dung, from Christy Mahon. As it is seen both these items belong to an agricultural society. The village atmosphere is again evoked with reference to the village fair. The races with which the people entertain themselves are such

traditional village games like roulette, the trick O' the loop, and braking the nose of the cockshot-men. As Dr. R.K. Kaul points out in his edition of *The Play Boy of the Western World*

All three of them are games of chance, while roulette is relatively sophisticated, the other two are of peasant origin. In the trick O' the loop the spectator has to guess the center loop in a belt. The last game is quite primitive. The cockshot-men is a man with a blackened face at whom competitors throw wooden balls.

The south of Ireland where the action of the play takes place was predominantly a Roman Catholic country. The peasants in this part of Ireland were very much controlled by the priests. An excellent example is the fear and blind obedience Shawn Keogh has for father O' Reilly. Synge, like the later play Wright Bernard Shaw was very critical of the hold that the priest had over the common people. Synge further felt that it was the tyranny of the priesthood that responsible for the villagers been timid and weak.

The superstitious nature of the characters in the play is brought out when Michael James doesn't dare to return from the funereal at night because he is afraid of ghosts.

The Irish were under the English rule which they looked upon as foreign. The policeman was perhaps the only representative of this foreign rule. Therefore they hated the policeman as a representative of the government they rejected. Throughout the play there are references to this general hatred of the policeman or the peeler as he is called. This aversion to law leads to their treating outlaws as popular heroes, as Pegeen says;

Where now will you meet the like of Dameen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler; or merceus Quin.

The Play Boy of the Western World is set against a typical, agricultural background. Most of the people are on the edge of the poverty line, subsisting on oat-meal and spuds. They are dominated by the Roman Catholic priests, they are highly superstitions and believe in ghosts. Because of their aversion to England ruling them,

they hate the policemen or peeler who is a representative of the government. This leads to their admiration of people who are outlaws and exhibit courage.

4.10.4 *Sample Questions:*

Trace the mingling of comedy and tragedy in *The Playboy of the Western World*

Bring out the rural atmosphere in *The Playboy of the Western World*

4.10.6 *Suggested Reading*

The Irish Dramatic Movement by U. Ellis – Fermour

J.M. Synge: A Critical Study by P.P. Howe

The Playboy of the Western World ed. R.K. Kaul (Oxford University Press- *Indian Edition*)

Dr. G. Chenna Reddy

Lesson 11

Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party

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4.11.1 Background: Writer and the Period

The most potent influence on drama was the practice of French play writers like Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Jean Anouith. Their plays were generally labeled Absurdist. Absurdism is rooted in the existential philosophy of Jean - Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, which views a human being as isolated in the alien universe that, in its turn, is devoid of inherent truth or meaning. As Camus explains in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

In a universe that is suddenly divested of illusion and lights, man feels alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home of the hope of a promised land. This diverse between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is property the feeling of Absurdity.

The most significant dramatist of Absurdism is Samuel Beckett. His plays project the universal human condition and to that end do away with realistic setting in a coherently evolving plot. Absurd drama is distinguished by an almost total lack of exposition. A breakdown of casual sequence makes the plot discontinuous. Often there is a decided lack of closure. The uncertainties of open-ended 'conclusions' are appropriately matched by the language that is itself constantly questioned. Absurdist drama emphasizes the intractability of language as a mean of communication and these

reflects the culture crisis of the post modern era with great fidelity. The plays of Tom Stoppard *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*, 1974 the early plays of Harold Pinter and the play of American dramatist, Edward Albee also belongs to this mode.

Harold Pinter was the most gifted disciple of Beckett. According to Edward Albert, "Pinter conveys the rambling ambiguities and silences of everyday conversation with an amazing authenticity that is obviously much influenced by Beckett, and uses them to build up the sense of menace and scarcely built violence which is characteristic. *The Birthday Party, The Dumb Waiter and The Caretaker*". Pinter is perhaps the most dominant play writer of postmodern Britain. His early plays can be Absurdist plays considering the fragmented nature of the characters who attempt to create an identity for themselves by making a choice. The plays are quite short and set in an enclosed, claustrophobic space, the characters are always in doubt of their function and in fear of someone or something outside. Pinter does not think of himself, as a technical innovator for he feels that what is going on in his plays is not realism. Often the characters deliberately avoid communication, the long and frequent silences being evasive measures indicating a refusal to communicate, to enter into another's experience. Pinter plays have also been considered to be comedies of menace. The early plays in particular are pervaded by a generalized sense of threat, of some outside damage infiltrating a secure place like a room for example. The use of black humour is often an accompaniment to such comedies. Pinter's verbal pyrotechnics affiliate him to Beckett. His use of language and his vision of the condition of modern man establish him as clearly anti-traditional.

4.11.2 Writer: His Life and Works

Pinter was born on the 10th October 1930 in Hackney, a London Borough. Pinter's father was a Jewish tailor, owning a house on the north side of Hackney Down and here Pinter spent the first nine years of his life. His father worked very hard, working twelve hours a day, making clothes. The calm atmosphere of Hackney was disturbed by the political events of the later 1930s and destroyed by the German air-raids of the 1939 – 45 world War II. At this outbreak of World War II, Pinter along with most of the other youngsters of London, was evacuated to the countryside, away from

the danger area. Pinter had also recorded his first experience of a flying bomb when he returned to London in 1944.

At school, Pinter contributed articles to the school magazine. At the age of sixteen he wrote an essay on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. He described *A Portrait* as "typical of Joyce, startlingly honest, true and forthright", and a work of great literary beauty. His major school activities included acting which he was to take up professionally after leaving school. After leaving school he thought of going to Oxford or Cambridge for higher studies but, as he had not learnt any Latin, he was not eligible to join any of those Universities. He studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1948 but left after the terms to join a repertory company as a professional actor. *Poetry London*, a literary magazine published two of his poems in 1950. He also started his efforts to obtain work as an actor and became a professional actor for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Pinter toured Ireland and England with various acting companies, appearing under the name David Baron in provincially repertory theatres until 1959. Although influenced by Beckett and associated with him in the theatre of Absurd, Pinter is better appreciated as the inventor of a new kind of comedy, sometimes called the "comedy of menace". The majority of his plays are set in a single room, whose occupants are threatened by forces or people whose precise intentions neither the character nor the audience can define. After 1956 he began to write for the stage *The Room* (1957) and *The Dumbwaiter* (1957), his first two plays are one-act dramas that established the mood of comic menace that was to figure largely in his early plays.

His first full-length play *The Birthday Party* was first performance at the Arts theatre, Cambridge on 28th April, 1958. The first London performance of this play took place at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith on the 19th May 1958. *The Birthday Party* puzzled the London audiences and lasted only a week but later it was revived successfully on the stage.

After Pinter's radio play *A Slight Ache* (1957) was adopted for the stage, his reputation was established by his second full-length play. *The Caretaker* (1960), established him as more than just another practitioner of the then popular theatre of the

Absurd. His next major play, *The Homecoming* (1965), helped establish him as the originator of a unique dramatic idiom. The play is perhaps the most enigmatic of all his work. For many critics it marked the climax of his dramatic career. Increasingly, involved in writing for films, Pinter wrote a series of short radio plays, abstract and poetic, *Xanscafe* (1968), *Silence* (1969), the two act *Old Times* (1971), and *Monologue* (1973). *No Man's Land* (1975), *Betrayal* (1978) and *The Hothouse* (1980), however proficient, lacked the theatrical excitement of his earlier work, with the result that the double-bill of *One for the Road* and *Victoria Station* (1983), restful and humorous, was greeted with something like relief by his admirers.

Several of Pinter's plays were originally written for British radio or TV. From the 1970, Pinter directed a number of stage plays and American film theatre production of *Butley* (1974). Closely associated with Peter Hall, Pinter became an associate director of the National Theatre after Hall was nominated as the Successor of Lawrence Olivier. Pinter also wrote a number of screenplays including *The Servant* (1963), *The Accident* (1967), *The Go-Between* (1971), *The Last Tycoon* (1974), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Betrayal* (1982), *Turtle Dairy* (1985), *Reunion* (1989), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990) and *The Trail* (1990).

4.11.3 The Text

ACT – I

The play opens with a conversation between Meg and her husband Petey. Both of them are around sixty years of age and they run a boarding house Petey works on the sea-beach as a Deck-Chair attendant. The couple indulge in conversation that is superfluous and meaningless. They have a lodger, Stanley Webber who is in his late 30's and has been staying in the boarding house for about a year. It is early morning and Petey has just returned from his morning rounds and is being served breakfast. Petey enquires if Stanley has not yet come down from his room for his breakfast. Meg replies that he has not yet come down and that she has given him his bed tea in the morning. Meg keeps on saying that her boarding house is on the list of approved boarding houses because of its good name. Petey enjoys his breakfast and informs Meg that he had met two men the previous evening and they were enquiring about the availability of accommodation in the boarding house. Petey has asked them to come on that day and

Meg says that she has a room which she had recently cleaned up and could accommodate the two guests if they arrived. Meg now goes upstairs to wake up Stanley and bringing him down for breakfast. Meanwhile Petey informs Meg that an entertainment show is come into their own town and Meg feels that Stanley could join the entertainers as he plays the piano. However, Petey says that the show that is coming to town will have no music as the showmen, entertain the audience only by their talk. Meg then goes upstairs to bring down Stanley for breakfast. We hear Stanley shouting and Meg laughing loudly and uncontrollably off stage. Meg comes down and she is breathless, her hair disarranged suggesting some kind of friendly or amorous struggle between her and Stanley. Stanley comes downstairs, his clothes are crumpled and he is unshaven. Stanley wears glasses and sits down at the table and Petey wishes him a good morning and Stanley responds. This shows the friendly and causal relationship between Stanley and Petey. Stanley is served breakfast and he is very critical of what is served, whereas earlier Petey was all appreciation for the breakfast. Petey now goes out on his duty. Stanley continues to criticize Meg, her breakfast, and boarding house. Stanley is very critical of Meg and he rejects her advances. Meg informs Stanley that she has to go out to buy a few things for the two gentlemen that she is expecting. Stanley reacts adversely to the arrival of two strangers in the boarding house and asks Meg if she knows who the two gentlemen are. Stanley now says that he has once been a great pianoist and has given performances in many cities of Europe like Berlin, Athens, Constantinople, Zagreb and Vladivostock, and also in every town in England.

Stanley goes on to give strange stories about his musical performances. At this point there is a sudden knock in the front door. The visitor is Lulu a girl in her twenties, living next door. Meg and Lulu have a whispered conversation, but Stanley overhears the conversation. Lulu tells Meg that a parcel has arrived for her. Meg asks Lulu to go inside the house with the parcel and Meg herself goes out shopping. Lulu places the parcel in the room and tells Stanley that he shouldn't touch it. Lulu asks Stanley to have a bath and look refreshed. Lulu asks Stanley to go out with her a walk but he refuses to go with her at that particular time. Lulu then leaves the house and Stanley goes to the mirror, takes off his glassier and begins to wash his face.

At this moment two men, Goldberg and McCann enter the room through the back door. Stanley catches a glimpse of them, puts on his glasses and goes out unobserved by the two men. The two men Goldberg and McCann are waiting for the house owner to arrive. McCann is portrayed as a person who is restless and worried, whereas Goldberg is steady and seems to control of the situation. We also learn that McCann has been hired by Goldberg to do this job. McCann expresses his gratitude to Goldberg. Meg returns from her shopping and she expresses her pleasure at meeting them. She accepts them as lodgers and tells them that the house is occupied by herself and her husband besides a male lodger. Goldberg is curious about this lodger and Meg gives her own jumbled account of Stanley as a Musician. She also informs them that it is Stanley's birthday today. Meg says that she has a present for him and would give it to him in the evening. Goldberg suggests that they should have a birthday party that evening in honour of Stanley. Goldberg further suggests that he would take care of all the arrangements and his assistant McCann will look into the details. It is agreed that they would have a party that evening and invite the neighbour Lulu also. Meg returns after showing the two men their rooms. Stanley now asks Meg who those two men are and what they want. Meg replies that the boarding house is on the approved list and therefore they must have come here. On being asked about their names Meg remembers only the name of Goldberg. Stanley is very much depressed because of the presence that the two strangers. Meg tries to cheer him up and tells him that today is his birthday. She gives him a parcel as his birthday present and asks him to open it. Stanley opens the parcel and he finds a Boy's drum inside. He hangs the drum round the neck and begins to beat the drum rhythmically. Suddenly the beating becomes irregular and soon turns violent. It is as if Stanley is possessed by some evil spirit.

The action of Act I shows a steady progress from the simple and ridiculous to a frenzy of action, as we notice the opening of the Act has dialogues between Meg and Petey which are trivial and inconsequential. This is followed by the interaction between Meg and Stanley which suggests amorous flirtation as well as the quarrelsome atmosphere where Stanley keeps on criticizing Meg and her boarding house. The next episode brings an air of strangeness with an entry of Goldberg and McCann. There is a sense of mystery and menace surrounding the mission on which they have come. This is further exaggerated by Stanley's restlessness and apprehension of the two strangers. The act ends with the frenzied beating of the drum by Stanley.

ACT – II

The action of act II continues in the living room of Meg's boarding house. The time is evening of the same day as Act – I.

Act II opens with McCann sitting at a table and tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. After a few moments Stanley enters, steps and watches him. Stanley and McCann greet each other. From the background voices are heard McCann introduces himself and Stanley asks him if he would be staying at the boarding house for long and McCann replies in the negative. Stanley introduces himself as Webber (Stanley's full name is Stanley Webber). Stanley says that he is thinking of going out, and McCann stands in Stanley's way and feels that he (Stanley) should not go out as the guests for the party would be soon arriving. On enquiry McCann informs Stanley that the other guests are a young lady and his own friend. Stanley tries to pick up one of the strips of the sheet of newspaper, McCann warns him not to touch it. There is something mysterious about the strips of paper and McCann refuses to reveal what it is. The conversation between McCann and Stanley continues, and Stanley gives the details of his earlier life. Stanley says that he has some property with a fairly decent private income. He started some business which has compelled him to stay away from home, and he doesn't like to do so. He says he would rather stay at home and lead a peaceful and quiet life rather than be involved in the tensions of business. Stanley goes on to say that his present appearance is due to his heavy drinking which is the result of being away from home. Stanley says that he hopes to give up this life and go home. He further points out that he is a peace loving person and wouldn't create any trouble anywhere. Stanley further tells McCann that they have selected the wrong house for their holiday. He also says that his birthday was not on that day but is in the next month. He points out that the lady of the house, Meg, is not reliable as she is a crazy woman. McCann somehow doesn't like Stanley's remark. Stanley now approaches McCann and holds his arm and wants to tell him something. McCann asks Stanley to withdraw his grip and when Stanley doesn't do so, he shakes his arm. Stanley continues to question McCann about his background and why he and his friend are here, without any success. At this moment Goldberg enters and gives an account of his own childhood. He says that he has led very quiet and simple life. As a young man he did everything in a natural manner. All in all he had a very pleasant childhood receiving affection from his parents.

At this juncture Petey who had entered earlier says that he has to go out to join his friends for a game of chess, but will try to return early. McCann accompanies Petey to get the bottles of liquor for the birthday party. Stanley now is rude to Goldberg when the latter tries to start a conversation. Stanley says that Goldberg and his friend have made a mistake in coming to this boarding house. He says the room which they have been given is already booked for someone else and Meg had forgotten about this. Stanley advises Goldberg, as the manager of the boarding house to clear out. Goldberg ignores what Stanley says and begins to describe how a birthday is a great occasion. And that the very fact of being alive is something to be happy and one should rejoice in it. Stanley's reaction to this long speech is only to ask Goldberg to get out of the boarding house. At this moment McCann enters with the liquor bottles. Stanley objects to liquor being consumed in the boarding house as they do not have the required license for permitting to the lodgers to drink. Goldberg tries to calm down Stanley. He asks him to sit down for a minute to relax and Stanley in the other hand makes clear that he wants Goldberg and McCann to leave and also that he wouldn't allow any one of the lodgers to consume liquor. As the boarding house is the inconvenient in everyway for Goldberg and McCann and that they should vacate. Goldberg however feels that Stanley is nervous and he should relax. The action that follows is typical of the way Pinter builds the tempo from just an ordinary incident to an emotionally charged one. Here the action begins with McCann suggesting that it would be good for Stanley to sit down as Goldberg has suggested. Stanley asks McCann why he himself is not sitting down. McCann tells Goldberg that Stanley is refusing to sit down and Goldberg replies that McCann should again ask Stanley to sit down. McCann tells Stanley that he would be more comfortable if he sits down and Stanley replies that the same thing is true for McCann also. McCann says that he would sit if Stanley does, but Stanley insists that McCann should first sit down. McCann slowly yields and sits down and asks Stanley to follow. Stanley replies that since Goldberg and McCann have had enough of rest it is time for them to clear out of the house. Goldberg and McCann feel that Stanley has played a dirty trick on them and they want to give him a sound thrashing. Thus, we find that McCann, Goldberg and Stanley are highly excited from an incident like sitting down. However, after whistling for a few moments Stanley also sits down. Goldberg now levels a number of charges against Stanley. He says that Stanley is a complete failure in life, he is driving the lady of the house to desperation, he is responsible for the old man (Petey) going out of the

house to play chess and finally he treats the young lady (Lulu) as if she is an untouchable.

Stanley is surprised and cannot understand why they are putting these questions. Before Stanley can answer them they bombard him with another series of questions. The most serious charge is that Stanley has not only left but also betrayed 'The Organisation'. Stanley however, is unable to understand what Goldberg and McCann mean. He feels that it is a case of mistaken identity and Goldberg and McCann are wrongly identifying Stanley with some one whom they want. However, the charges against Stanley by Goldberg and McCann continue and involve various issues. Stanley is so very strongly cross-examined and the volley of questions that are put to him, not giving him a chance to answer makes him (Stanley) feels tormented, and he almost breaks down under the pressure of the brain washing. Stanley reacts strongly to the insults and charges leveled against him. He kicks Goldberg who falls on the ground. McCann takes hold of a chair and raises it to hit Stanley and Stanley also picks up a chair to protect himself. Strangely Goldberg calls out to McCann not to hit Stanley (This action by Goldberg is perhaps due to the necessity of taking Stanley as a captive). At this juncture the sound of a drumbeat is heard and Meg enters the room dressed for the party. Everybody appreciates the dress that Meg is wearing. The liquor bottles and glasses are brought out and drinks are served to all the people present. There are two brands namely Scotch and Irish Whisky that is served. Goldberg feels that the right person to propose a toast on Stanley's birthday is Meg. After some persuasion Meg gives a speech as follows:

"It is very nice for us to be here to night in my house. I want to propose a toast to the health of Stanley because it is his birthday. He has lived here for a longtime now, and he is my Stanley now. I think that he is a good boy although sometimes misbehaves". (At this point, Goldberg laughs appreciatively). Continuing her speech Meg says, "He is the only Stanley I know; ad I know him better than anybody else knows him, even though he may not believe this. I am so happy at this time that I could cry. I am happy because I still have him here and because he has not gone away from me. I would do anything for his sake. And all of you are present here to night".

Lulu appears on the scene and Goldberg introduces himself. Goldberg then asks everybody to standup except Stanley, in whose honour he delivers an impressive speech which is as follows:

"I am glad that Stanley has sat down. First of all I want to say that I had never been so sentimentally affected as I have been to night by the speech which Mrs. Boles has just made. There is very little true warmth of affection now-a-days in this world. Once in a life time we may come across such true warmth as we noted just now in the speech made by Mrs. Boles. There was a time when this kind of love, this kind of comradeship, this kind of frank expression of affection were very common. But that time is gone (McCann here intervenes with the remark that all the affection and comradeship which once existed have now simply vanished from human life). Goldberg then continues with the speech". Till today I too had the impression that true affection and comradeship, had vanished from human life. I am a man who believes in hearty laughter, in going a – fishing, and also in a bit of gardening. I had my own glass-house in which I used to rear some lovely plants with my own labour and with self-confidence. That is the kind of man I am. I do not believe in size; I believe in quality. I believe in having a small Austin car; I believe in obtaining a book from a lending – library. I feel satisfied if I get these things. But today, a few moments before, Mrs. Boles, the lady of the house, made a speech which impressed me deeply by the sentiments which it expressed. Lucky is the man for who Mrs. Boles feels so much affection. Indeed, I cannot describe to you how deeply I appreciate the kind of affection this lady feels for the man whose birthday we are celebrating. Each person is alone in this world. Each one of us has to go through life all-alone. At night each one of us has a lonely pillow to rest our heads upon. But to night we have all witnessed a scene of which we can feel proud. We have heard a lady expressing he total devotion to, and her total love for, a fellow human being. Mrs. Boles is rightly proud of the man, Stanley, to whom she has so much love and affection. To you, Stanley, I offer my sincere congratulations. On behalf, of all of us, I wish you, Stanley, a happy birthday. I am sure that you have never felt so proud of yourself that you are feeling today. Congratulations and good luck, and may we always meet on such happy occasions; switch off the electric light, McCann, while we drink the toast".

This speech of Goldberg is followed by a toast and Lulu expresses her great admiration for Goldberg's speech. Meg greets Stanley and gives him a mother's kiss. This is followed by simultaneous conversations between Goldberg and Lulu on the one hand and McCann and Meg on the other. The conversation between Goldberg and Lulu is marked by the amorous nature whereas that between McCann and Meg is more dignified and sober. Lulu gets drunk and Goldberg starts fondling her and makes her sit on his lap. There is a change in the party and all of them decide to play blind man's buff. The first to be blind folded is Meg followed by McCann and then Stanley. McCann removes Stanley's glasses to blind fold him and later breaks the glasses. While Stanley is walking blind folded McCann places the drum in his path and Stanley walks into the drum, and falls down. Meg utters an exclamation of horror. Stanley however gets up and begins to move out dragging the drum on his foot. Stanley now touches Meg and as she doesn't move he seizes her throat and begins to strangle her. Goldberg and McCann rush forward and rescue Meg. Suddenly there is a blackout. There is a great amount of confusion, but McCann brings out his torch but somehow drops it on the ground. Everybody goes on their knees searching for the torch that McCann has dropped. Suddenly the sound of beating of the drum is heard from the back of the room, Lulu hears the sounds approaching her and she screams and faints. McCann and Goldberg try to search for her. McCann finds the torch and when he flashes it, Lulu is seen lying on the table with her arms and legs out stretched and Stanley bending over her. Goldberg and McCann advance towards Stanley. Stanley moves with his back against the wall and Goldberg and McCann continuously advance menacingly towards him. Here Act II ends and the reader is left to imagine what would have happened to Stanley.

ACT – III

The scene for act III is a repetition of Act – I namely morning. The action in this act takes place the day after the party. This morning after the party is different from the first one earlier as Petey is not given any breakfast but only tea. However the usual routine of reading the newspaper takes place. Meg however, says that she would go out shopping and get something for him to eat. Meg looks around the room and sees the broken drum. She asks Petey how the drum was broken which indicates that she has forgotten all that happened during the party because she has consumed a large amount of liquor. Meg then enquires whether Petey has seen Stanley. Meg says that she had gone up in the morning to Stanley's room with his tea but the door was opened by

McCann who asked Meg not to disturb them as they were talking. Later Goldberg and McCann comedown for breakfast but not Stanley. Meg then points out to Petey that she has seen a big car outside the house in the morning. The car contained a wheel barrow. Petey informs Meg that the car belongs to Goldberg but can't understand why a wheel borrow is kept in the car. As Meg is moving towards the door to go out she hears the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs. However, it is not Stanley but Goldberg that comes down. Meg asks Goldberg if Stanley too is coming down and Goldberg assures her that he will be coming down stairs. The conversation that follows indicates Meg and Petey's admiration of the shining black car which has plenty of room in the front as well as the back. After Meg has gone out Petey asks Goldberg about the condition of Stanley. Goldberg says that his condition is not very satisfactory and it is necessary for a doctor to examine him as he most probably suffers from a nervous breakdown. Petey asks Goldberg why a nervous break down occurs and Goldberg replies that there is no definite knowledge as to how, when or why a nervous break down would occur. He assures Petey that Dermot is keeping Stanley company. In the course of conversation we come to know that in the previous night the lights had gone out during the party because the payment was overdue (In some of the smaller towns they have a system in which a mater is installed in the house, and electricity flows when a coin is inserted. Whenever power stops it means that a fresh coin should be put in). Petey when he returned late in the night and saw the house in darkness inserted a coin for the power to regenerate. Petey is concerned about Stanley's condition and says that if Stanley doesn't recover before lunchtime he would go and get a doctor. Goldberg says that it is not necessary because steps have already be taken for the treatment of Stanley. At this juncture McCann enters the room carrying two suitcases. Petey asks if the two men are going to leave but gets no reply. Goldberg asks McCann what the position is and we notice that Goldberg and McCann seem to be disturbed about something. McCann replies that Stanley is quiet now, suggesting that he was not so earlier. Petey again suggests Stanley should be taken to a doctor. Goldberg says that he agrees with Petey and that necessary arrangements have been made and when Stanley comes down they will take him to Monty. The reader is again left in suspense as to whether Monty is the name of a doctor or the name of a place. Goldberg and McCann make preparations for leaving and suggest that Petey should go to the beach and attend to his work. The scenes that follow bring out certain differences between the characters Goldberg and McCann. They quarrel with each other for simple and silly matters. Goldberg finally gives

a long speech to McCann about his own childhood, and the sort of a person he is as follows:

“Let me tell you what I mean. You have looked into my mouth and you have probably noticed that all me teeth are intact. I have never lost a single tooth in the course of my life. That is the reason which I have reached my present position, McCann. I have always maintained excellent health. Throughout my life I have believed in the same principle and exerted the same principle that one should play the game and should play it fair. Furthermore, I have always believed that one should honour one’s father and one’s mother. I have always consistently believed in this principle. And I tell you, McCann, that nobody can go wrong in life he follows this principle. I am a self-made man. I always paid close attention to the matter in hand. At school I always behaved like a disciplined boy. I stood first in all the subjects. And why am I telling you these facts? Are you following my strain of thought and the course of my argument? It should be a principle with you to learn things by heart and not to write down anything. Another prevention that you should take in life is not to go too near the water. You will find by experience that what I am saying is true. I believe that the world... (here Goldberg stammers). I believe that the world ... (here Goldberg stammers again and become desperate). It believe that the world... (Goldberg again finds it impossible to complete his sentence and feels lost)”.

What Goldberg tells McCann about himself being an honest person doesn’t however hold true. At this point Lulu appears and we learn that Goldberg has seduced her in the previous night when she as in a drunken state. She further accuses him of exploiting her during the sexual intercourse he had with her. His behaviour with her was just to satisfy his lust. McCann goes out and returns bringing Stanley with him. Stanley is now dressed in a well cut suit, shoes and is wearing a white color, clean shaver holding his broken glasses. Goldberg and McCann put a number of questions but throughout Stanley is silent and shows no reaction. The continuous and forceful dialogue of Goldberg and McCann to Stanley is again typical of Pinter’s excellent use of short sentences, as follows:

.....

Goldberg: We shall act as your guardians

McCann: we shall act as your advisors
Goldberg: we shall give you proper care and treatment
McCann: we shall permit you to use the club-bar (we shall get you permission to drink at the club-bar)
Goldberg: we shall keep a table reserved for you at the club
McCann: we shall keep reminding you of the fest-days so that you may not fail to observe them
Goldberg: we shall take care for you
McCann: we shall remind you of all those days on which a man should keep kneeling all the time in prayer
Goldberg: we shall give you a free pass (for travel, or for the theatre, or for exhibition, or for the concerts, etc).
McCann: we shall take you for long walks for your health's sake
Goldberg: we shall give you information of an important and secret nature
.....
Goldberg: you will then be a real man
McCann: you will be a successful man
Goldberg: you will develop a unified personality
McCann: you will be in a position of authority so as to be able to give orders to others.
Goldberg: you will occupy an important position in which you will make decisions
McCann: you will become a big businessman
Goldberg: you will become a statesman
McCann: you will have your own luxury boats
Goldberg: you will own animals
McCann: yes, animals
Goldberg: you, Stanley, will be in a position to make people or break them. I swear by my life that it will be so, well. What do you say?

Throughout this dialogue Stanley remains silent. Stanley tries to speak but he is unable to say anything. His body trembles, his head hangs downwards and he seems to be shrinking within himself. At this point Petey returns. He asked where they wish to take Stanley. Goldberg replies that they are taking him to Monty. (we are again left in the dark as to whether Monty is a person or a place). Petey however insists that Stanley should

be left alone and that he himself would take proper care of him. But Goldberg and McCann disregard Petey's appeal and they help Stanley to get up from the chair and all three move towards the door. Petey makes a last effort to stop them, but Goldberg and McCann say that they would take Petey also, along with them in the car. At this threat Petey makes no further effort but he gives a last piece of advice to Stanley as he says in a tone of great sadness, "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do." Petey hears the sound of Goldberg's car starting and drive away. All is silent now. The action of the opening of the first act is again repeated as Petey reads the newspaper and Meg brings tea. She asks the same old question if Stanley is still in bed and that he would be coming for breakfast. Meg is ignorant of what had happened during her brief absence from the house. She indulges in petty talk and boasts how she had been the best looking woman in the Birthday party.

4.11.4 Analysis of the Text

The term "*The Comedy of Menace*" was first coined by David Campton in 1957 as the sub-title of this play *The Lunatic View*. This term has now been employed to describe Pinter's plays. A comedy of menace is a play in which the comedy arising out of the situation or dialogue is interwoven with some sort of an anticipation of menace. The sense of menace is usually produced by the feeling of insecurity or the possibility of danger which is around the corner. It usually comes from the outside, from an intruder who unsettles the warm and comfortable atmosphere.

In the play *The Birthday Party*, we notice the above throughout. The play opens with a routine dialogue between an aged couple, Meg and Petey. The dialogue is not only routine but also inconsequential and sometimes even foolish. The action is the normal routine domestic one of having breakfast. The main character Stanley comes down and we are first informed of something strange that is going to happen. The uncertainty comes from Petey informing that he had met two strangers who wanted to come and stay in the boarding house. This information of strangers arriving somehow disturbs Stanley, as he is apprehensive of menace. Stanley's account of his concert also involves how he had been locked up in the theatre as some people wanted to see him 'crawling on his bended knees'. This suggests that Stanley has enemies who want to damage him. The feeling of menace is reinforced when Stanley talks about people

coming in a van with a wheel- borrow. At this juncture, there is actually a knock on the door. For a brief moment there is suspense about the knock. However, typical of Pinter, the knock is not from any agency of Menace but the neighbour Lulu.

Following this a dialogue between Goldberg and McCann deepens the mystery. All that we know from the dialogue is that they have a job to carry out and that Goldberg has hired McCann especially for this job. We see Goldberg as a very balanced person whereas McCann seems to be nervous. As Goldberg and McCann enter the lodging house Stanley slips out unnoticed. This action of Stanley again makes us feel that he is hiding from the two strangers namely Goldberg and McCann. The cross examination of Stanley by Goldberg and McCann brings out the grueling nature but at the same time is mixed with questions that are amusing. The following is a brief selection of the questions which create the two fold effect of comedy and fear.

Why did you kill your wife?

Why did you never get married?

Webber! Why did you change your name?

Is the number 846 possible or necessary?

Why don't you pay the rent?

What about Ireland?

How did the chicken cross the road?

Chicken! Egg! Which come first?

What makes you think you exist?

The Birthday party of Stanley again enhances this dual nature of comedy and fear. The party is going on full of gaiety and enjoyment. Almost all of them are drunk and suddenly amidst this celebration there is a blackout. When lights are restored Stanley is found in a very compromising position with Lulu lying on the table with her arms and legs outstretched. Physical violence is now seen when McCann and Goldberg catch hold of Stanley and pin him against the wall, what happened after this is left to the imagination of the audience.

The next morning Stanley is brought down neatly dressed but physically a wreck. Petey says that he would take care of Stanley and take him to a doctor. Goldberg says that Stanley has a nervous breakdown and he will be taken to Monty. Here again there is

ambiguity for we don't know whether Monty is a place or a person. The two possibilities therefore are that Stanley would be taken to a doctor whose name is Monty or to a some place called Monty and what will happen to him there is again uncertain. This extreme sense of menace is followed by the trivial and inconsequential conversation between Petey and Meg, on yet another morning. We are left with the question whether this new day of Petey and Meg would bring yet another Menace.

4.11.5 Critical Comments

Personal experience has deeply influenced in all Pinter's writing. His childhood and his youthful experience have left a deep marks on him. For instance, it is Hackney which provides the characters in his plays with their ambitions, hopes, desires and occupations and the actual attitudes prevalent in Hackney coincide with those which infuse his work. Much of his work emphasized the fear lurking just round the corner. He conveys to us a sense that peace is only on illusion which is subject to sudden destruction by the appearance of an intruder. Of *Birthday Party* Pinter himself said that, "menace and fear do not come form extraordinary, sinister people but from you and me; it is all a matter of circumstance". His themes are violence, actual and potential, fear and menace, appearance and illusion, tranquility and chaos, inability to communicate and the urge towards self probing and the desire for self-definition.

Most of the Pinter's plays produce in the very beginning an impression of some kind of violence. Violence and anger are latent in the action from the very beginning. In the early one-act plays, Pinter reveals himself as master of the veiled threat which lurks in the most rare normal situations as well s in the most extraordinary situation.

Pinter's whole method of characterization differs sharply from the conventional method. For Pinter the past histories of the characters do not matter much. The seaside boarding house of *The Birthday Party* and his room full of accumulated junk in the *Caretaker* strikes us as very real and Goldberg and Meg are both solid characters, even though Pinter does not tell us much about them. In fact none of Pinter's characters are defined by their past history which they are liable to distort. Pinter's plays may be described as thrillers, full of mysteries, which are never told. In *The Birthday Party* we are never told what is behind the action of Goldberg and McCann in taking possession of Stanley and removing him from the boarding house.

Pinter's plays are ambivalent in their plots, presentation of character and endings, but they are works of undeniable power and originality. They typically begin with a pair of characters whose stereotyped relations and role playing are disrupted by the entrance of a stranger; the audience sees the psychic stability of the couple break down on their fears, jealousies, hatreds, several preoccupations and loneliness emerge from beneath a screen of bizarre yet commonplace conversation. In *The Caretaker*, for instance, a wheedling, garrulous old tramp comes to live with two neurotic brothers, one of whom underwent electroshock therapy as a mental patient. The tramps attempt to establish themselves in the household upset the precarious balance of the boarder's lives, and they end up evicting him.

Pinter's play may be described as thrillers, full of mysterious which are never solved. Hints are dropped deliberately as if they were clues in the mystery but the trail never leads to a solution. Pinter aims at tackling his characters at the very root of their existence. Like Beckett and Kafka, Pinter has the attitude of an existentialist. Man's existentialist fear as an everyday occurrence is at the bottom of Pinter's work. He has acknowledged the influence of writers like Hemingway, Dostoevski, James Joyce, Henry Miller and Kafka and Beckett move in a surreal world of acknowledge phantasy and dream. Pinter essentially remains in the firm ground of everyday reality, even though some of his earlier plays are symbolic and even supernatural elements are introduced into the action.

Dialogue is of central importance in Pinter's plays and is perhaps the key to the originality. His character's colloquial speech consists of disjointed and oddly ambivalent conversation that is penetrated by resonant silences. The characters' speech, hesitations and pause, reveal not only their own alienation and the difficulties they have in communicating but also the many layers of meaning that can be contained in even the most innocuous statements. The indeterminacy of the characters as well as the ambiguity of events actually heightens the dramatic tension.

4.11.6 Sample Questions

Consider *The Birthday Party* as a Comedy of Manners

Bring out the comic element in *The Birthday Party*.

4.11.7 Suggested Reading

John Russell Brows: *Modern British Dramatists*.

Patricia Hern ed *Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party*.

Dr. M. Krishna Murthy

Lesson 12

Beckett: Happy Days

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4.12.1 Background: Writer and The Period

During the 1930s, years of depression and the growing international threat of fatalism, the more interesting experiments is a socially committed and serious drama continued to take place outside the West End, on the theatrical fringe as it were. Again, economic factors contributed to the conservation of the mainstream theatre, as competition from the new forms of radio and film reversed the boom of the early 1920s and discouraged managements from taking financial risks. The 1920s also saw important developments in Shakespeare production, particularly at the old Val in London and the memorial theatre in Stratford. Here were the beginnings of the modern National theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

During the World War II the council for the encouragement of music and arts was formed to provide morale boosting entertainment on the home front. This was to prove highly significant, for it later evolved into the Arts council by Great Britain, which was founded in 1946 and which aimed to develop a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the Fine Arts, to increase their accessibility to the public and to improve their standard of execution. 1956 is often suggested as a starting date for modern political drama in Britain.

New influents such as the theatre of cruelty and the theatre of the Absurd helped dramatists, directors and actors to explore non-naturalistic techniques. The theater *** conceived by Antonin Artaud aimed to communicate with the audience at a primitive, subconscious level by means of symbols, gestures, movement and sound. The greatest exponent of Absurdist theatre on the English stage has been Samuel Beckett, an Irish man, living in France, whose work is heavily influenced by French existentialist philosophy and who has written many of his plays in French. His rejection of conventional plots and refusal to supply pat explanations of his plays' meanings established him at once as a *avant-garde* figure.

4.12.2 The Writer: Life and Works

Samuel Beckett was born in the town of Foxrock near Dublin, Ireland. His father, William Beckett, was a successful businessman and an active sportsman, an interest that his son imbibed. Beckett's mother, May was a fiercely independent woman whose main passions were animals and gardening. Beckett took his BA in 1927 and MA in 1931 Trinity College, Dublin in Modern European languages. He excelled at cricket, rugby, tennis at school as well as Trinity. But his academic performance was poor. It was perhaps Rudmose – Brown, a teacher who kind led a serious literary interest in him. Gradually Beckett became one of the most serious students in his class.

Towards the end of his university life, Beckett became interested in theater. The Abbey theatre which was the center of Irish-nationalist drama, promoted the works of Sean, O'casey, Lady George, Lenno Robinson and Denis Johnson among others. Beckett saw most of their plays. Beckett had become an avid reader. His academic performance was now excellent and he was awarded BA with honours, and a two-year fellowship to the famous Ecolie Normale Supérieure in Paris. Paris at this time was the intellectual and cultural capital of Europe. It was the home of the *avant-garde* in art and literature and attracted ambitious young men and women. During his stay there, Beckett came to interact with a number of writers and critics, read European literature and philosophy and produced his first serious writings. Soon after his arrival in Paris, Beckett was introduced to James Joyce. Joyce for whom he had admiration verging on awe, became his model.

Beckett was not yet sure of his vocation. He wrote in several genres fiction, poetry and criticism. He wrote an essay on Joyce in which he dealt with the latter's relationship to Dante, Bruno and Vico. Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 and took up a teaching profession at Trinity. Having spent two years in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Paris, he found life in Dublin provincial and regressive. He did not like teaching and spent his time largely reading and browsing. So he resigned his job at the end of the 1931 and left Ireland. For the next six years, he wandered in exile from place to place. London, Paris, Germany in search of a home and vocation. At one time, he even contemplated going to Moscow to study cinema under Eisenstein and Pudovkin. They were difficult years for Beckett, psychologically and physically as well as financially. However he continued to write.

His first published works were a volume of Verse *Whoroscope* (1930), and a critical study of Proust (1931) *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) was volume of short stories and Beckett's first novel, *Murphy* (1938), made little impact on its first publication. It is almost entirely on this work since 1950 that his fame rests. It earned him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. Beckett's major novel, the French 'trilogy' *Molly* (1951), *Malme Meurt* (1951) and *L'Innummable* (1953) – translated into English, in respectively, 1956, 1956 and 1958 – and the English *Watt* (1953), exist in and through their narrators, social misfits, old and ill, embarked on a quest for the explanation of 'I'. Although distinct from the plays, they are not cut off from them. *The Unnamable*, for example, searches for an escape from writing in the spoken word, and the difficult *Comment C'Est* is insistently aural. The short prose fiction that followed *How It Is* replace the puzzled subject of the novels with a bleak objectivity.

Beckett is probably more widely known for his plays, above all for *Waiting for Godot* (first produced in French in 1953 and in English in 1955), than for his novels. They introduced to the post-war theatre a philosophical dimension that bemused, missed and intrigued audiences. Martin Esslin saw Beckett as a leading exponent of the **Theatre of the Absurd**, arguing that his depiction of characters struggling doggedly with beginnings and especially, with endings, represented a perception of meaninglessness and incoherence. The three full-length plays, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* (first produced in French in 1957 and in English in 1958) and *Happy Days* (1961), if not exactly a trilogy, are all concerned with human suffering, survival and immobility. The

short, but still substantial, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Play* (1963) seek to identify moments in the characters' past when something actually happened, as does the uncharacteristically rich radio play *All That Fall* (1957). All of Beckett's stage plays replace conventional décor with stark images. In the fragmentary *Breath* (1970) the image in all we have. The mysterious *Come and Go* (1966), which Beckett calls a "dramaticule" shows three women behaving according to a regular pattern but not allowing the audience to hear the whispers that might (o might not) motivate their behaviour. In *Not I* (1972) and *Footfall* (1976), it is the detailed direction of stage lighting that dictates what the audience sees (a mouth and facet respectively) as the spoken words reverberate.

4.12.3 The Text

ACT – I: PART ONE

As the play opens we see Winnie, a woman aged about fifty buried waist deep in a mound of dry earth. There are a few things around her, namely, a large black shopping bag and a closed parasol (a light umbrella used to give shade against the sun). Behind her is the second character, Willie. He is hidden from view and is sleeping. A sharp sound of a bell ringing is heard. It stops and rings again. Winnie wakes up and looks at the sky. She recites the end of the Anglican prayer "The Gloria", making appropriate gestures like crossing herself. She tells herself to begin the day and brushes her teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste she takes out of the bag. She looks aimlessly at the mirror for sometime. She expresses her feeling of sympathy for Willie who has no interest in life. But then she concedes that his ability to sleep constantly is a gift that she wishes herself had. She then takes off her glasses to clean them, and wonders if she would one day lose her sense of light. She now cleans her toothbrush and again wishes that she had Willie's capacity to go to sleep, or retreat into one's shell.

On second thoughts she feels she has much to be thankful for, such as absence of any physical ailment except for an occasional headache. She feels that there "great mercies" of God are the result of her prayers. She now tries to read what is written on the toothbrush handle. She can make out only part of what is written, namely, "genuine pure", and quotes the lines from Hamlet "Woe woe is me to see what I see..." She now takes off her glasses and attributes the laziness of her sight to the age of her eyes, and

urges herself to forget it and go on. She now takes her parasol and pokes Willie to wake him up. She drops the parasol but Willie hands it back. She asks Willie not to fall asleep as she might need his services. she now removes a revolver from the bag, kisses it and puts it back in the bag. She now takes out a bottle of medicine that is red in colour. The label on the bottle promises “instantaneous improvement” for a variety of sicknesses, such as “loss of spirits, lack of keenness, want of appetite”. She drinks from the bottle and tosses it back carelessly in Willie’s direction where it shatters. She now again indulges in one of her routine chores, namely applying lipstick. Willies sits up, Winnie turns and sees blood trickling from his bald head. He spreads a handkerchief over his head, disappears behind the mound and put on a straw hat which is now visible about the mound. Winnie now orders Willie to put on his underwear, which he doesn’t do. Winnie now takes out a stylish hat from the bag and puts it on, and says it is “another happy day”, as Willie reads the newspaper.

Willie reads out from the newspaper. He reads a headline that announces the death of Father Carolus Hunter in a bathtub. This takes Winnie back to her childhood. She recalls sitting on his lap. Then follow two actions that run parallel. Willie is reading the newspaper as well as using it to fan himself. Winnie recalls her youth and the first kiss with a man inside a tool shed. Winnie now takes out the toothbrush and tries to read what is written on the handle. After much difficulty she is able to make out the lettering as “genuine pure hog’s setae” or bristles. She feels happy that she ahs learnt something new today as she feels there is always possible if one only makes an effort.

She now feels that one simply has to wait for the “happy day to come when flesh malts at so many degrees and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours”. Winnie now notices that Willie has a picture postcard and asks to look at it. She is taken clack by the picture, obviously one of a sexual nature. She returns the card to Willie, and tries to remember what a ‘hog’ is but her memory fails, yet, she has the confidence that it will come back. She is interrupted in her musing by Willie’s loud nose blowing.

ACT – I: PART TWO

Winnie now regrets that she does not allow Willie to sleep, which he very much likes. She is constantly needing him to listen to him, though it is doubtful how far Willie is doing their. She soup that if Willie dies she would not say a word. She now wonders if

she had combed her hair and brushed her teeth, and locates them in the bag. Since she normally puts them back in the bag only at the end of the day, she feels that she has not combed and brushed that day. She looks at a strand of her hair and revels the past golden days when “the last guest was gone; but cannot remember any past of what else was said. She reflects how sometimes even words fail to express our emotions and feelings, and Willie also agrees to this. Since it is so, she feels that it is best to keep our self busy with acts of personal hygiene since this will occupy one’s self the whole day.

She asks Willie to crawl back into his hole to avoid the sun, and Willie obeys. But, she is irritated with Willie because he is not following all her directions and asks him whether he is able to hear all her commands. Willie also groves irritable which his reflected in his time when he answer “YES”, each time. She recites a line from Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline* and asks Willie to repeat it. Willie’s only repeats half of the line “Fear no more the heat of the sun”. Winnie thanks him for repeating, for she now know that he can hear and is therefore alive, otherwise she would be left with only her big black bag for company. She now asks Willie if he will leave her soon, but he does not answer. She now wonders if Willie can see her, she feels that can see him but it however does not mean that Willie can see. She leans back so that he can see her but he still cannot. She says that the earth is lightening around her, and feels that it is perhaps because she is putting on weight. Willie now begins to muse or think. She compares herself to Willie. Willie likes to be left alone whereas she has so many needs. Her train of thoughts are interrupted when she sees an ant, carrying a little white ball along the grass in front of her. Willie says it was eggs, and she says “Formication”, which is the sensation of ants crawling over skin. Winnie gives an exclamation “God” and Willie breaks into laughter. Winnie also follows him and together they laugh loudly and laugh in succession. Winnie ends up laughing alone, and then stops. She is now grateful and happy that they laughed. She feels there is no better way to “magnify the Almighty” than by laughing at his little wonders of creation, like the ant carrying an egg, but then she wonders if she and Willie were laughing at the same thing.

ACT – I: PART THREE

Winnie now asks Willie if she was ever “lovable”, but Willie does not respond as she presumes that he does not love her. Yet she appreciates Willie’s being with her and says that she will not trouble him any more from now onwards, and that though it is

getting late it is too soon for her to sleep. She now thinks about her bag which is filled with deep treasures. She tells herself that she should not 'overdo' or over use her bag, but keep it for use in the future 'when words must fail' or she would have nobody to talk to and life will be lonely and only the bag will give her some comfort. However, she is unable to resist the temptation and reaches into the bag. She accidentally takes out a revolver, which she disgustedly throws back. She inspects the revolver again. She wonders why the revolver has not gone to the bottom of the bag as it is very heavy. She asks Willie if he remembers how he used to ask her to keep the gun away lost he should commit suicide and end his misery. But for now she decides to leave the revolver or gun around. She now talks of a feeling that she would be sucked up if she had not been buried in the mound and thus held down. She asks Willie if he feels like her, but Willie does not understand Winnie's scientific theory. She talks about 'natural laws' and then reminisces about her youth, how she was young and beautiful. She then comes out of her daydreaming and tells Willie she is happy to have his company now and hopes he is listening. She now again puts up her parasol. She starts to ruminate how it would be dangerous to spend a whole day without any action, how the weather keeps changing and the body adapts to the change, how it is easy if there is movement as per example one would find it difficult to hold an umbrella for a long time without moving, but it is not so difficult to hold an umbrella for a long time if one is walking. So she says there should be some change and movement, she asks Willie to help her to move but Willie does not respond. The parasol catches fire and Winnie throws it behind to extinguish it. She feels that this never happened before, she asks Willie but he is silent. She asks Willie if he is conscious and after several questions he signals that he is end Winnie is delighted at this. It suddenly occurs to her that if the sun grows hotter every hour, then all things will suddenly burst into flames and she feels that with the accumulated heat of years she too will be burnt one day. When she begin to think of how this is avoided by going form sun shine to shade and vice-verse, thus varying the temperature. This was possible because she could use her legs. But now she is covered in the earth, and if the earth covers her upto the breasts, her breasts or body will not be remembered. She now remarks that both something has happened and nothing has happened. She feels her parasol will be back tomorrow in perfect form. She now feels and takes out a music box from her bag and plays a waltz duet (A waltz is music set for dancing by coupled). She plays a song called "The Merry Widow" and Willie accompanies the line without the words. She becomes happy again, and when Willie refuses to repeat the accompanying the music,

she understands and feels that one cannot sing when one's feelings are not with the song.

ACT – I: PART FOUR

Winnie's feels that she is being watched by someone. She tells herself to stop thinking and do something. She starts filing her nails and at the same time thinks of a man and his and his fiancée. She then scolds Willie for eating up his handkerchief, but then she feels that it is natural that he should do so because he is idle all day. She now imagines that the couple with bags in one hand and the other free are staring at Winnie, and the man wonders why she is stuck in the ground. She then recalls their argument, their discussion of the usefulness of Willie and Winnie to one another. They think of digging Winnie out, but do not do so and leave. Now Winnie starts putting in the various things into her bag through it is not yet time for the night bell. She once thought that she would have first time to take out things and put them back in a day, but now it is not so. Before she is about to put the last item, the toothbrush. She also notices Willie is crawling out of his hole. She encourages him and goads him on to crawl. She hopes that he will be visible to her, but she knows he can't. She reads the words on the handle of the toothbrush with some difficulty and asks what a hog is. Willie tells her the meaning and she is happy. Willie now reads the job announcements in the newspaper, which are the same as before Winnie tries to sing but does not; she tries to pray, but this also she does not do.

ACT – TWO: PART ONE

Winnie is covered up to her neck in the mound and cannot move here head. A bell rings, she opens her eyes, and recites a line about light from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. She feels someone is looking at her still, it is a look of concern and care for her. She talks to Willie, punctuating her talk with pauses, but he does not respond. She now feels that there is so little to talk of, though once upon a time she thought she could talk so much about herself. She now comes to the conclusion that Willie has died and left her "like the others" in her life. She says that the bag he gave her to take to the market is however still there. She is sad over her present condition, which is both the same and different from what it was before. She grows anxious over the absence of her arms, breasts and Willie.

ACT – TWO: PART TWO

The bell rings, and Winnie asks Willie questions and getting no response says it is just like Willie, not to have any opinion and therefore not reply to her questions. She now recounts the story of a young girl who was undressing her doll in the middle of the night. Then Winnie's mind goes straying and she thinks of many different things like the difficulty of singing when there is no feeling, her memory of the "classics" she has read, the discussion of shower / cooler and the woman about her being buried and so on. She soon returns to the story of the doll and says how a mouse ran up her leg and Winnie acts out the scream of the girl and screams. Minmie goes on to say the girls family came running but it was too late. After screaming, Winnie now calms herself with the thought that the bell will soon ring for her to go to sleep. She recalls how she used to think that time was changeless. But now since she herself cannot move, she hopes something will happen, perhaps the wind will blow and there will be movement and change from this stillness into which she is thrust. Winnie shifts her eyes and sees Willie crawling towards her. He is dressed very fashionably and it reminds her of the day he proposed to her. She fires a number of questions at him but he does not respond. Winnie urges him on and is delighted when he crawls towards her. She asks him if he wants to kiss her or touch her, or "something else", and laments that she can no longer "give him a hand" as she once did. He whispers "win". She is happy and sings the song "I Love You So..." She closes her eyes, the bell rings, and she reopens them. She smiles at Willie, who looks at her, but she now stops smiling. The play closes with Winnie and Willie looking at each other silently for a long time.

4.12.4 Analysis of the Text

The play opens with Winnie, a woman in her 50s who is buried waist deep in a heap of dry earth. She has a large, black shopping bag and a collapsible parasol (an umbrella used to protect from sun shine). The other character Willie is behind her and hidden from the view of the audience. We come to know that Willie is asleep. Winnie wakes up as a bell rings. She first recites a prayer and then goes through several cleaning rituals like brushing her teeth, combing her hair, etc. she brings out the various implements like tooth brush, comb etc that are necessary for her cleaning rituals. She feels sorry that "poor Willie" as no interest in life. But then she wishes she had the gift of

constant sleeping that Willie has. However she is thankful for the few gifts that she has and does not complain. Winnie now tries to read what is on the toothbrush but cannot completely make out what it is. She now pokes Willie with the parasol to wake him up and drops it, but Willie, still hidden, hands it back. She now removes a revolver from the bag but replaces it. Then she takes out a bottle of medicine drinks from it and throws it in Willies direction, where the bottle shatters. Willie sits up and we see blood trickling from his baldhead. Winnie now orders Willie to put on underwear, which he does not do. Winnie now announces that it will be 'another happy day'. Willie now reads out the headlines from a newspaper, Winnie using a magnifying glass is able to make out what is on the toothbrush. Winnie looks at a post card that Willie has and is shocked by the picture and returns it to him. Winnie now feels sorry that she is not allowing Willie to sleep, but she says it is because she cannot tolerate being alone. She now is doubtful whether she had combed her hair and brushed her teeth and resolves that she would do it later. At this moment Willie speaks in answer to a question from Winnie. Winnie is overjoyed that Willie is at last speaking and calls in a 'happy day'. She now feels that the earth around her is tightening, and wonders if she has put on weight. At this moment she sees an ant on the ground carrying a little white ball through the grass. Willie says it is an egg and then says, "formication." Willie breaks into laughter and Winnie joins him. She now feels that there is no better way of praising the Almighty than to enjoy the little things, like watching the ant.

Winnie now reminds herself not to 'over do' the bag. She feels that it would be necessary in the future, 'When words must fail'. She now accidentally takes out the revolver but throws it back in disgust. Winnie says that she is tired and she will leave the revolver at the bottom. She also feels that if she was not held down by the earth she will be sucked up, but Willie does not understand what she feels. Winnie now thinks of how days will be long and boring without action or conversation. She now feels that there is a need of change for her world to move again. She goes back in memory to the time when she had the use of her legs. Winnie becomes sad now and to cheer up she plays some music. When Willie accompanies the song without words Winnie is again happy. Winnie now feels that she is being watched by someone, carrying bags in their free hands. This imaginary couple wonder about Willie and Winnie's usefulness to each other, think of digging them out, but leave. Winnie now sees that Willie is trying to crawl out of his hole. She encourages him and dreams that he would come to the other side, but knows he

cannot. There is short conversation between Winnie and Willie and she is happy that he is now responding and talking to her. Winnie now wants to sing and pray, but she does neither.

It is a new day and Winnie is covered up to her neck and cannot move her head. A bell rings she opens her eyes, tries to talk to Willie who does not respond she comes to the conclusion that Willie has died and left her “like the others”. She now becomes sad over her present condition and becomes anxious over the absence of her arms, breasts and Willie. The bell rings again and Winnie asks Willie a number of questions, but gets no response. She now recounts the story of a young girl who was undressing her doll during the middle of night, when suddenly a mouse run up her leg and she screamed. At this point Winnie also screams. In the next scene Winnie sees Willie crawling towards her in a fashionable dress and it reminds her of the day he proposed to her. Winnie urges him and Willie drops his hat and gloves and crawls towards her, Winnie is now delighted. He whispers “win”. She grows happy and sings a famous song “I love you so...” she now closes her eyes, the bell rings and she opens them. She smiles at Willie who looks at her and she stops smiling. The play closes with Winnie and Willie looking at each other for a long time.

4.12.5 Critical Comments

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Critical analysis of the Play

The title of the play *Happy Days* is taken from Jack Yellen and Milton Ager’s song “Happy Days are Here Again” which was very popular in 1929. The title also suggests two important themes. One is the way we would define happiness and the other the experience of our days.

The play opens with a number of actions of Winnie that are routine yet ritualistic as we carry them out religiously every morning. They are those acts of cleaning oneself up and praying. These acts of ours are mundane, repetitive and put us into a state of stasis or blind action without any thought or feeling. Winnie is seen praying for a world that does not end, and the reliance on ritualistic behaviours re-enforces this as there is no end to this brushing of teeth and cleaning oneself as one goes on repeating them. The repetition erases the difference between past, present and future. Winnie has

unflagging optimism, and is the reason behind *Happy Days* being one of Beckett's cheerful plays. She admires the happiness that each day brings and is grateful for what is not bad in her world. Of course there are minor troubles. Willie on the other hand is animalistic with his nose blowing and trying to avoid serious thoughts by his light reading or going to sleep at other times.

Winnie's dependency on Willie gradually increases. She wants him to respond to her so that she will not feel alone. She is afraid that if Willie does not respond, then she will fail in her communication and would be left lonely as she will reach a point "when words must fail". She goes on to think that just because she can see Willie and talk to him, it does not mean that Willie is able to see her or respond to her. This leaves her in a state of isolation where there is no meaning in words or existence. To compensate for this feeling of loneliness and to assert her existence perhaps Winnie indulges in a number of ritualistic activities to fill the gap and pass the day. She wants an end to her boredom, but she is afraid of that it would be perhaps death. So she constantly fidgets about, living in the present trying to avoid the future. She is so involved in this that her memory seems to fail her and she cannot obviously recollect the past. Willie presents a different perspective. He crawls into his hole and crawls out again and each time he does this he seems to be reborn, whereas Winnie is fixed and covered by earth. She is stuck to the present, whereas Willie can crawl back to the past and forward to the future. He is not tied down to the present environment. The distinction between stasis and change is further worked out in the play. For example Winnie feels that the earth is tightening around her, the sun is burning hotter- but then she says it is not. The paradox is further worked out when Winnie exclaims, "This will have been a happy day". Beckett employs the future perfect tense. It means that this is something that would happen in the past of the future, and hence there is no certainty of the event in the future. The statement suggests that Winnie is suspended between the past and present. Again Winnie and Willie offer contrast in movement. Winnie is fixed and the earth moves up and crawls up to meet her, she does not sink. Willie on the other hand is always low on the ground, sometimes in a hole. Their movements are opposite in directions and one wonders at certain points in the play if they would ever meet or are destined to the opposite ends. Again Willie has a free will and is not dependent on Winnie, whereas Winnie very often depends on Willie and looks forward to his response to establish communication and meaningfulness – she even confesses how lonely she would be

without Willie, his very physical presence is reassuring through he does not communicate orally. Winnie's is fantasy of Shower / Cooler and his fiancé creates the illusion that someone else watches her. She also conjures up the past image of a happy couple, but her own life comes into play and the couple is projected as bickering or quarrelling with each other. Here we may also note Willie's explanation that "ho" is a "castrated" pig "reared for slaughter", death which is the goal for everything. The human being is also castrated, by the ritualistic behaviour and prepared in due course for slaughter or death. Winnie emphasizes this by filing her nails (nails are the only part of the body that grow even after death, thus defying it)

In the second and final Act of the play, time drags on slowly. The speeches are punctuated with pauses and long silences. The pauses give us a feeling of creeping towards death more slowly than earlier. Even Willie has changed his dress, in a popular term we may say, "he is dressed to kill" – perhaps it is Willie's death outfit. The conclusion of the play has been brilliantly put forth by a critic as follows:

The audience finally sees or hears what Winnie has been waiting for all along, the song. It is her ritualistic reward at end of day, but it must still be heartfelt, as she often remarks, otherwise it cannot happen. That Winnie is able to sing means that, in a way, she is the "winner." While it takes her dependency on Willie, who shows a vulnerable dependency, to inspire her to sing, she is still able to do it. Still, the reward also depletes, as she previously has admitted she becomes sad after singing, and the long, smile-less pause at the end of the play indicates that life will return to normal again the next day. Indeed, the play is structured around a two-part ritualistic cycle of change and return to stasis. There are two acts to emphasize repetition, the bell rings twice at start of day, and it also rings at the start and end of day. And Winnie and Willie's marriage comes full circle in the final moments. After having found out for certain that they are married, Willie seems to court Winnie again as he crawls toward her. There is possibly some sexual innuendo, when Winnie asks Willie if he wants "something else", and regrets she can no longer "give him a hand". Then Willie grows vulnerable, Winnie sings her song of love and they look at each other, and then the final pause suggests a return to an eternal silence. Winnie is both winner and loser, constantly shifting back and forth, filling the longer and longer days with her empty, present tense rituals – yet

somehow holding out hope. Beckett does not force us to view the title of Happy Days as sincere or ironic but, as the ambiguity of the ending suggests, allows us to see it as both.

4.12.6 Sample Questions

Consider *Happy Days* as a play belonging to the theatre of the Absurd.

Comment the relationship between Winnie and Willie bringing out the humour and pathos.

4.12.7 Suggested Reading

Martin Esslin ed: *Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays*

Styan, J.L., *The Dark Comedy*

Kenner, Hugh, *A Reader's guide to Samuel Beckett.*

Dr. M. Krishna Murthy

Lesson 13

Christopher Fry: A Phoenix Too Frequent

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4.13.1 Background: Writer and the Period

Poetry in connection with drama has two terms “dramatic poetry” and “poetic drama”. Dramatic poetry certainly excludes plays in prose and can be applied to the plays like those of Marlow and Shakespeare. Ronald Peacock opinions,

It indicates a text in verse, which meaning derives ultimately from classical times. It means, secondly, the romantically poetic, and this refers rather to certain themes and attitudes irrespective of verse for prose forms, as we observe in fairy tales and in an author like Mactherlinck, whose plays are intensely romantic though in prose. Thirdly, it means lyrical and musical style, primarily in verse, but also in prose.

But the meaning of Ronald Peacock cannot serve the purpose in the contemporary conditions. The meaning is to be broaden the notion of ‘poetic drama’ for which Eliot’s definition is worth quoting.

It should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their feelings and volitions instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess to be

conscious of; it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal the victim of circumstances and the doomed or sanctified being.

The English contribution to the modern experiment in home was a new kind of drama. Until the early 1950s by which time it had become a spent force, it seemed as if verse drama was the final statement or dramatic modernity. Its weakness was innate; verse drama was a movement of writers rather than of individuals closely associated with the theatre and stage. Poet's language replaced probably language in dialogue. The practitioners in the mode were T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. Eliot's one great success in verse drama is *Murder in the Cathedral* which draws upon the conventions of Greek drama and uses ritual and formal poetic language to great theoretical effect.

Poetry can communicate the incommunicable. In it towery passions can be best realized and expressed. It is a mode in which reality is experienced most profoundly. Moreover, it is the privilege of dramatic poetry to be able to show us several plans of reality at one is sensuous, logical, psychological and spiritual, images used by a poetic dramatist are a mode of apprehending reality, enabling the author to say more in less pace and time. Poetry has a flexible scope. It extends the range of expression over that available prose. Since verse is suitable instrument it reveals the subtleties of nature better than prose.

It exposes more of person, their motives, though and situation than the bluster tools of prose can. It can range from 'near naturalism' to 'extreme formation' may lean towards the lyrical on the meditative, or the philosophical on whatever without cutting lose its anchor in the dramatic scheme. Since all drama is a make-believe, an exercise of imagination, how poetic drama alone can be unrealistic. As Yeasts opinion "*the real world is not altogether rejected it is touched here and there and into the places we have left empty rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimers that haunt the edge of trance*".

Poetic drama, therefore, is not prose drama with a top dressing of poetry, poetry to it, is so natural as breathing to a human being. And the writer of poet's drama is not merely a under skilled in two arts and skilful of to weave them together, he is not a writer

who can decorate a play with poet's language and metre. The decay of poetic drama for about two centuries cannot and does not give a due to concluded that the prime drama is better and greater than the poet's drama. Poetry ceased to be used on the stage for sometime only to give a proper opportunity for the development of prose. And development in art does not necessarily mean improvement. History can give ample if proof that prose drama is a light by product of verse drama. A genuine poet's drama is a picture and music, a poetic image and a ritual, an illumination and a catharsis, an excitement in life and a serenity above it, a re-enactment in sense and a liberation in idea.

As Legouis and Cazaman opinions that *unlike T. S. Eliot who being essentially a poet gropes for an acceptable form of presentation. Fry is drawn naturally to the theatre. He left school mastering for the boards, and he has direct knowledge of all the secrets of his trade, having been actor, stage manager, director of a repertory company, cabaret star, author of a musical comedy, librettist, etc. The combination of two factors, Christian faith and the theatre served by a sparkling gift of language, has produced a group of plays full of ardour, movement and honour, whose constant theme is the exploration of the enigma of man' stage, which leads back always to its unique source, God. Christopher Fry acknowledges T. S. Eliot as his master; but his gaiety, the graceful lightness of his banter, his extravagant sallies, and the pyrotechnics of his vivid and explosive style make his poetic drama completely autonomous.*

4.13.2 The Writer: His Life and Works

Christopher Fry was born on 18th December 1907, in Bristol, England, in a cultivated, but poor, family. Fry's architect father had given up his practice to become a lay-preacher to Bristol's slums. The family sometimes had little to eat at dinner because much had been given away. Fry's father health failed and he died in 1910, with young Christopher only three. His mother, a Quaker, raised the bright and introspective child, reading aloud to him prolifically (Pilgrim's Progress was favourite) and providing him with progressive schooling. He took her family name, Fry, when he was 15. The imprint of both his parents and their dedicated faith remained strong. A conscientious objector, Fry

served the English military in a fire and ambulance corps during World War II; his pacifist beliefs must have stemmed, in part, from his parents.

When Fry left school at 18, he became a 'strolling player' a jack-of-all trades with virus theatres, and alternatively, taught. By 1939, he had written one or two plays with limited success in English regional and amateur theatres; one production (*The Boy With A Cart*) featured a young Welsh actor just beginning his career; Richard Burton. In 1940, Fry became director of the Oxford Playhouse – just a few months before he was "called up" to serve. During the war, Fry served four years with the Pioneer Corps, fighting fires and dealing with bomb damage on the Liverpool docks.

Fry's early plays attracts little attention, by the Bristol production of *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946), a lively version of the widow of Ephesus story, proclaimed the arrival of new contribution to the revival of verse drama. Fry followed it with the *First Born* (1948), one of a number of plays as in which he uses biblical theme to celebrate life's beauty and mystery. *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1948) shows Fry's delight in language at its best. He later described it as the 'spring' piece in a seasonal cycle, completed by an autumn play, *Venus Observed* (1950), the winter, *The Dark is Light Enough* (1954), and *A Yard of Sun: A Summer Comedy* (1974). Since *The Lady's Not for Burning*, Fry has not found it easy to share with audiences his own belief that poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement. *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951) is among the best of his subsequent work, together with several effective adaptation of French plays, *Ring Round the Moon* (1950) and *The Lark* (1955) from Anouilh, *Tiger at the Gates* (1955), *Duel of Angles* (1958), and *Judith* (1962) from Giraudoux and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1975) from Rostand.

4.13.3 The Text

A Phoenix too frequent is one of earlier plays by Fry and is almost experimental. The play may be in fact described as a poetic extra vaganza for, there is more of the effects of poetic conceits and the power of verbal variations and many poetic tools that Fry employs in this verse-play. The dramatic action is the result of the twist of language leading to comic bathos. As Fry himself observed, "You know it is a trick I have all the

way through, following the flickers of poetry; as I prick the bubble of the love scene with "Is your husband expecting you?" and the laughs come and that is what I want?" (Fry)

The scene is the vault of a tomb where Dynamene along with her maid Dodo is keeping vigil over the dead body of her husband Virilius. Dynamene cannot accept the death of Virilius and is determined to give herself also to death. She moans her husband's death and says

*O Virilius,
My husband, you have let a wake in my soul,
You cut the glassy water with a diamond keel.*

Dido the maidservant of the young widow, however has a different outlook in life. She says.

..... life and death is cat and dog in this double- bed of a world

Dynamene is rooted in coldness and she laments

*Why did you leave me walking about our ambitions
Like a cat in the ruins of a house? Promising husband,
Why did you insult me by dying?*

Dynamene complains against the world's unreasonableness and also gives a long description of her husband as follows:

*What a mad blacksmith creation is
Who blow his furnace until the stars fly upward
And iron time is hot and politicians of glow
And bulls and roots sizzle into hyacinth
And orchids, and the sand put out the lion,
Roaring yellow, and oceans bud with porpoises,
Blenny, tunny and the almost unexisting.
Blindfish; throats are cut, the master piece
Looms out of labour, nations and rebellions
Are spat out to hang on the wind – and all is gone
In one Virilius, wearing his office tunic,*

*Checking the pence column as he went
Where's animation now? What is there that stays
To dance? The eye of the one-eyed world is out.*

For Dynamene her husband's death looms large. It has as far as is concerned, deprived the world of life or animation. For her there is no more celebration or dance. She feels her world has gone blind because her husband is dead and can no longer see. While she is in this mood of lamentation, Tegeus enters in search of a corpse. Tegeus comes there on duty as he has been ordered to search for a corpse. Dynamene feels the presence of Tegeus is an insult to her privacy she cannot tolerate this and flares up and says:

*If I were still of the world, and not cloistered
In a colourless landscape of winter thought
Where the approaching spring is desired oblivion,
I should write sharply to your commanding officer.
.....
Any why insolence matter
When my colour of life is unreal, blush on death,
A partial mere diaphane?*

Tegeus is also very ornate and oratorical in his speech. He swears that his intention in entering the tomb were completely innocent. He is highly theatrical in his speech as when he says to Dido:

*We'll put a moat of tears
Round her bastion of love, and save
The world. It's something, it's more than something
It's regeneration, to see how a human cheek
Can become as pale as a pool.*

And again later he bids them lie

*... .. in the terrible black crystal of grief
Which held them, before I broke it*

Tegeus' love of life is brought out again later preferring to die for love (by committing suicide) rather than face the ignoble death by court-martial he says:

*Since I have to die, let me die here, in love,
Promoted by your kiss to tower, in dying,
High above my birth. For God's sake let me die
On a wave of life, Dynamene, with an action
I can take some pride in.*

Dynamene and Tegeus now settle down to wide and quiet conversation. Tegeus now tells Dynamene of how he was always in love with life and in his boyhood "a star ran through me, to live in the brooks of my blood for ever".

He says he had always searched for the ideal woman, like Dynamene, but never met her. The women he saw were no comparison to Dynamene as he says:

*... .. Never you; never, although
They could walk with bright distinction into all men's
Longest memories, never you, by a hint
Or a faint quality*

The romantic episode that follows is full of love and brilliant poetic imagery that Fry uses. Dynamene gets under the influence of wine and her outlook on life changes. She begins to place a premium on life and love rather than cold death. She says:

*Oh, how inveterate body
Even when cut from the heart, insists on leaf,
Puts out, with a separate meaningless will,
Fronds to intercept the thankless sun*

and again

*When thoughts would die, the instincts will set sail
For life. And when the thoughts are alert for life
The instincts will rage to be destroyed on the rocks.*

For Tegeus, the whole world and creation itself seems to be compassed in Dynamene's embrace. He says:

*You have the skies already
Out of them you are buffering me with your gales*

*Of beauty, can we be made of dust, as they tell us
What! Dust with dust releasing such a light
And such an apparition of the world
Within one body?*

Dynamene is finally won over by Tegeus and the life force from her death wish while with her husband's corpse. She now desires Tegeus his love and life. She says:

*Charm's, you boy
I can't look away from you*

Dynamene is very nature even in the moment of crisis. From the newly and fully awakened love of life also finds a solution to the crisis. She boldly and with the new maturity, suggests that her husband's body be made to replace the missing body. She justifies her action observing:

*... .. Better, far better, he,
Than you who are still alive, and surely better
Than idling into corruption*

Towards the end, the very perceptive and understanding maid Dido says to Tegeus,

*You left something behind,
Ye gods, what a moon*

So the play ends, beginning with the dim lamp lit tomb, murky with the dead body and the death-wish of Dynamene to the romantic moonlight highlighting life and the love of Tegeus and Dynamene asserting the life-force and creation.

*When thoughts would die, the instincts will set sail
For life. And when the thoughts alert for life
The instincts will rage to be destroyed on the rocks.*

4.13.4 Analysis of the Text

The use of imagery in "***A Phoenix Too Frequent***"

The play *A Phoenix Too Frequent* belongs to Fry's early period. The most important aspects of the play are Fry's use of poetic conceits and rhetoric. We find this abundant use of poetic techniques in his earlier two plays also. However in *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, the imagery is used to bring out character so contract which was one of the important features in the play. The second aspect of important is the creation of the play's mood or atmosphere through imagery which Fry tried in the earlier two plays and has been able to much more affective in this play.

Coming to the imagery in *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, we find that the imagery employed by the main character Dynamene is different in the earlier and later parts of the play. This suggest a change in her character as well. For example, in the earlier part of the play when she moans the death of her husband. She says:

*O Virilius,
My husband, you have left a wake in my soul,
You cut the glassy water with a diamond heel.*

We find that though the expression is beautiful and expressive, it is at the sometimes formal and artificial. Again when she mourns her husband's death she says:

*Why did you leave me walking about our ambitious
Like a cat in the ruins of a house?*

This speech is very eloquent but again the emotions become spurious and artificial. We again find the long description of her husband ending with a concern that border on the metaphysical.

*What a mad blacksmith creation is
Who blows his furnace until the stars fly upward
And iron Time is hot and politicians glow
And bulbs and roots sizzle into hyacinth
And Orchids, and the sand puts out the lion,
Roaring yellow, and oceans bud with porpoises,
Blenny, Tunny and the almost unexisting.
Blindfish; throats are cut, the master piece
Looms out of labour: nations and rebellious*

*Are spat out to hang on the wind – and all is gone
In one Virilius, wearing his office tunic,
Checking the peace column as he went
Where's animation now? What is there that stays
To dance? The eye of the one-eyed world is out.*

Here is the speech again we see a series of images like the stars flying out the politician glowing the lion roaring and the ocean full of life. The total pictures obviously suggest the combination of the sublime and the ridiculous in this universe. All these images are in away forced to lead to the death of her husband Virilius. For Dynamene perhaps her husband's death is deprivations are negative of the world. But somehow these seems to be an artificiality in her emotions. As pointed out earlier this also reflects her character. For Dynamene is now ready to immolate herself. However deep her effects for her husband, death for his sake seems artificial and we may say indulgent. A little late in the play when Tegeus enter the tomb she says:

*If I were still of the world, and not cloistered
In a colourless landscape of winter past
Where the approaching spring is desired oblivion,
I should write sharply to your commanding officer.*

These lines again show that while chastising Tegeus. She indulges in metaphors about her present state which seems to be rather artificial. For a person to anger would be spontaneous in his exclamation rather than put it in ornate and metaphorical language. The imagery that Dynamene uses later one in her speeches shows a clear change. Even as her life takes a turn and becomes more meaningful as she realized of life force, her speech is also much more organsied. We have a beautiful passage when Dynamene talks of the effort of wine upon her. She is now much more balanced and mature in her mind. As we see the following passage the images she employs are much more deep in rooted than the earlier ones:

*Oh, how inveterate body,
Even when cut from the heart, insists on leaf,
Puts out, with a separate meaningless will,
Fronds top intercept the thankless sun*

In the following lines again, Dynamene is talking of more or less the same subject but uses imagery that is different. Where earlier she pointed out the regeneration in nature referring to "the leaf, puts out" here in this line the image that is centred again refuses to the glory of life in the image "set sail for life" the lines are as follows:

When we consider the other character Tegeus we again find this change in the language, we find Tegeus being highly dramatic and artificial when commenting on Dynamene's present state he says:

*We'll put a moat of tears
Round her bastion of love, and save
The world.*

The image is traditional of the medieval ages especially 'the moat of tears' and is romantic but not convincing. Later we have desires deciding to commit suicide rather than get court martial. The speech that he addressed shows a more balanced use of imagery.

*Since I have to die, let me die here, in love,
Promoted by your hand to tower, in dying,
High above my birth. For God's sake let me die
On a wave of life, Dynamene, with an action
I can take some pride in.*

Here we see the excellent use of public expression to portray the emotional tension of Tegeus.

Fry also makes an excellent use of light in this play. The play opens with the tomb which is lit by a lamp. Obviously it is semi dark reflecting the mood of sadness or sorrow of Dynamene at her husband's death. Then there is the intensification of Tegeus. At first Dynamene is angry with him but soon both of them sit down and talk to each other. The mood of Dynamene changes. She now looks at Tegeus with the light which shines on his face. Here is a change from the murky atmosphere in which she first met him to a situation of light that illuminates Tegeus. In Dynamene also there is a change from the 'death-wish' to the recognition of the gardener as the 'life force'. The play ends with the soft sensuous moonlight, as when the maid Dido supports. Another important factor is the imagery that refers to the seasons. In the earlier part of the play the dark mood is reflected in reference to winter. This is followed by the awakening and

apprehension of the life force in images that refer to the summer. The final regeneration and celebration of life is brought out with the images referring to spring. As Prof. S. Krishna Sharma points out in his *Study of Christopher Fry, the continual reference to the various moods of a particular season as in this play (A Phoenix Too Frequent), perhaps led Mr. Fry to evolve a new genera of comedy, which he has subsequently names the 'comedy of season' or 'comedy of mood'.*

4.13.5 Critical Comments

Christopher Fry has been largely responsible for bringing back the melody of the spoken word on to the modern stage, and for reinstating the spirit of comedy in English Poetic drama. The great fertility of his phrases and metaphor has revitalized the unpoetic stage on which the realistic prose drama had been reigning supreme. The starting images and phrases have enchanted the audiences, not only of the suburbs, but of the West End too; and the enthusiastic appreciation of many has led them to see in this poetry an Elizabethan vitality (Prof. S. Krishna Sharma: *The Achievement of Christopher Fry*). Mr. Fry's position with development of the modern drama can only be seen when it is realized that his verse is not, in the traditional of poetic drama, dramatic at all I mean that the drama is not in the verse as verse; its root is in the characters and in the moods and in phrases, where the verse certainly bears, but which it does not embody (R. Williams: *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*). I don't know whether a comedy of mood is an accepted category, or whether it's something I've coined to cover my particular aim. It means that the season and the characters are bound together in one climate. (Christopher Fry: *Theatre New Letter*)

4.13.6 Sample Questions

Give a critical appreciation of *A Phoenix Too Frequent*.

Comment on Fry's use of imagery in the play *A Phoenix Too Frequent*

4.13.7 Suggested Reading

Ellis Firmorm U, *The Frontier of Drama*

Stanford. D, *Christopher Fry: An Appreciation*

Prof. M. S. Rama Murty

Lesson 14

Ted Hughes Thrushes, November, Pibroach

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4.14.1 Background: Writer and the Period

The most striking single figure to emerge among the British poets since the last war is undoubtedly Ted Hughes, England's poet laureate. He one of the "New Poetry" poets, along with Thom Gunn and Philip Larkin. He was never a lover of celebrity, pomp or grandeur. Hughes was born in Yorkshire in a small village on August 17th, 1930 and died on October 28th 1998 at the age of sixty eight. Yorkshire covers a large part of the North of England. The place where Hughes was born, is a rugged country of bare moors and mountains, often cold, rainy and windy in summer, and bleak and snowy in winter. This part of England was the home of the Bronte family and the setting for Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights*. Knowing about the significance of Yorkshire origins helps in understanding his poetry. He is a blunt Yorkshire man and he is frequently accused of writing poetry which is unnecessary rough and violent where he is simply being a typically blintz Yorkshiremen, describing things as he sees them. He as a man and as a poet, frequently does not conform to the conventions which society expects of him, and naturally this upsets people. He is clever, strong minded and outspoken and his interests cover a huge range of topics, including magic, mythology, world religions, language and music. He never paid attention to the conventional attitude of his foregoing poets. Hughes is full of scorn for aestheticism intellect, courage and openness. He has no regard for humanism, old forms and old symbols in poetry. Yet he had great admiration for classical writes such as

Ovid, Frank Wedekind Racine and Lorca. He has published his translations and re-creations such as *Tales from Ovid*, *Spring Awakening*, *Blood Wedding* etc.

His elder brother who was a game keeper and father who had experiences of the first world war have influenced him to a large extent. There are other events such as his services for the National Service and stint at Cambridge University, experience as gardener and night-watchman for livelihood etc have had their impact on the evolving poetic sensibility of Ted Hughes. He married Sylvia Plath, the American poetess, in 1956 and this gave him a fame that transcended the select circle of poetry readers and enveloped him in an inextricable and enduring aura. She has showed him the world of the 'weird, the occult and supernatural'. Having grown up in a working-class background he was taught that emotions are dangerous, can disturb judgement hence should not be relied upon when one has to take decisions, they have nothing to do with truth. Time and again in his poetry, Hughes celebrates the natural energies and how they exit in mankind and makes a point that human wholeness depends on an acceptance of all aspects of our nature. He believes that one should recognize that self is part of natural world and is a subject to the same forces of nature as all other living things.

4.14.2 The Writer: His Life and Works

Ted Hughes is our first poet of the will to live. D. H. Lawrence wrote about animal Joy, a lighter, perhaps more fanciful thing. Robinson Jeffers picked up the topic occasionally but was too eager, too chimsy, to master it but Hughes is its master and at the same time mastered by it. The subject owns him, he is lord of the subject.

The will to live might seem the first and healthiest of subjects, in fact it is almost the last and most morbid. Men come to it after the other subjects have failed. It is the last step - waterless, exposed, before nothingness. Civilization blows off, love and utopia evaporate, the interest the human mind takes in its own creations washes out, and there its incisors bared, stands life, daring you to praise it.

In the beginning of his poetic career Hughes used to write only about animals and it was a boy's eager love, compounded of curiosity, possessiveness and adventure. 'My interest in animals began when I began', Hughes writes in *Poetry Is* (originally published as *Poetry In the Making*) "My memory goes back pretty clearly to my third years, and by then I

had so many of the toy lead animals, you could buy in shops that they went right round our flat – topped fire place fender, nose to tail”.

Later, at thrashing time Hughes would snatch mice from under the lifted sheaves till he has 30 or 40 crawling inside the lining of his coat. Squirring life! Yet the animals “the magpies and owls and rabbits are weasels and rats and curlews: his older brother shot – were just as exciting dead. ‘He could not shoot enough for me’ Hughes says.

In his poems the animals reemerged not as playthings but as the lords of death and life. In memory and imagination they were gods or demons, no matter. In what did their superiority consist? In nothing so much as their lack of self consciousness of the sickness of the mind. No hesitation, no remorse, a mind all reflex, streamlined as a trigger it began to look like the state before the fall.

In discovering his own dearth – so it would seem – Hughes concluded that the one thing that mattered with was life. He became a worshipper of the claw. An animal’s organs represent purely as Schopenhauer said “the will to live in particular circumstances quick eyes, the trap Jaw. The noose of the talon – these are forms of vital genius. The creature may be a poor thing of ‘forced condition’, but it is also a wire that will destroy, is it crab, the first mouth that chews it. ‘The universal desire for life’ is a thing both driven and terrible. No poems so grim and airless, so remote them Joy as Hughes. But if this is life, so be it, he seems to say, better to fight than die.

Signaling all to come, Hughes’s first collected poem., the title piece of *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) places man both literally and vitally below the Hawk. Hughes is primarily a poet of the will to live at the phenomenal level of the leaping blood which is almost to say at the poetic rather than the philosophical level of his theme. To Hughes, the more terrible the best, the most admirable the stabling thrush, the slaving wolf, the meat-eating dragon fly that “stands in space to take aim”, the hawk whose ‘manners are tearing off heads” etc. – these are the heroes of his world, his fierce bulwark against nothingness.

To Hughes the human has nothing whatever to recommend it, to be human is to start out behind the animals, like a one legged man in a race. The human mind for instance - what is it but a kind of missing leg, an ache where the amputated part had been? Not even in Lawrence does the intellect appear so repulsive as in “wings”, Hughes’s poem on Sartre, Kafka and Einstein. In an interview Hughes has expressed his opinion about poetry as,

“The record of just how the

*Forces of the universe try
To redress some balance
Disturbed buy human error.”*

The poem is brilliant with negative grandeur.

Mind in Hughes, takes the sting out of a man, women too incapacitate. They are formidable even though weak. Hughes seems to fear and hate them, like all would be strong men. They are persecuted as stale, over powering wombs, as in *Crow and Mama, Revenge Fable*. At their safest in Hughes women are groveling whores, gravel under the male heel. In truth this notion of female vileness is itself vile and we may be glad Hughes's world is ordinarily reserved for beasts and men. Only two types of men survive Hughes's pitiless need for strength, the he-man and the artist.

For Hughes the he-man's shadow extends into the caves of sleep. To be able to curl up beyond all danger, to snore fearlessly – this is to be like bull Moses, heavy and dark, a stone sunk beneath the frantic waters of conscious life. The unconscious part, the vegetative life with its ganglion system, into which in sleep the brain – consciousness disappears. This is the common life of all. In the master piece “November” Hughes writes of the sleeping tramp “I thought what strong trust slept in him” death would not think to stop so low as that rainy ditch – thick to descent there into ‘the common life of all. In another poem ‘Wino’ ‘I swell in there, soaking’, says the sleeper a bade in the veined hot interior of the grape, his ‘mulatto – mother’. Then there are his witches, demonic queens of night and the common life.

As for the artist he has the steel of nature's involuntary will, he drops on the ward, the note, the colour as the hawk drops on the mouse, like the brush, he displays

*Bullet and automatic / purpose?
Mozart's brain had it, and the shark's mouth
That hungers down the blood smell even to a leak of its own
Side and devouring of itself*

The artist works in fearless, instinctual region of attack, where no one heeds the minimum practical energy and illumination – that curse of civilization.

Though certainly it is easy to see what Hughes is criticized for violence, it is not really violence he celebrates, but an energy too strong for death. Hughes has even written one

open against violence as if to clear his name. Hughes has written a poem '*Crow's Account of the Battle*' which is the closest poem to Wilfred Owen's 'photographs'. This poem '*Crow's Account of the Battle*' is cynical about peace. Yet even in its regret over war, the poem slings blood and anguish like a clown slinging pies. The truth is that Hughes cannot avoid violence because life to him is a violent conception and he wants to be on the winning side. His weakness is not violence but the absolute egotism of survival. It is the victor he loves not war. He thrills to strength with all the envy the trembling to of a mortal man.

Hughes is a total nihilist. To keep death from drawing a black line and adding every effort up to zero is for him the whole sum of life. He is a nihilist on the scuffling, muscled side of nothingness the opposite kind from say Philip Larkin who has long since become a wise ghost. Larkin observes life half wishfully, half coldly as if from the farther side; Hughes is in the midst of the battle, relishing its proof of the will not to die – the correct name of the will to live. Where Larkin has taken 'the grave's part', Hughes is terrified of 'the earth's mouth'.

Hughes's wild rebellion against nullity is 'an irrational tendency'. It has no sufficient reason in the external world. Driven out of the womb, it is our fate according to Hughes's 'existential song' to run for dear life – but not because life is dear the running itself prevents that. Several of Hughes's recent poems are full of grinning and black laughter. It is the sound of the will in the void.

His first two volumes of poetry vigorously champion animal will. They represent a vomition of the human, of death. Hughes perches and gloats with the hawks, runs with the eaters not the eaten. The theme of this work is the dual horror of existence – that of the monstrous rage for life and that of being small, left out emptily included. This style has changed almost from volume to volume. The reason is that his apprehension of his subject has altered also. His manner has bloated or grown lean, smoked up or illuminated, entirely as this changing apprehension has prompted. It could not have been otherwise poetry is poignant understanding first, words second – through the words will seem always to race the understanding to the goal and get there in advance. The manner is a device for feeling the subject so fully, so precisely, that we will never forget it. But if it succeeds we will not forget the manner, either; it will cling to the subject, or to the memory, like a robe in the wind.

Regarding Hughes's poetic ability – *The Hawk in the Rain* was criticized and critics flocked to the book like ghosts to a pit of blood. Having been starved for violence they found Hughes's violence in Edwin Muir's word – 'admirable'. Because of his false exploitative relation to his subject, Hughes can neither put word to word with any necessity nor make his

poems pace, like animals, in voluntarily. Concrete and abstract often mix against each other like salt and sugar.

His second volume *Lupercal* (1960) received good praise. Like Philip Larkin, Hughes is one of those poets who grew up miraculously between their first and second volumes. In extreme contrast to the first volume there is now no 'falsifying dream', no fancy or sensational indulgence, between 'hooked head and hooked feet'. In all poems, observation and imagination are so subtly merged that it would be arbitrary to separate them. The beauty of the poems is as objective as the images and feeling. Hughes's words know how to act, where to strike, what to tell and it seems everything is possible to him. One finds dramatic fission, telling metaphor, (owlish moon) the welding cold, rain plastering the sand, 'till it was shining / like hammered lead, haunting planners quite profundity of image as in 'November'; where once again, the gibbeted owls hawks, cats, weasels, and crows are 'patient to outwait these worst days that beat / their crowns bore and dripped from their feet'. The poem possesses a delicate and contingent unity.

The cause of the change in the style in the two volumes *Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* is that of an anguished consciousness. Even the emphatic poems betray a scarcely containable anxiety. They jump and dark like animals trying to overrun the end. His next collection *Crow* which appeared in 1970 is developed from a newer style, being forceful a little noisy and deaf in the ear, breathless. The voice of this collection is nihilism. In *Crow* Hughes most extraordinary poetic achievement. Hughes assumes imaginative responsibility for the puritanical violence which is present in his poetry from the very beginning. In doing so he seems to take full possession of his own poetic powers. In *Crow* Hughes is able to explore and express the internalized violence of the rationalist sensibility with more imaginative power than any other modern poet. Poetry for him, is to do with the world of imagination. He calls it 'a journey into the inner universe' and 'an exploration of the genuine self'. Often he sees himself as a shaman, a kind of tribal medicine man who makes symbolic journeys to the underworld of the subconscious to bring back lost souls and to cure sick people. The words, the symbols, the images and the musical rhythms of the poetry, are, for him, like Shaman's magic drum which helps him on his journey. It is these which stir our imagination, and the effect is a magical release of emotional energy.

4.14.3 The Texts

Thrushes

Terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes in the lawn,

*More coiled steel than living-a poised
Dark deadly eye, those delicate legs
Triggered to stirrings beyond sense – with a start, a bounce, stab
Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing things.
No indolent procrastinations and no yawning states,
No sights or head-scratching. Nothing but bounce and stab
And a ravening second.*

*Is it their single mind sized skulls, or a trained
Body, or genius, or a nestful of brats
Gives their days this bullet and automatic
Purpose? Mozart's brain had it, and the shark's mouth
That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of its own
Side and devouring of itself, efficiency which
Strikes too streamlined for an doubt to pluck at it
Or obstruction deflect*

*With a man it is otherwise. Heroisms on horseback,
Outstripping his desk-dairy at a broad desk,
Carving at a tiny ivory ornament
For years: his act itself while for him,
Though he bends to be blent in the prayer, how loud and above.....
Furious spaces of do the distracting devils
Orgy and hosannah, under what wilderness
Of Black silent waters weep.*

November

*The month of the drowned dog. After long rain the land
Was sodden as the bed of an ancient lake,
Treed with iron and birdless. In the sunk lane
The ditch --- a seep silent all summer –*

*Made brown foam with a big voice, that, and my boots
On the lane's scrubbed stones, in the Gulleyed leaves,
Against the hill hanging silence;
Mist silvering the droplets on the bare thorns.*

Slower than the change of daylight,

*In a let of the ditch a tramp was bundled asleep;
Face tucked down into beard, drawn in
Under its hair like a hedgehog's. I took him for dead,*

*But his stillness separated form the death
Of the rotting grass and tho ground. A wind chilled,
And a fresh comfort tightened through him,
Each hand stuffed deeper into the other sleeve.*

*His ankles, bound with sacking and hairy band,
Rubbed each other, resetting. The wind hardened;
A puff shook a glittering from the thorns,
And again the rains' dragging grey columns*

*Smudged the farms, in a moment;
The fields were jumping and smoking; the thorns
Quivered, riddled with the glassy verticals,
I stayed on under the welding cold.*

*Watching the tramp's face and the drops on his coat
Flash and darken. I thought what strong trust.
Slept in him – as the trickling furrows slept,
And the thorn-roots in their grip on darkness;*

*And the buried stones, taking the weight of winter;
The hill where the hare crouched with clenched teeth
Rain plastered the land bill it was shining
Like hammered lead, and I ran, and in the rushing wood*

*Shuttered by a black oak leaned,
The keeper's gibbet had owls and hawks
By the neck. Weasels, a gang of cats, crows;
Some, stiff, weightless, twirled like dry bark bits*

*In the drilling rain. Some still had their shape,
Had their pride with it; hung, chins on chest,
Patient to outwait these worst days that beat
Their crowns bare and dripped from their feet.*

Pibroach

*The sea cries with its meaningless voice,
Treating alike its dead and its living,
Probably bored with the appearance of heaven
After so many millions of nights without sleep,
Without purpose, without self-deception.*

*Some likewise. A pebble is imprisoned
Like nothing in the Universe.
Careated for balck sleep. Or growing
Conscious of the sun's red spot occasionally,
Then dreaming it is the foetus of God.*

*Over the stone rushes the wind,
Able to mingle with nothing,
Like the hearing of the blind stone itself
Or turns, as if the stone's mind came feeling
A fantasy of directions.*

*Drinking the sea and eating the rock
A tree struggles to make leaves
An old woman fallen from space
Unproposed for these conditions
She hangs on, become her mind's gone completely.*

*Minute after minuom aeon after aeon
Nothing lets up or develops
This is where the staring angels get through
This is where all the stars bow down.*

4.14.4 Critical Analysis of the Texts

Thrushes

Refer to poets who have also written on birds for instance Keats's 'Nightingale', Shelley's "Skylark" Wordsworth's "Cuckoo" and Bridges "Nightingale", coming to contemporary America poetry Edgar Allen poems "Raven" but for every poet the birds have

been the symbols of their hidden thoughts and they have expressed their feelings through descriptions of these birds.

Coming to contemporary English poetry Ted Hughes refers to the "Thrushes" and what is important is that he does not refer to a single bird but a group of birds. Thus the title of the poem "Thrushes". This poem is from Ted Hughes's collection. *Lupercal* and is a most representative poem. Most of Lupe Cal poems deal with 'single minded animals and birds'.

The first line of the poem is quite significant as 'terrifying are the attent sleek thrushes on the lawn' where the word 'attent' is quite striking. It means giving attention. Thus birds are all the time attentive, because they are attentive and in that pasture they create and also experience terrifying feeling. Slim thrushes on the lawn – to look the give the appearance of twisted steel. 'Dark Deadly Eye' – adjective attent give the indication of the attention that the birds generally pay to their surroundings. It is to be noted that the eyes are dark but the poet also calls them 'deadly' because they hare always on the search for prey. 'these delicate legs' are also deadly – pulling out worms. They are not lazy, very alert symbols of action and activity. The first stanza is the description of the nature of the birds. Here Hughes contracts the alertness and activity of the thrushes with the 'ino'olent procrastinations', 'yawning sates', signs or 'head scratching' of man. The thinking, hesitation could be reasons for indolent and laziness of man but that cannot work with the birds for it sis bounce and stab / and a ravening second this part of the poem is an interrogation and is in meditative mood. The poet wonders about the reason for their activity whether the source is the 'single minded sized skulls'. Thus it is the small brown that impels action ora trained body or genius or is it their upbringing since they were brought up l a nest full of other small birds – the necessity for being active? Ted Hughes compares the action of the birds to the brain of Mozart. It is significant that he compares the bird to Mozart as the only thing common in between the two is the sweet sound of music, as Mozart was a very renowned musician. The second comparison is with the 'sharks mouth', which is so sensitive. But it is able to locate the smell of blood even when the blood is from its own body – the smell of the blood makes that it destroy itself. Therefore the efficiency of the shark is two streamlined for destruction. Here Ted Hughes observes that mature, unlike man, is incapable at doubt and deflection.

The third stanza is comparative in tone. Ted Hughes identifies action of the bird with act of human beings. The activity for thrush of for the shark is impelled by its need for food but for a man activity can be described in a different way. It could be heroism on horseback or it could be the creative instinct where he would be writing down his thoughts in his dairy or it could be fine art and carving lie carving a tine ivory ornament for a number of years. His

act is an end in itself and 'he may worship himself' whereas for him though he bends himself down in prayer over and above there is always furious fire which the destructing devils utilize in the shape of this sound like the 'hosannah' in prayers and the sound of the black silent waters in the forest. The words 'orgy' 'hosannah' and 'weef' suggest hidden forces in man that distract him from his main purpose. Some forces may be positive some are hellish and anyhow the single mindedness of the birds is not there. Thus, though the poet starts with the thrushes, he ends the poem finally with a reference to man and his different attitude's towards action.

November

The poem sets the tune for winter – just before winter there is always a heavy rain and the whole place gets water logged. The imagery that Ted Hughes uses is very unusual in this poem. He refers to the month of November as the month of the drained day where the 'dog' stands for the land and 'drowned' indicates the flooding. 'Tree with iron and bird less', we have to note that here Ted Hughes is using the noun 'tree' as verb. Treed with iron means all the iron posts and lamp posts are standing out very distinctly after being rain washed is the wet landscape. 'In the sunken lane the ditch – asleep silent all summer – the lane is filled with water'. 'Brown foam' refers to the muddy foam in the water running down in the ditch'. 'with a big voice' indicates the roaring sound made by the running water. 'That and my boots on the lane's scrubbed stones' – while walking down the lanes the boots make a noise on the washed stones of the lane. 'Against the hills hanging silence mist silvering the droplets on the bare thorns' – from each thorn a drop of water is hanging and the mist seems to be glissing like silver. Here Ted Hughes highlights the 'tramp' who was sheltering himself from rain in a ditch bundling himself in old clothes sleeping like a hedgehog. At one moment Ted Hughes the poet thought that he was dead. But he realized that the stillness that he could see in the tramp was different from the silence of death. As the chilled wind started to blow all around him the tramp curled deeper and deeper into himself to get some warmth. The rain started afresh and here the poet described the rain as 'the rains dragging grey columns' and through these columns the forms looked as if they were jumping and smoking, the thorns on the bushed trembled shaken by the falling rain. It is to be noted here that Ted Hughes uses a very unusual adjective for cold. He refers to it as 'welding cold' indicating that the cold is so much and so intense that it appears as if that the poet's body is being welded. Finally he watches the force of the tramp glistening in the rain and he also notices a hare crouching near the tramp with clenched teeth. The rain plastered the land with water till it looked as if it was shining. In the last two stanzas the poet equates 'nature' with death and he described a black oak tree where the game keeper had hung up dead owls and hawks, cats, crows, weasels and these dead animals went on moving on the branches like dry bits

of bark. The poet says that some of these birds will return their shape but since these were dead they were patiently waiting to see the end of these worst days and the worst of weather which was beating down in the shape of rain as their bare heads 'were dipping down from their feet'.

Jim Hunter, a critic on Hughes observes 'in his descriptive writing Hughes constantly tries to get to the heart of things, to see their essential function or essential nature. Here beside the vivid picture of rain, we are shown the thorn roots with their 'grip on darkness' and the buried stones taking the weight of winter' the tramp's life appears to be one of 'strong trust in the natural world'. We know Ted Hughes doesn't admire ordinary people but only the hero and the artist, with a single-minded genius. No doubt 'November' is one of Ted Hughes's most satisfying poems.

Pibroach

This poem is from Ted Hughes's collection of poems entitled *Wodwo* where he has lessened his relish for violence and given himself up to human problems. *Pibroach* means variation on a theme.

In the first stanza Ted Hughes described the sound of the sea as crying with its meaningless voice and treating the dead and living in a similar manner. The reason for it being its exposure to heaven for millions of nights without any purpose and without any self-deception.

In the second stanza the poet described the stone as a pebble that is imprisoned and there can be nothing to compare in the Universe. Perhaps the stone could be conscious of the sun which also appears like a red spot and occasionally the pebble also could dream that it is the foetus of God since it is also a part of creation. Thus the sea is meaningless and the shore is imprisoned.

The third stanza is about wind which rushes over the stone and is not able to mingle with anything like the stone which is blind. The change of direction in the wind Ted Hughes described or equated it with a change of feeling in the mind of stone, thereby creating a fantasy of direction.

The last stanza is about that of the tree which utilizes the water of the sea, thrives on the rock and struggles to grow leaves. The tree looks like an old woman that has fallen from space and quite unprepared for all these conditions, hanging on because she has

completely last hr mind. Thus minutes and eternity, after eternity Ted Hughes draws the comparison between small unit of time like the minute and the limitless time like eternity. Thus in time nothing is really destroyed and nothing remains. He suggests that though there are variations change yet there is really nothing like a change. This is the place where if there are angels, the angles pass by and the stars how down, as in the past, so also in the present. There is only a variation but nothing like a real; change. Thus the theme is the theme of existence. It could be the se, stone, wind and the tree. They are symbols of the same theme of existence.

This poem reveals the anti-romantic and pessimistic stance of Ted Hughes. He suggests not the glory of human life but the gloom of it. Anthony Thwait observed that in that poem, the sea, s stone, the wind, a tree all are seen caught up in a vertex of change and the struct on.

4.14.5 Critical Estimate

Ted Hughes is a powerful modern poet. The poets who influenced him in several ways were G. M. Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Wilfred Owen, Lawrence and Eliot. Among the American influences, Sylvia Plath, Wallace Steverse and Louis Simpson are important.

Though Ted Hughes got separated from Sylvia and married another woman, her death affected Hughes profoundly. Shortly after her death he wrote the anguished poem '*The Howling of Wolves, The Ranging of the Stormy Sea and The Destructive Sword*, are portiosn of eternity to a great for the eye of man and also another poem '*The Song of the Ra*' and then nothing for three years.

The study of the poems proscribed for you illustrate the way in which the poet's emotions, energy and intellect as well as his experience, are brought together to shape his work.

4.14.6 Sample Questions

Ted Hughes believes that an association with nature will restore man's vitality – discuss the poems proscribed for your study.

Give a critical appreciation of the '*The thought Fox*' bringing out the complex between violence and tenderness.

4.14.7 Suggested Reading

- 1) Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the making* (Faber, 1967)
- 2) Fass E. (1980) *The Unaccommodated Universe*, Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press.
- 3) Skea, A (1994), *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, Armidale NSW: University of New England Press.
- 4) *Nine Contemporary Poets* by P. R. King

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