SREENARAYANAGURU
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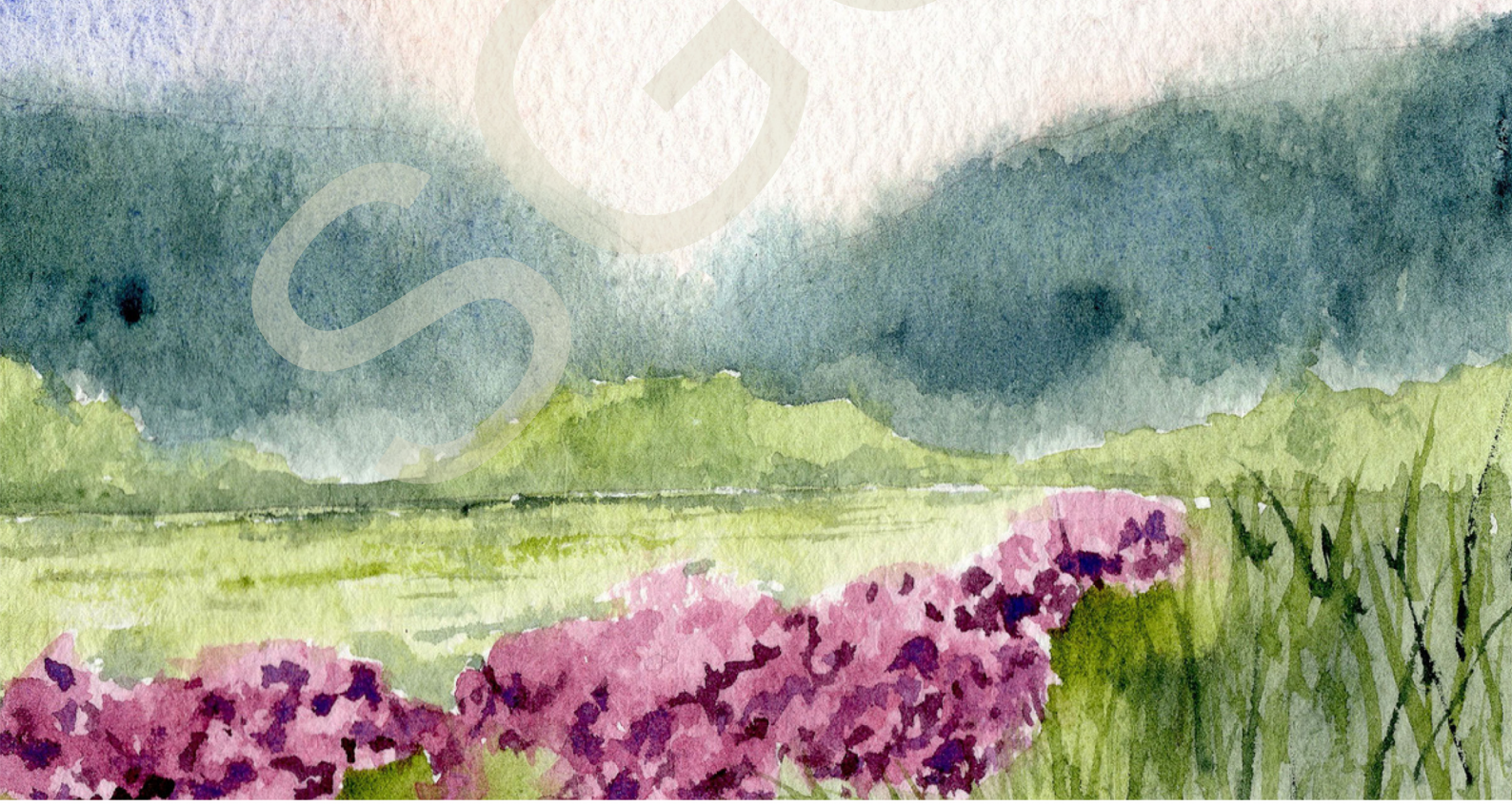
Introduction to Literary Genres I: Poetry and Drama

COURSE CODE: SGB24EG102MC

English Langauge and Literature (Honours)

Major Course

Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

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To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

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Access and Quality define Equity.

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Semester - II

Four Year Undergraduate Programme
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INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY GENRES I: POETRY AND DRAMA

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Dear Learner,

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Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

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Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme.

We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,

Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor

01-01-2025

Contents

BLOCK - 01

Understanding Poetry

Unit 1

Understanding Poetry: How to Read a Poem?

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- describe some of the predominant features of poetry
- detail the significance of the chief components of poetry
- identify different classifications of poetry
- acquire skills for reading, analysing, and appreciating poetry, creatively and critically

Prerequisites

Poetry is considered the highest form of artistic expression. Have you ever thought about how a poem works on us? It is by the capacity of the poem to move, inspire and appeal to us. What works primarily here is the imagination of the poet and the reader's emotional connection to it. Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks said "poetry is life distilled". Living in a fractured world, poetry helps readers connect with other people's realities. But sometimes, people prefer prose writings to poetry. This may be because of the poetic diction and other techniques added to make the poem more aesthetic. So it is necessary to understand how to read poetry. In this chapter, we will focus on understanding poetry.

Keywords

Poetic license, Poetic truth, Objective poetry, Subjective poetry

Discussion

Do you know which is the shortest poem in the world? Do you know who wrote it? The greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, Muhammad Ali wrote it. Before introducing the poem, let me tell you the background for it. Ali was giving a message on friendship in 1975, at Harvard. When he finished, the audience demanded a poem from him. And he uttered that poem which is still regarded as the world's shortest poem: "Me We". Just those two syllables were enough to convey what friendship means. It is a transition from the individual self "Me" to the power of unity, We. On the other hand, we have long verse narratives called epics. Both these forms come under the genre of poetry. So what exactly is poetry? What makes a poem, a poem? How do we understand a poem?

It is difficult to give a definition to poetry. For

ages, writers have tried to define it. Let us see a few interesting definitions:

1. **Thomas Carlyle:** Poetry is a musical thought.
2. **William Wordsworth:** Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions recollected in tranquility.
3. **P.B. Shelley:** Poetry is the expression of imagination.
4. **Edgar Allan Poe:** Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty.
5. **Robert Frost:** Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.
6. **William Hazlitt:** Poetry is all that is worth remembering in life.
7. **Terry Eagleton:** A poem is a fictional, verbally inventive moral statement in which it is the author, rather than the printer or word processor, who decides where the lines should end.
8. **Kahlil Gibran:** Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.

1.1.1 Origin of Poetry

To identify the earliest form of poetry is a task, as the origin of poetry dates back to antiquity. Poetry existed in an oral form from prehistoric times itself. The ancient Sumerian poem *Epic of Gilgamesh* is cited as one of the earliest examples of poetry, dating back to 1800 BCE. The Indian Vedas, dating back to 1700-1100 BCE, and Indian Epics like *The Mahabharatha* and *The Ramayana* dating back to 400 – 100 BCE are the other earliest examples of poems. These texts were part of oral tradition and eventually, they were written down.

The word 'poetry' comes from the Greek word 'poietes' meaning 'creator'. Therefore a poet is a creator, who makes poems with his/her imaginative power and transports the readers to that imaginary world of poetry. Poetry can be lyrical, introspective, or recount narratives. It can be philosophical, emotional or sentimental. It is a way of connecting more deeply with oneself through the medium of language. Poets enjoy 'poetic license' to create a desired effect. It is defined as the linguistic freedom the poets have to distort literal and historical truth in order to present a poetic truth, which often stems from their imagination. Let us look at certain common recognizable features of poetry that distinguish it from other genres of literature:

1. Language of Poetry

Poetry makes use of condensed language, that is, it makes use of fewer words to express a thought when compared to prose. In the language of poetry, every component, its order and pauses are important. Each word is purposefully patterned to create meaning. Although condensed, the language of poetry always means more than that of prose. It is open to interpretation.

2. Rich in Literary Devices

Poets use certain techniques to convey the implied meaning. It includes alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor, image, symbol, rhythm, rhyme, personification, hyperbole, etc. For example, Wordsworth in one of his 'Lucy' poems describes Lucy as:

"A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky" ("She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways")

This shows how the use of imagery can make a poem appealing to the senses. Similarly, rhyme and meter enhance the aesthetic pleasure of it. It usually of musical quality. Rhyme, rhythm, and meter create a rhythmic beauty that will attract people. However, it is not necessary that a poem must be of musical quality. Sometimes it can be aggressively prosaic. For instance, read D.H Lawrence poem "To Women, As Far As I'm Concerned".

3. Tone and Mood of Poetry

Tone and mood are often used interchangeably. But both differ in terms of perspectives. Tone expresses the poet's attitude towards the subject matter, while mood is about the reader's emotional response to it or the overall feeling conveyed to the reader. For example, consider Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper". The tone of the poem is excitement but the mood is that of contemplation.

4. Structure of the Poem

Poetic structure discusses the form of poetry, number of lines it has, how they are arranged, the rhythm, rhyme scheme, and its metrical composition. Unlike other genres of writings, poetry can be written in certain shapes by organizing its word components. For example, George Herbert's "Easter Wings" when originally published, appeared horizontally on the page in the shape of two sets of wings. Now the poem appears vertically on page, so the stanzas appear like two hourglasses:

Lord, who created man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall fall further the flight in me.
My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victory:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

5. Poetic Truth

It is a literary device that takes liberty with facts/ truths to create an effect. How poetry deals with the treatment of truth is interesting to note. For example, a poet and a scientist may deal with nature, but their approaches are different. Wordsworth states that: "the sunshine is a glorious birth" ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality"), but a scientist will explore the scientific reason behind the sunrise. Science thus tries to deal with factual accuracy, while poetry looks beyond the surface level of truth. Science caters to denotative meaning, while poetry caters to connotative meaning and thus transcends reality.

1.1.2 Classification of Poetry

Poetry can be broadly classified into two – objective poetry and subjective poetry. Let us see the difference between the two in Table 1.1.1

This difference cannot be strictly observed all the time, as there is often an overlap of the two. For example, Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is an example of combining subjective and objective elements. However,

this categorization is useful when we want to study different forms of poetry. We will learn about it in detail in the next unit.

Table 1.1.1 Classification of Poetry

Objective Poetry	Subjective Poetry
Impersonal and the poet presents an invented situation	Concerned with the poet's personal experiences and thoughts
Poet is a detached observer Objective poetry dates back to prehistoric time and was a part of oral tradition – people were interested in the physical world around them	Poet is not detached. He is the focus of attention Subjective poetry gained its prominence when people began to give importance to their inner thoughts and emotions
Includes ballad, epic, metrical romance, dramatic monologue, limerick	Includes lyric, ode, elegy, sonnet, epistle
Eg. Chevy Chase's "The Ballad"	Eg. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

1.1.3 How to Read a Poem?

Reading a poem is a creative act. Students often face difficulty in reading and understanding poetry. It is almost doing an injustice to the poem to analyse it in literal ways alone. Students often make false assumptions that they should understand an unfamiliar poem when they read it for the first time itself. The first thing we need to keep in mind while discussing this topic is that there is no such "one" way to approach a poem. Let us now see how to approach a poem:

9. Let the "words" speak for themselves: Read the poem several times to understand what the poem means. Pause when there is a punctuation and not at the end of each line break, that might break the flow of the poem. Wallace Stevens in his "Adagia" says "in poetry, you must love the words, the ideas … with all your capacity to love anything at all".
10. Listen to the "speaker" of the poem: a poem cannot always be the reflection of the poet's life. So the speaker/ narrator of the poem is more important than the poet's biography. Focusing on the speaker's part will help to understand the tone of the poem. Moreover, it helps to create a communication between the narrator and the reader.
11. Carefully analyse the figures of speech (imagery, metaphors, simile, etc), that drive the poem forward with thoughtful insights.

Let us take a poem and attempt to read it.

"The Solitary Reaper" by William Wordsworth

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travelers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

The poem is about a solitary reaper's song. In the first stanza, the poet talks about a lass (girl) reaping and singing all alone, immersed in herself. Let us analyse it deeper by looking into the punctuations used. The poet has used three exclamation marks in the first stanza to denote the excitement he has on listening to her voice. He invites us to listen to that voice which overflows the vale. It is a hyperbolic expression, telling us that the poet was entranced by her song.

In the second stanza, the poet compares the solitary reaper's song to a nightingale and a cuckoo (birds with sweetest voice). He says her voice is more thrilling and enchanting than that of the birds. It is symbolic that her voice is so melodious. It may also mean that the human voice is more soothing. This is a common device in poetry.

The third stanza tells about the poet's inability to understand the meaning of her song. This provides the speaker with a possibility to imagine what she might be singing. As he is not sure of the theme of her song, he puts forth his poetic fantasies that she might be singing about some past sorrows, unhappy things or some present natural sorrow, loss or pain. He is identifying a melancholic strain in her voice that may suit more with the poet's current state of mind.

In the final stanza, he says that although he is not sure of the theme of her song, her singing continues. He listened to it motionless and still. The poet tells us that "I had my fill" which suggests that he received what he wanted from her, even though he did not even know her name. He bears the music in his heart and continues his journey, in a sense, he is the 'solitary reaper'. He reaped what he wanted from her without her knowledge and walked out of her sight.

Now let's look into the literary devices used by Wordsworth to enhance the aesthetic pleasure of the readers:

1. **Rhyme scheme:** A total of four stanzas, each stanza following the rhyme scheme **ababccdd**
2. **Apostrophe:** The speaker addresses an absent person. This device helps him to communicate with the reader. As readers, we will feel a more emotional connection with the poet.

Imagery: The poet presents a verbal picture, appealing to the reader's senses through the right choice of words. For example "the vale

profound is overflowing with the sound", "More welcome notes to weary bands", "I saw her singing at her work/ And o'er the sickle bending". These lines help the reader to visualize what the poet has seen.

So, now, after closely reading the poem, we understand the message of the poem that the solitary reaper is offering us a lesson that we can overcome our sorrow by transforming it into art.

Recap

- Reading poetry is an act of reciprocity
- A passionate communication between the poet and the reader
- Poetry comes from the Greek word 'poietes'
- Poems make use of condensed language
- Use certain techniques to convey the implied meaning
- Tone and mood of a poem
- Poetic structure is the form of poetry
- Objective poetry is impersonal while subjective poetry is personal
- Poetry caters to connotative meaning and thus transcends reality
- Literary devices enhance the aesthetic pleasure of the readers

Objective Questions

1. How is poetry classified broadly?
2. What is the difference between 'tone' and 'mood'?
3. What do you mean by 'poetic license'?
4. From which Greek word is 'poetry' taken?
5. What is meant by imagery?
6. What are some of the literary devices used in poems?
7. What is 'apostrophe' in poetry?
8. What is objective poetry?
9. Which type of poetry does the 'lyric' come under?
10. What is poetic truth?

Answers

1. Subjective poetry and Objective poetry
2. Tone suggests the poet's attitude, while mood reflects the reader's emotional response
3. The linguistic freedom of the poets to violate the literal and historical truth in order to present a poetic truth

4. Poetry comes from the Greek word 'poietes'
5. A verbal picture
6. Alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor, image, symbol, rhythm, rhyme, personification, and hyperbole
7. Addressing an absent person
8. Impersonal poetry about invented situations
9. Subjective poetry
10. Literary device that takes liberty with facts/truth to create an effect

Assignments

1. Write a critical appreciation of e.e. cumming's poem "l (a, A Leaf Falls with Loneliness"
2. Write a poem of your own and ask your peers to critically appreciate it.
3. Find out the differences between objective and subjective poetry.
4. What do you understand by the tone and mood of a poem.
5. What is meant by rhyme scheme in a poem?
6. Define imagery.
7. What is meant by apostrophe?
8. Comment on the structure of a poem.

Suggested Reading

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- Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem*. Blackwell, 2007.
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Unit 2

Types of Poetry, Poetic Diction, Devices and Metre

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define some of the predominant types of poetry
- detail the main features of poetic types
- identify different types of poetic devices
- describe the significance of rhyme and metre in poetry

Prerequisites

According to the Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy, poetry is "emotion put into measure". In the first unit, we have discussed the general features of poetry. We have also seen a broad classification of poetry into Objective poetry and Subjective poetry. Objective poetry looks into the subject matter objectively, whereas subjective poetry gives importance to thoughts, feelings and emotions. Different from prose, poetry is often used to express specific feelings in a creative way. Poetry typically uses more decorative or expressive language, and analogies, while rhyme, and rhythm help to create a unique sound and feel. So, in this section, we plan to have a close look at the structural and technical aspects of poetry, such as its type, diction, literary devices and metre.

Keywords

Types of poetry, Poetic stanza, Poetic diction, Poetic devices, Metre

Discussion

Poetry is an interpretation of life through imagination and feeling (William Hudson). But how does poetry distinguish itself from other genres that also deal with the interpretation of life? The presence of metre, rhythm, rhyme, poetic devices, and most importantly, poetic diction helps to differentiate poetry from other genres.

Poetry is broadly divided into objective poetry and subjective poetry. For the sake of convenience, we can categorize poetry into different types. However, there is no strict separation between these forms as its features often overlap.

1.2.1 Types of Poetry

1.2.1.1 Objective Poetry

Ballad, Epic, Metrical Romance, Dramatic Monologue, Limerick

1.Ballad

The word 'ballad' is derived from the Latin word 'ballare', meaning 'to dance'. Originally,

they were part of the oral tradition, narrating legends and stories among illiterate people. A Ballad can be defined as an orally transmitted song that tells a story. Therefore, it is hard to describe an authorship to ballads in the medieval times. Philip Sidney called ballads "the darling songs of the common people" because of their public appeal.

Features of a ballad:

- The theme of a ballad can be tragic or comic. Its subject matter includes
- love, war, adventure, bravery, etc.
- A ballad usually narrates a single incident, told in a conversational style, in ordinary language. For example the ballad "Sir Patrick Spens" is about a single episode of shipwreck.
- The poem is composed of four line stanzas in the form of rhymed (abcb or abab) quatrains with alternating four-stress (iambic tetrametre) and three-stressed (trimetre) lines. Let us take our earlier example. The first four
- lines of "Sir Patrick Spens":

Table 1.2.1 Types of Ballads

Popular Ballad	Broadside Ballad	Literary Ballad	Mock Ballad
Also known as folk ballad or traditional ballad	Printed on one side of a single sheet (called broadside) of poor quality paper	Also known as lyrical ballad	Contains all the features of a literary ballad, but in a humorous way
Belongs to the oral tradition (never written)	Dealt with a current event or person and was sung to a well-known tune	Narrative poems written in deliberate imitation of the form, language and spirit of the traditional ballad	A comic theme is treated with the seriousness appropriate to ballad
Exists in many forms as each singer who learnt the ballad improvised it	Sentimental in subject matter (stories of murder, adventure, etc.)	Great influence of traditional ballads	
Eg. Francis J. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* – contains 305 ballads ('Sir Patrick Spens', 'The Ballad of Chevy Chase', 'The Twa Corbies', 'Clerk Saunders', etc. , Robin Hood Ballads	Public events were also published in broadsides and the advent of newspapers put an end to the broadsides.	Eg. *Lyrical Ballads* (1798– Wordsworth and Coleridge), Keats' 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'	Eg. William Maginn's 'The Rime of the Ancient Waggoner' and William Cowper's 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin'

The King sits in Dunfer line toun,
Drinking the blude -reid wine
'O whaur will I get guid sailor
Tae sail this new ship of mine?'

The poem rhymes **abcb**.

Ballads make use of stock epithets and refrains. A stock epithet is a phrase or an adjective used to describe a special trait of things or people. For example, in "Sir Patrick Spens", "blood-red wine", "my mirry men". Refrains are lines or words that are repeated at intervals in a poem for emphasis. For example in John Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci: A Ballad", his first two stanzas use the refrain "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms"

2. Epic

An epic or a heroic poem is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a grand and elevated style. Following are the criteria that an epic poem usually possesses:

- A long verse narrative on heroic deeds, told in a formal style. For example, Homer's epics have 24 books. *Paradise Lost* consists of 12 books. *The Mahabharata* is ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.
- Centered on a divine or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depend the destiny of a tribe or nation or the human race.

In terms of importance, Aristotle ranked the epic second to tragedy, while many Renaissance critics considered the epic the highest of all genres. Epics can be classified as "Traditional epics" and "Literary epics".

Table 1.2.2 Classification of Epics

Traditional Epics	Literary Epics
Also called as Primary epics or folk epics	Also called as Secondary epics
Written versions of oral poems combining myths, legends, folk tales and history, thus forming a part of the nation's cultural history.	Written by individual poets in deliberate imitation of the traditional form.
Eg. Homer's Greek epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (composed in circa 8th century BCE) , Valmiki's *The Ramayana* (composed in circa 5th century BCE), Vyasa's *The Mahabharata* (4th century BCE), Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (circa 8th century CE)	Eg. Virgil's *Aeneid* (1st century BCE) served as chief model for Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), which was in turn a model for Keats' fragmentary epic *Hyperion* (1820)

Features of an Epic

- Magnificent scale of action, time of action and settings: In *Paradise Lost*, the action involves the revolt of rebel angels against God, the journey of Satan to the newly discovered world, his attempt to outwit God by deceiving mankind and finally his success is subverted by the sacrificial action of

Christ which covers the period before the creation of the universe to the end of the world. Also Milton uses the entire universe and the cosmic spaces as its setting.

- The hero will be a quasi-divine figure whose actions will leave an impact on a large group of people. In *Iliad*, the greatest Greek warrior Achilles is the son of the sea-nymph Thetis. In *Paradise Lost*, Christ is both a God and a man.
- Epics make use of machinery, i.e., supernatural agents. Homer's epics have Olympian Gods, *Paradise Lost* has archangels, Christ, and Satan.
- **Grand style** of epic poetry: An epic uses a dignified and elevated language that suits the grandeur of the theme. For instance, Milton uses Latinate diction and complex syntax to narrate the story of the fall of man. The **grand style** of poetry includes the usage of classical allusions and epic simile. Epic similes, also called **Homeric similes,** first used by Homer, are long and formal similes in which the poet makes an elaborate comparison, to enhance the ceremonial quality of narration that runs into many lines. For example, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope expresses her feeling of helplessness by comparing the suitors to hunters and herself to a trapped lion:

"Her mind in torment, wheeling like some lion at bay, dreading the gangs of hunters closing their cunning ring around him for the finish."

- **Epic conventions**: Literary epics are highly conventional compositions, as they are imitations of Homer's epics. These conventions are prominent while ordering episodes. They include:

- The narrator begins with a **proposition** or an argument that defines the purpose, followed by an **invocation** to the muse for inspiration and then addresses an **epic question** to the muse, the answer to which inaugurates the narrative proper. For example, in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book 1), he opens his poem by declaring its epic theme, "warfare and a man at war," and invokes his muse and asks her to explain the anger of Juno, queen of the gods:

Arms and the man I sing, who, forced by fate
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
Expelled and exiled, left the Trojan shore.
Long labors, both by sea and land, he bore;
And in the doubtful war, before he won
The Latin realm and built the destined town,
His banished gods restored to rights divine,
And settled sure succession in his line;
From whence the race of Alban fathers come,
And the long glories of majestic Rome.
O Muse! the causes and the crimes relate,—
What goddess was provok'd, and whence her hate;
For what offense the Queen of Heav'n began
To persecute so brave, so just a man;
Involved his anxious life in endless cares,
Exposed to wants, and hurried into wars!
Can heav'nly minds such high resentment show,
Or exercise their spite in human woe?

These lines illustrate proposition, invocation and the epic question.

- The narrative begins at a critical point in action, i.e., "in the middle of things" (*in media res* – Latin expression). So

flashbacks and non-linear narratives are common devices used in epics to fill in the gaps of the story. Virgil's *Aeneid* begins at a crucial moment: when the Trojans are stranded on the shores of an enemy territory, after many years of wandering. It is only in Book II, the chronological beginning of *Aeneid*, i.e., Troy's invasion by the Greeks is given.

- Another significant epic convention is the cataloging of principal characters. For example, Milton's formal detailing of the procession of fallen angels in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.

- In epics, contests and games are used to advance the plot. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas organizes funeral games for his father's death anniversary—a boat race, a foot race, a boxing match, and an archery contest. Another notable example is the game of dice in *The Mahabharata*.

3. Mock Epic

A Mock epic or mock-heroic poem is a form of poetic composition where an insignificant, trivial theme is treated and presented with all the serious dignity of an epic. It has all the sublime features of an epic – proposition, invocation to muses, intervention of supernatural agents, inversions, high sounding language. But the intention is mostly satirical, aimed at reforming. An ancient example of a mock-epic is a parody of the *Iliad*, *the Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (circa 7th century BCE). Another great example for a mock-epic is Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), a satire on the fashionable society of the upper-class. It narrates a trivial incident – cutting off a lock of hair from Belinda's head by the Baron. It has all the features and conventions of an epic:

The poem begins with the invocation and the theme (proposition) is also suggested in the invocation.

> *"Say, what strange motive, Goddess! could compel*
> *A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?"*

It uses epic similes: Comparing Belinda's dressing to the arming of an epic warrior like Achilles.

> *"Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;*
> *The fair each moment rises in her charms,*
> *Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,*
> *And keener lightning quickens in her eyes."*

It also employs supernatural machinery – sylphs and gnomes to control the affairs of human beings.

(a) Metrical Romance

Metrical romance is a romance written in verse, which resembles the epic. It includes verse stories told in the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, Catalan). Romance originally meant a work written in the French language, which evolved from the dialect of a Roman language, Latin. Major themes are chivalry, adventure, love, etc. It makes use of supernatural events to add the mysterious effect of enchantments. This was popular during the Medieval times.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (14th century), Chaucer's *'The Knight's Tale'*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* are a few examples of metrical romances.

4. Dramatic Monologue

A dramatic monologue is a lyrical poem in which the speaker (not the poet) narrates his experiences and inner feelings in a conversational style. It is an objective poetic analysis of a subjective point of view. Robert Browning perfected this type of poetry.
Dramatic monologue reveals the speaker's

character through his long speech known as monologue. However, it differs from the soliloquy in the aspect that a soliloquy is not meant to be heard by other characters. But in a dramatic monologue, there is the presence of a listener. M.H Abrams remarks that the dramatic monologue has the following characteristics:

- A single person, who is not the poet himself, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment. In Browning's poem "Andrea del Sarto", the speaker is the historical Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto.
- The speaker addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know the presence of the listener and what he says and does, only from clues in the discourse of a single speaker. The listeners do not interrupt the narrator's speech but their reactions are conveyed naturally in the course of the single man's talk. Let us take our erstwhile example of Browning's poem. The presence of Lucrezia as the listener in the poem can be felt at the opening of the poem:

But do not let us quarrel any more
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
"Sit down and all shall happen as you wish
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?

From the lines like "You turn your face", "Nay, Love, you did give all I asked","Do you already forget words like those?", "And you smile indeed!", we can visualise how Lucrezia is reacting to Andrea's monologue.

- The monologue is so organised that its focus is on the temperament and the character that the dramatic speaker unintentionally reveals in the course of what he says. Here, Andrea reveals himself as a faultless painter (well-informed in techniques) but lacks soul in his paintings. From his monologue, readers will understand why he cannot excel like Raphael or Michelangelo.
- The readers will understand about the setting and background from the speaker. From the words of Andrea, the reader can see that the scene is in Andrea's studio in Fiesole:

As if-Forgive now – should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole

5. Limerick

The name is derived from a popular song's refrain "Will you come up to Limerick?", Limerick is a country in Ireland. In the genre of poetry, limerick is an oral form of light verse. Light verse poems treat subject matters in a gaily tone and use ordinary language. A limerick is a short poem, that is, it consists of a single five-line stanza in anapestic metre (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable), rhyming aabba. The third and fourth lines are shortened from three feet to two feet.

The oldest existing limerick is a prayer by Thomas Aquinas (13th century in Latin). The form was popularized by the English poet Edward Lear in his collection *A Book of Nonsense*. One such example from Edward Lear is given below:

There was a Young Lady whose chin
Resembled the point of a pin;
So she had it made sharp,
And purchased a harp,
And played several tunes with her chin.

1.2.1.2 Subjective Poetry

Lyric, Ode, Elegy, Idyll, Sonnet, Haiku

1. Lyric

The word 'lyric' is derived from the word lyre, a musical instrument. Originally, the lyric was a song sung to the accompaniment of a lyre or a harp. A lyric is a short non-narrative poem that expresses an intense state of mind or perception, thought and feeling of the speaker. The musical quality and rhythm of a lyric make it appealing to the listeners/ readers.

The lyrics contain three parts. In the first part, the poet talks about the subject matter or states how he is feeling. In the second part, he develops his thoughts, and the expression of his emotion reaches a maximum. In the final part, the poet accepts everything with a philosophical mind and finds solace. The poem can have either a happy ending or a pensive ending. For example, in P. B. Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind" (1820), the poet begins by stating his feeling of helplessness in the mighty hands of nature. In the later lines, which is the main part of the poem, the poet develops his thoughts. And in the final section, he seems to identify himself and realizes the truth. He ends the poem with a highly philosophical question. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

Features of a Lyric

- The lyric is written in the first person 'I', not necessarily the poet and expresses personal emotions (highly subjective)
- Spontaneous in composition and musical in nature
- Cohesively structured and towards the end of the poem, the growth of the speaker's mind is obviously clear

Important types of lyric poetry are ode, sonnet, elegy, occasional poetry, and hymn.

2. Ode

The word 'ode' is derived from a Greek word 'aeidein', which means to chant or sing. Ode denotes a long lyric poem that is serious and reflective in subject matter. It is addressed to someone or something and has a formal stanzaic structure. The Greek poet Pindar was the first to write odes. Later, the Roman poet Horace started writing odes with certain modifications from Pindar's odes. The English critic and poet Edmund Gosse defines the ode as, "a strain of enthusiastic and exalted lyric, verse, directed to a fixed purpose, and dealing progressively with one dignified theme."

The Greek ode had two forms, the Dorian ode and the Lesbian ode. The English odes, deviate in form and metre from the traditional Greek ode, also have two forms – the Irregular ode and Regular ode.

Let us look at a few features of an ode:

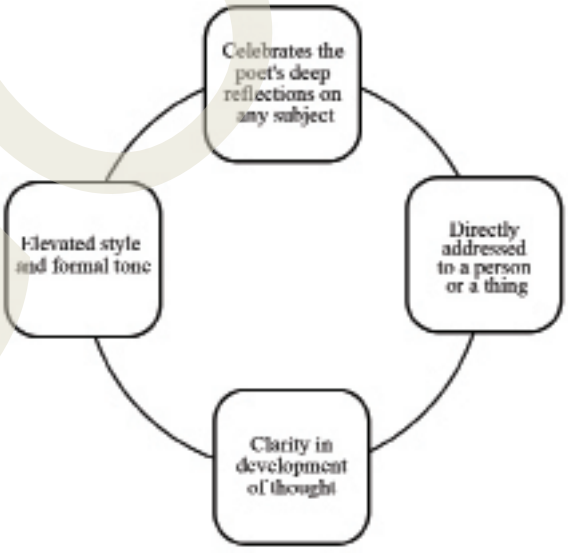

Fig 1.2.1 Features of an Ode

(a) Dorian Ode:

The Dorians were one of the three tribes of ancient Greece who had their own dialect and culture, and Dorian ode is named after it. It was choric in nature and sung to the accompaniment of dance. So it is also called Choral ode. The structure of the Dorian ode differ-

entiates itself from other odes. Its structure is based on the movement of the dancers:

I Stanza: STROPH

> The word meaning is 'to turn'. In reciting the strophe, the dancers move from the right of the stage to the left.

II Stanza: ANTISTROPHE

> The word meaning is "to turn back," which means that the dancers move in the opposite direction of the strophe, that is, the movement is from left to right. It serves as a response to the strophe.

III Stanza: EPODE

> The word meaning is "after song". During the recital of epode, the dancers stood still. The strophe and antistrophe are written in exactly the same structure, but the epode changes in structure.

This triad can be repeated any number of times in the ode. The ancient Greek poet Pindar popularized this kind of ode, hence this is also known as **Pindaric Ode**. Pindar's odes were encomiastic, that is, they were written to praise or glorify someone.

Eg. Thomas Gray's "The Bard" (1757) and "The Progress of Poesy" (1759). The triad is repeated thrice in these odes

(b) Lesbian Ode

It is named after the island of Lesbos, where it originated. The Latin poet Horace wrote odes in this form and hence it is also called **Horatian ode**. In contrast to the formal Pindaric odes, Horatian odes are calmer, meditative and colloquial in nature. It was popularized by another Roman writer Catullus.

Horatian ode consists of short stanzas of the same length , written in homostrophic form, that is written in single, repeated stanza form. For example, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland", is written in short four-lined stanzas of similar rhyme and metre.

(c) English Ode

English odes have two types, the Regular ode and the Irregular ode. The regular odes are those long lyric poems of same-length stanzas. Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is an example of regular ode. **Irregular odes** have varying lengths of strophe. This form was introduced by Abraham Cowley, so it is sometimes called **Cowleyan ode**. Each stanza had its own length and rhyme scheme. The Romantic poets have popularized this kind of ode. For example, Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality".

3. Elegy

Originated in Greece, the term elegy is derived from the Greek word 'elegeia,' which means to lament. An elegy was defined as any poem which was written in elegiac metre (alternating dactylic hexametres and pentametres in couplets known as elegiac distichs). Its mood or content was not relevant then. Elegy in its ancient form dealt with love, war, politics, mourning for the dead or any subject matter. From the 17th century, the usage of the term got limited to a formal and sustained verse of lament for the death of a beloved one, that usually ends in consolation. The English elegy does not use the ancient elegiac metre.

Elegy can be broadly classified as personal elegy and impersonal elegy. In a personal elegy the poet mourns for the death of some close friend or relative. Tennyson's "In

Memoriam" (1850) is an elegy on the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam. In an impersonal elegy, the poet grieves over human destiny or over some aspect of society and life. For example, Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) talks about memento mori and human mortality.

Features of an Elegy

- Reflective poem about the loss of someone or something
- Serious and dignified tone
- Some poets use 'elegy' as a vehicle to digress and express their perspectives on other subjects. In Milton's "Lycidas", he talks about the degradation of poetry and religion.
- There are certain common conventions in an elegy:
  - Begins with lamentation, where the poet mourns
  - Praise and admiration for the dead
  - Ends on a final note of consolation and death
  - Use of repetitions, refrains and repeated questions
  - A procession of mourners
  - The poet's reflection on the unkindness of death, resentment against cruel fate

Pastoral Elegy

In Latin, the word 'pastor' means 'shepherd'. Pastoral elegy is an important subtype of elegy in which the poet represents himself as a shepherd mourning the death of a fellow shepherd. The Sicilian Greek poet Theocritus was the well-known practitioner of this form. "His Idylls", "Epigrams", "Lament of Daphnis" are best examples. In ancient Rome, the Latin poet Virgil wrote his "Eclogues" and "Georgics" in this form. Later the English writers took up this form and made it popular. The first English pastoral elegy is Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherd Calendar* (1579). He wrote "Astrophel" (1595) to mourn the death of Sir Philip Sidney. Milton's "Lycidas" (1638), Shelley's "Adonais" (1821), Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" (1865) are the most notable examples of pastoral elegy.

Features of a pastoral elegy

- The speaker begins with an invocation to the muse and there are frequent references to various mythological characters.
- Nature joins the speaker to mourn for the dead.
- The mourner questions the nymphs for their negligence and criticizes them for the death.
- There is a procession of appropriate mourners.
- Digressions are significant for the development of thought.
- Detailed description on the flowers that are used to deck the hearse.
- The elegy concludes with a consolation.

4. Idyll

The word 'Idyll' is derived from the Greek word meaning "a little picture". It is not exactly a poetic genre, but a short poem or an episode in a larger poem that describes rural life. It has the characteristics of both lyric and narrative. It gives an idealised image of pastoral life or country life. It has no fixed form.

Early examples of idylls include the pastorals of Theocritus and Virgil. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" (1840), Alfred Tennyson's "English Idylls and Other Poems" (1874), Browning's "Dramatic Idylls" (1879) are other notable examples.

A few lines from "The Village Blacksmith" is

given below for your better understanding:

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

5. Sonnet

Originated in Italy in the 14th century, the sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines written in iambic pentametre and arranged in a specific rhyme scheme. The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word *sonetto* which means 'a little sound'. It was established by the Italian master Petrarch as a major form of love poetry, and came to be adopted in Spain, France, and England in the 16th century, and in Germany in the 17th.

A sonnet is defined by its form and not by the theme. The early standard was that of a courtly love convention. Petrarch's sonnets were expressions of his love for an idealized lady, Laura. The Elizabethan sonnets also dealt with Love. But in the 17th century John Donne extended the sonnet's scope to religion, and Milton extended it to politics. It was largely neglected in the 18th century. The sonnet was revived in the 19th century by Wordsworth, Keats, and Baudelaire, and sonnets were written on various themes.

(a) Sonnet Cycle: Also called as a sonnet sequence, it refers to a collection of sonnets that are thematically linked and show a progression in thought. The Italian master Petrarch's mid 14th century sonnet cycle was called *Il Canzoniere*. Sir Philip Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella" was the first major English sonnet cycle.

The two major patterns in sonnets are the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet.

(b) Petrarchan Sonnet

Also called as Italian sonnet, it has two parts – the octave and the sestet. The first eight lines are called **Octave** (rhyming abbaabba), which presents an argument, or observation or a question. The last six lines are called **sestet** (rhyming cdecde or cdccdc) which provides a counter-argument or an answer to the question posed in the octave. That is, the transition from octave to sestet coincides with a 'turn' (Italian, volta) in the argument or mood of the poem. The pause between octave and sestet is called **'caesura'**. Milton's poem "On His Blindness" is an example of Petrarchan sonnet.

(c) Shakespearean Sonnet

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey developed the English sonnet, after experimenting with the Italian form. Shakespeare was its greatest practitioner. This sonnet falls into three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming abab cdcd efef gg. The couplet presents a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas. Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 is an example for this form of sonnet.

(d) Spenserian Sonnet

Edmund Spenser in his famous sonnet sequence "Amoretti" (1595) deviated from the common pattern of English sonnet. It has three quatrains and a rhyming couplet like the English sonnet, but the quatrains are inter-linked with a connecting rhyme: abab bcbc cdcd ee.

11. Haiku

Emerged in Japanese literature during the 17th century, haiku is a poetic composition that

expresses the poet's emotional or spiritual response to a natural object, scene or season of the year. Haiku consists of unrhymed lines of 17 syllables, arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. This emerged as a terse reaction to elaborate poetic traditions. But it was difficult for the English writers to strictly follow this form, so most poets who wrote haiku loosened the rule for the number and pattern of the syllables. The imagist poets were greatly influenced by the haiku for its brevity. Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is a good example of the haiku in the loosened English form:

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

1.2.2 Poetic Diction

The term 'diction' generally covers the language of a work of literature, that ranges from vocabulary to the style of the work. Poetic diction is the language of poetry, particularly. The words are arranged in such a way that it arouses an aesthetic imagination in the reader. However, 18th century writers like Thomas Gray opined that 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry'. For instance, poets like Spenser in the Elizabethan age, or Hopkins in the Victorian age deliberately made use of a diction that is different from the common parlance or other genres, but also deviated from the writing style of other poets of their era.

For the neoclassical writers, the basics of poetic diction adhered to a principle of decorum – 'that is, a poet must adapt the level and type of his diction to the mode and status of a particular genre'. Higher genres like tragedy, epic, and ode use a refined and elevated style of language while pastoral poetry uses a poetic diction that is simple and understandable to common people. Neoclassical writers preferred poetic diction of certain characteristics like archaism, recurrent use of epithets, invocations, personifications, periphrasis or circumlocution (roundabout way of describing something) and substituted common terms with decorous words.

However, William Wordsworth in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" attacked this neoclassical poetic diction as 'artificial', 'unnatural' and 'vicious'. He claimed that the criterion for a poetic language must be the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' and the right model for the natural expression of feeling is the actual speech of "humble and rustic life".

1.2.3 Poetic Devices

Poetic devices are certain techniques or tools employed by the poets to emphasize the meaning and to create a special effect. It helps to create rhythm, tone, mood and feeling in a poem. Let us look at a few common poetic devices:

1.2.3.1 Poetic devices that make use of sounds

1. **Alliteration**: The repetition of the same sounds in a sequence of nearby words. Usually the term is applied to initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables for specialized effects, to emphasize the meaning and to connect related words. Read Emily Dickinson's poem "I Felt a Funeral in my Brain" for examples of alliteration:

   /f/ in "I felt a funeral",
   /s/ in "seated/ A service",
   /b/ in Bell/ And Being",
   /s/ and /r/ in ".. Silence, some strange Race,/ Wrecked solitary"

2. **Assonance**: The repetition of similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables of the

neighbouring words. The following lines from Wordsworth's "Daffodils" repeat the vowel sound /i:/

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze…

3. **Consonance**: Repetition of a sequence of two or more consonants, but with a change in the intervening vowel. Eg: "struts and frets"; "tale told" in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

4. **Onomatopoeia:** Derived from the Greek word "onomatopoeia," which means "the making of a name or word," onomatopoeia is sometimes called echoism. It implies a word or group of words that imitates the sound it denotes. For example, 'tick-tock' of a clock, 'hiss', 'buzz', 'rattle', 'bang'. In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven", the repetition of the words tapping and rapping mimics the sound of knocking at the door:

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door

5. **Rhyme :** Rhyme is the repetition of the same sound usually at the end of verse lines. The last stressed vowel and of all the speech sounds following it are usually repeated. Rhyme creates a musicality that appeals to the readers. For example, make-break, day-way, late-fate, etc.

The common rhyme scheme, that is when the rhyming words occur at the end of a verse line, is called **end rhyme**. On the other hand, **Internal rhyme**, also called middle rhyme, is rhyme that occurs in the middle of lines of poetry, instead of at the end of lines.

Let us consider the poem "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I

pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—

Only this and nothing more."

End rhymes are the rhyming words at the end of each line. In each stanza in "The Raven," the end rhymes of the first line and third lines alternate, while the second line, fourth line, fifth line and sixth lines are always the same. For example, the rhyme scheme in the first stanza is abcbbb. In each stanza of "The Raven", the first and third lines have internal rhymes, that is the rhyme occurs within the line instead of end rhyme. See, in line 1 "dreary" rhymes with "weary," and in line 3 "napping" rhymes with "tapping" and "rapping" as well.

When the rhyme consists of a single stressed syllable, it is called a **masculine rhyme**. When the rhyme consists of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, with the latter bearing the rhyming sound is called a **feminine rhyme**. Let us consider the poem "The Solitary Reaper":

1.	*Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang*	*a*
2.	*As if her song could have no ending;*	*b*
3.	*I saw her singing at her work,*	*c*
4.	*And o'er the sickle bending;—*	*b*

5. *I listened, motionless and still;* *d*
6. *And, as I mounted up the hill,* *d*
7. *The music in my heart I bore,* *e*
8. *Long after it was heard no more.* *E*

Still-hill, bore-more are examples of masculine rhyme and ending-bending is an example for feminine rhyme.

6. **Rhythm:** According to Ezra Pound, rhythm is a form cut into time (*ABC of Reading*). The term 'rhythm' is derived from a Greek word meaning 'flow'. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines rhythm as the pattern of sounds perceived as the recurrence of equivalent 'beats' at more or less equal intervals, that is, it is the pattern of stressed and unstressed beats. Thus, the stress governs the rhythm. It is analysed by determining the number of lines, the number of syllables and the arrangement of syllables in a line. It helps to create a flow while reading a poem.

1.2.3.2 Poetic devices that make use of the meaning of words

1. **Allegory**: The word 'allegory' is derived from the Greek word *allegoria* which means 'speaking otherwise'. It is a narrative strategy, in verse or prose, whose surface story has a connotative significance. The characters and the events of the story may represent or allegorize either historical personages or events (in a historical/ political allegory) or an abstract concept (in allegory of ideas). For example, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a political allegory, whereas John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory of ideas, where certain abstract entities (virtues, vices, modes of life, characters of people) are personified.

2. **Allusion**: A passing reference to another literary work or person or event is called an allusion. It is not explicitly identifiable, but the knowledge shared by the author is deciphered by the audience themselves. Thus allusions help an author to enrich their work with profound meanings. The title of Cleanth Brooks' collection of essays *The Well-wrought Urn* is an allusion to the fourth stanza of John Donne's poem "The Canonization".

3. **Apostrophe**: A figure of speech used by the poet to address directly an absent person or an abstract idea or a non-human entity. It serves as an outlet for the character to express his inner thoughts and feelings. Most of the odes use this tool to address an absent person or entity. In William Blake's poem "The Lamb", the poet begins the poem by apostrophising the imagined lamb:

> *Little Lamb who made thee*
> *Dost thou know who made thee*
> *Gave thee life and bid thee feed.*

4. **Cliché**: An expression or word that is overused is called a cliché. It relies on overly familiar language which can be either figurative or literal. "To err is human, to forgive divine", "A little learning is a dangerous thing" (from Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism") are expressions that sound cliché now.

5. **Euphemism**: An inoffensive or indirect expression used in place of a harsh and offensive one is called euphemism. The most common example is to say "passed away" instead of "died".

6. **Hyperbole**: A kind of trope which states an exaggeration of possibility. Its meaning should not be taken in a literal sense as it is an overstatement. It is often used either

for serious or ironic or comic effect. The Metaphysical poet John Donne is a master in employing the technique of hyperbole. For instance, consider his poem "The Canonization":

What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plaguy bill?

Donne uses these hyperboles to mock the Petrarchan paraphernalia of love.

7. **Irony**: A rhetorical device that refers to the incongruity between what is said and what actually is the reality. It is the contrast between the surface meaning and the underlying meaning of what is said. The word "irony" comes from the Greek word *eiron*, a stock character in ancient Greek comedy who pretends stupidity in order to deceive and defeat the alazon, a braggart. Both characters are dissemblers who pretend to be something other than what they are. This is the root of irony. Irony can be divided into verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony.

(a) ***Verbal Irony***: It is a kind of sarcasm, in which there occurs a discrepancy between what is said and what is actually meant. This technique is intentionally used by the speaker to criticize or blame someone or something. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Antony calls Brutus an "honourable man" in his speech:

He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.

Here Antony is mocking the idea of Brutus having honour, reminding people of what Caesar had done for them and how that was considered to be the cause for assassination by Brutus and others.

(b) ***Dramatic Irony***: A situation in which the character is ignorant of what is happening, whereas the audience knows the truth. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, King Duncan says that he trusts Macbeth ("he was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust"), but the audience knows that Macbeth is plotting to kill Duncan.

(c) ***Situational Irony:*** Literary technique in which the opposite of what is expected happens. This outcome can be either humorous or tragic. In O. Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi", the wife cuts her long hair and sells it to have the money to buy her husband a pocket watch chain. He sells his watch to buy her a hair accessory, leaving both with a useless gift, which was not what they expected for their efforts.

8. **Simile**: A figure of speech in which two distinctive things, actions or feelings are compared using the words 'as' or 'like'. For example, Wordsworth's comparison of his wandering to a cloud: "I wandered lonely as a cloud/ That floats on high o'er vales and hills'. Another oft-used example is Robert Burns "O my love's like a red red rose".

9. **Metaphor**: This figure of speech also compares two distinctive things, actions or feelings, but without asserting that comparison using the connectives 'as' or 'like'. Rather than the objects, their characteristics or qualities are compared here. For example, consider the poem "Hope is the Thing with Feathers":

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

Here Hope is compared to a bird. If it was written "Hope is 'like' a thing with feathers", then it becomes a simile. Here hope is compared to the quality of a bird without any connectives. Thus it becomes a metaphor.
I.A. Richards has introduced two terms – **Tenor** and **Vehicle**, to suggest the subject and the metaphorical term respectively. Here, Hope is the tenor and the 'bird' is the vehicle.

(a) An **implicit metaphor** is usually defined as any sentence that contains the metaphorical term (vehicle), but not a specified subject(tenor). The subject is implied from the context. For example, in Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird", the poet gives metaphors of two birds. The free bird is a metaphor for white Americans, while the caged bird represents African Americans and other black and brown people. But the subject is nowhere mentioned in the poem.

(b) A **mixed metaphor** contains two or more metaphors that seem unacceptable and do not logically fit with each other. When writers use mixed metaphors unintentionally or for a specific artistic effect, it is called **catachresis**. A famous example for mixed metaphor is Shakespeare's soliloquy in *Hamlet*:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing them.

(c) Two incongruous metaphors 'arms' and 'sea' are used here to suggest Hamlet's confusion. A **dead metaphor** is a metaphor that has been used for so long and has become so popular that we no longer care about the literal difference between the subject and the metaphorical term. Phrases like 'raining cats and dogs' (to suggest raining heavily), 'body of an essay' are examples of dead metaphors.

10. **Metonymy**: The term 'metonymy' in Greek means "a change of name". It is a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it. For example, "the crown" and "the sceptre" are used to refer to the king.

11. **Oxymoron:** A rhetorical figure that conjoins two contradictory or opposing ideas. 'Pianoforte', the original name of the instrument piano, is an example of oxymoron, in that 'piano' means quiet and 'forte' means loud. Other examples are 'happy grief', 'darkness visible', 'pleasing pain' Oscar Wilde's statement "I can resist anything, except temptation" is another example of oxymoron.

12. **Paradox**: A statement that seems logically absurd or contradictory, but can be interpreted in a way that makes sense. Wordsworth's famous poem "My Heart Leaps Up" contains a line "The child is father of the man", George Orwell's statement from *Animal Farm* "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" are notable examples.

13. **Personification**: A figure of speech in which human qualities are attributed to an inanimate or an abstract thing. It is also a type of metaphor and helps the reader to create an emotional connection with the object. See how Death is personified in Emily Dickinson's poem"Because I could

not Stop for Death":

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

14. **Synecdoche**: The term 'synecdoche' in Greek means "taking together". It is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to signify the whole or the whole is used to denote a part. One common form of synecdoche uses a body part (hand, heart, head, eyes, etc.) to represent an entire person. For example, when we say "we need to hire more hands' ', it suggests that we need to hire more laborers. For a better understanding, let us look at the following lines from Dickinson's poem "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died":

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room –

Here, eyes refer to people around. Sometimes people confuse synecdoche with metonymy. The difference is that in synecdoche, a part of the whole thing is used to represent the whole, whereas in metonymy, a closely associated word is substituted to represent it.

1.2.3.3 Poetic devices that make use of the images

1. **Imagery:** Cecil Day Lewis, a poet of the 1930s, defined an image as "a picture made out of words" and the poem may itself be "an image composed from a multiplicity of things". Therefore, imagery is a descriptive language that creates a mental picture evoking sensory experiences as well as emotional responses in the reader. It involves visual, auditory, tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste) and kinesthetic (movement) qualities. In a wider sense, the term 'imagery' is also used to denote figurative languages of metaphors and similes.

For example, Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils" is a good example for visual imagery:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

2. **Synesthesia**: The term is derived from Greek roots, 'syn' meaning 'union' and 'aesthesis', meaning 'sensation'. Therefore the literal meaning of the word is a union of senses or to feel together. In poetry, it stands for a fusion of senses. The term was popularized by French symbolists Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. This description of one mode of sensation in terms of another, is also called 'sense transference.'

In Emily Dickinson's poem "I heard a Fly Buzz- When I died", she connects visual and auditory senses.

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

1.2.4 Metre

In simple terms, metre is the rhythmic arrangement of stresses in a line of verse. The metre is determined by the pattern of stronger and weaker stresses in a syllable (stressed

syllable and unstressed syllable respectively) of the words in a line. The art of identifying the metre of a poem is called scansion. Scansion identifies the rhythm of poetry by dividing the lines into feet (unit of metre), marking the stressed and unstressed syllables and then counting the syllables.

1.2.4.1 Metrical foot

A **metrical foot** is a combination of strong stress and an associated weak stress. Therefore, metre can also be defined as the number of feet in a line of verse. There are five standard feet in English. Let us look at each of them with an example:

Foot	Stress pattern	Example
iamb	unstressed-stressed	The cur | few tolls | the knell | of par | ting day.|
anapest	unstressed-un-stressed-stressed	The Assyr|ian came down| like the wolf|on the fold|
trochee	stressed – unstressed	Tyger,|Tyger,|burning bright|
dactyl	stressed-unstressed-un-stressed	Half a league,| half a league|
spondee	stressed – stressed	Break, break, | break

Metre is named after the number of feet in a line:

monometer	one foot	pentameter	five feet
dimeter	two feet	hexameter	six feet
trimeter	three feet	heptameter	seven feet
tetrameter	four feet	octameter	eight feet

Consider the first line from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

The cur | few tolls | the knell | of par | ting day.|

Since it has five feet and each of the feet is an iamb, the line is said to be written in iambic pentameter.

An alexandrine is a verse line written in iambic hexameter.

1.2.4.2 Types of Verses:

1. **Blank Verse**: The verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter is called blank verse. Introduced by the Earl of Surrey, this metrical form resembles the natural rhythm of ordinary speech. It is used more often in versification than other forms, due to its flexible nature. Milton's *Paradise Lost* was written in blank verse. Wordsworth used it in his autobiographical work "The Prelude".
2. **Free Verse**: Known by the name *vers libre* in French, free verse lacks a regular metrical pattern, that is, it is not ordered into feet. Free verse has irregular line length and it uses a rhythm that suits the meaning and sounds. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is an example for free verse.
3. **Heroic couplet:** A verse form introduced into English by Geoffrey Chaucer, it is written in iambic pentameter which rhymes in pairs: aa, bb, cc, and so on. It was called heroic, due to its frequent usage in heroic poems and in heroic dramas.

Recap

- Poetry can be broadly divided into objective poetry and subjective poetry, which can be in turn divided into ballad, epic, metrical romance, dramatic monologue, limerick, lyric, ode, elegy, idyll, sonnet, haiku, etc.
- Ballads can be divided into popular ballad, broadside ballad, and literary ballad.
- Odes can be divided into Pindaric ode, Horatian ode and Cowleyan ode.
- Poetic diction refers to the specialized language used particularly in poetry.
- Poetic devices are tools used to create a special effect in poems which includes alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme and rhythm, apostrophe, euphemism, hyperbole, irony, simile, metaphor, etc.
- Metre is the rhythmic arrangement of stresses in a line of verse.
- The different feet in English include iamb, anapaest, trochee, dactyl, spondee
- Blank verse, free verse and heroic couplet are different verse forms.

Objective Questions

1. Why is broadside ballad called so?
2. What are Homeric similes?
3. Who perfected the dramatic monologue?
4. Who introduced irregular odes?
5. What is the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet?
6. What is scansion?
7. What is Blank Verse?
8. What is the use of mixed metaphors for a specific artistic effect known as?
9. Which literary age in English was famous for adhering to the principle of decorum?
10. Which poetic device was popularised by French symbolist poets?

Answers

1. Because it is printed on one side of a single sheet which is called broadside.
2. Long and formal in nature, used to make an elaborate comparison is called Homeric similes. It is also called epic simile.
3. Robert Browning
4. Abraham Cowley
5. abab cdcd efef gg

10. Synesthesia

6. The art of identifying the metre of a poem
7. Verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter
8. Catachresis
9. Neoclassical age

Assignments

1. Read Alexander Pope's poem "The Rape of the Lock" and describe how it is a mock poem?
2. Identify the end rhyme, masculine rhyme and feminine rhyme in Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper".
3. What are the different types of verses in English poetry?
4. Write a detailed note on the poetic devices that make use of the meaning of words.
5. Differentiate between metonymy and synecdoche.
6. What are the different types of ironies?
7. What are the different poetic devices that make use of sounds?

Suggested Reading

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Unit 3

Sonnet 116

William Shakespeare

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define some of the predominant features of the sonnet
- detail the significance of William Shakespeare as a sonneteer
- describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

The sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter and arranged in a specific rhyme scheme. The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word *sonetto* which means 'a little sound'. It was established by the Italian master Petrarch as a major form of love poetry. Sonnets are of two forms-the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey developed the English sonnet, after experimenting with the Italian form. Shakespeare (1564–1616) was its greatest practitioner, and hence the name Shakespearean sonnets. It is also referred to as Elizabethan or English sonnets, which falls into three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming **abab cdcd efef gg**. The couplet presents a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas.

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets and was published in his 1609 'quartos'. Of them, the first 126 are addressed to a young man whom he calls the "fair youth". The identity of this young man is not certain. The possibility can be either William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke or Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton. The remaining sonnets are addressed to a mysterious woman known as 'Dark Lady'. His sonnets dealt with various themes, such as the nature of love, relationships, passage of time, infidelity, beauty and so on. Our present sonnet to study is "Sonnet 116", first published in 1609. It talks about the immortality of love, i.e., love should exist independently of temporal concerns.

Keywords

Love, Nature of relationships, Passage of time, Beauty and mortality

Discussion

The poem

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

You might have heard of *Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, The Tempest*. But William Shakespeare is not only a dramatist but also an established poet. Will you believe that he had written 154 sonnets? Now we can go through his "Sonnet 116". In this sonnet, he expressed his thoughts regarding true love. The paraphrasing of the poem can be read from the following paragraph:

I don't accept that anything can prevent two people from being genuinely in love with one another. Love is not real love if it changes with the change in circumstances or gets removed when someone is trying to remove it. Love is a mark fixed forever that will not even shake in an impetuous storm. Do you know how I will compare love? No, no, not to roses. I will compare love to a star. Love is like a North star that guides the wandering ships in the seas. You may measure the height of the star, but you can never estimate the worth or value of the star. Similarly, love is priceless and you can't measure it. Love is not a fool of Time (Death). Rosy lips and cheeks that mark the youthfulness in a person may fade with time, but not love. Love will not change with the passing of hours or weeks, but uphold it until the death or even after death. If my words are wrong, and if you prove so from my behavior, then I have never written a poem and no man has ever loved.

1.3.1 Analysis

The sonnet reflects that the intensity of true love is immeasurable. In the first quatrain, Shakespeare talks about the steadfastness in love. He uses the word "marriage" to denote true love. In the second quatrain, the poet uses a metaphor to support his stance, the metaphor of a guiding star to the wandering sailors in a tempest. The progression of thought is smooth. For instance, in the first quatrain, the speaker explains what love is not and in the second quatrain he tells what love is. This continues with the third quatrain as well. Here he writes about the unsusceptible nature of love towards its greatest enemy, time. Beauty may fade with time, but not true love. It "bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom". It reminds us of what Virgil said in his Eclogue, "Love conquers all". The final couplet presents a bold closing statement by challenging the readers to prove whether he is wrong in his thought. If so, then no man has ever loved. It reflects the poet's emotional conviction in love.

Through the capitalization of its first letter of Time, it is personified in the poem, so that it is presented as a strong figure which rules over human affairs. In line 11, the poet speaks of "his brief hours and weeks". This suggests that Time has some ownership over man's existence. This "Time" can also refer to the linear system of counting the days of human life. Love, however, is not a fool of time. The poet suggests by stressing the words "not" in the first foot and "fool" in the second foot, that love does not belong to time. Hence, even

though moments of human life are measured in "brief hours and weeks", time cannot alter the course of love.

1.3.2 Structure of the Poem:

As we have repeatedly mentioned, this is a typical Shakespearean sonnet. It consists of three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*. The poem is written in iambic pentameter – a line of five feet in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. Tone of the poem is passionate and assertive.

1.3.2.1 Literary Devices:

- Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds
  - /m/ - ".. marriage of true minds"
- Personification – Time is personified as a reaper
- Hyperbole – Extravagant exaggeration of facts or possibilities. In the poem, the constancy of life is presented through the line "but bears it out even to the edge of doom" is an example for hyperbole
- Metaphor – an idea or object is substituted by another to show the similarity between the two. For example, love is compared to the North Star – "It is the star to every wand'ring bark"
- Polyptoton – figure of speech that consists of repetition of words derived from the same root. In the poem we have the lines:

"Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove"

Recap

- True love conquers even death
- The first quatrain says that love is not changeable with the change in circumstances
- The second quatrain says it is ever fixed, unshaken by tempests
- The third quatrain talks about the influence of time on love.
- Love does not fade away with the passage of time
- The final couplet announces the certainty of the poet in Love
- Structure-typical Shakespearean sonnet
- Literary Devices-Alliteration, Personification, Hyperbole, Metaphor, Polyptoton

Objective Questions

1. How many sonnets did Shakespeare write?
2. What is the main theme of "Sonnet 116"?
3. What does Shakespeare compare love to?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of Shakespearean sonnets?
5. What is personified as a reaper in the poem?
6. Which idea is discussed in the first quartrain?

7. Why is 'Time' personified in the poem?
8. What is the term used to denote the repetition of words derived from the same root?
9. What does the final couplet reflect?
10. Which poetic device is used when love is compared to the North Star?

Answers

1. 154 sonnets
2. The constancy of love
3. To a North Star
4. abab cdcd efef gg
5. Time
6. The steadfastness of love
7. So that it can be presented as a strong figure which rules over human affairs
8. Polyptoton
9. The poet's emotional conviction in love
10. Metaphor

Assignments

1. Do you think "Sonnet 116" is relevant in today's materialistic world? Explain.
2. Attempt a critical appreciation of "Sonnet 116".
3. What are the structural patterns of "Sonnet 116"?
4. How does Shakespeare deal with the theme of love in "Sonnet 116"?
5. What are the poetic devices employed in "Sonnet 116"?
6. How does the poet employ hyperbole in "Sonnet 116" to convey his idea?

Suggested Reading

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Unit 4

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

John Donne

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define some of the predominant features of metaphysical poetry
- detail the significance of John Donne as a poet
- describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

A metaphysical poet and a priest in the Church of England, **John Donne (1572 – 1631)** belongs to the Elizabethan Age. His realistic and argumentative language, modeled on actual speech, provides logical and psychological insights. But we need a different sensibility to understand that. Donne uses witty, thought-provoking metaphysical conceits (conceits are extended metaphors that compare two extremely dissimilar things), as opposed to the idealized and romantic metaphors of the Elizabethan age. Let us look at the context of the poem "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning". The poet is going to France with Sir Robert Drury and he is advising his beloved Anne Moore in England, not to mourn like an ordinary couple when they bid farewell to each other. Although written in 1611, the poem was published in 1675 in the fourth edition of *Life of Donne*. Love, separation and reunion are the predominant themes in the poem. With this understanding, let's start reading the poem.

Keywords

Metaphysical poetry, Conceits,Valediction, Unification of sensibility

Discussion

How do you bid farewell to your loved ones when you leave for a faraway place? If you ask this question to a poet, how do you think he/she will reply? Maybe they will talk about how sad they are, how lonely they are and so on. But here, John Donne challenged these familiar and conventional methods of farewell.

Let me take you to the poem which uses logical comparisons to explain the speakers' Platonic love towards his beloved wife. The poem could be paraphrased as follows:

First stanza: I think about virtuous people,

who are wiser and not afraid of death. They realise it when their time comes, and whisper to their souls to depart from this earthly world. They pass away so quietly to the extent that those people around them at their deathbed are confused whether their breath has left. Some would say "he is dying now" while some others would say "no, we didn't see any sign".

Second stanza: Like virtuous people passing away silently, we (my lover and I) melt or depart without making any noise. We don't create a flood out of our tears, nor raise a storm-sized sigh like some lovers react. When they make such noises, the world will be aware of their suffering. Had we behaved like this, it would have been an insult to our joys. Our sacred love must not be exposed before the common people (laity).

Third stanza: There is a difference between ordinary love reactions and elevated or mature reactions while parting. Haven't you noticed an earthquake (moving of the earth)? It harms and evokes fear in people. They will talk about the damage, and what this earthquake actually meant? Is it a sign of any imminent disaster? There is a greater trembling movement (trepidation), the movement of the Spheres, i.e., the planets revolving around the sun. Yet it does not make any noise. Nobody is aware of the rotation and revolution of the earth. Everybody discusses the visible effects in an earthquake, but the trepidation of the spheres is of immense magnitude that is never a subject of discussion among the laity. Similarly, our love is also very special, which is beyond a common man's understanding.

In stanzas Four, Five and Six, it is made clear why physical separation is not a big issue. Insensitive, earthly lovers ("dull sublunary lovers") cannot accept the absence of their loved one. Because their love is confined to their senses alone. The absence removes the physical body of the beloved one, which is very fundamental (elemental) for their love to continue. But our love is so refined and it is still a mystery to me and my lover. We are so sure about ourselves so we don't care about any sense organs that give us bodily pleasures. Distance will not separate us. Therefore my absence would not cause any breach (gap or distance) within our two souls, which are made one by love. My departure will only expand our love like gold beaten into a thin sheet. The more we beat the gold, it will spread and not break. Similarly, the more we suffer from our parting, the more we expand in our love.

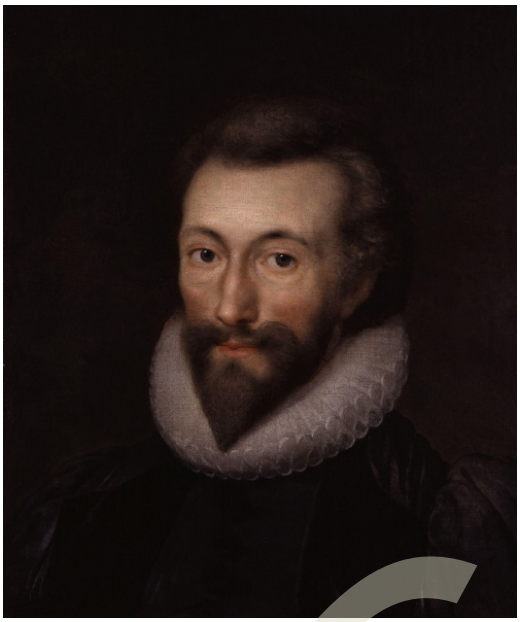
Seventh stanza: Two souls are compared to a compass. Think of a compass which we use to draw circles. Our two souls are made into one by love. But if they remain as two souls, then it is like the two legs of a compass which appear to be separate, but in reality they are united at the top. My lover's soul is like a fixed foot as she always stays at home. It seems like the fixed foot is not moving, but in reality it moves, if the other foot moves.

My beloved stands firm as the fixed foot of a compass. But when I, like the other leg, roam farther, she leans and listens (hearkens) after me. And she stands upright (erect) when I return home. Home is the place where I feel complete because it is her firmness and steadfast loyalty that make me complete my circle. In the last stanza, it is made clear that my beloved is like a fixed foot to me, who wanders and runs like the other foot of the compass to do many things. Her firmness motivates me to return to the place where I began.

1.4.1 Analysis

Regarded as "the tenderest of Donne's love poems" (Grierson), "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is the poet's thought on physical separation between true lovers. The

term 'Valediction' comes from the Latin verb *valedicere* meaning to bid farewell. The poem speaks of a condition where time and distance will not diminish the strength of the relationship. It is a typical example of metaphysical poetry. Let us see a few of its features from the poem:



1.4.1 John Donne (1572 - 1631)

1. **Language of the poem**: The metaphysical poetry uses direct and conversational language to create an impact on the reader. In this poem, Donne uses striking but simple imagery, comprehensible enough to convey his thoughts and there is the presence of a listener to whom he directly speaks.

2. **Metaphysical Conceits**: Originally, the term conceit means 'an image'. As a figure of speech, it suggests 'the exaggerated juxtaposition of two dissimilar ideas'. Metaphysical conceit is described as a 'wit' which is a kind of Discordia concors, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike…The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (Dr. Samuel Johnson in his essay "Life of Cowley" from *Lives of the Poets*). In the first stanza, he says the parting of lovers is analogous to the death of virtuous men. The most famous example of metaphysical conceit is the analogy of a compass to describe his union with his beloved.

3. **Use of hyperboles**: Hyperboles are "extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility, used either for serious or ironic or comic effect" (M.H.Abrams). Here the poet uses compound words like "tear-floods", "sigh-tempests" to suggest that their love is spiritual and they must not mourn and weep over their separation.

4. **Unification of sensibility**: T.S. Eliot defines it as "a fusion of thought and feeling". In this poem, Donne uses logical and reasonable comparisons, to illustrate his use of rationale to evoke an intense emotional feeling. You can say Donne has transformed logic into poetry.

5. **Donne draws imagery from several spheres of knowledge**: From philosophy (talking about death and reunion), astronomy (trepidation of spheres), spirituality (refined love), metallurgy (gold to airy thinness beat) and geometry (compass analogy).

Metaphysical Poetry:

The word 'meta' means 'beyond' and 'physical' means something verifiable or empirical. Thus metaphysical literally means 'beyond the purview of empirical knowledge.'

Dr. Samuel Johnson first used the term 'metaphysical poetry' in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*(1779 – 1781) when he wrote about a group of 17th century British poets that included John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. It was critiqued in the 18th century for its false wit but was praised in the 20th century by writers like T S Eliot for the unified sensibility.
Important features include:

- Abrupt openings
- Use of wits, conceits, paradox, puns
- Theme of carpe diem (seize the day)
- Use of syllogism and argumentation

1.4.2 Structure of the Poem

The poem has nine stanzas . Each stanza has 4 lines each. The rhyme scheme is **abab**. The poem is written in **iambic tetrameter**. Metre is the number of feet in a line of a poem. One metre consists of two syllables. So tetrameter is a line of four metre of eight syllables. Now, in an iambic metre, the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. So, iambic tetrameter means a line of four feet in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. For example:
"And **whis**per **to** their **soul**s to **go**" (syllables in bold are stressed)

Recap

- The poem is a typical example of Metaphysical poetry
- The poem warns against mourning over separation of the lovers and emphasizes on spiritual love
- The poem employs four comparisons to highlight their Platonic love:
  1. death of virtuous men
  2. trepidation of planets
  3. gold when it is beaten
  4. feet of the compass

Objective Questions

1. What is the figure of speech used in line 6 – "tear-floods' and 'sigh-tempests'?
2. What does the poet consider as a profanation of their joys?
3. Why does the poet say that their love is like gold?
4. What is the metaphysical conceit used in the poem?
5. What is the tone of the poem?
6. What does the Latin term valedicere mean?
7. Which aspect of metaphysical poetry does T.S. Eliot highlight?
8. What type of language is used in the poem?
9. Which poetic meter is used in the poem?
10. What is 'discordia concors'?

Answers

1. Hyperbole
2. To tell the laity of their love
3. Because like gold, their love too will be expanded and will not break even if beaten.
4. Comparison of the lovers to a compass.
5. Serious, optimistic and melancholic.
6. Bid farewell
7. Unification of sensibility
8. Direct and conversational
9. Iambic tetrameter
10. Combination of dissimilar images

Assignments

1. How does the poem celebrate love?
2. Read other poems of Donne and understand its features as metaphysical poems.
3. Attempt a feminist reading of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning".
4. Elaborate on the metaphysical conceit which explains love through a compass image.
5. What are the poetic devices employed in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning"?
6. Comment on John Donne's use of imagery.
7. What is meant by the notion of unification of sensibility?

Suggested Reading

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Unit 5

Ode to the West Wind

P. B. Shelley

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- define some of the predominant features of Romantic poetry
- detail the significance of P.B. Shelley as a poet
- describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

One of the best known poets among the Young Romantics, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 -1822) lived a passionate, restless and brief life. Like other Romantics, Shelley's poetry too deals with nature, imagination, creativity, beauty, and political liberty. He never separated poetry and politics. Therefore, his poems show a revolutionary zeal and his desire to bring reforms in the society. His insatiable thirst for individual freedom as well as freedom of expression is seen in his works.

Our present poem for study, "Ode to the West Wind" was written in 1819 and published in 1820 in his collection *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*, *with Other Poems*. In the introduction, Shelley wrote:"This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, [Italy] and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapors which pour down the autumnal rains." This poem was written when he was going through the toughest phase of his life. A few months before its composition, his son William died. The year before, his daughter died. As a result, his wife Mary Shelley got a nervous breakdown. He himself was suffering from bad health, rumors regarding his personal life, failure of his political hopes and even his writings were not acceptable to the public. All these mental agonies would have inspired him while composing this philosophical poem. When we consider the historical context, the poem was written months after the Peterloo Massacre. So the poem expresses his despair and his hope for a better tomorrow. It also indicates his thorough materialistic understanding about the world.

Keywords

The West Wind, Life Cycle, Poetic Creation, Human Limitations

Discussion

Have you ever thought of the possibility of being an invincible power? Have you ever admired anything for its double-edged power to create as well as destroy things? P.B. Shelley, a Romantic poet, who was called "mad Shelley" by his classmates for his unconventional beliefs has done so. In one of Shelley's important poems "Ode to the West Wind", he admires the powerful West Wind and laments at his powerlessness as a human being. The paraphrasing of the poem could be read from the following paragraphs.

1.5.1 P. B. Shelley (1792 - 1822)

The West Wind is the life-breath of Autumn season. He is invisible and can only be experienced. In his presence, the dead leaves scatter away, just like the ghosts that run away from a sorcerer. The fallen leaves are of different colours like yellow, black, pale and red and are similar to a crowd of people who are afflicted with disease. He carries the winged seeds to their cold beds inside the earth like a chariot. There the seeds lie cold as if in a grave. Each seed was like a dead body waiting for the West Wind's gentle sister Spring wind to come and blow her trumpet over the sleeping earth to awaken her and bring life to everything. Spring wind also creates sweet buds and feeds them in open air, like flocks of sheep. She fills the plain and hills with lively colour and odour, i.e., flowers. I appealed to the frantic but omnipresent West Wind that creates and destroys life to listen to me.

In the second canto, I realized the effect of the West Wind on the sky. The West Wind is passing through the sky and moves the clouds that appear like shedding leaves, shook from the entangled boughs of horizon. The clouds are like the messengers of rain and lightning. The West Wind drives away these loose clouds spread on the blue sky. I compare these clouds to the bright hair of Maenad, who is the female worshiper of Dionysus. It spreads from the horizon to the topmost level of the sky and looks like the hair of the West Wind itself. The blowing sound of the West Wind resembles to a dirge / funeral song of the dying year (West Winds occur during the autumn season from September to December) and that night appears as a dome of a vast sepulcher (tomb) made of clouds, whose arches are decorated with vapors. From the solid atmosphere of the clouds, heavy rain, lightning and hail will burst. I implore this mighty Wind to hear my plea.

In the third Canto, the West Wind wakes up the blue waters of Mediterranean Sea, who was lulled into sleep by the sound of its undercurrents. The sea was sleeping near an island made of pumice stones in the Bay of Baiae and dreamt of the old palaces and towers of ancient civilizations that now lie inside the water covered with sea plants and mosses. The image is so beautiful that I often fail to picturise it. I requested again the West Wind to hear my prayer, for whom the great Atlantic Ocean split itself to make a path for him to pass through while the sea plants and trees

covered with lifeless vegetation deep inside the sea turn pale with fear on hearing his roaring voice and tremble withering away their leaves.

In the fourth canto, some of the appeals are made to the West Wind. I wished if I were a dead leaf or a swift cloud or even a wave, so that I could share his strength even though I was not as free as this uncontrollable West Wind. In my childhood, I too was an unbridled boy as he is now. I could have even given him company when he wandered through Heaven. But I never thought of overcoming him ever, even in my dreams. So I called out to this omnipotent being to lift me up as a wave or a leaf or to drive me as if I am a cloud, because bitter and sharp thorns of life were pricking me. I was bleeding. Time with its heavy weight had chained me down, who was once uncontrollable, swift and proud like the West Wind.

In the final canto, I continued my earnest requests. I implored him to make me his lyre so that he can blow through me like he does to the forest. I am also in the autumn season of my life. The sound of Wind's blow has a pleasing effect. It will create a deep autumnal music out of me and the forest. It is sweet, even though there is sadness within it. I wish for his fierce spirit to be mine. Not just the spirit I want this impulsive Wind to be me. The adversities in life have made my thoughts dead. So I requested the wind to drive away my dead thoughts over the universe like how he scatters withered leaves because I wanted a rebirth at the earliest. By the recital of this poem, I wish to scatter my words among mankind as how an unextinguished hearth contains embers in ashes. I appealed to the wind to blow the trumpet of prophecy in order to awaken the unawakened earth, through my lips and verse. The poem comes to an end by asking a question to the omnipotent Wind: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?."

1.5.1 Analysis

The poem "Ode to the West Wind" expresses the melancholic trait of Romanticism. It is written in the form of an Ode, to the powerful force that can create and destruct – the West Wind. In the first, second and third cantos, the poet praises the wind for its effect on earth, sky and sea respectively. The fourth canto explains why the West Wind is invoked and speaks about the poet's wish to identify himself with West Wind. The final canto is the poet's prayer to the West Wind.

Written in the backdrop of the Peterloo Massacre, the poet connected it to the season of Fall and Winter. So the poem begins in a pessimistic tone and the poet seems to accept the overpowering nature of the West Wind as the thought develops. However towards the end of the poem, his acceptance evokes an optimism within him. He ends the poem with a universal truth – "if winter comes, can Spring be far behind?". He relates to the possibility of a future liberty. Although in an interrogative form, the poem affirms a universal truth. It also indicates Shelley's idealistic conviction that the world should be directed towards universal truths and ideas.

The poem also talks about the process of poetic creation. He prays to the Wind for poetic inspiration, blowing into the season of Winter and Autumn. The speaker beseeches the Wind to scatter his dead thoughts and arouse the dying embers in him. He yearns for individual as well as creative freedom.

1.5.2 The Major Romantic Traits in the Poem

1. **Love for nature**: The poet is seeking consolation in the West Wind, to heal his internal miseries. He wishes to be a wave, or a leaf, or a cloud so that his burdens will lose weight.

2. **His imaginative flight:** According to Shelley, "poetry is the expression of imagination". His imaginative capacity has its own uniqueness, that he makes use of his scientific knowledge to adorn his poetry with a different sensibility. With his imaginative power, he longs for an ideal world. In the poem he describes that the plants inside the ocean lose their green colour and turn pale because of the West Wind, while scientifically it is due to the lack of sunlight. This is one example of his ability to draw the readers into his world of imagination.
3. **Individual as melancholic and brooding in despair:** Romantic poetry stresses on the individuality, subjectivity, emotions and feelings. In this poem, the speaker is a lonely man suffering in an evil world and leading a life of thorns.

1.5.3 Structure and Form of the Poem

This is a lyric poem of five stanzas in the form of sonnets (each stanza containing 14 lines). It belongs to the genre of ode. The rhyme scheme employed is terza rima, i.e., interlinked tercets (tercet is a stanza of three lines) that end with a couplet, rhyming **aba bcb cdc ded ee**. The poet attempts to mimic the motion of the wind. The poem is written in an iambic pentameter but this pattern changes in some lines.

1.5.3.1 Poem as an Ode

Ode denotes a lyric poem that deals with a serious subject matter. It contains a message. It is a subjective poem triggered from a personal experience. In most of the cases, the poem begins from a personal distrust, grows through philosophical speculations and ends up in a kind of revelation. For example, in "Ode to the West Wind", the poet takes into account a serious issue of how powerless humans are, based on his personal experience. Finally, he attains the revelation that life is a balance of happiness and sorrows. Time will change the adversities into opportunities.

Odes are of three types: Pindaric ode, Horatian ode and Irregular ode. Pindaric odes, imitating Pindar's style, are written to praise or glorify someone. It consists of a strophe, antistrophe and an epode. Horatian odes, based on Horace, are calm, meditative and colloquial. It explores intimate scenes of daily life. They are less formal than Pindaric odes. Irregular Ode, also called the Cowleyan ode, has irregular stanzaic structure, unlike Pindaric or Horatian odes. Its stanzaic structure alters according to the mood and the subject.

According to the American literary critic Harold Bloom, the poem "Ode to the West Wind" employs the features of both Pindaric and Horatian Odes. It becomes Pindaric in the sense that it celebrates and glorifies the West Wind, whereas Horatian for its personal description of the poet and his contemplation on human sufferings.

1.5.3.2 Literary Devices

- Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds. For example:
  - /w/ - O Wild West Wind
  - /s/ - steep sky's
  - /g/ - grow gray
- Personification: Attribution of human qualities to nonhuman entities.
  - Here the West Wind is personified as a powerful person, who destroys the old order and the preserves the new.
  - Spring wind as the sister of West Wind blows her clarion.

- "The locks of approaching storm" gives storm a human like quality.
- Mediterranean Sea as a sleeping man, lulled by the sound of the crystalline streams.

- Apostrophe: A figure of speech which is a direct address to an abstract entity or an absent person. Many odes have employed this technique. Here, the poem is addressed to the West Wind, applying human characteristics to an inanimate thing.
- Anastrophe: A figure of speech in which the normal word order (often adjective and a noun) is reversed with the intention of emphasizing a word.
  - "Leaves dead" – instead of dead leaves
- Symbolism: A form of conveying the poet's deeper thoughts as a symbol is representational.
  - West Wind – power of nature as well as a revolutionary storm
  - Winter – sufferings in human life, death, corruption and tyranny of his time
  - Spring – Happiness, regeneration, new age
- Simile:
  - Dead leaves falling in the air are compared to ghosts fleeing from a wizard.
  - Winged seeds lying in the soil are compared to corpse within its grave.
  - Loose clouds were compared to falling leaves and bright hair uplifted from the head of Maenad.
- Elision: Literary technique where an unstressed syllable, consonant or letter from a word is dropped to adjust the metre. For example,
  - "Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth"
  - "Lulled by the coil"
  - "scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven"

Recap

- West Wind as the preserver and destroyer of life
- In the first, second and third cantos, the poet praises the wind for its effect on earth, sky and sea respectively
- The fourth canto explains why the West Wind is invoked and speaks about the poet's wish to identify himself with West Wind
- The final canto is the poet's prayer to the West Wind
- The poem reflects the poet's love for liberty
- The poem is an ade
- The literary devices used are alliteration, personification, apostrophe, anastrophe, symbolism, simile, elision

Objective Questions

1. Whom does the poet invoke?
2. What is the tone of the poem?
3. What is the message conveyed by the poem?
4. What is the form of "Ode to the West Wind"?
5. What was the event which led to the writing of "Ode to the West Wind"?
6. How does the poem end?
7. What trait of romanticism is expressed in the poem?
8. Which elements are praised in the first, second, and third cantos?
9. What is the rhyme scheme used in the poem?
10. What is anastrophe?

Answers

1. Wild West Wind
2. Begins in pessimism, but ends with optimism
3. The winter of sufferings will give way to a spring of happiness.
4. Ode
5. Peterloo Massacre
6. "If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"
7. Melancholic
8. Earth, sky, and sea
9. Terza Rima
10. Figure of speech in which normal word order is reversed

Assignments

1. Discuss the Symbolism used in the poem "Ode to the West Wind."
2. How does the poet identify himself with the West Wind?
3. If you have the superpowers of the West Wind, what changes would you bring about in society?
4. What are the literary devices employed in "Ode to the West Wind"?
5. Consider "Ode to the West Wind" as an Ode.
6. What romantic traits are present in "Ode to the West Wind"?
7. Discuss "Ode to the West Wind" as a poem of poetic creation.
8. Elaborate on the personification used in "Ode to the West Wind"?

Suggested Reading

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BLOCK - 02

British Poetry II

Unit 1

My Last Duchess

Robert Browning

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Victorian literature
- contextualise Robert Browning as a representative poet of his era
- detail some of the prominent stylistic elements in “My Last Duchess”
- identify some of the major themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

The Victorian Age in English Literature takes its name, as you know, from Queen Victoria of Great Britain, who ascended the throne in 1837 and was monarch until her death in 1901.1830 marks the beginning of the Victorian period in English Literature. Robert Browning is considered a Victorian poet, as he wrote during this time period. Yet, Browning’s work is simultaneously a revolt against some of the most well-defined aspects of that time, and a reflection of its characteristics. The most well-known feature of Victorian England was its ‘prudish’ attitudes on sex and Browning’s work takes great issue with such repressions. The Victorian idea that women should prepare a nice home and facilitate social success for men is shown to be equally fallacious in poems like "My Last Duchess" and "The Laboratory". His works drew on the prevailing Victorian doubts about the national supremacy of England.

Browning wrote true-to-life poetry that reflected upon some of the darkest aspects of Victorian life. The poem in the unit, "My Last Duchess", is a well-known dramatic monologue. It suggests that the speaker has killed his previous wife and will soon do the same to the next unfortunate woman he marries. The poet’s inspiration for this poem came from the Duke and Duchess of Ferarra. Married at fourteen, the Duchess passed away under very suspicious circumstances by the age of seventeen. Browning uses this event as the basis for a poem that dives deep into the mind of a powerful man who wishes to control his wife in every aspect of her life, including her feelings.

A similar historical instance can be found in Henry the VIIIth, and his many wives

whom he accused of treason and executed when he grew tired of them. Indeed, during the time, wives were viewed as disposable. Their husbands would often accuse them of certain

crimes to do away with them and marry anew. The life of a Victorian wife was thus a perilous one. As with other poems of Browning, this one revolves around the darker side of Victorian life – the treatment of wives by their husbands. In effect, as we will soon glean from exploring the work in more detail, Browning was a man of his time, both in the way he reflected new Victorian learning and questioned some of its assumptions on morality and behaviour.

Keywords

Dramatic Monologue, Dark themes, Art, Power, Position of women

Discussion

2.1.1 Section 1

Lines 1-15

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

"My Last Duchess" opens with the speaker asking an implied listener if he would please sit down and look at a portrait of his last Duchess. This makes the readers wonder why the lady in the portrait is currently not his Duchess. He does not reveal whether she is deceased or put away in a convent somewhere. He asks his listener to sit and look at the life-sized painting of her. He reveals that this painting is behind a curtain and that no one, but he is allowed to draw the curtain to view the painting or to show it to anyone. The reader can immediately sense that the Duke is controlling. The question that remains unanswered still is, why is this his last Duchess?

The Duke describes the look on the Duchess' face, commenting that she had a joyous look and an earnest glance. He notes that "twas not Her husband's presence only called that spot of joy into the Duchess' cheek". This is a curious thing to say. Why would he expect that his presence alone, and nothing else, would bring joy to her face? He does not answer that question, but the fact that he notes this gives a little bit of insight into why he was the only one who was allowed to open the curtain.

All along, he wanted to be the only one who would bring a look of joy to his Duchess' face. Now that she was put away somewhere, and her life-size painting was on the wall, he could be the only one to ever see that look of joy on her face since he would allow no one else to look at the painting without his permission. Suddenly, our speaker begins to seem mentally disturbed.

2.1.2 Section 2

Lines 16-24

Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

In this section of "My Last Duchess", the Duke seems to be reminiscing about his former Duchess and all that bothered him about her. She was too easily pleased by everyone around her, a quality that the Duke was not happy with. He didn't like that if someone like "Fra Pandolf" (we don't know much more about this character) were to tell her that her shawl covered her wrists too much, she would blush. The Duke also did not like her blushing at the flirtations of another man. He did not like the things which he called common courtesy would "call up that spot of joy" which she seemed to always have on her face. The Duke accuses her of having a heart that was "too soon made glad" and "too easily impressed". He was annoyed that she liked everything that she looked at. Steadily, the speaker's words paint the picture of a man who seems more and more psychotic and controlling. The implication seems to be that he put away his Duchess because he could not control her feelings. He wanted to be the only one to bring her joy and make her blush.

2.1.3 Section 3

Lines 25 -35

Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling?

In these lines of "My Last Duchess", the Duke continues to explain all of the flaws in the Duchess' character. He says that she values her white mule, a branch of cherries, and sunset as much as she values a piece of jewellery that he had given her. He is irritated that she does not seem to see the value in what he gives to her; in fact, she seems to value the simple pleasures of life just as much as she values his expensive gifts to her. He also seems irritated that she does not seem to understand the importance of his place in life. By marrying

her, he had given her a "nine-hundred-years-old name". This reveals that his family had been around for a very long time, and thus he gave her a well-known and prestigious name in marrying her. She did not seem to be any more thankful for this than she was thankful to watch the sunset. This irritated the Duke so much that he was not even willing to "stoop" to her level to discuss it with her. He thinks it would be "trifling" to do so.

2.1.4 Section 4

Lines 35-47

Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet

The Duke continues to explain that he chooses not to stoop to discuss with his Duchess what made him so disgusted with her. Yet, he seems quite comfortable discussing it with this listener. Perhaps he thought himself too high and mighty to stoop to talk to a woman, even if that woman was his wife. He admitted that she smiled at him pleasantly when he passed by, but it bothered him that everyone received that same smile from her. He explained that he "gave commands" and "then all smiles stopped together". This causes the reader to feel sorry for the Duchess, and rightly so.

She comes across as a lovely, happy, exuberant person. It seems that the Duke commanded her in such a way as to make her stop smiling altogether. He robbed her of her joy with his controlling attitude toward her. After explaining what happened when he commanded her, the Duke turns his attention back to the painting on the wall and says, "there she stands as if alive". This suggests that the real Duchess is no longer alive. The Duke seems happier with a painting of her because he can control who gets to look at the joy on her face. The Duke then invites his listener to return downstairs with him.

2.1.5 Section 5

Lines 47-56

The company below then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

This section of "My Last Duchess" reveals the identity of the Duke's listener. He is the servant of a Count in the land, and they are trying to arrange a marriage between the Duke and the Count's daughter. The Duke says that his

"fair daughter" is his "object". He brings the man back downstairs with him, and as they walk, he points out the bronze statue that was made especially for him.

The statue is of Neptune taming a sea horse. Neptune, of course, is the god of the sea. This symbolizes the Duke, and the sea horse symbolises any Duchess he would acquire. The Duke views himself as a god, and he wishes to tame his wife to do whatever he wishes her to do, including even to feel whatever he wishes her to feel. This clearly shows the level of derangement of the speaker. It seems that the speaker in "My Last Duchess" is an exploration of certain notions that were attached to domesticity and marriage in Browning's time.

2.1.6 Critical Appreciation

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. In the poem, "My Last Duchess", Robert Browning probes the theme of power and entitlement to reveal how the main character cared about his name and fame, wanting things to be done absolutely in his terms and sometimes even abusing authority. In the poem "My Last Duchess", power and authority can be seen to be symbolised through the character of the Duke. The Duke talks about the painting of the duchess hanging on the wall from the beginning of the poem. He is responsible for her being nothing more than a painting.

Another example that reflects power and authority can be seen through the attitude of the duke towards the painter. He is talking about the painting of the duchess on the wall, but not crediting the painter for his work. He also talks about how he is the only person now, who has control over the curtain that the painting is hung beside to. The Duke confronts a crisis of manhood in that the Duchess challenges both the construction of manliness as well as the Duke's use of such manliness to justify his social position.

The degree of power and entitlement possessed by the Duke can be seen in his pride that he now has control over duchess's smile. He had an objection over her smiling to strangers as if she did not value his nine hundred years' old name. The Duchess had incurred his displeasure by her expansive friendliness and her refusal to acknowledge his superiority in all things. Now, the smile of the duchess has forever been silenced and the Duke is happy with the fact. In fact, he mentions that all it took was a simple command and she had been silenced. Browning manages to create horror in the reader at the Duke's sociopathy. It is only at this point that the identity of the listener as the servant of a Count in the land becomes clear. A union between the Duke and the Count's daughter is being considered. This shows the complete dominance that the Duke had over those around him.

Another example of power and entitlement can be seen when the Duke talks about the other artworks that he owns. He speaks about a sculpture of Neptune taming a sea-horse, admiring his collections and depicting himself as a lover of the arts. He is, in reality, portraying the Duchess and women in general, as objects who can be controlled by the strength of his will. There is no surety that the Duke is conscious of his implications: given his excessive pride, his refusal to ever stoop, he could hardly tolerate allowing another to believe that his Duchess was unfaithful to him, especially through his own revelation, however subtle. Within the poem "My Last Duchess", Robert Browning excellently explored the theme of power and entitlement through the attitude of the Duke towards the Duchess. The Duke, having excessive pride, abuses his power and authority to carry out tasks that are immoral.

Recap

- Dramatic Monologue in 56 lines
- The Duke displays the painting of his last duchess to the implied listener
- Fra Pandolf is the painter
- Painting displayed to outsiders only with the Duke's permission
- Suspicious comments about the Duchess
- Duke suggests that his presence is not the only thing that made her smile
- Controlling nature of the Duke revealed through comments
- Her easy-to-please nature and friendly disposition annoys the Duke
- She is equally pleased by the Duke's attention as by the beauty of nature
- She is as impressed by an ordinary gift as she is by his wealth and position
- Duchess's behaviour constantly scrutinised
- Duke found it demeaning to have a conversation with the Duchess about his complaints
- His commands ended her smile – implying that harm had come to her
- Implied listener is a servant of a Count
- Arrange marriage between Duke and Count's daughter
- Portrayal and position of women in The Victorian Age

Objective Questions

1. Which poetic form is followed in "My Last Duchess"?
2. Who is the speaker of the poem?
3. Whose portrait is hidden behind the curtains?
4. Why does the 'spot of joy' on the Duchess's face annoy the Duke?
5. What does the Duke observe about the Duchess's heart (or her nature)?
6. What does the Duke mean by his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name"?
7. What does the Duke consider to be 'stooping'?
8. Why did "all the smiles" stop?
9. What is the identity of the unseen listener?
10. Whom does the Duke seek to marry next?
11. What artwork does the Duke point out towards the end?
12. Who cast the sculpture of Neptune?
13. Which aspect of the poem reveals the Duke's true nature?

Answers

1. Dramatic Monologue
2. The Duke
3. The portrait of the last Duchess
4. Because he is not the reason for her joy
5. That it is too easily made glad or impressed
6. The chance to share his wealth and position
7. Having a conversation with the Duchess about his complaints and expectations
8. Because of the Duke's commands
9. The Count's servant
10. The Count's daughter
11. The sculpture of Neptune taming the sea-horse
12. Claus of Innsbruck
13. His comments about the Duchess

Assignments

1. Discuss "My Last Duchess" as a Dramatic Monologue.
2. Can "My Last Duchess" be considered as a psychological study? Support your opinion with examples from the poem.
3. How does the poem suggest or imply that the Duke might have harmed the Duchess in some way?
4. What can we infer about the Duchess's nature from the comments made by the Duke?
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "My Last Duchess".
6. Explore the major underlying themes of the poem "My Last Duchess."

Suggested Reading

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Unit 2

Journey of the Magi

T.S. Eliot

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Modernist literature
- contextualise T.S. Eliot as a representative poet of his era
- detail some of the stylistic elements in the selected poem
- identify some of the central themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

The first fifty years of the twentieth century saw the emergence of several major poets in Great Britain, whose contributions to British poetry were of immense value. One of them was Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), an American, who made England his home and left behind him a wealth of literary works in prose, poetry, and drama. He was a Modernist poet who came under the sway of contemporary European trends of art and literature. His literary works show the influence of the French imagist and symbolist poets. The efforts he made in introducing ongoing European literary movements in English poetry are second to none.

Though differing opinions have been expressed about his relative merit as a poet of international repute, it is best to regard him as a figure who contributed to the enrichment of English Literature. He successfully worked for the revival of the poetic drama, which was virtually a dead literary form in Ireland and England. He inspired a young generation of English poets who appeared on the English literary scene following the years of First World War (1914-1918). In this section we shall go through T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" and discuss the main features of his poetic art displayed in this poem.

Keywords

Dramatic monologue, Biblical narratives, Religious transformation, Doubt, Journey

Discussion

2.2.1 Stanza One

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
(…)
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

In the first stanza, the speaker, who is one of the traveling Magi [wise men], starts the poem by giving a broad overview of the journey he and the other Magi embarked on. It was not a pleasant trip. They had a "cold coming…of it." The men were forced to deal with terrible weather that made everything harder. The speaker reflects on the days of travel as having occurred in the "worst time of the year / For a journey." Due to the fact that they could not choose when they travelled, they had to face these conditions.

The next two lines expand the details of their journey and the troubles they had to face along the way.

> "The ways deep and the weather sharp,
> The very dead of winter."

The men were not the only ones who suffered at this time, their camels, which were made to walk through the landscape bearing the men and their supplies were "galled, sore-footed, refractory." They eventually ended up "Lying down in the melting snow."

It is interesting that the poet chose to begin this piece, which is about the birth of Christ, in such a way. It does away with the image of majestic beings riding in to visit the child; instead, they are painted as deeply human. They suffered just as anyone would traversing the countryside. The speaker even states at one point that "There were times we regretted," or missed, "The summer palaces…the terraces… And the silken girls bringing sherbet." These were all elements of their home which were familiar to them and without which they were made to travel.

The following lines, which are crafted in an ever-worsening list, describe a litany of problems the men faced. There were the "camel men" who were often "cursing and grumbling." At points, they even ran away from the camps seeking out "liquor and women." The campsites were often cold as the fires went out, and there were no "shelters" to keep the men and animals dry.

In addition to these troubles with nature, they faced "hostile" cities and "unfriendly" towns that were unwilling to help them. The men had a "hard time…of it." By the time they got to the end of their journey, they had learned to prefer traveling at night. This way they could avoid the worst that the landscape, and the cities it held, had to offer.

There were even times, on the way to meet the son of God, that they said "this was all folly."

2.2.2 Stanza Two

> Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
> Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
> With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
> (…)
> But there was no information, and so we continued
> And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
> Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

In the second stanza, a few changes come over the party of travelers. The speaker describes a "dawn" in which they "came down to a temperate valley." This is a landscape that is quite unfamiliar to them as they had spent so much time traveling through such terrible conditions. The valley is "below the snow line" and it smells "of vegetation." It is clear from these

first lines that they have come to a much better place.

There is running water and a “water-mill beating” in the dark. Eventually, the men make their way to a "tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel." They inquired at this tavern, looking for information about Christ and they received none. The men continue to travel and “arrive at evening.” It was the speaker states, not a moment too soon. Everyone was close to their final breaking point having faced hunger, terribly cold weather, shelterless nights, and inhospitable towns. One might expect the speaker to revel in his arrival to the manger where Christ was born, this is not the case.

He says that the pace they finally came to was “satisfactory,” nothing more. This could be a reference more to the physicality of the place rather than the momentous nature of the occasion, but either way, it is a strikingly drab and depressing way to describe the moment.

2.2.3 Stanza Three

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
(…)
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

In the third stanza, the speaker halts his description of the journey and moves on to describe how he feels about the entire experience now. It is clear he has terrible memories of the trip, but what of the manager itself?

He begins by saying it was “a long time ago” but that he would “do it again.” It was, at least in his mind, a journey worth undertaking. It is at this point in the poem the speaker directs a question to his listener to whom he is telling the story. He asks, "..were we led all that way for Birth or Death?"

He knows that there “certainly” was a “Birth.” This is the case as there was “evidence and no doubt,” but what of the death? In the next lines, he equates birth and death. This particular birth was so painful to the Magi and their companions that it was “like Death, our death.”

After the trip was over they “returned to [their] places, these Kingdoms.” When they arrived there and attempted to settle back into the lives they once knew and loved, they were “no longer at ease.” Everything had changed for them. The men did not feel comfortable in this world in which “alien people [were] clutching their gods,” when they had seen the true God.

The poem concludes with the speaker stating that he would be glad to die another death. Perhaps this one could bring him to his final rest alongside God.

2.2.4 Critical Appreciation

The poem "Journey of the Magi" is based on the theme of the Bible. It is full of religious feelings. The visit of the Three Wise Men of East to Palestine at the time of Christ’s birth has been described in a very realistic way. The wise men started their journey in the extreme cold of the winter to reach the place of Christ’s birth to offer presents to him.

The poet wants to emphasise that the birth and death of Christ were different from those of the common people. His birth was hard and bitter agony for the human race, like death. He was crucified for the redemption of humanity from sins and bondages. The description of three trees on the low sky symbolises the future Crucifixion of Christ because he was crucified near the three trees. The poet takes

a sense of relief and appreciates the quality of Christ and his extraordinary death. The language of the poem is very measured. The poet has achieved grand success as an artist. The poem is very symbolic and full of religious touch.

"Journey of the Magi" is an allegory of the spiritual journey in which the flesh still craves for sensual enjoyment. The details of the journey of the three wise men from the east bound for Jerusalem to honor the newborn Jesus are the "objective correlatives" of the spiritual experiences of the journey from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of heaven, which entails the death of the old physical self and the birth of a new spiritual one. It is a long hazardous journey in "the worst time of the year" in the "very dead of winter", when the body needs protection and seeks sensual pleasure.

The Magi are a composite symbol of the spiritual quest. While one of them reminisces the journey undertaken by them, he longingly recollects their indulgence in sensual pleasure. He says that while they were going to Emmaus, they felt drawn to the fleshly enjoyments, the lack of which tortured them and in such a moment of spiritual crisis, they regretted to have obeyed the call of the spirit.

However, the quester survives the long journey in the night and at dawn he is in a "temperate valley" where everything is pleasant. It is the dawn of spiritual exhilaration; the different aspects of nature signify the new images of life; the "running stream" symbolises the rhythmic flow of life; the "water-mill beating the darkness" suggests the doubt being driven away; the galloping away of "the white horse" in the meadow symbolises upward movement of the spirit. At this stage the quester becomes conscious of the betrayal of the man of belief at the hands of those who are without any belief. In this kingdom of spirit, he visualises the three crosses on Calvary, one of Christ and the other two of the two "male factors." He also has the vision of Christ riding a white horse and of Judas betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver, and the Roman dicing for the robes of Christ after the Crucifixion. These memories of the misdeeds of men without belief engage his mind for a while and he realises that the secret of his quest is not revealed to him as yet and so he continues his exploration. At the end of the day he finds himself in a place from where he looks back to the region he has traversed and feels satisfied with the advance he has made.

The positive gain of the journey is the affirmation of the belief that for the spiritual rejuvenation the overcoming of the sensual aspect of life is essential. "Journey of the Magi" is inspired by the story in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. One of the Magi recounts the arduous journey they undertook to witness the Birth which was 'hard and bitter agony' for them. The journey is beset with the same kinds of temptations as are hinted at in "Ash Wednesday", and similar regrets for the summer palaces or slopes, the terraces, and the silken girls bringing sherbet. The New Birth does not bring unalloyed joy because the transition from the old to the new is accompanied by pain. It is a kind of experience referred to by Jung in his Psychological Types: "The birth of the deliverer is equivalent to a great catastrophe since a new and powerful life issues forth just when no life or force or new development was anticipated".

Recap

- Modernist, allegorical poem
- Dramatic Monologue form
- Speaker is one of the Magi or Wise Men who travelled to meet the Baby Christ
- I Stanza describes hardships of the voyage
- Humanises the myth of the Magi
- Away from the comforts of the home
- Felt the journey might be a mistake or a folly
- II Stanza revolves around their arrival in a temperate valley – symbolising new life
- Image of three trees, hands dicing for pieces of silver, white horse – symbolising crucifixion, Judas's betrayal, and the coming of Christ
- They arrive at a tavern, seeking information about Christ and receiving none
- The arrival at the holy manger is anti-climactic, described as 'satisfactory'
- III Stanza conveys the speaker's thoughts on the experience
- The experience has been meaningful but harsh
- Witnessed the birth of Christ, and the death of the old religion
- Upon return, the travellers found their homes and ways to be "alien"
- The experience changed them entirely
- Speaker wishes for "another death" – suggesting the end of his own life
- Biblical themes, Paradox of life and death
- The journey as well as the birth of Christ is not a moment of celebration – presented as an event that seemed like a death
- The quest completely transforms the travellers

Objective Questions

1. Why was it the "worst time of the year" to go on a long journey?
2. What happened to the camels during the journey?
3. What memory makes the Magi regret their journey?
4. What makes the Magi feel that the journey was a folly?
5. Who runs away in search of liquor and women?
6. Why did the Magi come to prefer travelling by night?
7. Where do the travellers arrive in the dawn?
8. What sight do the Magi see in the low sky?
9. What does the image of "six hands dicing for pieces of silver" symbolise?
10. Why does the speaker say they found the place "not a moment too soon"?
11. Why does the birth seem like a "Hard and bitter agony" to the travellers?
12. What does the speaker mean by "another death"?

Answers

1. Cold weather and steep ways
2. They lay down in the melting snow
3. The memory of the comforts they left behind
4. The hardships that they faced
5. The camel-men
6. To avoid the harsh weather and people
7. At a temperate valley
8. Three trees
9. Judas's betrayal
10. They were desperate to find the place after such an arduous journey
11. They are no longer comfortable in their own home and old ways
12. The end of his own life

Assignments

1. What examples does the speaker offer in the first stanza to suggest that they had a "hard time"?
2. Which aspects of their old life do the Magi regret during their journey?
3. Describe the images that the speaker sees in the temperate valley.
4. Comment on the biblical imagery that the Magi witness during their journey.
5. How does the poem "Journey of the Magi" break with traditional Christian themes?
6. Explain the allegory of the quest in the "Journey of the Magi".
7. What literary form is used in "Journey of the Magi"?
8. Write a short note on the impact of ambiguity in the representation of reality and truth in the poem "Journey of the Magi".
9. Comment on the symbols in the poem "Journey of the Magi'.

Suggested Reading

- Smith, Grover. T.S. *Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- Southam, B. C. *A Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*. Harvest Books, 1996.
- Williamson, George. *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot: A Poem-By-Poem Analysis*. Syracuse UP, 1998.

Unit 3

A Prayer for My Daughter

W.B. Yeats

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Modernist literature
- contextualise W.B. Yeats as a representative poet of his era
- detail some of the predominant stylistic elements in the selected text
- identify some of the themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

"A Prayer for My Daughter" exposes the typical modernist sentiment of the poet. The poet has portrayed a way of life and would like his daughter to adopt it. The kind of philosophy, he formulates in the poem, is oriented towards an emphasis on the importance of tradition, custom and culture in the modern world which is dominated by chaos. The tradition, custom, culture stand certainly for aristocracy.

He is of the opinion that aristocracy is the only culture which can redeem the modern world of chaos and anarchy. For him, aristocracy is the source of aesthetic, intellectual and cultural beauty. Therefore, probably because of Nietzsche's influence upon him, he expresses his bias against commoners and wishes his daughter to be trained in the school of aristocracy. He considers it an ideal way of life. The poem presents this as a well-reasoned ideal, drawing not only on mythology and history, but also on his own experience. The poet advocates an essentially non-Christian order, the keynote of which is a man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency. The poet has left sentiments and pathos behind and has cultivated an almost tragic outlook. He now combines the appreciation of beauty with a sense of the tragic rather than a pathetic element of life. He may now impart meaning to the ordinary events of life which his earlier poetry did not attempt. In the process, his poetry becomes a vehicle of public speech.

Keywords

Paternal love, Class values, Ideal womanhood, Irish politics, Spirituality

Discussion

2.3.1 Stanza One

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

The poem "A Prayer for My Daughter" opens with the image of the child sleeping in a cradle half hidden by its hood. The child sleeps innocently amidst the "howling storm" outside, but Yeats couldn't settle down due to the storm inside. The storm howling symbolises destruction mentioned by the poet in his "The Second Coming". The wind bred in the Atlantic has no obstacles except the estate of Lady Gregory, referring to the poet's patroness, and a bare hill. The direct impact of the wind, meaning the force of the outside world, especially on his daughter, worries the poet. Because of this great gloom he walked and prayed for his daughter to be protected from the physical storm outside and the political storm brewing across Ireland.

2.3.2 Stanza Two

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

In the second stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats' worries about the future are further explained. He hears the sea screaming upon the tower, under the bridge, and elms above the flooded stream. The onomatopoeia word "Scream" and the "flooded stream" symbolise the poet's overwhelming anxiety for his daughter. Also, it refers to the great flood in the Bible. Due to his haunting fear, he imagines the future coming out of the sea and dances to the frenzied drum, referring to war and bloodshed. In the last line, the poet employs the paradox "murderous innocence" to contrast the world and his daughter, which also recalls the images of "blood-dimmed tide" in "The Second Coming".

2.3.3 Stanza Three

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

In the third stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats prays for his daughter to be gifted with beauty. At the same time, he doesn't want her beauty to distract or to leave her dependent on her beauty for everything. Further, he doesn't want her to become proud or vain that she spends all day staring at the mirror and fails to have natural companionships. The poet implies that too much beauty is a dangerous one and that he only wants her to be beautiful enough to secure a husband.

2.3.4 Stanza Four

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

In stanza four of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats substantiates his view on how excessive beauty has always been a source of trouble and destruction. He turns to Helen in Greek mythology, considered to be the most beautiful woman on earth, brought the doom upon her, and many others. The image of Helen evokes another figure Aphrodite, who rose out of the spray. The union of Aphrodite with Hephaestus bandy-legged Smith brings to mind the Maud Gonne-MacBride episode. It makes the poet wonder if the beautiful women eat something stupid for salad, that they make a stupid decision which brings misery forever. The rich "Horn of Plenty" is suggestive of courtesy, aristocracy, and ceremony, that is lost by those women who make stupid decisions.

2.3.5 Stanza Five

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

In stanza five of "A Prayer for My Daughter", the poet continues with what he wants his daughter to possess more than mere beauty. He wants his daughter to learn to be compassionate and kind. Many times, men who believed to love and loved by the beautiful women faced disappointment compared to those found love in the modest yet compassionate women. Moreover, he says modest and courteous people attract hearts than those with beauty, referring to his own marriage. Ultimately, he makes it clear that he wants his daughter to be an agreeable young woman than an arrogant beauty.

2.3.6 Stanza Six

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

In stanza six of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats continues to talk about his hopes and expectations for his daughter. As she grew up, he wants her to be happy and content. He wants her to become "a flourishing hidden tree" and her thoughts like a "linnet" referring to its innocence and cheerfulness. Like a linnet, he wants her to be satisfied with herself, and infect others with her happiness. Further, he wants her to live like a "laurel" rooted in a particular place. The poet reveals his wish for his daughter to be rooted in the tradition.

2.3.7 Stanza Seven

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate

May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

Yeats continues to talk about self-contented women in stanza seven of "A Prayer for My Daughter". He believes that kind, self-contained, traditionally rooted women are incorruptible. The poet considers hatred to be the cause of all evil and prays that she be left off that evil. Further, he believes that a soul free from hatred will preserve its innocence and hatred. Just as the storm outside can't tear leaves from sturdy trees, turmoil and war can't break a strong woman.

2.3.8 Stanza Eight

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

In stanza eight of "A Prayer for my Daughter", the poet implores his daughter to shun passion and wild feelings that he considered as the weakness of beautiful women. She must be temperate because people who love deeply, could hate deeply too. Hate destroys people and makes them do cruel things, especially intellectual hatred which is the worst of all kinds. The poet reflects upon his emotional state when Maud Gonne rejected him to marry John MacBride. He wants his daughter to experience neither disappointment nor hatred.

2.3.9 Stanza Nine

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

The ninth stanza continues to describe the impact of hatred and the benefit of staying away from hatred. Once hatred is driven out, the soul could recover its innocence. Then the soul would be free to explore and find that it is "self-delighting", "self-appeasing" and "self-affrighting". According to the poet, the ideal woman makes everyone happy and comfortable, despite all storms of misfortunes that come in her way. She is a stronghold for people around her and her will would be that of heavens, for she has a clear mind.

2.3.10 Stanza Ten

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

In the last stanza of "A Prayer for my Daughter", the poet expresses his final wish. He prays that his daughter to be married to a good husband who takes her to a home with aristocratic values and traditions. There, he believes, neither arrogance nor hatred of common folks could be found, but morality and purity. Further, the poet does not want her to live a decadent life. He concludes by stating that his daughter would be rooted in spiritual values like a 'laurel tree'.

2.3.11 Analysis

In the poem, a speaker (usually read as Yeats himself) prays about the type of woman he hopes his daughter will become and the kind of life he hopes she will have. At its core, the poem expresses a father's heartfelt wishes for his newborn daughter. In a larger sense, "A Prayer for My Daughter" is a rich, complex reflection on the joys and struggles of parenthood, Irish politics, and Yeats's own past.

W. B. Yeats in his ten-stanza poem, "A Prayer for my Daughter" questions how best to raise his daughter. Though by 1919, the war was over, in Ireland it yet turned normal. So, he ponders how she will survive the difficult times ahead, in the politically turbulent times. The poem not only expresses the helplessness of Yeats as a father, but of all fathers who had to walk through this situation. He wants to give his daughter a life of beauty and innocence, safety, and security. He further wants her to be well-mannered and full of humility, free from intellectual hatred and from being strongly opinionated. Finally, he wants her to get married into an aristocratic family which is rooted in spirituality and traditional values.

In a nutshell, "A Prayer for My Daughter" is a reflection of poet's love for his daughter, and wonderfully portrays a father's concern for his daughter which becomes a universal emblem of paternal love. The poet concerns how she will survive against the violence and anarchy of the modern world. That's why Yeats prays for his daughter that she must embody some noble qualities that will assist her to encounter the harsh reality and future uncertainty with grave confidence and ultimate independence. Avoiding the hatred and arrogance, she can cultivate good virtues following the traditions and customs, and being open-minded she can win the love of others rather than having a ravishing beauty. In a word, Yeats urges for the restoration of grace and order in a battered civilization under an established culture and tradition.

Recap

- Poem reveals speaker's love and expectations for infant daughter
- Paternal love and class value as theme
- 10 stanzas
- 1st stanza sees speaker viewing daughter in cradle amidst a great storm
- Protection against the political storm in Ireland
- Fear for his daughter in the hostile world and unpredictable future
- Beauty as a dangerous gift
- Mythological examples of Helen and Aphrodite – women losing the "horn of plenty"
- Wants his daughter to develop ideal qualities
- Become a kind young woman than arrogant beauty
- Achieve self-satisfaction but provide joy to others – rooted in tradition
- Incorruptibility of traditional, ideal women
- Shun passion and wild feelings

- Stay away from hatred and other misfortunes
- Good aristocratic marriage – keep away from baser feelings of common people
- Spiritual foundation for life

Objective Questions

1. What stands between the child and the howling storm?
2. Why does the speaker pray for his daughter?
3. What does the speaker fear that his daughter's beauty might do to a stranger?
4. Which mythological examples does the speaker point out to support his arguments about beauty?
5. What do beautiful women eat, according to the speaker, to undo the 'Horn of Plenty'?
6. What would the speaker like his daughter to learn about 'hearts'?
7. What must the daughter aspire to be like?
8. Which kind of hatred does the speaker consider to be the worst?
9. Where does the speaker wish his daughter would marry into?
10. What ideal qualities does the speaker associate with noble, aristocratic families?

Answers

1. Lady Gregory's woods and a bare hill
2. Because of the great gloom in his mind
3. Cause distress/make them distraught
4. Helen of Sparta and Aphrodite
5. A crazy salad
6. That hearts are earned, not received as a gift
7. A Linnet
8. Intellectual hatred
9. An accustomed and ceremonious house/ aristocratic family
10. Innocence and beauty

Assignments

1. What does the poet value most for his daughter in "A Prayer for My Daughter"?
2. What are the different wishes and dreams that the speaker harbours for his daughter in "A Prayer for My Daughter"?
3. How does the poem reveal a father's concern for his daughter?
4. In the poem "A prayer for my daughter" nature serves in both its aspects – wild and joyous." Explain.
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, "A Prayer For My Daughter".

Suggested Reading

- Arkins, Brian. *The Thought of W.B. Yeats*. Peter Lang, 2010.
- Bloom, Harold. *Yeats*. Oxford UP, 1970.

Unit 4

The Thought-Fox

Ted Hughes

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of late twentieth century literature
- contextualise Ted Hughes as a representative poet of his era
- detail some of the predominant stylistic elements in the selected text
- identify some of the important themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

Ted Hughes is acknowledged as one of the most original and powerful English poets of the post-Second World War period. This does not mean that his poetic gifts and viewpoints were never disputed. He had both his admirers and detractors, and when in 1984, he was named Poet Laureate, he received fresh lots of bouquets and brickbats.

Born in 1930, Hughes has been a writer of versatile genius. Apart from nearly a dozen books of poetry for adult readers, he has published a large body of writings for children. His poetry has maintained an ongoing dialogue with history, literary, socio-political, religious and intellectual arenas. The great sweep of his imagination has taken in the most significant issues of life in the contemporary world, ravaged by a series of dirty and great wars, unprecedented bloodbath, carnage, intense psychical conflicts and horrors.

Ted Hughes is one of the most influential English poets of the twentieth century. While at Cambridge University he met and later married the American scholar and poet Sylvia Plath. For many years after Plath's suicide Hughes remained virtually silent about her, despite accusations that he had contributed to his wife's tragic death. Shortly, before he died Hughes published *Birthday Letters*, a collection of poems about his relationship with Plath.

Earlier in his career, Hughes wrote nature poetry, but his poems about his native Yorkshire landscape and its animals were very different from the pastoral conventions of English poetry; charged with the intensity of the mythic, his work was rawer, darker and more violent. Drawing on Anglo-Saxon literary heritage, the language Hughes used often has a rough-hewn physicality that gives his verse a monumental quality.

Keywords

Creative process, Metaphor, Animal imagery, Metapoetry

Discussion

"I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed."

"The Thought-Fox" starts on a silent, clear night where the poet, sitting alone at his desk, is attempting to write. But he has no luck with it. While struggling with his own creative process, he senses a second presence - "something more near / though deeper within darkness / is entering the loneliness". Here, the night symbolises the depths of imagination, evoking the idea of dormant genius, and the muse/inspiration. The poet is alone at night, labouring over his poem, when he feels the slow awakening of an idea – perhaps a thought about how he might develop his poem or an image that leads him to a poetic line.

The oncoming idea itself is symbolised by the fox's presence. At first, it is not clear what the idea is, to the poet. This is depicted in the fragmented nature of the image: "a fox's nose touches twig, leaf;". There is only a very basic and limited view of an idea at this point. "The fox is shrouded in darkness; only the pinnacle of it can be seen by the watchful poet, and likewise, the muse visits but only leaves him with a fragment of an image to build into a poem." The fox is a half-hidden and elusive figure throughout much of the entire poem, serving as a metaphor for the poetic idea which likewise remains half-hidden to the poet.

It is possible to see Hughes's attempts to mythicize or create a mythical aura through his use of language. He employs images such as the 'dark snow', the 'eye / a widening deepening greenness'. There is almost a cinematic quality of imagery – the reader can very easily 'view' the quiet night, the poet, and the fox as separate 'shots' or images. By doing so, the writer is able to provide concrete imagery for an abstract and often misunderstood creative process. Further, it also evokes the idea of the playful muse, sneaking in, and sneaking out of

the poet's mind.

The moment of revelation when the fox/idea arrives out of formlessness is thus made clear: "a sudden sharp hot stink of fox". The poet appears to have reached the heights of poetic reflection, and has managed to write down the poem that has been forming within him throughout the night. The sudden visibility of the fox is paralleled by the committing of the poetic idea to the page – "The poem and the fox exist as one entity".

The very pattern of the poem itself invites attention. Ted Hughes writes with a pace that heightens the reader's anticipation. At the beginning of the poem, only the fox's nose is seen, followed by a slow reveal of its eyes. The broken punctuation and syntax show the gradual, hesitant manner in which the fox/idea comes about. The movement of the poem is from the abstract to the concrete. The image of the fox is elusive, then quickened, and finally solidly visible. The poem comes a full circle with its final lines, leading back to the beginning stage; "the window is starless still; the clock ticks; / The page is printed."

2.4.1 Critical Appreciation

The poem "The Thought-Fox" is about writing a poem, and it explains the nature of literary inspiration and creation. The poem's action takes place at midnight, when the poet is alone at his desk, with only the ticking of the clock for company. The image conjured up is one of silence and solitude, with the poet cut off from the rest of the world, waiting to be transported by his literary imagination. The poet's imagination is depicted as if creeping silently upon the poet, evoking a sense of stealth.

"The Thought-Fox" by Ted Hughes embodies the solitude that surrounds a work of art. The final line of the poem carries an air of fatalism and wistfulness. "The Thought-Fox" has frequently been hailed as the most fully realised and artistically satisfying poem in Ted Hughes's first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*. Simultaneously, it is one of Hughes's most frequently anthologised poems. It is a poem about the process of writing poetry.
Hughes's 'fox', it must be noted, possesses none of the animal's freedom. It is incapable of rising from the page and walking away to nuzzle its young cubs or engaging in foxy behaviour behind the poet's back. It is incapable of dying in its own mortal, animal manner. For it is the poet's creature, wholly owned and possessed by him, fashioned in order to proclaim not its own reality but that of its creator.

Hughes' poetry is permeated by the conflict of sensibility that Hughes unintentionally dramatises in "The Thought-Fox." On the one hand, his work demonstrates an extraordinary sensuous and sensual generosity that coexists with an uncommon sense of abundance and a capacity for tenderness in contemporary poetry. These characteristics are particularly evident in several of his most mysteriously powerful poems–poems such as 'Crow's undersong,' 'Littleblood,' 'Full moon and little Frieda,' and 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days.' On the other hand, his poetry–particularly his poetry in *Crow*–is infamous for the ferocity of its violence, a violence that has been viewed as destructive of all artistic and human values by some critics. Hughes appears to regard his own poetic sensitivity as 'feminine,' and his poetry frequently conveys the impression that he can indulge this sensitivity only within a protective shell of hard, steely 'masculine' violence.

This conflict of sensibility appears in such a diminished or suppressed form in "The Thought-Fox" that it is far from the poem's most striking feature. It is most evident in the tension between the extraordinary sensuous

delicacy of the image Hughes uses to describe the fox's nose and the predatory impulse that appears to underpin the poem – an impulse Hughes has repeatedly compared the act of poetic creation to the process of capturing or killing small animals. Indeed, one could argue that the poem's final stanza records what amounts to a ritual of tough 'manly' posturing. For in it, the poet may be seen as engaging in an imaginative game in which he attempts to outstare the fox by staring directly into its eyes and refusing to move, flinch, or show any sign of 'feminine' weakness.

The fox, on the other hand, does not flinch or deviate from its path. It is almost as if it has successfully completed an initiation ritual to which the poet unconsciously subjected it; the fox, initially nervous, circumspect, and as soft and delicate as the dark snow, has demonstrated that it is not 'feminine' at all, but tough, manly, and steely willed 'brilliantly, concentratedly, going about its own business'. Perhaps it is only under these conditions that the poet can accept its sensuality without anxiety.

Recap

- Poem about the creative process
- Animal imagery as metaphor
- Speaker/Poet sitting at his desk, struggling to write a poem
- Feels a presence in the dark
- The image of a fox's nose and eyes gradually becomes clear
- It sets neat prints into the snow
- Comes closer, the body is almost visible now
- Speaker comprehends the image of the fox
- The visualisation of the image parallels poetry writing
- Poem about the role of imagination and creativity in writing
- Metapoetry – poem about poetry

Objective Questions

1. What is the speaker doing in the beginning of the poem?
2. Which images in the opening stanzas of the poem reveal that it is night time?
3. What does the fox's nose do as it appears?
4. Why does it appear that the fox is hesitant to appear?
5. What does the "widening" and "deepening" of the eye signify?
6. What olfactory image/image of smell makes it clear that the fox is there?
7. Why does the speaker state "The page is printed"?
8. Why is the clock described as suffering from "loneliness"?
9. What does the choice of the fox as a metaphor for creative writing suggest?
10. Which genre of poetry does "The Thought-Fox" belong to?

Answers

1. Struggling to write
2. "Midnight moment's forest"/ "Through the window I see no star"/ "darkness"
3. Touches twig and leaf
4. The gradual manner in which it makes itself visible
5. Comprehension of the poetic idea
6. "Hot stink of fox"
7. Because the poetic process has been completed
8. Because of the lateness of the hour
9. The mystery and elusiveness of the process
10. Metapoetry

Assignments

1. Write a critical note on the animal imagery used by Ted Hughes in "The Thought-Fox."
2. In your opinion, why does the speaker use the fox to comment on the nature of the creative process in "The Thought-Fox."
3. How does the movements and nature of the fox in "The Thought-Fox" parallel the creative process?
4. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "The Thought-Fox."
5. Write a detailed account of the contributions of Ted Hughes to British poetry.

Suggested Reading

- Armitage, Simon. "Over the Hills and Far Away." *The Guardian*. 25 May 2016. 5 August 2018.
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- Hughes, Ted and Drue Heinz. "The Art of Poetry, No 71." *The Paris Review*. 1995. 5 August 2018. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1669/ted-hughes-the-art-of-poetry-no-71-ted-hughes>.

BLOCK - 03

Representative Poetry from Different Countries

Unit 1

Mending Wall

Robert Frost

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- analyse the themes of Frost's poetry
- examine themes, imagery, and metaphors in *Mending Wall* critically
- evaluate Frost's poetic philosophy on form, originality, and purpose
- compare and contrast speaker and neighbour perspectives in *Mending Wall*
- apply Frost's concept of poetry balancing spontaneity and craftsmanship
- identify the elements and symbols in the poem

Prerequisites

To fully appreciate Robert Frost's poetry and his philosophy, it is essential to understand both the man and his works. Frost's life experiences, including his connection to rural New England and his early struggles for recognition, deeply influenced his writing. His poetry collection, such as *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*, explore universal themes like human relationships, individuality, and the tension between tradition and progress, all set against the simplicity of rural life. Despite his accessibility, Frost's works are rich with symbolism and layered meanings, inviting readers to reflect on life's complexities. His ability to weave profound insights into everyday events and settings, as seen in *Mending Wall*, elevates ordinary moments into thought-provoking metaphors for human boundaries and connections.

Equally important is Frost's philosophy of poetry, which emphasises its dual purpose: to delight and instruct. He believed that a poem's insight "begins in delight and ends in wisdom," encapsulating his focus on originality, emotional resonance, and intellectual depth. Frost struck a delicate balance between structure and spontaneity, blending accessible language with vivid imagery and profound ideas. Avoiding both rigid traditionalism and extreme experimentalism, he positioned himself as a conscious craftsman, valuing form while embracing fluidity of thought. His works often serve as a "momentary stay against confusion," offering clarity and solace amid life's uncertainties. By understanding Frost's artistic approach, including his use of metaphor, symbolism, and personification, readers can uncover the layers of meaning within his seemingly simple yet profoundly complex poetry.

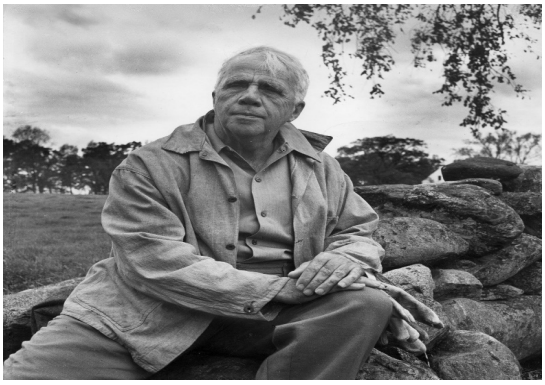
The poem "Mending Wall" speaks at length about how a wall, a human construction, shapes the interaction between people. Set in rural New England, Massachusetts, the poem takes on the rhythm and rituals of life there. The poem provokes readers to consider the purpose of borders between individuals.

Keywords

Boundaries, Nature, Symbolism, Traditions, Customs, Modernity

Discussion

3.1.1 Robert Frost



3.1.1. Robert Frost

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is one of the most beloved and widely read American poets, a name synonymous with the charm of rural New England and the clarity of thought that he brought to poetry. His poems, though often rooted in the landscape of the Northeast, resonate with universal themes that transcend geography and time. Frost's unique ability to capture the essence of nature and the human experience made him a poet for the people, and his remarkable accessibility of language brought profound insights to readers from all walks of life. In fact, he was so revered that he was invited to read at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, cementing his place as a national poet.

Despite being strongly associated with New England, Frost's roots are far from local to that region. Born in 1874 in San Francisco, Frost moved with his family to Lawrence, Massachusetts, at the age of eleven. Though Frost is often described as a "farmer-poet," it was in the urban setting of Massachusetts that his early years unfolded, and his lifelong connection to rural life began to take shape later. After attending high school in Lawrence, he studied briefly at Dartmouth College and Harvard University, though he never completed a degree. Frost worked various jobs, including teaching at Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1910, during which time he wrote several poems that would later appear in his first collection, *A Boy's Will*.

In 1911, seeking broader recognition, Frost moved to England, where he hoped his poetry would garner attention from the literary establishment. His gamble paid off, and both Ezra Pound and Edward Thomas praised his early works, leading to the publication of *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) in England. This success catalysed his return to America, where he quickly gained fame, culminating in the publication of *Mountain Interval* in 1916. By this time, Frost had become a well-known figure, receiving invitations to teach at universities and garnering numerous literary awards. Among these were four Pulitzer Prizes and honorary degrees from prestigious institutions like Oxford and Cambridge.

Frost's crowning achievement came when he was asked to read his poem *The Gift Outright* at President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, a moment that marked the peak of his public recognition. He became the first American poet to receive such an honour. Yet, despite his fame, the later years of Frost's life were marred by personal tragedy. He faced the deaths of his wife and three children, events that deeply affected his work. Nevertheless, his poetic contributions remained integral to the literary world until his death in 1963, just shy of his 89th birthday.

What continues to captivate readers in Frost's poetry is the apparent simplicity of his language, combined with the complexity of his thought. Much like the great poet William

Wordsworth, Frost found beauty in the rural landscape and the lives of the people who lived there. His works are infused with an imaginative sympathy that offers both a window into nature's world and a reflection on the human condition. Frost believed poetry could both delight and instruct, famously stating, "A poem's insight begins in delight and ends in wisdom." This philosophy encapsulates the core of his writing, and it is clearly reflected in his work, such as the poem "*Mending Wall"*, where the natural world intertwines with deeper human understanding, inviting readers to reflect, learn, and grow.

Frost's Concept of Poetry

No Rigid Definition: Robert Frost did not adhere to a strict definition of poetry. He regarded poetry as "words that have become deeds." In his essay *The Figure a Poem Makes,* Frost presented his views on poetry as "certain elastic principles," emphasising its fluid and adaptable nature.

***Originality, Delight, and Wisdom*:** Frost believed poetry should embody originality and initiative, giving it a timeless freshness. He argued that a poem derives its appeal from its journey from delight to wisdom, capturing "the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew."

Neither Extremist nor Preacher: Frost was neither an advocate of poetry as pure art nor as a tool for preaching. For him, both content and form were equally significant. He opposed the use of poetry solely as a medium for expressing disgust or frustration, favoring a balanced and meaningful approach.

***The Importance of Form*:** Frost emphasised the necessity of form in poetry. Form, for him, included stanzaic structure, balance, equilibrium, and the organization of meaning or substance. He insisted that these elements must seamlessly blend with the poet's personal idiom. Additionally, Frost highlighted the importance of aligning the poet's experiences with those of the reader to create a shared emotional resonance.

Unity of Heterogeneous Elements: According to Frost, the essence of poetry lies in its ability to unify and blend diverse elements. With his deep poetic insight, Frost could view an object both objectively and subjectively. He believed that integrating these heterogeneous elements into a single cohesive entity-the poem-is what gives poetry its mystery, wonder, and magic.

A Momentary Stay against Confusion and Life Clarification: Frost likened the journey of a poem to the course of true love. Both begin with an impulse to which one surrenders. For Frost, a poem "begins in delight, inclines to the impulse, assumes direction with the first line laid down, runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a profound one, but a momentary stay against confusion."

A Serious Artist and Conscious Craftsman: While Frost valued spontaneity, he also viewed poetry as a serious art form requiring deliberate craftsmanship. He believed the poet's joy lies in discovering words, images, metaphors, and expressions that authentically reflect the emotion, thought, and situation being conveyed.

Conclusion:

Frost viewed the poet as an accidental collector of impressions and knowledge, with poetry emerging retrospectively from this accumulation. He described a poem's logic as "backward, in retrospect, after the act." To Frost, the poet draws from "the vast chaos of all that I have lived through" to create a momentary clarification of life, offering a brief respite from confusion. This, for Frost, encapsulates the enduring purpose and beauty of poetry.

> "A poem's insight begins in delight and ends in wisdom."
>
> - Robert Frost

About the Poem

"Mending Wall" was first published in 1914 in the volume, North of Boston. It is one of Robert Frost's most widely quoted poems, exploring the simple yet profound subject of maintaining a stone wall, a regular duty for a farmer. It is written in blank verse. Starting from the building of a broken down boundary wall between his estate and that of the neighbour, Frost goes on to reflect about physical and figurative walls between men. The popular view of the poem is that it expresses Frost's philosophy of tolerance, generosity and brotherhood, in contrast with the narrow-mindedness of his neighbour. But this interpretation is open to question. The poem is perhaps delivering a message not so simple.

3.1.2 Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

3.1.2 Summary

"Mending Wall" presents a dialogue between the speaker and his neighbour about the need for a stone wall that separates their properties. The poem opens with the observation that there is something, a mysterious force in nature that does not "love a wall." This force causes the frozen ground to swell, making stones tumble and create gaps large enough for two people to pass. Hunters also contribute to these gaps, taking apart the wall in search of rabbits. The speaker attempts to fix the damage, tracking down the hunters and rebuilding the wall in the spring.

The speaker and his neighbour each work on their respective sides of the wall, replacing stones and hoping that they will stay in place. The neighbour's behaviour is rigid and traditional, adhering to the saying, "Good fences make good neighbours," a sentiment that the speaker questions. While the speaker feels there is no real need for the wall- his apple trees will never cross into the neighbour's pine trees- the neighbour insists that the wall is necessary for maintaining boundaries and good relationships. The speaker challenges this idea, wondering why a wall would be necessary in their particular case.

As the poem progresses, the speaker reflects on the absurdity of maintaining barriers that serve no practical purpose. The neighbour, however, remains firm in his belief, repeating his mantra, and the speaker compares him to an ancient warrior, steadfast in his beliefs. The poem concludes with the speaker's realisation that his neighbour is content with his traditional view of the world, one that rejects change and introspection.

Through the use of vivid imagery, metaphors, and personification, Frost explores themes of tradition, isolation, and the human tendency to erect barriers, both physically and emotionally. The poem invites readers to consider whether such walls are truly necessary or whether they are mere constructs that limit connection and understanding.

3.1.3 Analysis

Many of Robert Frost's poems address social situations, and "Mending Wall" is a symbolic exploration of a modern dilemma: the simultaneous desire for global unity and the persistence of nationalist or individual boundaries. While nations strive for international understanding, certain forces cling to militant nationalism, undermining the very idea of unity. Humans often wish for a world without barriers but simultaneously find comfort in self-imposed limitations. This paradox, rooted in human nature, forms the core of the poem. Frost's treatment of this theme is impartial and insightful. He avoids advocating for militant nationalism, individualism, or universal brotherhood. Nor does he propose a compromise. Instead, he presents the problem and leaves readers to draw their conclusions.

The poem's strength lies in its central contradiction, encapsulated in two key statements:
Something there is that doesn't love a wall
and
Good fences make good neighbours.

These opposing viewpoints are expressed by two characters in the poem, each reflecting a different perspective. However, Frost subtly conveys his thoughts without acting as a judge. Through the speaker, Frost adds layers to the debate, highlighting that walls are not always necessary. The speaker remarks: *There where it is we do not need the wall.* This implies that walls might be necessary in some situations but not in others. For example, the speaker says: *He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across And eat the cones under his pines. I tell him. He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'*

Here, the wall serves no purpose since the trees cannot intrude, but the speaker acknowledges situations where boundaries might be needed. He reflects:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know What I was walling in or walling out And to whom I was like to give offence.

The poem reveals that walls, both literal and metaphorical, can be essential or redundant depending on the context. In the case of *Mending Wall*, the boundary is unnecessary and serves no practical purpose.

The poem's central scenario invites deeper symbolic and social interpretations. Some critics view it as addressing contemporary issues like nationalism and international tension, while others see it as a reflection of tradition versus progress. The neighbour's repeated phrase, "Good fences make good neighbours," symbolises a rigid adherence to tradition passed down by his father, whereas the speaker advocates for adaptability based on current needs.

Frost, however, denied embedding social or ethical messages in the poem. He described it as a dramatic character study, where the speaker and neighbour reveal their personalities through their contrasting attitudes. The neighbour's traditionalism and the speaker's questioning nature form the crux of the poem's tension.

Critic Lynen noted that while the poem appears anecdotal and descriptive, it evokes a sense of puzzlement, suggesting a deeper meaning. The speaker represents a natural force opposing barriers, stating: *Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun.* This natural force contrasts with the neighbour's belief in boundaries, reflecting the broader conflict between openness and conservatism.

The poem does not resolve this debate or offer clear answers. Instead, it presents two perspectives: one advocating for connection and another for separation. The wall becomes a symbol of man-made divisions, while the natural forces opposing it reflect the instinct for unity. Frost's intent is not to teach a lesson but to explore the complexity of this issue, leaving readers to interpret the conflict in their own contexts.

Recap

- Robert Frost's poetry bridges simplicity with profound human experiences
- Famous for capturing rural New England's natural charm vividly
- His works explore universal themes transcending time and geography
- Won four Pulitzer Prizes and numerous honorary degrees globally
- Advocated poetry as delight ending in wisdom and insight
- Published in 1914, "Mending Wall" is Robert Frost's poem
- Focuses on farmers rebuilding a wall that divides their properties
- Explores physical and emotional barriers separating people in society
- Highlights contrasting perspectives: tradition versus adaptability and change
- Nature's mysterious force opposes walls, creating gaps between stones
- Speaker questions necessity of barriers; neighbour values tradition strongly
- Famous line, "Good fences make good neighbours," emphasizes rigid mindset
- Symbolic themes include isolation, tradition, and human-created divisions
- Frost provides no solution; readers interpret division versus connection
- Vivid imagery, metaphors deepen poem's exploration of barriers in relationships

Objective Questions

1. What was the name of Frost's first published poetry collection?
2. What is the title of Frost's poem that he read at President Kennedy's inauguration?
3. What poetic style is "Mending Wall"written in?
4. What phrase does the neighbour repeat in the poem "Mending Wall"?
5. What universal theme does "Mending Wall" explore?
6. What does Frost compare the poem's journey to in his concept of poetry?
7. What is the main conflict presented in "Mending Wall"?
8. How does the speaker describe the neighbour's adherence to tradition in the poem?
9. What did Frost believe was the primary purpose of poetry?
10. What does the speaker of the poem and his neighbour do every spring?
11. What is an unreasonable activity according to the poet?
12. What does the poem mean by 'stones falling from the wall?'
13. Why does the poet justify the wall's construction in the end?
14. What does the wall symbolise in the poem?

Answers

1. Frost's first published poetry collection was "A Boy's Will."
2. Frost read "The Gift Outright" at President Kennedy's inauguration.
3. "Mending Wall" is written in blank verse.
4. The neighbour repeats the phrase, "Good fences make good neighbours."
5. "Mending Wall" explores the theme of barriers, both physical and metaphorical, between people.
6. Frost compared a poem's journey to the course of true love, starting in delight and ending in wisdom.
7. The main conflict in "Mending Wall" is the necessity of maintaining boundaries versus questioning their purpose.
8. The speaker describes the neighbour as moving "in darkness," adhering rigidly to his father's saying.
9. Frost believed poetry's primary purpose was to offer a momentary stay against confusion and provide clarity.
10. Mending a stone wall across their boundaries.
11. Repairing the wall.
12. Nature is not in favour of building the fence.
13. It is because the poet respects the traditional belief of his neighbour.
14. The wall symbolises the ambiguity of distancing and union of two people/nations.

Assignments

1. How do speaker and neighbour contrast in *Mending Wall*?
2. How does Frost's "delight to wisdom" philosophy appear here?
3. Examine the various stylistic elements employed in the poem "Mending Wall."
4. In your opinion, what is the relevance of the poem "Mending Wall" in contemporary life?
5. Explore the major themes portrayed in the poem "Mending Wall."
6. How does the act of 'mending a wall' become symbolic in the poem "Mending Wall"?

Suggested Reading

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- Fagan, Deidre J. *Critical Companion to Robert Frost: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work.* Facts on File, Inc. 2007.
- https://literariness.org/2021/02/22/analysis-of-robert-frosts-mending-wall/
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- https://poemanalysis.com/robert-frost/mending-wall/

Unit 2

Telephone Conversation

Wole Soyinka

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Analyse Wole Soyinka's themes addressing racial prejudice and societal oppression
- examine Soyinka's use of satire, irony, and vivid imagery stylistically
- evaluate Soyinka's critique of racism in *Telephone Conversation*'s dialogue
- discuss Soyinka's portrayal of tradition versus modernity in his works
- interpret Soyinka's literary significance in West African and global contexts

Prerequisites

Wole Soyinka, a prominent Nigerian writer and Nobel laureate, is a towering figure in world literature. Born on July 13, 1934, in Western Nigeria, he has excelled as a poet, playwright, novelist, actor, and musician. After studying at University College, Ibadan, and Leeds University in England, he returned to Nigeria to teach and contribute to African cultural expression by establishing two theatre companies and editing *Black Orpheus* magazine. Soyinka's works often delve into West African traditions, exploring the clash between tradition and modernity. His celebrated plays, such as *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), exemplify this theme. His relentless fight for democracy in Nigeria and his immense literary contributions earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, making him the first African laureate.

One of Soyinka's notable works, the poem "Telephone Conversation" (1962), is a sharp satire on racial discrimination inspired by a real-life incident. The poem portrays a telephone exchange between an African man and a British landlady, using humour, irony, and sarcasm to expose the absurdity of racism. Soyinka critiques the so-called politeness of Western society, which masks deep-seated racial prejudices, and highlights the ignorance of those who perpetuate discrimination. By juxtaposing wit and biting commentary, the poem underscores the dehumanising effects of racism and serves as a powerful reflection on the hypocrisy of a society that claims to be civilised.

Keywords

Racism, Ignorance, Prejudiced thoughts, African Identity

Discussion

3.2.1 About the poet

3.2.1 Wole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka is a West African writer. He was born in Western Nigeria on 13 July 1934. He was not only a poet but also a playwright, novelist, actor and musician. He was educated at University College, Ibadan and later at Leeds University, England. He began editing and teaching in Nigeria after his return from England. He founded two theatre companies. He edits a magazine called 'Black Orpheus'. He takes interest in the West African folk traditions. He has written plays depicting the tension between tradition and modernity.

A fierce critic of political oppression, Soyinka has openly condemned successive Nigerian and African governments, particularly military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. His works tackle powerful themes such as racial discrimination, political corruption, social justice, human cruelty, and the inevitability of death. Stylistically, Soyinka is known for his use of vivid imagery, satire, antithesis, dramatic dialogue, and biblical allusions.

Among his most celebrated dramatic works are *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Kongi's Harvest*, and *Madmen and Specialists*. His notable novels include *The Interpreters*, *Season of Anomy*, and *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth*. Soyinka's essays, such as those in *Man, Literature, and the African World*, offer deep insights into African identity and the global literary landscape. His memoirs, including *The Man Died* and *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, reflect his personal and political experiences. As a poet, he has published powerful collections like *Poems from Prison*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, and *Modern Poetry from Africa*, where the poem "Telephone Conversation" appears. This poem, written in free verse, is a poignant critique of racism. Through a dialogue between an African man and a British landlady discussing an apartment rental, Soyinka highlights the absurdity of racial prejudice. The speaker cleverly mocks the landlady's ignorance and exposes the biases underlying her superficial politeness, making the poem both an incisive commentary and a call for social change.

"Telephone Conversation" is a poem by Wole Soyinka based on a real experience. It is a humorous satire on racial discrimination written in 1962. He uses irony to point out that the western society that seems to be well-bred is tainted with racial prejudices. The poem sarcastically reveals the ridiculousness of racism. The poet is surprised to note that racism has permeated even the most ordinary dealings between the blacks and the whites.

The Poem

Telephone Conversation

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. "Madam," I warned,
"I hate a wasted journey--I am African."
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was foully.
"HOW DARK?" . . . I had not misheard . . .
"ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK?" Button B, Button A. * *Stench*
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis--
"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came.
"You mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. "West African sepia"--and as afterthought,
"Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding
"DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like brunette."
"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?" "Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blond. Friction, caused--
Foolishly, madam--by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black--One moment, madam!"--sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears--"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather
See for yourself?"

3.2.2 Summary

A dark West African man is looking for a new apartment. At last he decides to hire a house which has a reasonable price. The location of the house is neither good nor bad. It is also characterised by lack of partiality. The landlady herself stays out of the locality. The speaker feels that it is satisfactory and informs her that he is black. He admits that he is black fearing that his journey to the place will be wasted on that account. So he is apologetic for his skin colour.

Hearing that the potential tenant is a black man, the landlady is rendered silent. She remains silent for some time because of the pressures of her good-breeding. She does not deny the house bluntly. When she speaks, the black man easily makes out that she is adorned

with make-up and artificiality. Her silence itself transmits her artificial politeness.

To his surprise and embarrassment the landlady wants him to explain whether he is very dark or light. For a moment he is confused and does not know whether to continue or end the talk. He stares at the buttons on the telephone meant to disconnect the call and get the money back. He is not sure of the reality of what he has heard. He is dumbfounded. She too remains silent in a disgraceful manner. He asks her what she actually means by that question. She is considerate enough to repeat the question. The speaker asks her whether she means the distinctions of colour. She says 'yes' without any feeling. The black man plainly tells her that he is of a darkbrown colour. The landlady silently analyses the dark colours in her mind and asks for clarification.

This makes the speaker give details of the different colours of the parts of his body in a sarcastic manner. He says that his face is 'brunette', his hands and feet are 'peroxide blonde' and his bottom is 'raven black' due to friction. This greatly annoys the landlady and she hangs up on him. The speaker asks whether the landlady would like to meet him in person to judge his skin colour for herself.

The poet decides to retaliate by using high diction to perplex and mock the landlady. He uses the term 'West African sepia' to define his colour. Unable to identify what it means; the landlady begs for simplification. The poet then makes her more confused by describing the colours on the palm of his hand and soles as 'peroxide blond.' Through these lines, the poet invites the reader's attention to the ignorance of the landlady. Furthermore, the poet sarcastically invites the landlady to have an inspection of his bottom to understand the actual colour, thereby humiliating the landlady for her racist questions.

3.2.3 Analysis

Wole Soyinka's *"Telephone Conversation"* is a masterful satire on the absurdity and dehumanising nature of racial discrimination. Through humour, irony, and wit, the poem exposes the deep-seated prejudices of a supposedly "civilised" society. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between a West African man and a British landlady, highlighting how racism infiltrates even the most mundane interactions. Soyinka's critique is as much a condemnation of societal hypocrisy as it is a call to confront and dismantle such prejudices.

The poem begins with the speaker, a West African man, calling a white landlady to inquire about renting an apartment. Despite her polite and courteous demeanour, the landlady's ingrained racism quickly surfaces when she asks the man to clarify the shade of his skin, inquiring whether he is "very dark or light." This moment shifts the poem's tone from mundane to satirical as Soyinka uses the speaker's clever wit and sarcasm to dismantle the landlady's prejudice. The speaker describes his complexion in deliberately absurd terms, saying his face is "brunette," his hands and feet are "peroxide blonde," and his bottom is "raven black due to friction." These vivid, exaggerated descriptions ridicule the obsession with categorising people based on their skin tone. By turning the focus on her own ignorance, the speaker forces the landlady-and by extension, the reader-to confront the absurdity and cruelty of racism.

Soyinka's use of satire is central to the poem's critique. Satire employs ridicule, irony, and sarcasm to expose the flaws and vices of individuals or societies, and Soyinka wields these tools skilfully. The landlady's initial politeness and "good breeding" are a facade,

hiding her shallow and discriminatory mindset. Her fixation on the speaker's skin tone instead of the apartment's details reveals the hollowness of her civility. The poet contrasts the landlady's artificiality with the speaker's wit, intelligence, and politeness. Through this contrast, Soyinka dismantles stereotypes that portray white Westerners as inherently "cultured" and Black individuals as "uncivilised." Instead, it is the speaker who emerges as the more dignified and cultured individual, even as he exposes the landlady's biases with humour and irony.

The poem also critiques the deeper societal structures that normalise racism. The speaker's initial apology for being African reflects the pervasive discrimination he anticipates. This self-effacing tone underscores the psychological toll of racism, where individuals feel the need to apologise for their very existence. Soyinka highlights the internalised nature of such discrimination and critiques the societal systems that uphold it. The poem's humour does not diminish its serious message but rather amplifies it, making the reader uncomfortable with their own biases and assumptions.

Furthermore, the imagery in the poem enhances its satirical impact. The speaker vividly describes the red telephone booth, red pillars, and red double-decker bus, with the colour red symbolising anger, shame, and the unrelenting presence of racism. The landlady's silence is another potent symbol, representing the passive-aggressive nature of discrimination, where overt hostility is cloaked in polite indifference. The speaker's witty retorts not only expose the absurdity of the landlady's questions but also highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of those subjected to such prejudice.

In conclusion, *"Telephone Conversation"* is a scathing critique of racism that uses humour and satire to confront uncomfortable truths about prejudice in Western society. Soyinka's portrayal of the landlady's ignorance and the speaker's intelligent defiance exposes the absurdity of judging individuals based on skin colour. The poem's wit and irony make its critique more accessible and impactful, forcing readers to reflect on their own biases and the societal structures that perpetuate discrimination. Through this powerful work, Soyinka underscores the need for dialogue, self-awareness, and change in the face of racism.

Humour in the Poem

Wole Soyinka's poem *Telephone Conversation* is a humorous satire on racial discrimination. The exchange between the speaker and the landlady is comically exaggerated. Soyinka humorously describes the telephone booth as a "hide-and-speak." Upon hearing the landlady's "lipstick-coated" voice, the speaker quickly deduces her artificiality and make-up. His clever responses to her questions add to the humour as he skilfully leads her into confusion and embarrassment. Words like "sepia," "brunette," "peroxide blonde," and "raven black" to describe his skin colour humorously dismiss her racial curiosity. Finally, he even offers to show her his "raven-black" bottom, further mocking the landlady's prejudices. The humour effectively critiques the absurdity of judging someone by their skin colour.

The Landlady in the Poem

In *Telephone Conversation*, Soyinka portrays the landlady as a woman of privilege who is eager to rent out her property but reveals a deep-seated racism. She goes so far as to ask her potential tenant if he is dark or light-

skinned. The speaker, a West African, is wary of being rejected due to his race. The landlady seeks a quantifiable measure of his skin colour to categorise him. She is portrayed as superficial, her voice revealing her obsession with makeup and artifice. As she questions him, the speaker responds with an array of sophisticated terms to describe his skin, leaving her bewildered and embarrassed. Ultimately, he suggests she meet him in person to assess his colour first-hand, prompting the landlady, now humiliated, to end the conversation.

Recap

- Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian Nobel laureate writing in English
- He critiques political corruption, racial discrimination, and societal inhumanity
- His works span drama, poetry, essays, novels, and autobiographies
- The poem "Telephone Conversation" highlights racism in Western society
- The speaker informs the landlady about being African while renting
- Landlady questions the speaker's skin tone, revealing internal racial bias
- The speaker sarcastically mocks her ignorance using vivid, humorous imagery
- Colour symbolism highlights hypocrisy and oppression within societal structures
- The poem critiques prejudice and challenges stereotypes through biting satire
- Soyinka contrasts superficial civility with inherent racism in modern interactions

Objective Questions

1. Who is Wole Soyinka, and in which language does he write?
2. In what year did Wole Soyinka win the Nobel Prize in Literature?
3. Name any two themes commonly found in Wole Soyinka's works.
4. What is the title of Wole Soyinka's memoir?
5. In which poetry collection is the poem "Telephone Conversation" found?
6. What societal issue does "Telephone Conversation" address?
7. How does the landlady react upon learning the speaker's racial identity in "Telephone Conversation"?
8. What tone does the speaker adopt to respond to the landlady's racist question?
9. What colour does the speaker sarcastically describe his palms and soles as?
10. What symbolic colour is repeatedly used in "Telephone Conversation" to signify hypocrisy and racism?

Answers

1. Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist who writes in English.
2. Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986.
3. Two common themes in Soyinka's works are racial discrimination and political corruption.
4. His memoir is titled *Ake: The Years of Childhood*.
5. The poem "Telephone Conversation" is found in the poetry collection *Modern Poetry from Africa*.
6. The poem addresses the issue of racism.
7. The landlady falls silent, revealing her hidden racial prejudice.
8. The speaker adopts a sarcastic tone to mock the landlady's ignorance.
9. The speaker sarcastically describes his palms and soles as "peroxide blond."
10. The colour red is used symbolically to signify hypocrisy and racism.

Assignments

1. Write a critical overview of the poem "Telephone Conversation."
2. Analyse the context in which the poem "Telephone Conversation" is written as well as its current importance.
3. Write a short note on the use of visual imagery in the poem "Telephone Con-ver-sation".
4. Explore the tone and structure of the poem ""Telephone Conversation".
5. In your opinion, is the title "Telephone Conversation" apt for the poem? Support your answer with examples.

Suggested Reading

- Ojaide, Tanure. *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka*. Malthouse Press, 1994.
- https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/telephone-conver-sa-tion#CriticalOverview.
- https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-Telephone-Conver-sa-tion-by-Wole-Soyinka.
- https://poemanalysis.com/wole-soyinka/telephone-conversation/.

Unit 3

My Grand Mother's House

Kamala Das

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- analyse Kamala Das' poetry as a reflection of feminist perspectives
- evaluate the themes of love, loss, and identity in Kamala Das' works
- explain the significance of confessional poetry in Kamala Das' literary career
- compare Kamala Das' autobiographical elements with other confessional poets
- interpret the use of symbols, imagery, and diction in Kamala Das' poems

Prerequisites

Kamala Das, a trailblazer of confessional poetry in Indian English literature, is celebrated for her unflinching exploration of themes such as love, identity, and the struggles of womanhood. Fearlessly challenging societal conventions, Das gave voice to the unspoken emotional and psychological turmoil faced by women, particularly within patriarchal institutions like marriage. Born in Kerala to a culturally rich family, she inherited her literary prowess from her mother, the renowned poet Balamani Amma. Her works, infused with vivid imagery and raw emotional depth, extend beyond personal experiences to highlight universal themes of longing, loss, and discontent, making her a profound and relatable voice in Indian literature.

In *"My Grandmother's House,"* one of her most poignant works, Kamala Das explores the depths of nostalgia, reflecting on the sanctuary of her ancestral home in Malabar. The poem contrasts the unconditional love and warmth she once experienced with the emotional barrenness of her present life, marked by shallow, loveless relationships. Through a deeply personal and symbolic narrative, the poet portrays the house as a metaphor for innocence, love, and solace, which now exist only in memory. With its confessional tone and feminist perspective, the poem critiques the futility of lust-driven relationships while mourning the loss of genuine affection, showing her mastery in articulating the complexities of human emotions.

Keywords

Longing, Love, Memory, Affection, Feminism, Confession Imagery, Nostalgia

Discussion

3.3.1. About the Poet

3.3.1 Kamala Das

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is considered one of the most prominent feminist voices of the post-colonial era. She is a bilingual writer who wrote in both Malayalam (her mother tongue) and English, and she is regarded as a major poet and short story writer in Indian English writing. Her significant contributions to Indian English poetry earned her the title "mother of modern Indian English poetry."

Kamala Das wrote in Malayalam under the pen name Madhavikutty. She later changed her name to Kamala Suraiya after converting to Islam. Her important works include *The Sirens*, *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* among her poetry, the novel *Alphabet of Lust*, the short story collection *Thanuppu*, and the autobiography *My Story*. She has also received several literary accolades, which include the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Asian Poetry Prize, and Ezhuthachan Award, to name a few.

Kamala Das, the celebrated voice of feminine sensibility in Indian English poetry, was born in Southern Malabar on March 31, 1934. She was the daughter of the renowned Malayali poet Balamani Amma, inheriting a rich literary legacy. Her maiden name was Madhavikutty. Primarily educated at home, she was denied the opportunity of regular school and college education. Her grandmother, who is lovingly remembered in her poems "A Hot Noon in Malabar" and "My Grandmother's House," had a profound influence on her life.

Married at the age of fifteen to K. Madhava Das, Kamala Das found herself trapped in an emotionally unfulfilling marriage, which she often described as a male-dominated institution. Her frustrations and the absence of love in her married life are candidly expressed in her poems and her autobiography, *My Story*. Her yearning for love and connection reverberates in lines like:

I see you go away from me
And feel the loss of love I never once received.
(from "The Sea Shore").

Despite her personal struggles, Kamala Das managed to channel her pain into profound literary creations. A bilingual writer, she excelled in both Malayalam and English, producing timeless works such as *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse* (1974). Her poems have appeared in prestigious journals and anthologies like *Young Commonwealth Poets '65* and *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*. Under her pseudonym Madhavikutty, she also authored several short story collections in Malayalam. Her autobiography, *My Story*, was translated into multiple languages, solidifying her status as an international literary icon.

Kamala Das' poetry is celebrated for its boldness and emotional clarity. As Devendra Kohli aptly observed: "Courage and honesty are the strength of Kamala Das' character and her poetry... one has no regrets and that one has lived beautifully in this beautiful world." Her fearless essays, such as *I Studied All Men* and *Why Not More Than One Husband*, further established her as a writer unafraid to challenge societal norms.

In her later years, Kamala Das lived a life of introspection, often critiquing politics, societal corruption, and communal hatred. A staunch believer in the unity of humanity, she wrote, "Tradition, ideology, customs, and beliefs that have gone beyond the expiry date should be discarded." Her ability to provoke thought and inspire dialogue remained undiminished until her passing on May 31, 2009.

Kamala Das left behind a rich literary legacy and an indelible impact on Indian writing. Her fearless exploration of identity, love, and societal norms continues to inspire readers and writers across generations.

Kamala Das and Confessional Poetry

The term "confessional poetry" was coined by M.L. Rosenthal in his 1959 article *"Poetry as Confession"* while reviewing Robert Lowell's seminal work *Life Studies*. Lowell's innovative approach to exploring intensely personal and often taboo subjects had a profound impact on emerging poets of his time. Notable practitioners of this genre, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, were Lowell's students, while other poets like Allen Ginsberg and W.D. Snodgrass further popularised the form. Even before the late 1950s, poets such as John Berryman and Delmore Schwartz were producing works now classified as confessional. This poetic form often deals with deeply personal and controversial themes, such as mental illness, depression, addiction, infidelity, and suicide, bringing to light experiences that were traditionally shrouded in silence. Written in a lyrical style, confessional poetry employs literary devices like metaphors, allusions, aphorisms, and imagery to enrich its emotive power and create a profound connection with readers.

In the Indian context, Kamala Das stands as a trailblazer of confessional poetry, alongside poets like Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, and Nissim Ezekiel, whose works also exhibit traces of this style. Das, however, employed the confessional mode with remarkable effectiveness throughout her literary career. Her poetry is intensely introspective and self-analytical, narrating deeply personal moments in a conversational tone. Unlike traditional poets who often addressed broader themes, Kamala Das focused on domestic scenarios and private thoughts, laying bare her vulnerabilities and emotional struggles. Through her unique voice, she redefined the boundaries of Indian English poetry, making the personal political and paving the way for a more intimate, authentic literary expression.

3.3.2 About the Poem

The poem "My Grandmother's House," is an autobiographical poem, in which Kamala Das recalls her ancestral home and her late grandmother. This poem is written in the form of a confession, contrasting her current broken state with being unconditionally loved by her grandmother. The poem is composed of 16 lines with no discernible rhyme scheme. The poem has a melancholy tone to it. The poem begins in a nostalgic mood, telling readers about a house far away from her current residence. She once "received love" in that house.

3.3.2 My Grandmother's House

There is a house now far away where once
I received love……. That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
Among books, I was then too young
To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
Dog…you cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved…. I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

3.3.3 Summary

"My Grandmother's House" (1965), from *Summer in Calcutta*, is a poignant reflection of Kamala Das' nostalgia for her childhood home in Malabar, where she experienced the warmth and love of her grandmother. The poet recalls the deep affection she received from her grandmother, who was her closest companion during her happiest years. Now living in a distant city, the poet feels a sense of loss and melancholy, realising that the past is irretrievable.

In vivid detail, she remembers the house and her grandmother's death, an event that left an indelible mark on her. The house itself seems to mourn, withdrawing from life after the grandmother's passing. The poet reflects on her childhood fear of the many books in the house, which appeared repulsive, and how her grandmother's death left her pale and lifeless, like the moon. The house, once full of life, now stands empty, with the windows "blind" and no one to gaze through them. The poet yearns to return to this house, to revive memories of her grandmother through the cold, haunting winter winds. She wishes to revisit the house, peering through the dust-covered windows and absorbing the stillness that lingers there. The darkness of the house no longer frightens her; instead, it offers a sense of peace and solace that she desperately seeks to bring into her loveless and hopeless married life.

The image of the "window" in the poem symbolises the link between the poet's past and present, and her desire to reconnect with her lost innocence and affection. Yet, despite this longing, the poet feels a deep emptiness in her current life, as the love and warmth she once found in her grandmother's house are now absent.

The poet expresses to her husband that he cannot truly understand the depth of love and pride she felt for her grandmother's house, which once gave her a sense of belonging. Her separation from this sanctuary after her marriage has left her life hollow and devoid of love. She now feels like a beggar, desperately seeking love from strangers, unable to find the selfless affection she once had. She reflects on how, as an adult, she still seeks love, but is unable to find it, leaving her heart hungry and unfulfilled. The loss of her grandmother's love has crippled her sense of pride and happiness, leaving her lost and longing for the warmth and security she once knew.

The poem symbolises the grandmother's house as a retreat from the harsh, corrupt world, representing innocence, love, and simplicity, which are no longer present in the poet's life. It is a sanctuary of love that contrasts sharply with the exploitation and coldness of reality.

3.3.4 Analysis

"My Grandmother's House" first appeared in Kamala Das' debut anthology of verse, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). It is an autobiographical poem that vividly portrays the poet's yearning for her ancestral home in Malabar. This house represents a place where she experienced profound love and affection from her grandmother. Through the poem, Kamala Das expresses her deep sense of loss and longing, reflecting her feminine sensibility. The poem highlights the poet's emotional connection to her past and exposes the emptiness of loveless relationships. A prevailing note of pessimism runs through the poem.

In the poem, Kamala Das reflects on her nostalgic longing for Nalappat House in Malabar, Kerala. The poet, living far away in a different city, recalls the immense love and care she received as a child from her grandmother. Following her grandmother's death, the house lost its vitality, plunging into a death-like silence. The poet describes her grief, which is so overwhelming that it leaves her almost unable to articulate her emotions. Even the house itself, once vibrant and full of life, seems to share in this unbearable loss, symbolising her grandmother's irreplaceable presence.

As a child, the poet was too young to read, and the sight of books in the house seemed repulsive and frightening, like snakes. The death of her grandmother had a chilling effect on her, leaving her emotionally frozen and pale, akin to the lifeless moon.

Her intense attachment to her grandmother's house persists, and she frequently longs to revisit it. The house, now deserted and dust-ridden, beckons her to relive her cherished memories. She imagines peering through its closed windows and listening to the stillness that now envelops the place. For her, visiting the house represents a means of reconnecting with her childhood and her grandmother's love.

Feeling of Nostalgia : Love for the Past

Kamala Das is a poet deeply rooted in nostalgia, often evoking vivid memories of her past. In this poem, she poignantly recalls her childhood and the unconditional love she received from her grandmother. Disillusioned with her present life and loveless marriage, she contrasts her current emotional desolation with the warmth and care she experienced in her grandmother's house.

The poet is saddened to see her grandmother's house neglected and deserted after her grandmother's death. She expresses guilt for not visiting the house since her grandmother's passing. In her imagination, she longs to carry the darkness of the house with her as a source of strength and inspiration amid her current struggles. Her grandmother's love represents a purity and depth absent from her relationship with her unfeeling husband, who offers only lust but not love.

Confessional Elements

Kamala Das' poetry is deeply confessional, revealing intimate details about her life and emotions. The frequent use of 'I' underscores the personal and autobiographical nature of her work. "My Grandmother's House" candidly explores her relationships with family, friends, and lovers, exposing the emotional and physical voids in her life. Her poetry often conveys anger and suffering, particularly caused by lovers who disregard her emotional and intellectual needs.

In this poem, the poet metaphorically expresses her quest for love and emotional fulfilment:

I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, in small change?

Feminism: A Woman's Perspective

Kamala Das was a prominent feminist voice in Indian English poetry, advocating for women's dignity and equality in a patriarchal society. Her poetry represents the female perspective, unfiltered and unapologetic. In "My Grandmother's House", she critiques the futility of loveless relationships and the male-dominated institution of marriage. The poem reflects her disillusionment with her husband, who views her primarily as an object of lust rather than a partner deserving of emotional and spiritual connection. Her depiction of seeking love "at strangers' doors" highlights her longing for affection and respect that society denies her.

Lust vs. Pure Love

The poem juxtaposes the concepts of lust and pure love. Kamala Das criticises lust as merely physical gratification, devoid of emotional or spiritual fulfilment. For her, "skin-communicated" relationships lack the depth and reciprocity of true love. In contrast, the pure, selfless love she received from her grandmother becomes a cherished memory and a standard against which all other relationships fall short. The poet reflects on her longing for this pure love, which was "proud and loved" and remains unmatched in her adult life.

Note of Pessimism

A pervasive note of pessimism runs throughout the poem, reflecting the poet's unfulfiled desire to revisit her grandmother's house. Her yearning is tinged with despair as she imagines:

How often I think of going
There, to peer through the blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
Dog.

The poet is heartbroken to see the house in ruin, neglected and silent after her grandmother's death. The once vibrant home is now engulfed in death-like stillness, mirroring her own sense of loss and desolation.

Diction, Imagery, and Symbols

Kamala Das employs simple yet evocative diction to convey profound emotions. The ellipses in the poem emphasise her inexpressible grief. Her imagery vividly portrays the house's decay and her inner turmoil. The "blind eyes of windows" and "frozen air" symbolise death and despair, while the simile of a "brooding dog" captures her unresolved yearning to revisit her ancestral home. The house becomes a living metaphor for her consciousness, an integral part of her identity and emotional landscape.

In conclusion, "My Grandmother's House" is a deeply autobiographical and confessional poem that poignantly expresses the poet's longing for her ancestral home and the pure love she received there. Kamala Das vividly contrasts the life of lust with the life of pure love, underscoring her disenchantment with shallow relationships. Through her evocative imagery and feminist perspective, the poet lays bare her emotional struggles and nostalgic yearning. This poem remains a testament to Kamala Das' mastery in portraying feminine sensibility, loss, and the indelible impact of childhood memories.

Recap

- Kamala Das was a celebrated poet known for her bold femininity
- Born in Malabar, she inherited literary talent from Balamani Amma
- Kamala's early life was marked by emotional struggles and isolation
- Her marriage was emotionally unfulfilling, influencing her candid poetry
- "My Grandmother's House" expresses nostalgia and loss of childhood love
- House falls silent after grandmother's death, symbolising emotional desolation
- Fear of books and cold emotions after grandmother's passing
- Longs to revisit house, seeking comfort and lost memories
- Yearns for warmth and affection, contrasting with loveless present life
- House represents past love and security now lost and forsaken
- Emotional longing for pure love contrasts with current hollow relationships
- Confessional poetry exposes intimacy, personal grief, and emotional voids
- Feminist themes critique patriarchal loveless marriages and physical lust
- Vivid imagery highlights decay, grief, and nostalgia for a vanished love
- "My Grandmother's House" captures the poet's nostalgic, pessimistic worldview

Objective Questions

1. Where was Kamala Das born?
2. What was Kamala Das' maiden name?
3. Who was Kamala Das' grandmother?
4. What was the impact of Kamala Das' grandmother on her life?
5. At what age did Kamala Das get married?
6. What is the title of Kamala Das' autobiography?
7. In which anthology did "My Grandmother's House" first appear?
8. What is the main theme of Kamala Das' poem "My Grandmother's House"?
9. Where was Kamala Das' childhood home located?
10. What event left an indelible mark on the poet in the poem?
11. How does Kamala Das describe her emotional state after her grandmother's death in the poem?
12. What is the symbolic significance of the "window" in the poem?
13. In the poem, the poet compares her blood to which celestial object?
14. What emotion dominates the poem "My Grandmother's House"?
15. What does Kamala Das critique in the poem regarding her relationship with her

husband?

16. How does the poet contrast the love she experienced in her grandmother's house with her current life?
17. Which literary device is employed when the poet describes the house as having "blind eyes"?

Answers

1. Southern Malabar.
2. Madhavikutty.
3. Kamala Das' grandmother was a significant figure in her life and deeply influenced her.
4. Kamala Das' grandmother had a profound influence, especially on her childhood, and is remembered in several poems.
5. Kamala Das got married at the age of fifteen.
6. *My Story*.
7. "My Grandmother's House" first appeared in the anthology *Summer in Calcutta* (1965).
8. The main theme is nostalgia and loss, reflecting the poet's longing for her childhood home and grandmother's love.
9. Kamala Das' childhood home was located in Malabar, Kerala.
10. The death of the poet's grandmother left an indelible mark on her.
11. The poet describes her emotional state as one of loss and grief, feeling emotionally frozen like the moon.
12. The "window" symbolises the connection between the poet's past and present, representing her longing to reconnect with lost innocence.
13. Kamala Das compares her blood to the cold moon, symbolising her emotional numbness.
14. The poem is dominated by a sense of loss, melancholy, and nostalgia.
15. Kamala Das critiques the loveless and patriarchal nature of her marriage, where she feels like an object of lust rather than a partner.
16. She contrasts the pure, selfless love she received from her grandmother with the emptiness and frustration in her current, loveless marriage.
17. The literary device used is personification, where the house is described as having "blind eyes," symbolising its abandonment and decay.

Assignments

1. Comment on Kamala Das as a confessional poet.
2. Examine the women characters in Kamala Das's poems.
3. Examine 'love' as a theme in the poem "My Grand Mother's House".
4. How does the imagery used in the poem "My Grand Mother's House" enrich its message?
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "My Grand Mother's House".

Suggested Reading

- "My Grandmother's House by Kamala Das." (2016, Dec 08). https://studymoose.com/my-grandmothers-house-by-kamla-das-essay
- Das, Kamala. "My Grandmother's House." *Selected Poems*, edited by Devindra Kohli. Penguin, 2014.
- https://www.indianenglishlit.com/2021/11/poem-my-grand-mother-house-sum-mary-and-critical-appreciation.html

Unit 4

Tonight I can Write the Saddest Lines

Pablo Neruda

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- familiarise themselves with the poetic style of Pablo Neruda
- discuss the theme of the poem
- identify the literary elements in the poem
- describe the formal structure of the poem

Prerequisites

Pablo Neruda, one of the most important Latin American poets of the twentieth century, is celebrated for his ability to capture universal emotions such as love, loss, and yearning with remarkable clarity. Born in Chile in 1904, his poetry spans a broad range of themes, from sensual love to intense political activism. His early work, particularly *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, brought him widespread acclaim for its emotional depth and vivid imagery. Neruda's poetry was deeply connected to his personal life and the political upheavals of his time. His experiences as a diplomat and his eventual exile due to political turmoil shaped much of his work, reflecting both his inner emotional struggles and his commitment to social justice. Neruda's ability to intertwine personal, political, and universal themes has ensured his legacy as one of the most celebrated poets in world literature. His poems are renowned for their lyrical beauty and evocative imagery, often exploring existential questions about love, identity, and human suffering. "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines," from *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, is a powerful exploration of heartbreak and the passage of time. Through the metaphor of the vast, starry night sky, Neruda contemplates the impermanence of love and the anguish of its loss. This poem, like many of his works, resonates deeply with readers, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries with its universal themes of longing and emotional pain.

Keywords

Lost love, Memory, Pain, Poetry, Nature

3.4.1 About the Poet

3.4.1 Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda is regarded as the most significant Latin American poet of the twentieth century, celebrated for his profound impact on literature and his remarkable poetic range. His birth name was Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, and he was born on 12 July 1904 in Parral, Chile, as the son of a railway worker. From a young age, Neruda demonstrated exceptional talent, beginning to write poetry at the age of ten. A voracious reader, his literary talent became evident early on, with his poems appearing in newspapers and magazines while he was still a student at Temuco Boys' School.

In 1924, at the age of twenty, Neruda published *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair,* a volume of poetry that was an immediate success. It remains one of his most popular and enduring works, celebrated for its sensuality, passion, and emotional depth. Even at this young age, Neruda's literary output was prolific, and he quickly published several more volumes of poetry, solidifying his reputation as one of Chile's most prominent literary figures. His early success opened doors to diplomatic appointments, and he was sent as a diplomat to several Asian countries, including Burma, Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), and Java. Neruda's five years in Asia were transformative. While he developed a deep appreciation for Asian cultures and their people, he was also deeply affected by the pervasive poverty and social inequalities he witnessed. This experience shifted the tone of his poetry, moving from the passionate clarity of *Twenty Love Poems* to darker, more cryptic, and surrealistic verses. These years marked a period of experimentation and evolution in his poetic style.

In 1934, Neruda was appointed Consul in Barcelona, Spain, and later in Madrid, where he became closely associated with the Spanish literary scene. During this time, he befriended celebrated poet Federico García Lorca, who introduced him to Spanish intellectuals and writers. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) had a profound impact on Neruda, as he witnessed the horrors of war and the murder of his friend Lorca. Deeply moved, he became an ardent supporter of the Republican cause and expressed his solidarity through the publication of *Spain in My Heart,* a collection of poems that captured the pain and hope of the period. This period also marked his increasing alignment with communism, which became a defining aspect of his life and work.

In 1937, Neruda returned to Chile and began actively participating in the country's political life. During a visit to Peru, he climbed the ancient city of Machu Picchu, an experience that left an indelible impression on him. The grandeur of the ruins and the deep connection to the indigenous history inspired one of his finest works, *The Heights of Machu Picchu* (1943), which celebrates the resilience of humanity and critiques colonial exploitation. However, political turmoil in Chile in 1948

forced Neruda into exile. During this period, he composed *Canto General* (1950), an epic poetic work that encapsulates his communist ideology and chronicles the history of Latin America, blending mythology, politics, and personal reflection. His exile took him across Europe, where he continued to write prolifically and gain international recognition. By 1952, Neruda was able to return to Chile, where he resumed his political activities and intensified his poetic production. Between 1958 and his death in 1973, he published an astounding twenty volumes of poetry, further cementing his legacy as a literary giant.

In 1971, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to poetry and his ability to merge personal, political, and universal themes. By then, he was gravely ill with cancer, but he continued to write until his death in 1973, just days after the military coup that overthrew the government of his friend, President Salvador Allende.

> *"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming."*
>
> - Pablo Neruda

Neruda's poetry exhibits lyrical impulses and romantic longings for persons and places. But Neruda's oeuvre also includes poems that are deeply political. The topical and deeply political nature of some of his poems has been eclipsed by the popularity of *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* with which he is identified in public imagination. Neruda wrote poems about dictionaries, a cup of tea, and also poems about very ordinary objects including the national dish of Chile. For him no topic was too low to be rejected as a subject of poetry. Neruda served as his country's ambassador to France. He also visited the East in official capacity and his poetry bears the impress of his travels. Being a close friend of Salvador Allende who later became the President of Chile, Neruda had to undergo political trial for his writings which appeared in the national dailies of Caracas and had to flee for his life under the dictatorship of Gonzales Videla. During these dark days of his life he was supported and protected by his people. These experiences are recounted in his Memoirs. In 1973, Quimantu the famous publishing house founded by Salvador Allende published Neruda's political work A Call for the Destruction of Nixon and Praise for the Chilean Revolution. Neruda saw the poet as an artisan - an idea that he stressed in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Neruda died of cancer in 1973. Historians of Latin American Poetry mark his death as the end of a great period not just in Latin American Poetry but in the lives of Chileans. Marjorie Agosin writes: "The death of Pablo Neruda, who vindicated Latin American poetry in the eyes of the world and especially in his own country, coincides with the death of another person, Salvador Allende, who symbolises the Latin American democratic spirit. With their passing ends a period of hope lived by the Chilean people."

"Tonight I can write the saddest lines" which appeared in *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* has been translated into many languages. Marjorie Agosin assesses the importance of *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* for Neruda and for world poetry thus: "The year 1924 marks a watershed in the poetic route of Neruda. In that year, he published *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair.* The unexpected impact of this slim volume of poetry on Spanish-American and world poetry cannot be overemphasised. In it, an adolescent speaks to a woman of sensual and erotic

love with a clarity and simplicity of expression unknown until then in Spanish-language poetry."

Neruda's poetry is celebrated for its richness, variety, and accessibility. He wrote love poems, surrealist verses, political epics, and even odes to everyday objects, plants, and animals. His ability to blend the personal and the universal, the lyrical and the political, makes his work timeless and relatable to readers around the world. His poetry has been translated into numerous languages, ensuring his place as one of the most influential and widely read poets of all time.

Discussion

3.4.2 W. S. Merwin

"Tonight I can write the saddest lines" is about an experience that cuts across all kinds of boundaries and cultural barriers. It talks about one of the most powerful emotions, love and the loss of love. In simple words the narrator in the poem speaks about the loss with clarity of vision that is rarely seen in life. The poem is built on a contrast. The past was beautiful because the narrator was in love and was loved. The present is unbearable because he is no longer loved. The loss of the loved object is compounded by the fact that his beloved is in love with someone else. The poem is also about survival. In certain respects the poem belongs to that category of poems that Donald Davie calls articulate remedy. Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", and Coleridge's "Dejection Ode" belong to this category. Articulation, in such poems, has a redemptive quality. It redeems and relieves the narrator/author of some problem. The poem ends on a resolution. The narrator declares in a resolute manner that he shall no longer be affected by the pains caused by his beloved and his last poem on her is already over. The love that Neruda talks of is deeply sensuous. It rejects Platonic versions of love and grounds his experience of love in the body of his beloved. The uninhibited mode of expression adds to the appeal of the poem.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

Write, for example, 'The night is starry and
the stars are blue and shiver in the distance.'

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.
How could one not have loved her great still eyes.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense

without her.
And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.
What does it matter that my love could not keep her.
The night is starry and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing.
In the distance.
My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight tries to find her as though to bring her closer.
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. As she was before my kisses.
Her voice, her bright body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer
and these the last verses that I write for her.

-Translation by W. S. Merwin

3.4.2 Summary

The poem reflects the sorrow of lost love, blending vivid imagery, powerful emotions, and literary devices to convey the speaker's pain and longing. The poet begins by describing a starry night, with trembling stars that symbolise his sadness and loneliness. The use of personification and visual imagery, such as stars shivering in the distance and the blue sky symbolising depression, creates an evocative atmosphere.

The poet reminisces about holding his beloved under the vast sky, recalling her dark, steady gaze that made her irresistible. Although he loved her deeply, he doubts whether her love was equally sincere. Now that she is gone, the infinite night feels even more immense and empty. The poet compares the act of writing poetry to dew falling on grass, expressing how his emotions pour out in verses.

As the night continues, the poet's heart aches for his beloved, longing to bring her closer even though she is nowhere to be found. He reflects on how the moonlit nights they once shared remain unchanged, but both he and she are different now. Though he claims he no longer loves her, he acknowledges the lingering pain of love that fades quickly but leaves lasting scars.

The poet laments that she will belong to someone else, just as she did before him. Her voice, radiant beauty, and deep gaze haunt him. He admits his conflicting emotions - part of him no longer loves her, yet another part cannot let go. Ultimately, he resigns himself to writing these final lines about her, expressing his enduring sorrow and the bittersweet ache of love and loss.

3.4.3 Analysis

Pablo Neruda's *"Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines"* is the final poem in his celebrated collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, published in 1924. This poem is one of Neruda's most famous works, resonating deeply with readers due to its universal theme of love and the sorrow of losing a loved one. Its emotional depth and candid exploration of heartbreak have cemented its place as a classic in world literature.

The poem takes the form of a monologue, a departure from traditional love poetry that is often directly addressed to the beloved. Instead, this poem is an introspective meditation where the speaker grapples with his emotions and deliberates how to express his sense of loss poetically. The narrative intertwines two strands- his grief over the loss of his beloved and his struggle to articulate that grief in verse. This interplay between personal sorrow and the poetic process adds a layer of complexity and self-awareness to the poem.

The speaker mourns a love that has ended, painfully acknowledging that the woman he once cherished will belong to another. Nature is employed as a reflective backdrop for his emotional state. The vastness of the night is described as "more immense without her," and the stars "shiver in the distance," mirroring the speaker's inner turmoil and loneliness. These images create a poignant atmosphere, blending the beauty of the natural world with the anguish of separation.

While the poem contains elements of traditional love laments, it also introduces a modern, introspective tone. The speaker repeatedly questions the nature of his past love, expressing doubt and irony in lines such as, "I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too," and "She loved me, sometimes I loved her too." These expressions challenge the idealization of romantic love, suggesting that love is complex, fleeting, and often unbalanced. The self-reflective uncertainty is particularly striking in the line, "I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her." This vulnerability and honesty make the poem resonate on a deeply human level.

The grief expressed in the poem oscillates between being profound and performative. At times, the sorrow feels genuine but not overwhelming, while at others, it seems like the speaker is consciously examining the conventions of love poetry and the cultural notions of romantic love. The poem raises fundamental questions: What is love? How does it feel? How should one cope with rejection? In doing so, it subtly challenges the expectations of traditional love poetry.

An undertone of melancholy pervades the poem, reflecting the inevitability of change and the impermanence of love. Nature remains constant, but the lovers themselves have transformed. As the speaker notes:

The same night, whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

The love they once shared has vanished, and even its reality in the past is questioned. Love is portrayed as fleeting, while the process of forgetting is long and painful:

Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

However, the speaker accepts the impermanence of love, recognising that his wound will eventually heal. The poem concludes with a sense of resignation:

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer and these the last verses that I write for her.

Though the loss of a beloved is the surface subject of the poem, its deeper theme is the death of romantic love itself. The poem is also self-aware, reflecting on its own existence as a love poem. This meta-poetic quality, along with its introspective tone, makes it an original and thought-provoking work.

The love expressed in the poem is not the typical romantic idealization. Instead, it carries a profound sense of sincerity and introspection, rooted in the lover's genuine self-awareness. The speaker candidly re-examines the nature of his attachment to his beloved, with no attempt at self-deception. He acknowledges the physical intimacy they once shared and admits that his soul "is not satisfied that it has lost her." Yet, he grapples with acceptance, vowing to move forward, declaring he will no longer allow her to cause him pain or dedicate further poetic tributes to her.

What makes the poem particularly compelling is not only Neruda's unconventional exploration of love but also the simplicity and elegance of its style, as well as the vivid beauty of its imagery. The language is direct and clear, imbued with a natural strength that enhances its emotional impact. Lines such as "the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture" demonstrate Neruda's mastery of simile and lyrical expression. Even in translation, the music of the poem is captivating, but one can imagine it being even more resonant in the original Spanish. Words like "distance" and "immense" are repeated, amplifying the speaker's sense of isolation and loneliness.

Neruda's ability to connect with readers lies in his simplicity and directness. In this poem, he captures a universal experience - the sorrow of lost love- and sets it against the backdrop of a starry, windswept night. The emotions of the speaker are conveyed with honesty and sensitivity, while the natural world echoes his grief, creating a timeless and deeply moving work of art.

Recap

- Pablo Neruda, influential poet, shaped 20th-century Latin American literature profoundly
- Began writing poetry at age ten, displaying extraordinary talent early
- Published *Twenty Love Poems* at twenty, achieving immediate literary success
- Won Nobel Prize for merging personal, political, and universal poetic themes
- Known for love poems, surrealist verses, and everyday life odes universally
- His poetry's clarity, rich imagery, and universal appeal ensure timelessness
- *"Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines*" mourns lost love with vivid imagery and reflective tone
- Stars tremble, mirroring speaker's heartbreak and lingering longing
- Nature reflects sorrow; love fades but memories remain eternal
- Conflicted emotions explore fleeting love and painful separation
- Heartbreak and acceptance coexist within melancholy starry night

- Love's impermanence deepens sorrow; forgetting takes excruciatingly long
- Poet's introspection blends personal pain with poetic artistry
- Nature remains unchanged; lovers transformed by love's transience
- Lost love's scars linger; soul struggles to embrace closure
- Neruda's vivid language immortalises universal pain of heartbreak

Objective Questions

1. What is Pablo Neruda's birth name?
2. At what age did Pablo Neruda begin writing poetry?
3. Which collection made Neruda famous in 1924?
4. In which year did Pablo Neruda win the Nobel Prize for Literature?
5. What emotion does the poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" primarily convey?
6. What natural elements are used to symbolise the poet's emotions in the poem?
7. What does the poet reflect on regarding his lost love?
8. What does the poet compare the act of writing poetry to?
9. How does the poet describe his feelings about his former lover belonging to someone else?
10. In which collection does "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" appear?
11. How does the speaker view love in the poem?
12. What is the significance of the line "Love is so short, forgetting is so long"?
13. What does the speaker mean when he says "We, of that time, are no longer the same"?
14. How does the speaker resolve his feelings at the end of the poem?

Answers

1. Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto.
2. At the age of ten.
3. *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*.
4. In 1971.
5. The poem conveys sorrow over lost love.
6. The stars and the vast night are used to symbolize loneliness and sadness.
7. He reflects on how she once loved him but now belongs to someone else.
8. He compares writing poetry to dew falling on grass.
9. He feels haunted by her voice and beauty but acknowledges that she will belong

to someone else.

10. *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924).
11. The speaker sees love as fleeting, complex, and unbalanced.
12. It conveys the brief nature of love and the long-lasting pain of forgetting.
13. The speaker suggests that both he and his lover have changed over time.
14. He resigns himself to the fact that his love has ended and vows to move forward

Assignments

1. Write a detailed critical appreciation of the poem.
2. Examine the themes and symbols used in the poem.
3. Does nature reflect the emotions of the speaker in the poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines"? Support your answer with appropriate examples.
4. What literary devices are used to emphasise the theme of 'lost love' in the poem?
5. Write a short note on the poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" as an example of a lyric.

Suggested Reading

- de Costa, Rene. *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*. Harvard UP, 1979.
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BLOCK - 04

Reading Drama

Unit 1

Major Dramatic Genres

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- get acquainted with the literary genre of drama
- become aware of the various sub-genres of drama
- get introduced to the various features of Drama
- become prepared to watch and understand plays

Prerequisites

The adage "Curiosity killed the cat" aptly reflects the audience's anticipation when engaging with a play. The natural question that arises in any narrative is: What happens next? As the story unfolds, viewers inevitably speculate on its resolution—will it end happily or tragically?

Consider Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. No audience member can help but imagine an alternate ending where the lovers survive and find happiness. However, the play concludes with their tragic deaths, classifying it as a tragedy. Beyond tragedies, drama encompasses various genres, including comedies, tragicomedies, and numerous other forms, each offering distinct narrative structures and emotional impacts.

Keywords

Comedy, Tragedy, Tragicomedy, Melodrama, Masque, Epic Drama, Absurd Drama, Kitchen-Sink Drama, Verse drama

Discussion

Drama, like other literary genres, has its own genres, the understanding of which will enable us to appreciate and analyse dramas in general.

4.1.1 Comedy

Comedy, in general, is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to delight and amuse us. The term 'Comedy' is applied to plays for the stage or to motion pictures. Comedy literally means revel-song (revel means to celebrate). It is a lighter form of drama which has a happy ending. It deals with the lighter side of life and aims at evoking our laughter. Comedy may be classical or romantic in design. 'High Comedy' is serious comedy, featuring intellectual humour derived by pointing out the follies of individuals or the inconsistencies

in human nature in general. 'Low Comedy' lacks seriousness and contains episodes of buffoonery and word play and fighting.

Comedy originated in ancient Greece. Three phases in the development of comedy have been identified : Old Comedy, Middle Comedy and New Comedy. Old Comedy, prevalent in the 5th century B.C., featured fantastic plot lines and contained buffoonery and farcical elements. A chorus was a regular element of these comedies. Aristophanes was a major writer of this form. His famous comedies are *Clouds*, *Knights* and *Frogs*. Relatively little is known about Middle Comedy which was prevalent in 4th century B.C. The major writers of Middle Comedy were Antiphanes and Elixis. The elements of satire almost disappeared from the New Comedy of 4th Century and 3rd Century B.C. These comedies featured love affairs and intrigues with a happy ending. The major writers of this form were Meander, Philemon and Diphilius. Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*(1552) is considered to be the first English comedy.

4.1.2 Tragedy

The term 'Tragedy' is applied to literary, especially to dramatic representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. Any play which deals with serious subject matter and which features the downfall of the protagonist can be termed a tragedy . The most distinguishing character of a tragedy is the seriousness of the subject matter and the presence of disastrous incidents. It deals with the dark side of life and aims at inspiring us with pity and awe. In it, the characters are involved in circumstances that impel them towards an unhappy fate.

More precise and detailed discussions of the tragic form properly begin with Aristotle's classic analysis in his *Poetics*. Aristotle defined tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude complete in itself" in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than of narrative presentation, involving incidents arousing pity and fear, where with to accomplish the catharsis of such emotion. Catharsis means 'purgation' or 'purification'. Aristotle sets out to account for the fact that tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed but relieved. The term 'Catharsis' has been explained in two ways. The idea is that tragic events in the play would arouse the emotions of pity and horror in the minds of the audience and the tension caused by these emotions is relieved by the end of the play. Another explanation is that it is the protagonist of the tragedy who undergoes catharsis with his remorse at his mistakes, purging him of his guilt.

According to Aristotle, the tragic hero should be a man who is better than ordinary people and somebody who is neither thoroughly good nor bad. This hero is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because he is led by his "hamartia".Hamartia or 'tragic flaw' is an imperfection in the tragic hero's character which brings about his downfall. The earliest known tragedies were performed in the dramatic festivals in Athens in the 5th century B.C .The major tragedians were of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes. The most notable tragedian in ancient Rome was Seneca. Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* is considered to be the first English tragedy. The major tragedians of the Elizabethan Age include Thomas Kyd, John Webster and William Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are the most acclaimed tragedies.

Until the close of the 17th century, almost all the tragedies were written in verse. Later tragedies are written in prose. Tragedy since World War I has also been innovative, including experimentation with new versions of ancient tragic forms. A recent tendency has been to interpret traditional tragedies, primarily in political terms, as incorporating the problems of the tragic individual, an indirect representation of contemporary social or ideological dilemmas and crises. Henrik Ibsen, Tennessse Williams, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter are some of the great playwrights of tragedy after William Shakespeare.

4.1.3 Tragicomedy

Unlike comedy and tragedy, tragicomedy emerged a bit late. Tragicomedy, as its name implies, is half comedy and half tragedy. It is a play which mixes the elements of tragedy and comedy harmoniously. This intermingling can take place in several ways: plays featuring tragic incidents may have happy incidents or vice versa. Tragic plays can have comic subplots, etc. The term 'tragicomedy' was coined by Plautus in the prologue to his play *Amphitryon*. It was Italian playwrights of the Renaissance period who established tragicomedy as a separate genre. Although the form is primarily associated with the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, the mixing of tragedy and comedy has always been a feature of English drama.

4.1.4 Melodrama

Melodrama is a sensational dramatic piece with crude appeal to emotions and usually ending in happiness. It relies for its effect on physical action, purely theoretical language and behaviour, and naive sentiments. Melodrama was originally applied to all musical plays, including Opera. In these plays, typically the protagonists are 'flat types' – the hero is great-hearted, the heroine pure and the villain a monster of malignity. The themes depicted in melodrama are simple and without any twists. They are mostly love stories with beautiful heroines, charming heroes and scary villains. The influence of melodrama was so great that it penetrated other areas of literature and entertainment. Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Brown* and Douglass Jerrod's *Black –Eyed Susan* are examples.

4.1.5 Masque

Masque is a dramatic entertainment in which plot, character, and even to a great extent dialogues, are subordinated on the one hand to spectacular illustration and on the other to musical accompaniments. In it, the characters are deities of classical mythology, nymphs and personified abstractions like Love, Delight. Harmony, etc. The scenes are laid in ideal regions such as Olympus and Arcadia. Dances of various kinds are introduced at appropriate situations. The scenery and costumes are very elaborate. Two examples best known to modern readers are the masques within a play in the Fourth Act of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Milton's *Camus*, with songs. The 'antimasque' was a form developed by Ben Johnson. In it, the characters were grotesque and unruly. It served as a foil and counter type to the elegance, order and ceremony of the masque proper. Ben Johnson's *Oberon*, *The Hue and Cry After Cupid* are the best examples.

4.1.6 Epic Drama

Epic drama is a kind of drama introduced and developed by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's notion of epic drama rejected Aristotelian notions in several senses. By the word 'epic, Brecht signified primarily the attempt to emulate on stage the objectivity of the narration. He proposed the use of episodic

narrative. His dramas are aimed at breaking dramatic illusions. The actors were expected to be aware of the fact that they were merely performing a role, rather than trying to become the character while on stage. Such dramas would feature episodic plots interspersed by songs and by ironic commentary either by a chorus or a narrator. Stage machinery is never concealed, but visible to the audience, constantly reminding them that they are watching a play. Songs are used to invite the actors to step out of their roles and address themselves to the audience. Sometimes, the actors would change their roles in the middle of the play. These techniques were aimed at changing the relationship between the play and the audience. Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* is an example.

4.1.7 Absurd Drama

The term Absurd Drama is applied to a number of works in drama and prose fiction which have in common the view that the human condition is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd. The ancient Roman mime plays can be seen as precursors of the absurdist drama. The most direct influence was the 'existential philosophy'. The extremely cynical mood of these works reflects a prevalent frame of mind in a Europe ravaged by two World wars. Martin Esslin first used the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' in his 1961 book of the same name to describe the works of a group of dramatists of the 1950s and 1960s. The major writers considered to be part of the movement include Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. The most famous work of this form is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* and Edward Albee's *The American Dream*.

4.1.8 Kitchen-Sink Drama

Kitchen-Sink Drama is the name given to plays that depict the daily struggles of ordinary working class people. Plays in this category often deal with social issues, such as poor living conditions, lack of employment, poverty and turbulent living relationships. Many of these plays were performed on radio and television. The plays of Arnold Wesker, John Osborne and Alun Owen are associated with this form. Wesker's *The Kitchen* and *Rooms* are classic examples .

4.1.9 Verse Drama

As the name suggests, verse drama is the kind of drama which is written in verse form or in the form of a poem. Verse drama has taken as its model the Greek dramatic conventions. The concept of chorus has been used deftly in verse drama but only in the revived form of the older tradition. Many 20th century writers preferred to write verse dramas and the most important contributions were made by the Irish dramatic writers. W.B. Yeats tried his hand in verse drama. Another poet who made a deft contribution in verse drama is T.S Eliot. His *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* are famous verse dramas.

The Renaissance began in Italy around the mid 14th century, slowly moving out all over Europe and reaching England around the 16th century. The Renaissance rejected religious and superstitious beliefs in favour of actual scientific experiments and logical rational thinking.

Shakespeare's first published play was *Titus Andronicus*, printed anonymously in 1594.

Recap

- Drama's divisions
- Origin of Comedy
- The aim of comedy is to amuse
- Three phases in the development of comedy - old, middle and new
- Chorus - a regular element
- Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* published in 1552 - First English Comedy
- Tragedy - Aristotle's definition in *Poetics* - Catharsis or Purgation and Tragic flaw or Hamartia
- Shakespeare's greatest tragedies - tragic comedy, half comedy, half tragedy
- Italian playwrights who established it as a separate genre
- Melodrama is a sensational dramatic piece
- Masque – dramatic entertainment – spectacular illustration and musical accompaniment
- Epic Drama developed by Bertolt Brecht
- Objectivity of narration and breaking dramatic illusion

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Poetics*?
2. Whose play is *King Lear*?
3. Name two tragedies written by William Shakespeare.
4. What is meant by the term 'Catharsis' ?
5. Who introduced and developed 'Epic Drama'?
6. Name an epic drama written by Brecht.
7. Which philosophy directly influenced absurd dramatists?
8. Who used the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' first?
9. Who wrote *Waiting For Godot*?
10. What is Kitchen-Sink drama?
11. Who wrote *Murder in the Cathedral*?

Answers

1. Aristotle
2. William Shakespeare
3. *Hamlet, Othello*
4. 'Catharsis' means purgation

5. Bertolt Brecht
6. *Mother Courage and Her Children*
7. Existential Philosophy.
8. Martin Esslin
9. Samuel Beckett
10. Kitchen Sink Drama is the name given to plays that depict the daily struggles of the ordinary working class.
11. T.S. Eliot

Assignments

1. Write short essays ,each in about 100 words
    a. Tragedy
    b. Comedy
    c. Epic Drama
    d. Absurd Drama
2. Write an essay in about 300 words
    a. Major Dramatic genres
3. What is 'Kitchen-Sink Drama'?
4. Examine the concept of 'Catharsis'.
5. Write an essay on the various genres in English Drama.

Suggested Reading

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
3. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literaturev.* Maple, 2012.

Unit 2

Types of Comedy

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify the major genre of drama - comedy
- describe the various types of comedies
- develop an interest in the appreciation of comedy
- analyse comedies in general and their features in particular

Prerequisites

Comedy, a longstanding genre of drama, has evolved significantly since antiquity. Traditionally, it served as a vehicle for social commentary, satire, and critique of societal norms. Comedic plays employ diverse techniques to provoke laughter and engage audiences. Understanding the various forms of comedy, such as romantic comedy, enhances appreciation of the genre's complexity.

This unit explores the different divisions of comedy, examining its subgenres in detail to facilitate deeper analysis and appreciation of comedic texts.

Keywords

Romantic Comedy, Comedy of Humours, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy, Farce, Burlesque, Black-Comedy

Discussion

Comedy deals with the light side of life and aims at evoking our laughter. There are many divisions of comedy like Comedy of Humour, Comedy of Manners, etc.

4.2.1 Romantic Comedy

Romantic comedy was designed by Elizabethan dramatists on the model of contemporary prose romances. Such comedies usually depict a love affair that involves an idealised couple, especially a beautiful and engaging heroine. The course of this love does not run smooth, yet overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy reunion. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* are examples.

4.2.2 Comedy of Humours

Comedy of Humours is a type of comedy developed by Ben Jonson based on the ancient psychological theory of the "Four

Humours" that was still current in Jonson's time. The human character was governed by the presence of four basic humours (humour in Latin means 'liquid') in the body, namely blood, phlegm, choler or yellow bile and melancholy in blackbile. The mixture of these humours was held to determine a person's physical condition and type of character. In Jonson's Comedy of Humours each of the major characters has a humour in excess that gives him a characteristic distortion. Jonson's *Everyman in His Humour* is considered to be a masterpiece of this genre. The Comedy of Humours was popular from the 16 th century to the 17 th century.

4.2.3 Comedy of Manners

Comedy of Manners or the Restoration Comedy deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper class society. It relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue. It is specifically devoted to picturing the external details of life, the fashions of the time, its manners, its speech, and interests. The play often presents the picture of a highly artificial society where appearances matter more than reality. These plays are set in familiar places. They are remarkable for their neat, precise, witty, and lucid prose style. The Restoration Comedy is a genuine reflection of the temper, if not of the actual life, of the upper class of the nation. It has a sociological as well as literary interest. Unlike the Shakespearean comedy, which is Romantic in spirit, the Restoration Comedy is devoted, specifically to picturing the external details of life, the fashions of the time, its manners, its speech and its interests. The dramatists confirm their scenes to the familiar places and not to remote and far off places. The characters represent chiefly people of fashion. The plots of restoration comedies are mainly love intrigues. They are remarkable for a neat, precise, witty, balanced and lucid prose style.

The Restoration Comedy of Manners was shaped by native and French influences. It drew its main inspiration from the native tradition which had flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642. In particular it was indebted to Fletcher and Ben Jonson.

4.2.3.1 Characteristics of the Restoration Comedy of Manners:

1. **Intellectual and Refined Tone:** The Restoration Comedy is conspicuous for intellectual and refined tone. It is full of vitality and moves with great pace. It is devoid of the romantic exuberance of the Romantic Comedy. It replaces emotion by wit, and poetry by clear concise prose. The lack of passion and emotion gives it polished crystal hardness.

2. **Presentation of Aristocratic London Society:** Fashionable and aristocratic life, with its sophisticated pursuit of sensuous pleasure, provided material in plenty for the authors. The single aim of this comedy is to show the upper ranks of contemporary society. The aristocratic refined society it presents is fashionable. It exposes "the follies but these are the follies of refined gentlemen and not of low characters." The Restoration Comedy depicts a small world which has a distinct territory of its own - the fashionable parks and coffee houses of the London of Charles II's times. The characters seldom move from this charming world.

3. **Sex and Licentiousness:** Sex is treated with utter (disregard for the rules of behaviour in sexual matters) frankness. The chief subject of the comedies is the intimate relations between men and women. The relation between the

sexes at that time was one of great importance. There is a powerful undercurrent of intellectual honesty about the comedy of this period. It is the predominance given to this subject, and the manner in which it is treated that makes Restoration Comedy different from any other. The restoration comedies are considered anti-social in that they represent social institutions, particularly marriage in a ridiculous light.

4. **Characters**: The characters in the Restoration Comedies are largely types, whose dispositions sufficiently indicated by a study of their name. We have Colonel Bully, Sir John Brute, Lady Bountiful, Lady Fanciful, etc. The Restoration dramatists were far more realistic.

5. **Plot**: The Restoration dramatists were interested in wit, and portrayal of manners, rather than in the movement and progression of events, the loose-knit pattern of such a plot was of a definite advantage to them. It provided a better scope for the contrast and balance of characters. Conflicts and intrigues occupy an important place in the Restoration Comedy of Manners.

6. **Wit:** A careless, frank and debonair marks the advent of the Comedy of Manners. It was an age in which the art of talking brilliantly without meaning was regarded as one of the most important social graces. No dramatist who failed to provide wit could be successful. Men of pleasure, and wit, and women of guilt, meet and clash in Restoration Comedies.

The Comedy of Manners drew its main inspiration from the native tradition which had flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642 . It is full of vitality and moves with great pace. William Congrave is the best and finest writer of the Comedy of Manners. *The Old Bachelor* is his first play. *The Way of the World* is considered as a pure Comedy of Manners noted for its flashes of wit and brilliant sparkling dialogues. The comedy of manners was revived again in the 18 th century by Oliver Goldsmith through *She Stoops to Conquer,* and Sheriden through *The Rivals,* and *The School for Scandal*. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is another example.

4.2.4 Sentimental Comedy

Sentimental Comedy arose as a reaction to the Comedy of Manners. It is also known as 'Drama of Sensibility'. It is the representation of middle class life. Here, the virtues of public life are exhibited, and the distress rather than the faults of mankind are highlighted. The characters have plenty of sentiments and feelings. The heroes of these plays are virtuous, honourable and extremely considerate. These plays focus on pathos rather than humour. Richard Steele is considered the founder of this genre. Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* are examples.

4.2.5 Farce

Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple hearty laughter. To do so, farce employs highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters, puts them into improbable situations, and often makes free use of sexual mix ups and broad verbal humour. The word 'farce' comes from the Latin word 'Farcire' which means 'to stuff' which was first used during the medieval age to refer to farces which were inserted into medieval religious drama. In absurd drama, farcical elements are employed to produce

the effect of a universe which is not guided by reason or logic. Farce was a component in the comic episodes of miracle plays. In English drama, farce is usually an episode in a more complex form of comedy. There are farcical elements in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors* and even in tragedies such as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

4.2.6 Burlesque

Burlesque is a piece of writing which tries to make something look ridiculous by representing it in a humorous way. It is a form of imitation which is characterised by a disparity between the subject matter and the style of the work. The purpose is to ridicule a literary work or a whole genre through imitation and hence it is related to parody, and satire. The subject matter is said to be faults rather than vices. Burlesque can be classified into 'high burlesque' and 'low burlesque'. In high burlesque, a dignified style is applied to a low subject, whereas in the low burlesque a serious subject is treated in an undignified manner. The earliest notable instance of burlesque in the English stage should be the story of Pyramus and Thisbe enacted by Bottom and his friends in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But burlesque is not limited to drama alone and it can belong to any genre.

4.2.7 Black Comedy

In Black comedy, baleful or inept characters in a nightmarish or fantastic modern world play out their roles, during which events are often comic as well as horrifying and absurd. Black humour abounds in these plays. In order to shock the audience, events like death, disease and war become sources for humour. Tragic and disturbing subjects are treated with typical amusement.

Greek comedy of the fifth century resembled tragedy in its broadest aspect. It was performed at festivals of Dionysus under the aegis of the Athenian state.The structure of comedy shows many of the characteristics features of the mature magic drama, such as 'prologue', 'parados' and 'exodus.' Elizabethan dramatists polished the comic art of their times to evolve various forms of comedy. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a famous comedy.

Recap

- Literal meaning
- Two types - High comedy and Low comedy
- Different sub genres of comedy
- Romantic Comedy developed in the Elizabethan Age
- Central Theme - love
- Comedy of Humour governed by one character trait 'humour'
- Generally associated with Ben Jonson
- His masterpiece is *Everyman in his Humour*

- Comedy of Manners flourished during the Restoration period
- Sentimental Comedy emerged as a reaction against the Comedy of Manners
- Richard Steele is the founder.
- Farce seeks to provoke laughter.
- Burlesque is a form of imitation to ridicule a literary work or whole genre related to parody or satire.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
2. Who developed 'Comedy of Humours'?
3. Who is the author of *Everyman in His Humour*?
4. In which period of English Literature did Comedy of Manners flourish?
5. Which Comedy is the representation of middle class life?
6. Who is the author of *The Conscious Lovers*?
7. What is Farce?
8. Who is the author of *Doctor Faustus* ?
9. What is the purpose of 'Burlesque'?
10. From which Latin word is 'farce' derived?

Answers

1. William Shakespeare
2. Ben Jonson
3. Ben Jonson
4. Restoration Period
5. Sentimental Comedy
6. Richard Steele.
7. Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple hearty laughter
8. Christopher Marlowe
9. The purpose is to ridicule a literary work or a whole genre through Imitation.
10. Farcire

Assignments

1. Write short essays, each in about 100 words.
    a. Comedy of Manners
    b. Sentimental Comedy
    c. Burlesque
2. Briefly examine a comic play that you recently read.
3. Examine the different types of comedy in English Drama.
4. Outline the theory of four humours and its influence on the drama of Ben Jonson.
5. List the differences between 'Farce' and 'Burlesque'.

Suggested Reading

- Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
- Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
- Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
- Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature.* Maple, 2012.
- Sethuram . *A Concise Companion to Literary Form*. Emerald, 2003.

Unit 3

Types of Tragedy

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- get acquainted with the various genres of tragedy
- gain a deep understanding to analyse tragedies
- analyse the plot, characters, and themes of tragedies
- develop an awareness about the basic differences among the various sub genres

Prerequisites

Tragedy has been a cornerstone of drama, inspiring legendary playwrights across history. Ancient Greek classics set the foundation for the genre, with Aristotle's concept of tragedy remaining crucial for understanding works such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, and Macbeth.

Tragedy explores themes of fate, free will, justice, and the human condition, aiming to evoke emotions like pity and fear. Understanding its subgenres, classical tragedy, revenge tragedy and domestic tragedy enhances appreciation of its distinctive features. This unit provides an in-depth exploration of these tragic forms.

Keywords

Revenge Tragedy, Domestic Tragedy, Heroic Drama

Discussion

The term tragedies broadly applied to literary and especially dramatic representation of serious actions, which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. There are different divisions of tragedy like Revenge Tragedy, Domestic Tragedy and Heroic Drama.

4.3.1 Revenge Tragedy

This type of play is also called tragedy of blood, derived from Seneca's favourite material of revenge, murder, ghost, etc. The first English tragedy *Gorboduc,* by Norton and Sackville was a revenge tragedy. Revenge tragedy is the type of drama popularised by the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Kyd through his masterpiece *The Spanish Tragedy*. The subject matters of revenge tragedy are murder and the quest for revenge. It also includes the use of pretended insanity, suicide, a scheming

villain, philosophic soliloquies and the sensational use of horror.

The elements of Revenge tragedy also involved the victim's ghost appearing before the protagonist and prompting him to take revenge, the feigned or real madness of the protagonist play within the play, complex intrigue and disguises, etc. The best example in this case is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Senecan tragedies violence always happens off stage and it is only reported, whereas in Revenge tragedies such scenes are presented on stage to satisfy the appetite of the contemporary audience for violence and horror. Shakespeare's *Othello* is one of the few tragedies which accords closely with Aristotle's basic concepts of tragedy and plot. Most Shakespearean tragedies generally depart from introducing humorous characters, incidents or scenes called comic relief, which in various ways and degrees made relevance to the plot and enriched the tragic effect. Webster's *The White Devil,* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* are examples of revenge tragedy. Some Revenge tragedies are also termed as tragedies of blood because they are filled with gross themes of violence and bloodshed.

4.3.2 Domestic Tragedy

Domestic tragedy is also termed 'Bourgeoise tragedy'. It was written in prose and presented the protagonist from the middle or lower social ranks who suffer a commonplace domestic disaster. They are distinct from the classical drama and the Renaissance drama which focused on the life of the nobility and aristocracy. Domestic tragedies depict misfortune affecting individuals and their families. The earliest known instances of domestic tragedies are some verse plays of the Elizabethan, and Jacobean age such as Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. The Domestic tragedy was revived in prose form in the eighteenth century largely due to the influence of George Lillo. His famous work is *The London Merchant*.

4.3.3 Heroic Drama

The Heroic Drama often written in rhymed couplets deals with the conflict between love and honour or love, and duty. This type of tragedy flourished during the Restoration age. This form was influenced by the conventions of French classical drama and Italian Opera. The term suggests that these plays are similar to epics in their subject matter and style. Thus, the language used is frequently bombastic. They usually feature the conflict between the hero's passionate love affair and his duty towards his nation. The place was often set in far off countries. The action often involves the fate of an Empire. The Heroic Drama was parodied in two well-known works. The Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal,* and Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies*.

Recap

- Definition of tragedy
- The most popular type - Revenge Tragedy
- Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* which popularised tragedy
- Shakespeare's greatest tragedy
- Domestic Tragedy - the story of a middle class protagonist

- Heroic Drama flourished during the Restoration Age
- Incidents in tragedy arouse pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.
- The Elizabethan era marked both the beginning and the acme of Dramatic tragedy in England.

Objective Questions

1. Name two tragedies written by William Shakespeare.
2. What are 'tragedies by blood'?
3. Name two plays written by Webster.
4. What is the theme of Domestic tragedies?
5. Which type of drama was influenced by French Classical Drama and French Opera?
6. What are the subject matters of Revenge Tragedy?
7. Which play of Tourneur is an example of Revenge Tragedy?
8. What type of language is frequently used in Heroic Drama?
9. What conflict is usually featured in Heroic Drama?
10. Which two works are well-known parodies of Heroic Drama?

Answers

1. *Hamlet*, *Othello*
2. Some tragedies are called 'tragedies by blood' because they are filled with gruesome scenes of violence and bloodshed.
3. *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*
4. Domestic tragedies depict misfortune affecting individuals and their families.
5. Heroic Drama
6. Murder and quest for revenge
7. *The Atheist's Tragedy*
8. Bombastic language
9. Conflict between hero's passionate love affair and his duty towards the nation
10. *The Rehearsal* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies*

Assignments

1. Write an essay on "Different types of tragedies" in about 300 words.
2. Critically analyse a tragedy of your choice.
3. Briefly explore the genre of Revenge Tragedies in English drama.
4. Write a short note on ‘Heroic Drama’.
5. Discuss the genre of ‘Domestic Tragedy’ in English drama.

Suggested Reading

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Pearson, 2008.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature*. Maple, 2012.

Unit 4

Dramatic Devices

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- familiarise themselves with the various dramatic devices used by the playwrights
- enhance their understanding of plays and their features
- become acquainted with the various aspects by which plays become appealing
- analyse some of the predominant dramatic devices in plays

Prerequisites

Dramatic devices encompass a variety of techniques and strategies used in theatre and other forms of performance to enhance dramatic tension, engage audiences, and communicate meaning effectively. These devices include essential elements such as dialogue, setting, lighting, sound effects, and stage directions, each contributing to the overall impact of a performance.

A thorough understanding of dramatic devices allows for a deeper appreciation of theatrical artistry and the ways in which drama mirrors and influences human experiences, emotions, and societal issues. By critically analyzing these elements, students can develop a nuanced perspective on how playwrights and directors craft compelling narratives and evoke powerful audience responses. This foundational knowledge is crucial for studying drama, as it enables a richer interpretation of plays, from classical works to contemporary performances.

Keywords

Soliloquy, Aside, Irony, Verbal, Dramatic devices

Discussion

4.4.1 Irony

In most of the modern critical uses of the term 'irony', it expresses the root sense of dissembling or of hiding what is actually the case, not however to deceive but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects. Irony refers to a range of literary devices which is based on a discrepancy between appearance and reality. The word irony has its root in a Greek word which means 'dissembling'. The Greek comedy featured a stock character named 'eiron' who pretended to be stupid and spoke in understatement. There are a few varieties of irony like verbal irony and dramatic irony.

4.4.1.1 Verbal Irony

Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is expressed. It is the simplest form of irony in which the speaker says the exact opposite of what the other person means. The irony is similar to sarcasm but it is different from sarcasm in that the intention is not to insult. In the overall situation the speaker intends a very different and often opposite attitude or evaluation. That's when Mark Antony keeps repeating that "Brutus is an honourable man" in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, he means to convey the exact opposite meaning. A more complex instance of irony is the famous sentence with which Jane Austen opens *Pride and Prejudice*. "It is universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". Actually, it means that a single woman is in love with a rich husband and that a rich young man is sought after by young unmarried women and their families.

4.4.1.2 Structural Irony

Structural irony is when the discrepancy in meaning is derived from a structural feature such as an unreliable narrator. Unreliable narrators are narrators who hide or do not grasp the full significance of events that they recount. Verbal irony depends on the knowledge of the speaker's ironic intention which is shared both by the speaker and the reader. On the otherhand structural irony depends on a knowledge of the author's ironic intention shared by the reader but is not intended by the speaker.

4.4.1.3 Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony involves the situation in which the audience or reader shares with the author the knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant. In simple terms, dramatic irony arises when the audience has the knowledge about the characters' situation that the characters themselves lack. Writers of Greek tragedy based their plots on legends whose outcome was already known to the audience, and made frequent use of this device. A classic example can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* in which, Romeo finds Juliet dead and he commits suicide by drinking poison. But the audience is aware that Juliet is only asleep, having drunk a potion which will make her look lifeless for forty-four hours.

There are other forms of irony such as cosmic and romantic irony which are more used in other literary genres, and not commonly used in dramas.

4.4.2 Soliloquy

Soliloquy is the act of talking to oneself whether silent or aloud. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character alone on stage attached to their thoughts allows the audience to know what is passing in their mind. This dramatic device is most commonly found in Elizabethan drama. It is not supposed to be heard by anyone and spoken when another actor is present on the stage. Shakespeare used this device largely, his most famous ones being found in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Dramatists continue to use soliloquy in the Restoration period and in the 18th century. With the emergence of naturalistic drama, the convention fell into disguise because naturalistic drama tried to represent reality with utmost sincerity. "To be or not to be" is a famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*.

4.4.3 Aside

Aside is a dramatic device in which a character expresses to the audience his or her thoughts or intention in a short speech

which by convention is audible to the other characters on the stage. Renaissance plays use this convention to reveal the intimate thoughts of the characters. Some playwrights use this device for comic effect. Aside is not used in modern drama. Eugene O' Neill used this device to a great extent in his play *Strange Interlude*.

4.4.4 Chorus

Among the ancient Greeks, the chorus was a group of people wearing masks who sang verses while performing dance-like moments at religious festivals. In ancient Greek drama, the chorus is a group of actors who witnesses and comments upon the action of the play. The word 'chorus' means group of dancers. It is believed that Greek tragedy evolved out of these performances. During the Elizabethan, and Jacobean age the term chorus was applied to a single person who in some plays spoke the prologue and epilogue. This character served as the playwright's vehicle for commentary on the play and for the exposition of the subject, time and setting. In some of the plays the chorus would be accompanied by a dumb show. Modern scholars use the term 'choral character' to refer to a person within the play itself who stands apart from the action and makes comments. The Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear,* and Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra* are examples. Chorus have almost disappeared from modern drama. One notable instance of the use of chorus in the twentieth century drama is T S Eliot's verse play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.

4.4.5 Imagery

Imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a literary work. Imagery is used to describe or compare something so that the reader forms a picture in their mind. It is an ornate, figurative illustration, especially used by the author for particular effect.

4.4.6 Paradox

Paradox is a statement that seems to say something opposite to common sense or the truth, but which may contain a truth. Example: "more haste, less speed". It is used to draw the attention of the reader or the listener and provides emphasis. G. K Chesterton was a master of paradox. His plays abound in paradoxes which drive the readers to laughter.

4.4.7 Pathetic Fallacy

It is the attribution of human feelings and responses to inanimate things or animals, especially in art, and literature. It is a phrase invented by John Ruskin in 1856 to signify any representation of inanimate natural objects that ascribes to them human capabilities, sensations, and emotions.

4.4.8 Nemesis

Nemesis is the Greek goddess of retributive justice. Nemesis generally stands for punishment of the wicked. Nemesis is the protagonist's main enemy. The person diametrically opposes the main character values or beliefs. For example in the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet acts a nemesis for Claudius who kills his father and marries his mother. Claudius' devilness calls for immediate retribution.

Famous soliloquies of Shakespeare

"To be or not to be "- by Hamlet in *Hamlet*.
"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" - by Macbeth in *Macbeth*
"All the World is a stage"- by Jacques in *As You Like It.*

Dramatic Irony : If you are watching a movie about *The Titanic* and a character leaning on the balcony right before the ship hits the iceberg says, "It is so beautiful I could just die" - that is an example of dramatic irony.

"The police station gets robbed", a post on Facebook complains about how useless Facebook is - these are examples of situational irony.

Recap

- The purpose of irony is to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects
- Three types of irony- verbal, structural and dramatic
- In verbal irony, what the speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is expressed
- In verbal irony, the speaker says exactly the opposite of what the other person means
- Structure irony is when the discrepancy derives from a structural feature
- Dramatic irony is a situation in which the audience or reader shares with the author the knowledge of circumstances about which character is ignorant
- Soliloquy is talking to oneself whether silent or aloud
- The audience gets acquainted with what is passing in the characters mind
- In aside, a character expresses to the audience their thoughts or intention
- Chorus is a group of masked actors who would witness and comment upon the action of the play
- Choral characters are persons within the play itself who stand apart from the action

Objective Questions

1. What are the different types of irony?
2. What is the dramatic device in which the charecter talks to oneself, whether silent or aloud ?
3. In which play do you come across the famous soliloquy 'To be, or not to be '?
4. Name the dramatic device in which a character expresses to the audience his or her thoughts or intention in a short speech.
5. Name a verse drama of the 20th century.

6. What are unreliable narrators?
7. What aspect of Romeo's death is an example of dramatic irony?
8. Which dramatic device attributes human feelings and responses to things or animals?
9. What purpose does the 'choral character' serve?
10. Who is 'Nemesis' in Greek mythology?

Answers

1. Verbal, Structural and Dramatic irony
2. Soliloquy
3. *Hamlet*
4. Aside
5. *Murder in the Cathedral*
6. Narrators who hide or do not grasp the full significance of events they recount.
7. The audience is aware that he kills himself mistakenly assuming Juliet's death (she has only taken a sleeping potion).
8. Pathetic Fallacy
9. The 'choral character' stands within the play and comments on the action.
10. She is the goddess of retributive justice.

Assignments

1. Write an essay in about 100 words.
   (a) Irony
   (b) Soliloquy and Aside
2. Write a detailed note on the various dramatic devices used in drama.
3. Discuss the evolution of the chorus in English Drama.
4. What is meant by 'Paradox' in drama?
5. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Imagery
   (b) Pathetic Fallacy
   (c) Nemesis

Suggested Reading

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature.* Maple, 2012.
5. Sethuram . *A Concise Companion to Literary Form*. Emerald, 2003.

BLOCK - 05

Shakespearean Drama

Unit 1

William Shakespeare: Life and Works

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- acquaint themselves with the relevant period and social milieu in which Shakespeare as a writer emerged
- get a general overview of Shakespeare's personal and literary life
- obtain a familiarity with Shakespeare's oeuvre
- familiarise themselves with the general themes and styles of Shakespeare's works

Prerequisites

More than four centuries have passed since the Bard of Avon left this world, yet his literary masterpieces continue to captivate and stimulate readers' minds worldwide. The English playwright's works have been translated into over 85 languages, studied extensively in the academic curriculum, and adapted countless times for the stage and screen. Why does Shakespeare still matter? The answer is simple: his plot and themes have surpassed the test of time, resonating with readers across generations and cultures.

The enduring appeal of Shakespeare lies in his ability to capture the essence of human nature and universal emotions that transcend time and place. His works speak to us through new adaptations and interpretations, offering fresh perspectives on the timeless themes of love, power, jealousy, revenge, and ambition. For every reader, Shakespeare's characters are reflections of ourselves, and his themes strike a chord with our life experiences.

As a literature student, when you delve into the world of Shakespeare, it is essential to remember the historical context in which he lived and worked in England. Understanding his private and public life, along with the chronological order and background in which all his works were written, is crucial in comprehending his artistic choices. The external and internal factors that influenced Shakespeare, from his time's cultural and social norms to his personal experiences, shaped the complexity and beauty of his works.

Shakespeare's enduring relevance is a testament to his unparalleled artistic vision and insight into the human condition. His works continue to inspire and challenge readers, providing a timeless perspective on the joys and struggles of the human experience.

Keywords

Writer, Drama, English sonnets, Chronology

Discussion

Despite the limited biographical material available from Shakespeare's time, many details about his life, and theatrical career have been pieced together by scholars in the years following his death. Although there were no significant biographies of Shakespeare until 1709, many anecdotes, and legends circulated about him. It was Nicholas Rowe who made the initial effort to compile available information and various versions of Shakespeare's works to create a coherent narrative. His volume, *The Works of Mr William Shakespeare; Revised and Corrected,* served as a source for subsequent works by different authors until the 19th century.

5.1.1 Private Life

Shakespeare's exact date of birth remains a mystery, but April 23rd is traditionally celebrated as his birthday. The register of the Stratford parish records his baptism date as April 23, 1564, and he passed away on the same date and month in 1616. Unfortunately, no surviving records shed light on Shakespeare's childhood and education. The second public record concerning his private life is the marriage license granted to him and his wife, Anne Hathaway, on November 27, 1582. Shakespeare and Hathaway had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

The interval from 1585 to 1592 in Shakespeare's life is not documented, so it is known as the "lost period" and is surrounded by tales and conjectures about the writer. By the conclusion of the 16th century, Shakespeare had gained prosperity and the favour of the aristocracy, despite not holding a specific government position. We get a hint of his financial interest and its successful management from the way he invested money to buy properties in Stratford, London.

There are no surviving private or official letters from Shakespeare except one written by his friend Richard Quiney. In the letter, Quiney mentions taking a business trip from Stratford to London and needing 30 pounds. He writes to Shakespeare, a friend and fellow resident of Stratford, from the Bell Inn in Carter Lane, asking for a loan and addressing him as "To my loving good friend and countryman, Mr Wm. Shakespeare." Little is known about what happened after the letter was sent, but years later, Quiney's son, Thomas married Shakespeare's daughter, Judith, indicating a close friendship between the two families.

> According to a well-known legend, Shakespeare spent the years between 1585 and 1592 in London, where he supposedly worked as a stable boy taking care of horses before he began writing for the theatre. During this time, he became acquainted with the playhouses and began his career as a playwright.

Shakespeare's last will, written on March 25, 1616, provides another personal record of the playwright. In this document, he left most of his property to his elder daughter Susanna's sons. Shakespeare's signature on the will appears shaky, suggesting that he was in poor health at the time of signing. He passed away just a month later. Shakespeare's gravestone at the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford bears the following inscription:

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear

To dig the dust enclosed here.

Blest be the man that spares these stones,

And must be he that moves my bones."

Eventually, a monument was erected in 1623 with a Latin epitaph attributing the wisdom of Nestor, the genius of Socrates and the poetic abilities of Virgil.

5.1.1.1 Social Milieu of Shakespeare's Age

Shakespeare lived during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, also known as the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603), and King James I, also known as the Jacobean Era (1603-1625). The Elizabethan society in which Shakespeare lived and wrote struggled to emerge from the hangover of the ideas and social structures established during the Middle Ages. The renaissance spirit was gradually permeating into the life and culture of the English people. The Queen was still considered the representative of God on earth. But unlike the Middle Ages, the Elizabethans challenged the high-handedness of the Catholic Church. Religious leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin and so on challenged the authority of Rome. The Church of England, which King Henry VIII founded, was firmly established by the Queen.

Meanwhile, the rise of capitalism, the expansion of education and the beginning of colonialism unsettled the existing social and economic order. Colonialism and the wars fought in Europe exposed England to different cultures. London became a cosmopolitan city and the most important cultural centre, reflecting the growing prominence of England in trade, art and naval might under the Queen. London's population rose beyond its limits. The emergence of the productive merchant middle class led to an economic boom.

When Shakespeare entered the theatre, English audiences were familiar with the translated versions of the Latin comedies of Terence and Plautus. At the same time, the Senecan tragedies were performed in Elizabethan universities and schools. Also, native dramatic versions in continuation with the medieval miracle plays were performed in villages, and towns until they were banned during the Queen's reign. These plays assimilated French farce, interludes by which the clowns entertained the audience, and morality plays in which abstract themes were presented. Even the Oxford and Cambridge-educated 'University Wits' (Marlowe, Kyd, Green, Peele and Lyly), who were Shakespeare's predecessors, wrote plays using and improvising the popular narrative forms. Meanwhile, English as a language was getting standardised and spreading its range. The cheap and easy accessibility to printed books led to the standardisation of the vocabulary and grammar of the language.

5.1.1.2 Shakespeare as a Writer

It was Robert Greene, one of the 'University Wits', who first mentioned Shakespeare as a playwright, though in a sarcastic tone, in his posthumously published book *A Groats-worth of Witte, Bought with a Million of Repentance* in 1592. Henry Chettle, in his 1592 published book, *Kind-Hearts Dream*, mentions Shakespeare as an established literary figure and professional playwright though nothing much is known about his beginning as a writer. He was a prominent member of Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theatre company which comprised a group of male actors. Richard Burbage was the lead actor in the company, and he played the roles of Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. By 1595, Shakespeare became the 'sharer' in the company, as he shared the profit and expenses of the company. An entry in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Royal Chamber prepared in March 1595 mentions the role of Shakespeare in the theatrical world of London and his prominent

position as a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's Company. He is mentioned as a payee receiving 20 pounds post the Christmas performance before Elizabeth I, the Queen. The company was shifted to the newly built Globe Theatre in 1599.

On 29 June, 1613, an accidental cannon firing, part of Henry VIII's performance, set the Globe Theatre, made of reused wood and thatches, ablaze.

In 1603, Lord Chamberlain's Men was renamed the King's Men with the accession of James Stuart to the English throne. The company functioned successfully until the puritan parliament closed the theatres in 1642.

Shakespeare's Globe, built on the banks of the Thames river, is a modern reconstruction of the Globe Theatre based on the structure of the destroyed theatre. It is 750 feet away from the original location of the Globe Theatre.

London was hostile towards theatres in Shakespeare's days, yet he managed to attract the patronage of the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley. He eventually dedicated "Venus and Adonis", and "Rape of Lucrece," his first published poems, to the Earl of Southampton. Research demonstrated that he possessed extensive knowledge and was highly competent in overseeing both the theatrical productions and financial aspects of his business. His success in the industry is evident by his purchase of New Place, a grand estate in Stratford, in 1597. Despite his family residing in Stratford, he resided in London throughout his professional career.

5.1.2 Shakespeare's Works

Determining the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays is a formidable task due to the lack of recognition of playwriting as a literary pursuit during his time, resulting in incomplete or corrupted publications. Only half of his plays were published while he was alive, and these were often incomplete or flawed, known as "bad quartos".

Following Shakespeare's death, an edition of his collected works, the First Folio, was published in 1623. However, many of his manuscripts were lost in 1642 when theatres were closed, and puritans burned them. Since the publication of the First Folio, scholars and critics have attempted to establish the order and originality of his plays. Nicholas Rowe's edition of Shakespeare in the 18th century was the basis for all subsequent biographies until the 19th century. Modern scholars aim to compile a perfect and authentic text by drawing from all available sources, or by compiling different versions of the text into the same edition, dismantling the notion of an "original" text. Regardless, it is known that Shakespeare dedicated twenty years of his life to writing plays and poetry.

During the period between 1589 and 1612, Shakespeare produced 38 plays. His first play is generally considered to be *Henry VI Part I*, and his last *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In the early years, between 1589 and 1594, he experimented with a variety of literary forms, including erotic poems such as "Venus and Adonis", courtly comedy like, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, farcical comedy such

as *The Taming of the Shrew*, history plays like *Henry VI, Parts I, II,* and *III*, *Richard III*, a moral narrative poem called "The Rape of Lucrece," and a tragedy of blood in *Titus Andronicus.* During this period, he also collaborated with other authors on a play called *Sir Thomas More* and wrote some sonnets. The theatres were closed due to the plague in 1592 and 1593, during which time Shakespeare turned to write poems. He published "Venus and Adonis" in 1593 and "The Rape of Lucrece" in 1594, which caught the attention and patronage of the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, to whom both poems were dedicated.

Between 1595 and 1600, we see him gradually moving out of his amateurish writing. In this period, he wrote *Love's Labor's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, King John, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, Richard II, Henry IV- Part I and II, Henry V, Julius Caesar, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet.*

Between 1601 and 1607, Shakespeare emerged as a mature playwright writing more tragedies, exploring the darker sides of human minds and the lure of power. Major plays of this period include *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

Between 1608 and 1613, Shakespeare wrote later plays like *Timon of Athens, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. It is believed that as Shakespeare approached the end of his life, he collaborated with a young playwright named John Fletcher to co-author two plays: *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Cardenio, a play thought to have been co-written by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, is believed to have been lost and did not withstand the test of time..

A quick look into the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays:

- *Henry VI Part I* [1589- 1590]
- *Henry VI Part II* [1590-1591]
- *Henry VI Part III* [1590-1591]
- *Richard III* [1592-1593]
- *The Comedy of Errors* [1592-1593]
- *Titus Andronicus* [1593-1594]
- *The Taming of the Shrew* [1593-1594]
- *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* [1594-1595]
- *Love's Labor Lost* [1594-1595]
- *Romeo and Juliet* [1594-1595]
- *Richard II* [1595-1596]
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [1595-1596]
- *King John* [1596-1597]
- *The Merchant of Venice* [1596-1597]
- *Henry IV Part I* [1597-1598]
- *Henry IV Part II* [1597-1598]
- *Much Ado About Nothing* [1598-1599]
- *Henry V* [1598-1599]
- *Julius Caesar* [1599-1600]
- *As You Like It* [1599-1600]
- *Twelfth Night* [1599-1600]
- *Hamlet* [1600-1601]
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* [1600-1601]
- *Troilus and Cressida [*1601-1602*]*
- *All's Well that Ends Well* [1602-1603]
- *Measures for Measure* [1604-1605]
- *Othello* [1604-1605]

- *King Lear* [1605-1606]
- *Macbeth* [1605-1606]
- *Antony and Cleopatra [1606-1607]*
- *Coriolanus* [1607-1608]
- *Timon of Athens* [1607-1608]
- *Pericles* [1608-1609]
- *Cymbeline* [1609-1610]
- *The Winter's Tale* [1610-1611]
- *The Tempest* [1611-1612]
- *Henry VIII* [1612-1613]
- *The Two Noble Kinsmen* [1612-1613]

5.1.2.1 General Classification of Shakespearean Plays

Shakespeare's 38 plays are commonly classified into four categories to provide a general understanding of his themes and style, although his works often contain elements of tragedy, comedy and history. The accepted categories are History, Comedy, Tragedy and Problem Plays.

History Plays focus on the English royalty, including kings and queens, during the War of the Roses. Although these plays are not historically accurate, Shakespeare drew inspiration from political events of his time to appeal to the Elizabethan and Jacobean society. The major history plays include *Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra, Henry IV Part I, Henry V, Richard III, Richard II, Henry VIII, King John, Henry IV Part II,* and *Edward III*.

Comedy Plays in Shakespearean theatres are distinct from contemporary comedy, with specific elements and structure, such as characters overhearing conversations leading to confusion and cross-dressing. Often, the plot revolves around a moral, and some plays have dark undertones. Major comedy plays include *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It* and *The Tempest.*

Tragedy Plays are more famous and frequently performed than Shakespeare's comedies. These plays feature tragic heroes who are powerful throughout the play but meet a tragic end. Major tragedy plays include *Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus.*

Problem Plays do not fit into the general categorisation and are classified together as a separate category. These plays include *All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure,* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and some scholars add *The Merchant of Venice, Timon of Athens,* and *Winter's Tale.* The main characters in these plays represent a social problem rather than being comedic or tragic figures.

5.1.3 Shakespeare's Sonnets:

Between the early 1590s and 1605, Shakespeare wrote and published 154 sonnets, which explore themes, such as love, time, ageing, infidelity, lust, absence and beauty. Divided into three quatrains followed by a couplet, Shakespeare's sonnets are composed of 14 lines and follow the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg,* later known as the "English sonnet."

The first 126 sonnets are addressed to a Young Man, whom the speaker ("I") loves and are the subject of much quarrelling and despair. In the first 20 sonnets, the speaker urges the Young Man to marry to preserve his beauty through his children. The remaining sonnets deal with time, beauty and love.

The Young Man is also in love with a Dark Woman, who is attractive, and the speaker is both attracted to and repelled by her. In sonnets 33 to 35, the speaker quarrels with the Young Man, and some sonnets describe the poet's loneliness in the Young Man's absence and irresponsible behaviour.

Sonnets 127 to 152 are addressed to the Dark Lady, while sonnets 79 to 86 focus on a Rival Poet who competes for the Young Man's attention. Sonnets 153 and 154 are not directly connected to the rest of the sonnets and instead focus on the god Cupid and desire.

Although there are many speculations about the characters' identities and how much they are connected to Shakespeare's real life, it is undeniable that Shakespeare's poetic persona, different from his real life, intensifies the drama in some of the sonnets.

5.1.4 Shakespeare's After Life

Shakespeare's memory lived long after his death within the theatre community. His plays remained in the repertoire of the King's Men until 1642, earning him the titles 'Swan of Avon' and 'Bard of Avon.' In the First Folio, English poet and playwright Ben Jonson dedicated a poem titled "To the Memory of my Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare and What he Hath Left us," praising Shakespeare's natural genius. However, in his prose work *Timber, or Discoveries* (1630), Jonson criticised Shakespeare's speed of writing, using Julius Caesar as an example. Ben Jonson ridiculed Shakespeare for "never blotted out a line." Later, Jonson declared that no English author could be compared to Shakespeare and that his works stood alone in comedy. He also wrote about how Shakespeare's plays left a strong impression on Queen Elizabeth I and King James I.

Shakespeare's contributions to the English language were immense, as his writings helped standardise spellings, phrases, vocabulary and grammar. Samuel Johnson, in his *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), noted that Shakespeare had introduced thousands of words and phrases into the English language during his writing career. *The Oxford English Dictionary* attributed 3000 original words to Shakespeare's works. Phrases like "break the ice," "with bated breath," "tongue-tied," "be-all and end-all," and "there is method in my madness," all originated from Shakespeare's writings. These phrases, along with others like "in a pickle," "eaten out of house and home," "hoodwinked," "it's Greek to me," "forever and a day," "green-eyed monster," "cruel to be kind," "wild goose chase," and "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve," have become common usages in the English language that we may not even realise they originated from Shakespeare's works.

Shakespeare's influence extends far beyond the English language. His plays, written for a limited audience in a repertory theatre in the 16th and 17th centuries, have been adapted and reproduced into different languages, genres and mediums. Like Shakespeare, no other writer has managed to break national and linguistic barriers.

Recap

- Shakespeare's exact date of birth remains a mystery, but April 23rd is traditionally celebrated as his birthday.
- Lived during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, also known as the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603), and King James I, also known as the Jacobean Era (1603-1625).
- Became a 'sharer' in the Lord Chamberlain's Men theatre company by 1595
- Became a successful business owner and purchased a grand estate in Stratford.
- Determining the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays is a formidable task.
- His plays are commonly classified into four categories: History Plays, Comedy Plays, Tragedy Plays, and Problem Plays.
- Between the early 1590s and 1605, he wrote and published 154 sonnets.
- His sonnets explore love, time, ageing, infidelity, lust, absence and beauty.
- His writings helped standardise English spelling, phrases, vocabulary and grammar.

Objective Questions

1. When is Shakespeare's birthday generally celebrated worldwide?
2. When did Shakespeare pass away?
3. Who was Shakespeare's wife?
4. Who was the new middle class that emerged during Shakespeare's life?
5. Who mentioned Shakespeare for the first time as a playwright in print?
6. Who first mentioned Shakespeare as an established literary figure and a professional playwright?
7. In which theatre company was Shakespeare a member?
8. When were the theatres shut down due to the spread of the plague in London?
9. Who was the young playwright with whom Shakespeare entered into collaboration by the end of his career?
10. How many plays were written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher?
11. Name the plays written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher?
12. Which sonnets are addressed to the Dark Lady?
13. Which sonnet talks about a Rival Poet?
14. Which sonnets focus on the God Cupid?
15. What was Shakespeare's nickname?
16. Who is the 'Swan of Avon'?

Answers

1. 23rd April
2. 23 April 1616
3. Anne Hathaway
4. Merchants
5. Robert Greene
6. Henry Chettle
7. Lord Chamberlain's Men
8. 1592 and 1593
9. John Fletcher
10. Two
11. *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*
12. Sonnet 127 to 152
13. Sonnet 79 to 86
14. Sonnet153 and 154
15. Bard of Avon
16. William Shakespeare

Assignments

1. Write a paragraph on the available data about Shakespeare's private life.
2. What were the social conditions of the age in which Shakespeare lived?
3. Prepare a summarised outline of Shakespeare's dramatic career.
4. Explain Shakespeare's Historical, Comedy, Tragedy, and Problem Plays briefly.
5. Develop a note on Shakespeare's poems.

Suggested Reading

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Unit 2

Julius Caesar

William Shakespeare

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:

- introduce themselves to a Shakespearian play and its structure
- obtain a detailed summary of the play
- identify relevant Acts and Scenes from the play
- appreciate the timelessness and mastery of Shakespeare as an author
- trace the psychological evolution of the character and relate it to contemporary issues

Prerequisites

You might have heard the phrase "you too, Brutus?" or "the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves". Both these phrases are from the play *Julius Caesar* written by William Shakespeare. Such is the greatness of Shakespeare's writings that we unknowingly quote his works and words in our day-to-day life.

As a literature student, you are expected to be well-acquainted with William Shakespeare and his position in English literature. One of his famous works, *Julius Caesar*, was composed during 1599-1600, likely for the inaugural performance of the newly-constructed Globe Theatre by the river Thames. The play is not a historical account of the assassination of Julius Caesar but rather Shakespeare's interpretation of those events. As you read the play, pay attention to Shakespeare's portrayal of darker themes, the tragic structure of the play, and the characterisation of its cast. Additionally, take note of the cyclical nature of human history that Shakespeare illustrates, showcasing the rise and fall of powerful men.

Keywords

Julius Caesar, Tragedy, Murder, Power, Roman, History, Problem

Discussion

Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* was written between 1599 and 1600 and is known for being one of his shortest plays. It was first published in print form in the First Folio in 1623. The play is set in 44 BCE in Rome and depicts the events leading up to the assassination of Julius Caesar, a senator and statesman. At the time, Rome was transitioning from a republic to an empire, stretching from North Africa to Britain and Spain to Persia. As Rome grew stronger, infighting among the senators and military leaders created social and political unrest, threatening its existence. The citizens were divided into the plebeians, and those represented in the Senate.

Many men sought to gain power and become the ruler of Rome, but only Gaius Julius Caesar came closer. He was a statesman and army general who led the Roman army to victory in many wars, helping him become a prominent politician. The Roman Republic had a constitution to prevent any individual from attaining too much power and becoming a monarch. Caesar entered a secret political alliance with Pompey and Crassus, promising to help each other overcome the constitutional hurdles. This alliance was called the First Triumvirate. However, with Crassus's death, Pompey shifted his allegiance to the Senate, which adhered to the constitution. In the ensuing civil war, Caesar defeated Pompey in the battle of Pharsalus, ultimately leading to Pompey's death.

In 45 BCE, Caesar defied the Senate, sparking a civil war that left him unchallenged and in control of the government. However, his authoritarian government and populist reforms were not well-received by the elites and senators, who feared being oppressed and ruled by one of their own. A conspiracy led by a group of senators, including Cassius and Brutus, resulted in Caesar's assassination on March 15, 44 BCE, the Ides of March. This event sparked a series of civil wars that eventually ended with Caesar's nephew, Octavius, consolidating power and Rome becoming an empire.

5.2.1 Act and Scene Wise Summary of the Play

Act 1: Scene 1

In February 44 BC, the scene opens on an ancient Roman street where Marullus and Flavius, the tribunes of Rome appointed to protect citizens' rights, are trying to disperse a crowd. They question a few workers about their absence from work and their profession. While the first worker answers straightforwardly, the second uses puns to suggest that he is a cobbler and that they are there to see Caesar returning to Rome after a victorious war. Marullus accuses them of dishonouring Pompey's memory and asks them to seek forgiveness from the gods. Flavius suggests taking the gathering to the banks of the Tiber river to repent for disrespecting Pompey.

Later, Flavius asks Marullus for assistance in removing decorations hung on public statues to prevent Caesar from becoming a tyrant. Despite Marullus' concern about the propriety of doing so during the feast of Lupercal, Flavius insists on removing the ornamentations.

During the celebration of Caesar's victory, a stranger warns Caesar to "beware of the Ides of March" as the day falls on the 15th of the month in the Roman calendar, the final day for paying off debts. Caesar's protégé, Mark Antony, attends the public games organised to celebrate Caesar's triumph.

Act 1: Scene 2

During the feast of Lupercal, Mark Antony, a protégé of Caesar, is scheduled to participate in a race that is said to have the power to bestow fertility upon childless women if a holy runner touches them while running. Knowing this, Caesar, who had recently returned to Rome after his triumph over Pompey, asks his wife Calpurnia to position herself in a spot where Mark Antony will touch her during the race.

While this is happening, a soothsayer in the crowd warns Caesar to "beware of the ides of March," but Caesar ignores the caution and departs with his attendants, leaving behind Cassius and Brutus. Seizing the opportunity, Cassius probes Brutus about his feelings toward Caesar and his opinions on Caesar's increasing power. Though already troubled by these developments, Brutus is unsure what to do. Cassius attempts to exploit this by reminding Brutus of his noble lineage and pointing out that Caesar, despite his god-like status, is a mortal with human weaknesses.

As Caesar reenters amidst the crowd's cheers and the trumpets blaring, he expresses his suspicion of Cassius to Mark Antony, calling him a dangerous man who overthinks. After Caesar leaves, Brutus, Cassius, and Casca meet and discuss that Caesar was offered the crown by Mark Antony three times, but refused it each time before having an epileptic seizure and falling.

The three men go their separate ways to contemplate Caesar's growing power. In a brief monologue, Cassius reveals his plan to gain Brutus's unwavering support and involvement in their conspiracy to overthrow Caesar.

Act 1: Scene 3

The scene occurs on the street in Rome during the evening after a terrible storm. Casca and Cicero encounter each other on the street, and Cicero recounts the unnatural occurrences that had transpired earlier. He mentions an owl hooting in the middle of the marketplace during noon and dead roses covering graves. After Cicero exits, Cassius enters the stage and interprets these unusual events as a warning from the gods about Caesar's intentions to destroy the Roman Republic. He seeks Casca's assistance in thwarting Caesar's rise to power.

Cinna, a co-conspirator, then joins Cassius and Casca on the street. Cassius urges Cinna to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy, instructing him to throw a fabricated message through Brutus' window. At Pompey's location, the three agree to meet with other conspirators, including Trebonius, Decius Brutus, and Metellus Cimber.

Act II: Scene 1

The scene occurs in Brutus' home, specifically in his orchard. After instructing his servant, Lucius, to light a candle in his study, he departs. Subsequently, Brutus delivers one of the play's most significant soliloquies, articulating his political beliefs and the rationale behind his support for the plan to overthrow Caesar. He asserts that he possesses no personal grievances against Caesar, but rather, he is motivated by a desire to serve the common good. Despite acknowledging Caesar's virtuous character up until this point, Brutus expresses apprehension that Caesar's ascent to power may transform him into a tyrant. Therefore when he says, "think him as a serpent's egg, Which, hatched, would as his kind, grow mischievous, And kill him in the shell", he agrees with the conspirators' plot to assassinate Caesar.

After Brutus' soliloquy, Lucius, his servant, arrives with a letter acquired from a nearby window. Following this, Casca, Cassius, Decius, Trebonius, and Metellus Cimber make

their entrance. Cassius proposes that they take an oath to solidify the conspiracy, but Brutus disagrees, asserting that honourable men acting for a just cause do not require an oath. Additionally, he opposes Cassius' proposal to include Cicero in their group. Cassius argues that Mark Antony, Caesar's protégé, must be eliminated alongside Caesar. Brutus also voices his objection to this proposal, stating that they should not shed too much blood and are mere "sacrificers, but not butchers." He clarifies that their goal is to oppose the spirit of Caesar and that in "the spirit of men, there is no blood." Following this, the conspirators leave, and Brutus is left in mental turmoil.

Portia, Brutus' loving wife, enters. She has noticed "some six or seven, who did hide their faces, Even from the dark" and that Brutus has lost sleep. She is disturbed by his behaviour and demands he shares his troubles. Portia, asserting that she is the daughter of Cato and mentally strong, believes she is above ordinary women. Touched by her devotion, Brutus promises to open up to her. After Portia exits, Caius Ligarius enters, declaring his intentions to follow Brutus in his noble and honourable deed despite his recent illness.

Act II: Scene 2

Caesar opens the scene by remarking on the terrible weather and Calpurnia's nightmare in which he is killed. The setting is his house, at night during a storm with thunder and lightning. Caesar sends his servants to meet the augurers, who can interpret dreams and signs and perform sacrifices to appease the gods. Calpurnia enters and begs Caesar not to leave the house, citing her belief in omens. However, Caesar insists that mortals cannot alter the gods' plans and that death is inevitable. The servant returns and reports that the augurers have advised Caesar to stay home since the sacrificed animal had no heart. Despite Caesar's reluctance to accept this interpretation, Calpurnia finally convinces him to stay home, and she asks Mark Antony to inform the senators that Caesar is ill.

Decius enters the scene, and Caesar tells the senators that he "will not come. That is enough to satisfy the Senate." Caesar confides in Decius about Calpurnia's dream, in which "smiling Romans" dip their hands in a stream of blood flowing from his statue. Knowing Caesar's weakness for flattery, Decius interprets the dream as a sign of Rome's revival, which Caesar's blood will fuel. He also suggests that the smiling Romans seek vitality from him by dipping their hands in his blood. Decius warns Caesar that the Senate will mock him for being swayed by his wife's dream. Ashamed, Caesar decides to go to the Capitol despite Calpurnia's warnings.

All the conspirators, except Cassius and Publius, enter the scene, and the tension rises as Caesar is encircled by his enemies. Mark Antony enters late, looking tired, and Caesar teases him about his late-night partying habits. However, Brutus reminds them that the meeting is scheduled for 8 o'clock. Caesar prepares to leave for the Capitol and asks Trebonius to accompany him on some business. Trebonius agrees and privately expresses his pleasure at being closer to Caesar than his supposed "best friends." Realising that Caesar is surrounded by conspirators who pretend to be his friends, he laments on an aside that he does not have any true friends.

Act II: Scene 3

The scene's setting is a street close to the Capitol. Upon entering the scene, Artemidorus, a teacher of rhetoric and a supporter of Caesar, proceeds to read out the conspirators' names from a note he has written to Caesar. His purpose is to warn Caesar of the imminent danger. However, he debates that his survival hinges on fate favouring Caesar over the con-

spirators.

Act II: Scene 4

Accompanied by Lucius, Portia emerges onto the street in front of her home. She appears unsure of her actions and gives Lucius incomplete instructions regarding an errand to the Capitol. She jerks with unease in response to imagined sounds emanating from the Capitol. During her walk, she encounters a soothsayer en route to meet Caesar. Portia inquires whether he has any knowledge of a plot to assassinate Caesar. The soothsayer expresses apprehension for Caesar's safety and departs to locate him. Subsequently, Lucius is dispatched to the Capitol to deliver Portia's greetings to Brutus and retrieve any news from the area.

Act III: Scene 1

The scene commences with Caesar, Mark Antony, Lepidus, and the conspirators proceeding towards the Capitol. While en route, Caesar notices the soothsayer and remarks, "the ides of March are come." The soothsayer responds, "Aye, Caesar, but not gone." Artemidorus calls out to Caesar and implores him to read his note, which Caesar declines and proceeds into the Capitol. Meanwhile, Popilius Lena whispers to Cassius, "I wish your enterprise today may thrive." As the group enters the Capitol, Trebonius discreetly guides Mark Antony offstage to prevent him from interfering in the assassination. Metellus Cimber entreats Caesar to repeal his brother's exile, which Caesar denies. Casca, Brutus, and the others join the plea, and as their appeal intensifies, Casca stabs Caesar from behind. The conspirators take turns stabbing him, with the last blow delivered by Brutus. Caesar falls to the ground and exclaims in disbelief, "Et tu, Brute?"

The shocking event stirs spectators, and the conspirators attempt to quell them. Trebonius arrives and announces that Antony has fled. The conspirators dip their hands in Caesar's blood and vow to proceed to the marketplace, "waving [their] red weapons o'er [their] heads" and proclaiming, "Peace, freedom, and liberty!" A servant arrives with a request from Antony to meet them. Brutus grants permission, and Antony enters. Upon seeing Caesar's corpse, he bids him farewell and feigns reconciliation by shaking hands with the conspirators. Antony requests permission to deliver a eulogy for Caesar, which Cassius opposes, but Brutus permits.

The conspirators exit, leaving Antony alone with Caesar's lifeless body. Antony implores Caesar's body for forgiveness for being cordial to his murderers. He predicts that Caesar's spirit will seek retribution and cause turmoil. A servant enters with the news that Octavius Caesar is out of Rome but on his way home. Antony informs the servant that he will give a speech in the marketplace and asks him to bear witness so he can recount the event to Octavius upon his arrival. Both men exit, carrying Caesar's corpse.

Act III: Scene 2

The Forum is the setting for the opening scene where a group of people have gathered to demand explanations for Caesar's assassination. Cassius and Brutus arrive and separate the crowd; Cassius takes one group to present his arguments while Brutus addresses the others. To begin his speech, Brutus urges the audience to listen to him patiently and judge him rationally, asserting that he is an honourable man. He then provides his reasons for the murder, supported by existing documentation. The crowd is convinced and cheers him, and he encourages them to attend Mark Antony's funeral speech.

Antony enters the Forum carrying Caesar's bleeding body and starts his speech with the famous line, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not

to praise him." He acknowledges that he has Brutus' permission to deliver the funeral oration and, like Brutus, plans to base his speech on reasons. Antony refutes Brutus' accusations against Caesar and appeals to the crowd's emotions with his grief over losing his friend. He then reads Caesar's will, which promises public land and money to every citizen of Rome. The combination of Caesar's generosity and Antony's powerful rhetoric turns the crowd against the conspirators. They become a mob that burns the homes of the murderers and cremates Caesar's body with reverence.

A servant interrupts the chaos with news that Octavius has arrived in Rome and is at Caesar's home with Lepidus. Antony immediately leaves to meet with Octavius and plan their next steps. The servant informs him that Brutus and Cassius have fled.

Act III: Scene 3

The scene opens with a chaotic mob confronting Cinna, a poet who is on his way to attend Caesar's funeral. The mob demands his personal information, and he reluctantly gives his name. Upon hearing his name, the mob mistakes him for the conspirator Cinna and decides to kill him. Cinna pleads for his life and clarifies that he is a poet, not a conspirator. However, the mob declares that he will be killed for his "bad verses." They take Cinna as a captive and proclaim their plan to burn down the conspirators' homes.

Act IV: Scene 1

Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius form the Triumvirate. At the start of the scene, they convene to determine which Romans should be killed and who should be spared. Antony and Lepidus agree to the deaths of some of their close relatives. After their discussion, Antony dispatches Lepidus to retrieve Caesar's will, intending to modify its bequests and share some of their wealth. Lepidus departs.

Antony informs Octavius that Lepidus is unfit to govern Rome and suggests they use him for their benefit before seizing his power. Octavius defends Lepidus, pointing out that he has proven his bravery on the battlefield. Antony retorts that even Lepidus's horse has such qualities and that Lepidus should be trained and utilised accordingly. Antony and Octavius agree to immediately plan for the defeat of the armies of Brutus and Cassius.

Act IV: Scene 2

The scene opens in a camp near Sardis. Titinius and Pindarus, Cassius's servant, meet Brutus outside his tent and inform him of Cassius's imminent arrival. Brutus is offended by Cassius's actions and expects an explanation. Pindarus is confident that Cassius can provide a satisfactory answer. Lucilius reports that he followed all the protocols when meeting Cassius but received no warmth. Upon hearing this, Brutus remarks that Cassius may fail them if put to the test.

Cassius enters the scene with his army and accuses Brutus of wronging him. Brutus responds that he would never wrong a friend and invites Cassius to speak with him inside the tent to avoid having their armies witness their disagreement. Both leaders instruct their subordinates to take their armies away and safeguard their privacy.

Act IV: Scene 3

Cassius and Brutus are conversing inside the tent. Cassius accuses Brutus of wronging him and further accuses him of condemning Pella for bribery despite receiving a letter in his defence. Brutus retorts that he should not have defended such a person, and he accuses him of selling offices. Furthermore, Brutus says he would "rather be a dog and bay the moon" than sell his honour for money. He also reminds Cassius of failing to send him the gold he had asked for his army. Cassius denies ev-

erything and asks Brutus to kill him, accusing him of not loving him anymore. Eventually, the two reconcile and renew their friendship.

During a conversation over drinks, Cassius, Brutus, Titinius, and Messala learn that the armies of Antony and Octavius are marching towards Philippi and have killed numerous senators, including Cicero. Messala reports Portia's suicide, which Brutus already knew but pretends to learn for the first time. Brutus suggests marching towards Philippi and confronting the enemy there, while Cassius suggests waiting for the enemy to come to them. Eventually, Cassius agrees to Brutus's plan.

After their guests leave, Brutus invites Claudius and Varro to sleep in the tent and asks Lucius to sing for him. Lucius falls asleep, and Brutus begins reading a book. However, he is interrupted by the appearance of Caesar's ghost. He asks the apparition whether it is "some god, some angel, or some devil", to which it replies that it is "thy evil spirit." The ghost terrifies him by telling him they will meet in Philippi.

Act V: Scene 1

Octavius and Antony are stationed in Philippi with their armies, waiting for the arrival of Brutus and Cassius' armies. A messenger arrives to inform them that the opposing armies are approaching. Antony requests that Octavius lead the left side, but he declines and insists on leading the right side.

When the two parties meet, they exchange insults and accusations towards each other. Octavius challenges Brutus and Cassius to fight them. Eventually, Octavius and Antony exit the scene with their armies. Cassius expresses apprehension regarding the upcoming battle. He and Brutus worry that they will never meet again. Cassius says a poignant goodbye to Brutus that; "For ever, and forever, Brutus! If we do meet again, we'll smile indeed; If not 'tis true this parting was well made".

Act V: Scene 2

Brutus sends a message to Cassius through Messala, urging him to engage the enemy immediately as he believes Octavius' army is currently vulnerable and can be defeated.

Act V: Scene 3

The scene opens with Brutus' army searching for and collecting war spoils after successfully driving back Octavius' army. However, this leaves Cassius' side of the battlefield unguarded, and Antony's army takes advantage of this to surround Cassius' troops. Seeing soldiers in the distance, Cassius asks Titinius to ride towards them and verify their identity.

Meanwhile, Cassius instructs Pindarus to climb a nearby hill and watch Titinius. Pindarus reports back that Titinius has been surrounded by joyous and shouting soldiers. Misunderstanding them as the enemy, Cassius orders Pindarus to keep his oath of obedience and kill Titinius. Pindarus reluctantly obeys and stabs Cassius to death. Cassius says thus while dying, "Caesar, thou art revenged. Even with the sword that killed thee".

When Titinius arrives on horseback, Brutus' soldiers cheer and hail him. Titinius and Messala ride in to inform Cassius of the good news that Brutus has been victorious in the battle against Octavius' army. However, upon their arrival, they find Cassius' dead body. Messala hurries to inform Brutus of Cassius' death, while Titinius takes his own life using Cassius' sword. When Brutus arrives with Messala, Strato, Young Cato, and Lucilius, they discover Cassius and Titinius' lifeless bodies. Brutus mourns their loss and bids them a sorrowful farewell. He then exits with his remaining men to confront the enemy.

Act V: Scene 4

Brutus and his men enter the battlefield while the fighting is ongoing. He urges them to fight with courage before leaving. Tragically, Young Cato is slain, and Lucilius is captured. Mistaken for Brutus, Antony's soldiers rush to inform their commander. Upon arriving, Antony sees Lucilius as his prisoner and inquires about Brutus. Lucilius responds that Brutus is still alive and unattainable. Antony orders his guards to search for Brutus.

Act V: Scene 5

Brutus arrives on the scene accompanied by Volumnius, Clitus, Strato, and Dardanius, all weary from the battle. He asks Clitus and then Dardanius to kill him, but both refuse. Brutus confides in Volumnius that he has seen Caesar's ghost and that his time has come. When Volumnius declines to do the deed, Brutus points out that they are surrounded by the enemy and implores him to hold the sword while he runs into it. Volumnius insists it would be wrong for a friend to assist in such a manner.

The sound of the approaching enemy army is heard, and Clitus urges Brutus to flee. But Brutus bids farewell to his comrades, stating once again that his time has arrived. As his army marches ahead, Strato and Brutus remain behind. Strato takes hold of Brutus' sword, and the two men shake hands. Finally, Brutus runs onto the sword and kills himself.

Antony, Octavius, Messala, Lucilius, and others enter and discover Strato standing over Brutus' lifeless body. Octavius proclaims that he will welcome all those who fought for Brutus into his service. Antony delivers the famous farewell speech for Brutus. He begins his speech thus; "This was the noblest Roman of them all", as he believed that, while all other conspirators stabbed Caesar because of jealousy, Brutus did that for the greater good of Rome. Octavius pledges to give Brutus a dignified funeral, and the fighting comes to a halt. Octavius then orders for a celebration to be held.

Recap

- *Julius Caesar* tells the story of the events leading up to the assassination of Julius Caesar.
- In the opening scene, two tribunes of Rome attempt to disperse a crowd celebrating Caesar's return.
- During the feast of Lupercal, Caesar asks his wife to position herself to be touched by Mark Antony, while a soothsayer warns Caesar of the ides of March.
- Brutus delivers a soliloquy outlining his political beliefs and reasoning for joining the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar.
- Caesar is convinced by his wife Calpurnia and the augurers to stay home due to her nightmare about his death.
- Decius manipulates Caesar into going to the Capitol.
- The conspirators assassinate Caesar in the Capitol, with Brutus delivering the final blow.
- Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius form the Triumvirate and plan to defeat Brutus and Cassius's armies at Philippi.

- The ghost of Caesar visits Brutus.
- Brutus and Cassius prepare for battle against Octavius and Antony's armies.
- Cassius is deceived by Pindarus and dies, followed by Titinius.
- Brutus ultimately kills himself, and Antony delivers a eulogy for Brutus.

Objective Questions

1. When was Julius Caesar written?
2. Who formed the First Triumvirate?
3. When was Julius Caesar assassinated?
4. When is Ides of March according to the Roman calendar?
5. Who is Portia's father?
6. What did Caesar say to Brutus after his stabbing?
7. Who is punished by the mob for his "bad verse"?
8. Who forms the Triumvirate after Caesar's murder?
9. Who reports the suicide of Portia to Brutus?
10. Who keeps the oath of obedience to kill Cassius?
11. Who uses Cassius' sword to kill himself?

Answers

1. Between 1599 and 1600
2. Julius Caesar, Cassius and Pompey
3. 15 March, 44 BC
4. 15 March
5. Cato
6. "Et tu, Brute?"
7. Cinna, the poet
8. Antony, Lepidus and Octavius
9. Servilia
10. Pindarus
11. Titinius

Assignments

1. Write a brief note on the historical background of the play *Julius Caesar.*
2. Write a character sketch of Mark Antony, including his funeral oration.
3. Explain Act 5 of the play *Julius Caesar.*
4. Write a short essay on the different adaptations and interpretations of Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar.*
5. How does Brutus justify his involvement in Caesar's murder?

Suggested Reading

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Unit 3

Julius Caesar - Theme and Characterisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:

- conduct a close reading of the play *Julius Caesar*
- identify and analyse different themes of the play
- obtain an idea of the development of characters in a Shakespearean play
- appreciate the mastery of Shakespeare as a writer
- trace the relevance of the characters and themes to the contemporary world

Prerequisites

Assuming that you have some knowledge of Shakespeare's life and works, as well as the play *Julius Caesar*, this unit requires you to focus on the play's themes and characterisation. In literary studies, the theme refers to the central idea or ideas conveyed to the reader through the text. A literary text may revolve around a single theme or multiple themes. Short stories and poems are typically built, around a single theme, while novels and dramas offer the opportunity to explore various themes within a text. Often, writers explore universal ideas in their work. The theme of a play is developed through the plot, characters, their actions and interactions, dramatic devices (such as soliloquies, asides, choruses, masks, and more), as well as the theatrical props and settings. It is important to distinguish between the theme and moral of a text, as the moral is the lesson a character learns at the end of a text and falls under the theme.

Characterisation is generally understood as the way in which a character is created or depicted in a text. This may be achieved by describing physical features, mannerisms, nature, dialogues, inner thoughts, interactions with other characters, and other characters' responses. Characters are presented in a play either by directly introducing and explaining them to the audience or by allowing the audience to infer their characteristics through their thoughts, speeches, actions, and more.

Keywords

Shakespeare, Play, Themes, Characterisation, Leadership, Power, Language, Fate

Discussion

Julius Caesar is a play that is considered a tragedy, a history play, a Roman play, and a political play. Some scholars even refer to it as a problem play. Despite its political nature, Shakespeare does not offer any explicit political judgment. It is possible to draw parallels between the political shifts in *Julius Caesar* and the British context in which the play was written. When Shakespeare wrote this play, Queen Elizabeth I had consolidated monarchical power, amassing immense wealth and power at the expense of the House of Commons and the aristocracy. The Queen was sixty-six years old and had been reigning for forty years. Like Caesar, she had no natural heir, creating fear among the people that England would fall into chaos and battles for succession. Shakespeare presents his anxiety regarding this through his interpretation of an ancient incident, as he could not directly express his views and risk offending the Queen. In essence, the play portrays a power struggle between the emerging monarchy and the republicans, culminating in the assassination of a potential monarch. While exploring the possibilities of characterisation and themes in relation to a political crisis, Shakespeare maintains a neutral stance.

5.3.1 Themes

In *Julius Caesar*, similar to other Shakespearean tragedies, the major themes are drawn from the darker aspects of human nature that arise during power struggles. Shakespeare, acting like a skilful maestro, utilises rhetorical devices and literary and dramatic devices throughout the play to convey abstract elements, such as themes, style, characterisation, and tone. The following are the primary themes:

5.3.1.1 Leadership

In 44 BC, Rome, much like England, had reached the pinnacle of its geographical expansion. The governance of Rome rested with the senators, yet military generals and politicians, such as Julius Caesar, basked in the glory and admiration of the masses. Additionally, the plebeians elected Tribunes to represent them, as seen in Act I Scene 1 of the play, where Flavius and Marullus reprimand men celebrating Caesar's return to Rome. Rome's power structure was relatively decentralised, and some senators feared Caesar's return would eventually shatter the system. As a dramatist, Shakespeare envisioned the dramatic potential of such an event. Shakespeare uses Caesar's return to Rome to illustrate the conflict and tensions inherent in leadership. The play portrays a situation in which the ruling class loses its unity, vision, and spirit of being true Romans. Cassius invokes the glorious tradition and integrity of Rome to gain the support of the conspirators to kill Caesar. However, he uses this to satisfy his jealousy rather than to elevate Rome's glory. In this sense, all the conspirators lose their integrity as human beings and leaders.

5.3.1.2 Power

The major theme of *Julius Caesar* is the power crisis faced by a Republic undergoing a slow transition to an Empire. In the play, characters are seduced by the allure of power and compete for dominance in the emerging empire, leading to an escalation of conflict. Caesar's growing power and popularity, earned through his military victories and statesmanship, stoked fear in the minds of conspirators who worried that he would consolidate power and become a tyrant. Cassius and Brutus argue that Caesar would establish a dictatorship and will eventually

become a tyrant. Their concerns stem from their fear of losing their freedom and the power they currently hold. Brutus, a true Roman, is anxious about Rome's shift from a decentralised republic to an empire where power is concentrated in one person. In contrast, Cassius, who was secretly allied with Caesar in the Triumvirate, is envious of his growing power and popularity and fears becoming subservient to him.

5.3.1.3 Persuasion

Shakespeare delves into the potential of persuasion as a theme to create a dramatic effect in Julius Caesar. Characters are swayed by ego, pride, honour, family obligations, love, or moral duty to act. Shakespeare explores both external stimuli and internal conflict as ways to persuade characters to act. External stimuli examples include Cassius manipulating Brutus, the conspirators plotting to assassinate Caesar, Caesar planning, Calpurnia's fear, Brutus' speech, Mark Antony's oratory strategy, and the mob's ambivalence. Meanwhile, Brutus' internal conflict over whether to kill Caesar, Portia's efforts to remain composed, and the conspirators' demand for loyalty to Rome demonstrate the power of internal persuasion.

In contrast, Caesar adopts a style of persuasion to glorify himself to the Romans. He proves his courage and skill in battle and returns to Rome, where he persuades the crowd to adore him by showcasing his victory through the streets. Caesar also persuades the masses to question his ambition to become a tyrant when he dramatically refuses the crown offered to him three times.

5.3.1.4 Fate

Is one's destiny determined by their actions, or is fate unaffected by their actions? This is the dilemma that Shakespeare appears to present in *Julius Caesar* without providing a clear resolution. During Caesar's victory march, a soothsayer warns him to beware of the Ides of March. On the day of his assassination, as Caesar makes his way to the Capitol, he challenges the soothsayer that the Ides of March has arrived, but the soothsayer responds that it has not yet passed. Moments later, Caesar is killed. Shakespeare deliberately leaves the question of fate unanswered, as we, the audience, know that Caesar's pride and vanity made him susceptible to Decius' persuasion to go to the Capitol. Shakespeare portrays characters interpreting supernatural events to guide their actions, yet they also exhibit human frailties that ultimately dictate their destiny. Thus, supernatural signs are real for Shakespeare, but human behaviour is primarily responsible for determining one's fate.

5.3.1.5 Power of Language

The play *Julius Caesar* significantly emphasises speeches and arguments. Although there are violent and gruesome scenes, much of the action centres around debates and discussions. The art of oration and the ability to persuade others through language is a recurring theme throughout the play. The characters present their arguments as logical, but Antony and Cassius possess a talent for manipulating language to make their arguments appear reasonable. Antony's success in countering Brutus' reasoning for killing Caesar is a prime example.

Cassius also employs his language skills to persuade Brutus to support the conspiracy by identifying his weaknesses and arguing logically. One instance is Cassius' use of anonymous letters, which he carefully crafted to praise Brutus' devotion to Rome and Caesar's tyranny. By leaving blank spaces between lines, Cassius knew that Brutus would fill

them with his interpretations, fueled by his fear of Caesar's rise and Rome's suffering. Similarly, Brutus logically argued in his funeral speech why Caesar deserved to die. However, he failed to recognise that the crowd was not moved by the logic presented but was swept up in the moment of passion, cheering for him to be their new leader. In contrast, Antony succeeded in touching the emotions of the crowd by expressing his grief over the loss of his dear friend. This led the public to become a mob, sparking riots and wars.

5.3.2 Characterisation

Although *Julius Caesar* is based on the ancient Roman dictator of the same name, it should not be considered a play about real historical events. Shakespeare utilised all of the characters in the play, except for Lucius, from Sir Thomas North's English translation of *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch. Originally written in Greek, this work chronicled the leaders of ancient Rome, and their stories were imbued with human qualities and intertwined to form a literary masterpiece. The characters in Julius Caesar are complex and driven by their weaknesses, with Caesar and Brutus serving as the primary figures around which the play revolves. Additionally, Cassius, his co-conspirators, and Mark Antony all play significant roles in the story.

5.3.2.1 Julius Caesar

Shakespeare creates a dramatic representation of a political and power crisis by using Julius Caesar's victorious re-entry into Rome and his potential to become a tyrant. Although Julius Caesar is not portrayed as a figure of greatness, he is presented as an ambiguous character who is sometimes superstitious, arrogant, aloof, and sometimes reasonable and compassionate. This uncertainty in his character is enough to make the senate fear him, but he is not a cruel villain.

In the opening scene of Act I, Flavius criticises Caesar for being an ambitious person who wishes to be above all men and keep them all under his control. Antony and Casca see him as someone whose wishes should be seen as commands and fulfilled. Caesar's attitude suggests that he complies with this view. He believes he is above humans and declares he does not fear Cassius. Moments before his murder, Caesar compares himself to the gods and expresses his determination to continue as the arbitrary administrator of Roman justice. This arrogance and vanity make him ignore the signs of his impending death. From the play's opening act, we see Caesar's superstitious nature. He asks Calphurnia to follow the superstitious belief of getting touched by a holy runner to cure her sterility. At the same time, he ignores the signs and beliefs of his wife, priests, and soothsayers and proceeds to the Capitol. By this time, Caesar has placed himself above men and mortals, and this sense of superiority clouds his judgment, making him incapable of thinking clearly.

However, Caesar's reference to his partial deafness and the episode of epileptic seizure defies his claim of being above mortals. It gives the impression of an ageing man who thinks of himself as invincible and immortal. After his murder, Caesar continues to appear in the play. Brutus and Antony talk about the spirit of Caesar, and Antony invokes the memory of Caesar's spirit, turning the crowd into a mob. Brutus sees Caesar's ghost at Sardis and Philippi, suggesting his incapability to reconcile with his moral degeneration by participating in the murder.

5.3.2.2 Brutus

Many scholars have pointed out that despite Julius Caesar being the dominating figure in

the play, Brutus is the hero. He is portrayed as a naïve but honourable person committed to moral and ethical codes of conduct and is constantly fearful for his country, imagining Caesar becoming a despotic ruler. He stands for the Republican values of Rome and resists any possibility of compromise. Therefore, he justifies the murder of Caesar as being for the good of Rome.

Although his arguments are logical, he cannot judge the people of Rome and is considered an honourable man. Cassius seeks Brutus' support for the assassination due to his acceptance and reputation as a righteous man, which would give legitimacy to the murder of Caesar. However, Brutus' overemphasis on his honour blinds him to the true characters of Cassius and Antony. He underestimates the capabilities of Antony, and by allowing him to give a funeral speech, he loses control of the situation, and the crowd turns into a violent mob. Despite obvious hints, he fails to recognise Cassius' role in manipulating him through the letter.

Brutus is a man conflicted within himself, and his delayed decisions are a result of his inner moral dilemma. He takes over a month to decide whether to participate in the assassination plot. He tries to justify the murder by reasoning out Caesar's threat to the Republic and performing a ritualistic murder.

5.3.2.3 Cassius

Caesar's words about Cassius reveal his expertise in reading men's deeds and his sharp observation skills, reflected in his cunning and ability to perceive the motives of those around him in the play. He employs his keen observation skills to understand Brutus and deceive him through long debates and manipulative letters, all in pursuit of his goal to assassinate Caesar.

While Cassius is jealous of Caesar's power, he fears becoming enslaved under his tyranny and will do anything to maintain his freedom. He blames the nobility of Rome for Caesar's rise to power and believes they must restrain him. Given his immense power, Cassius sees assassination as the only way to stop Caesar.

Cassius is corrupt, supporting bribery and imposing ruthless taxes to fund his army. He is highly emotional, expressing his intense hatred for Caesar in his arguments and revealing his envy of him. Upon discovering that the conspiracy has been exposed, Cassius loses control out of fear and expresses his anger in a tent at Sardis during an argument with Brutus. He contemplates suicide several times and ultimately dies to avoid being captured and humiliated by Antony and Octavius.

5.3.2.4 Mark Antony

Mark Antony is viewed as Caesar's protege in the play. Several instances indicate Caesar's admiration for Antony and portray him as a true Epicurean and hedonist. Caesar and Brutus see Antony as incapable of serious work because he is always occupied with games and pleasure-seeking activities. Antony is even more skilled at manipulation than Cassius in the play. He can deceive Caesar and Brutus, who fail to see his true nature, while Cassius can see through him and knows Antony can potentially eliminate all Republicans.

Antony is well-versed in the art of oration and the power of language. He knows how to manipulate language in a way that appeals to the sense of justice of the crowd. At Caesar's funeral speech, he successfully turns the crowd into a rioting mob. He has no moral scruples and uses every possible means to achieve his goal. Antony is a character who needs an opportunity to emerge as a power-hungry individual. Along with Octavius, he engages in a war against Cassius and Brutus, ultimately defeating them. Cassius and Brutus both commit suicide to avoid humiliation at Antony's hands.

Recap

- *Julius Caesar* portrays a power struggle between the emerging monarchy and the republicans, culminating in the assassination of a potential monarch.
- The major themes in *Julius Caesar* are drawn from the darker aspects of human nature that arise during power struggles.
- Shakespeare uses Caesar's return to Rome to illustrate the conflict and tensions inherent in leadership.
- The play centres on the power crisis faced by a Republic transitioning into an Empire.
- Shakespeare explores the theme of persuasion in the play, utilising external stimuli such as manipulation and assassination plots.
- The author presents the dilemma of whether fate or human actions determine one's destiny.
- He places significant emphasis on speeches and debates, showcasing the art of oration and the ability to manipulate language for persuasive purposes.
- Julius Caesar as an ambiguous character, neither a hero nor a villain
- Brutus is portrayed as the hero due to his commitment to moral and ethical codes of conduct.
- Cassius as a jealous and corrupt character
- Mark Antony as Caesar's protege in the play and a skilled manipulator

Objective Questions

1. Who consolidated the monarchical power when *Julius Caesar* was written?
2. How old was the Queen when *Julius Caesar* was written?
3. What are the two themes of the play?
4. Who are the Tribune representatives in the play's Opening Scene?
5. What does the ruling class lose?
6. What was the crisis faced by the Republic of Rome during Caesar's time?
7. Who argues that Caesar will become a tyrant?
8. What do the characters usually do in the play?
9. Who translated Plutarch's Greek work on famous men of Rome into English?
10. What is the title of Sir Thomas North's English translation of Plutarch's work?
11. To whom did Caesar compare himself?
12. Who is considered the play's hero by some scholars?
13. Who can read men's deeds?
14. Who is a good observer?
15. How does Cassius die?

Answers

1. Queen Elizabeth I
2. 66 years
3. Leadership and power
4. Flavius and Marullus
5. Unity, vision and Roman spirit
6. Power struggle
7. Cassius and Brutus
8. Argument/ debate
9. Sir Thomas North
10. *Parallel Lives*
11. Gods
12. Brutus
13. Cassius
14. Cassius
15. By suicide

Assignments

1. Discuss the elements of power and leadership in the play *Julius Caesar.*
2. "Fate is a central theme in the play *Julius Caesar".* Elaborate.
3. Does language significantly impact the development of the play *Julius Caesar*? Explain.
4. Develop a character sketch of Caesar in *Julius Caesar.*
5. "Brutus is a man conflicted within himself." Discuss.

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Unit 4

Julius Caesar - Structure and Style

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:

- identify and analyse the structure and style of the play *Julius Caesar*
- obtain a general idea of the structure and style of a Shakespearian play
- appreciate the beauty of the play's sentence construction, syntactic structure and rhetorical devices
- identify the nature of the language Shakespeare used in the play

Prerequisites

The categorisation of *Julius Caesar* as a Shakespearian play is problematic due to its structure and style, which are ambiguous and resist classification. Additionally, the archaic language and syntax present a challenge to modern readers.

To fully appreciate and understand Shakespeare's works, it is necessary to know the Elizabethan stage and the cultural context in which they were created. It is important to recognise that these plays were intended for an audience that lived during the Elizabethan era. Therefore, approaching the play as a director would be beneficial in identifying its intended structure and style for performance on stage.

Keywords

Elizabethan stage, Actors, Audience, Verses, Style, Structure

Discussion

Julius Caesar is believed to have been written specifically for the opening of the newly built Globetheatre. Despite being Shakespeare's shortest play, it is divided into five Acts, each with its scenes. Act I has three scenes, Act II has four, Act III has three, Act IV has three, and Act V has five. To truly grasp the structure and style of the play, one must analyse it from a director's perspective, taking into account its intended audience and the context in which it was written. Scholars of Shakespeare suggest that when examining the structure and style of a play, it is important to remember that it was written with a particular audience in mind, to be performed on a specific type of stage, and with a certain group of actors in the roles.

5.4.1 Elizabethan Stage

The Globe Theatre, designed by Shakespeare and his actors after James Burbage's theatre (known as The Theatre), was the intended venue for the performance of *Julius Caesar*. During the Elizabethan era, the stage extended into the audience and was an octagonal platform with three acting levels that the audience from three floors could view. The balconies and windows were used to replicate each acting level, allowing actors to suddenly appear and disappear in groups from different parts of the stage, thereby increasing the tempo of the performance and making it more dynamic. This stage arrangement also facilitated interaction between the audience and the actors, as they were seated around the stage at different levels. The poorest members of the audience paid the least to watch the play and stood nearest to the stage, allowing them to interact with the actors and influence the course of the play. Unlike modern productions, which rely on sophisticated visual and sound effects, Shakespearean plays rely on splendid costumes, makeup, props, and proper staging to partially imagine the play's visual and sound effects on the audience's minds.

5.4.2 The Actors

Shakespeare's theatre company comprised men and boys who acted in his plays. He specifically wrote his plays for this group of actors. Depending on who left the company, who died, or who was promoted from an apprenticeship, he would write his dramas with specific actors in mind.

Shakespeare wrote lead roles with specific actors in his company in mind. He knew their acting strengths and weaknesses and could use this knowledge to add intensity and subtlety to their characters. He also hired skilled actors from failed troops to perform smaller roles. As a result, the original actors in Shakespeare's company needed no instructions on what to do on stage, as they were familiar with his writing style and the hints in the script. To play women characters, boys were cast as apprentices who were close to graduation. As a result, these women characters were portrayed without "femininity" and with no emphasis on sexual intimacy.

5.4.3 Audience

Shakespeare's plays were enjoyed by a specific group of people who frequented them. This group, like the actors, were well-versed in the hints, poetic and language devices, stage props, and settings used in the plays. They would engage with the performance and actors by offering comments or cheering. Shakespeare's use of repetition in his plays may suggest that his audience had a shorter attention span or would leave the theatre for breaks. This repetition was likely intentional to enable the audience to return to the play and follow the plot. Both commoners and aristocrats were part of the audience for Shakespeare's plays, and he included elements in his plays that would satisfy both groups.

5.4.4 Versification

Shakespeare's plays are made more beautiful by incorporating lines and verses. He is renowned for using iambic pentameter, which involves variations in metre to emphasise particular parts of the dialogue. These meter variations also serve to modulate the tempo of the dialogue and provide cues to the actors regarding their actions on stage. For instance, a sequence of shared lines necessitates a quicker delivery tempo from the actors, resulting in rapid exchanges between the characters to maintain the metrical rhythm until its completion. For example, if we take the following conversation between Brutus and Cassius in

Act IV Scene 3:

Brutus: Well, to keep our work alive.
What do you think
Of marching to Philippi presently
Cassius: I do not think it is good.
Brutus: Your reason?
Cassius: This it is:
It is better that the enemy seeks us.

These lines are in an Alexandrian metre, which means a line has six feet. Here the meter demands Brutus and Cassius to speak rapidly to finish the metric division perfectly. When delivered perfectly by the characters, this metric division will create an impression among the audience that the two are at war against Antony and Octavius and are in haste to decide their next course of action.

5.4.5 Language

Julius Caesar employs a language style emphasising dialogues, speeches, arguments, sarcasm, and public passion. Shakespeare's focus in the play is on rhetoric. Despite the characters playing with words, the language is clear and straightforward. The play features carefully crafted language and logical arguments skillfully used to manipulate others. For instance, in Act I scene 2, Cassius manages to subvert Brutus' loyalty and plant the seed that will ultimately deal a disastrous blow to the Republic, using just twenty lines. Cassius employs subtle imagery, rhetorical devices, appeals, and carefully chosen diction to gain Brutus' support.

The language used in the play is highly poetic, with rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, simile, and personification frequently used to heighten the drama and emotion of the scenes. The use of soliloquies and asides allows the audience to gain insight into the characters' innermost thoughts and motivations, while the use of dramatic irony creates tension and suspense. The play also uses repetition and parallelism to reinforce key themes and ideas.

The language used by different characters in the play reflects their social status, personality, and beliefs. For example, Caesar speaks in an exquisite and self-assured manner, reflecting his position as a powerful and revered leader. In contrast, Brutus speaks in a more measured and reflective tone, reflecting his philosophical and introspective nature. The play also includes numerous references to classical mythology and history, which help contextualise the play's events and add depth and complexity to the characters and their motivations. Overall, the language used in *Julius Caesar* is both powerful and evocative, allowing the audience to engage with the play's themes and characters on a profound level.

Recap

- Shortest play by Shakespeare with five Acts
- Written for the Elizabethan stage, actors and audience
- The Globe Theater was designed by Shakespeare and some of his actors.
- The theatre was modelled on James Burbage's theatre.
- The stage was an octagonal platform projecting into the audience.
- Audience could interact with the play and the actors.
- Boys played the role of women.

- Both aristocrats and commoners watched his plays.
- Verses add to the beauty of his plays.
- Careful use of language

Objective Questions

1. Which is the shortest play written by Shakespeare?
2. How many Acts are there in the play?
3. Who designed the Globe theatre?
4. What is considered the model of the Globe Theatre?
5. What was the shape of the Elizabethan stage?
6. How many acting levels did the stage have?
7. What allows the actors to appear immediately or appear in groups?
8. Where does the audience sit?
9. Who stands in the yard closest to the stage?
10. Who were the actors in Shakespeare's company?
11. Who played the women's roles in Shakespearian plays?
12. Who attended the theatre performances of Shakespearian plays?
13. What is the metric division used by Shakespeare generally?

Answers

1. *Julius Caesar*
2. Five
3. Shakespeare and some of his actors
4. James Burbage's "The Theatre"
5. Octagonal
6. Three
7. The three-level structure of stage
8. Around stage
9. The poor people
10. Men and boys
11. Boys
12. Both aristocrats and commoners
13. Iambic pentameter

Assignments

1. Write a short note on the stage during Shakespeare's time.
2. Write a brief essay on the actors and audience of Shakespearean plays.
3. Write a paragraph on the characteristics of language in *Julius Caesar.*
4. Discuss the significance of versification in Shakespeare's plays.
5. Write a brief account of the stage and actors during Shakespeare's time.

Suggested Reading

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BLOCK - 06

Modern Drama

Unit 1

Introduction to Modern Drama

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- acquire a general idea about modernism in literature
- obtain information regarding the origin of modern drama and its features
- identify the major practitioners of modern drama
- briefly analyse the major movements and classifications in modern drama

Prerequisites

The evolution of modern drama has been marked by a series of bold departures from traditional theatrical conventions, with playwrights reshaping the very nature of storytelling. From the rise of realism in the late 19th century to the absurdism and expressionism that emerged in the 20th century, drama has continuously evolved to reflect the changing tides of society, politics, and the human experience. These dramatic shifts not only mirror the discontent of their respective eras but also offer a deeper exploration into the complexities of the human condition.

Realism, with its focus on the struggles of ordinary individuals, sought to depict life as it truly was, confronting social issues such as class inequality and personal turmoil. The influence of Romanticism, though fading in many ways, continued to infuse modern plays with expressive language, complex characters, and symbolic imagery. The Absurdist movement, spurred by existentialism, rejected traditional narrative structure and instead embraced the meaninglessness of existence, capturing the alienation and confusion felt in the aftermath of two world wars. Expressionism, with its exaggerated and distorted portrayals of inner psychological states, further explored the tumultuous depths of human consciousness, breaking free from realism's constraints. Meanwhile, the Impressionist movement, though initially a painting style, found its way into drama, focusing not on plot but on mood, sensory experience, and fleeting emotional truths.

This introduction to the various movements in modern English drama provides a lens through which we can examine not only the technical aspects of playwriting-such as characterisation, dialogue, and imagery-but also the profound philosophical underpinnings that shaped the theatre's evolution. These diverse styles continue to influence contemporary theatre, film, and television, ensuring that the exploration of human nature and social structures remains as relevant today as ever before.

By understanding the roots and impacts of these movements, we gain insight into how modern drama has reshaped our perception of life itself, with each playwright contributing to a deeper, more intricate understanding of both individual and collective struggles.

Keywords

Drama, modern, realism, Romanticism, Absurdism, Expressionism, Impressionism

Discussion

Modern drama refers to theatrical works written and performed from the late 19th century to the present day. It is characterised by departing from traditional literary conventions and exploring new forms of expression, themes and techniques. Modern drama emerged as a response to the changing social, political, and cultural landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the rise of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the emergence of new forms of media and technology.

In contrast to the structured, formulaic plays of the past, modern drama often focuses on characters' inner lives and psychologies, exploring complex human emotions, motivations and relationships. It also frequently addresses social and political issues, reflecting the concerns and tensions of its time. Some of the most influential playwrights of modern drama include Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Harold Pinter. Their works continue to be studied and performed worldwide, profoundly impacting the development of theatre and the arts.

6.1.1 Realism in Modern English Drama

The emergence of realism in drama during the late 19th century marked a significant shift in how the theatre was perceived and practised. Realism in modern English drama refers to a mode of theatre that attempts to depict the world as it is, focusing on ordinary people's everyday experiences and struggles. This section briefly explores the origins and development of realism in modern English drama and its impact on the evolution of theatre.

The origins of realism in modern English drama can be traced back to the mid-19th century when a group of writers, artists, and thinkers began to challenge the traditional forms and conventions of literature and art. Known as the Realist movement, they sought to represent reality as it was, free from the idealism and romanticism of earlier periods.

One of the pioneers of the Realist movement was the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. His plays, such as *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), rejected the conventions of melodrama and explored the darker side of human nature. Ibsen's characters were complex and flawed, and his plays often dealt with issues, such as women's rights, social injustice, and sexual morality. Another important figure in developing realism in modern English drama was George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's plays, such as *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Saint Joan* (1923), were known for their wit and social commentary. He used his plays as a platform to express his views on politics, society, and culture, and his characters often challenged the status quo.

6.1.1.1 Characteristics of Realist Drama

Realism in modern English drama is characterised by its focus on the everyday experiences of ordinary people. The plays are set in familiar settings, such as homes, offices, and streets, and the characters are often drawn from the working or middle classes. The dialogue is naturalistic, reflecting the way people speak, and social and political issues often drive the plots.

One of the most significant examples of realism in modern English drama is Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). The play portrays the life of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who cannot achieve the American Dream. Miller's play exposed the dark side of capitalism and the human cost of pursuing success. Another example of realism in modern English drama is John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). The play focuses on the life of Jimmy Porter, a working-class man frustrated with his social and economic status. Osborne's play was a significant departure from the conventions of earlier drama, with its use of colloquial language and focus on the struggles of ordinary people.

6.1.1.2 Impact of Realism in Modern English Drama

Realism in modern English drama significantly impacted the evolution of theatre. It marked a departure from the formalism and idealism of earlier periods and a move towards a more authentic and honest portrayal of the world. Realism also provided a platform for playwrights to explore social and political issues and challenge conventional approaches towards writing plays.

Realism in modern English drama also influenced the development of other art forms, such as film and television. Using naturalistic dialogue and everyday settings became a staple of film and television drama. Many of the themes and issues explored in modern English drama continue to resonate with audiences today.

Realism in modern English drama represented a significant shift in how the theatre was perceived and practised. It provided a platform for playwrights to explore social and political issues and challenge earlier drama conventions. Realism also significantly impacted the evolution of other art forms and continues to influence theatre and popular culture today.

6.1.2 Romanticism in Modern English Drama

The Romantic era was a cultural and artistic movement that originated in Europe during the late 18th century and lasted until the mid-19th century. It emphasised individualism, emotion, imagination, and a deep connection with nature. Romanticism profoundly impacted English literature, and its influence can still be seen in modern English drama.

Like its literary counterparts, the Romantic movement also has influenced modern English drama. While many of the plays produced in the contemporary era have moved away from the traditional Romantic themes of love, passion, and nature, the Romantic influence is still present in language, characterisation and imagery.

6.1.2.1 Language

The use of language in modern English drama is one of the most apparent ways Romanticism has influenced the genre. Romantic writers sought to create a new language that could express their emotions and experiences in a way that traditional language could not.

This led to a more fluid, expressive style that emphasised the use of metaphor and symbol. In modern English drama, this language style is often used to create a sense of heightened emotion or convey complex ideas and themes. Plays such as *Equus* by Peter Shaffer and *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner are notable examples of this use of language. Both plays use metaphor and symbolism to explore complex themes, such as religion, sexuality and identity.

6.1.2.2 Characterisation

Another way Romanticism has influenced modern English drama is through its approach to characterisation. Romantic writers sought to create complex, passionate and emotional characters. They believed that the individual was the most important aspect of human existence and that the individual's inner world was just as significant as the outer world.

This approach to characterisation can be seen in modern English drama in the form of the anti-hero. The anti-hero is a character who is flawed, often morally ambiguous, and does not conform to traditional societal norms. Plays such as *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter both feature anti-heroes as their protagonists.

6.1.2.3 Imagery

Finally, Romanticism has influenced modern English drama through its use of imagery. Romantic writers believed that nature was a source of inspiration and that it could reveal profound truths about the human experience. They used nature imagery to convey emotions and ideas that were difficult to express in words.

In modern English drama, nature imagery is often used to create atmosphere or mood. Plays like *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonagh and *The Ferryman* by Jez Butterworth use nature imagery to create a sense of foreboding and unease. Thus, Romanticism has significantly impacted modern English drama, shaping the language, characterisation, and imagery used in the genre. While many of the traditional themes of Romanticism have been abandoned in modern drama, the movement's influence can still be seen in how playwrights approach the creation of their works. By examining the language, characterisation, and imagery used in plays, students can gain a deeper appreciation of the artistry and complexity of modern drama and the ways in which the Romantic movement has influenced it.

6.1.3 Absurdism in Modern English Drama

Absurdism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century, challenging the fundamental assumptions of human existence. Modern English drama is a fertile ground for exploring absurdism. It often deals with the absurdity of contemporary life, alienation and despair, and the breakdown of communication and social order. This section discusses the key characteristics of absurdism in modern English drama, its origins and influences, and some of its most prominent examples.

Absurdism is often traced back to the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who argued that human existence is fundamentally meaningless and that individuals must create meaning in a meaningless world. The absurdists, however, took this idea further, rejecting the notion that there is an inherent meaning in human existence and emphasising the world's irrationality, chaos and absurdity. Absurdism is characterised by disorientation, confusion, anxiety, and rejection of traditional forms of

meaning-making, such as religion, morality and reason.

Absurdism has profoundly influenced modern English drama, especially the works of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. Beckett's plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, are the most iconic examples of absurdism in modern English drama. They feature characters trapped in meaningless and repetitive routines, unable to communicate with each other, and struggling to find any sense of purpose or direction in their lives. Beckett's plays are often described as existentialist, and they embody the sense of absurdity and irrationality central to absurdism.

Harold Pinter's plays, such as *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*, also explore the themes of alienation, isolation, and communication breakdown that are central to absurdism. Pinter's characters often speak in non-sequiturs, engage in power struggles and emotional manipulation, and inhabit a world of uncertainty and ambiguity. Pinter's plays often critique the social and political order, and comment on the psychological and emotional forces that shape human behaviour.

Tom Stoppard's plays, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia* are more playful and intellectual than Beckett's or Pinter's, but they also embody the sense of absurdity. Stoppard's characters often engage in philosophical debates and intellectual puzzles. However, their discussions are ultimately futile, as they are still looking for definitive answers to the questions they are grappling with. Stoppard's plays are often seen as celebrations of the human capacity for creativity and imagination, even in the face of the absurdity and irrationality of the world.

Several literary and philosophical movements, including Surrealism, Dadaism, and Existentialism, have influenced Absurdism in modern English drama. The Surrealists, such as Salvador Dali and Andre Breton, sought to reveal the irrational and subconscious aspects of human experience, while the Dadaists, such as Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara, sought to challenge the conventional norms of art and literature. The Existentialists, such as Sartre and Camus, emphasised the importance of individual choice and responsibility and the need to confront the absurdity of human existence.

Absurdism in modern English drama has also been shaped by the historical and cultural context of the 20th century, including the two world wars, the Cold War, and the social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.

6.1.4 Expressionism in Modern English Drama

Expressionism is a modernist movement that originated in Germany in the early 20th century. It was a reaction to the traditional forms of art and literature that dominated the era and sought to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means. Expressionism in modern English drama reflected this broader cultural trend, and was characterised by a rejection of naturalism and a focus on the inner psychology of the characters.

The roots of Expressionism in modern English drama can be traced back to the early 20th century when several playwrights began experimenting with new forms and techniques. One of the most influential figures in this movement was the Irish playwright J.M. Synge, whose play *Riders to the Sea* is often cited as a precursor to Expressionism. The play depicts the harsh lives of the people of the Aran Islands, and uses stylised language and symbolism to convey their emotions and experiences.

Another significant influence on Expressionism in modern English drama was the work of the Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov. Chekhov's plays are known for their focus on the psychological lives of the characters, and for their use of symbolism and suggestion rather than explicit action. These techniques would be adopted and expanded upon by later Expressionist playwrights.

The first Expressionist play in modern English drama is generally considered to be *Beyond the Horizon* by Eugene O'Neill, which was first performed in 1920. The play tells the story of two brothers, Robert and Andrew Mayo, who are torn between their desire for adventure and their sense of duty to their family. The play uses Expressionist techniques, such as symbolic lighting, distorted sets, and stylised acting, to convey the characters' inner psychology.

Other notable Expressionist plays from this era include *The Hairy Ape* by O'Neill, which explores the alienation and despair of the working class, and *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell, which depicts the dehumanising effects of industrial society on women. Both plays use Expressionist techniques, such as fragmented dialogue, surreal imagery, and stylised movement to convey their themes.

One of the most influential expressionist playwrights of the era was Tennessee Williams, whose plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie* are considered classics of modern English drama. Both plays use expressionist techniques such as symbolic lighting, dreamlike sequences, and stylised movement to convey the characters' inner lives. Williams was particularly interested in exploring themes of desire, illusion, and the human search for meaning.

Expressionism in modern English drama continued to evolve throughout the 20th century, with notable examples, including the plays of Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and David Mamet. These playwrights continued experimenting with expressionist techniques, such as non-linear narrative, fragmented dialogue and stylised movement. They used them to explore themes, such as power, sexuality, and the nature of reality.

The movement was a reaction to the traditional forms of art and literature that dominated the era, and sought to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means. A rejection of Naturalism and a focus on the inner psychology of the characters characterised the movement. It was influenced by the work of playwrights, such as J.M. Synge, Anton Chekhov and Eugene O'Neill.

6.1.5 Impressionism in Modern English Drama

Impressionism was a revolutionary artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th century in France. It was characterised by focusing on light and colour and rejecting traditional forms and techniques. While Impressionism was primarily a movement in painting, its influence spread to other art forms, including drama. Impressionism has significantly impacted how plays are written and performed in modern English drama.

One of the key elements of Impressionism is its emphasis on the sensory experience. In painting, this meant capturing the fleeting effects of light and colour on a particular moment. In drama, it translated into a focus on the emotional impact of the moment rather than the traditional emphasis on plot and character development. Impressionist plays often explore the characters' interior

lives, using language and imagery to evoke emotions and sensations.

This emphasis on sensory experience is particularly evident in the works of playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Beckett's plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are known for their spare, minimalist dialogue and use of repetition and silence. These elements create a sense of emptiness and isolation, evoking the existential themes of the plays. Pinter's plays, such as *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* use language and imagery to create a sense of unease and tension, emphasising the emotional impact of the moment rather than the plot.

Another key aspect of Impressionism is its rejection of traditional forms and techniques. In painting, this meant a move away from the realistic, academic style of the past. In drama, it meant a rejection of traditional plot structures and character development. Impressionist plays often have fragmented narratives and ambiguous endings, reflecting the uncertainty and chaos of modern life.

This rejection of traditional forms is evident in the works of playwrights such as Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill. Stoppard's plays, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia* play with time and structure, creating a sense of disorientation and fragmentation. Churchill's plays, such as *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* challenge traditional notions of gender and identity, using non-linear narratives and multiple characters played by a single actor to explore the complexities of modern life.

Finally, Impressionism is known for its use of light and colour. In painting, this meant capturing the effects of light on a particular moment. In drama, it translated into a focus on the visual and physical aspects of the stage. Impressionist plays often use lighting and staging to create atmosphere and mood, emphasising the audience's sensory experience.
This use of light and colour is evident in the works of playwrights such as Sarah Kane and Simon Stephens. Kane's plays, such as *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* use stark lighting and minimal sets to create a sense of unease and disorientation. Stephens' plays, such as *Punk Rock* and *On the Shore of the Wide World* use lighting and staging to create a sense of atmosphere and mood, emphasising the emotional impact of the moment.

In conclusion, Impressionism has had a significant impact on modern English drama. Its emphasis on sensory experience, rejection of traditional forms, and use of light and colour have influenced playwrights to explore new ways of writing and performing plays. Impressionist plays challenge conventional notions of plot and character development, creating a sense of uncertainty and fragmentation that reflects the complexities of modern life.

Recap

- Modern drama as a departure from traditional literary conventions
- Modern drama explores new forms of expression, themes, and techniques.
- Realism aimed to represent reality as it was, with pioneers such as Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard.
- Realism focuses on the everyday experiences of ordinary people and the explora-

tion of social and political issues.

- The Romantic movement- the use of language to convey emotion and ideas and the creation of complex anti-heroes as protagonists
- Absurdism embodies themes of disorientation, confusion, and the breakdown of communication and social order.
- Prominent examples- Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Tom Stoppard
- Expressionism focused on conveying subjective emotions and experiences through non-realistic means.

- Influenced by playwrights, such as Synge, Chekhov and O'Neill.
- Impressionism emphasised the sensory experience and focused on light and colour to create atmosphere and mood.

Objective Questions

1. Whose everyday life experiences are captured in the Realist dramas?
2. Which type of drama rejects the conventions of melodrama and explores the darker side of human nature?
3. Name one Realist Drama written by George Bernard Shaw.
4. Which drama portrays the life of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who cannot achieve the American Dream?
5. Name one Romantic Drama in which the language is often used to create a sense of heightened emotion.
6. Which movement in modern drama often traces the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus?
7. Name one example of Absurdist drama.
8. Which movement originated in Germany in the early 20th century?
9. Which play is often cited as a precursor to Expressionism?
10. Which revolutionary art movement emerged in the late 19th century in France and impacted the development of modern drama?
11. Name one play that uses stark lighting and minimal sets to create a sense of unease and disorientation.

Answers

1. Common people
2. Realist drama
3. *Pygmalion*

4. Death of a Salesman
5. *Equus* by Peter Shaffer
6. Absurdism
7. *Waiting for Godot*
8. Expressionism
9. *Riders to the Sea*
10. Impressionism
11. Blasted

Assignments

1. What characterises modern drama, and how does it differ from traditional plays?
2. Who were some influential playwrights in modern drama, and what issues did their plays often address?
3. How did realism impact modern English drama, and what were some of the characteristics of realist dramas?
4. Who are some of the most prominent playwrights associated with absurdism in modern English drama, and how do their plays embody the sense of absurdity?
5. What are some of the philosophical and literary movements that influenced absurdism in modern English drama, and how did the historical and cultural context of the 20th century shape the movement?
6. Who were some of the influential playwrights associated with expressionism in modern English drama, and how did they use expressionist techniques to convey their themes?
7. What were some of the notable expressionist plays of the era, and how did they use techniques, such as symbolism, suggestion, and stylised movement to convey their themes?
8. What is the difference between naturalism and expressionism, and how does expressionism seek to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means?

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Unit 2

A Doll's House

Henrik Ibsen

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire familiarity with the general background of Henrik Ibsen's life
- identify the phases of Henrik Ibsen's career as a playwright
- describe the predominant features of Ibsen's writing style
- detail the themes in Ibsen's plays

Prerequisites

Henrik Ibsen, a towering figure in the world of modern drama, redefined the theatrical landscape of the 19th century with his pioneering works that delved deeply into the complexities of social and psychological issues. Born in 1828 in Norway, Ibsen's early life was marked by personal hardships, which shaped his later works. Rising from the ashes of financial ruin in his family, Ibsen's career as a playwright began in obscurity, with early works like *Catiline* and *The Burial Mound* failing to capture the public's attention. Undeterred by initial setbacks, Ibsen's move to Italy, away from the conventional confines of Norwegian theatre, catalysed his creative revolution. It was here that he gave birth to some of his most influential works, including *Peer Gynt* and *Brand*.

Ibsen's plays, known for their realistic portrayal of contemporary life, disrupted traditional theatre by addressing pressing social issues such as political corruption, gender roles, and individual psychological struggles. His work led to his reputation as "The Father of Modern Drama," influencing playwrights like George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Eugene O'Neill. His shift from historical verse dramas to socially conscious and psychological explorations marked a crucial turning point in drama.

One of Ibsen's most enduring contributions to the theatre is *A Doll's House* (1879), a play that remains a landmark in the history of modern drama. The play's exploration of the constraints placed on women in 19th-century society, and its portrayal of Nora Helmer's ultimate rebellion against her husband's oppressive love, was groundbreaking. Through Nora's personal journey from subjugation to self-liberation, Ibsen challenged the gender dynamics and moral expectations of the time, sparking widespread controversy.

In this discussion, we will explore how Ibsen's writing, particularly in *A Doll's House*, reflects

his broader artistic evolution and how his introspective dramas serve as a powerful critique of social conventions, identity, and the human condition. As we examine his life and works, we gain insight not only into the mind of one of the most influential playwrights of the modern era but also into the transformative power of theatre as a medium for social reflection and change.

Keywords

Dramatic traditions, New drama, Realism, Moral questions, Themes, Style

Discussion

Henrik Johan Ibsen, more popularly known by the name Henrik Ibsen, was born in 1828 in Norway to an elite aristocratic family. But the family soon went into bankruptcy, with Ibsen forced to leave school. At the age of fifteen, he joined as an apprentice to a pharmacist in a nearby town named Grimstad. At the same time, he developed an interest in plays and started writing them. At the age of eighteen, he moved to Christiania (later renamed Oslo), intending to become a college student. But he dropped this idea later and focused his full attention on writing plays.

Henrik Ibsen was influenced by Norwegian folk tales in his early periods. He followed the works of playwrights and authors, such as Henrik Wergeland, Peter Christen Asbjornsen, and Jorgen Moe ardently. At the age of 20, he wrote his first play, *Catiline*; the tragedy was composed under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme but was never staged. Later on, *The Burial Mound,* his first play to be staged, drew very little attention from audiences. Despite writing and staging countless unsuccessful plays in the following years, Ibsen continued to labour towards being a playwright.

He spent the next few years as a writer, director, and producer at Det Norske theatre in Bergen, Norway. There, Ibsen was involved in the production of more than 145 plays and in the publication of five plays. However, he was not able to gain popular acceptance. Ibsen was confined to practising existing, traditional formats of plays since he was part of the theatrical institution. Soon, he went into self-imposed exile to Sorrento in Italy where he was able to write according to his will, neglecting preconceived traditions in drama.

It was after this he came up with brilliant poetic dramas, such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, which garnered him critical acclamation. This was followed by plays, such as *Emperor and Galilean*, *The Pillars of Society*, and *A Doll's House*, which made him international figure. In the latter stages of his career, Ibsen began to write dramas that were more introspective and focused more on the issues of the individual rather than on critiquing social and moral standards. He radically rewrote the rules of drama by infusing realism, a style that is still used today. James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Eugene O'Neill are just a few of the playwrights and authors he influenced.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Ibsen often exposed realistic contemporary bourgeois life to European audiences through his plays. This, quite often, invited controversies and outrages. Ibsen's characters are usually portrayed in a real-life social scenario. By creating open-ended settings for his plays, he was able to initiate discussions on the familial and social issues presented in

his plays. Thus, he broke the conventional standards practised in the plays of his time and created a new direction of moral inquiry. This has garnered him the titles, 'The Father of Realism' and 'The Father of Modern Drama'.

Ibsen's career as a playwright can be broadly divided into four periods. In his early period, he wrote verse dramas based on Norwegian history. However, these plays got little attention and Ibsen was dissatisfied with the conventions of the time. He was unable to identify with any of the existing forms of drama but did not stop writing. In his second phase, which was during the 1860s and early 1870s, he wrote epic dramas, such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt,* which gained critical acclamation. In his third phase, which was during the late 70s and early 80s, Ibsen focused his attention on writing plays that dealt with social issues. In the fourth phase of his career as a playwright, during the 1880s and 1890s, he diverted his attention to writing symbolic plays, such as *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*.

Ibsen's plays often addressed social issues such as political corruption and the changing role of women. They also paid attention to psychological conflicts arising from frustrated love and destructive family relationships, emphasising character over plot. Many Ibsen scholars have compared the characters and themes in his plays to his family and upbringing, with his themes frequently dealing with financial and moral dilemmas. According to biographer Michael Mayer, the playwright deviated from the theatrical norm in a variety of ways, but most notably by combining the three key innovations of "colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and plot tightness." His conception of recognisable and relatable settings, characters, and narratives for his audiences was a remarkable turning point in the history of modern drama.

6.2.1 *A Doll's House*: Summary

A Doll's House was written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen in 1879. It was originally written in Norwegian and later translated into English. The play is considered a landmark in the history of modern drama and is one of the most performed plays in the world. It addresses issues of gender, identity, and power in the context of a 19th-century middle-class family.

The play is set in the home of Torvald Helmer, a bank manager, and his wife, Nora. Nora is a beautiful young woman devoted to her husband and children. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Nora is not as happy as she seems. She is burdened with a secret debt she has been keeping from Torvald. Her relationships with the other characters in the play reveal her lack of autonomy and self-determination.

Act I of the play introduces us to the Helmer family, consisting of Torvald Helmer, a bank manager, his wife Nora, and their three children. The act opens on Christmas Eve, and Nora is shown to be busy preparing for the holiday festivities. We see Nora as a carefree and somewhat flighty woman who is more concerned with her image and reputation than with being honest with her husband. We learn that Nora has taken out a loan to pay for a trip to Italy necessary for her husband's health. However, she is still paying off the debt and is afraid to tell her husband the truth. Nora tries to convince Torvald to give her more money for Christmas shopping, but he is reluctant to do so, as he believes they should be careful with their finances.

We are also introduced to Dr Rank, a family friend who loves Nora but knows he is dying

of venereal disease. The act ends with Nora dancing the tarantella, a traditional Italian dance, to please her husband, and Dr Rank leaves after confessing his love for her. Through Act I, we see Nora's dependence on her husband and concern for appearances, which sets up the conflicts that will drive the rest of the play.

Act II is the central act of the play, where the conflict that has been building up since Act 1 comes to a head. The act opens with Nora anxiously waiting for Krogstad, a lawyer who had given her the loan to pay for her husband's health, to arrive. Nora's anxiety stems from the fact that she has forged her father's signature on loan, which is a serious crime. Krogstad arrives and confronts Nora about the loan, threatening to reveal the forgery to her husband unless she convinces him to keep Krogstad's job at the bank. Krogstad had been dismissed by Torvald, but Nora persuaded her husband to reconsider and keep Krogstad employed. Nora believes that this will appease Krogstad and that he will destroy the evidence of her forgery.

However, things quickly spiral out of control as Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, which reveals the truth about Nora's forgery. Torvald is outraged and berates Nora for her dishonesty, saying that he can no longer love her as he did before. Nora pleads with Torvald, telling him that she committed the forgery for his sake and is willing to take the blame for her actions. However, Torvald is only concerned with Nora's actions' effect on his reputation and social standing. The act ends with Nora realising that her life has been a lie and that she has been living as a doll in *A Doll's House*, playing the role of a subservient wife to please her husband and society's expectations. Nora decides she can no longer live this way and must leave her husband and children to find herself and her independence.

Act 3 of the play is the final act and provides the resolution to the conflicts that have been building up throughout the previous acts. The act opens with Nora packing her things to leave her husband and children, as she feels she can no longer live as a doll in A Doll's House. Torvald initially tries to convince Nora to stay, saying that he will forgive her and forget about her forgery. However, Nora sees through his words and realises he is only concerned with his reputation and social standing. Nora tells Torvald that she no longer loves him, as she has realized that he has never truly loved her for who she is.

The climax of the play comes when Nora decides to leave, and Torvald reacts with anger and threats, saying that she cannot leave him and that he will take care of everything. However, Nora stands up to Torvald and asserts her independence, saying that she must find herself and her own identity, even if it means leaving her family behind. The play ends with Nora walking out on Torvald, leaving him and her children behind. The final scene suggests that Nora is unsure of her future but is determined to find herself and live her life on her terms rather than as a doll in *A Doll's House*.

The play is a groundbreaking work that challenged the social norms of its time by portraying a strong and independent female character who defies the expectations of her husband and society. The play is still widely performed today and is considered a modern drama masterpiece.

Recap

- Henrik Ibsen was a major Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century.
- Plays depicted realistic contemporary European bourgeois lives.
- Plays with open-ended settings
- Discussed familial and social issues
- He broke the conventional standards in plays.
- Father of realism
- Father of modern drama
- Wrote dramas based on Norwegian history in the first phase
- Wrote epic dramas in the second phase
- Focused attention in writing plays dealing with social issues in the third phase
- Symbolic plays in the fourth phase
- His plays addressed social issues, political corruption, and changing role of women.
- Psychological conflicts
- He gave emphasis to character over the plot.
- His themes frequently deal with financial and moral dilemmas.
- He combined colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and plot tightness in his plays.
- A Doll's House is a play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1879 and is one of the most performed plays in the world.
- The play addresses issues of gender, identity, and power in the context of a 19th-century middle-class family.
- The conflict of the play centers around Nora's secret debt and her forgery of her father's signature.
- A Doll's House challenged the social norms of its time by portraying a strong and independent female character.

Objective Questions

1. When was Henrik Ibsen born?
2. Where was Ibsen born?
3. When did Ibsen start working as a pharmacist's apprentice?
4. Which town did he go to become an apprentice to a pharmacist?
5. When did Ibsen start writing plays?
6. What influenced Ibsen in his early periods?
7. Whose works influenced Ibsen?

8. At what age did Ibsen write his first play?
9. What was the name of his first play?
10. What was the genre of his first play?
11. What pseudonym did he use when composing his first play?
12. What was the title of his first staged play?
13. Where did Ibsen work as a writer, director, and producer?
14. Where did Ibsen go on his self-imposed exile?
15. What was Ibsen's writing style?
16. Who were influenced by Ibsen?
17. When and where did Ibsen died?
18. What did Ibsen's plays show?
19. How is Henrik Ibsen popularly known as?
20. What did Ibsen write during his early years?
21. What did Ibsen write between the 1860s and the 1870s?
22. When was A Doll's House written?
23. Who is the protagonist of A Doll's House?
24. What did Dr. Rank confess to Nora?
25. How does the play end?

Answers

1. 1828
2. Norway
3. At the age of fifteen
4. Grimstad
5. At the age of fifteen
6. Norwegian folk tales
7. Henrik Wergeland, Peter Christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moeardently
8. At the age of 20
9. *Catiline*
10. Tragedy
11. Brynjolf Bjarme
12. *The Burial Mound*
13. At Det norske theatre in Bergen, Norway
14. Sorrento in Italy

15. Realism
16. James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Eugene O'Neill
17. 1906 at Kristiania
18. Realistic and contemporary European bourgeois life
19. The father of realism and the father of modern drama
20. He composed verse dramas about Norwegian history.
21. Epic dramas
22. 1879
23. Nora, Torvald Helmer's wife.
24. His love to Nora
25. The play ends with Nora walking out on Torvald.

Assignments

1. Write a brief biographical note about Henrik Ibsen?
2. In what ways did Henrik Ibsen transform the conventions of traditional drama?
3. Trace the various periods in the writing career of Henrik Ibsen.
4. Why is Henrik Ibsen considered the 'Father of Modern Drama'?
5. Briefly discuss the themes taken up by Henrik Ibsen in his plays.
6. Write a brief note about the main characters in *A Doll's House*?
7. What is the play *A Doll's House* about? Discuss briefly.

Suggested Reading

- Ledger, Sally. *Henrik Ibsen*. United Kingdom, Northcote House/British Council, 2008.
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Unit 3

A Doll's House – Themes and Characterisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define what is meant by theme and its importance in a literary work
- describe the major themes employed in the play *A Doll's House*
- acquire a general idea about characterisation and its importance in a play
- analyse the characterisation employed in the play *A Doll's House*

Prerequisites

In Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the themes of sacrifice, gender bias, love, and deception are interwoven, revealing the complexities of social roles and personal identity. The play sheds light on the oppressive realities faced by women during the late 19th century, where they were often compelled to make personal sacrifices for their families or to fit into the narrow expectations of society. Through characters such as Nora, Mrs. Linde, and Anne Marie, Ibsen explores the struggle for independence in a world where women were denied autonomy, and often forced to conceal their desires, emotions, and even their financial decisions. Nora's journey from a naïve, sheltered wife to an empowered woman who rejects her role as Torvald's "doll" is a powerful critique of gender inequality and the stifling nature of traditional marriage.

At the same time, Ibsen delves into the theme of love, questioning the authenticity of romantic relationships in a society built on deception. Torvald and Nora's seemingly affectionate relationship, full of pet names and outward affection, is ultimately exposed as hollow, built on lies and an imbalanced power dynamic. Meanwhile, other characters like Mrs. Linde and Krogstad present alternative views of love, where sacrifice and personal integrity play a more significant role.

Deception runs throughout the play, with characters like Nora hiding crucial truths about their lives and decisions, ultimately leading to the unravelling of their relationships. This theme is not just limited to personal lives but extends to the social fabric, highlighting how appearances and social expectations shape behaviour.

Through his dynamic characterisations, Ibsen creates a cast of characters who are bound by the social roles assigned to them, yet who each wrestle with these constraints in unique ways. Nora, in particular, represents the internal conflict between social pressure and individual desire, evolving from a seemingly submissive character to a bold, independent woman who

chooses self-liberation over a stifling marriage. In contrast, Torvald's desire for control and his superficial understanding of love are challenged as the play progresses, making him a symbol of the oppressive patriarchal system.

In exploring these themes and character dynamics, *A Doll's House* invites us to examine the intersection of personal integrity, social expectations, and the pursuit of true freedom. Through its critique of the roles women were expected to play, Ibsen's work remains a compelling exploration of gender, love, and self-determination.

Keywords

Doctrine, literary device, main idea, perception, interpretation, direct characterisation, Indirect characterisation.

Discussion

The Drama *A Doll's House* contains several themes, some of the major themes are discussed here:

6.3.1 Themes

Sacrifices made by women/ gender bias: The female characters in the play exemplify Nora's claim that while men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." Mrs. Linde was forced to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man in order to support her mother and two brothers. The nanny, Anne Marie had to abandon her own child in order to support herself by caring for Nora and her children. Despite being economically advantaged in comparison to the other female characters in the play, Nora leads a difficult life because society requires Torvald to be the dominant partner in the marriage. Torvald issues the rulings and disdains Nora, and Nora is forced to conceal her loan from him because she knows Torvald would never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had assisted in saving his life. In addition, she must work in secret to repay her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without the permission of her husband at that time.

Love and Marriage: Torvald and Nora are depicted as a married couple. They refer to each other using pet names, demonstrating their affection. Mrs. Linde and Krogstad are married at the end of the play. Dr. Rank has never married, and he confesses his love for Nora, despite the fact that she is married.

Deception: Deception is another major theme in the play. In order to obtain a loan, Nora forges her dying father's signature. Krogstad assists her in all of this and then uses it to blackmail her later on. Nora never tells her husband about it because society does not allow women to borrow money. She then tells her friend Mrs. Linde, who advises her to tell her husband because a proper marriage is not built through deception, and true to her word, when Nora's husband discovers this, her marriage will inevitably fall apart. Krogstad also has a bad reputation because he assists Nora in forging the documents.

6.3.2 Characterisation

Characterisation is another major literary device in *A Doll's House*. In the drama, Ibsen uses the method of indirect characterisation to define characters. Ibsen portrays the characters in the play as being strictly bound to the roles that society assigns them.

Some of the major characters in the play are discussed here:

Nora Helmer: The protagonist Nora Helmer is initially presented as naïve and carefree who lacks information about the outside world. She is depicted as a spendthrift through the character of Torvald. She happily accepts Torvald's pet names for her, which include "skylark," "songbird," "squirrel," and "pet." Torvald also refers to her and treats her like a child, for example, by forbidding her from eating macaroons, which she does despite her promises of total obedience to him. The animal and child imagery both reflect Nora's seemingly innocent, carefree nature and imply that her husband does not regard her as a proper adult because she is a woman. Nora also has some self-doubt, which she attributes to being treated like a doll her whole childhood. She is frequently reminded by Torvald that she is a "prodigal", a spendthrift, "just like your father". She also shows her lack of confidence to her husband by saying, "I wish I had inherited more of papa's good qualities." Her uncertainty is also visible in her haste to paint a lovely and ideal picture of her life for Mrs. Linde, telling her right away that she has three beautiful children and that her husband now has a wonderful job at the bank.

But as the play progresses, it is revealed that Nora is not as silly as her husband, Torvald, assumes. When Nora realises that her perception of herself, her husband, her marriage, and even her society is incorrect, she decides that she can no longer be happy in her current situation and decides to leave her husband, Torvald. Nora's final change into a mature, brave, fearless, and independent lady is an important aspect of her character. When she realises that her husband is not the protector or saviour he claims to be and sees through his apparent hypocrisy, she instantly abandons her position as his little "doll." She plans to travel and learn more about the world so that she can find a better understanding of herself. In the end, Nora turns out to be a more confident and empowered woman who has broken free from the constraints of her past existence.

Nora's character is incredibly complicated. She is crafty yet innocent, shy and insecure yet tremendously daring, defenceless but fiercely independent, manipulative and covert at first but bold and forthright at the end. But, until her metamorphosis, she seems to be performing two roles: one of her own self and another of her husband's doll.

Hence, her persona as the doll is the weak, unassertive, dependent, and secretive side of herself, which she abandons as soon as she realises that being Helmer's doll serves no purpose and causes her more harm than benefit. Nora represents feminism and all downtrodden women who are patronised and denied their freedom and self-identity.

She therefore represents every woman's right to personal independence and individuality, and she defies the preconception that a woman's sole responsibility is to her children and her marriage.

Torvald Helmer: Torvald Helmer is a lawyer when the play starts and towards the end, he is promoted as Bank Manager. He is very affectionate towards Nora, but he often treats her more as a pet, child, or object than as a real person. He enjoys being Nora's guardian, guide, and instructor, and he prefers to have total control over her. His passion to teach Nora the tarantella dance demonstrates this. Torvald appears to be in command of every area of her life, making choices about what she should eat, how she should move, and so on. He regards his wife Nora as an object of his

desire, a piece of property over which he has unlimited control. "I've often wished that you could be threatened by some imminent danger so that I could risk everything I had—even my life itself—to save you." He imagines himself as a saviour to Nora.

Torvald's high sense of self is another crucial character feature. He regards himself as an idealistic, morally honest person with unquestioned morality. Torvald believes that the role of a man in marriage is to protect and guide his wife. He is straightforward and traditional in his beliefs about marriage and society. Torvald's obsession with reputation and appearances is highlighted by his focus on status and being treated as superior by people such as Nils Krogstad. Torvald is acutely aware of how people see him and his place in the community. He states that he refuses Nora's request to retain Krogstad at the office since doing so would make him a "laughingstock before the entire staff." Torvald's response to Nora's dishonesty also illustrates his desire for society's respect. Despite the fact that he claims Nora has damaged his happiness and will not be permitted to raise the children, he insists on her staying in the house since his primary priority is maintaining "the image" of their household.

Nils Krogstad: Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an antagonist at the beginning of the play. He is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man who threatens and blackmails the Helmers. He, too, has committed the crime of forgery in the past, an act for which he did not go to prison but which damaged his reputation and made it exceedingly difficult for him to get a good profession. Later in the play, it is revealed that he once had feelings for Kristine Linde, who later married another man. This has made him lost and unhappy in his marriage, and is the reason behind his moral corruption.

Towards the end of the play, Nil Krogstad is revealed as capable of compassion when he shows mercy towards Nora. He is presented as one who is coerced into morally dubious behaviour by society's rigid and unforgiving forces.

Mrs. Kristine Linde: Mrs. Kristine Linde is presented as an independent woman in contrast to Nora. Kristine had experienced some misfortunes and trials in her life, which drove her to work in order to provide for her family and herself. Kristine is credited with breaking the stereotype of women as subservient and docile objects of male attention. However, by the end of the play, she desires to be with Krogstad for love and security.

Dr. Rank: Torvald's best friend, Dr. Rank is unconcerned about what others think of him. Dr. Rank has spinal tuberculosis, which he believes is the result of his father's vices. He is unmarried and lonely, and it is revealed throughout the play that he is in love with Nora. His view towards life is cynical.

Recap

- Theme as a general concept or doctrine
- The theme carries the main idea or underlying meaning.
- The theme helps in a better understanding of a literary work.
- Themes are susceptible to the reader's or audience's perception and interpretation.
- The theme helps literature to remain meaningful and dynamic.
- The characterisation is a literary device.
- Characterisation helps in the introduction and development of characters in a play
- Characterisation is of two types, direct and indirect.
- Direct characterisation - author introduces the character
- Indirect characterisation – understanding character through behaviour
- Nora claims hundreds of thousands of women have sacrificed their integrity.
- Mrs. Linde was forced to abandon Krogstad.
- Anne Marie had to abandon her children to care for Nora and her children.
- Love and marriage, main themes of the play
- Deceptions as another major theme
- The indirect characterisation in *A Doll's House*
- Nora is presented as a naïve and carefree character.
- Torvald is straightforward and traditional in his beliefs.
- Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man.
- Mrs. Linde is depicted as independent in contrast with Nora.
- Dr. Rank is presented as a cynical person.

Objective Questions

1. What is a theme?
2. What does the theme contain?
3. How are themes conveyed?
4. What is the function of the theme?
5. What is characterisation?
6. What are the different types of characterisations?
7. What type of characterisation is used in *A Doll's House*?
8. What are the major themes in *A Doll's House*?
9. Why Kristine Linde was forced to abandon Nils Krogstad?
10. Why does Anne Marie abandon her children?

11. What kind of a character is Torvald Helmer?
12. How is Nils Krogstad portrayed in the play?
13. Who loved Kristine Linde?
14. What caused Nils Krogstad to become morally corrupt?
15. Who is presented as an independent woman in the play?
16. Which character is unconcerned about others in the play?
17. What is Dr. Rank afflicted with?

Answers

1. It is a general concept or a doctrine incorporated in a literary work.
2. The theme contains the main idea of the literary work.
3. Themes are conveyed through characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all of these elements.
4. To make literature meaningful and dynamic.
5. The characterisation is a literary device.
6. Direct Characterisation and Indirect Characterisation.
7. Indirect Characterisation
8. Sacrifices made by women, love, marriage, and deception.
9. To help her mother and two brothers from poverty.
10. To care for Nora and her children.
11. Torvald Helmer is straightforward and traditional.
12. Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man.
13. Nils Krogstad is redeemed towards the end.
14. Kristine Linde's betrayal caused him to be morally corrupt.
15. Kristine Linde
16. Dr. Rank
17. Spinal tuberculosis

Assignments

1. Analyse and interpret the different themes in *A Doll's House*.
2. Make a list of the various types of characters used in the play *A Doll's House*.
3. Briefly examine the characterisation of Mrs. Kristine Linde in *A Doll's House*.
4. How does Nora Helmer evolve during the course of the play?
5. How does *A Doll's House* present the theme of deception?

Suggested Reading

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Unit 4

A Doll's House – Structure and Style

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- acquire a general insight into different types of structures used in drama
- acquire a general overview of the key styles used in drama
- determine the structure and style of the play *A Doll's House*
- identify the stylistic elements in the play *A Doll's House*

Prerequisites

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* stands as a remarkable exploration of social norms, identity, and the consequences of personal choices. Through its innovative structure and compelling character contrasts, the play defies traditional plot expectations, challenging the very foundations of social and familial obligations. By using a three-act format that breaks from conventional narrative closure, Ibsen presents an exposition that sets the stage for Nora's precarious life, a complication that unveils the tensions within her marriage, and a denouement that leaves the audience questioning the nature of personal freedom and self-realisation.

Ibsen's use of vernacular language enhances the realism of the play, allowing the characters to communicate in a way that resonates with the audience. This straightforward language contrasts sharply with the underlying complexity of the characters' emotions and decisions, particularly as seen in Nora's transformation from the 'doll' wife to an independent woman seeking her own identity. The juxtaposition of Nora with Mrs. Linde, and Helmer with Krogstad, further underscores the central theme of personal versus social expectations. These contrasts deepen the irony threaded throughout the play, where appearances often mask deeper, more painful truths.

The play's modern tragic elements push boundaries by presenting a protagonist, Nora, whose flaw isn't grandiose ambition or fatal hubris, but rather the blind submission to social roles and personal illusions. Through retrospection, the audience is invited to understand the motivations behind Nora's actions and, by extension, the tragedy of a system that limits personal agency. Ultimately, *A Doll's House* challenges the audience not to simply mourn the loss of an idealised home but to reflect on the possibilities of personal emancipation and self-discovery in a restrictive society. This rhetorical exploration serves as a call for change, prompting introspection about gender roles, morality, and the human capacity for reinvention.

Keywords

Plot, Exposition, Complication, Denouement, Vernacular

Discussion:

A Doll's House, The play is written in three acts to tell the story, thereby breaking the conventional plot structure. The three acts are divided into an exposition/rising action in the first act, a complication in the second act, and a discussion in the third act. Nora's conversations with Helmer, Mrs. Linde, and Krogstad in Act I tell us everything we need to know about how critical the situation is. The situation is developed and complicated in Act II. Nora tries to find a way out, first by convincing Helmer to change his mind, then by enlisting the assistance of Dr. Rank. When all of her possible solutions fail, the action reaches a climax.

Act III leads to the climax, in which Ibsen builds suspense by hinting at a resolution. Krogstad's change of mind could imply that the letter will be destroyed. Then Ibsen eliminates that possibility by having Mrs. Linde decide to expose the truth. He heightens the tension by having Dr. Rank postponed Helmer's reading of the letter.

At the falling action or denouement, all the secrets are revealed and successfully resolved. But instead of a conventional plot structure that usually portrays a 'happily ever after in the end,' the play took a different turn through Nora's announcement of leaving her marriage and children, making the ending of the play open-ended. The play also contains a subplot, but it is integrated so flawlessly into the main plot. The play's structural coherence is unaffected by the subplot featuring Krista and Mrs. Linde.

The writing style of the play *A Doll's House* demonstrates the writer's straightforward and convincing approach. In this play, Ibsen portrays his characters and incidents from a real-life point of view, which the audience can often relate with their contemporary life and society. The characters in this play communicate in everyday language. Ibsen's use of vernacular language in the play makes it a realistic and relatable experience for the viewers.

The plot technique of juxtaposition combines contrasting individuals or circumstances. For this reason, it is also necessary to make some personalities and circumstances analogous or parallel. The similarities between the characters increase the contrasts in this way. Nora and Mrs. Linde are opposites in *A Doll's House*, and Helmer is represented opposite to Krogstad.

The contrast between Nora and Mrs. Linde are the most evident. Mrs. Linde begins as a tragic widow but later transforms into a blissfully contented wife of Krogstad; Nora begins as a happy wife but turns out to be a tragic character by the end of the drama. Nora initially appears to be a doll, a lovely and fascinating object of entertainment, but she later reveals that she is truly intelligent, searching for her identity and dignity, and she eventually leaves her home at the end of the play. Mrs. Linde is a severe and independent woman who initially leads a serious life, but she eventually manages to assume the character of a romantic young wife who is happily dependent.

Krogstad is contrasted with Torvald Helmer. Despite being a classmate of Krogstad,

Helmer is a conservative, inflexible, and uncaring egotist. Although Krogstad is generally considered to be the antagonist of the play, he is empathetic in sentiment, progressive in thought, flexible in attitude, and not rigid in his beliefs. It is unexpected that Krogstad attempts to alleviate Nora's worries following his blackmailing. He arrives and informs Nora that his main goal is to regain his job through blackmailing her husband, who has been so heartless as to fire his classmate without a valid reason.

A Doll's House is noted for its use of irony as a technique. Dramatic irony is a technique used in theatre to create a contrast between appearance and reality, between what appears to be the case, the situation, or the message, and what is actually the case. A speaker may use irony consciously or unconsciously. When a remark is intentionally ironic, it conveys the complete opposite of what it appears to mean.

We can see Ibsen using irony on multiple different instances. Nora tells Mrs. Linde in the beginning of the play that she and Helmer have had a tremendous stroke of luck because Helmer has been appointed the manager of a bank, that he will now be receiving a huge salary and lots of benefits. But the real incidents in the play, which we understand in the course of the play, prove just opposite of what was expected. Retrospection, or turning back on the past to gain knowledge and understanding, is another element that the plot is built around. Many issues related to Nora, Helmer and Krogstad in the play are disclosed through the technique of retrospection.

A Doll's House can be dubbed a modern tragedy because it differs from classic tragedies in that it features a tragic flaw in the protagonist, who is normally a hero. In reality, *A Doll's House* ends with a new beginning rather than total collapse. Old values are broken as Nora's illusionary world comes crashing down, yet Nora appears to have succeeded in our eyes at least by acquiring knowledge and courage.

Recap

- The structure of a play or dramatic structure is a literary element.
- The structure of a play helps in unfolding the plot.
- Aristotle's text on dramatic theory– the first written work to examine story structure
- Aristotle gave primary importance to the plot.
- A play should have a beginning, middle, and an end – Aristotle.
- A play should have a protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe – Aelius Donatus.

- In 1863, Gustav Freytag developed Freytag's Pyramid.
- Freytag's Pyramid – Five acts- exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement
- Usually, dramatic structure is linear - actions taking place in a chronological order
- Non-linear structure – play moves forwards and backward in time
- Style varies from one work of literature to the next.

- Style is the method in which a particular work is presented.
- Style makes a play or an author distinct and unique.
- Style is influenced by time, place, artistic, and other social structures.
- Different types of theatrical styles are naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism
- The play *A Doll's House* consists of three acts.
- Exposition in the first act, complication in the second act, resolution in the third act
- Nora's conversations with Helmer, Mrs. Linde, and Krogstad reveal the critical situation
- The situation is developed through Nora's failed attempts to convince Torvald in Act II.
- Act III leads to the climax where Ibsen complicates the story further.
- At the falling action or denouement, all the secrets are revealed and successfully resolved.
- Nora's announcement of leaving her marriage and children makes the ending of the play open-ended.
- The writing style is straightforward and convincing.

Objective Questions

1. What is dramatic structure?
2. Which is the first written text that examines story structure?
3. Who wrote *Poetics*?
4. According to Aristotle, what should a play have?
5. Who was Aelius Donatus?
6. According to Aelius Donatus, what does a play consist of?
7. Who was Gustav Freytag?
8. According to Freytag's pyramid, what should a plot have?
9. What are the two types of dramatic structures?
10. How do events take place in linear dramatic structure?
11. How do events take place in a non-linear dramatic structure?
12. What is a style in literature?
13. What makes an author or a play distinct and unique?
14. How many acts does the play *A Doll's House* have?
15. What does Act I of the play reveal?
16. What happens in Act II?
17. What is the writing style of the play?

Answers

1. It is a literary element that functions as a framework that allows the plot of a story to unfold
2. Poetics
3. Aristotle
4. A beginning, middle, and an end
5. A roman grammarian and teacher of rhetoric
6. Protasis, epitasis and catastrophe
7. A German playwright and novelist
8. An introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement
9. Linear dramatic structure and non-linear dramatic structure
10. In chronological order
11. Forward as well as backward manner in time
12. Style is the method by which a particular literary work is presented
13. Style
14. Three
15. The first act reveals the situation of the play
16. The situation becomes complicated
17. Realistic

Assignments

1. Make a detailed examination of the structure of the play *A Doll's House*.
2. Explore the different types of theatrical styles in Modern Drama.
3. How does the plot of *A Doll's House* break the conventional structure of a play?
4. Elaborate on the exposition or rising action in *A Doll's House*.
5. Discuss the falling action or denouement in *A Doll's House.*
6. Analyse the structure of *A Doll's House* on the basis of Aelius Donatus' protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe.

Suggested Reading

- Hornby, Richard. *Script into Performance: A Structuralist Approach.* Hal Leonard Corporation,1995.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Modernism" *Modern Drama, A Definition and an Estimate*. Cornell U P, 1953.
- Mencken, H. L. *The Collected Drama of H. L. Mencken: Plays and Criticism*. Scarecrow Press, 2012.

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