



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 302

COURSE NAME: MODERN BRITISH
DRAMA

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**ENGLISH
BLOCK I**



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MEG 302: Modern British Drama

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UNIT 2: READING *PYGMALION*

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

MEG302: British Drama II: Modern and Contemporary is the concluding course of British drama and deals with the major works of representative British dramatists of the twentieth and twenty first century. It would deal with the various trends/ movements in this period to see the historical, cultural and critical contexts of the plays taken up for study. The learners are also encouraged to examine these texts keeping in mind the developments in European theatre since these had a great impact on British dramatists. Dramatic works ranging from George Barnard Shaw to Caryl Churchill will be useful for the learners to develop a comprehensive knowledge of British and other European dramatists writing in English.

For the benefit of the learners this course is divided into two Blocks. Block I includes Module I and II. Block II has succeeding Module III, IV and V.

INTRODUCTION: BLOCK I

Module I: G. B Shaw: *Pygmalion* is consists of three units. ***Unit 1: Trends in Modern English Drama*** will help you to understand the nature of drama during the twentieth century that has undergone a visible transition from that of the drama of Victorian period. George Bernard Shaw being a major exponent of modern drama finds special reading in this unit where you are provided with a brief study of life and works of this great playwright along with the socio-political and cultural concern primary to Shaw's plays. ***Unit 2: Reading *Pygmalion**** will acquaint learners with Shaw's one of the greatest plays *Pygmalion* (1912) based upon Greek mythological character Pygmalion. *Pygmalion* brought much fame to Shaw and attracted the attention of the critics because of its dealing with contemporary issues. A detail actwise summery of the play given in this unit will not only help the learners to constitute a considerably good knowledge of the play, but will also prepare for the critical aspects to be discussed in the succeeding unit. ***Unit 3: Critical Analysis of the Play*** will introduce the learners to the

important characters of the play and their role within it. This unit will also deal with major thematic concerns such as class conflict, social absolutes, and the role of language in ascertaining the class of an individual in the society. *Pygmalion* belongs to the class of problem plays and in this unit you will be able to develop a fair idea of the nature of problem plays.

Module II: Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* will introduce the learners to one of the most critically acclaimed plays of Post War period. The play has many aspects for which it is considered to be one of the most appropriate theatrical presentations of modern times. Divided into three units, ***Unit 4: Theatre of the Absurd*** will give you a fairly good idea about the rise of the Theatre of the Absurd in post war period. This will not only help you to understand absurdist techniques, but also to relate them to the text that we are going to analyse in the succeeding units. ***Unit 5: Reading the text*** is an elaborate discussion of the *Waiting for Godot*. In this unit you will also be able to introduce yourself to the major characters of the play and the line of action which will prepare you to understand critically the major issues discussed in the next unit. ***Unit 6: Critical Analysis of the Play*** presents important issues that are relevant during the period of the making of the play. You will be able to know how the play has universal relevance and appeal to all time and people.

Though most of the aspects of the texts prescribed for your study in the course are discussed considerably extensively, we always suggest you to read the texts properly to understand the issues discussed. Reading of the texts will enable you to grow your critical view of any text.

MODULE I: G B SHAW: *PYGMALION*

UNIT 1: TRENDS IN MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Trends in Modern English Drama
- 1.3 G. B. Shaw: Life and Works
- 1.4 Shaw's ideological background
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 Assessment Questions
- 1.7 References and Recommended Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented growth of British drama and novel. The theatre had survived despite many setbacks imposed on it; and it was during the time of G. B. Shaw the theatre again gained its lost status. The development of the problem play towards the close of the Victorian age was closely related to the growth of the realistic movement in the field of English drama. Here in this unit we will try to trace the new trends available in drama during that time and examine the importance of George Bernard Shaw in general and his play *Pygmalion* in particular.

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This is the first unit of the course Modern and Contemporary British Drama and it will help you to understand the nature of drama during the twentieth century. It will also provide you with a brief study of George Bernard Shaw's life and works. We will read his famous play

Pygmalion and the themes and issues he addresses in it. After going through this unit you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with a general overview of modern drama
- familiarize yourself with the life and works of George Bernard Shaw
- understand the socio-political and cultural background that is reflected in Shaw's play

1.2 TRENDS IN MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

Drama, which had suffered steep decline during the Victorian age, was revived with great gusto in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the course of six decades had witnessed many trends and currents in the twentieth century drama.

Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern drama. The dramatists of early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with the real problems of life in a realistic manner in their plays. Shaw being the foremost practitioners of the genre popularised the genre called the problem play which sought to focus on the contemporary life. Two other modern dramatists besides Shaw who wrote a number of Problem plays were Granville-Barker and John Galsworthy.

Modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is employed by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they seek to propagate in the society. The modern drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age.

The earlier dramatists of the twentieth century were Realists to the core, but with the passage of time, brought in new trends in modern drama. Romanticism, which had been dear to Elizabethan dramatists found its way in modern drama. It was mainly due to Sir J. M. Barrie's effort that the new wave of romanticism swept over modern drama for

some years in the twentieth century. Barrie kept himself aloof from sordid and squalid realities of life and made excursions into the world of romance, fantasy, magic and the supernaturalism. He charmed his readers by the tender whimsicality of his imagination and provided them an escape from the drab and dull realities of life. The realistic movement was a reaction against such a trend and was strengthened by the growth of the scientific spirit, which stimulated the desire for facts and fostered an attitude of dispassionate observation.

Another reaction to realism and naturalism in drama was found in the popularisation of poetic plays by a host of dramatists who have produced poetic plays in large numbers. They have made poetic plays a force to reckon to within modern drama. T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood can be cited as the chief practitioners of this kind. Another trend perceptible in modern drama is in the direction of using history and biography for dramatic treatment. There were many beautiful, historical and biographical plays in modern dramatic literature. In these plays, there is a central dominating personality standing on a higher pedestal over the multiplicity of individual delineated character.

A new trend in modern drama was introduced by the Irish dramatists who brought about the Celtic Revival in literature. In the hands of the Irish dramatists, drama ceased to be realistic in character, and became an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people from remote days to their own times. The imaginative idealism which has always characterised the Celtic races, the love of passionate and dreamy poetry which has exercised a fascination over the Irish mind, the belief in the fairy world which has been an article of faith in the Irish people have been represented in modern Irish drama. The Irish National Theatre, with a permanent venue at the Abbey Theatre, had been associated with the revival of the Irish drama with Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey stealing the limelight.

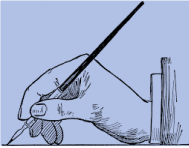
The impressionistic plays of W. B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality, rather than in presenting reality as it is. Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than making an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or events.

Just as Impressionism, Expressionism also is another important feature of modern drama. It marks an extreme reaction against naturalism. It aimed to offer a subjective, psychological representation with emphasis on the subconscious. The dialogue of such plays was often cryptic and patterned, now verse, now prose, and was in every way as far removed from the naturalistic prose of the realist school as can well be imagined.

There is a revival of the comedy of manners in modern dramatic literature. The drama after the Second World War has not exhibited a love for comedy, and the social conditions of the period after the war was not very favourable for the blossoming of the artificial comedy of the Restoration Age.

With the onset of twentieth century the melodramatic themes like lords as villain, maiden in distress, plays ending with a marriage and with expressions like 'They lived happily ever after' became obsolete. In late nineteenth century the emergence of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) brought about a sea change in the way drama was looked at. His realistic dramas like *The Doll's House* (1879), *The Ghost* (1881), and *The Wild Duck* (1884) dealt with the domestic themes of ordinary lives in a manner considered unique. The plays of Ibsen influenced many European dramatists of the twentieth century and G. B. Shaw was no exception. Shaw in his essay "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" (1891) analyses Ibsen's dramatic works and acknowledges his skill in portraying very strong characters defying the accepted social norms. With the changing lifestyles in twentieth century because of the advent of science and technology drama too altered the way it used to be

presented. In modern drama, there are elaborate stage directions. These stage directions considerably ease the work of dramatic production on the stage. The three classical unities of time, place and action are generally maintained. Dialogues in modern drama are short. The lack of action is made up by fine dialogues.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is a Problem play?

2. Name two dramatists who wrote Problem plays

3. What do you mean Expressionism?

4. Name two Irish dramatist and at least one play written by them.

5. Name two plays written by Henrik Ibsen. Which country did he belong to?

1.3 G. B. SHAW: LIFE AND WORKS

George Bernard Shaw was born at Upper Synge Street (now 33 Synge Street), Dublin on July 26, 1856. His father, George Carr Shaw (1814–85) was a small merchant and sometime civil servant, and his mother, Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly (1830–1913) was a professional singer. He had two sisters, Lucinda Frances (1853–1920) and Elinor Agnes (1855–76). Lucinda was a singer and Elinor died of tuberculosis. His father was a drunkard, but his mother was a practical woman. Shaw inherited the gift of fun, satire and comic indifference to the hardships of life from his father; and from his mother he derived love for music and the unshakable faith in his own rightness against other people's opinions. Michael Holroyd's biography on Shaw says that Shaw's original father is not George Carr Shaw, but George Vandeleur Lee, a music instructor, who stayed with their family.

Shaw's formal education began under Miss Caroline Hill. Later, he came under the charge of Reverend William George Carroll, Rector of St. Bridge's, Dublin, who taught him Latin. At the age of eleven, he entered a Protestant institution, the Dublin Wesleyan Connexional School. In 1869, he entered the Central Boys' School, which he so much hated. He describes his stay in this school as, "It was to me what the blacking warehouse was to Dickens."

On November 1, 1871, Shaw became a junior clerk in the office of a firm of estate agents, Uniacke and Townshed, Dublin, starting at a wage of 18 shillings a month. Later he was promoted as the cashier of the same firm. He left this job on April 1876 due to some displeasure earned in the office and went to London, where he became Way leave Manager to the Edison Telephone Company in November 1897.

Shaw had privately started scribbling stories and other pieces before he was ten. His first work is a novel named, *Immaturity* (completed in 1879); this is followed by four others: *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882) and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). All were rejected by the publishers to whom he submitted them, although *An Unsocial Socialist* and *Byron's Profession* were serialised in a Socialist Journal, *Today*, in 1884 and 1885-86 respectively. *The Irrational Knot* and *Love among the Artists* were serially published in *Our Corner*, a journal controlled by the great theosophist Mrs Annie Besant. After this Shaw gave up his attempt to become a novelist.

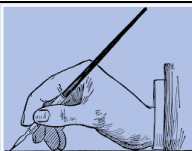
In 1879 Shaw joined the Zetetic Society, an organisation devoted to discussing various philosophies, and later he became a member of the Fabian Society founded by a group of young followers of Davidson's Fellowship of the New Life. The Fabian Society believed in a sort of militant socialism for achieving its economic ideals. The modern Labour Party of England was largely the product of the Fabian Society. When the Fabian Society had outlived its utility because of the emergence of the Labour Party, Shaw resigned from its Executive Committee in 1911.

After that Shaw became a journalist and art critic through the good offices of William Archer. Archer gave Shaw the job of a reviewer of books. Shaw also started writing plays in collaboration with Archer.

Shaw began his career as a dramatist with *Widowers' Houses* (1892). After that, *The Philanderer* and *Mrs Warren's Profession* both were published in 1893. All these three are together called plays "unpleasant". His first very successful play, *Arms and the Man*, was written in 1894. In the same year came *Candida*, followed by *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell* in 1895. These four are together called plays "pleasant". His "Three Plays for Puritans" include *The Devil's Disciple* in 1896, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1899) and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898). His *The Perfect Wagnerite* was published in 1898, *Man and Superman* in 1903, *John Bull's other Island* and *How He Lied to*

Her Husband in 1904, *Major Barbara* in 1905, *The Doctor's Dilemma* in 1906, *Interlude at the Playhouse* in 1907, *Getting Married* in 1908, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), *Androcles and the Lion*, *Overruled*, and *Pygmalion* in 1912. *Heartbreak House* was published in 1919, *Back to Methuselah* in 1920, *St. Joan* in 1923, *The Apple Cart* in 1929, *Too Good to be True* in 1932, *Village Wooing* in 1934, *The Millionairess* in 1936, *Cymbeline Refinished* in 1937, and *The Lady She Would Not* in 1950, the year of his death. Most of these plays were produced in America, England and many other countries of the world and enjoyed amazing popularity. Some of them were also filmed.

Shaw as a dramatist, orator, and a social reformer acquired much fame both during and after his life. In 1925 he even won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He also won an Academy Award for the screenplay of *Pygmalion*. He donated the entire amount of the prize money for establishing an Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation for sponsoring and promoting the study of English language and literature in Sweden. Shaw died on November 2, 1950, at the age of ninety five. He left a will according to which his body was to be cremated and the ashes mixed inseparably with those of his wife's and it should be "inured or scattered in the garden of the house in Ayot St. Lawrence where we lived together for 35 years..."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Which are the "three play of Puritan" written by Shaw?

2. Name the novels written by Shaw.

3. In which year did Shaw get Nobel Prize?

1.4 SHAW'S IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

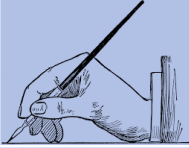
G. B. Shaw was an advocate of the new problem and social drama of Ibsen who exposed the rottenness of the contemporary social life and became a strong dramatic voice in the eighteen nineties. Shaw was much influenced by Ibsen prepared the ground for the advent of this new drama in England. He faced the actual problems of contemporary life and civilization with amazing courage, and did not seek an imaginative escape into a visionary world. Shaw's fundamental aim in his plays was the betterment of humanity by exposing the conventional wisdom that refused to confront the problems. Scoffing at the romantic view of life, he examined man and his social institutions with intellectual courage and shrewd, irreverent insight. Slum landlord, prostitution, marriage, conventions, social prejudice, the romanticized soldier, the glamorous historical figure, the medical profession, the critics, religion-these are but some of the issues and concerns which came under the microscope of his rationalism. Shaw dramatized the social and economic aspects of prostitution in *Mrs Warren's Profession*. Even wars could not escape his scrutiny. The romantic glamour and heroism associated with war and the war heroes are exposed in *Arms and the Man*. In *Widowers' Houses* he

discussed slum landlordism. In this play, he showed middle class respectability flattening on poverty and exploitation. *Candida* dealt with modern women and contained many amusing reflections in love, marriage, socialism, Christianity, and art. *You Can Never Tell* deals with the emancipation of modern woman.

LET US STOP AND THINK



You can draw a relationship between *Pygmalion* and other plays by Shaw because his concern in most of his plays is common human problems. For example, in *Man and Superman*, Shaw dramatizes the idea of Life Force, which he shows through the characters of Ann Whitefield, the mother-woman, John Tanner, the philosopher and Octavius Robinson, the poet-lover. In *Arms and the Man*, he satirizes romantic love and ridicules a heroic soldier like Sergius; in *Devil's Disciple* and *The Shewing of Blanco Posnet*, he attacks current religious beliefs and tries to present them in their reformed shape; in *Major Barbara*, he condemned poverty, because he believes the want of money is the source of all kinds of evil; in *John Bull's Other Island*, he attacks English and Irish Prejudices; in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, he attacks the medical profession; in *Getting Married*, he draws his satire against the prevalent customs of marriage; in *The Man of Destiny*, he exposes the hollowness of the great historical personality, Napoleon; in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shaw exposes the general romantic conception of Caesar as a great Roman hero. In *Mrs Warren's Profession*, he attacks Mrs Warren's justification of the immoral trade of prostitution. In *Widowers' Houses* he attacks slum landlordism. In *The Philander*, he ridicules those who regard marriage as slavery and who want to get married on the excuse that they have fallen in love; capitalism is satirized in *The Apple Cart*. Shaw, like Ben Jonson, used satire with a view to reforming society, changing the values of life and making mankind happy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the subject of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*?

2. What is the basic theme of *The Apple Cart*?

3. What did Shaw criticise in the *Arms and the Man*?

1.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have got a brief but concise idea about the trends in modern drama and how with the emergence of realism to theatre, dramatic world changed drastically. We have also discussed Barnard Shaw here as his contribution is immense to the realistic drama. He, being one of the noted dramatists of the modern era, tried to highlight every aspect of the modern time in his plays. Being an iconoclast in his own time Shaw laid out several problems through his plays ranging from the problem of English language to socio-economic and humane problems. A careful study of this unit will help you to proceed to the next units where various nuances brought to modern drama will be discussed with reference to prescribed plays.

1.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of twentieth century drama?
2. What do you mean by 'Drama of Ideas' or 'Serious Drama'? Is it different from 'Problem Play'?
3. Discuss Shaw as an iconoclast.
4. Did Shaw's life contribute to or influence his view of human relationships to be found in his works?

1.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Choudhury, Bibhash. *English Social and Cultural History: An Introductory Guide and glossary*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Ltd. 2005.

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UNIT 2: READING PYGMALION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Actwise summary of Pygmalion
- 2.3 Summing Up
- 2.4 Assessment Questions
- 2.5 References and Recommended Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Pygmalion was first staged in 1912. It is based upon a Greek mythological character named Pygmalion. It is a play in five acts with a preface and a sequel. *Pygmalion* is one of Shaw's famous works, dealing with several issues like divisions between classes, social absolutes, and the vital role language plays in ascertaining the class of an individual in the society and such other.

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be familiar with

- the detail action of the various Acts of the play
- the plot and structure of *Pygmalion*.

2.2 ACTWISE SUMMARY OF PYGMALION

Act I:

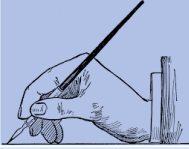
In this act, G.B. Shaw introduces almost all the major characters. The act begins with people running from the theatre to take shelter from the rain at the portico of St. Paul's church in Covent Garden at around

11.15pm. A boy (Freddy) is forcing his mother and sister to come out in the rain and fix a cab. There is a man who is preoccupied with a notebook noting down something. Freddy comes back drenched and has not found a cab. He collides with a flower girl (Eliza Doolittle) as he gushes into the portico. The flower girl's flowers are spoiled from the rain and mud. She rebukes him of his bad manners in her cockney dialect. Even though she does not know her name she calls him 'Freddy' just like that.

A gentle man appears in the scene. Eliza addresses him as 'captain' and requests him to buy a flower from her. During all this time a bystander notices what was happening in the portico and tells her that whatever she was saying is being noted by the gentleman with the notebook. Poor Eliza gets scared. People try to calm her down, but Eliza is not to be calmed down easily. She threatens to call the police and seeks help from the colonel. Then the bystander explains that he is neither a detective nor a thug, he is only taking note of the dialect she is uttering. It is only after lots of tantrums finally Eliza understood that there is no harm before her.

Then Higgins (the bystander, taking notes) starts telling the crowd out there as to who belongs to which place by only listening to the person speak. People were awestruck by this. But after the rain has stopped they moved towards their home. Here Colonel enquires as to how he can say such things about a person's place of domicile. Higgins explains that he is a Professor of Phonetics. After hearing Eliza speak in cockney he says that a person who speaks such language has no right to live. He also says in a zest that he can pass her off as a duchess in three months at the Ambassador's party. Colonel too here reveals his identity that he is no other than Colonel Pickering who wrote *Spoken Sanskrit* and is himself a student of Indian dialects. And the note-taker is none other than Professor Henry Higgins, the author of *Universal Alphabet*. After that they all leave, Higgins throwing some money into Eliza's basket who was asking for it. Freddy comes in a cab, and Eliza tells him that his mother and sister has left in a bus. She too calls a cab and goes to her place which is a

miserable dark room and from there she for the first time plans for her future.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does Eliza's use of language point to her social class?

2. How does the opening scene introduce us to the major characters and sets the action of the play??

Act II:

This act takes place in Higgins's laboratory in Wimpole Street. Higgins and Pickering were discussing the training methods and instruments used in his laboratory. Just then Higgins's housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce comes in to tell him that a very common girl with a horrible way of speaking is at the door to meet Higgins. Then the girl is brought up and she is no other than the flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, whom they have met last night when they were taking shelter from rain. This time Eliza looks a

bit changed. She has come over to Higgins if he can give her lessons on improving her language so that she can work as an assistant in a flower shop. She wants to be a lady and this won't happen to her unless she speaks English properly. Eliza says that she is also ready to pay him. She once learnt French from a teacher for eighteen pence a lesson, and because Higgins had to teach her her mother-tongue she would not pay him more than a shilling per lesson. Higgins was greatly amused on hearing this. How much can a flower girl pay him for his lessons?

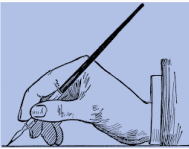
It is here Colonel Pickering wages a bet at Higgins if he could train Eliza and pass her off as a duchess at an Ambassador's party within six months. And Higgins accepts the bet. He right away orders Mrs. Pearce to clean Eliza of all her dirt with some monkey brand soap and buy her new clothes. On hearing this Eliza yells and shouts. But right after the change, Eliza looks totally different. Pickering treats her like a lady but to Higgins she is a mere object of his bet. Higgins does not have any emotional attachment with his pupils. To him, the language lab is everything.

Just then, Alfred Doolittle appears in the scene. Doolittle is an elderly dustman. He is Eliza's father who has come to claim his daughter. He threatens Higgins and Pickering to have kept his daughter. Higgins, who at the very outset had clearly asked Eliza about her belongings and family, is shocked to see her father of whom Eliza has not mentioned anything. But this man has not come for his daughter. Higgins though at one go is ready to part with Eliza, and asks Doolittle to take his daughter away with him, is amused to see when the latter is not there to take his daughter back. Rather he has come to earn some profit if he can have from the situation. Then Doolittle goes on to say that he wants just some amount of money from them. On hearing this Higgins asked him whether he has no morals, and to it Doolittle replied that, a poor man like him cannot afford to have morals. He belongs to the category of 'undeserving

poor'; how the middle class comes between their needs and wants and denies their due.

Higgins and Pickering are tremendously impressed by Doolittle on his honest views on middle class morality. He did not take extra money offered by Higgins because it would make him rich and also said that he won't marry his mistress because marrying her would kill his freedom.

Eliza's lessons starts after this. It was very severe for Eliza but the presence of the Colonel was of great relief to her. Higgins keeps record of every uttering by Eliza. Eliza seemed to progress faster than expected. She has a good ear and can differentiate between sounds and dialects. Later she is taken to meet Higgins' mother.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does Shaw satirize class distinctions in this Act?

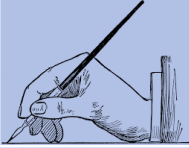
2. What type of person is Alfred Doolittle according to you?

Act III:

This act starts with Higgins visiting his mother when she was least expecting him. Her house is described very beautifully by Shaw depicting the taste of an English woman and also at the same time reflecting the culture. It was Mrs. Higgins' At Home day, when she only expects some friends and Higgins' presence in front of her friends only creates tension and displeasure. But today Higgins is not alone. He has brought his presentable and mentored subject, Eliza to show to his mother. To Higgins, his mother would be the best judge to decide if Eliza is ready or not for the Ambassador's party.

Just then Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill along with Freddy comes in. They are awestruck when they meet Eliza. She was trained till then only to talk about the weather and greet people by Higgins. But because conversation took a different turn she started talking about how her aunt died of influenza. Mrs. Higgins somehow took control of the situation and later told Higgins that Eliza is only weak in her manners. Freddy after seeing her fell in love with her.

After six months is over, Eliza is ready for the test. Eliza is forwarded by Higgins and Pickering to the Ambassador's party. The hostess is impressed to receive Eliza, such a beautiful and well mannered and well spoken lady. She walks with grace to the party. But suddenly one of Higgins' old student, Nepommuck turned up who initially questioned Eliza a lot and claims to know thirty –two language. He is in demand as an interpreter and doubts Eliza, but fails to see the truth and calls her a foreign princess. He is of the view that no English can talk like her, only a foreign princess taught to speak English can talk like her. She is also called by some Queen Victoria. All these, at the end prove Higgins' victory over Pickering. Higgins won the bet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How important a role does Mrs Higgins play in the life of Higgins?

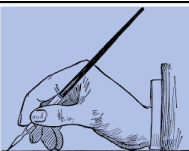
2. Write a brief note on Eliza's education.

Act IV:

After the Ambassador's party is over all three come back home. It's already midnight. The two men are terribly tired and they think it's all over. Higgins searches for his slippers but fails to find them. Meanwhile Eliza moves out silently, brings the slippers and puts them in place. Higgins finds his slippers and thinks that they have appeared from nowhere. But now it is Eliza's duality, whether to go back to her old life or stay with them. During all these six months, Eliza has developed a feeling of love for Higgins, but Higgins' rude and rough attitude has hurt her deeply. Higgins does not find anything enchanting in Eliza nor has he any romantic inclination towards her. He only considers her as a mere speaking machine. Higgins and Eliza, after Pickering went to sleep, engage in a heated altercation. She accuses Higgins of treating her as an

object rather than a human being. “I’ve won your bet for you, haven’t I? That’s enough for you. I don’t matter, I suppose.” sums up Eliza’s frustration. She is unable to decide whether to go back to her old life, which she cannot do now after such tremendous change in her or to continue living with Higgins, which she is not supposed to. She shouts and groans with pain. Ignoring Eliza’s romantic inclination Higgins asks her to marry some rich boy who according to him she can earn with her good looks and manners. Angry Eliza throws the slippers at Higgins and the ring he has given her into the fire place. She sarcastically asks Higgins if she has right over her clothes bought by them because her own clothes were burnt by them and decides to leave the house in her night dress.

A frustrated Eliza moves out of the house and finds Freddy waiting outside for her. She is shocked to hear from Freddy that he has been waiting in the street facing her room for very many nights. Finding Freddy as a lover at the moment of such torment and sadness, Eliza embraces him and they run away. They spent the night together running from police in a taxi and finally went to Mrs. Higgins’ house.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Briefly comment on the developing relationship between Eliza and Higgins.

2. Write a brief note on the relationship between Eliza and Freddy.

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Act V:

After spending the night with Freddy in the taxi and roaming about in the streets and she goes to Mrs. Higgins' house early in the morning the next day. Higgins and Pickering not finding Eliza in the house are terribly shocked. Higgins directly goes to his mother's house and Pickering decides to call the police. Both of them tells Mrs. Higgins that may be Eliza has run away and now they are asking Mrs. Higgins what to do. During all these time Mrs. Higgins has asked Eliza to stay upstairs and not to come out.

Mrs. Higgins tells them both that the girl has enough right to go away if she wishes. Also Pickering should not have called the police as if she has stolen something or is a lost product.

Just then, Alfred Doolittle makes his presence. He is all dressed up like a groom. Seeing him Higgins is shocked thinking if Eliza is fending for her father's dresses and other needs. But to Higgins' shock, Alfred Doolittle life has changed after Higgins has written a letter to the American millionaire, Mr. Wannafeller that Doolittle is the most original moralist living in England. Mr. Wannafeller who wanted an heir to the large part of wealth left by him and he forms a Moral Reform League decides Doolittle to be his heir who will be given three thousand pounds per year on the condition that he should deliver moral lectures every year. And all these made him a gentleman which he cannot accept, he has become a victim of middle class morality and finding Eliza missing he thinks may she too has gone to meet him and ask for some money. He says

that he would like to take lessons from Higgins for improving his language.

Mrs. Higgins even asks Doolittle to part with his money and reject the offer if it is causing him so much trouble. But because Doolittle belongs to the undeserving poor and have no treasure for the future so he cannot choose to reject the offer even if it causes problems.

Then Mrs. Higgins thinks the problem itself is solved because now Doolittle can take care of his daughter. But to this Higgins denies because he claims to have paid Doolittle for Eliza and she no longer belongs to him.

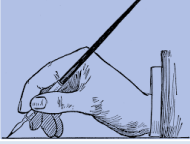
It is only then Mrs. Higgins' disclose that Eliza is with her and she has not expected such rude behaviour from Higgins and Pickering and praising only themselves after the success at the Ambassador's party and considering it is all over from then. Then suddenly again Doolittle enters and declares of his marriage with a low woman. He is going to marry her today and invites everyone.

On the other hand Higgins, Pickering and Eliza decide on Eliza's future. She declares she would marry Freddy when he settles himself properly, till then she would stay with them. Or, she would become an assistant to Nepommuck. She also rebukes and insults Higgins for his behaviour and praises Pickering for the manners he instilled in her. She is always a flower girl to Higgins but Pickering treated her like a lady from the beginning.


But finally, Eliza emerges as a strong willed woman who can bully Higgins and not just be bullied by him. She also says that she would advertise that she was a flower girl turned into a duchess taught and trained by Higgins and can teach the same to others like her on a payment of thousand guineas.

After all these heated arguments finally all three decide to stay together not as master and trainer but as two old bachelors and a silly girl. Despite this Eliza still looks after Higgins' needs and yet confident in

herself. Mrs. Higgins thinks that surely her son would someday fall for Eliza and marry her. But Higgins was sure that this would not happen to him and Eliza would marry Freddy.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS	
	<p>1. Compare and contrast the two relationships—Eliza-Higgins and Eliza-Freddy.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>2. Write a note on the ending of the play.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>	

LET US STOP AND THINK

	<p>Pygmalion is based on a myth of ancient Greece. In the earliest version of this story Pygmalion was a king of Cyprus who was an ardent devotee of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. But Ovid, a Roman poet, gave a more interesting version of the story. According to this, Pygmalion was a Greek sculptor. He was wholly dedicated to his art, but he always found something lacking in each of his creations. Once he started working on an ivory statue of a girl; he worked day and night on it, and he completed it, he embodied it as his ideal of beauty. He named it Galatea, and was in love with it. Next day, was the festival of Goddess Aphrodite, whom Pygmalion especially prayed to for a bride, who would resemble his ivory statue, Galatea. After that when he returned home and kissed the statue, he was shocked to</p>
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realise that the ivory statue has become warm and soft and finally turned into a human being. Then both of them got married. This was revived in England by William Morris at the end of the nineteenth century.

2.3 SUMMING UP

On perusal of the text one will obviously find a deeper and hidden understanding of Shaw's ideas. Shaw's attitude to life and society at large is dealt with in a very different way in this play. Higgins, Pickering and Eliza, all three, ensemble in one stage though they are different altogether by nature and class. By problematizing several issues, G. B. Shaw puts forward a plethora of questions to the reader. Each and every character has a story to tell and Shaw has empowered them all in their own way. He is able to showcase a variety in the society and several problems associated with it.



2.4 REFERENCE AND RECOMMENDED READING

Shaw, Bernard. *Pygmalion*. Kolkata: Orient Blackswan Private Ltd. 2009.

UNIT 3: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Pygmalion as a problem play
- 3.3 Snobbery and class distinction
- 3.4 Middle class morality
- 3.5 Man-Woman relationship
- 3.6 Wit and Humour
- 3.7 Comedy of Manners
- 3.8 Title Significance and the Myth
- 3.9 Anti-romantic elements
- 3.10 Shavian Idea of Individualism
- 3.11 Importance of the Preface
- 3.12 Dramatic Structure
- 3.13 Stage and Screen Adaptation
- 3.14 Major Characters
- 3.15 Critical Responses to the play
- 3.16 Summing Up
- 3.17 Assessment Questions
- 3.18 References and Recommended Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Famous as a problem play, *Pygmalion* deals with the life of an aristocrat, Professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins and a flower girl Eliza

Doolittle who speaks cockney dialect. Through her and Higgins' life and the people associated with them, Shaw tries to delve into several issues concerning the society of that time, which he felt were genuine problems of class and economic disparity. In the Preface he advocates the need of knowing the proper sounds of the English language and also the loopholes of the English alphabet and says: "the reformer we (England) need most today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play." (1). In the play, Shaw begins by inverting the myth of Pygmalion. Here Shaw's Pygmalion is Higgins, a professor of Phonetics. He in the play makes a bet with Colonel Pickering that he can turn a flower girl named Eliza Doolittle into a duchess within a span of six months. He ridicules British class system and how the way one speaks denotes one's class. Shaw through various characters tries to show the hypocrisy of the English.

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will be acquainted with several important issues, major characters from the play, the dramatic structure and stage and screen adaptation of *Pygmalion*.

3.2 PYGMALION AS A PROBLEM PLAY

Largely influenced by Ibsen, Shaw believed that a play should present a problem and discuss thoroughly. Shaw took a propagandist approach in his plays in presenting a problem and seeking its solution in his own inimitable way. He paid attention to some of the concerns of the contemporary society. Let us now discuss *Pygmalion* as a problem play.

Pygmalion, which is one of the major and popular plays of Shaw, is also rightly called a problem play or a play of ideas. The title of the play is based on the myth of Pygmalion; the Greek sculptor who fell in love with an ivory statue of a woman he had made and later married. In Shaw's play *Pygmalion* it is Professor Higgins who resembles the sculptor. Being

an eminent professor of Phonetics and also a specialist in the dialects of London. Prof. Higgins becomes successful in making a lady out of a guttersnipe. But unlike the mythical story, Shaw does not show the professor falling in love with the lady he created with his best labours. Probably Shaw denounces such conventional romantic technique only to keep his ideas of a problem play in its most striking appeal. However, in the climax of the play, Shaw seems to expose the theory that if a person born in a low class, get the opportunity to be trained with the correct speech and manners, he or she can easily come up to the social and intellectual level of the upper class. In the Preface he says, "The English have no respect for their language and will not teach their children to speak it." (p.1)

Thus, the play *Pygmalion* comments on some important world issues and problems such as, class difference, the economic backwardness of the poor and their miserable conditions and language as a measure of cultural and class differences.

Primarily, in the play *Pygmalion*, Shaw is concerned with these issues but he also reflects on the problem of education and sounds of the English language. To educate a girl like Eliza through lessons on phonetics and thereby to make her a lady is not an easy task; but Higgins takes a challenge and within six months she can easily pass off as a duchess in an ambassador's party. But it is this education that created problem for Eliza. Her knowledge and training had made her a lady but to no avail. After her training and success in the party she is left with an identity crisis. She cannot now both go back to her earlier condition and sell flowers nor can she continue with her new found identity. At the same time training is not enough to level herself up with the aristocrats. Realising this grim fact, Eliza feels torn and alienated. She realises that her identity is at stake. She therefore seeks a place for her in the society. Thus she utters in agony having lost her identity:

What I am fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go?
What am I to do? What to become of me? (Act IV; p.76)

Along with the world-problem of education, Shaw brings out the pedantic and pompous attitude of the English upper class. But Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering are exposed as representatives of this egoistic class. Professor Higgins definitely does not train Eliza in elite class manners out of any altruistic sense; rather he does this purely to satisfy his ego by winning the bet against Pickering. Higgins feels that the root cause of Eliza's miserable condition is her defective tone and lack of upper class mannerism. Even after her grand success in the Garden party, she is still treated as a social inferior by Higgins. Eliza, being ill-treated even after her upliftment as a respectable lady is pathetic. She utters with anger and agony against this pompousness of the upper class:

The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves,
but how she is treated. (Act V; p.93)

Another problem raised in the play is the predicament of Alfred Doolittle. Through him, Shaw is able to make much satirical thrust at middle class morality and also reveals the injustice done to the poor. Indeed, Doolittle is a rebel against the way in which wealth is distributed in society.

At first Doolittle was happy at his job as a dustman. Even though it was low on the social level, he was happy in doing it as it has no morals associated with it. As such, he is not subjected to any sort of "dreadful middle class morality". But later he becomes a member of the "undeserving rich" through an undeserving will. Now he is compelled to act according to the conventions of middle class morality; which he despised when he was a very poor labourer. The huge amount of money which he now gets is indeed a burden for him. But he cannot even throw it away because he is too poor to pass his old days amidst rest and leisure. Thus being trapped in an unenviable situation, he is now as helpless as Eliza. He cannot return to his old undeserving poor state nor can he be

happy in the acquired middle class status. Thus, he feels himself “a prisoner in the hands of middle class morality”.

Further he feels that being uplifted, he will have to marry his mistress; which implies that now he would lose his happiness as his mistress would no longer stay under his dictates as she did before marrying him. Therefore, Doolittle should try to acquire middle class moral codes and must try to adjust to or cope up with his present status; but all these will be possible at the cost of his happiness.

Thus, through *Pygmalion*, Shaw shows that there is nothing intrinsically great about what Higgins has done to Eliza to lift her out of her poverty. Indeed Alfred Doolittle is a rebel against the way in which wealth is distributed in society and Shaw, the Fabian socialist, seeks to criticise the patronising attitude of the rich to the poor.

Shaw once wrote, “I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation in my opinion...I have no other incentive to write plays...” It is the general estimate that Shaw, the great dramatist of the twentieth century, was a tireless crusader for social justice and righteousness and in his aim to reveal the social problems to the readers; in converting the nation to his opinion he was greatly successful and in this respect *Pygmalion* will remain as milestone where his aim and objects are concerned.

3.3 SNOBBERY AND CLASS DISTINCTION

Fine features make fine birds but they do not make ladies. This seems to be the idea which drives Shaw’s *Pygmalion* forward. If such a view seems to be an over simplification, one would do well to remember that the determination of class on the basis of breeding is one of the oldest of heresies in England- as witness to the British obsession with its aristocracy (which still survives despite Shaw). Coming from a good

family or being well-bred is an important consideration that decides who is to be a lady or a gentleman.

Therefore, in *Pygmalion*, Shaw takes it upon himself to create a lady- but only after destroying the myth of the lady. To do this he presents before us a “squashed cabbage leaf” from the gutters of Tottenham Court Road and places her between the two ladies. One is a well-bred scion of the Large Lady Park, a pathetic individual with no intelligence, no worthwhile income or occupation, no taste or refinement worth the mention, in fact, nothing but a pathetic desperation to cling on to the fringes of the ‘fine society’ her breeding has placed her in. She is Mrs Eynsford Hill and the other is Mrs Higgins. Mrs Higgins is genuinely refined, cultured, intelligent, and of independent judgement. In between the two is Eliza Doolittle with the potential to be either.

The obvious negation of Mrs Eynsford Hill as a role model itself indicates the hollowness of the concept of superiority through breeding. The ridiculousness of their pretensions is matched only by Clara’s gauche bravado. Breeding is obviously not a decisive factor.

If Mrs Eynsford Hill cannot, Mrs Higgins can certainly be an excellent role model. Therefore, when Higgins takes on Eliza Doolittle, it would not be irrational to suppose that he has his mother’s image before his eyes. Eliza’s primary education- at first torturous and then absorbing, leads to the creation of an exquisite creature, perfect in dress, posture, diction and demeanour so perfect indeed that she surpasses the notion of a lady and ends up being mistaken for a true blue Hungarian Princess. By the time the Ambassador’s garden party is over one can almost visualise Shaw snapping his fingers and saying “So much for breeding and blue blood.” Fine feathers may, after all, be acquired through training. They may be picked up as easily as Clara picks up Eliza’s expletive in her folly. Shaw’s satire on the foolishness of class distinctions is certainly effective, but is yet far from complete.

What marks out Mrs Higgins' superiority, one must remember, is not her manners, which may be acquired, but her character, which has to be developed from within. Nor can the former be a base for the latter, for what is learnt may be forgotten. Eliza momentarily forgets hers in Act V when she meets her father, now resplendent in Wannafeller legacy. This is why from Act IV onwards the emphasis shifts from Higgins to Eliza. From this point onwards she must either learn to fend for herself or submit to a lifetime of fetching Higgins' slippers for him. She decides to throw them at his face instead, and thus begins the gradual building and the final assertion of her character. The process itself is gradual. It begins with the recognition that she is no more to Higgins than his "slippers", a heartbreaking realization for someone who has come to see life in terms of emotional dependence. But Pygmalion-Higgins is an unrelenting taskmaster. Absolutely inflexible, he allows Eliza no route for escape and more out of anger than conviction, she states her decision to do without him as she defiantly says:

Now I don't care for that for your bullying and big talk. I'll advertise it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself. (Act V; p.103)

Inadvertently, she has matured into that realization of independence which qualifies her for the status of a lady-or at least Shaw's concept of it. Self-respect she had already possessed. But this new found confidence, this new independence is something which has evoked within and has turned her from a pathetic specimen of degraded humanity to a person who deserved respect for being what she is. Her social or financial status

notwithstanding, Eliza is sure to command respect wherever providence may place her. It is therefore with genuine admiration that Higgins says:

Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now you're a tower of strength: a consort battleship. (Act V; p.104)

Hardly by such terms, would one choose to describe the traditional 'lady'? Yet Shaw's point is clear and, one must admit, laudable.

Incidentally, Clara too undergoes her own metamorphosis, and Shaw's world is mercifully rid of well bred, silly girls and filled up with the Shavian ideal woman- strong, independent, self-respecting and, therefore, commanding respect.

3.4: MIDDLE CLASS MORALITY

Shaw has used Doolittle in the play as an exponent of his own philosophy. Through him, he wants to expose the injustices inherent in the economic system of England and ridicules and satirizes at the conventional morality of the English middle classes. Doolittle is one of the 'undeserving poor'. "I am", says he,

"one of the undeserving poor; that is what I am. Think of what that means to a man. It means that he is up against middle class morality all the time. If there is anything going and I put in a bit for it, it is always the same story: 'You are undeserving; so you can't have it.' I don't need less than a deserving man; I need more. I do not eat less hearty than him; and I drink a lot more. Well, they charge me just the same for everything as they charge the deserving." (Act II; p.43-44)

Doolittle is someone who is totally free from the clutches of fear and conscience. He is frankly immoral. He easily confesses that he "Can't afford them (morals)." Even though he is just a dustman, yet he is

vigorous and has rather interesting features. He is very apt in extorting money from others.

But later, when he became a member of the “undeserving rich” through an undeserving will which Higgins had written to an American millionaire, Mr. Wannafeller, who left him three thousand dollars per year, then Doolittle had lost his earlier zeal and freedom. Now he is compelled to act according to the conventions of middle class morality, which he hated so much. Along with this he will also have to marry his mistress and acquire middle class moral codes.

3.5: MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP

(a) **Higgins-Eliza:** Mythical Pygmalion did not marry Galatea, nor does Professor Higgins marry Eliza Doolittle in the play. Higgins undertakes an adventurous task to transform the social status of a simple flower selling girl. It is this challenge of Higgins to teach the girl all the finer points of aristocratic speech and pass her off as a duchess that has led both of them to be together for a span of six months. Eliza has to forgo her life as a flower girl and come to the laboratory of Higgins. Higgins in his own terms religiously undertakes the task of giving true phonetic knowledge to Elizabeth. As the play develops, Elizabeth quickly responds to Higgins’ lessons and begins to devote herself in the language learning that is typical of an aristocratic class. Thus, Eliza reached refinement and learns all the essence of aristocratic manners and speech. She is put into a list; which she passes easily. The next episode of Eliza-Higgins relationship takes a sudden turn. Higgins’ earlier motivation to Eliza in learning the finer tricks of aristocratic speech seems to be missing in the world of Eliza. For a long time, Eliza has cherished the idea that Higgins is so obsessed with phonetics that he cannot even think of anything else. In fact, Higgins is a typical Shavian character whose approach to life is rationalistic and realistic. He values science and literature, philosophy and

art more than the company of woman. Eliza is nothing more than an object of experiment for him.

According to Tracy C. Davis, “In *Pygmalion* (1913), Shaw again depicts female dependence as the central theme, tying it metaphorically to the classic dyads of male and female, master and slave, colonizer and colonized. Henry Higgins, the Pygmalion, who understands all about *how* people talk but grasps nothing of what they *mean*, thinks he can dispose of the new improved Eliza into the marriage market, but explicitly disavows this as an economic relationship. He cannot see the brutality of his own behaviour in using Eliza as an amusing experiment, objectifying her as a product of his own skill, then taking her presence as perpetual slipper-fetcher for granted.”

(b) **Eliza-Freddy:** Ignored by Professor Higgins, Eliza also counterattacks Higgins with ego and she also declares that if Higgins falls for her emotionally, she is not ready to respond to him. The high degree of life force, which works through Eliza, makes her think of marrying Freddy, a handsome young man who satisfies her both emotionally and sexually. The sexual love which is also essential in a romantic relationship is provided by the Eliza-Freddy love story. Freddy is a simple minded boy who falls deeply in love with Eliza when he meets her at Mrs Higgins’ house. On the other hand, influenced by life force, Eliza gets a new idea of love and she understands that it is Freddy who can give her life a new dimension. Freddy is unlike Higgins who only used her for his professional benefits. Even though, Eliza-Freddy love episode is romantic enough, yet, the play cannot be termed as a romance.

3.6 WIT AND HUMOUR

G. B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* has proved to be a very popular play, although it is written on a dry subject like Phonetics. The reason is that the dialogue is full of wit and humour, and keeps us amused throughout the

performance or the reading of the play. By nature, G.B. Shaw was a popular humorist and a comedian. *Pygmalion* is full of fun and humour which led critics to interpret the play as a comedy. Higgins, the protagonist of the play, plays a vital role to arouse comic effect in the play. He refers to Eliza's speech as "Kerbstone English" and also calls her a "squashed cabbage leaf" and considers her as "an incarnate insult to the English language." (Act I; p.16) His satirical remarks are enough to amuse the audience. Higgins also went to the extent of calculating Eliza's offering of a shilling per lesson. He feels that it is equal to sixty or seventy pounds from a millionaire. When he scornfully talks to the members of the Hill family; it is really enough to expose the comic side of his character and hence it is not probably wrong to regard the play also as a comedy to some extent.

Shaw was a master of paradox and he made full use of it in the play. He makes deliberate inversion in the very theme of the play. Shaw retained the title of the myth of Pygmalion for his play, but turned the Pygmalion-Galatea story upside down. His Pygmalion (Higgins) finds his Galatea (Eliza) as a statue, trains her and makes her a living woman. But when the miracle has happened, it is found that he does not love her at all. He leaves her free to go where she likes and marry anyone she pleases.

By an intentional irony, Shaw called this a Romance. It is indeed a romance in the sense a wonderful change is brought about in Eliza within a period of six months. But when a reader starts reading a "romance" on the Pygmalion-Galatea theme, he naturally expects that Higgins would marry Eliza. But no such romance takes place in the play.

It is also ironical that Higgins should recommend an immoral like Alfred Doolittle as "the most original moralist living in England today." (Act V; p.86)

Higgins is responsible for a lot of unconscious humour in the play. His brilliant statements, his emotional outbursts and his lapses from taste all keep us amused. At the portico of St. Paul's Church in the beginning of

the play he amuses the people by telling them from their way of speaking where they come from. The people are as much taken aback as when some astrologer tells them of their past life. We are amused when he describes Eliza as “deliciously low-so horribly dirty.” (Act II; p.27)

He asks Mrs Pearce if there was a good fire in the kitchen. She naturally thinks that he wants something to be cooked. But he only says, “take off all Eliza’s clothes and burn them.” He tells Mrs Pearce to clean her with Monkey Brand and wrap her in brown papers till new clothes comes.” (Act II; p. 27)

When Mrs Pearce asks him not to swear before Eliza he says, “I swear! I never swear, I detest the habit. What the devil do you me?” (Act II; p. 36) She reminds him that he applied the word ‘bloody’ every morning to his things. When Mrs Pearce asks him not to wipe his hands on the dressing gown in future, he replies that he would wipe his hands in his hair in future.

Colonel Pickering is a good man, but he is somewhat stupid. However, some of the things he says unconsciously make us laugh. Higgins’ mother is also a very witty lady.

Shaw is very fond of indulging in anti-English jokes. The English generally do not take a bath. Eliza tells Mrs Pearce, “You expect me to get into that and wet myself all over. Not me. I should catch my death. I knew a woman deep it every Saturday night and she died of it.” (Act II; p.33)

There are situations when the misery of some people is a source of laughter to us. We are amused to see the misery of Eliza when she is being cleaned by Mrs Pearce. Her screams are heart-rending.

But the most amusing misery is that of her father. Higgins had written to an American millionaire that Alfred Doolittle was the most original moralist in England. This person left three thousand pounds a year for him. He was thus made rich all of a sudden. It did not make him happy. He is sorry that he has been made a gentleman. Everybody is now out to extort money from him and yet he cannot refuse the request because

in that case he will have to go to workhouse in his old age. He is intimidated. Middle class morality is forcing him to marry his sixth mistress. He is very nervous about it and requests Mrs Higgins and Colonel Pickering to go to the church to lend him moral support.

We cannot help pitying at the misery of this undeserving poor man suddenly turned into an undeserving rich man. Humour also arises out of the clash of ideas rather than from idiosyncrasies of character.

Shaw also makes humorous comments on the upper classes of British society. Colonel Pickering embodies these upper class manners. They are always courteous and polite. They are chivalrous towards all ladies. They take off their hat when entering a room and do not talk with their hand in their pockets.

Thus, paradox, irony, wit and humour make G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* an extremely interesting play.

3.7 COMEDY OF MANNERS

Though far from being influenced by the 18th century 'Comedy of Manners' *Pygmalion* combines comic elements with serious social issues and makes humorous comments on the morals and manners of the people of the people of his time. From this play we can get a clear idea of the speech and manners of the upper middle class and the poor class of the British society.

The issue of speaking correctly has a close relation with the upper class manners. Shaw was sensitive to music and wanted to hear English language spoken correctly. After listening to Eliza's cockney speech, Higgins calls her an "incarnate insult to the English language" and adds that "a woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to live." (Act I; p.16). The fact is that, in the English alphabet the letters do not stand for any definite sounds. The words are not spoken as they are written. The members of the upper classes who have been taught

by good teachers speak English correctly; but those who have not had this advantage speak the language very badly. The difference between the different classes appears from the way they speak. So, the reformer England needs most is a phonetician. When Eliza gets an expert phonetician like Higgins to teach her for six months, she is able to cross the social barrier and appears to everyone to be a duchess. Thus, Shaw has shown in this play that upper classes appeared to be superior to the lower classes only because of their inherited wealth which enables them to go to good schools and live in an environment of enlightened culture.

In this play, Colonel Pickering embodies the manners of the upper middle class English society. They are always courteous and polite. They are chivalrous towards all ladies. They take off their hat while entering a room and do not talk with their hands in their pocket. They never swear or use bad words. They are calm and controlled in all circumstances.

Mrs Higgins represents the culture and taste of the upper classes. She has a taste for art. In her drawing room there are oil paintings by Burne Jones and a landscape drawn by Cecil Lawson. The wallpapers are in the Morris style. There is also a Clippendale chair on one side and an Elizabethan chair curved in the taste of Inigo Jones on the other side etc. Only the rich could afford to purchase these treasures of art.

The poor people of that age were awfully dirty. They never took a bath because bath meant a tub full of warm water, and that was very costly. In the cold country it does not seem to be a necessity. It is a costly luxury. They never change their clothes because they do not have too many. Eliza thought that it was indecent for a girl to remove all her clothes and when she was asked to enter the tub full of warm water she thought that they wanted to kill her. Her screams when she was given a wash.

Alfred Doolittle represents the point of view of the poor people who are paid very little for their work and when they ask for more, they are told that they do not deserve to get anything more. The rich decide

what the poor deserve and there is no consideration for the needs of an individual.

A little later in the play Doolittle enters the ranks of the undeserving rich. Shaw shows that our capitalistic society is full of the undeserving rich and the undeserving poor. There are very few persons who work hard to earn their living and have enough for their needs.

Shaw also shows that the poor girls were terribly afraid of the police. Eliza says that if she is charged by the police, she would lose her character. The poorer English houses did not have bathrooms. Hence, Eliza mistook the bath tubs for a large copper vessel in which clothes were boiled.

Shaw also comments on the system of housekeeping. Mrs Pearce is a very efficient house keeper. She looks after the needs and comfort of Higgins very well. Shaw also shows some other practices of the time like whistling for cabs.

Thus, in *Pygmalion* Shaw gives us an insight to the customs and manners of the people of England of the first decade of the 20th century.

3.8 TITLE SIGNIFICANCE AND MYTH

Hard boiled realism often made Bernard Shaw invest the titles of his plays in literal terms. In *Pygmalion*, for the first time Shaw uses a title derived from mythological figures and the title aptly shows Shaw's anti-romantic and propagandist stand. The title *Pygmalion* has been derived from a Greek legend in which Pygmalion was a sculptor and the king of Cyprus. According to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Pygmalion was devoted to his art. He once prepared an ivory statue, with whom he fell in love deeply. This statue was for him his ideal woman. Seeing his devotion, Aphrodite, Goddess of beauty granted his prayers of transforming the ivory statue into a living woman, whom Pygmalion later married and named her Galatea. This story is found in Morstone's *Metamorphosis of*

Pygmalion Image (1598). There is another twisted version of this story adapted by W. S. Gilbert in his *Comedy of Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871). Here the sculptor is a married man and his wife Cynica, was jealous of the animated statue Galatea. But here we find that after the statue's transformation to the living state, she retires to her earlier state voluntarily; because the wife of the sculptor could not take it easily.

Shaw's *Pygmalion* is a creative farce; like Professor Higgins, who is modelled upon the famous linguist Henry Sweet. The female protagonist of the play Elizabeth Doolittle is undoubtedly Galatea of the myth. In fact, the story of the legend has been recreated by Shaw with a contexture change. Moreover, there are even similarities between Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the Cinderella fairy tale. Cinderella, as the tale says, in spite of suffering in the hands of her step mother, finally achieved her goal and got married with the Prince.

As already pointed out, Shaw recreates the Greek legend in his play, *Pygmalion*. No doubt, Professor Higgins is the Pygmalion of the legend and Elizabeth Doolittle is the Galatea; she initially sold flowers in the streets of London; but whom afterwards Higgins transformed her into a refined lady. Thus, Higgins is the maker of the transformed Elizabeth; but unlike the legend Higgins does not marry Elizabeth-Galatea and thus the story of *Pygmalion* deviates from the legend.

Again, the story has a close touch with the Cinderella fairy tales. The Cinderella story could symbolise any girl who has led a miserable life and later achieved happiness and success. Like Cinderella, Eliza also leads a life of suffering in the hands of her uncaring father and her step mother. She is a poor girl who earns her money by selling flowers. But her life changes when she meets Higgins, who transformed her into a cultured lady through education; Eliza later found her love in Freddy, a handsome young man, who married her and finally they led a happy life. Freddy is like the prince of Cinderella fairy tale who enters into Eliza's life and

makes her happy; and may be somewhere Higgins played the role of the angel.

Thus the title of the play is apt and suggestive. It had been derived from the legend and as Higgins creates a new woman out of a flower girl. But whereas Galatea was created out of the marble ivory; Shaw creates his Galatea out of a flower girl and injects new life to her. But he simply modified the legend and mixed it with the Cinderella fairy tale.

3.9 ANTI- ROMANTIC ELEMENTS

Shaw's plays are the result of Shaw's practical critical vision of writing plays. On the one hand, Shaw was a realist with a strong aversion to romanticism and sentimentalism, on the other, he was a Fabian Socialist whose political vision was not based on utopian idealism. His plays display a strong sense of realism with ideas that often are of much social debate. In his *Man and Superman*, Shaw gives us realistic ideas of a superman, and in *Major Barbara*, he shows how the question of capital and social work should not be separate in idealism, but complementary to each other.

Shaw's *Pygmalion* is a realistic play in every sense of the term. The anti-romantic posture in the play comes out of Shaw's basic concern about the nature of human relationship, class division and the rise of individualism in the society.

For this the play is made to revolt round the Greek legend of Pygmalion and Galatea. Anti-romanticism as we usually define relates to the absence of genuine romantic feelings between the hero and the heroine. The Shavian conception of drama does not value a predominant importance to any particular character; different characters become mouthpieces of various ideas and in the play and they develop a "discussion" to resolve the questions that arise in the play.

Shaw's *Pygmalion* has all the ingredients of a romantic play and Shaw is adept in creating a romantic atmosphere with the characters centring on the leading pair as foils. Professor Higgins is the most dominant character in the play, who being a teacher in Phonetics, makes an effort to pass a judgement on his own pedagogic ability. Being a Phonetician, he gives a high premium on the correct Received Pronunciation in an individual. He searches for and finds a flower girl named, Eliza Doolittle.

Eliza remains a flower selling girl with a typical cockney accent. The fact remains that Eliza's remarkable vivacity is cut off when a deal is struck between Higgins and Eliza's father about Eliza's potential transformation from a flower girl to a temporary putative duchess. It is at this moment that romantic possibilities in the play begin to unfold themselves very much in line with the conventional dramatic literature of England. The potential duchess is to pose for a real one on a date subsequently. But meanwhile she has to brush herself off in Higgins' language laboratory.

Higgins' single minded approach in treating Eliza as someone who must serve his pedagogic purpose sometimes may seem to be a hindrance to the romantic possibilities in the drama. While Mrs Pearce speaks about Eliza's future, Higgins replies to it as:

Well, when I've done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again; so that's all right. (Act II; p.30)

The significant part of the plot up to the point revolves round the hectic brushing up of Eliza to pick up the received standard of pronunciation and the gestures typical of an aristocratic society. The plot of the play is developed in line with the relationship based on one character's attempt at realising his capability at the expense of another, and the other character's sub-conscious desire to move up the class ladder. This remarkable opposition is continued throughout but Eliza, the

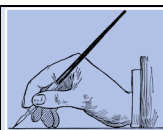
supposed victim, is not aware that Higgins' intellectual life is devoid of any romantic feelings for her.

The anti-romantic note of *Pygmalion* issues out of Shaw's basic concern that in a society based on class divisions, the union between a teacher and a declassed flower girl cannot be a reality. The problem becomes deeper as Higgins' personality cannot accept Eliza's final requests to him about her willingness to be a part of Higgins' household. Higgins' individualism cannot in any way accept Eliza as someone for whom he can devalue his status. The more Eliza requests him to accept her, the more Higgins becomes cruel; more without much emotion and certainly not without any romantic feelings. Higgins can easily dismiss Eliza's constant requests:

Marry some sentimental hog or other with lots of money, and a thick pair of lips to kiss you with and a thick pair of boots to kick you with. It can't appreciate what you've got, you'd better get what you can appreciate.
(Act V; p.102)

The possibility of romantic union between Eliza and Higgins virtually comes to an end and Eliza has to derive some consolation with her marriage with Freddy.

The anti-romantic overtone in the play is struck only towards the end, but gives us hints of Higgins' indifference to Eliza continuously in the plot. The basic nature of anti-romanticism in the play emerges out of Shaw's view that the two individuals of different classes should not come together in a marriage bond. Eliza's success in the garden party does not indicate that she had imbibed aristocratic ideals. In such circumstances, her marriage with Higgins would be a mismatch. This idea forms the essence for anti-romanticism in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What the myth of Pygmalion?

2. What is the significance of the subtitle of the play “A Romance in Five Acts”?

3.10 SHAVIAN IDEA OF INDIVIDUALISM

Bernard Shaw’s dramatic philosophy has got something to do with the political ideology he championed- Fabian Socialism. As this ideology advocated, social system should be changed in a gradual manner and not through the revolutionary means. Shaw in most of his plays calls for the necessity of a doctrine of individualism, if only the individual can be a perfect symbol of values that can help in the gradual social reformer transformation. In *Pygmalion*, Shaw describes in dramatic terms the coming together of Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle on the basis of the term dictated by Higgins. Higgins, a professor of Phonetics finds it necessary to test his pedagogic skill. He is in quest for someone without an idea of Received Pronunciation and who can be transformed into a duchess at least in verbal postures and external ways of behaviour. Shaw indicates that Higgins’ individualism centres on his attitude of giving temptation to a declassed woman about dreams of social elevation. As

things turn out subsequently, this individualism becomes stronger and stronger which leaves the declassed woman with her dreams shattered.

The individualistic temperament with which Higgins does all his practical works leaves in the wayside the present position and future prospects of the flower girl with whom he wants to practise his professional success mission. As he strikes a deal with Eliza's father on his plan to transform the cockney speaking girl, his turn becomes dominant. Eliza's desperation for cooperating with Higgins possibly goes in satisfying her sub-conscious desire to scale up the social ladder and thereby chase her dream a life.

The ultimate rejection of Eliza by Higgins is a significant pointer regarding the individualistic bent of mind of Higgins. It may be noted that Eliza has been throughout a passive girl who has to tolerate Higgins whenever he speaks of her life up to the decisive garden party. Needless to say, Shaw notes that Higgins' individualism is conventional. He does not cherish any romantic wish regarding Eliza, nor does he care about her sentiments that she may find it hard to get back to her former profession when she has already cherished the dream of high social status. When Eliza marries Freddy he is neither shocked, nor anguished. Higgins has used Eliza to test his pedagogic needs. This is the individualism, which Shaw speaks of in regards to Higgins. Shaw is himself confused in giving any value judgement, but he knows that Higgins' individualism is necessary for keeping the social formation in right order. If this individualism would have softened so as to accept Eliza, then this would have been against Shaw's philosophy of anti-romanticism.

3.11 IMPORTANCE OF THE PREFACE

Shaw's Preface to *Pygmalion* is like a manifesto for the English language and its speakers. Higgins clearly states that, "The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it."

(p.1). Shaw, on the other hand, had great love and respects for the English language- the language of Shakespeare and Milton. He was disgusted with the harsh manners in which Englishmen spoke the language. The uneducated people of London do not even open their mouths and mispronounce all the words.

Shaw further said that people mispronounce English words because of the defective English alphabet in which the letters do not stand for specific sounds. The same letter produces different sounds in different words. The English spellings are also very confusing. The result is that only men and women of the higher classes, who have been educated in good schools and universities, are able to speak and write correct English. If a person speaks a word as it is written he often goes wrong.

English people are very sensitive to the way in which a person speaks the language. Eliza was considered ‘low class’ because she spoke the cockney dialect. The fashionable flower-shops were not ready to employ her. But after she has been trained to speak correctly, this illegitimate low class girl is regarded as a princess. Therefore if the problem of language is solved, the glaring disparities between different classes will disappear.

Shaw suggested that the English alphabet should be made Phonetic. Each letter should stand for a specific sound. If that happens, everyone will be able to pronounce English words correctly and class distinctions based on language will disappear. Along with this Shaw also advocated spelling reform.

Finally, Shaw tells those who have the ambition of rising high on the social ladder by learning to speak correct English that they can fulfil their ambition by taking a proper training on phonetics under the supervision of an expert phonetician; not by mere imitation. So the reformer England needs most is an “energetic phonetic enthusiast.” (p.1)

3.12 DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Pygmalion is a well-constructed play with five acts, accompanied by a preface and a sequel. Shaw has used the five act structure common to English drama from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. Shaw play is very aptly constructed with elements of wit, humour, and suspense so that it can hold on the reader or viewer's attention till the very end. Shaw subverts the Pygmalion and Galatea myth and gives it a totally different turn.

In Act I, Higgins claims that he can train Eliza and pass her off as a duchess in the Ambassador's party within six months. Besides a discussion on English language, this act also includes comments on manners and etiquettes. In Act II, Eliza undergoes the rigorous training under the supervision of Higgins. Her transformation starts from this act. Alfred Doolittle's 'middle class morality' and 'undeserving rich' position is also brought into the fore. Act III shows Mrs Higgins as a representative of the English people and the mother-son equation and Eliza's arrival at the Garden party and her success in the same. In Act IV and V after Higgins' winning the bet, Eliza emerges as a different woman. She realises that she can neither go back to her earlier self nor can she start a new one very easily. Verbal repartee goes on between Higgins and Eliza regarding the consequences of her education.

Eric Bentley said regarding Shaw's *Pygmalion* that, in the first part of the play Shaw has shown us how a flower girl is converted into a duchess and the second part of the play she has shown us that how this same duchess can be transformed into a woman with power and zeal. Thus Shaw's construction of the play is inherent with logic, wit, artistry and social concern.

3.13 STAGE AND SCREEN ADAPTATION

Shaw in the Preface to *Pygmalion* said: “I wish to boast that *Pygmalion* has been an extremely successful play, both on stage and screen, all over Europe and North America as well as at home.” (4)

Written in 1912, *Pygmalion* was first staged on October 16, 1913 at the Hofburg Theatre, Vienna. It was first presented in England on April 11, 1914 by Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty’s Theatre, London. The play had several revivals in both England and the U. S. In later years, it was produced in 1974 at the Albert Theatre, directed by John Dexter. In the early 1980’s Peter O’Toole’s theatre of comedy series included *Pygmalion*. At the Drury Lane Theatre where it opened in the spring of 1958, it had a run for six years encompassing 2,281 performances.

Shaw even wrote some additional scenes for the film including the elaborate scenes of the Ambassador’s part which could not be shown on stage. Shaw insisted that the theme and the spirit of the play should be correctly presented in the film version.

As a film, *Pygmalion* was first screened in Germany on September 2, 1935 at Berlin with Eric Angel as the Director and Heinrich Oberlander and Walter Wassermann as the screenplay writers. The first English screening was at London on October 6, 1938 followed by the New York screening of December 7, 1938. This Gabriel Pascal production was directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard and the screen play was done by Shaw himself. The film was a great success and it bagged several Academy awards. Shaw was given the award for the best screenplay and the film was adjudged the best film of the year.

Pygmalion’s musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* which opened at the Mark Hellinger Theatre on Broadway contained fifteen numbers composed by Frederick Loewe with lyrics by Alan J. Learner and directed by Moss Hart. Julie Andrews played Eliza, Rex Harrison was Higgins and Stanley Holloway acted as Alfred Doolittle.

First screened in October 1964 at New York by CBS/Warner, the film version retained Rex Harrison as Higgins, but replaced Julie Andrews by Audrey Hepburn as Eliza. Alan J. Lerner wrote the screenplay. For the film, Oscars were presented to Andre Previn for his musical adaptation of the original score by Frederick Lowewe, to Rex Harrison for the hero's role, to George Cukor for direction and to Cecil Beaton for costumes.

3.14 MAJOR CHARACTERS

ELIZA DOLLITTLE

The very first words uttered by Eliza Doolittle in the play condemn her to that class of society continuously referred to by Higgins as “the gutter”. Indeed to him she herself is no more than a “squashed cabbage leaf” from that gutter. The problem as he sees it is how to make a lady of her.

However, before going into all that, it would be worthwhile to examine in greater detail what Eliza is at this point in the play in terms of both the negative and the positive points of view.

To begin with the negative part of Eliza, it is quite evident that she is poor and thus shows all those tricks which necessarily attend poverty. She is dirty, awkward, and careless both in manners and speech. Her diction is that of a low class dialect which passes for English among the uneducated. Poise, charm and such feminine virtues are of course unknown to her. But the worst is possibly a lack of dignity evidenced by her incessant uttering and her breaking out into howls at the slightest provocations. So she appears to us to be a persona far removed from the concept of a lady.

Yet, there lies a spirit in her which can be defiant when necessary, adventurous when it chooses, certainly a spirit when she potentially progresses and not easily daunted. It manifests itself when she flares up at Freddy or at Higgins the latter flings money at her and or when she smartly takes the cab and orders the driver to take her to “Bucknam

Pellis”, all to impress Freddy. The life she is leading as flower girl at this point in the play may certainly be mean. Yet, she is free and need not bow down to the dictates of any person; she is poor yet her soul is free to allow her to choose a more alluring prospect when she takes Higgins’ careless boast seriously.

From this point, Eliza, walks into the Wimpole Street and moves towards her ‘development’. Her development is two-fold- one positive and the other negative. Superficially over a period of six months the thorough grooming by Higgins and Pickering transforms her from a poor wretch to a significant lady. She awes her hostess at the Garden party where Higgins wins the bet. She is in fact mistaken for a princess. The “squashed cabbage leaf” has been metamorphosed into a perfect lady.

The moment Eliza becomes a willing pupil she surrenders her independence to Higgins. From this point onwards her life is miserable in relation to the quantitative approval or disapproval of Higgins. Beyond lesson hours her life is devoted to doing odd jobs for Higgins- keeping his appointments, fetching his slipper and so on. When the ordeal is over and both Higgins and Pickering rather thoroughly forget to praise her, Eliza’s make-believe universe with Higgins at the centre shatters. “What to become of me?” is more a serious question because it concerns the fact of her earning her livelihood.

It should be remembered that Shaw calls his play *Pygmalion* not *Galatea* even though it is largely the story of Eliza not Higgins. Galatea of the Pygmalion myth was too passive a creature to have any remote similarities with Shaw’s “new woman”. Curved by Pygmalion she was given life by Aphrodite and presumably went through life as a mere substitute for the Goddess whom Pygmalion wanted to marry in the first place. Eliza, on the other hand, must develop into someone more positive if she is ever to conform to Shaw’s concept of the term ‘lady’; she must recover her lost independence. But this cannot be done as long as she remains under Higgins’ rather too strong will.

Hurled by a superior wit she lands in the arms of an inferior, Freddy and with this first stepping stone she rises during the course of a night to a state where she can see a world peopled not only by the colossus Higgins, but by Pickering and Mrs Higgins and Freddy too. So the next morning when she meets Higgins and Pickering she is able to make a superb attempt by judging things for herself. Her telling to Pickering that he taught her to be a lady by treating her with respect; and that Higgins' part in it was nothing, clearly displays a more mature Eliza who can now look upon the world her way.

The 'new woman' is finally born and even Pickering cannot contain his admiration. She has finally come into her own- a tower of strength with courage, conviction and determination to forge ahead triumphant through life. For, after all, this is what Shaw's 'new woman' is all about.

The high degree of life force which works through Eliza makes her think to marry a young man named Freddy, who satisfied her both emotionally and physically. Eliza gets a new notion of life and she understands that Freddy is the one who can give her life a new dimension. Freddy is unlike Higgins who used her for his professional benefits, winning a mere bet. So Eliza finally marries Freddy and Shaw also remains true to his philosophy.

The relationship between Eliza and Higgins thus proves to be a relationship of misguided emotional energy. Professor Higgins is bound by professional ethics, and his "mother fixation". But on the other hand, Eliza is moved by the idea of emotional bond. As the play suggests, Eliza has also got an identity of her own who wants something more than social status, based on false aristocratic values. Emotion, in the final analysis, seems to be a stringer force than intellect, and it is thus emotion, intellect equation; which becomes the central point of Eliza-Higgins relationship. In the final analysis we can say that Eliza-Higgins relationship is the outcome of Shaw's anti-romantic philosophy and the play could not have

ended otherwise. “Eliza likened herself to a child in a foreign country, having forgotten her own language, yet she learned enough of the master's knowledge to abandon him yet co-exist.”(Innes)

HENRY HIGGINS

“*Pygmalion*”, says Shaw, “needs, not a preface, but a sequel.” However, the preface is invaluable as a guide to Henry Higgins. Shaw here speaks of an acquaintance, Henry Sweet, an arrogant professor of Phonetics at Oxford with an abysmal contempt for academic dignitaries and quite impatient with less expert mortals who needed detailed explanations of his work. His namesake in the play shares the same arrogance, contempt and impatience, and although Shaw claims not to have modelled Higgins on Sweet, the similarities are only too obvious.

In Henry Higgins, Shaw has drawn a man who is arrogant to the last bearable degree, has a furious temper, bullies everyone, especially women, and should logically be the most detestable creature on earth. Yet not only do we not dislike him, we invariably end up being charmed. This is so because each seemingly negative aspect of his character is merely an extension of a virtue. His arrogance, for instance, results from self-respect, from knowledge of his own worth. His temper is that of a remarkably agile mind impatient with slower minds- and above all- is his honesty. Higgins is absolutely honest-sometimes even brutally so and expects honesty which should be carried to such an extreme that he sees no reason to subscribe to a social code which he comes to see as hypocrisy and invariably offends his mother's polite friends.

Of course, Shaw must need to tell us more about Higgins in detail and this he does in the scenes when Higgins meets his mother. In Mrs Higgins, we find an extremely cultured and refined lady who sets up a standard of “intelligence, personal grace, dignity of character without harshness, and a cultivated sense of the best art of her time.” Mrs Higgins has been presented as a model of excellence of perfect English woman and when Higgins tells his mother that his ideal of a woman is someone who is

as close to his mother as possible we have the reason behind his confirmed old bachelor status. At the same time, however, he is an extremely intelligent, passionate and creative man who is vastly superior to the average human beings we may suppose surrounding him. But these energies, instead of being directed to sex, are directed towards phonetics which emerges as his grand passion. This is what Shaw calls “a disentanglement of sex from the associations with which it is so commonly confused.” Consequently, we have a strong, upright, passionate man (accused of being a misogynist for the wrong reasons) who refuses to bow down to any norm he considered silly and hypocritical and forges through life on the strength of his own convictions.

The play, after all, belongs to Pygmalion- the man who carved the beautiful statue he fell in love with. To what extent then is Henry Higgins Pygmalion? The original Pygmalion, one would do well to remember, was in love with Aphrodite, who would not return his love. It was this frustration which made him carve his beloved Goddess in stone who pitying him breathed life into it. Galatea, Pygmalion’s creation, is ultimately a substitute Aphrodite. Higgins on the other hand, would be an eminently wrong choice for the role of a pining lover. He is too much positive for that; and while one may be tempted to draw parallels between Mrs Higgins and Aphrodite it is certainly not romance as the possibility of it which makes Higgins take up the task of making a lady out of a “squashed cabbage leaf.” He is more a product of intellectual arrogance and boundless self-confidence and love does not have a place in his life. Even after the metamorphosis is over, Higgins wants Eliza to stay on at Wimpole Street with him and Pickering, not as his wife but as three old confirmed bachelors.

Therefore, any attempt to find any correspondence between the romantic Pygmalion and Higgins is doomed to failure. If anything, Higgins represents the anti-romantic. In the final analysis it is only as the

man responsible for Eliza's transformation that Higgins can claim Pygmalion's name for himself.

Probably, Bernard Shaw has made the use of Freudian psychology to depict the emotional condition of Professor Higgins. He loves his mother so much that he cannot accept any other woman. He feels they somehow do not come up to the standards of his mother. Moreover Mrs Higgins possesses such intellectual capacity which prevents her from judging any girl in her face value. Rather she considers every girl as comparatively low in refinement and intellectual value. As Freud noted that any son who finds himself in such a situation is bound to consider any girl with strong aversion. Thus, this psychology of Higgins makes him to think about Eliza as inferior. This created a puzzle about uncultivated people like Eliza; their upbringing and pecuniary conditions has denied them bits of sophistications and certain polished manners. This indifference forces Higgins to think of Eliza not as an individual with normal human longings and Eliza is once again reduced to the point from which Higgins rescued her. This emotional quality of Professor Higgins gives birth to anger in Eliza and she leaves him in a huff. Eliza also counter-attacks Higgins with ego as she herself declares that if Higgins falls for her emotionally, she is not ready to respond to him. To him, Eliza should marry someone who is rich, with "a thick pair of lips to kiss and boots to kick her." (Act V; p. 102)

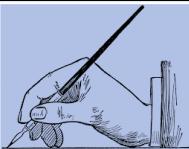
Higgins tells his mother that he cannot love anyone because of his cynicism to woman is too deep in his consciousness to be changed. This view not only expresses, Shaw's icon-classicism but also Higgins' negative sexual attitude. Nigel Alexander considers that there is an emotional inadequacy in Higgins' characters. The charm of Shavian hero lies in their ability to keep themselves at a distance from romantic trap which may lead them to marriage.

However, though Higgins' personality is many sided, yet his character in the play should be judged on the basis of the author's anti-

romantic idea. Higgins' character should be judged not in terms of romantic sensibility but in terms of his professional skill and his revolutionary and unconventional notions regarding some common aspects of the day to day life like sexuality, marriage, etc. From Shawian iconoclastic viewpoint, Professor Higgins' character is a success, but in social terms, in the final analysis, his unresponsive behaviour reveals his selfish motive.

ALFRED DOOLITTLE

Alfred Doolittle is Eliza's father, an elderly but vigorous dustman who has had at least six wives and who "seems equally free from fear and conscience." When he learns that his daughter has entered the home of Henry Higgins, he immediately pursues to see if he can get some money out of the circumstance. His unique brand of rhetoric, an unembarrassed, sincere, advocating of drinks and pleasure (at other people's expense), is amusing to Higgins. Through Higgins' joking recommendation, Doolittle becomes a richly endowed lecturer to a moral reform society, transforming him from lowly dustman to a picture of middle class morality--he becomes miserable. Throughout, Alfred is a scoundrel who is willing to sell his daughter to make a few pounds, but he is one of the few unaffected characters in the play, unmasked by appearance or language. Though scandalous, his speeches are honest. At points, it even seems that he might be Shaw's voice piece of social criticism (Alfred's proletariat status, given Shaw's socialist leanings, makes the prospect all the more likely).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How significant is the character of Alfred Doolittle according to you?

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3.15 CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE PLAY

There have been many critical responses on Shaw and *Pygmalion*, much of which lasted for a short span. Academicians, theatre personalities, social and political activists, ethical thinkers too critiqued him. Michael Holroyd's monumental biography on Shaw, in four volumes, Archibald Henderson, Leon Hugo, R. Mander and J. Mitchenson, R. J. Kuauflmann, L. Kronenberger, H. Nethercot, Colin Wilson etc. were famous Shawian critics. Later criticism was considered more of Feminist and Post-Colonial types after Holroyd's monumental biography on Shaw.

According to B Ifor Evans, "To his generation he [Shaw] has been a great figure and he has given more delight in the theatre to the world at large than any man of his time. His limitations are obvious. He does not touch tragedy possibly because he has a certain fastidiousness, which amounts almost to a fear of a world which cannot be controlled by his own thought....He has kept romance and colour out of his plays deliberately, and so failed to give the visual artists of the theatre, the designers the costume-makers, the opportunities of the collaboration which they would have delighted to possess."

LET US STOP AND THINK



If you look closely, you will find that Higgins also has a comical side. By nature G. B. Shaw was a popular humourist and a comedian. *Pygmalion* is also full of fun and humour which led critics to interpret the play as a comedy. Higgins refers to Eliza as "Kerbstone English" and calls her a

“squashed cabbage leaf” and regards her as an incarnate insult to the English language. His satirical remarks are enough to amuse the audience. Again, when he calculates that Eliza’s offering of a shilling per lesson to him is equal to a sixty or seventy pounds from a millionaire and when he scornfully talks to the members of the Hill family; it is really enough to expose the comic side of his character and hence it is not probably wrong to regard the play as a comedy to some extent.

3.16 SUMMING UP

Modern drama deals with realities, societal problems, problems from day to day life, etc. and Shaw’s *Pygmalion* is no exception to it. Shaw satirizes all the customs and conventions and institutions which are hollow within. The Preface to this play also acts as a manifesto for the English people. *Pygmalion* has received enormous popularity in theatrical and screen adaptations all over the world. Dealing with several contemporary and genuine issues, Shaw’s *Pygmalion* has also become a part of the English literature courses offered in colleges and universities.



3.17 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Critically comment on the characters and setting of the play.
2. Critically analyse *Pygmalion* as a Problem play?
3. Bernard Shaw’s plays are realistic and are devoid of emotionalism. How far the description is appropriate? Illustrate your answer with suitable illustrations from the play.
4. Show how G. B. Shaw makes use of the myths in *Pygmalion*?
5. Write a note on Shaw’s use of wit and humour in *Pygmalion*.
6. Analyse *Pygmalion* as a comedy of manners.
7. *Pygmalion* is often considered a satire on the folly of class distinctions. Discuss.
8. Write a note on Shavian individualism.

9. Comment on the character of Henry Higgins as a Phonetician, Shavian hero and a victim of Freudian psychology.
10. Assess the role of Alfred Doolittle and his critique of middle class morality.
11. In what way is Eliza Shaw's new woman?
12. Shaw's Preface to his plays is often interesting. How is the Preface to *Pygmalion* a manifesto for the English people?



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MODULE II: SAMUEL BECKETT: *WAITING FOR GODOT*

UNIT 4: THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 The origin of the Theatre of the Absurd
- 4.3 Samuel Beckett: Life and Works
- 4.4 *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd Play
- 4.5 Summing up
- 4.6 Assessment Questions
- 4.7 References and Recommended Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

We have already come to know about the changes that had taken place in the world of drama before the World War II. The War brought drastic change in the viewpoint of the people and eventually the dramatic world brought many nuances to present the post war reality. One of such experiment is the rise of the theatre of Absurd. In this unit we are going to discuss elaborately the theatre of absurd with all its peculiarities and the place and contribution of Samuel Beckett in bringing revolution to the post war theatre.

4.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on one of the path breaking play, *Waiting for Godot*. By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- familiarize yourself with the life and works of Samuel Beckett.
- understand the origin of the Absurd play.
- understand the social and cultural background which shaped Beckett and other playwrights of Absurd theatre.

4.2 THE ORIGIN OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The use of absurdist ideas and images in drama goes back to French writer Albert Camus, when his *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*) and the essay, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' got published in 1942. It is based on the famous image drawn from a Greek fable where a man is condemned to roll a rock up a mountain only to have it roll back down under its own weight, suggestive of human predicament that lasts for eternity. The monotonous and repetitive action of the fable symbolises the human condition in a world where we can no longer make sense of events. Camus conveys the lesson that instead of committing suicide, the 'only really serious philosophical problem', we should reconcile ourselves to this 'elusive feeling of absurdity' and bear it as best we can.

The inhumanity shown in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Nazi death camps, two of the momentous phenomena of modern times supported Camus' anticipation of the growing absurdity of human condition, the feeling of anxious uncertainty that gripped Western countries in the post-war period. Added to that was the existence of God and the stringent words of the critic Arnold P Hinchliffe, 'I have taken it as axiomatic for Absurdity to exist, God must be dead'

Camus only used the word absurd, but his was not a catch word as made popular by a group of playwrights during 1950s and 1960s. The Absurdist plays came as a shock because of their most unconventional ways of treating realism of modern world as theatrical subject. The phrase 'the Theatre of the Absurd' was first coined by the critic Martin Esslin and the term is often used more specifically, to refer to the group of playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. Characterised by a fascination with absurdity in all its forms – philosophical, dramaturgical, existential, emotional – this is a drama form that pushes theatre to extremes, and which asks probing questions about what reality really looks like. Often depicted in an apparently funny way the

challenges of living in a 20th-century world that seems devoid of meaning, these plays are far more lurid than funny when probed deep.

The Absurdist abandoned the idea of plot and character as nothing can appropriately represent realism. “The spectators of the Theatre of the Absurd are thus confronted with a grotesquely heightened picture of their own world: a world without faith, meaning, and genuine freedom of will. In this sense, the Theatre of the Absurd is the true theatre of our time” (Esslin 6)

The concept of time is dead in an absurd drama as ‘present’ can never grasped as present it is already anticipated in the future or already slipped into the past.

‘Emotional identification with the characters is replaced by a puzzled, critical attention. For, while the happenings on the stage are absurd, they yet remain recognizable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity, so that eventually the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence. Thus, the absurd and fantastic goings on of the Theatre of the Absurd will, in the end, be found to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure’ (Esslin 5)

Use of incoherent language is an essential dramatic device of absurdist plays. The dialogue in these plays consists of meaningless clichés and the mechanical, circular repetition of stereotyped phrase. Many a times conversations in an absurd drama seems uncommunicative and metaphysically alien to its audience and thus the purpose of disconnectedness and frustration depicted in the plays are served.

However, each of these writers has his own special way of presenting this absurdity. In Beckett it is melancholic, colored by a feeling of futility born from the disillusionment of old age and chronic hopelessness. His epoch making play *Waiting for Godot* (1952) presents two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon – both tramps, both standing on a road next to a tree, “nothing to be done” both waiting for someone called Godot (God?) whom no one has seen ever. Waiting is endless where Godot never turns up. Human

beings' concern with futile and senseless objectives, ennui and boredom associated with these and gloom and depression resulted from it are primary depiction of the play. But Beckett is of view that all these are also cathartic for modern generation.

Adamov's (*Invasion* 1950) is on the other hand more active, aggressive, earthy, and tinged with social and political overtones.

It is the same futility and pointlessness of human effort, the same impossibility of human communication which Ionesco expresses in ever new and ingenious variations. In Ionesco absurdity has flavor of tragical clowning. But they all share the same deep sense of human isolation and of the irremediable character of the human condition. You may carefully read this dialogue from *The Bald Soprano* (1949) to realize this isolation and impossibility of human communication

Mr Martin I have a flat on the fifth floor, flat Number 8, dear lady.

Mrs Martin How very extraordinary! Oh goodness gracious, how very amazing and what a strange coincidence! I too live on the fifth floor, Sir in flat Number 8!

.....

Mr Martin Goodness, how strange, how amazing, how extraordinary!
Then, Madam, we must live in the same room and sleep in the same bed, dear Madam. Perhaps that is where we met before!

In *The Chairs* (1952) the two old people making conversation with the empty air and living in the expectation of an orator who is to pronounce profound truths about life, but turns out to be deaf and dumb. The monotony of modern life is depicted in the play by placing a few empty chairs in the stage and nothing else. Ionesco summerises this human condition by saying that, "Cut off from his religion, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost: all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless".

4.3 SAMUEL BECKETT: LIFE AND WORKS

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Foxrock, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland, in 1906. He was the second son of comfortable middle-class parents who were a part of the Protestant minority in a predominantly Catholic society. He lived in a huge house called Cooldrinagh. It was in this secluded three story Tudor home, surrounded by acres of gardens, a croquet lawn, stables for his mother's donkeys and dogs, a poultry house, and a tennis court, Beckett and his older brother spent their childhood. High brick walls separated them from the outside world, and ensured them uninterrupted tea parties, piano lessons, and formal dinners. Their much-loved father took them hiking and swimming. Their mother, against whom Beckett rebelled almost all of his life, took them to church. By the time they were five, the boys were in school. By the time they were 12, they were local tennis champions—aiming all shots at their opponents' heads.

Before he left for boarding school in 1920, Beckett had already developed into an avid reader. He kept his books on a small shelf above his bed, along with busts of Shakespeare and Dante. While in the boarding school, he excelled at sports, and received a solid educational foundation. He entered Trinity College (Dublin) in 1923.

There he developed an intellectual bent of mind. He read Descartes, French poetry, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Apollinaire, and discovered the theatre of O'Casey and Pirandello. He was also rebellious and moody. He had a reputation for reckless driving, heavy drinking, and irreverent behaviour. In spite of this, he graduated first in his class in 1927 with a major in modern languages. He started his career with a job as a teacher of English in the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. In 1931, he returned to Ireland as a lecturer in French literature. He received his master's degree in French from Dublin and subsequently returned to Paris as a teacher in 1932. He has made Paris his home since that time, except for visits abroad and a retreat to the Unoccupied Zone in Vichy, France, during 1942–44.

However, Beckett found teaching uncongenial to his creative activities and soon turned all of his attention to writing. By the time his father died in 1933, leaving him a small income, Beckett's character had already been formed. Between bouts with physical and mental illnesses that included flus, colds, aching joints, depression, anxiety, boils, cysts, constipation, insomnia, and glaucoma in both eyes, he would live the rest of his life as a writer. During the 1930s and 1940s, he wrote critical studies (Proust and others), poems, and two novels (*Murphy* and *Watt*), all written in English. In the late 1940s, he shifted from writing in English to writing in French. One of the reasons for this was his basic rejection of Ireland as his homeland. When asked why he found Ireland uncongenial, he offered the same explanation that has been given by other famous Irish expatriates, such as Sean O'Casey and James Joyce. He could not tolerate the strict censorship of so many aspects of life, especially the arbitrary censoring of many works of literature by the Catholic clergy. Moreover, the political situation created an oppressive anti-intellectual atmosphere. Even after he became famous, he refused to allow some of his plays to be presented in Ireland. In 1958, during the International Theatre Festival in Dublin, a play of his compatriot O'Casey was banned, and Beckett, in protest, withdrew his plays, which have not been seen in Ireland since then.

In the next fifty years he would go on to produce an impressive collection of work in a variety of genres. He created essays, poems, short stories, novels, plays, mime, and film. In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In December 1989, after too long a stay in "an old crock's home," Samuel Beckett died of respiratory failure at the age of 83. Right before he died, he was asked if anything in life was worthwhile. "Precious little," he replied.

4.4 WAITING FOR GODOT AS AN ABSURD PLAY

The appearance of *En Attendant Godot*, original French name of the play *Waiting for Godot*, at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1953, created ripples in the literary world for its uniqueness of approach to the art of drama. The new principles of dramatic art adopted in this play virtually created the term "Theatre of the Absurd". The entire group of plays that developed out of this genre of theatre usually got associated with the name of Samuel Beckett. Although other dramatists too have contributed substantially to this genre, Beckett remains its single, most towering figure.

This movement known as the Theatre of the Absurd was not a consciously conceived movement, and it has never had any clear-cut philosophical doctrines, no organized attempt to win converts, and no meetings. Each of the main playwrights of the movement seems to have developed independently of each other. The playwrights most often associated with the movement are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov.

The title "Theatre of the Absurd" —comes from Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (1962) in which he maintains that these dramatists write from a "sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition." But other writers such as Kafka, Camus, and Sartre have also argued from the same philosophical position. This theatre, as Esslin has pointed out, "has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being — that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence."

If we have to examine *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd play, we must compare it to traditional theatre which had coherently developed situations, characterizations that are rooted in the logic of motivation and reaction, and settings that bear an intrinsic, realistic, or obvious relationship to the drama as a whole. In such traditional plays, language was a tool of logical communication and the cause-and-effect relationships. By their use of a

number of puzzling devices, these Absurd playwrights have gradually accustomed audiences to a new kind of relationship between theme and presentation. In these seemingly queer and fantastic plays, the external world is often depicted as menacing, devouring, and unknown. The settings and situations often make us vaguely uncomfortable; the world itself seems incoherent and frightening and strange, but at the same time, it seems hauntingly poetic and familiar.

Beyond the technical and strange illusionary techniques which prompt the critic to group these plays into a category, there are larger and, ultimately, more significant concerns by which each dramatist, in spite of his artistic differences, is akin to the others. Aside from such similarities as violation of traditional beginning, middle, and end structure (exposition, complication, and denouement) or the refusal to tell a straightforward, connected story with a proper plot, or the disappearance of traditional dramatic forms and techniques, these dramatists are all concerned with the failure of communication in modern society which leaves man alienated; moreover, they are all concerned with the lack of individuality and the overemphasis on conformity in our society, and they use the dramatic elements of time and place to imply important ideas; finally, they reject traditional logic for a type of non-logic which ultimately implies something about the nature of the universe. Implicit in many of these concerns is an attack on a society or a world which possesses no set standards of values or behaviour.

Foremost, all of these dramatists of the absurd are concerned with the lack of communication. Each makes a futile attempt to get another character to understand him, but as the attempt is heightened, there is more alienation. We see how Vladimir and Estragon talk but with not much of communication happening between them. Lucky's speech is the best example of speech without any meaning. In Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, the inability to communicate causes an entire race of so-called rational human beings to be metamorphosed into a herd of rhinoceroses, thereby abandoning all hopes of language as a means of communication.

In Beckett's *Act Without Words I*, (1957) we have our first play in this movement that uses absolutely no dialogue. And even without dialogue, all the actions on the stage suggest the inability of man to communicate. Beckett's characters are tied together by a fear of being left entirely alone, and they therefore cling to one last hope of establishing some kind of communication. His plays give the impression that man is totally lost in a disintegrating society, or, as in *Endgame*, that man is left alone after society has disintegrated. In *Waiting for Godot*, two derelicts are seen conversing in a repetitive, strangely fragmented dialogue that possesses an illusory, haunting effect, while they are waiting for Godot, a vague, never-defined being who will bring them some communication about — what? Salvation? Death? An impetus for living? A reason for dying? No one knows, and the safest thing to say is that the two are probably waiting for someone or something which will give them an impetus to continue living or, at least, something which will give meaning and direction to their lives. As Beckett clearly demonstrates, those who rush hither and yon in search of meaning find it no quicker than those who sit and wait. The "meaning" about life that these tramps hope for is never stated precisely. But Beckett never meant his play to be a "message play," in which one character would deliver a "message." The message here is conveyed through the interaction of the characters and primarily through the interaction of the two tramps. Everyone leaves the theatre with the knowledge that these tramps are strangely tied to one another; even though they bicker and fight, and even though they have exhausted all conversation notice that the second act is repetitive and almost identical — the loneliness and weakness in each calls out to the other, and they are held by a mystical bond of interdependence. In spite of this strange dependency, however, neither is able to communicate with the other. The other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, are on a journey without any apparent goal and are symbolically tied together. One talks, the other says nothing. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon and the journeying of Pozzo and Lucky offer themselves as contrasts of various activities in the modern

world — all of which lead to no fruitful end; therefore, each pair is hopelessly alienated from the other pair. For example, when Pozzo falls and yells for help, Vladimir and Estragon continue talking, although nothing is communicated in their dialogue; all is hopeless, or as Vladimir aphoristically replies to one of Estragon's long discourses, "We are all born mad. Some remain so." In their attempts at conversation and communication, these two tramps have a fastidious correctness and a grave propriety that suggest that they could be socially accepted; but their fastidiousness and propriety are inordinately comic when contrasted with their ragged appearance.

Their fumbling ineffectuality in their attempts at conversation seems to represent the ineptness of all mankind in its attempt at communication. And it rapidly becomes apparent that Vladimir and Estragon, as representatives of modern man, cannot formulate any cogent or useful resolution or action; and what is more pathetic, they cannot communicate their helpless longings to one another. While failing to possess enough individualism to go their separate ways, they nevertheless are different enough to embrace most of our society. In the final analysis, their one positive gesture is their strength to wait. But man is, ultimately, terribly alone in his waiting. Ionesco shows the same idea at the end of *Rhinoceros* when we see Berenger totally alone as a result, partly, of a failure in communication.

Waiting for Godot, therefore, presents a critique of modern society by showing the total collapse of communication. The technique used is that of evolving a theme about communication by presenting a series of seemingly disjointed speeches. The accumulative effect of these speeches is a devastating commentary on the failure of communication in modern society. In conjunction with the general attack on communication, the second aspect common to these dramatists is the lack of individuality encountered in modern civilization. Generally, the point seems to be that man does not know himself. He has lost all sense of individualism and either functions isolated and alienated, or else finds himself lost amid repetition and conformity.

Ultimately, the absurdity of man's condition is partially a result of his being compelled to exist without his individualism in a society which does not possess any degree of effective communication. Essentially, therefore, the Theatre of the Absurd is not a positive drama. It does not try to prove that man can exist in a meaningless world, as did Camus and Sartre, nor does it offer any solution. Instead, it demonstrates the absurdity and illogicality of the world we live in. Nothing is ever settled; there are no positive statements; no conclusions are ever reached, and what few actions there are have no meaning, particularly in relation to the action. That is, one action carries no more significance than does its opposite action. Pozzo and Lucky's frantic running and searching are no more important than Vladimir and Estragon's sitting and waiting.

No conclusions or resolutions can ever be offered, therefore, because these plays are essentially circular and repetitive in nature. In all of these playwrights' dramas, the sense of repetition, the circular structure, the static quality, the lack of cause and effect, and the lack of apparent progression all suggest the sterility and lack of values in the modern world.

Critics referred to the Theatre of the Absurd as a Theatre in transition, meaning that it was to lead to something different. So far this has not happened, but the Theatre of the Absurd is rapidly becoming accepted as a distinct genre in its own right. The themes utilized by the dramatists of this movement are not new; thus, the success of the plays must often depend upon the effectiveness of the techniques and the new ways by which the dramatists illustrate their themes. The techniques are still so new, however, that many people are confused by a production of one of these plays. Yet if the technique serves to emphasize the absurdity of man's position in the universe, then to present this concept by a series of ridiculous situations is only to render man's position even more absurd; and in actuality, the techniques then reinforce that very condition which the dramatists bewail. In other words, to present the failure of communication by a series of disjointed and seemingly incoherent utterances lends itself to the accusation that functionalism is

carried to a ridiculous extreme. But this is exactly what the absurdist wants to do. He is tired of logical discourses pointing out step-by-step the absurdity of the universe: he begins with the philosophical premise that the universe is absurd, and then creates plays which illustrate conclusively that the universe is indeed absurd and that perhaps this play is another additional absurdity.

In conclusion, if the public can accept these unusual uses of technique to support thematic concerns, then we have plays which dramatically present powerful and vivid views on the absurdity of the human condition — an absurdity which is the result of the destruction of individualism and the failure of communication, of man's being forced to conform to a world of mediocrity where no action is meaningful. As the tragic outcasts of these plays are presented in terms of burlesque, man is reminded that his position and that of human existence in general is essentially absurd. Every play in the Theatre of the Absurd movement mirrors the chaos and basic disorientation of modern man. Each play laughs in anguish at the confusion that exists in contemporary society; hence, all share a basic point of view, while varying widely in scope and structure.

4.5 SUMMING UP

You must have got a fair idea about the Theatre of Absurd and Beckett's contribution in bringing this new trend with immense popularity. We have also tried to present a fairly good idea of the other plays of Beckett by giving an elaborate details of them. Also this section gives some preliminary details of *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd play before going to the succeeding unit.



4.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the rise of the Theatre of the Absurd as a reaction to the realist drama.

2. Briefly write on the contribution of Samuel Beckett in bringing revolutionary change to the world of drama. Who are the other dramatists who practised in the field of Absurdist drama?



4.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 5: READING WAITING FOR GODOT

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1. Learning Objectives
- 5.2. Reading the text
- 5.3. Summing up
- 5.4. Assessment Questions
- 5.5 References and Recommended Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Waiting for Godot as you have already come to know, brought revolution in the British theatre primarily because of its unique way of treating realism. The monotony and ennui of contemporary time was very appropriately dramatized in this play. In this unit we are going to give you an elaborate detail of the action of the play. Hope this will help you to proceed to the succeeding unit to discuss the important dramatic elements of the play.

5.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on the textual aspects of the play. After going through this unit you will be able to:

- comprehend various critical aspects associated with the play
- trace the elements of Absurd play in the text.

5.2. READING WAITING FOR GODOT

Beckett's dramas were mostly composed in French and first presented in Paris. Therefore, many critics find it difficult to classify his works. The question is, whether he should be considered French or an Irish writer? The nature of his characters, though named Vladimir and Estragon, seems to be

more characteristically Irish than any other nationality. Interestingly, Beckett, when composing in French, was his own translator into English and vice versa. Thus his works do not suffer from another translator's tampering with them, and his great plays now belong to the realm of world literature.

Waiting for Godot is a play in two acts. Act I begins on a country road by a tree. It is evening. Estragon, an old man, is sitting on a low mound trying to remove his boot. Vladimir, another old man, joins him. They begin to chat. They have apparently known each other for years. Once perhaps respectable, they are now homeless, debilitated, and often suicidal. They wonder out loud why they did not kill themselves years ago; they consider the possibility of doing it today. They are waiting for someone they call "Godot". While they wait, they share conversation, food, and memories. Two other elderly men, Pozzo and Lucky, arrive on the scene. It is clear that Pozzo is the master, and Lucky is the slave. Upon command, the slave dances and thinks out loud for the entertainment of the others, until he is forcibly silenced. After Lucky and Pozzo depart, a boy arrives. He tells Estragon and Vladimir that Godot will not be there today, but will be there tomorrow. He leaves, and they continue to wait.

The second act is almost the same as the first. The tree has sprouted leaves, Estragon and Vladimir chat while they wait for Godot, and Pozzo and Lucky arrive again. This time, Pozzo is blind and helpless, and Lucky is mute. After some interaction, Pozzo and Lucky leave, and the boy arrives. He has the same message as before. Godot will be there tomorrow. Estragon and Vladimir are left to wait as before.

The curtain rises, to present a landscape, which is strange and alien. It most resembles some strange place in outer space with its haunting and brooding sense of despair. A country road is the main setting, and there is a single tree. We know there is a ditch on the other side of the road because immediately Estragon tells Vladimir that he slept last night in the ditch. The loneliness and the isolation of the setting set the tone for the play. The idea of a road implies a journey, a movement, a purpose to life, but we see, instead,

two deserted, isolated figures with no place to go and with no journey to look forward to. These figures are dressed in rags and tatters, clothes that would be worn by two tramps in an old, second-rate burlesque production. Thus the setting and the clothing make an ominous comment before we are too far into the drama.

The play opens with Estragon involved in a tremendous struggle — but not a struggle of a highly metaphysical nature; instead, it is a physical struggle to get his stuck boot off his sore foot. The struggle has literally exhausted him, and he gives up the struggle with the opening words of the play: "*Nothing to be done*" (emphasis ours). Estragon's words are repeated two more times by Vladimir in the next moments of the play, and variations of this phrase become one of the central statements of the drama. The phrase is innocent enough in itself and obviously directed toward a specific struggle — the removal of the boot. But as frustrating as the boot is, this is still a minor concern when compared to what Estragon and Vladimir are to do with the problem of waiting for Godot. In response to Estragon's struggle with his foot, Vladimir ignores the immediate physical problem but agrees with Estragon metaphysically that there is "nothing to be done," even though he has not "yet tried everything."

Thus the two opening speeches, innocent and simple enough in themselves, set the tone for the entire drama. The words carry a foreboding overtone which will be later associated with the word "appalled," or as Vladimir calls it, "AP-PALLED," and also the two tramps' inability to laugh. As the play progresses, we find that the two tramps are linked to each other in some undefined, ambiguous way. Vladimir greets Estragon with the comment "I thought you were gone forever," and since they are "together again at last," they will "have to celebrate." Vladimir then discovers that Estragon spent the night "in a ditch . . . over there" and that he was beaten by "the same lot as usual." This reference to a beaten man in a ditch carries overtones of other matters, but cannot be definitely correlated. For example, this could be an oblique reference to the biblical story of the Good Samaritan

who finds a man beaten, robbed, and thrown into a ditch and rescues him. But no Good Samaritan has come to Estragon's rescue. Instead, he has apparently spent the entire night alone in the ditch, which means that both of them are, as their clothes indicate, in the most extreme, impoverished condition that they have ever known.

Estragon remains concerned with his boots; Vladimir, however, is extremely impatient and finds the conversation about the boots to be profitless. He turns the conversation to more abstract matters. Very early in the play, then, the difference between the two tramps is established: Estragon is concerned about immediate, practical problems — the removal of his boots, the beating, and now his aching foot; Vladimir, in contrast, laments the general nature of their sufferings by remembering better days that used to be. Whereas Estragon's foot hurts, Vladimir is concerned with suffering of a different nature.

The philosophical concept of the nature of suffering is first introduced here by the contrasting physical ailments of each character: Estragon has sore feet which *hurt* him, and Vladimir has some type of painful urinary infection which causes him to suffer; one character *hurts* and the other one *suffers*. Ultimately, the physical disabilities characterize the two men (an aching foot is easier to locate and describe than is a painful urinary infection) and also symbolize the various spiritual disabilities of the two characters.

Vladimir's thoughts shift from his urinary problems to the biblical concept of "Hope deferred maketh the something sick . . ." but he is unable to complete the proverb. (See *Proverbs* 13:12: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.") The proverb fits Vladimir and Estragon's condition perfectly since we will see them in a state of sickness of heart; their hopes are constantly deferred as they continually wait for Godot, and their desires are never fulfilled since Godot never arrives. Vladimir then concludes as did Estragon: "Nothing to be done."

Estragon is not able to take off his boot yet, and he looks inside it to see what was causing the difficulty. Vladimir then chastises Estragon for one

of man's most common faults: blaming one's boots for the faults of one's foot. This accusation, of course, refers to the tendency of all of mankind to blame any external thing — boots, society, circumstances, etc. — for deficiencies in one's own nature. It is easier for Estragon to blame the boots for his aching feet than to blame his own feet.

The idea of Estragon's foot hurting and Vladimir's suffering, combined with their appalling human condition, causes Vladimir to realize again that there is "nothing to be done." This suffering and lack of hope turn Vladimir's thoughts to the suffering of the two thieves on the cross and their lack of hope. Then from the Old Testament proverb about hope, Vladimir's thoughts turn to the New Testament and the possibility of hope expressed in the story of Christ and the two thieves on the cross. There were *two* thieves, as there are now *two* tramps, and *one* of the thieves was saved; therefore, maybe there may be hope for either Vladimir or Estragon if they repent — but there is nothing to repent of, except being born. This remark causes "Vladimir to break into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles," and he reminds Estragon that "one daren't even laugh any more"; one may "merely smile." This comment is another early indication of the seriousness of their condition. Vladimir's apprehension over laughing suggests that they both have a nagging awareness of the precariousness and insecurity of their condition, a condition that extends beyond their physical concerns.

In the discussion of the thieves, Estragon is unable to participate fully because he can't remember the details. In frustration, Vladimir yells to Estragon: "Come on . . . return the ball can't you, once in a way?" Vladimir's complaint is descriptive of much of the dialogue in the remainder of the play; it is very much like two people playing a game with one another and one is unable to keep the ball in play. Estragon constantly fails to "keep the ball in play"; that is, throughout the drama, he is unable to sustain his end of the conversation. Even in response to the matter of being saved "from hell" or "from death," Estragon merely replies, "Well what of it?" Therefore, even if they were to repent, Estragon can't understand what they might be saved

from, who their saviour would be, and, furthermore, why the four Gospels differ so significantly. The discussion is brought firmly to a close with Estragon's pronouncement: "People are bloody ignorant apes."

From this discussion, the two tramps confront the central problem of the play. Estragon looks about the bleak, desolate landscape and tells Vladimir: "Let's go." The recurring thematic refrain is then put forth: they can't leave because they are "waiting for Godot." They are not sure they are in the right place; they are not sure they are here on the correct day; they are not sure what day of the week it is (maybe it is yesterday); they think they were to meet Godot on Saturday, but if today is Saturday, is it the right Saturday? At least, they are fairly certain that they were to meet by a tree, and there is only one tree on the horizon, but it could be either a bush or a dead tree. The tree, whatever its symbolic value (the cross, the hanging tree, spring's renewal), is a rather pathetic specimen and cannot be a very hopeful sign. Completely frustrated, they resign themselves to waiting. Vladimir paces, and Estragon sleeps.

Suddenly, feeling lonely, Vladimir awakens Estragon, who awakens from his dream with a start. Estragon wants to tell about his dream (or nightmare), but Vladimir refuses to listen to it. Estragon's nightmare, even without its subject being revealed, symbolizes the various fears that these tramps feel in this alienated world. Vladimir's refusal to listen suggests his fear and apprehension of all of life and of certain things that are best left unsaid. Estragon, then, unable to tell about his nightmare, tries to tell a joke about an Englishman in a brothel. Again Vladimir refuses to listen and walks off.

Estragon's attempt to tell his nightmare and then his attempt to tell the joke about the Englishman — a story that is never finished represents an effort to pass the time while the two are waiting for Godot. Since they have been waiting and will be waiting for an indeterminate time, the essential problem is what to do with one's life while waiting, how to pass the time while waiting.

On Vladimir's return, the two embrace and then they try to decide what they are going to do while waiting. During the embrace, the tender, fraternal rapport of the moment is suddenly broken by Estragon's mundane observation that Vladimir smells of garlic. This technique is typical of Beckett's method of deflating man's pretensions by allowing the absurd and the vulgar to dominate the action.

The eternal question returns: what to do while waiting? Estragon suggests that perhaps they could hang themselves. That would certainly put an end to their waiting. Hanging also has another incentive: it would excite them sexually and cause each to have an erection and an ejaculation. But the matter of hanging creates some problems. Vladimir should hang himself first because he is the heaviest. If the straggly tree does not break under Vladimir's heavier weight, then it would be strong enough for Estragon's lighter weight. But if Estragon went first, the tree might break when Vladimir tried it, and then Estragon (Gogo) would be dead, and poor Vladimir (Didi) would be alive and completely alone. These considerations are simply too weighty to solve. Man's attempts to solve things rationally bring about all types of difficulties; it is best to do nothing — "It's safer." Accordingly, they decide to "wait and see what [Godot] says," hoping that he, or someone, will make a decision about them or that something will be done for them. They will make no effort to change their rather intolerable and impossible situation, but, instead, they will hope that someone or some objective event will eventually change things for them.

Having resolved to wait for Godot, they then wonder what he might offer them and, even more important, "what exactly did we ask him for?" Whatever it was they asked him for, Godot was equally vague and equivocal in his reply. Maybe he is at home thinking it over, consulting friends, correspondents, banks, etc. The tramps' entire discussion about Godot indicates how little, if indeed anything at all, they know of this Godot. The fact that Vladimir can't remember what they asked of Godot indicates that they are unable to understand their own needs. They rely on someone else to

tell them what they need. Similarly, the request and the possible response are discussed in terms of a person requesting a bank loan or some type of financial transaction. A philosophical question then begins to emerge: how does one relate to Godot? If he is God, can one enter into a business contract with this person? And if so, where is He? If Godot (or God) has to consult many outside sources before replying or appearing, then Vladimir and Estragon's condition is not very reassuring. And, if, as it now begins to become obvious, Vladimir and Estragon represent modern man in his relationship with God (Godot), then the modern condition of man is disturbingly precarious.

What, then, is man in this modern world? He is a beggar or a tramp reduced to the direst circumstances: he is lost, not knowing where to turn. He is denied all rights, even the right to laugh:

ESTRAGON: We've no rights anymore?

VLADIMIR: You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.

Furthermore, they are reduced to crawling "on [their] hands and knees." Of course, in ancient cultures, man always approached a deity on his hands and knees. But in Beckett's dramas, a character's physical condition is correlated with his spiritual condition; all outward aspects of the two tramps reflect man's inward condition.

In a feeble attempt to assert their freedom, Estragon murmurs that they are not tied, but his assertion does not carry much conviction. The assertion, however feeble, that they are not tied might suggest man's revolt from God, because as soon as the idea of revolt is verbalized, they immediately hear a noise as though someone is approaching — Godot or God — to chastise them for heresy. They huddle together in fear.

After the discussion of whether or not they are tied has occupied their thoughts, Vladimir gives Estragon their last carrot to eat. Now they have

only a turnip left to eat, and these reduced circumstances make it necessary for them to continue to wait for Godot and possible salvation.

While eating his carrot, Estragon ruminates further about being "tied" or "ti-ed." Even though Vladimir feebly asserts that they are not tied, we noted that they are indeed tied to the idea of waiting. They cannot assert themselves; they have ceased struggling; there is even "no use wriggling." They are merely two stranded figures on an alien landscape who have given up struggling and are dependent upon waiting for Godot, realizing there is "nothing to be done." Thus, the play opens, and this section closes on the same note: nothing to be done.

It is daytime again and Vladimir begins singing a song about the death of a dog, but twice forgets the lyrics as he sings again. Estragon claims to have been beaten last night, despite no apparent injury. Vladimir comments that the formerly bare tree now has leaves and tries to confirm his recollections of yesterday against Estragon's extremely vague, unreliable memory. Vladimir then triumphantly produces evidence of the previous day's events by showing Estragon the wound from when Lucky kicked him. Noticing Estragon's barefootedness, they also discover his forsaken boots nearby, which Estragon insists are not his, although they fit him perfectly. With no carrots left, Vladimir offers Estragon a turnip or a radish. He then sings Estragon to sleep with a lullaby before noticing further evidence to confirm his memory: Lucky's hat still lies on the ground. This leads to his involving Estragon in a frenetic hat-swapping scene. The two wait for Godot, as they did yesterday, and in the meantime distract themselves by playfully imitating Pozzo and Lucky, firing insults at each other and then making up, and attempting some fitness routines—all of which fail miserably and end quickly.

Pozzo and Lucky unexpectedly reappear, but the rope is much shorter than yesterday, and Lucky now guides Pozzo, rather than being controlled by him. As they arrive, Pozzo trips over Lucky and they together fall into a motionless heap. Estragon and Vladimir see an opportunity to exact revenge

on Lucky for kicking Estragon earlier. The issue is debated lengthily until Pozzo shocks the pair by revealing that he is now blind and Lucky is now mute. He claims to have lost all notion of time, and assures the others that he cannot remember meeting them before, but also does not expect to recall today's events tomorrow. Pozzo's commanding arrogance from yesterday appears to have been replaced by humility and insight, though his demeanour is one of utter despair. His parting words—which Vladimir expands upon later—eloquently encapsulate the brevity of human existence: They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it is night once more. Estragon has again fallen asleep by the time Lucky and Pozzo depart.

While Estragon sleeps on, Vladimir is encountered by (apparently) the same boy from yesterday, though Vladimir wonders whether he might be the other boy's brother. This time, Vladimir begins consciously realising the circular nature of his experiences and existence: he even predicts exactly what the boy will say, involving the same speech about Godot not arriving today but surely tomorrow. Vladimir seems to reach a moment of revelation before furiously chasing the boy away, demanding that he be recognised the next time they meet. Estragon awakes and pulls his boots off again. He and Vladimir again consider hanging themselves, but they test the strength of Estragon's belt (hoping to use it as a noose) and it breaks; Estragon's trousers consequently fall down. They resolve tomorrow to bring a more suitable piece of rope and, if Godot fails to arrive, to commit suicide. In the end, they decide to clear out for the night, though once again, neither of them makes any attempt to move.

5.3. SUMMING UP

So in this unit you must have got a pretty good idea about *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd play. Once you are able to form your opinion about the play, it will not be difficult to move to other aspects of the same.



5.4 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is the dramatic significance of Godot in Beckett's play?
2. *Waiting for Godot* possesses neither a conventional plot nor any female interest. What, then, are the reasons for its immense popularity on the stage?
3. Do you subscribe to the view that *Waiting for Godot* ultimately tends to enhance rather than lower one's belief in human dignity?
4. Discuss *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd Play?
5. Discuss *Waiting for Godot* in the light of the traditional principles of dramaturgy.
6. What estimate have you formed of the two tramps? What do you think they symbolize?



5.5 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

Beckett, S. *Waiting for Godot*, London: Faber and Faber, [1956] 1988

UNIT 6: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1. Learning Objectives
- 6.2. Major Themes
- 6.3. Major Characters
- 6.4. Symbols in *Waiting for Godot*
- 6.5. Summing Up
- 6.6. Assessment Questions
- 6.7. References and Recommended Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Waiting for Godot as you have come to know created history in the world of post war theatre. The popularity of the play has not gone down even today. Consequently it caught much critical eye of the critics. In this unit we will try to see what made the play so unique. In going to do that we will discuss major themes, major characters and other dramatic devices used in the play.

6.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint the learners with the themes, characters of the play and some important symbols that add to the charm of the play.

6.2. MAJOR THEMES

With the appearance of *En Attendant Godot (Waiting for Godot)* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1953, the literary world was shocked by

the appearance of a drama so different and yet so intriguing that it virtually created the term "Theatre of the Absurd," and the entire group of dramas which developed out of this type of Theatre is always associated with the name of Samuel Beckett. His contribution to this particular genre allows us to refer to him as the grand master, or father, of the genre. While other dramatists have also contributed significantly to this genre, Beckett remains its single, most towering figure so far as the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned.

This movement known as the Theatre of the Absurd was not a consciously conceived movement, and it has never had any clear-cut philosophical doctrines, no organized attempt to win converts, and no meetings. Each of the main playwrights of the movement seems to have developed independently of each other. The playwrights most often associated with the movement are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. The early plays of Edward Albee and Harold Pinter fit into this classification, but these dramatists have also written plays that move far away from the Theatre of the Absurd's basic elements.

In viewing the plays that comprise this movement, we must forsake the Theatre of coherently developed situations, we must forsake characterizations that are rooted in the logic of motivation and reaction, we must sometimes forget settings that bear an intrinsic, realistic, or obvious relationship to the drama as a whole, we must forget the use of language as a tool of logical communication, and we must forget cause-and-effect relationships found in traditional dramas. By their use of a number of puzzling devices, these playwrights have gradually accustomed audiences to a new kind of relationship between theme and presentation. In these seemingly queer and fantastic plays, the external world is often depicted as menacing, devouring, and unknown; the settings and situations often make us vaguely uncomfortable; the world itself seems incoherent and frightening and strange, but at the same time, it seems hauntingly poetic and familiar.

These are some of the reasons which prompt the critic to classify them under the heading "Theatre of the Absurd" — a title which comes not from a dictionary definition of the word "absurd," but rather from Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, in which he maintains that these dramatists write from a "sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition." But other writers such as Kafka, Camus, and Sartre have also argued from the same philosophical position. The essential difference is that critics like Camus have presented their arguments in a highly formal discourse with logical and precise views which prove their theses within the framework of traditional forms. On the contrary, the Theatre of the Absurd seeks to wed form and content into an indissoluble whole in order to gain a further unity of meaning and impact. This theatre, as Esslin has pointed out, "has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being — that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence."

Too often, however, the viewer notes only these basic similarities and fails to note the distinctive differences in each dramatist. Since these writers do not belong to any deliberate or conscious movement, they should be evaluated for their individual concerns, as well as for their contributions to the total concept of the Theatre of the Absurd. In fact, most of these playwrights consider themselves to be lonely rebels and outsiders, isolated in their own private worlds. As noted above, there have been no manifestoes, no theses, no conferences, and no collaborations. Each has developed along his own unique lines; each in his own way is individually and distinctly different.

6.3. MAJOR CHARACTERS

VLADIMIR AND ESTRAGON

In spite of the existential concept that man cannot take the essence of his existence from someone else, in viewing this play, we have to view Vladimir and Estragon in their relationship to each other. In fact, the novice

viewing this play for the first time often fails to note any significant difference between the two characters. In hearing the play read, even the most experienced Theatre person will often confuse one of the characters for the other. Therefore, the similarities are as important as the differences between them.

Both are tramps dressed in costumes which could be interchanged. They both wear big boots which don't necessarily fit, and both have big bowler hats. Their suits are baggy and ill-fitting. (In Act II, when Estragon removes the cord he uses for a belt, his trousers are so baggy that they fall about his feet.) Their costumes recall the type found in burlesque or vaudeville houses, the type often associated with the character of the "Little Tramp," portrayed by Charlie Chaplin.

The Chaplinesque-type costume prepares us for many of the comic routines that Vladimir and Estragon perform. The opening scene with Estragon struggling with his boots and Vladimir doffing and donning his hat to inspect it for lice could be a part of a burlesque routine. The resemblance of their costumes to Chaplin's supports the view that these tramps are outcasts from society, but have the same plucky defiance to continue to exist as Chaplin's "Little Tramp" did.

Another action which could come directly from the burlesque Theatre occurs when Vladimir finds a hat on the ground which he tries on, giving his own to Estragon, who tries it on while giving his hat to Vladimir, who tries it on while giving the new-found hat to Estragon, who tries it on, etc. This comic episode continues until the characters — and the audience — is bored with it. Other burlesque-like scenes involve Vladimir's struggles to help Estragon with his boots while Estragon is hopping awkwardly about the stage on one foot to keep from falling; another scene involves the loss of Estragon's pants, while other scenes involve the two tramps' grotesque efforts to help Pozzo and Lucky get up off the ground and their inept attempts to hang themselves. Thus, the two characters are tied together partly by being two parts of a burlesque act.

LUCKY

When Beckett was asked why Lucky was so named, it seems he replied that he supposed he was lucky to have no more expectations. It has been contended that Pozzo and Lucky are simply Didi and Gogo writ large, as unbalanced as their relationship. However, Pozzo's dominance is noted to be superficial; upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that Lucky always possessed more influence in the relationship, for he danced, and more importantly, thought – not as a service, but in order to fill a vacant need of Pozzo: he committed all of these acts for Pozzo. As such, since the first appearance of the duo, the true slave had always been Pozzo. Pozzo credits Lucky with having given him all the culture, refinement, and ability to reason that he possesses. His rhetoric has been learned by rote. Pozzo's "party piece" on the sky is a clear example: as his memory crumbles, he finds himself unable to continue under his own steam.

POZZO

Little is learned about Pozzo besides the fact that he is on his way to the fair to sell his slave, Lucky. He presents himself very much as the Ascendancy landlord, bullying and conceited. His pipe is made by Kapp and Peterson, Dublin's best-known tobacconists (their slogan was "The thinking man's pipe") which he refers to as a "briar" but which Estragon calls a "dudeen" emphasising the differences in their social standing. He confesses to a poor memory but it is more a result of an abiding self-absorption. Pozzo has been defined as a character who has to overcompensate. That is why he overdoes things and his overcompensation has to do with a deep insecurity in him.

Pozzo controls Lucky by means of an extremely long rope which he jerks and tugs if Lucky is the least bit slow. Lucky is the absolutely subservient slave of Pozzo and he unquestioningly does his every bidding with extreme devotion. He struggles with a heavy suitcase without ever thinking of dropping it. Lucky speaks only once in the play and it is a result of Pozzo's order to "think" for Estragon and Vladimir. Pozzo and Lucky have

been together for sixty years and, in that time, their relationship has deteriorated. Lucky has always been the intellectually superior but now, with age, he has become an object of contempt: his "think" is a caricature of intellectual thought and his "dance" is a sorry sight. Despite his horrid treatment at Pozzo's hand however, Lucky remains completely faithful to him. Even in the second act when Pozzo has inexplicably gone blind, and needs to be led by Lucky rather than driving him as he had done before, Lucky remains faithful and has not tried to run away; they are clearly bound together by more than a piece of rope in the same way that Didi and Gogo are "[t]ied to Godot".

In his [English] translation ... Beckett struggled to retain the French atmosphere as much as possible, so that he delegated all the English names and places to Lucky, whose own name, he thought, suggested such a correlation.

THE BOY

The boy in Act I, a local lad, assures Vladimir that this is the first time he has seen him. He says he was not there the previous day. He confirms he works for Mr. Godot. His brother, whom Godot beats, is a shepherd. Godot feeds both of them and allows them to sleep in his hayloft.

The boy in Act II also assures Vladimir that it was not he who called upon them the day before. He insists that this too is his first visit. When Vladimir asks what Godot does the boy tells him that he does nothing. We also learn he has a white beard—possibly, the boy is not certain. This boy also has a brother who it seems is sick but there is no clear evidence to suggest that his brother is the boy that came in Act I or the one who came the day before that.

Whether the boy from Act I is the same boy from Act II or not, both boys are polite yet timid. In the first Act, the boy, despite arriving while Pozzo and Lucky are still about, does not announce himself until after Pozzo and Lucky leave, saying to Vladimir and Estragon that he waited for the other two to leave out of fear of the two men and of Pozzo's whip; the boy

does not arrive early enough in Act II to see either Lucky or Pozzo. In both Acts, the boy seems hesitant to speak very much, saying mostly "Yes Sir" or "No Sir", and winds up exiting by running away.

GODOT

The identity of Godot has been the subject of much debate. When Colin Duckworth asked Beckett point-blank whether Pozzo was Godot, the author replied that he was not. It was just implied in the text, but it was not true. When he was asked who or what Godot stood for, Beckett replied that it suggested itself to him by the slang word for boot in French, *godillot*, *godasse* because feet play such a prominent role in the play. This is the explanation he has given most often. Some people would like to think that Godot represented God. However, Beckett maintained that it was not so and that if Godot was God he would have called him God.

6.4. SYMBOLS IN WAITING FOR GODOT

Symbolism is the key factor in *Waiting for Godot*. As in Surrealism and Existentialism, symbolism plays a key part in the production of the play. We shall discuss four major aspects of symbolism: Duality, the tree, the character's hats, and the "waiting"/ time; however, there are more symbols throughout the play such as Gogo's inability to get close to people due to his sense of "smell" (his repulsion of the banality of humanity), Lucky and Pozzo and the connection to self-slavery and how the slaver and the slave are intertwined (Pozzo doesn't know how to do anything. He would be powerless without Lucky's help), the oncoming night representing death, and Lucky's dance "The Net"- showing how he has been enslaved so long he can no longer dance true dances of joy, but can only stretch for freedom before falling back into slavery.

DUALITY

Fifty fifty chances are a running theme in the play. In the conversation between Vladimir and Estragon on suicide it is decided that the tree branch may or may not break, concluding that one person may live and one person may die. The two thieves one may be saved while the other is damned in the end. Godot himself may only save one of the two main characters. The entire play is bound in pairs: Vladimir and Estragon are bound together for what seems throughout time. There are two thieves. Pozzo and Lucky come and leave as a pair. Cain and Abel the first two brothers are discussed. The tree's movement between life and death throughout Act one and Act two. In addition, it must be noted that the play only has two acts rather than the standard three of the time. The theme of duality that runs through the play is intended to express the ambiguity of not really knowing about God, time, existence. It shows the idea that we all have fifty-fifty chances in who we are and where we will eventually end. Either we are right or we are wrong in our decisions about what we are supposed to do with our life.

THE TREE

The tree is the only prominent piece of the set. It is discussed that the tree may be a willow that has given up weeping and is now dead. Didi and Gogo are to wait beside the tree in order to meet Godot. However, they are concerned that it is the wrong tree despite the fact that it is the only tree in what the audience can perceive as the world. In general the tree is to have two branches that give the tree the impression that it is a cross, contributing to the image of a cross. This connects to the idea that the tree itself represents regeneration or resurrection. A side joke that is hidden in the text of the play is that both Didi and Gogo consider hanging themselves from the limb of the tree but decide against it because the limb will not support them. Under the ideals of Catholicism, the salvation promised through the cross does not support those who commit suicide.

THE CHARACTER'S HATS

Each character has a hat (except the boy). In the original play, all characters had bowler hats, but in several modern versions, directors have chosen to have various styles, so the audience can track the hats' movements. The bowler hats are a nod to Beckett's joy of Vaudeville Theatre where the majority of the performers wore bowler hats. Likewise, the bowler hats are generally used through blocking with vaudevillian hat tricks. The hats represent the identity and personality of each of the characters. Vladimir (Didi) focuses almost completely on his hat. Throughout the play, he is the thinker. Estragon (Gogo) is fixated on his boots and his hat is secondary. He is the realist of the two companions. He has his feet on the ground. Lucky can only think with his hat on, and Pozzo shows his dominance over Lucky by removing the hat and returning it at his will. Lucky's hat is also used when Didi decides to wear it. This indicates Didi's desire to change himself. It is interesting that Didi chooses the slave rather than the master when he makes this shift. Finally, the hats are used to show that uniformity comes from removing your personality. Every time the group agrees or comes to a conclusion, all hats are removed.

Finally, the symbolism of Gogo and Didi "waiting." At one point Gogo calls it "hope deferred." Both of the main characters are preoccupied with passing the time. It is symbolic of how some people are so preoccupied with waiting for good things, bad things, resurrection, death, the lives and choices of others, their own failings, etc. they never move forward in life. The continual ramblings of Didi and Gogo trying to entertain themselves during the "waiting," exemplifies how people distract themselves from their own hopes and dreams. Neither Didi nor Gogo come to any realizations about their lives throughout the course of the play and this is shown in the final line "Yes, let's go." The statement gives the expectation of movement, yet in the staging of waiting for Godot, neither Didi nor Gogo move. The

play is clear that there should be an overall sense of lingering by the two actors giving the audience a clear statement that they will not actually leave from where they are seated. This hints back at Pozzo's statement when he plans to leave that he cannot go forward. "Such is life" is the reply. Pozzo must get a running start in order to leave the stage. It is important to note that Pozzo loses his watch before he is able to move forward along the road. (He loses his awareness and connection to waiting.) Gogo and Didi remain, however, eternally focusing on the waiting.

6.5. SUMMING UP

You must have realized by now why *Waiting for Godot* is a path breaking play, not only in terms of dramatic form and structure but for the thematic concerns of modern man's existence. We would urge you to take up other plays by Beckett or any Absurd playwrights and read them in the light of contemporary criticism.



6.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Do the characters in *Waiting for Godot* evolve at all, or learn anything, or change in any way from the beginning to the end of the play?
2. If it's true that nothing happens in *Waiting for Godot*, how is it that we manage to be entertained as the audience/reader?
3. Do you think the play would function differently if the characters were all female instead of male?
4. Do Vladimir and Estragon stand around killing time because they're waiting for Godot or is *Waiting for Godot* itself just an act to fill the void?
5. If *Waiting for Godot* is moralistic in nature, what is the moral? How does the play instruct us to lead our lives? Are these lessons subjective and personal for each viewer, or objective and universal?
6. Show that the main theme of the play *Waiting for Godot* is waiting.
7. In what respect does *Waiting for Godot* resemble Existential literature?

8. How is the problem of existence looked upon in *Waiting for Godot*?
9. To what extent is it correct to interpret *Waiting for Godot* as a clash between Society and the Outsider?
10. Some of Pozzo's speeches go beyond what seems dramatically plausible in a decaying boss-figure". Substantiate.
11. Compare and contrast the various human relationships in *Waiting for Godot*.
12. Samuel Beckett sub-titled his play *Waiting for Godot* as tragicomedy. How far is it appropriate to describe the play thus?
13. Write an essay on the elements of comic and farcical element in *Waiting for Godot*.
14. How far is it appropriate to call *Waiting for Godot* as a tragic play?
15. How would you interpret Godot? What purpose does he serve in Beckett's play?
16. Explain the significance of the title *Waiting for Godot*.
17. Waiting for Godot is not about Godot or even about waiting. It is waiting." Discuss.
18. Give the character sketch of
 - i. Vladimir
 - ii. Estragon
 - iii. Godot



6.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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