



**National Open University of Nigeria**

**Plot 91, Cadastral Zone, University Village,**

**Nnamdi Azikiwe Expressway,**

**Jabi, Abuja.**

## **ENG 426: TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE**

### **Course Team:**

**Course Developer/Writer:** **Dr. Folasade Hunsu**  
Department of English  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.  
[oyinhunsu@yahoo.com](mailto:oyinhunsu@yahoo.com)

**Course Editor:** **Professor Abdul R. Yesufu**  
National Open University of Nigeria  
Lagos.

**Course Co-ordinator:** **Dr. Felix Gbenoba**  
Department of Languages  
National Open University of Nigeria  
Abuja.

## **ENG 426: TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

This 3 credits unit course opens up ways in which the realities of the twentieth century shaped the literary works of the time. It shows how writers represented the events of the century and how the desire for change informed the innovative and experimental techniques of their literature. In order to help students understand the literature of the time, the socio- political, historical realities, the relationship between the literature of the previous century or era and the twentieth century literature especially, writers' choice of style and themes will be discussed. The course is divided into five modules of four units each. Modules 1-4 focus on modernist writings: modernist prose, drama and poetry while Module 5 briefly introduces postmodernism which came about towards the end of twentieth century.

### **Using the Course Guide**

Students are to read the course guide so as to be familiar with what the course entails and requires. The course guide comprises the course description, course aims and objectives, expectations and requirements, among others. Most especially, the course guide contains the course modules and units. At the end of each unit there is at least one self- assessment question which helps the student to assess their grasp of the course content of each unit. Students are advised to note down the areas that appear knotty or unclear and seek for clarification in class or tutorials.

The notes in this study guide do not make enough readings for a student to pass this course as it is not exhaustive of what the Twentieth Century English Literature is about. Students are advised to read literary texts, recommended textbooks and relevant critical materials. At the end of each module, there is a list of textbooks that could aid student's understanding of the course.

### **Course Aims**

The aim of the course is to enable the students have a good grasp of the background, influences, novelty and traditions of Twentieth Century English Literature. For students to be well acquainted with these, the course aims at:

- (a) studying the socio- political as well as historical background of the period;
- (b) examining the influence of the socio- political and historical realities of the period on its writings;
- (c) studying relevant literary movements and ideologies that informed or influenced the literary works of the twentieth century;
- (d) examining the style and the themes of Twentieth Century English Literature; and
- (e) discussing the major works and/or writers of the period.

### **Course Objectives**

The course objectives are to:

- (a) reveal the impact of the World wars, science, and psychology on the twentieth century literature;
- (b) enable the students critically appreciate the literary works of the twentieth century; and
- (c) encourage independent reading and sharpen critical engagement of literary texts.

## **Course Expectations and Requirements**

### **Expectations**

At the end of the course students are expected to

- Have read the selected texts and consulted recommended texts so as to have the knowledge of the socio- political and historical realities that informed literary modernism and postmodernism and be able to identify the presence or absence of modernist and postmodernist styles and themes in selected literary texts
- Have submitted two essays, a general test or assessment and exam paper
- Have had at least 70% attendance in class.

### **Requirements**

To pass this course the student must have

- Had at least a pass,
- Had a record of 70% attendance which will be necessary before a student is allowed to write the exam,
- Be on time and participate in class discussions as this will be graded,
- Written and submitted original essays on time,
- Avoided plagiarism and/or intellectual theft.

### **Completing Assignments and Writing Test or Examinations**

Essays should be submitted on or before the deadline, and the general test or assessment must be attended. In case of any emergency i.e. life threatening issues, get across to the tutor before the deadline or the date of the test with the proof of whatever the situation involves and the student should be ready to finish the essays and sit for the make- up test on the date the tutor might fix.

### **Moral and Ethical Policies**

- Avoid plagiarism
- Put off all cell phones
- Students are advised to avoid noise making, and distractions in the class
- Individual comportment and respect for the tutor as well as fellow students is compulsory

In defying any of the above policies, the tutor will punish the student(s) accordingly and/or report to the appropriate authority.

## **Grading**

- Attendance and participation- 10%
- First essay- 10%
- Second essay- 10%
- General Test/ Assessment- 10%
- Exams- 60%

## **Course Schedule**

Students are advised to consult the school and/ or department's timetable for course schedule. The HOC or the Class Representative should contact the tutor and/or course coordinator in time for any clash, postponement or make- up classes.

## **Course Materials**

- Course guide
- Course modules and units
  - Literary texts (novel, poetry, drama)
  - Textbooks and critical materials

## **Course Modules and Units**

This course is divided into four modules. There are four units under each module which breaks down each module into bits that will enable the student to understand various aspects of the twentieth century English literature. In all, there are twenty units in this course. Below is the break- down of the modules.

### **Module 1- Introduction to Modernism**

Unit 1: Britain, the Age of Change and the Old and the New Literature

Unit 2: Modernist Thematic Concerns, Styles and Techniques.

Unit 3: Modernism, Post Modernism, and the Twentieth English Literature

Unit 4: Post-Modernist Themes and Techniques

### **Module 2: The Novel in the Twentieth Century English Literature**

Unit 1: Virginia Woolf: *A Woman at the Fore*

Unit 2: D.H Lawrence and *Vitality*

Unit 3: Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Unit 4: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day*.

### **Module 3: Twentieth Century English Poetry**

Unit 1: T.S Eliot's "The Wasteland"

Unit 2: W.H Auden's Pessimistic Poetry

Unit 3: W.B Yeats and Modernist Poetry

Unit 4: Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"

## **Module 4: Twentieth Century English Drama**

Unit 1: Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd

Unit 2: George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*

Unit 3: Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Unit 4: T.S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*

### **Recommended Reading**

Primary Materials

#### **Prose**

Virginia Woolf-*Mrs. Dalloway*

James Joyce-*The Portrait of an Artist as A Youngman*

D. H Lawrence-*Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Graham Greene-*The Power and the Glory*

#### **Drama**

Samuel Beckett- *Waiting For Godot*

George Bernard Shaw- *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

T.S Elliot- *Murder in the Cathedral*

Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*.

#### **Poetry**

T.S Eliot- "The Wasteland"

W.B Yeats "Second Coming"

W.H Auden's "Stop all the Clocks, Cut the Telephones"

Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"

### **Secondary Materials**

Graham, H.(1975).*The Dark Sun: A Study of D.H Lawrence*. Britain: Duckworth.

Lukacs, G. (1973). "The Ideology of Modernism." *Issues in Contemporary Criticism*. Ed. Gregory T. Polleta. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Pp 712-733.

Matz, J. (2004). *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Woolf, V. (1988). "Character in Fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 3. Ed. Andrew McNeilie. London: Hogarth Press. Pp 420-438.

-----.(1969). "Modern Fiction." *Modern British Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Mark Schorer. London: Oxford UP. Pp 3-10.

-----.(1988). "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 3. Ed. Andrew McNeilie. London: Hogarth Press. Pp 384-389.

## Course Marking Scheme

The following is an analysis of marks obtainable in this course

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four assignments of 10% each, out of which the best three are selected to make up 30% of the total marks
Final Examination	70% of the total course marks
Total	100% of course marks

### Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

Fifteen tutorial hours are provided for in this course to enable the students and their tutors to meet and examine the contents of the course at intervals. You will be informed of the dates, time, and venue for these tutorials, along with the name and particulars of your tutor as soon as one is assigned to your group. Your tutor will grade and comment on your assignments, monitor your progress and provide answers to your questions during tutorials. You must submit your assignments in good time to enable your tutor to read them well and to make appropriate comments. Do not play with your tutorials or hesitate to consult your tutor when the need arises. Tutorials afford you opportunity to meet and discuss with your tutor face to face and they help you to get immediate answers to troubling questions. Apart from tutorials, you may consult your tutor when:

- You do not understand any part of the study units;
- You have difficulty understanding Self-Assessment Exercises or Tutor-Marked Assignment;
- When you have problems with the tutor's comments on your assignments or their grading. To gain maximally from the tutorials, you ought to prepare a list of questions before attending them and you must endeavour to participate actively in discussions during tutorials.

### Summary

This course deals with the history, socio-cultural milieu and major theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English Literature. It also analyses selected texts that best exemplify these factors. It will enable you to understand for example, the events that shape the English literature of this period. It provides insight into the main three genres of literature namely prose, poetry and drama. It explains the preoccupations of prominent English writers, whose works depict among other things, the culture, writing styles and history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English society.

Goodluck!

## **Module 1- Introduction to Modernism**

Unit 1: Britain, the Age of Change and the Old/New Literature

Unit 2: Modernist Thematic Concerns, Styles and Techniques.

Unit 3: Modernism, Post Modernism, and the Twentieth English Literature

Unit 4: Post-Modernist Themes and Techniques

### **UNIT 1: Britain, the Age of Change and the Old/New Literature**

#### **Content**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Nineteenth Century English Literature
  - 3.2 The First World War and Post War Disillusionment
  - 3.3 Traditional English Literature
  - 3.4 The Theory of Evolution
  - 3.5 Psychoanalysis and Twentieth Century English Literature
  - 3.6 Traditional English Literature and its Features
  - 3.7. English Literature in the Twentieth Century
  - 3.8 The Post Victorian Literature
  - 3.9 Modernism and its Literary Propositions
  - 3.10 The Modernist Literature
  - 3.11 The Characteristic Differences between the Victorian (Old) and the Twentieth Century (New) Literature
  - 3.12 Fusion of Romance and Gross Realism
  - 3.13 Moral Representation/ Idealism/The Narrator
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

#### **1.0INTRODUCTION**

Twentieth century English literature covers literary works, prose, drama and poetry produced in the 1900s. Generally speaking, the twentieth century marked a significant shift in the history of Great Britain and also in the imaginative writing of the period. Looking back to the literature of the previous century (also referred to as Victorian literature: late 1830s to 1901), it is obvious that both in style and content, twentieth

century English literature is different. The difference is not unconnected to certain events which shattered human experiences and questioned age-long beliefs and practices, including how literature should be written.

The First and Second World Wars, the development and use of sophisticated chemical weapons, the emergence of new theories such as Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Sigmund Freud's Theory of Psychoanalysis were among the major reasons for this change. People's world view, attitudes, and disposition to life changed as they could not rationally explain the kind of chaos and destruction their normal and peaceful world had witnessed as a result of the wars. Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory interrogates and negates the biblical account of creation while Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis opens up discussions on the inner workings of the human mind.

Moreover, the war and the consequent displacement of persons from their previous physical and psychic groundings seemed to devalue humans and the world was seen as becoming a more absurd place as years went by. There was a break in tradition and reactions against established institutions. With Karl Marx's analysis of class structure and the oppressive nature of the capitalist system, the Church and Christianity became associated with capitalism and the modern mind believed that there was no absolute truth and that truth was relative.

Generally, it was an era of change and the writings of the period also reflected this change. The experience and feelings of alienation, loss and despair were evident in the works of writers of this period, some of whom were labelled "modernists". Writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, Robert Brooke, W.H. Auden, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, are among many writers identified with modernism.

Therefore, this course shall concentrate on the works of some of these writers and show their depiction of the twentieth century period. However, in order to lay a foundation for the study of twentieth century literature, in this unit, we shall briefly discuss nineteenth century literature and explain reasons for the change in twentieth century English literature.

In Unit 1, we will also discuss the change that Britain went through as a result of the First World War and you will be given a brief synopsis of the traditional English Literature. You will also be exposed to the Twentieth Century English Literature in general, and the different ways in which modernist writers sought to do away with the Victorian or traditional literary styles and themes in order to show what they considered the realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English society

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:



- discuss the salient features of nineteenth century English literature; and
- explain factors that led to change in twentieth century English literature
- relate the realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English society to the concerns of modernist writers;
- discuss the characteristic differences between Victorian and modernist literature

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Nineteenth Century English Literature (Victorian English Literature)**

Nineteenth century English literature is generally believed to cover the literary production of the late 1830s to 1901. It is also known as the Victorian English literature, named after Queen Victoria. The early Victorian period witnessed a lot of scientific and technical innovations especially the industrial revolution and colonisation of Africa and the Middle East. The fact that many nations or countries were under the British rule at the time, established Britain as an “empire” and a world power. This status gave Britain the opportunity to expand its territorial powers and increase its economic base. It was the period of Industrial Revolution as industries were established and export business boomed in Britain. These affected the socio- economic and political life of the empire as there were massive movements of people from villages to cities where they believed they could have access to better life. As time went on, there were more people than jobs giving rise to unemployment, poverty, and child labour. Protests and riots became commonplace. Charles Dicken’s *Oliver Twist* was set in this historical background.

The novel was the dominant genre of the Victorian period. Among the writers of the period were Robert Browning, Emily Bronte and her sister Charlotte Bronte, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Charles Dickens. Their works featured protagonists who reflected the roles of the individual in the society as they strive for love, social position or success. There was the description of characters’ surroundings, speeches, actions, depiction of real life issues, plots were linear and coherent; the stories of the heroes and heroines were well finished and ended; and there were unified or well patterned representations of life.

#### **3.2 The First World War and Post-War Disillusionment.**

Before the First World War, also called the Great War, though there were bottled-up conflicts and apprehensions, economies were doing well and there was really no great cause for serious distress. In Britain, individuals who amassed wealth following the industrial revolution lived in affluence, and generally, people lived in relative tranquillity and orderliness. The First World War which started in 1914 brought about a chaotic and tumultuous time and ended an era of relative peace and progress in Britain. Until the time of the war, the South African War of 1899 – 1902 was the only experience of major war Britain had. Although many British died fighting in that war (Boer War), the experiences of that war was different from those of the First World War. This was basically because the war was fought in another continent and a different hemisphere. So it was a distant

experience and the death toll was tiny compared to the death recorded in the First World War. Even while the Boer War was going on in South Africa, the people's lives in Britain were not disrupted. But during the First World War, British cities were directly attacked. Also, many people enrolled into the military to fight, leaving their wives and children behind.

Though it was believed that the world war would end quickly, it did not and great financial and material resources were lost. The war ended in 1918, although the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 to officially mark the end of the war. There were records of millions of deaths; young war veterans suffered from psychological disorders and traumas like shell- shock and were unable to function normally after the war; and many women and children lost their husbands and fathers who fought in the war. The relief and happiness of many that the war was over was tainted by these experiences. With the death of many young men and conscription to the military, women became more active and were employed by factories that needed workers. Unlike the situation before the war, this economic power and visibility strengthened women's resolve to speak against their subjugation and fight against women oppression.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the First World War had a strong impact on the socio-political, economic, psychological as well as emotional state of Britain and its people. The aftermath of the war was incomprehensible and the Post war era was a period of decline in every aspect. Individual companies, homes, places of relaxation, and well-built monuments were destroyed. Women became bread winners in many families. As a result, people lost their faith in all the values, traditions and expectations that they cherished before the war. Authorities were questioned and human relations shifted as so many felt alienated, lost, and helpless. 'The survival of the fittest' was a maxim and the philosophy of existentialism which is characterised by absurdity, alienation, atheism, helplessness, despair and nothingness became a reality. The nothingness and emptiness in life was felt by those who witnessed the destruction wrought by the hands of men and the presence of a Supreme Being who directed the affairs of men but who could not control the world and prevent millions from dying or seriously injured was questioned. Many people became mentally and physically ill, poverty became the order of the day, and gloom was the companion of men. These after effects of the war became the defining factors of modernism as people rejected traditional ways of doing things and began to do things in ways that reflected their experiences and new notions about life.

### **3.3 The Theory of Evolution**

Until the late nineteenth century, people, including scientists agreed that all species were created at the same time. This implied that there was a creator – Supreme Being. To

explain the fact that some species had gone into extinction, most scientists believed that the biblical story in which God wiped out creatures with flood must have been the reason. Charles Darwin rebuffed these claims in nineteenth century. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin explains that human evolved from an earlier kind of animal. He explains that different species had experienced significant changes which eventually led to what he called *transmutation*. That is evolvement of new forms. By implication, Darwin held that there was no Supreme Being, no creator, no God. This notion became popular among literary writers after the First World War as explained above.

### **3.4 Psychoanalysis and Twentieth Century English Literature**

In 1910, Sigmund Freud promoted a “strange” and sensational theory he had propounded a few years before. It is known as Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis emphasises the relationship between what goes on in the sub-conscious aspect of a human mind and the actions and behaviour of that person. To Freud, certain feelings of people are repressed in their sub-consciousness and manifest sometimes as resistance or in dreams. Though Freud applied this theory in the clinic, it affected the literature of the post war period when writers focused on the sub-conscious of a character and explored the deep feelings and experiences stored in the sub-conscious. The reader is given access to this through the stream of consciousness technique and is made to believe that the things that matter are not seen or touched but are buried in the innermost mind of the person. As you will discover in subsequent units, Twentieth Century English literature writers found this technique useful in their depiction of the chaos and disillusionment of their time. Though Freud’s concept was based on clinical case studies, psychoanalysis has since been applied to disciplines such as Literature, Psychology, Philosophy, Cultural Studies and Feminist Studies among others.

### **3.5 Traditional English Literature and its Features**

**Traditional English Literature:** What is known as the English Literature began from the Anglo-Saxon period but became well developed and recognised in the eighteenth century, also known as the renaissance period. Prior to the renaissance period, literature from Europe drew heavily in form and style from the Roman and Greek literary traditions. Events depicted in the literature at the time were derived from mythology, history, religion, and legend. With these sources, literary expressions often conveyed communal senses and ideologies. The Roman and Greek literary traditions had two main genres - drama and poetry.

The renaissance period witnessed the rebirth of literature in Britain. A new form of expression emerged - the novel. As the genres of drama and poetry moved from one country (in Europe) to the other, it adopted new techniques and adapted existing ones. Gradually, Britain developed her own literary tradition (known as English Literature) which is distinguishable from, for instance, French or Russian literature. Apart from the fact that it is written in English, it portrays the socio-cultural, economic, and political experiences of Britain and her people.

**Features of English Literature:** Traditional English literature broadly refers to writings of the English people that were over the years common and acceptable as the “norm”. The thematic concerns, plot, settings viewpoint, and characterisation styles followed a predictable pattern. For example, it is believed that traditional English literature, especially the novel, drew inspiration from actual life experiences of people in the author’s immediate environment which in turn produced linear and coherent plot. Traditional literary works represent morality. For example, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* narrates the life experiences of an individual. The event in the novel was drawn from neither myth nor legend; it has to do with actual life experiences of the British society of the time it was written. The novel shows morality by representing the consequences of inordinate ambition through the life of Crusoe.

### **3.6 English Literature in the Twentieth Century**

Between the renaissance of English literature and the Twentieth Century Literature, there was the Victorian literature which has been discussed in the previous unit. The Victorian writers retained the traditions of the renaissance literature, only that the industrial revolution and the resultant economic and scientific advancement widened the scope of people’s life experiences and living became a bit more complex. There were still linear and coherent plots. Individual experiences were still being represented. Morals were still serious considerations among the writers, and representations of life, heroes and heroines were done in unified pattern. In the Victorian literature, what basically changed from the earliest tradition was the kind of real life experiences being represented. The complexities of modern life outdid the kind of experiences Crusoe has in *Robinson Crusoe*. For example, the home Crusoe grows up and the kind of experience he has at the Island of despair are different from the kind of home and experience someone in an industrial British setting would have. Victorian writers represented this kind of new experiences, but do not bother about the inner feelings of the character.

In Twentieth Century Literature, there were moves and breakaway from the traditions that the Victorian had retained. There was also a breakaway from the kind of real life experiences being represented. More complex experiences were occurring making writers rethink deep the present and future of humanity. The Twentieth Century English Literature began in the post-Victorian period and got to its peak with the Modernist movement.

### **3.7 The Post-Victorian Literature**

The Victorian literature ended sometime around 1901 and the modernist movement began after the First World War which ended in 1918 and officially in 1919. This means that there was a literary period between the Victorian and the modernist movement. This literary period is the post-Victorian literature and it marked the beginning of the Twentieth Century Literature. Between 1901 and 1914, Edward VII and George V reigned in Britain. The literary works produced in these periods are most times referred to

as the Edwardian literature. In the Post-Victorian literature (the Edwardian literature), writers were already forming new ideas that were different from the literary traditions of the Victorian period.

Technological development had advanced more than it did in the years before and experiences became more complex and the British were beginning to observe the adverse effects of industrialisation. The Post-Victorian writers depicted how the beautiful landscape of Britain was being disfigured by the establishment of industries and how industrialisation diminished the lives of the people who struggled to survive in mining towns, for example. This is because with the emergence of industries, machines took over some of the jobs that were usually done by human beings and the lush Greenland gave way to industrial buildings. Instead of linear and coherent plot of the Victorian literature, the Post-Victorian literature employs disjointedness. Disjointedness is not only a style to the writers. It is a way of showing that the life people live in this world is not an ordered sequence. In poetry, the writers used unrhymed verse. Morals were no longer considered. Unlike the morality in *Robinson Crusoe*, there is no moral in E.M. Forster's *Howards Ends* (1910). The representation of the real experiences of life in unified pattern stopped.

Women became more prominent in the Post-Victorian literature than in the Victorian literature. The industrial revolution of the Victorian period had brought empowerment to a lot of women; instead of just remaining at home as housewives and farmhands, women got jobs in garment industries, food processing industries and so on. As a way of representing reality, Post-Victorian English Literature depicted women in terms of the opportunities they had for self-development in modern world. For example, Helen Schlegel in *Howards Ends* becomes a single mother with no intention of marrying. She is able to take care of herself without a husband. In short, writers in the Post-Victorian period represented the individual and actual experiences that were in Britain, and which resulted from the high level of economic development and the new ways and social struggles of the people living in Britain. Themes were developed around issues such as the importance of landscape and the earth, the mechanised, industrial world and the role of women in a changing world.

One of the aspects of the Victorian literature that was retained was the representation of heroes and heroines. Writers still saw reasons to applaud individual achievements in different endeavours. Also, Post-Victorian writers failed to consider the inner feelings of characters, they focused less on the mind of the individual; they concentrate on describing the immediate environments of the characters. Post-Victorian writers still used the omniscient narrator who knows everything about the character and his environment. These preoccupations of the Post-Victorian literature only continued to assume other shapes to reflect the actual life experiences of the people after the First World War.

### **3.8 Modernism and its Literary Propositions**

Modern generally means contemporary so that what comes to mind when modernism is mentioned is 'new ideas' or a time in history when new ideas are in vogue. In literature, Modernism is not a chronological designation; rather it consists of literary work possessing certain loosely defined characteristics. It is a movement and it was the horrors of the First World War and its accompanying atrocities and senselessness that became catalyst for the Modernist movement. In relation to this course, modernism is an important literary movement of the twenty-first century English literature and cannot be ignored or glossed over. Though scholars have never agreed on the specific date of the commencement of modernism, it is gained momentum in the early 1900s and continued to the 1930s.

In the wake of the happenings that took place after the world war ended, writers sought for new ways to represent these new realities. The world according to them had gone through a most confounding experience that had fragmented and disrupted the normal and peaceful flow of life and human relations so, what was written would change and the style of writing too must change. According to Christopher Reed, these writers sought for writings "appropriate to the sensibilities of the modern outlook" (129). Prominent among these writers are James Joyce, W.B Yeats, Ford Madox Ford, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, D.H Lawrence, T.S Eliot, Aldoux Huxley, Stevie Smith and a host of others.

By definition, literary modernism is the radical shift in aesthetics and cultural sensibilities evident in the art and literature produced after the First World War. It is basically about modern thoughts, modern characters, modern styles or practices that arose after the change that affected the nature of human life and relationships. Although modernists built upon the progress of the post-Victorian literature, modernism in literature came up as a reaction against Victorian literary tradition. Modernism thus marks a distinctive break from Victorian bourgeois morality as it rejects the 19th Century optimism while presenting a profound pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray. It seeks for new aesthetics as against the traditional and old ways of writing because modernist writers saw traditional ways of writing as outmoded and inadequate.

Modernist writers argue that modern life is not symmetrical but is characterized by disjointedness, restlessness, absurdity, alienation, gloom, sadness, and the disruption of the traditionally accepted way of living. To the modernist writers, institutions in which they hitherto believed are no longer reliable means to give meaning to life; they believe that people should turn to themselves to discover the answers to life issues. In order words, the world is better viewed from individuals' perspectives. This antipathy towards traditional institutions became the basis of the literary propositions of the modernist writers and this belief found its way into their writings and reflects in the contents and forms of their writings. The whole essence of writing, to the modernists, is to present life

in its decadence and ugliness, and show that man is disillusioned, confused and marooned in a world that is devoid of order and peace.

The modernist literary propositions are vehemently opposed to the coherent, finished and unified representations of life in Victorian writings, especially the novel. They saw weaknesses in traditional English literature and regarded the realistic literary productions of Victorian writers as mere fact records. The truth, for modernists, could not be obtained from the details of external or environmental descriptions but from the progression of the minds of the characters. Modernist writers were more interested in the individual rather than the society. For them, there was no need for 'guide books' as the mind was sufficient to bridge the gap between the outer and inner realities and as a result, they argued for a change in form and content of literature.

In her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", Woolf posits that outward reflections are not enough to arrive at the truth as they are mere facts and that those things hidden and stored in the inner recesses of human mind are most likely to convey truth than those outward reflections. Unlike in Victorian literature where there are heroes and heroines, the modernists do not have heroes or heroines in their works because such portraiture falls short of depicting the complexities of human life and experience. Interior monologue and stream of consciousness are the predominant devices of modernist writing. As a matter of fact, modernists proposed to change the aspects of the Victorian literature that the Post-Victorian literature could not change. They went ahead to represent more complex realities that reflected the calamities of the First World War.

### **3.9 The Modernist Literature**

The Modernist literature had its origin in the years immediately preceding the First World War (Louise B. Williams 2002). That was the time when the changes in the Post-Victorian literature that have been discussed above really took place. The disillusionments of the First World War expanded the scope of the change that was already going on in the Post-Victorian literature. The modernist writers began to represent graver troubles than the experiences of people in the Victorian and the Post-Victorian literatures. The writers were spurred by the troubles that the First World War brought upon man. The beautiful landscapes that were being disrupted by industrial activities in the Post-Victorian periods were totally destroyed during the war. In the modernist literature, there was no need to represent or describe landscape since it does not show the truth about human lives and feelings. The representation of women changed and included the harsh experiences the war brought on them. They had become unfortunate widows, bread-winners, company workers, and individualised. There was no need to applaud great deeds of people, so heroes and heroines were not represented, and writers concentrated on the inner feelings of characters rather than their immediate environments.

### 3.10 Characteristic Differences between the Victorian and the Twentieth Century Literature

Because of the differences in the realities that the Victorian and the Twentieth Century literatures represented and the differences in how they represented their messages, there were differences in the literary works produced. The basic differences are as follows:

#### 3.10.1 Fusion of Romance and Gross Realism:

**Fusion of Romance:** Romance is the form of literary representation which deals with unrealistic ideas by focusing on nature and being. It was the form of literary representation till the economic progression and new life experiences of the Nineteenth Century Victorian literature did not discard this form. It married the romance form with the kind of realistic life experiences people had in the period. This accounts for the description of environments in Victorian literature. The new experiences of the people which reflected in the Victorian literature included various economic reform movements like emancipation, child labour, women's right, and evolution.

**Gross Realism:** In Twentieth Century Literature, specifically, in the modern literature, there was total breaking away from romantic ideologies. Nature and being were no longer given attention. The writers believed that the truth about nature and the essence of being can only be found in each individual. Their literary works focused more on representing only practical realistic experiences of people and tried to provide insights into what the future of humanity will be with technological advancement.

#### 3.10.2 Moral Representation/Idealism/The Narrator

**Moral Representation:** There was strong moral representation in the Victorian Literature. Writers asserted moral purposes. This became necessary because people moved from the countryside to places where industries were located and they were beginning to adopt new life styles. Victorian literature attempted to correct the attitudes of people in order to preserve relationships, societies and so on. The literary works of Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, and Ruskin show great moral messages.

The Post-Victorian literature, that is the early Twentieth Century Literature, showed moral, but in the modernist literature, attention was not given to morals at all. The modernists had witnessed the First World War. They saw the decline of civilization and the doom that civilization brought upon human. Instead of morals, modernist writers represented how machinery and increased capitalism had alienated individuals and led to loneliness. The writers also preferred to show that life needs to be lived according to practical desires. For example, the happiness of Connie is *Lady Chatterley's Lover* lies in living with a man who could satisfy her sexually, and she gets this vitality in Mellors.

In Victorian literature, there was doubt about the existence of a Supreme Being who controls the affairs of human. Scientific advancement had caused this doubt among people. The ideal of evolution was upheld by a lot of people. Then, it seemed like man



was recreating the world and was giving meaning to life through his ideas and institutions. But Victorian writers still exalted ideal life. They struggled to maintain that despite the new form of life to which the people were exposed, and irrespective of the questioning of a Supreme Being, ideals like 'truth', 'justice', 'love', and 'brotherhood' were still valuable. These notions were represented in the literary works produced.

**Idealism:** Modernist writers were no longer contemplating the existence of a Supreme Being. They believed that there was no Supreme Being anywhere. Their question seemed to be: if there was a Supreme Being, why could he not protect human from the calamities of the First World War? They represented the idea that men are only capable of creating machinery and institutions that can destroy them. To them, every action of people towards greatness will lead to their sudden destruction. Modernists considered people's feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. They saw the environments as deceitful, and saw the inner beings as where true feelings and thoughts can be found. Therefore, in modernist literature of the Twentieth Century, ideals like 'truth', 'justice', 'love' and 'brotherhood' were not valued as they were in the Victorian literature.

**The Narrator:** In the Victorian literature, the omniscient narrator is evident. The narrator always knows everything. In the modernist writing of Twentieth Century literature, the omniscient narrator is not evident. This is because, to the modernists, no one knows an individual better than the individual. The modernists represented the truth about a character as being in the character and can be perceived through his or her psychological dispositions.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Discuss the changes that took place in Twentieth (20th) Century Britain.

List three features each of Victorian and modernist literatures

Post-Victorian literature was a precursor to the modernist movement. Discuss.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Literature reflects life and every literary or creative work has an element of verisimilitude as it feeds on history or real life issues. Twentieth Century English literature evolved as a response to the realities of the First World War. We have opened this module and unit by looking at some of the socio-political, historic events and intellectual developments of the Twentieth Century and how they connect to the English Literature. As members of the society, writers are also affected by these events and their works reflect the changes that the world around them has experienced or is experiencing.

The emergence of modernist writers marked a significant change in English Literature because modernists attempted to free the writer and his imagination. For modernists, the traditional methods of representation are inadequate to relate the true life experiences of

the modern man. Modernist writing, however, has its root in the years that preceded the First World War. That is the Post-Victorian period

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have attempted to lay a foundation for this course so that you would be familiar with the effect of the First World War on Britain, its people, and its literature. In the next unit, you will get acquainted with the changes English literature had to go through and how modernist writers represented the complexities that characterised life after the First World War in literature.

You have also learnt about some features of Victorian literature. You have also encountered how modernist writers thought that the upheaval and sadness that the First World War brought would not be well reflected in traditional or Victorian mode of writing. Modernists felt that literary representations should reflect life as it was: disjointed, fragmented, gloomy, unending, without rationality, love, or happiness. You have equally learnt that the modernist ideas began in the early Twentieth Century, prior to the First War, but became more prominent in the years after the war.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Account for the effect of the First World War on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English Literature.
2. Discuss two of the major events of the Twentieth Century.
3. How would you describe modernist literary proposition and style?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

Barlow, Adrian (2002). *The great war in British literature*. Cambridge: University Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature*. London: Penguin.  
Francis, A. Keith (2007). *Charles Darwin and the origin of species*. London:  
Fraser, G.S. (1964). *The modern writer and his world*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Freud, Sigmund (1909). *The origin and development of psychoanalysis with*  
Greenwood Press. *introduction and commentary by Raymond E. Fancher*. Trans.  
Harry W. Chase. New York: New York University, 1998.

Jeffares, N. (Ed) (1983-1991). *Macmillan history of literature (10 vols)*. London:  
Macmillan.

Laja, O.O (2011). *University literature book 2: prose and poetry*. Ilorin: Ibitola.

*literature, politics and the past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Lorcher, Trent (2015). "Modernism in Literature: Quick Overview". Ed. Wendy  
Finn. [www.brightubeducation.com](http://www.brightubeducation.com)

Peacock, H.L.A. (1970). *A history of modern Britain, 1815- 1979*. London: Heinemann.

- Press.
- Reed, C. (1996). "Redefining and defining" *A Roger Fry reader*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tiltson, G. (1978). *A view of Victorian literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Louise Blakeney (2002). *Modernism and the ideology of history*:

### **UNIT 3: Thematic Concerns, Styles and Techniques of Twentieth Century English Literature**

## Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Modernist Thematic Concerns
    - 3.1.1. Lack of Communication
    - 3.1.2. Solitariness and Aloness
    - 3.1.3 Trauma and Gloom
    - 3.1.4. Existentialism
    - 3.1.5. Search for New Grounds
    - 3.1.6. Rebellion and Individuality
  - 3. 2. Modernist Styles and Techniques
    - 3.2.1. Anti- Tradition
    - 3.2.2. Subjective Realism
    - 3.2.3. Stream of Consciousness Technique
    - 3.2.4. Convoluted and Fragmented Plots
    - 3.2.5 Focus on Characterisation
    - 3.2.6. Autobiographical Narrative
    - 3.2.7. Open- Ended Conclusions
    - 3.2.8. Complex Language
    - 3.2.9. Time as a Symbolic Sequence
    - 3.2.10. Epiphany
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Modernist writers as you have seen from the introduction to this module believed that literature must change so as to reflect the new changes in the society. In the last unit you learnt about the Victorian era, its style of writing, and the differences between the modernist and the Victorian literatures. This unit deals with the thematic concerns of modernist writers. This unit will reinforce what you have learnt in the previous units.

In order to effect a change from tradition and conform to modern realities, modernist writers employed new techniques in their works. Because there was a disregard of any authority irrespective of what it was and the belief that there was no final answer, they made their stories open-ended. In addition, because of the distrust of former orders and history, there was heavy reliance on personal experiences which then makes their novels autobiographical. Plots of modernist novels are fragmentary and episodic, having parallel structures, employing stream of consciousness, a focus on the minds of characters and a focus on the development of characters rather than plots

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- List and discuss modernist themes;
- Explain the concerns of modernist writers and how different or similar they are to the traditional ways of writing;
- identify techniques that are peculiar to modernist writing
- discuss techniques of modernist writing

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Modernist Thematic Concerns

The modernist's major concern was that there was a need for a new art for a new world which had new challenges and realities. Modernism refers to a group of characteristics which are new and distinct in form, concept and style in literature. It is a strong reaction against established religious, social and political views. Modernists had a deep distrust and disappointment in the institutions they were brought up with and held dear which had led their peaceful world into war and a state of destruction. As a result, their works reflected a persistent sense of despair, loss, disillusionment and trauma. They laid emphasis on fragmentation, discontinuous narratives, and randomness which to them was how the world was.

For modernists, characters are the soul of fiction. They tried to locate meaning from the view point of the individual and discarded the omniscient narrator who is all-knowing because they argued that nobody really could be the custodian of truth and therefore adopted the stream of consciousness technique to represent inner and psychological realities of man. To modernist writers, there is no absolute truth and everything is subjective and relative. To show the meaninglessness and disjointed nature of life, they paid less attention to plot or the structural organisation that would show cause and effect, beginning, middle or end of a text. The cause and effect presentation of the traditional writing was discarded for a discontinuous, fragmented and complex narration because it was seen as that which "...ceases to be a means of communication between writers and readers, and become instead, an obstacle and an impediment" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown", 10). The modernist idea especially that of Woolf was that the literary convention of the previous age was artificial and that literature should demonstrate that the society had changed.

Modernist works are imbued with interrelated themes that show lack of communication, fragmentation, solitariness/aloneness, trauma and gloom, existentialism, quest, unrealised love and unfulfilled life, class differences, and anti-heroism, and so on.

**3.1.1 Lack of communication:** The characters in modernist writings, especially the novel are emotionally and psychologically distraught. They are characters who are anti- social and introverted loners who sometimes dwell in the gloom of their minds as mere

observers and thinkers, unable to associate with or communicate their feelings to the other.

**3.1.2 Solitariness and aloneness:** This lack of communication gives rise to characters that are alienated, isolated and detached from the external world. They are so alone that they seem oblivious of external realities. They escape to and live in the world they have created for themselves in their minds and are always afraid of and angered by external disturbance or interruptions.

**3.1.3 Trauma and gloom:** The terrible experiences that some people had on the battlefield or what they saw in hospitals, the loss of their loved ones, and so on, brought the minds of many to a sad state. There are gloomy portraitures of life in modernist writing through an inward reflection of the inner consciousnesses of characters.

**3.1.4 Existentialism:** Modernist writing shows how life itself has become or seems to be meaningless as the ontology of man was seen to be marked with futility. So many lost hope in the struggles for life and were afraid to give birth to children. This hopelessness makes the characters not to believe in institutions made by man, including religion and the military. Sometimes, these institutions are satirised like George Bernard Shaw mocked the military in *Arms and the Man*.

**3.1.5 Search for New Ground:** With the loss of hope, and with the notion that the world is without God, true guidance and rule, and clear distinction between good and bad, there is always the quest for a new basis of meaning in the world. Characters are often seen trying to seek for happiness. Sometimes, the characters leave their own countries in search of a place where they can make their lives meaningful.

**3.1.6 Rebellion and Individuality:** The search for meaning and attempt to give meaning to an individual's life in a practical world always lead to rebellion and assertion of individual's notions. Through this theme, attention is usually drawn to how old traditions are questioned and reversed without moral decorum.

**3.1.7 Anti heroism:** Unlike in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature where heroes and heroines are depicted, in modernist writing, characters are shown to be people with flaws and weaknesses and are unable to attain any lofty heights. Indeed, in the fail in their struggles to be "good" and oppose traditional values of their societies. Their acts might look incomprehensible but their strength, joy and pride are in their flaws and frailties.

## **3.2 Modernist Styles and Techniques**

### **3.2.1 Anti- tradition**

"With the modern soul in fragments, with human character in question, with the mind a mystery, and with authority now uncertain, fiction had to change, and 'the modern novel' refers to fiction that does so gladly, radically, and even with the hope of making a difference" (Matz:7). Modernist writings are marked by a strong conscious break from

tradition. Modernism implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss, and despair and modernists try to show this in their works. It rejects not only history but also traditional values and assumptions, and rejects equally the rhetoric by which they are sanctioned and communicated (ibid). It elevates the individual and the inward over the social and the outward, and it prefers the unconscious to the self-conscious. In rejecting traditions and conventions like linear plot and omniscient narration, modernists introduced new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature.

### **3.2 Subjective Realism**

One of the significant ways in which modernists challenge the traditional representations in the 'traditional' novel form is by undermining the external reality and foregrounding the inner, subjective reality of the mind, and also by fashioning an appropriate medium to render that reality, namely, the stream-of-consciousness technique. There is no absolute truth because truth has become subjective, making objectivity almost impossible.

### **3.3 Stream-of-Consciousness Technique**

"Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" (Woolf, qtd in McNellie 1988). This point of view resembles human thought and involves recording the thought processes as they arise in the mind of the various individuals. This technique enables the reader to be close to the character's thoughts and motives than what obtains in the traditional novel, for the latter describes a character from the outside only superficially, while the stream of consciousness shows each character as a living and thinking individual who is actively and noticeably developing as the novel progresses.

### **3.4 Convoluted and Fragmented Plots**

"... they made its sentences as slippery as the movements of the human mind; they let plot go random, told their stories from changing points of view, and began or ended them abruptly" (Matz: 9). The idea of oneness and togetherness in form, law, order or sequence is challenged in the face of modernism. Events are not necessarily narrated in an order or sequence. There are narrative disjunctions or sudden shifts from one character's consciousness to another.

### **3.5 Focus on Characterisation**

Modernist literature is more interested in the individual and the consciousness of the character than the physical surrounding or society. So that instead of describing a scene, a place or the weather, modernist writing concentrates on individual characters, showing them as being more important than things that could be seen or touched. They show how the individual is able to adapt to changes in the world around them. In her essay, "Mr.

Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf posits that the foundation of good fiction is characterisation and nothing else, and that the character’s inner life should be presented as it is instead of burdening the narrative with details of the environment.

### **3.6 Autobiographical Narratives**

Modernists believe that it is important to write fiction that is true to daily life, primary feelings, desires and experiences, and also because no knowledge or information can be accepted at face value, modernists borrow largely from their own lives and the experiences that they have undergone. Therefore, there is usually a connection between the personal experiences of the writer and characters in their works.

### **3.7 Open-Ended Conclusions**

“Real life never gives full last explanations; its stories always continue.... In recognition of this continuance, of the necessity of loose ends, modern novels stay open-ended” (Matz40). Nothing is settled, nothing is final. Stories are left without conclusions but with possibilities, so that the reader continues to draw many inferences from them. Modernist writing shows this as being representative of “reality” as opposed to "closed" endings, in which matters are resolved and conclusions are drawn.

### **3.8 Complex Language:**

The language of the modernist literary works is usually complex. It is no longer a transparent form through realities can be mirrored directly. Rather, language often contains nuanced constructions of realities that could have multiple meanings. The language usually includes infusion of objects, people, places and events with significant meanings (symbolism). The language may also include the use of appendage sentences, short, crisp and rhythmic language. The modernist writers also made use of vulgar expressions.

### **3.9 Time as a Symbolic Sequence:**

Time in most modern writings becomes a psychological sequence. It accommodates a symbolic reality rather than a historical reality. For example, events of many years may be narrated as occurring within few years or even months. The use of fragmentation and juxtaposition make this possible.

### **3.10 Epiphany**

This term refers to moment of realisation. In modernist works, it is often used to show a point at which a character comes to terms with the realities about him/herself. An example of this will include a character who is at the verge of choosing a career or has already chosen one but suddenly realises that (s)he is not fit for the career but for something else due to her personality. It can also be an awakening in a character which makes him/her realise where his/her happiness lies. In short, epiphany lets a character to know the truth about him/herself.



### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

In not more than three paragraphs, explore the attitude of modernist writers to characterisation and linear plots.

Explain the concept of ‘anti-heroism and existentialism’ in modernist literature

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The techniques the modernists adopted are challenging. Readers are “shocked” out of complacency and are helped to understand that their world has truly changed and this change requires drastic reactions.

Modernists challenged and opposed the traditional or conventional form of writing as shown in their works. Though the themes in the preceding paragraphs are not exhaustive of their concerns but they are some of the major ones.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The different techniques adopted and advanced by the modernists have been explained in this unit. You have been exposed to what to expect when you read a modernist text. These techniques might be a little challenging at first because they are different from what you are used to, but the fact is that when you remember what these writers wanted to accomplish by their style of writing, you will learn to appreciate and critic whatever their new creativity offers.

In this unit, you have been exposed to some of the themes of modernist writing such as; lack of communication, aloneness, solitariness, existentialism, search for new ground, rebellion and individuality, trauma and gloom. The unit shows that the cardinal concern of the modernists was to make literature new by showing the realities of their societies after the First World War

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Explain four techniques of modernist literature.

List five modernist themes and discuss three of them.

### **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING.**

Clarke, W. (1976). *A short history of English literature*. London: Evans.

Daymond, J. (2004). *Virginia Woolf scholarship from 1991 to 2003: A Selected Bibliography*. London: Longman.

Lukacs, G. (1973). “The ideology of modernism.” *Issues in contemporary criticism*. Ed. Gregory T. Polleta. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Pp 712-733.

Lye, John “Characteristic Features of Modernist Fiction.” *Some Attributes of Modernist Literature*, 2001. [www.brocku.ca/English/courses](http://www.brocku.ca/English/courses)

Matz, J. (2004). *The modern novel: a short introduction*. USA: Blackwell .

- Woolf, V. (1988). "Character in fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 3. Ed. Andrew McNeilie. London: Hogarth Press. Pp 420-438.
- .(1969). "Modern fiction." *modern British fiction: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Mark Schorer. London: Oxford UP. Pp 3-10.
- .(1988). "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." *The essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 3. Ed. Andrew McNeilie. London: Hogarth Press. Pp384-389.

### **UNIT 3: Modernism, Postmodernism and Twentieth Century English Literature**

#### **Content**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Revision of Modernism

3.2	Postmodernism
3.3	Literary Postmodernism.
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Postmodernism is a reaction to the basic values and assumptions of modernism. It deals with this and the realities of the two world wars. Postmodernist approach to the realities of the world war is less serious and tragic than the modernist's. This unit reminds you of the basic assumptions of modernism while discussing the similarities and differences between the two literary movements.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- highlight at least four features of literary postmodernism,
- differentiate between modernism and postmodernism; and

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Modernism**

Modernism is a revolutionary movement that affected the creative world from the 1890s to 1900s, a period during which artists and writers sought to liberate themselves and their works from the conventions and tradition of the strict Victorian period. Modernism became popular after the World War I, a very traumatic event that physically devastated, psychologically disillusioned and affected the economy of the West in an entirely unprecedented way. As against the tradition of the Victorian era, modernism employed a different aesthetic tradition. For example modernist fiction lacks a coherent, linear or organic plot, and is oftentimes "plotless". Where a coherent plot may be identified, it is usually cyclical, broken-down, and open-ended to give a picture of life that is never conclusive or ended, but one in which there are possibilities and the individual is always on a quest for meaning. Characters in modernist fiction are not presented as products of social or environmental events as we have them in Victorian literature. Rather, they are shown to be anti-social, ahistorical and introverted loners, who sometimes dwell in the gloom of their minds as mere observers and thinkers, perpetually sad and unable to associate with one another.

In modernist literature, there are no heroes whose fall symbolically implies the fall of the community. There are usually only anti-heroes whose lives negate every fabric of the ideals and beliefs that their societies extol. The characters are alienated, isolated, detached from the external world. The omniscient third person narrator is rarely favoured, and where it is used at all, it is radically revised, sometimes confusing the reader, for example *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* where the stream-of-consciousness technique almost overshadows the author's attempt at using the omniscient third person

narrator. The scepticism to what is the Truth or the Meaning of life in modern existence led writers to be less assertive in that quest for relative meaning; hence, there is no need for a know-it-all narrative voice. The modern novel preferred a multiple perspective that privileged the stream-of-consciousness technique and the internal monologue, as a way of understanding the psychic reality of humans.

### **3.2 Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is largely a reaction or response to the assumptions of modernism. Scholars do not always agree on its definition but “it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyper reality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning” (Aylesworth, 2005).

As a movement, it began in the arts and architecture and just like modernism, abandons the realist mode of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Postmodernism as a concept improves on modernism and shares many characteristics with modernism including: absence of universal or absolute truth, anti-authority and anti-tradition, disregard for rationality, the belief that human life is complex and disjointed but could also be celebrated as it cannot be changed. For postmodernists, nothing is based on logical reasoning or an established widely accepted or acceptable universal truth as everyone has lost faith in truth, rationality or an ordered world where events are to happen normally but rather what is depicted is a world where things happen anyhow and anytime. There is no certainty, security or structure. This reality for them cannot be changed as everything is fragmented, de-centered and unstructured. For them this situation should not be approached mournfully or tragically as modernists do but should be played with. This is what brings about the artistic playfulness that postmodernists are known for.

In this respect, Samuel Beckett is regarded as a transitional playwright, whose writing could be read as modern and postmodern, especially *Waiting for Godot*. The way he allows his characters to “play” about everything is a significant feature. Like other postmodernists, he approaches life playfully deploying techniques irony, parody, and dark humour. In postmodernist literature there is little or no difference between fiction and nonfiction, postmodernists clamour for equality in gender, religion, class and race among others. Morality as well as truth is relative.

A major feature of postmodern thought is that universality is unacceptable and that “all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic” and this cannot be ignored in understanding how human relations function (Harvey, 1989). Differences along gender, sexuality, religion, class and race lines are all important. Postcolonialism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and feminism are all offshoots of postmodernism.

### **3.3 Literary Postmodernism**

Postmodernist disillusionment and its celebration of the existential nature of life were noticed around 1960 to 1990 in literary representations. Its characteristics include de-centeredment, pastiche, allegory, ambiguity, irony, parody, dark humour, fragmentation, especially in dialogue, questionable narrators, meta-narratives, isolated characters, and the blurring of the divide between reality (life) and fiction. It is clear that modernism and postmodernism share a lot in common but they are different.

Postmodernism did not just succeed modernism, it replenished it. It came at a time when people had lost faith in all forms of positive thinking (Matz, 2004). The skepticism that accompanied modernism had changed the way people think and approached life. Although the modernists attempted to show how the society and the individual grow farther from each other, their literature sensitized the people into a sad and isolated position. All faith in any idealism as a form of redemption or answer to the lingering questions of existence was lost. Literature turned the society's view in a way that what had been good about modernity suddenly felt good no longer and the inventions of modernity became the same tool that birthed the estrangement in the atmosphere

Modernists were shocked and horrified by the ways machine replaced and displaced men in the modern world. They were not in support of the changes that technology, machines and industrialization brought to their world. However, instead of feeling alienated and helpless by these changes, postmodernists accept and embrace these technologies and machines. They are interested in representing these technologies and machines and the social, political and economic consequences of these innovations.

Instead of the alienated and isolated characters who find it difficult to communicate and enter into relationships in modernist texts, postmodernist characters are comfortable and at ease with their loneliness. They enjoy this alienation and do not feel strange about it. Postmodernist texts show a world that is fragmented, incoherent and uncertain. Neglected and marginalized members of the society are also given prominence in some postmodernist writing, for example the colonized and women.

As against the stream of conscious/ess technique of the narration of the modernists where the workings of the mind of the characters are seen as more important than the external realities or communication, in the narratives of the postmodernists, characters are allowed to speak for themselves, there are at least two narrators whose stories or versions of a story are at times contradictory and it is not always easy to point out who the true narrator of the story is.

In modernist literature, unrealistic issues and events live only within a character's mind as a form of sickness or hallucination for example in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith lives in his unrealistic world and in his mind the human nature is upon him. Modernists will find an explanation for this unrealistic hallucination or sickness and Septimus's is the shell shock he suffered as a soldier in the First World War. But in a postmodern literature like Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Miss Jean Brodie's obsession to bring up her chosen girls to become *de crème la crème* in her prime is exhibited outside her mind, she lives it and practices it and this obsession is left

unresolved even though it is illogical and lacks any rational explanation. This kind of strange obsession or event can also be seen in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* where a young girl's over imaginative mind leads her to accuse her sister's friend of rape and this sets the course for the novel.

While modernists clamour for a new and independent way of writing literature and representing reality, postmodernists revisit and reform the past and blend it with the new. The concept of pastiche is a postmodernist one and it connotes the mixing of texts, genres, style and works of art. Postmodernists posit that every text is a product of a wide range of experiences(texts) and that interpretation is problematic because all the underlying texts of a text have some impact on the new text that is produced.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Describe four features of postmodernist literature.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The influence of postmodernism can be seen in different fields like architecture, literature, philosophy, social sciences, arts, and so on. As noted earlier postmodernism as a concept did not start in literature but its influences are present to a large extent in literary theories like deconstruction, gender studies and criticism not to talk of creative writings.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, an attempt has been made to discuss some of the assumptions and values of literary postmodernism. Some of the similarities and differences between modernism and postmodernism were also discussed.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Discuss the similarities and differences between modernism and postmodernism.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

- Aylesworth, G. (2005). "Postmodernism". Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>, Retrieved 17 December 2013.
- Lye, J. (1999). "Some attributes of postmodernist literature". <http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/post-mod-attrib.php>. Retrieved 17 December 2013.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Malpas, S. (2005). *The postmodern: the new critical idiom*. New York: Routledge.

## **UNIT 4: Postmodernist Themes and Techniques**

### **Content**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Postmodernist Themes and Concerns
  - 3.2 Postmodernist Techniques

4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Arguably, postmodernism has influenced the prose form of literary writing more than the other genres. In this Unit, the concerns of postmodernists in fiction as well as their thematic preoccupations and techniques will be discussed.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- discuss the themes and techniques of postmodernist writing
- relate these themes and techniques to those of modernism and differentiate between them.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Postmodernist Themes and Concerns**

After the Second World War, people started losing interest in modernist idealism especially modernist belief that fiction could bring a change to the way people see themselves in a changing society. The Second World war reinforced people's belief that modernity was not a piece of cake and it was not a perfect change to civilization, rationality or humanity but that modernity brought along with it science and technological innovations including weapons of mass destruction. Postmodernism as a literary movement characterized late twentieth century literature and is helpful in understanding English literature of the latter part of the twentieth century.

Postmodernism questions objective reality and claims that reality cannot be known through reasoning or the senses. Reality is created through its representations. Postmodernism also rejects grand or master narratives and their claims to totality. It questions the notions of grand narratives as they are full of contradictions and is not as total or stable as they present themselves. Grand narratives refer to basic and long standing histories of civilization or reality has no basis as the world changes and everything in the past or history becomes unreal, a fantasy.

Postmodernist themes are almost the same with those of modernism. They both look into issues of poverty, oppression whether it is class oppression, gender subjugation, racism, aloneness or lack of communication, helplessness, sexuality, politics, and so on. Just as literature will tend to question and portray all of the issues that confront man in his day to



day activities, postmodernism also attend to these issues though it does not mourn these realities but rather engages them playfully and celebrate these situations.

### **3.2 Postmodernist Techniques**

Postmodernists were concerned about the innovation and experimentation of the modernists which seems to be purposeless and regarded as a 'literature of exhaustion'. As a result, a literature that will bridge the gap between modernist innovation and traditional or conventional form of writing was advocated for, a 'literature of replenishment'. According to Jesse Matz, "at first, postmodernism seemed to mean the end of the modern novel, but ultimately it was a "replenishment"; at first it threatened an end to any faith in "representation" but ultimately it would turn out to solve many of the problems left unsolved by the modern novel... (128). This means of replenishing literature by combining the conventional art form and bringing in the modernist experimentation brings about the pastiche that postmodernists are known for.

Postmodernists made use of metanarratives, stories about stories and narrators who are concerned about the ways they narrate their stories and how their audience receives their stories. These narrators are mostly unreliable as their narratives are sometimes fraught with inconsistencies and they hide their true emotions or vital information till a particular time when their audience will believe their intentions or actions as well as their story.

Modernists, in trying to ascertain what reality is, probe into the thought and consciousness of their characters and made it seem that reality is knowable even if it is subjective and personal but the postmodernists are of the opinion that language mediates and constructs reality and as a result, the narratives of the postmodernists are open for questioning to ascertain if the stories are true and if the reality the story is trying to create was truly in existence before the story was 'cooked' up.

Postmodernists believed that literature or any other aesthetic work could not change the society as a result postmodernists turned their works into a parody, a playful way of dealing with the existential nature of human life. They viewed the modern world through a different lens and celebrated this situation. Their experimentation too was playful and it was mainly an art for art's sake experimentation not really to redeem or change any situation. Part of this experimentation is the use of flashback and digression by narrators.

#### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Identify and discuss four postmodernist techniques

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Postmodernism to a large extent revisits and revises the techniques of the traditional or Victorian way of writing and that of the modernists. In a way it solved the problems of the traditional literature as well as the modernists' problem of stifling life and entertainment out of literature. It could be difficult at times to differentiate between a modernist work and a postmodern writing especially the novel as they have a lot in common but the major difference between the two is the fact modernists shock the reader

with the gloomy and sad situation of life with the gloomy settings, alienated characters, difficult diction, fragmented and disjointed plot and so on while postmodernists are playful about these facts, they celebrate the nonsense they perceive life to be and are more entertaining than modernist writings.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit, the concerns and themes of postmodernists as well as their techniques were discussed in a bid to make it easy for you to differentiate between a modernist and postmodernist writing.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Examine three salient differences between modernist and postmodernist writings

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Barth, J. (1996). "The literature of replenishment" In *Essentials of the theory of fiction*, eds Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy, 2nd edition. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 283.

Matz, J. (2004). *The modern novel: A short introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

## **MODULE 2: MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST NOVELS**

### **Module 2: The Novel in the Twentieth Century English Literature**

Unit 1: Virginia Woolf: *A Woman at the Fore*

Unit 2: D.H Lawrence and *Vitality*

Unit 3: Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Unit 4: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day*.

## UNIT 1: Virginia Woolf: A Woman to the Fore

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Virginia Woolf
  - 3.2 Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*
  - 3.3 Modernist Features in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*
  - 3.4 Modernist Themes in *Mrs Dalloway*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf was one of the most revolutionary and controversial English writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as her writings whether creative or critical (essays) demonstrate. She was concerned about liberty and freedom for writers and their art as well as for women, their lives and their writings. In her book, *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is optimistic that in years to come, women's writing would be better than what it was in her own time. She was very passionate about the changes that came or started in her time and she wrote about this in her essays like "Three Guineas", "A Room of One's Own", "Women and Writing", "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", "Modern Fiction" and her novels.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the life and modernist inclination of Virginia Woolf;
- analyse *Mrs. Dalloway* by highlighting modernist features in the novel.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf was born to Sir Leslie Stephen a literary critic of renown. She inherited her father's passion for books. She was a complicated woman whose mental instability perhaps led her to attempt suicide twice before she eventually succeeded in taking her own life in 1941. Her creative works include *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *The Waves*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts*, Woolf's last novel

which was published posthumously. As a writer, Woolf snatched the novel from the governing traditional rules and conventions. Her position is argued in different essays and reviews where she looks at authors and their approaches to character creation, plot, and perspective. In her essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf posits that a writer should be in a continuous quest for new ways with which to shape his/her imagination and thereby discover new possibilities. She posits further that the novel or fiction should be a record, an account for the reality within and not only outside. In “Mr Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” through the imaginary Mrs. Brown, Woolf states that the foundation of any good fiction is the character. Character-creation, which should explore the tensions and influences of the mind, is the soul of fiction. These views are echoed and pronounced through her novels, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway*.

### 3.2 Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

The events in the story of *Mrs. Dalloway* take place in a single day in the middle of June. Clarissa Dalloway who has recently recovered from an illness is preparing for the party she is to host that evening. She goes out to buy flowers for the party and while doing this, she reflects on her past including her decision and reasons for marrying Richard Dalloway years earlier instead of Peter Walsh. Septimus Smith, a traumatised war veteran is on the street with his wife Lucrezia. As Septimus struggles with the after effects of the war with the voices he hears and his feeling that life is meaningless, his wife struggles with the drastic changes she has noticed in him. She pities herself and at the same time tries to distract her husband from being overtly preoccupied with himself. Meanwhile, Clarissa returns home and remembers Sally Seton and the kiss they have once shared. Clarissa starts mending the dress she is to wear for the party when her former suitor Peter Walsh comes for a visit. Though Clarissa and Peter talk about the present, they both think of the past and the choices they made which made them who they are now.

The entrance of Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth ends his visit. Peter goes to a park where Septimus and Lucrezia are also walking. The couple is discussing Septimus' attempt and thoughts of suicide heatedly, but Peter sees them as a young couple in love just quarrelling. Lucrezia has decided to take Septimus to a specialist, Sir William Bradshaw, who dismisses the complexity of Septimus' madness and suggests a rest in an asylum for him.

Richard Dalloway has been to lunch with Lady Bruton and Clarissa is not happy that Lady Bruton has not invited her. Richard decides to tell Clarissa that he loves her, something he has not been able to do for years. But unfortunately, he never expresses his feeling to her eventually. Clarissa goes to see Elizabeth who is studying with her tutor, Doris Kilman. Clarissa dislikes Doris who she sees as a monster who is taking her daughter away from her. Doris dislikes Clarissa because of her high class and financial buoyancy. Septimus and Lucrezia return to their apartment to wait for the attendants that will take Septimus to an asylum. Septimus decides to escape and run away as Dr. Holmes arrives but he jumps to his death through the window. Clarissa's party has started with Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, and people from her past in attendance. Very late into the party

Sir William and Lady Bradshaw arrive and apologise for their lateness. Mrs Bradshaw explains that they have been delayed because of one of Bradshaw's patients (Septimus) who has committed suicide that day. The party and the novel end with Richard and Elizabeth glad the party is over.

### 3.3 Modernist Features in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

**Anti- Tradition:** The storyline of *Mrs Dalloway* happens in a single day in London, it has no action in the traditional sense of cause and effect and there is no linearity in the narration of the story. The novel has many disjointed plots and in fact it thrives on sub-plots. It has an open form, the ending being inconclusive. It is the characters' feelings, experiences and thoughts that make up the storyline. The sense of action is provided by the passage of time, heralded by clocks chiming and Big Ben striking towards Clarissa's party, as well as the suicide committed by Septimus. Unlike traditional novels with unified plots and situations, *Mrs Dalloway* has no story to tell. It is a coherent collection of myriad impressions, an exploration of the myriad tensions that have invaded the modern mind.

**Subjective Realism:** There is no absolute truth and no one is the custodian of knowledge, as a result, each character in *Mrs. Dalloway* is revealed not by actual description by the author or an omniscient (all-knowing and all-seeing) voice as is the case in many traditional novels, but by giving voice to the thoughts of characters as well as what others think of them. While Clarissa thinks of herself, Peter thinks of her from his own perspective and Sally Seton has another opinion of her. To Peter, Septimus and his wife are having a lover's quarrel in the park, to Maisie Johnson, they look queer, to Lucrezia, Septimus is making her miserable, while Septimus thinks Lucrezia is disturbing him. The perspective of other characters like Mrs. Dempster, Lady Bruton, Richard Dalloway, Miss Brush, Miss Kilman and many others form the different voices of the novel's storyline. The different interpretations of the crowd to the aeroplane's sky writing, their speculations and the meaning they give it also foreground this fact. These multiple and partial views of situations are exposed to the reader through the individual perception of the characters as shown in their thoughts. This style of writing affirms modernist position that "no single view or style of explanation could ever be adequate to the diversity of modern experience" (Matz, 59).

**Stream of Consciousness Technique:** The point of view of the novel resembles human thought. The stream-of-consciousness technique involves recording the thought processes as they arise in the mind of the various individuals without any evident links or connection. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, there seems to be no coherence in the thought patterns of a character. From the first page of the novel, Clarissa's thought of buying flowers for herself, jumps to Lucy's work being cut out for her, to the hinges of the window to the freshness of the air and the memory of Peter Walsh, Elizabeth, and other matters.

These myriads of thought are seen throughout the novel as perspectives of different characters are seen. In addition, through the use of this technique, characters bring the past into the present, allowing the meaning and remembrance of the present to be shaped by the past. Woolf moves from one character's thought to another without the reader being fully aware of it as we move from one character's consciousness to another. She also uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to connect her characters as she presents several characters whose lives and experiences are connected through individual thoughts. The characters are known not by their actions but mainly by their innermost thoughts and these thoughts are not ordered but spontaneous are quite revealing. This fragmented, disordered structure of the subconscious mind for the modernist writer like Woolf is the true nature of human existence. In this novel, Woolf shows that life lacks order and that it is human beings that introduce relative logic or order into it.

**Convolved and Fragmented Plots:** The idea of oneness and togetherness in form, law, order or sequence is challenged in the face of modernism. Modernists make use of narrative disjunctions or sudden shifts from one character's consciousness to another. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is no chronological arrangement of events or actions as readers are made to follow the thought patterns of characters as they move from one concern to another; as a result, the narrative jumps from the present to the past and back to the present again, especially in the consciousness of Clarissa and Septimus. There is the influx of many characters in the first pages of the novel which makes it difficult to follow the development of the story. As noted in earlier, the novel itself has no chapter divisions. It is the chiming of Big Ben and the line demarcation that signal the introduction of a new character or event.

**Psychological Stories:** In *Mrs Dalloway*, the treatment of characters and incidents is essentially psychological in nature. Each character is seen as a result of various experiences that he or she has gone through. Clarissa's rejection of Peter's proposal of marriage has influenced all his later thoughts and actions. The effects of war experiences on a sensitive mind are explored through the character of Septimus who, years after the cessation of the war, is seen struggling frantically to come to terms with and then to overcome his experience of war and death, and then of disenchantment and madness: "...he threatened, to kill himself – to throw himself under a cart! ...there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud." (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 21).

The details concerning the tortured feelings of Septimus, the reasons behind his present mental state, his delusions and his reactions to everyday incidents, as well as his mistrust and abhorrence of the doctors, Clarissa's thoughts and mental reactions, Peter's life as seen through his thoughts and those of others, are vividly presented. The novel broods on death: the deaths of loved ones during the war, Clarissa and Septimus' meditated death and the latter's success at suicide. Existence becomes an illusion and the likes of Miss Kilman and Lucrezia feel alone and unloved, even Richard Dalloway finds it difficult to express his love for Clarissa.

**Focus on Characterisation:** In her essay, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” Woolf posits that the foundation of good fiction is characterisation and nothing else, and that the character’s inner life should be presented as it is instead of burdening the narrative with details of the environment. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is the focus on characters’ consciousnesses and how the happenings in their past and present affect them and how they respond to these realities. While Septimus commits suicide as he could no longer survive the trauma of the war, the doctors and his wife’s intrusion, Clarissa is seen at the end of her party thinking that “she must assemble” (158).

**Poetic language:** There is the use of appendage sentences, short, crisp and rhythmic language which can be seen on almost all the pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf tampers with the traditional sentence structure and uses commas, exclamation marks, parenthesis, inverted commas, hyphens, semicolons, and other punctuation marks in abundance throughout the novel. The language of the novel is also poetic and full of symbolisms. For instance in narrating Septimus’ perception of the world, the repetition of ‘human nature’ as being open to him, condemning him to death, shows Septimus as acknowledging his mental process in his encounter with his doctors. The repetition of Clarissa’s and Septimus’ ‘feeling nothing’ and Clarissa’s repeated thought that she ‘had failed him’ shows how disconnected they are with the people around them.

**Autobiographical narrative:** As an extension of the position of modernists that it is important to write fiction that is more true to daily life, primary feelings, desires and experiences, and also because no knowledge or information can be accepted at face value, modernists borrow largely from their own lives and the experiences that they have undergone. Woolf herself was sick for a period of time though longer than that of Clarissa. She had attempted suicide before writing *Mrs Dalloway* and though she did not fight in the War like Septimus, she had relatives who died during the War. Virginia Woolf also had her own Sally Seton: “the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* coincided with the erotically charged build-up to Woolf’s affair with Vita Sackville-West, and the relationship between Clarissa and Sally reflects the growing excitement Virginia felt in Vita’s company” (*Mrs. Dalloway*: Introduction).

**Open ended:** nothing is settled, nothing is final. Leaving stories open-ended is seen to be more representative of “reality” as opposed to “closed” endings, in which matters are resolved. *Mrs. Dalloway* does not end like the traditional novels where a conflict is resolved or a reader can convincingly say that the novel ends on a clear note. *Mrs. Dalloway* ends with Peter Walsh’s thought of where Clarissa is. This leaves the reader wondering what will happen to Clarissa at the end of the party and if she will also commit suicide or not.

**Symbolism:** Modernist writers infused objects, people, places and events with significant meanings. One important symbol in the novel is Big Ben. Although the novel does not have chapters, the narrative is divided into units as Big Ben strikes the hours. Clock time

divides the narrative. Big Ben plays a significant role throughout the novel and the ways it affects Londoners.

The aeroplane's sky writing and different characters' attempts to decipher the letters in their own individual ways are also symbolic of the fact that there is no absolute knowledge and that truth is subjective and not objective. The fact that the story spans a single day emphasises the importance of every single moment; so much can happen in a single moment that will change all that has happened over the years.

### **3.4 Modernist Themes in *Mrs Dalloway***

As you were told, modernist themes are interrelated and they are also the themes that are evident in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran who suffers from shell-shock, cannot relate with his wife and people around him. He has delusional and hallucinatory episodes and he questions the significance of life, unable to share his inner torment with others in a coherent fashion. He jumps to his death. Lucrezia finds it difficult to communicate with Septimus and cries, "I am alone; I am alone!" (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 20) Clarissa is glad that Richard allows her to have her freedom and she is happy to be left alone in her narrow bed. Richard finds it difficult to communicate his feelings to Clarissa. Through Clarissa and Miss Kilman we see the social barrier and conflict that modernist writing engages. This class difference generates animosity between the two women. Kilman's inability to dress appropriately contributes to her isolation and loneliness: "people don't ask me to parties... I'm plain, I'm unhappy" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 112). The British upper class is represented by characters like Richard Dalloway, Hugh Whitbread, and Lady Bruton, while the likes of Rezia, Septimus and the degradingly poor Miss Kilman show the inequalities of the society.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of Woolf to modernist literature is the place of women in her fictive world. *Mrs. Dalloway* features independent-minded women who are seen and heard in the society. They are not portrayed as appendages to male characters. They make life changing decisions to be free and live their lives as they think best as shown in the decision of Clarissa to marry Richard as well as Elizabeth Dalloway's consideration of her career as a woman. This is an important departure from 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature where women are restricted to the home and are stripped of the ability to decide things for themselves.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Summarise Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and highlight the major events of the novel.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

For Woolf, there should be no dogmatic approach to novel writing. Like many other modernist writers, she affirms that there is no complete knowledge or absolute truth. She departs from the traditional rules of coherence, close ending, unified or linear representation of life, and omniscient point of view of an all-knowing presence.



## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt about Woolf's radical ideas that were made manifest in her works like the text we discussed, *Mrs Dalloway*. The features of modernism and the modernist themes that could be found in the novel are also explicated.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

To what extent do you think Woolf demonstrates her modernist position in *Mrs. Dalloway*?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING.

Matz, J. (2004). *The modern novel: a short introduction*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Woolf, V. (1969). "Modern fiction." *modern British fiction: essays in criticism*. Ed. Mark Schorer. London: Oxford University Press.

---.(1988). "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 3. Ed. Andrew McNeilie. London: Hogarth Press.

---. *Mrs Dalloway*. (1926). New York: Oxford UP, reprint 2000.

## UNIT 2: D.H. Lawrence and Vitality

Content

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	D.H. Lawrence
3.2	D.H. Lawrence's <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>
3.3	Modernist Features in <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>
3.4	Modernist Themes in <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

David Herbert Lawrence (1885 – 1930) was one of the most controversial modernist writers. This is because of his inclination to depict vividly sexual relations in his works. Like Woolf and Joyce, he wrote autobiographically as he took bits and pieces from his life as materials for his fiction. His works are preoccupied with man's relationship with man, his body, the vegetation or life around him.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the life and modernist inclination of D.H Lawrence,
- highlight modernist features in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 D. H. Lawrence**

David Herbert Lawrence was the fourth child of his family. His father, Arthur John Lawrence, was a miner and his mother a teacher but she had to work in a lace factory because of the family's financial challenges. Lawrence spent his formative years in a coal mining town. In March 1912 Lawrence met Frieda Weekley with whom he was to share the rest of his life. Frieda Weekley was six years older than Lawrence and already had three children for Lawrence's former modern language professor, Ernest Weekley. Lawrence and Frieda Weekley developed to her parents' home in Metz, a garrison town then in Germany near the disputed border with France. Their stay there included Lawrence's first brush with militarism, when he was arrested and accused of being a British spy before being released following an intervention from Frieda Weekley's father. After this encounter, Lawrence left for a small hamlet to the south of Munich where he was joined by Frieda Weekley for their "honeymoon"

David Herbert Lawrence was an English novelist, poet, playwright, essayist, literary critic and painter. His works include, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. His collected works represent an extended reflection upon the dehumanizing effects of technology and modernity. Lawrence in his works confronts issues relating to emotional health and vitality, spontaneity, and instinct. Lawrence's opinions earned him many enemies and he endured official persecution, censorship, and misrepresentation of his creative work throughout the second half of his life, much of which he spent in a voluntary exile which he called his "savage pilgrimage." At the time of his death, his public reputation was that of a pornographer who had wasted his considerable talents.

### **3.2 D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover***

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* begins with an introduction of Connie (also known as Constance) Reid, the female protagonist of the novel. She was raised as a cultured bohemian of the upper class, and was introduced to love affairs, intellectual and sexual liaisons as a teenager. In 1917 at 23, she marries Clifford Chatterley, the scion of an aristocratic line. After a month's honeymoon, he is sent to war and returns paralysed from waist down and also becomes impotent. However, whatever he lost in his physiology, he gains in writing as Clifford becomes a successful writer, making many intellectuals to patronise the Chatterley's mansion, Wragby.

Connie feels isolated, the vaunted intellectuals prove empty and bloodless, and she resorts to a brief and dissatisfying affair with a visiting playwright, Michaelis. Connie longs for a real human contact and falls into despair, as all men seem scared of true feelings and passion. There is a growing distance between Connie and Clifford, who has retreated into the meaningless pursuit of success in his writing and his obsession with coal mining, and towards whom Connie feels a deep physical aversion.

A nurse, Mrs. Bolton, is hired to take care of the handicapped Clifford so that Connie can be more independent, Clifford falls into a deep dependence on the nurse, his manhood fading away into an infantile reliance. Into the void of Connie's life comes Oliver Mellors, the gamekeeper of Clifford's estate, newly returned from serving in the army, Mellors is aloof and derisive, yet Connie feels curiously drawn to him by his innate nobility and grace, his purposeful isolation, his undercurrents of natural sensuality. After several chance meetings in which Mellors keeps her at arm's length, reminding her of the class distance between them, they meet by chance in a hut in the forest, where they have sex. This happens on several occasions, but, she still feels the distance between them, remaining profoundly separate from him despite their physical closeness.

One day, Connie and Mellors meet by coincidence in the woods and they have sex on the floor. This time, they experience simultaneous orgasms. This is a revelatory and profoundly moving experience for Connie; she begins to adore Mellors, feelings that

have connected in some sensual levels. She is proud to believe that she is pregnant with Mellor's child. He is a real, living man, as opposed to the emotionally dead intellectual and dehumanized industrial workers. They grow progressively closer, connecting on a primordial physical level, as woman and man, rather than two minds or intellects. Connie goes away to Venice, for vacation, while she is gone, Mellors' old wife whom he has initiated divorce proceedings returns causing a scandal. Connie returns to find that Mellor's has been fired as a result of some rumours spread about him. Connie admits to Clifford that she is pregnant with Mellors's baby, but Clifford refuses her divorce. The novel ends with Mellors working on a farm, waiting for his divorce, and Connie living with her sister, also waiting. The hope exists that in the end, they will be together.

### **3.3 Modernist Features in *Lady Chatterley's Lover***

**Stream of consciousness:** Lawrence employs this technique in this novel to focus on his character's consciousness and even the subconscious. He creates an impression that the reader is eavesdropping on the flow of conscious experience in the character's mind. Attempt is made to go into the mind of Constance, letting it come into existence. For instance on page 46, the reader is taken into her mind as she is with Tommy Duke discussing about men and women in love. This is a discussion which probably occurred previously but is brought to the present through stream of consciousness, subsequently the reader sees her as she walks in the wood, stumbles on the gamekeeper with his daughter who is frightened at the sight of the pussy that he is hunting. The bitch goddess as an example of the experience of the nothingness or vanity of life is related to the reader from the mind of Lady Chatterley (52).

**Autobiographical Mode:** *Lady Chatterley's Lover* tends towards autobiography in the sense that, the story is said to have originated from events in the life of Lawrence. Lawrence took inspiration for the setting of the novel from where he was brought up. Lawrence's own father was a miner, and the author was intimately familiar with the region of the Derby/Nottinghamshire coalfield, having been born at Eastwood, Nottingham. Eastwood, Nottingham also is one of the few places where the distinctive dialect of East Midlands English is extensively spoken. This is reflected in the setting of the novel, Tevershall, a coal mining village where vernacular is spoken.

The relationship between Lady Chatterley and Mellors, the gamekeeper can be linked to that of the fling between Lady Ottoline Morrel with Tiger, a young stone mason who came to carve plinths for her. Lady Ottoline was a prominent writer during Lawrence's time. It could also be connected to that of Lawrence's and his wife Frieda. Many critics have seen the character of Oliver Mellors as an extension of Lawrence himself. Mellors, like Lawrence, was born into the industrial proletariat, his father was a collier. He is partially educated and like Lawrence can operate successfully in the middle or upper class of the society.

**Open-endedness:** Just like most modernist novels, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a novel that is left with a rather open and vaguely unsatisfying ending. This implies that people

could come to their conclusions. It possibly might portray a failing society because nothing is resolved and conclusions are hard to reach on the strands of relationships that we see in the novel. For example, what becomes of the relationship between Connie and Mellors? Is there any hope for them? It might also imply that the future of Connie and Mellors is a symbol of the unclear and undetermined future of the society.

**Spectacular Use of Language:** Modernist writers use language in ways that are different from how the Victorians used it. The language use in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is simple and coherent, but there are some spectacular uses. In some instances, there are lewd descriptions like *Fuck* and *cunt* used to qualify the sexual acts in the narrative. For instance, in the letter that ends the novel, Mellors writes:

And if you're in Scotland and I'm in the Midlands, and I can't put my arms round you, and wrap my legs round you, yet I've got something of you. My soul softly flaps in the little Pentecost flame with you, like the peace of fucking. We fucked a flame into being. Even the flowers are fucked into being between the sun and the earth. But it's a delicate thing, and takes patience and the long pause. (268)

**Symbolism:** The novel is symbolic especially in the treatment of Clifford and all he embodies. Clifford's paralysis and impotence is a symbol of most men of his sort and class who are both paralysed physically and sexually. It is also an expression of the dehumanising nature of technology and industrialisation. The wounded landscape of Tevershall is also symbolic. It represents the dehumanising force of industrialism which has left so many wounded and unproductive in the society.

The love created and the deep intimacy between Connie and Mellors, suggests the solution that can heal the wound of war and the one created by the industries. The love affair between Connie and Mellors begins in the wood, and the sexual scenes take place either in the hut or in the wood itself. The wood, a remnant of Sherwood Forest, "the great forest where Robin Hood hunted" (79), stands for the lost potential of an older England that is now circumscribed by the industrial system that surrounds it. Although the wood still retains a "power" and a "vital presence" (106), its power is increasingly precarious and threatened. Nevertheless, Lawrence's lyrical descriptions of the wood evoke a Romantic vision of nature as a moral alternative to the debased city.

The symbolic significance of this world as an embattled refuge from the industrialisation of modern England is clearly established in such scenes as Clifford's visit to the wood in his mechanical chair, where he "rides upon the achievements of the mind" (156). As Clifford argues with Connie about the miners and said they "are not men . . . but animals" (159), his chair ploughs through flowers, "squashing the little yellow cups of the creeping-jenny . . . making a wake through the forget-me-nots" (161). It is within the context of this world of trees and flowers, and against Clifford's world of the industrial mines, that Connie and Mellors make love.

**Anti-Tradition:** An important feature of modernist writing is the break from traditional mode of representation or what is referred to as anti-tradition. This break is displayed in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in two fold. The first in the form of sexual liberation as we see characters involved in sexual exploits, which ordinarily are frowned upon by the society. Sexual scenes are described in great details, contrary to what we find in earlier English literature. Moreover, traditionally, Connie is expected to be the dutiful wife who stands by her husband in times of trials. She is not only repulsed at his impotence but she goes ahead to find a replacement from a social class lower than hers. This leads to the second way in which the novel and its characters break away from conventional ways of thinking. The society expects social boundaries to be maintained such that people of the upper class should go into relationships with people within their class, proletariats, that is the working class, are also socially confined to their class. But Connie, the wife of an aristocrat, finds solace in the arms of the half-educated Mellors.

**Character Development:** Like most modernists do, Lawrence properly developed the characters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, especially, the major characters, Constance and Clifford. These characters appear so real to the people of the modern era. In Clifford Chatterley, the reader sees the inadequacy of the intellect to give true fulfilment and happiness. Clifford is an intelligent, fame-seeking husband, a replica of a young man of the modern era. He is a wealthy upper class man, highly educated, but emotionally and sexually impotent. Lawrence focuses on how the choice of career Clifford makes affects him and those around him. The life of Clifford also reveals the pains modern warfare causes people. In Constance Chatterley, the truth about the inner workings of human is revealed. Lawrence creates in Constance a woman who is unfulfilled despite the rich home she lives. More importantly, Constance plays the role of a dutiful house wife, yet her happiness lies deep in her until she begins to have sexual experience with Mellors, Clifford's gamekeeper.

### 3.4 Modernist Themes in D.H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

**Breaking class bounds:** In the novel, we have a society that is marked by class difference and conflict: the upper, the middle, and the working classes are well represented. While Connie was lower in class to Clifford before her marriage to him, Clifford represents aristocracy and he has his own big hall with servants to attend to him. The relationship among the classes in the traditional Victorian time was well defined in such a way that the boundaries are set. In the novel, there is constant insecurity that arises among the classes that makes them feel a kind of resentment for one another. Lawrence captures this dissatisfaction and resentment of the colliers against Clifford.

But the First World War and the aftermath made men to begin to have a new vision about life that is different from the one they had before the war. The war drew men away from traditional sensibilities, individual problems became deeper and complex, bringing about a change in the world idea as exemplified in the changing tradition that affects Constance and Clifford's marriage and the relationship between them deteriorated to the extent that Connie no longer enjoys his company and his writings. Clifford on the other hand, is a

man that is incapable of any feeling to the extent that he does not notice her weariness. Clifford's physical paralysis translates to his sexual incapability and in a way affects how he sees life between himself, his wife, the workers and the world. As Clifford and Connie later find solace and companionship in their servants, there is a break in class boundaries and restrictions. Constance becomes sexually and emotionally involved with Mellors Oliver, their game keeper, and Clifford becomes more dependent on Mrs Bolton to the extent that he teaches her games, which is only common among the aristocrats and she begins to serve as his typist.

**Entrapment and the search for freedom:** Lawrence explores the experience of Constance being trapped by marriage to a man she grows to hate. Marriage as the creation of the society designates certain roles between the individuals involved in it. Connie is tied at the beginning of the novel to her husband Clifford by pity and by her duty as wife, and the consequence is that, he (Clifford) sucks life out of her. Not only is she trapped by marriage, Connie is also trapped in an estate that is neither beautiful nor productive. Wragby in Tevershall represents aristocracy throughout the novel with its bleak scarred, sterile midland landscape. The sterile land is a symbol of the dehumanising effects of industrialisation which has sucked life out of the town and Connie is also trapped by her family especially her sister, Hilda who has influenced her greatly.

The rebellious act of Constance against these forces is by extension a revolt against traditional norms. She frees herself from the marriage that was almost drowning her and has made her an unhappy character for most part of the novel. She also frees herself from the estate Wragby by refusing to come back. Lastly she frees herself from Hilda's influence by refusing to listen to her despite the warning that she will regret her actions. Lawrence therefore, develops the character of Lady Constance Chatterley from a submissive and dutiful wife of an aristocrat, to an adulterous rebellious woman, who stoops so low by having an affair with her servant.

**Sexual Liberation:** Sexual liberation was a social movement that challenged traditional codes of behaviour related to sexuality and interpersonal relationships throughout the western world in the twentieth century. It is said that at that time, public morality severely restricted open discussion of sex and specific sexual practices; such as sexual behaviour that did not lead to procreation or marriage (i.e prostitution, homosexuality, nudity and pornography). The explicit description of sex in the novel is without apology, the free discussion by the intellectuals who gather at Wragby Hall and several sexual escapades of Connie depict anti-tradition and all that the society represents. The novel at one time was banned because it was believed to have promoted pornography and other 'illegal' sexual practices. Nevertheless, Lawrence wants his reader to see that beyond the several sexual escapades is the idea that people should embrace the sensualities of life, not just necessarily sex, but feelings in general.

### **Self- Assessment Exercise**

Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is about class struggle and upturn of the aristocracy. Discuss.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is about the notions of vitality and paralysis, vitality intellectually as well as sexually. Clifford, a highly placed aristocrat, is portrayed as a man of words and intelligence who he has no regards for his servants and the vegetations or life around him. He hosts a group of friends and they engage in intellectual discussions that the lower class like Oliver Mellors is seemingly incapable of. Clifford lives with his wife after the war, physically paralysed man who thinks that intellectual engagements and living in the mind is enough to make his wife happy but it is the gamekeeper who is in touch with the fields, plants and animals who knows what it takes to live actively. Oliver is the symbol of physical and in a way intellectual vitality, he lives as a semi educated man but he is in touch with life and so gives Connie what she is deprived of in her rational marriage to Clifford and there lies the irony of the novel, the Lord's paralysis gives way to the break in class boundaries in the novel as Clifford in his helpless state become dependent on Mrs. Bolton and Connie runs to Mellors for companionship.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have learnt about D.H Lawrence's contribution to the modern novel through his techniques and the themes he deploys in his novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Describe the ways in which modernism is reflected in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's*

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Lawrence, D.H. (2005). *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth.

Hough, G. (1975). *The Dark Sun: A Study of D.H Lawrence*. Britain: Duckworth.

### **UNIT 3: Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

Content



1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Muriel Spark
3.2	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
3.3	Themes and Techniques in <i>The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
3.4	Characterisation in <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
3.5	A Postmodern Reading of <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Muriel Spark is a prominent female postmodernist writer. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is regarded as her best work probably because of the intriguing, complex, unknowable heroine, Miss Jean Brodie. In this unit, you will be introduced to Muriel Spark and the themes and techniques that characterize the work as a major twentieth century English text.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- write a synopsis of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
- Discuss at least four features of post-modernist writing in the novel.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Muriel Spark

Muriel Spark, a novelist, poet and essayist, was born to Bernard Camberg and Sarah Elizabeth Maud in 1918 in Edinburg Scotland. She attended James Gillespie's High School for Girls. She worked as an English Teacher and later as a Secretary for a while before she married Sidney Oswald Spark in 1937. Their marriage was blessed with a son, Robin, but the marriage did not last as her husband was said to be a maniac whose violent attacks did not help the marriage. She left her husband and son in 1940 and though she had planned to have a good relationship with her son, she had a strained relationship with him throughout her life. She converted to Catholicism in 1954. She produced a collection of short stories and poems. Her works include *The Comforters*(1957), *Robinson* (1958), *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), *The Bachelors* (1960), *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) *Memento Mori*, *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), *The Public Image* (1968), *Not to Disturb* (1971), *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), *The Abbewes of Crewe* (1974), *The Takeover* (1976), *The Territorial Rights* (1979), *A Far Cry From Kensington* (1988), *Symposium* (1990) and *The Driver's Seat* (1970) and so on. Muriel Spark died on 13th April 2006 in Italy.

### ***3.2 The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

It is the early 1930s. At the Marcia Blaine School, located in Edinburgh, Scotland, a class of ten-year-old girls begins two years of instruction with Miss Jean Brodie, a charismatic teacher at the Junior school who claims again and again to be in her “prime.” She provides her pupils with an energetic and unorthodox education in unauthorized topics as various as poetry, makeup, Italian fascism under Mussolini, and her own love life, believing that Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are of supreme value, and that the arts hold a higher place than the sciences. In time, Miss Brodie singles out six girls as special to her, and who she intends to mould into “the crème de la crème”: Sandy Stranger, Rose Stanley, Mary Macgregor, Jenny Gray, Monica Douglas, and Eunice Gardiner. These girls come to be known as the Brodie set, whom Miss Brodie culturally develops and confides in. However, in one of the novel’s characteristic prolepses (fast-forwards), we learn that one of these girls will eventually betray Miss Brodie, though Miss Brodie never learns which.

The girls’ other teachers at the Junior school include the art master, the handsome, sophisticated Mr. Teddy Lloyd, a Roman Catholic who lost his arm during World War I, as well as the singing master, the short-legged and long-bodied Mr. Gordon Lowther. Both of these men come to love Miss Brodie, but Miss Brodie is passionate only about Teddy Lloyd, whom she commends for his artistic nature. The two kiss once, as witnessed by Monica Douglas, but Miss Brodie soon renounces her love for Teddy Lloyd, as he is married with six children. Instead, she commences an affair with the unmarried Mr. Lowther during a two-week leave of absence (although she claims that her absence is due to illness).

Meanwhile, the highly imaginative, psychologically penetrating Sandy becomes increasingly obsessed with Miss Brodie’s love life, going so far as to imagine her teacher having sexual intercourse. At one point in their two years in the Junior school, Jenny who is Sandy’s best friend is accosted by a man exposing his genitals to her near the Water of Leith (a river that runs through Edinburgh), an incident investigated by a female policewoman. Sandy falls in love with the idea of this policewoman, and imagines that she is in the police force alongside her, with the purpose of preventing sex altogether. She also imagines that she and her invented policewoman should investigate the love affair between Miss Brodie and Mr. Lowther. At the age of twelve, the girls leave Miss Brodie’s class and graduate to the Senior school, where they are taught by teachers like the excellent science instructor Miss Lockhart, all of whom are committed to the authorized curriculum that Miss Brodie neglected. Nonetheless, the girls retain their group identity as the Brodie set, even though they have nothing in common save being picked out by Miss Brodie, whom they visit as they did as students at the Junior school, going with her to the ballet and other places.

The headmistress of Blaine, Miss Mackay, has all the while been fostering a professional disapproval of Miss Brodie's educational methods and scorn for the group identity of her six special girls; she wishes Miss Brodie would leave Blaine to teach at another school, but Miss Brodie dismisses the idea.

Consequently, Miss Mackay attempts to extract incriminating facts from the girls about their former teacher that might allow her to dismiss Miss Brodie. Miss Macaky also attempts to break the Brodie set up. Both attempts fail; the Brodie girls are unflaggingly loyal to their beloved teacher and to the principles of collectivism, love, and loyalty she instilled in them. Miss Brodie's love affair with Mr. Lowther continues; when the sewing teachers at Blaine, the sisters Miss Ellen and Alison Kerr, begin to work as housekeepers for Mr. Lowther, and encroach on Miss Brodie's exclusive claim to him, she asserts her influence by coming to Mr. Lowther's house whenever the Kerr sisters are there so that she can oversee them. She criticizes them for skimping on their employer's meals, and sets about fattening Mr. Lowther up. She also begins to invite her special girls, now thirteen years old, to socialize with her in pairs at her lover's house. She asks them often about Mr. Lloyd, for several of the girls, especially Rose Stanley, have begun to sit for portraits with their art teacher. Miss Brodie especially enjoys hearing about how each face Mr. Lloyd paints strangely resembles her own. One day in Mr. Lloyd's studio, Sandy points this fact out to Mr. Lloyd himself, glaring at him insolently; Mr. Lloyd kisses the young girl, and she doesn't know what to think about it.

As the girls grow from thirteen to fourteen and fourteen to fifteen, Miss Brodie determines that she can trust Sandy absolutely as her informant and confidant. Miss Brodie is also becoming increasingly fixated on the idea that Rose—as the most instinctual of the Brodie set and famous for sex (although Rose has no interest in sex)—should have a love affair with Mr. Lloyd as her, Miss Brodie's, proxy. Miss Brodie additionally plans on Sandy being her informant regarding the affair. Indeed, so fixated does Miss Brodie become on this strange plan that she neglects Mr. Lowther, who, to everyone's surprise, soon becomes engaged to the senior school science instructor Miss Lockhart. During this time, another girl, the "rather mad" and delinquent Joyce Emily Hammond, is sent by her rich parents to Blaine as a last resort. She desperately wants to attach herself to the Brodie set, but they won't have anything to do with her. Miss Brodie, however, will. She spends time with Joyce Emily one-on-one, and privately encourages her in her desire to run away and fight in the Spanish Civil War under Francisco Franco's Nationalist banner (Miss Brodie admires Franco, who like Mussolini is a fascist). Swiftly and shockingly, Joyce Emily does so, only to be killed when the train she is travelling in is attacked. The school holds a remembrance service for her.

The Brodie girls, having turned seventeen and upon entering their final year at Blaine, begin to drift apart. Mary Macgregor and Jenny Gray leave before taking their final exams, Mary to become a typist, Jenny to enroll at a school of dramatic arts. Monica Douglas becomes a scientist, and Eunice Gardiner becomes a nurse and marries a doctor.

Rose makes a good marriage, and easily shakes off Miss Brodie's influence. Sandy decides to pursue psychology. During this period, both Sandy and Rose, now eighteen years of age, continue to go to Mr. Lloyd's house to model for him. One day, alone with Mr. Lloyd while his wife and children are on holiday, Sandy commences a love affair with him, usurping Rose's role in Miss Brodie's plan (Rose never had any erotic feelings for Mr. Lloyd, nor he for her). The two carry on for five weeks during the summer and even once Mr. Lloyd's wife and children return home. But by the end of the year Sandy loses interest in Mr. Lloyd as a man, becoming more and more exclusively interested in his painter's mind, as well as in his obsession with Miss Brodie as it is documented on his canvases. She eventually leaves Teddy altogether, but takes with her his Roman Catholic beliefs.

That following autumn, Sandy approaches Miss Mackay and announces for reasons never made explicit that she is interested "in putting a stop to Miss Brodie." She tells Miss Mackay about Miss Brodie's side interest in fascist politics and suggests that by following up on this lead Miss Mackay will at last have the incriminating evidence she needs to dismiss Miss Brodie. And indeed, presumably connecting Miss Brodie to Joyce Emily's running away, Miss Mackay at last succeeds in forcing Miss Brodie to retire. Sandy's betrayal is complete, and it won't be until the end of World War II, when she is near death, that Miss Brodie can bring herself to think that it was her most intimate confidant Sandy who betrayed her. By middle age, Sandy becomes the author of a famous psychological treatise entitled "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace" as a Roman Catholic nun called Saint Helena of the Transfiguration.

Over the years, she receives several visitors at her convent, mostly Brodie girls, and invariably, the conversation turns to Miss Brodie: Sandy suggests that Miss Brodie was silly but also an enlarging presence, yet she also suggests that neither she nor any other Brodie girl owed Miss Brodie any loyalty. One day, a young man comes to the convent to interview Sandy about her famous work in psychology, asking her at one point, "What were the main influences of your schooldays, Sister Helena? Were they literary or political or personal? Was it Calvinism?" Sandy responds: "There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime"; it would seem that she of all the Brodie set was most deeply influenced by their strange, charismatic teacher. It is also ironic that she who is the closest to Miss Brodie betrayed her.

### **3.3 Themes and Techniques in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

**Love:** Miss Jean Brodie decides to forgo her love life so that she could be committed to bringing up her girls to become the crème de la crème in the society. While she was still the girls' teacher, Miss Jean Brodie becomes emotionally involved with two teachers namely: Mr Lowther, the music teacher and Mr Lloyd, the arts teacher. It is obvious that she is truly in love with Mr Lloyd but she goes ahead in a relationship with Mr. Lowther. She also recounts her experiences with her old lover. The theme of love recurs in the novel.

**Loyalty and Betrayal:** Though Miss Mackay the headmistress tries her best to get information from the girls so that she could get rid of Jean Brodie from the school, the girls refuse to betray Miss Brodie. They remain loyal to her even after their promotion to upper class. At some point, Jean Brodie decides to test the girls' loyalty and concludes that Sandy Stranger is the most loyal of the girls. However, the supposedly most loyal Sandy betrays her though Jean Brodie is unaware of this. Sandy does not think that she owes Miss Brodie any loyalty.

**Obsession with Control:** Miss Jean Brodie is determined to have a set of young girls that would become members of the upper class in the society. Her obsession for control robs the girls of their individuality and uniqueness as they all begin to look and behave like her. In an attempt to maintain her hold on the girls' lives, she assigns roles and future professions to each of them. She does not think that she should allow them to choose for themselves but thrusts her opinion about life on them.

**Education:** As a teacher, Miss Jean Brodie knows how important education is to young minds and its effect on what they eventually grow up to become. Her decision to jettison the formal curriculum for an informal one creates a gulf in their education. Once they move to a higher class, they are unable to meet up academically because of the imbalance. Teaching them from personal experiences and history gives the girls a restricted form of education which deprives them of the benefits of mainstream formal education. Miss Brodie's personality becomes the major factor in the shape that their lives take in future as we see in the examples of Mary Macgregor and Sandy Stranger.

## **Techniques**

**Loss of Structure and Fragmentation:** As a typical postmodernist novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* does not have a structured or linear plot. Stories are narrated in a disjointed manner and the reader is left to make sense of them by making connections. The narration of events in the novel is fragmented. As a postmodern writer, Spark ensures that the inner consciousness of characters is unknown. The reader is left to decide and conclude on what is "true" about the characters and their experiences. We do not know the thought of Miss Jean Brodie or the thoughts of any of her students. We only know that Brodie is a complex and eccentric character that wants to shape the lives of the girls. We are unable to determine why she behaves in this way or how she has become this kind of character. This leaves us with many questions unanswered, more unknown than known. Her world like the narration is fragmented and conclusions are difficult to draw.

### **3.4 Characterisation in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

**Miss Brodie:** Miss Brodie, with her dark Roman profile, is a charismatic but unorthodox teacher at the Blaine Junior school. She doesn't instruct her girls in history and arithmetic, say, so much as she shares with them poetry, makeup tips, the virtues of fascism, her own romantic history and the like. Although she is a woman of culture and even has something of an artistic nature, Miss Brodie can also be dogmatic, manipulative, and cruel. Just as the predestining God of Calvinism elects the few to salvation, so does

Miss Brodie elect six of her pupils to become her special girls, girls whom she develops culturally and confides in, and who in turn loyally admire her—these six girls make up the “Brodie set”.

Miss Brodie’s power over those around her—not just her pupils but also the men in her life—stems in part from her feeling that she is in her prime, that is, at the height of her charisma both sexual and otherwise. Indeed, she loves the Blaine art teacher Mr. Lloyd and he loves her, but, as he is married, Miss Brodie renounces her love for him, becoming intimate instead with the singing teacher Mr. Lowther. Nonetheless, she subtly grooms the instinctual Rose Stanley to have a love affair with Mr. Lloyd as her proxy, and she grooms her favorite, the insightful Sandy, to serve as her informant in regards to the affair. In this way, Miss Brodie plays God, determining the course of fate. But, in the end, all of Miss Brodie’s plots go awry: it is Sandy, not Rose, who ends up sleeping with Mr. Lloyd, and it is Sandy who betrays Miss Brodie to the Blaine headmistress, for Miss Brodie in her enthusiasm for fascism encouraged a Blaine student named Joyce Emily to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

So it is that Miss Brodie is forced into retirement, a pale memory in the minds of her special girls save Sandy, who both recognizes that Miss Brodie had an enlarging effect on her, but also doubts whether Miss Brodie was worthy of her loyalty.

**Sandy Stranger:** Miss Brodie’s favorite and most intimate confidant, Sandy is highly imaginative and deeply interested in analyzing human behavior—she has “got insight,” as Miss Brodie tells her. She becomes deeply, even obsessively interested in Miss Brodie’s love affairs, going so far as to create fictionalized accounts of them with her best friend Jenny when the two are only young girls. But fiction later becomes fact when, in her eighteenth year, Sandy seduces Miss Brodie’s beloved Mr. Lloyd—in part because she is interested in his obsession with Miss Brodie and with his Roman Catholicism—thereby becoming her teacher’s proxy in the affair (a role Miss Brodie herself anticipated that Rose Stanley would fill).

Nonetheless, and rather surprisingly, Sandy also at last betrays Miss Brodie, suggesting as she does to the Blaine headmistress Miss Mackay that Miss Brodie’s interest in fascism may well provide grounds for forcing her to retire. And so it does. Why Sandy would betray Miss Brodie, however, remains one of the novel’s most haunting open questions. After graduating from Blaine, she converts to Roman Catholicism and becomes a nun known as Sister Helena. When asked what her greatest girlhood influence was, Sandy, now in middle age, responds: “There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.”

**Rose Stanley:** Rose is a member of the Brodie set, an appealing blonde “famous for sex” in her later years at the Marcia Blaine School even though has no curiosity about sex whatsoever, never talks about sex, and does not indulge in it presumably until marriage. Miss Brodie holds out hope that Rose, along with Sandy, will prove to be the “the *crème de la crème*” of her pupils, and claims that Rose herself has instinct, a quality she admires in her. Indeed, when Rose begins modeling for Mr. Lloyd’s portraits, Miss Brodie gets it into her head that the girl will have a love affair with him as her, Miss

Brodie's proxy, and she plans for this to come about; but it never does, for Mr. Lloyd has no sexual interest in Rose and Rose merely poses for him because she needs the money to fund her "addiction" to the cinema (i.e. movies). After graduating from Blaine, Rose marries well and, in contrast to Sandy, shakes off "Miss Brodie's influence as a dog shakes pond-water from its coat."

**Mary Macgregor:** She is the scapegoat among the girls and the least loved. Mary does not have the sexual appeal that Rose possesses or the intelligence of Sandy. She seems to be an "extra baggage" in the novel whose life is of no consequence, a girl who seems to get blamed for every offence committed. We are not surprised to see that her stupidity in later years climaxes with her death in a hotel fire. Brodie did not show kindness to Mary and members of her set were also cruel to her.

**Jenny Gray:** She is the best friend of Sandy and co-author of a fictionalized romantic tale from the stories Miss Brodie had told them about her fiancé Hugh Carruthers. Later both of them make up stories about the female detective who interviews Jenny about the man who exposed himself to her. She sings beautifully and intends to be an actress. Her character is used to demonstrate that the efforts of Miss Brodie in a way are not wasted. The fact that she embraces the arts attests to this.

**Mr Lowther:** He is the school's music teacher. He resembles Mr. Lloyd but is less attractive, long-bodied and short-legged, he also owns a rich estate in Cramond. He is sexually attracted to Miss Brodie and they both are involved sexually for some time. However, to show that sexual attraction is not enough to build a strong relationship on, he chooses Miss Lockhart, the beautiful science teacher, as wife.

**Monica Douglas:** A member of the Brodie set famous for her mathematical ability and violent anger. After graduating from Blaine, Monica goes into science and marries a man who later demands a separation from her, after she throws a live coal at his sister.

**Eunice Gardiner:** A member of the Brodie set famous for "her spritely gymnastics and glamorous swimming," Eunice is at first quiet, and so it is strange that she joins the Brodie set at all; but she soon becomes very entertaining to the other girls, and fits right in. After graduating, Eunice becomes a nurse and marries a doctor.

**Mr. Teddy Lloyd:** The art teacher at Blaine, Mr. Lloyd is handsome and sophisticated, half Welsh and half English, with red and gold hair. He lost his left arm during World War I. While they are colleagues together at Blaine, Mr. Lloyd falls deeply in love with Miss Brodie and she with him. But Mr. Lloyd is a married man, and so Miss Brodie renounces her love for him altogether, bestowing it instead on Mr. Lowther. So strong is Miss Brodie's love for Teddy despite this, however, that she arranges a plot whereby her student Rose Stanley is to become Mr. Lloyd's lover in her stead. So strong is Mr. Teddy Lloyd's love for Miss Brodie, in turn, that all of the people he paints portraits of, including the Brodie girls, resemble Miss Brodie herself. Ultimately, Miss Brodie's plot

fails: it is not Rose but Sandy who ends up having a love affair with Mr. Lloyd, in part because Sandy is so interested in Teddy's obsession with Miss Brodie—an obsession which she shares.

**Miss Lockhart:** The Senior science teacher at Blaine, Miss Lockhart is, in contrast to Miss Brodie, a teacher dedicated to nothing more than teaching her subject rigorously and well. She does not regard the girls in her class as personalities but as students, which they appreciate. Toward the end of the novel, Miss Lockhart becomes engaged to Mr. Lowther.

**Joyce Emily Hammond:** A rich and delinquent girl sent to Blaine as a last resort, Joyce Emily very much wants to attach herself to the Brodie set, but the other girls resist her. Nonetheless, Miss Brodie makes time for Joyce Emily, going so far as to urge this “rather mad” girl to run off to fight for Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Joyce Emily does so and dies in that conflict, a fact which Miss Mackay later uses against Miss Brodie in forcing her to retire.

**Miss Ellen and Alison Kerr:** The two sewing teachers at Blaine, the Kerr sisters are meek Calvinists who begin housekeeping for Mr. Lowther, and it seems as though one might even marry him. However, Miss Brodie crushes their prospects by becoming intimate with the singing teacher herself. Later, Miss Ellen Kerr discovers Miss Brodie's nightdress under one of Mr. Lowther's pillows, which she tells Miss Mackay about. But as much as she wishes to dismiss Miss Brodie, Miss Mackay recognizes that the nightdress is insufficient proof of scandal to justify Miss Brodie's dismissal.

**Miss Gaunt:** A gaunt woman, and the sister of a Calvinist minister, Miss Gaunt substitutes for Miss Brodie at Blaine in the autumn of 1931. Unlike Miss Brodie's influence on the classroom, Miss Gaunt's presence in the classroom subtracts, in her students' minds, from the sexual significance of things. She becomes like a sister to Miss Ellen and Alison Kerr and advises them to make their arrangement with Mr. Lowther permanent, but due to Miss Brodie's intervention this does not come to pass.

### 3.5 A Postmodern Reading of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

The novel entails core postmodernist themes and attributes. The life of Jean Brodie is characterized by constant feeling of loneliness and isolation. However, a proper modernist template will be to leave Jean Brodie in the state of loneliness and alienation from the society. She obviously has a separate view of what education is and how education should be delivered from her headmistress and a larger number of teachers in the school. However, instead of ending the novel on the note that she is unsuccessful in her attempt to connect with other characters in the novel, her loneliness becomes a



creative tool that Muriel Spark plays on to make the novel an enjoyable read. Miss Jean Brodie raises a set of young girls and imparts her knowledge of life into them, and instead of attempting a connection with the girls she diverts the energy and passion into raising them into crème de la crème. A major feature of postmodern writing is the art of playing with the theme of loneliness, despair and helplessness that modernist writing is associated with.

The purpose of the novel is not plain existentialist as most modernist novels are known to be. The focus is a mixture of characterization and existentialism. Leading modernists argue that characterization should be the focus of a proper novel and that character creating should be done through the use stream of consciousness. In this novel, the existential nature of Miss Jean Brodie herself is parodied. Miss Jean Brodie's existentialist view is for art and beauty but the girls did not ultimately become what she might have hoped for. None of the girls turned out to be the "crème de la crème" and none even ends as a lover of art.

The novel also engages the day-to-day challenges of stereotyped educational system which Miss Jean Brodie defies to form a curriculum of her own. She teaches the girls about her experiences and etiquette. She is rarely seen teaching them any orthodox class subject. She only keeps the subject titles on the class room board in case the headmistress or other teachers in the school comes along. The difference in view of the headmistress and Miss Jean Brodie was highlighted but rather in a pseudo-confrontational manner. The headmistress and Miss Brodie were never seen arguing in the novel. The confrontations were only talked about. This difference in opinion is played with by Muriel Sparks as a form of mockery of the system. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also highlights the experience of people living in the ghetto as Miss Brodie takes the girls on a walk; but much attention was never given to why they are the way they are except for the fact that the period was the time after the war.

In conclusion, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* embodies postmodernist attributes that gives the novel a deeper understanding. Reading the novel from a postmodernist standpoint gives a further insight into the background of the novel and the circumstances that could have informed the writing.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has been studied as a novel that focuses on fascism. Her desire to control the lives of the Brodie set at an impressionable age of ten makes Jean Brodie discard the curriculum and mold the girls' lives in a way that destroys their individual personality and worldview. As a postmodernist novel, it draws the reader's attention to the importance of education in the development of young minds.

#### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Examine at least three themes explored in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit, you have studied the life of Muriel Spark and her novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Through the depiction of characters and discussion of some of the author's concerns and style, you are able to see a postmodernist representation of the twentieth century English society.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Justify the classification of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as a postmodernist novel.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Spark, M. (2000). *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. London: Penguin Group.

Scanlan, M. (2000). "The recuperation of history in British and Irish fiction" in B.W. Shaffer B.W (ed) *A companion to the British and Irish novel: 1945- 2000*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 144- 159.

## **UNIT 4: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day***

### **Content**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Kazuo Ishiguro
3.2	<i>The Remains of The Day</i>
3.3	Themes And Techniques in <i>The Remains Of The Day</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the postmodernist writers who are preoccupied with how language mediates reality. His novel *The Remains of the Day* is about Butler Steven's life and how he narrates his entire life as a butler and what he thinks of the remains of his life. In this unit, you will be introduced to Kazuo Ishiguro and his novel *The Remains of the Day* especially how much of postmodernism we can find in the novel.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- summarise Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*;
- discuss the postmodernist themes and techniques in the text; and
- relate these themes and techniques to what obtains in modernist texts.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on November 8, 1954, to Shizuo (an oceanographer) and Shizuko (a homemaker). When he was six, his family moved to England where his father was commissioned by the British government to work on a project. Although the family expected to stay only a few years, his father's work kept them there much longer until England had truly become their home. His novels include: *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *Nocturnes*. All of his novels have earned critical acclaim. Ishiguro's novels deal with self-deception, regret, and personal reflection. In 1995, Ishiguro was appointed as a member of the Order of the British Empire for his contributions to literature especially contemporary English fiction.

### 3.2 *The Remains of the Day*

*The Remains of the Day*, tells the story of Stevens, an old English butler who has been working at Darlington Hall since the beginning of his career as a butler. At the start of the novel, he narrates how he is encouraged to take a vacation by his employer, Mr. Farraday, an American gentleman who believes Stevens needs a break from his duties. Stevens is also of the opinion that the suggestion will work well with his desire to visit a former colleague at Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton now Mrs. Benn, residing in West England. Twenty years earlier, they had worked at Darlington Hall together, he as Butler, and she as the Housekeeper. She left Darlington Hall when she got married and now twenty years after, she is divorced because of the challenges she had in her marriage especially as she really was not in love with her husband. Stevens looks forward to having her back because after the Second World War, it has become increasingly difficult getting enough hands to work at the estate. An interesting point to note is that though this is an important reason for wanting her back at Darlington Hall, an overriding reason is that Steven has always been in love with Miss Kenton. On her part too, Miss Kenton has tried many times to make Steven know that she loves him and that they should be together. So, he hopes that the woman who is now free of the burden of marriage will oblige and return to the Hall.

The novel is the diary that Stevens keeps in his one week trip to visit Miss Kenton and during this trip Stephens recollects and reflects deep on his past. He aims at coming to terms with his life's choices and his ultimate direction. Stevens finally makes the last part of his journey to meet Miss Kenton. But when Stevens finally does meet her, with the hope of bringing her back to Darlington Hall and perhaps to confess his love, he finds that the spirit has gone out of her. She reveals that she is going back to her husband. Even though she may not love him, he has always been there for her. Stevens realizes he is too late and sends her off with well-wishes and immediately makes plans to return to Darlington Hall to fulfill the remains of his day.

### 3.3 Themes and Techniques in *The Remains Of The Day*

#### Themes

**Professionalism:** The major theme in *The Remains of the Day* is that of professionalism. Stevens is obsessed with his work and he is only interested in reaching the standard of the traditional butlers who serve their masters without the hindrance of emotional or family attachments. In the narrative of Stevens it is clear that he loves Miss Kenton who he refused to call by her married name. He loves her but because he is against employee relationships or marriage, he allows her to marry a man she is clearly not in love with. This sense of duty makes him neglect his father who is an old Butler at his deathbed in order to attend to Lord Darlington's visitor. Stevens is against bantering but because it seems it is a requirement for him so he decides to learn the art of bantering. His quest for professional success leads to emotional and psychological repression and aloneness.

**Dignity:** The issue of dignity is also pertinent in the novel. Stevens is concerned about the dignity of his boss, Lord Darlington and that of his own as a Butler. His decisions and interactions in the story are shaped by his opinion of what dignity is to him. When he is asked about the issue of dignity during his travels, Stevens' reply shows that he takes dignity as a very important virtue in his profession but after he leaves these people, he ponders more about it.

**Unrequited Love:** From the stories that Stevens tells, it is clear that Miss Kenton loved him when they were co-workers in Darlington Hall. However, because Stevens believes that it is unprofessional to get romantically involved with a co-worker, he never reciprocated. Unfortunately for him, when he is ready to show his love to her, she is at the point of returning to her former husband. At the end, the love they would have shared never materialises.

## **Techniques**

**Flashback:** *The Remains of the Day* is mostly a form of review of events that took place in the past. The main character, Stevens tries to bring the reader up to date on the issues that led to the present-his impending trip to the United States of America and the state of affairs in Darlington Hall. As a result, there are series of flashbacks where he fills the reader in. This technique causes him to digress from one issue to another as he tries to explain himself. Being a dedicated butler and professional, he pays great attention to details including giving information on every aspect of the preparation for his journey. It is through the use of flashback that the reader gets to know that Stevens must have "overdone" his professionalism to the point that he fails to gain those things that are important to him in life. For example, when he recollects his working relationship with Miss Kenton, he discovers that he should probably have given her some attention when she showed interest in him.

**Humour:** In *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro introduces the issue of banter which is against the all serious and official nature of employer/ employee relationship in traditional English society. Stevens has always been a strict professional butler who thinks he should not be unnecessarily familiar with his boss or employer. Meanwhile, his American employer, Mr. Farraday, coming from a different culture thinks otherwise. The author plays on the cultural difference to poke fun at the rigidity of the English culture. It is banter that eventually infuses humour in the narrative. At the end of the novel, Steven changes his view and decides that banter is the key to human warmth

**Fragmentation:** The plot of *The Remains of the Day* is fragmented plot because of the diary form adopted in the narrative. There are so many different stories that are told to serve two purposes. The first is to let the reader know about things that have happened before the narration started. The second purpose that these stories serve is to explain Stevens' values and character. For example when he views the serenity of Salisbury, he links the quietness of the environment to those qualities that he considers cardinal to his

profession. He recalls stories that exemplify each quality. This invariably takes the reader from the present to some disjointed past. In addition, the novel has no chronological plot. Rather, all issues are subject to the drift that takes us from one strand to another. For instance, the record of Stevens' motoring trip is interjected by a lot of digressions.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Narrate four stories told by Stevens and discuss their functions in the novel.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The novel to a great extent shows the changes that have taken place in the mid-twentieth century English society. As a butler, he struggles to cope with the informal way Mr Farriday interacts with him. Stevens' problem is his inability to adapt to some of these changes. Since most part of the narrative deals with the past, the novel also shows how the past shapes the present and the importance of balancing efficiency with practicability.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have been introduced to Kazuo Ishiguro and his novel *The Remains of the Day*. A synopsis of the novel was done and the themes and postmodernist techniques in the novel were discussed.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Discuss Stevens' professionalism and its connection to the regrets he has towards the end of the novel.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Barth, J. (1996). "The literature of replenishment" in *Essentials of the theory of fiction*, eds Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy, 2nd edition. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ishiguro, K. (1989). *The remains of the day*. London: Faber and Faber.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Malpas, S. (2005). *The postmodern: the new critical idiom*. New York: Routledge.

Marcus, A. (2006). "Kazuo Ishiguro's *The remains of the day*: the discourse of self-deception". *Journal of literature and the history of ideas*. Vol. 4:1, pp 129-150.

Marshall, P. J. (1996). *The Cambridge illustrated history of the British empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**MODULE 3**  
**THE TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH POETS**

This module will expose you to different modernist poets to demonstrate that the challenge for something new, experimental, and innovative in the wake of a changing world also found its way into poetry. In the spirit of modernism, radical poets like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wilfred Owen, W.H Auden and D.H Lawrence among others saw the modes of the poetry of earlier periods (for example renaissance and Victorian poetry) inadequate to describe and evoke the feelings and temperament of the modern age. Their poetry, like modernist novels, was complex and experimental most often without metrical patterns or rhymes. A great number of themes that bothered on real life issues i.e. the poet's experience as well as ordinary men's life and problems were the interests of these poets. The 20<sup>th</sup> century English poetry was poetry of realism mixed with disillusionment and pessimism. The suffering and tragedy that marked the modern life was of great interest to them especially as there was no longer any spiritual essence in the modern life. Modern poets were also interested in nature because this was the beauty and essence they could easily identify with.

### **Module 3: The Twentieth Century English Poets**

Unit 1: T.S Eliot and "The Wasteland"

Unit 2: W.H Auden's Pessimistic and Political Poetry

Unit 3: The Poetry of W.B Yeats

Unit 4: Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"

## **UNIT 1- T.S Eliot and "The Wasteland"**

### **Content**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 T.S. Eliot
  - 3.2 T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"
  - 3.3 Themes and Techniques in T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland"
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

T.S Eliot's "The Wasteland" is an experimental poem and it is a departure from Victorian or traditional in several ways. In "The Wasteland", Eliot shows that there is no sense of vitality or life in the modern society and that the relation between man and his spirituality is lost to modernity and its attendant experiences.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:



- summarise “The Wasteland”
- discuss the themes and the techniques of T.S Eliot’s *The Wasteland*

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)

T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis Missouri and he is arguably the most influential poet of the 20th century. He attended Smith Academy in St. Louis and Harvard but he could not finish his studies in Harvard due to the First World War. His works are much influenced by the poetry of Dante, John Donne and John Webster. T.S. Eliot was seen as a highly intellectual and difficult poet. He was a playwright, literary critic and poet. He is believed to have transformed how poetry was being written and understood. “The Wasteland” published in 1922 was seen as the longest poem in English language. T.S. Eliot published “Four Quartets” in 1943. His works are experimental in style and diction. In his poems, Eliot depicts ugly realities of urban life and decline of Western civilization using fragmentary images. In most of the poems Eliot wrote after 1927 when he joined the Church of England, he often stressed belief in spiritual comfort. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

#### 3.2 T.S.Eliot’s “The Waste Land”

“The Wasteland” has five sections, “The Burial of the Dead”, “A Game of Chess”, “The Fire Sermon”, “Death By Water”, and “What the Thunder Said”. This analysis will only dwell on the first section “The Burial of the Dead”. “The Wasteland” is about spiritual dryness or poverty. There is futility in attempts to bring back relief and value to human life especially his day to day activities. In the poem, Eliot dwells on myth and other religious and spiritual material to show that religion is able to help man in the chaos of modern life that is marked with alienation and emptiness. “The Wasteland” is about the difference between different kinds of life and death. In “The Burial of the Dead” the poet persona talks about the attractiveness of death and how difficult it is for people to come back from the experience of death that marks the life of the people in wasteland. Men live in a dream world and are afraid to face reality.

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain.  
 Winter kept us warm, covering  
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
 A little life with dried tubers.

Though April is the sweet month of rebirth, it is the most joyful season but it is the cruellest, it brings hope to the wasteland and it mocks the people there because it reminds them of what they had before and the need to have it back. The people do not wish to have a new life; they prefer the winter that makes them seek forgetfulness, a season that

does not call for activity or action. They detest the rain that April brings though it brings new life and regeneration.

In the second section of “The Burial of the Dead”, the poet persona talks again about the rootlessness, desolation and futility in modern life.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?  
Son of man  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief  
And the dry stone no sound of water.

There is barrenness and spiritual death in modern civilization. The modern soul finds no relief or comfort in his environment. There is biblical allusion in the above lines from the book of Ezekiel, Isaiah and Ecclesiastes.

In the third section of “The Burial of the Dead”, the poem shows that the height of joy, fulfilment or meaning in life is like death. This section is about a young and beautiful hyacinth girl who has been forgotten by her lover. The following commentary is instructive of the reason behind Eliot’s difficult style in “The Waste Land”:

Eliot’s poem, like the anthropological texts that inspired it, draws on a vast range of sources. Eliot provided copious footnotes with the publication of *The Waste Land* in book form; these are an excellent source for tracking down the origins of a reference. Many of the references are from the Bible: at the time of the poem’s writing Eliot was just beginning to develop an interest in Christianity that would reach its apex in the *Four Quartets*. The overall range of allusions in *The Waste Land*, though, suggests no overarching paradigm but rather a grab bag of broken fragments that must somehow be pieced together to form a coherent whole. While Eliot employs a deliberately difficult style and seems often to find the most obscure reference possible, he means to do more than just frustrate his reader and display his own intelligence: He intends to provide a mimetic account of life in the confusing world of the twentieth century. (<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/eliot/section2.rhtml>)

### 3.3 Themes and Techniques in T.S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland”

It is good to bear in mind that Eliot dwells a lot on antithesis and paradoxes in this poem as well as biblical and historical allusions which inform the themes that we can find in the poem. The themes discussed below are not exhaustive of the themes we can find in the poem but they are some of its central themes. You are advised to read the poem and come up with suitable themes for the issues the poet raised in the poem.

**Death and Rebirth:** From the title of the sections “The Burial of The Dead” and “Death by Water”, one could deduce that the theme of death is central to them. Death is shown as

the end of existing and as the phenomenon that is always present with living beings. The example in Section V substantiates this point “He who was living is now dead/We who were living are now dying/With a little patience (Lines 7-10). The images of Christ’s death calls to mind the fact that by dying there is hope for whatever is dead as there is hope for a new life. By referring to different seasons and what they connote, Eliot shows that though there should be changes, everything is really cyclical and it does not change much. Water is used as a symbol for rebirth but it could also cause death. For Eliot, death and rebirth are interwoven as there really is no rebirth without first dying, alluding to Christ’s death and resurrection.

**Love and Lust:** Matters of sexuality are prominent in “The Wasteland” and are the cause of the problem that we can see in “The Fire Sermon”. Eliot talks about a female typist and a carbuncular man, and other instances of sexual relations. Though lust and illicit sex might be sinful, Eliot as seen in this poem seems to prefer it to passivity and coldness. Sex produces and renews life as against infertility and depression that its absence brings. It brings excitement being an antidote for boredom and tiredness as seen in these lines:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
Which still are unreproved, if undesired,  
Flushed and decided, he assaults her at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference. (Section III, Lines 63-71).

In “The Burial of The Dead” and “A Game of Chess” love is seen as being destructive. This could also be seen in the third section of “The Burial of the Dead” where the hyacinth girl is forgotten. According to Brooks, the love of the past (traditional) was enduring and real but the love in modern times is transitory and unreal. But the love we see in “The Wasteland” is rotten and the sex is only for selfish reasons.

**Alienation:** the people in the wasteland find it difficult to express their feelings. They are locked up in their worlds, imprisoned with no hope of getting released especially as they are self-centred. In the second section, “The Game of Chess”, where a process of seduction is described, the woman desperately calls on her lover to say something, probably to calm her nerves but nothing comes out from the entreaty:

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. “What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? “I never know what you are thinking. Think”

Even here, where the lovers are expected to communicate their thoughts to each other, there seems to be a break and a palpable coldness permeates the atmosphere. In addition, the sounds produced by humans are “sighs” and “cries” while the gramophone and mandoline produce the music that breaks the silence in Section III.

**Experimentation:** Eliot makes use of complex technique, language, and unusual poetry length. The poem relies heavily on many religious, historical, and philosophical inspirations which includes the Bible, the legend of the holy grail and Greek legends, regeneration of myths and so be found in the poem comes from the many sources that Eliot borrowed from in his poem.

**Fragmentation:** The poem is fragmentary and shifts between different issues, speakers and occurrences. For example, the first part of Section II dwells on the seduction of the aristocrat woman, in a scene of opulence while the second part moves to a poor neighbourhood where two women discuss another woman. The fragmentary nature of the poem makes it difficult to follow and understand. In order to have a good grasp of the flow of the poem, one needs some basic knowledge of the allusions that are made.

**Repetition:** Words, phrases and clauses are repeated throughout the poem, creating a feeling of boredom and adding to the pessimistic outlook of the poem. It seems no progress is made, things are almost static, and nothing new happens. From the first set of lines in the second part of Section II to the end, the statement “HURRY UP PLS IT’S TIME” is repeated. The attendant at the bar urges the women to round off their conversation but he is ignored till the end where they round off and bid each other goodnight, almost endlessly:

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

Good night, ladies, good night, good night.

Though these lines are allusions to Ophelia’s parting words in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, they also attest to the significance of repetitions in Eliot’s modernist oeuvre in the poem.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“There is little or no difference in how Eliot portrays death and life in *The Wasteland*.” Discuss.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Brooks, C. (1948). “The wasteland: an analysis.” *T.S Eliot*. Ed B. Rejan. New York: Funk and Wagnall’s.

Eliot, T.S.(1922).“The wasteland”in *The Norton anthology of poetry*.Ed. Alexander W. Allison et al. 4<sup>th</sup>edn. New York and London: Norton Anthology, 1996, Pp. 1344 – 56.

“The Challenge of Modernism: Selected Poetry by T.S. Eliot” *Modern and Contemporary Literature*, (2006).Author and Publisher?

## **UNIT 2 – W.H. Auden’s Pessimistic Poetry**

Content

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	W.H. Auden
3.2	“Stop All the Clocks, Cut Off the Telephone”
3.3	Themes in “Stop All the Clocks, Cut Off the Telephone”
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0INTRODUCTION**

Wystan Hugh Auden is one of the modernist poets whose personal experiences and feelings are reflected in their works. In this unit you will be introduced to W.H. Auden and two of his poems - “Stop all the Clocks, Cut off the Telephone” and “September 1, 1939”.

## **2.0OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit you should be able to:

- relate W.H. Auden’s personal life to the poetry discussed in the unit
- analyze the poem by focusing on modernist concerns in the poem

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 W.H. Auden**

WystanHugh Auden was born in 1907 in York, England. He attended Christ Church College, University of Oxford after which he became a school master; he later became a professor of poetry at Oxford before he returned to Christ Church as a writer in residence. He was one of the great poets of the 20th century and his style has been compared to T.S Eliot’s especially for his use of irony and allusions to religious themes. He is asocial and political poet and playwright who depended on the proceeds coming from his poetry for a living. When writing poetry professionally could not sustain him, he had to go into teaching to augment his income. His first poetry collection was published in 1928. He was homosexual and his love life was not really a success. Christopher Isherwood was one of his lovers. Isherwood helped him greatly in his literary career, he wrote three plays and two books with Isherwood before he went on with Chester Kallman who was also a poet and writer and he wrote the poem “Atlantis” for Kallman. He was awarded the King’s Gold Medal for Poetry and his poem “The Age of Anxiety” won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1948. Other poems by Auden include “Lay your Sleeping Head, My Love”, “Miss Gee”, “James Honeyman” “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” and “Musee Des Beaux”. Auden converted to Christianity after the Second World War. He died in 1973.

### **3.2 “Stop All the Clocks, Cut off the Telephone.”**

Excerpt:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.  
Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.(Lines 1-8)

This poem is also known as “Funeral Blues”. The poet persona is in a state of grief as he is mourning the death of close friend. The mood of the poem is that of sadness and grief. From the beginning of the poem we can deduce that the persona is not interested in the normal movement of the day such as the sounds of clocks, telephone, animals or musical instruments. He wants to be alone in the world of his grief; one that he is in as a result of the death of a loved one. He commands that all clocks should be stopped, and they should cut the telephones, the dogs should be stopped from barking and the pianos should be silenced so that he will not be distracted or disturbed from mourning his beloved’s death.

To stop all the clocks and cut the telephones is an impossible task but he wants the entire world to stand still as the sound of the clock will remind him of the futility and brevity of life. He wants the dead to be respected with the muffled drum, with airplanes scribbling the message in the sky for all to see, that a beloved is dead. He would like policemen and public doves, indeed the entire world to mourn this death with him. In the third stanza, the persona shows how important the dead man is to him and how overwhelming his love for him is “he was my north, my south, my east and west”. In line 12, the disappointment and sadness he feels is seen as he “thought love would last forever”. There is a tone of hopelessness and finality in the poem as the persona does not want to see the star again, his world is now without the sun and the moon as he has ordered should be done away with. The poem is full of hyperbolic metaphors like “pour away the sea”, “stop all the clocks”, “pack up the moon”, “dismantle the sun”, to show the depth of the persona’s loss and the meaninglessness that his life is presently experiencing.

### **3.3 Themes in “Stop All the Clocks, Cut Off the Telephone”**

**Death and Grief:** The poem brings up an atmosphere of funeral which is expected to be solemn with mourners paying their last respect to the deceased. The poet persona is trying to come to terms with the death of the man who means a lot to him but who is now no more. He invites the world join him to mourn and even asks that all activities be stopped for the because of his personal loss. In lines 1-4 he says:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

**Pessimism and Futility of Existence:** It is at the occurrence of the death of the beloved that the poet persona realizes that love cannot last forever. The transitory nature of life hits him in the face and this makes him pessimistic about life. He commands using the words ‘stop’, ‘cut’, ‘prevent’ ‘silence’ and in the final line after showing his feelings of sadness and grief claims that he is doing all these “for nothing now can ever come to any good”.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Analyze one of the poems studied in this unit, showing W.H. Auden’s use visual and other forms of imagery.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Auden’s modernism is apparent in the nothingness, emptiness and despair that mark the poems discussed in this unit. The modern world is shown in the age of industrialization as one that has failed to meet the expectations of its inhabitants.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have learnt about W. H Auden as a modernist poet. His poems “Stop all the Clocks, Cut Off the Telephones” and “September 1, 1939” are discussed.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Explain any four themes explored by W. H Auden in his poems.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

- Auden, W. H. (2006). “Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone.” *The Norton Booth*, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays. New York, London: W.W Norton and Company.
- Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature*: Penguin.
- Drabble, M. ed (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hollander, J, Kermode, F eds (1973). *The Oxford anthology of English literature*. 2 Vols. London: Oxford University Press.

## **UNIT 3: The Poetry of W.B. Yeats**

Content



1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	W.B. Yeats
3.2	“The Second Coming”
3.3	Themes and Techniques in “The Second Coming”
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Twentieth Century poetry was also greatly influenced by the World Wars because it mirrors the disorientation and the terrible experiences of the war. The poems express the anger, violence, grief, psychological disorders due to shell shock, and the futility of man’s life. These reactions towards the reality of the war are central to the modernist poetry and they could be seen in some of Yeats’ works especially “The Second Coming”. Other poems by W.B. Yeats include “Easter” “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death” and “Sailing to Byzantium”.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- discuss themes and techniques in Yeats’ “The Second Coming” and “Sailing to Byzantium”
- make a connection between the works of W. B. Yeats and other modernist writers.

## **3.0 MAINCONTENT**

### **3.1 W.B. Yeats**

William Butler Yeats was born in 1865 in Dublin, Ireland to John Butler Yeats an Irish Painter. He went to school in London and Dublin to study painting. He started reading William Shakespeare, John Donne, William Blake and a host of other writers at a young age. He was a poet and a writer who was seen as one of the greatest poets in the 20th century. He devoted his time to writing poetry and drama even as he was interested in the unity and independence of the Irish nation. He married George Hyde- Lees after he had proposed and been rejected before by other women. His works were enriched with the use of myths and symbols which were regarded as complex. He founded the Abbey Theatre which was first known as Irish Theatre with Lady Gregory. His volume of poetry includes, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *The Tower*, *Michael Robartes and the Dancers* and so on. Hewon the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He died in 1939 and W.H Auden wrote an elegy for him “In Memory of W.B Yeats”.

### **3.2 “The Second Coming”**

Yeats "The Second Coming" (1920):  
Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight; somewhere in the sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Yeats' poem is about the change that came about at a particular time. The change is a bad one as it is marked with violence and death. The first six lines of the poem show that the poet is painting a picture of anarchy and chaos where everything is not as it was in time past. The imagery of destruction and impending doom could be seen in the words, "the falcon cannot hear the falconer", "things fall apart the centre cannot hold" and "the blood- rimmed tide is loosed". The situation that is pictured in these lines shows that there will be death and destruction of lives. The poet in the second stanza alludes to the second coming of Christ in the Bible and that the present situation of doom and chaos the society is experiencing could be the signs of the end - time of the world which Christ's coming is about to effect or that there might be a change, a salvation through Christ's coming but the poet is pessimistic about this as the symbol of hope comes in the form of a beast, a creature that has a lion body and the head of a man with a blank gaze that is pitiless as the sun and who slouches to Bethlehem to be changed and reborn.

Yeats' "The Second Coming" shows the modernists disillusionment about grand narratives and structures like religion, the church, traditional values and truths as none of them were justification for wars and other inhuman disasters. There is no longer a centre

or base and though the poet is longing for a replacing structure, there is little or no hope in it.

### **3.3 Themes and Techniques in “The Second Coming”**

**Change:** From the first lines of the poem we could see that there is a drastic change from the realities of the traditional world where life was not marked with nuclear weapons, war and death. The modern world the poet paints here is a place where the falcon cannot hear the falconer, there is no longer reasoning and rationality and this could also mean that the modern world was no longer interested in God and authority that are the voices of caution as a result; the centre that holds everything together is reduced to nothing.

**The effect of war:** The war opened and loosed the blood – rimmed tide as a result, there was the loss of innocence, people kill one another on the war front and both the old and the young participated in the war actively losing their lives, their emotions, and value for life.

**Death and destruction:** In the world the poet paints, there is destruction and death, destruction of values, norms, philosophies and morals as things fall apart and death as the “blood- rimmed tide” is opened. To compound matters, the saviour that comes, comes in the figure of a beast that is slow to action and first slouches towards its own redemption and change and is less concerned about the situation around him with its pitiless and blank gaze.

**The use of imagery:** There is the use of violent visual imagery in the poem which includes: “the widening gyre”, “the blood-dimmed tide is loosed”, the beast that is half man, half lion, the falcon that could not hear the falconer, and so on.

**Metaphor and symbolism:** The metaphors include the falcon and the falconer, the blood – rimmed tide is loosed and so on while the major symbol in the poem is the second coming.

**Allusion:** There is biblical allusion to the Second Coming of Christ and some critics have seen some classical allusion in the poem too.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

From the title of the poem and the image of the beast what do you think is Yeats’s stand on divine intervention?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

W. B Yeats “The Second Coming” captures the concern of the modern world that is far removed from the tranquil and peaceful society that obtained before the war. People no longer believe in God as a result the hope that a saviour will come to change the terrible situation of the modern world is not popular as we can see from the poem that is marked with pessimism and hopelessness. In “Sailing to Byzantium” Yeats concerned himself

with the abandonment of the modern age and the consequent disillusionment it caused to people.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have come across a short biography of W. B Yeats. The poems “The Second Coming” and “Sailing to Byzantium” have been briefly analysed and some of the major themes and techniques in the poems have been discussed.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Examine the depiction of the society of Yeats in “The Second Coming”.

### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature*: Penguin.

Drabble, M. ed (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.

Hollander, J, Kermode, F eds (1973). *The Oxford anthology of English literature*. 2 Vols. London: Oxford University Press.

William Butler Yeats – 402 Poems – Classic Poetry Series. Poemhunter.com. The World’s Poetry Archive, 2012.

## **UNIT 4: Wilfred Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth”**

### **Content**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Wilfred Owen
3.2	“Anthem For Doomed Youth”
3.3	Techniques and Themes In “Anthem For Doomed Youth”
3.4	Similarities and Dissimilarities between W. B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen’s Poetry
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Wilfred Owen is arguably the youngest of all the war poets who lost his life at the war front a week to the end of the First World War. His poetry was known after his death and he is one of the renowned poets of the Twentieth Century English Literature. This unit will discuss his life and his poems “Anthem For Doomed Youth” and “1914”, and the themes and techniques he employed in the poems.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Discuss your impression of the war from the poems especially the poet’s view of the war.
- Discuss the themes and techniques of war that you can find in the poem
- Compare and contrast the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen

## 3.0 MAINCONTENT

### 3.1 Wilfred Owen

Wilfred Owen was born in 1893 and died in 1918. He attended Birkenhead Institute, Shrewbury Technical School and University of London. He developed his love for poetry at an early age. He was a devout Anglican in his early days but he later abandoned his religious zeal. He served in the British army in the First World War and was later diagnosed with shell shock after terrible encounters on the war front. In his poetry, after experiencing the war first hand, he painted the horror of the war in a bid to let civilians and the people who were not directly involved in the war see the terrible effects of the war on soldiers. Some of these poems are “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, “1914”, “Strange Meeting”, “Futility” and “Dulceet Decorum”. He is recognised as a war poet who depicted the war as a waste of lives and discouraged youths from being deceived by the popular saying then that “it is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one’s country” - *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. Birkerts Wilfred Owen also became one of the youths whose lives were cut short as a result of the war.

### 3.2 “Anthem For Doomed Youth”

Excerpt:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

Wilfred Owen's “Anthem for Doomed Youth” relays the poet's anger at the terrible effect of the war as well as the death and suffering that comes in its wake. The poem talks about the death of soldiers and how their deaths will be announced and how their goodbyes or funeral will be. Their deaths are likened to the way cows die. The reality of the war dawns on the poet persona as people are killed and injured. The poem is an anthem to honour the soldiers who died in their youth; they are doomed youths that the World War caused to die in their prime.

The passing-bells in Line 1 is the bell that is used to announce the death of someone and to signal that a soul is passing to the great beyond but these soldier's deaths are not to be announced through the passing-bells but through the monstrous anger of the guns because they died like cattle. Even if the passing-bells are to be rung, they won't be heard as the sounds of the monstrous angry guns will override the sounds of bells. This is ironical because these soldiers lost their lives to the guns and the guns are used to announce their deaths. They are also deprived of religious prayers and bells and the choirs who sing at their funeral are wailing shells. At the funeral, girls hold out flowers to bid them good bye and there is the expression of grief.

### 3.3 Techniques and Themes In Wilfred Owen's “Anthem For Doomed Youth”

**The Use of Contrast:** The poem juxtaposes the traditional/ conventional activities and instruments that attend the mourning and funeral of an ordinary or regular (civilian) man and that of the soldiers who died like cattle, whose death is not new and does not come with grief or regret as soldiers die almost every day on the war front and not much value is attached to these deaths. The solemnity that being in the church and at a funeral calls for is also seen as related in the poem.

**Use of Images:** We have both visual and auditory images in the poem. The visual images include: ‘die as cattle’, ‘anger of the guns’, ‘drawing – down of blinds’, and so on while the auditory images include: ‘passing bells’, ‘rifles rapid rattle’, ‘patter out’, ‘wailing shells’, ‘bugles calling’, and so on.

The central theme in the poem is the waste and emptiness that war brings especially on young and promising soldiers who died in the war.

**Violence and Death:** The war front is about violence on man and the environment present in the course of the war. The sounds of guns and weapons of war will rend the air as well as the screams of the injured and dying. Soldiers die on a daily basis and the reality of the war is all about violence and the death that this violence results in.

**Waste and Futility:** The death of these soldiers and especially the fact that their death and funeral are not marked with the honour that should attend such deaths shows that these deaths are just a waste and that no matter how much these youths strive to defend and stand up their country and what they believe in, their efforts and sacrifice have been and will be just in futility.

### 3.4 “1914”

“1914” is a fourteen-line poem that recounts the catastrophic aftermaths of the First World War. In the poem, the poet traces the progress made in Europe before the outbreak of the war. He also traces how the war disrupted the developments that were being made before the broke out. Owen employs the four European seasons of the year. He adeptly uses the changes that often usher in these seasons to depict the disastrous change that resulted from the First World War. Logically, the poet highlights the classical Greek roots of European civilisation referring to it as spring. Historically, this civilisation found its fulfilment in Roman Empire and Owen refers to it as the “Summer blazed her glory out with Rome” in line ten. The poet then uses autumn to represent modern history which historically is the amazing result of the civilisation that begun in Greek. Finally, the “wild winter of the world” is used to express the outbreak of the First World War which led to the need to start all over. This need is the “new spring” Owen mentions in the last line of the poem.

### 3.5 Themes and Techniques

**Terrible Experiences of War:** The First World War brought disaster, grief, physical and psychological disorder. All of these painful experiences are captured and are described as “... the winter of the world / With perishing great darkness” (Lines 1 and 2).

**Retrogression:** One of the things the First World War caused was decline in Europe, especially. The developmental achievements that were evident in institutions and economies of European countries declined drastically. This backwardness is described as “Rending the sails of progress ...” (Line 5). Further in the poem, Owen paints a clearer picture of the retrogression. He shows, first, how Europe had progressed before the war.

For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,  
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,  
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,  
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.  
But now, for us, wild Winter . . . . (lines 9 – 13)

**Desolation:** After the retrogression and calamities the world experienced, what were left in Europe was ruins. The world, Europe specifically, was desolated. There was a need to start all over, to rebuild all aspects of the continent. This point is made in the last two lines of the poem thus: "... now, for us, wild Winter, and the need / Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed".

**Allusion:** In the poem, Owen alludes to the progression of European civilisation which historically roots from Greece but became refined in Rome. This historical allusion is made thus: "For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece / And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome," (Lines 9 and 10).

**Metaphor:** An extended metaphor is used in the poem. Metaphor is referred to as extended when a comparison or an analogy is sustained through many lines or sections of a poem. The poet sustains references to the decline and death of civilisation, using suggestive words that relate to changes in season. Other metaphors in the poem include: "The foul tornado" (line 3), "the sails of progress" (line 5), "Harvest home" (line 11).

**Symbolism:** Words that are used as symbols of things outside the textual context include: "Spring" (line 9), "Summer" (line 10), "Autumn" (line 11), and "Winter" (line 13).

### **3.6 Similarities and Dissimilarities between W. B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen's Poetry**

**Rhyming Pattern:** In order to break away from tradition, Yeats abandoned the conventional use of meter and other forms of traditional poetic expressions. Instead, he adopts irregular rhythm and conventional speech method, and sometime uses imperfect rhyme (half-rhyme). An imperfect rhyme is a rhyme pattern in which the stressed end vowels or consonants are the same but with slight differences in sound and articulation. Examples of this is 'hold'(/həuld/) and 'world'(/wɜ:rd/) in "The Second Coming" (lines 3 and 4) and 'unless'(/ənles/), 'dress'(/dres/) and 'magnificence'(/magnifnsn/ in "Sailing to Byzantium" (lines 10, 12 and 14) which rhyme in an alternate pattern. The conventional speech method is evident in most poems of Yeats. Owen is more concerned with sound than Yeats. His rhyming pattern differs from the forms Yeats employed. Although Owen also makes use of imperfect rhyme, he is more regular with rhyme and also uses full rhyme (perfect rhyme). For example, in "Anthem For Doomed Youth", 'guns' rhymes in an alternate pattern with 'orisons' (lines 1 and 3), and in "1914", he maintains a regular rhyme pattern of ABBAABBA (Stanza 1) ABBACC (Stanza2).

**Lyricism:** Although the poetry of Yeats is not completely devoid of sound, he cared less about the sound and beauty of poems. Therefore, the poems of Owen are more lyrical than those of Yeats. Unlike Yeats, Owen creates good sound effects through complex patterns of assonance and alliteration. For example, 'i' assonates in a complex manner



(that is in various lines) in “1914” while ‘tt’ alliterates in a complex form in “Anthem For Doomed Youth”.

**Use of Imagery:** Yeats uses frank imagery like that of violent destruction created through metaphoric falcon and falconer amidst whirlwind. Owen is more direct with the irrationality and brutality of the First World War. For example, Owen writes in “1914”: “War broke: and now the Winter of the world / With perishing great darkness closes in” (lines 1 and 2). In “Anthem For Doomed Youth” Owen also writes: “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle” (line1).

**Use of Metaphor:** Yeats uses unconventional metaphors. Unconventional metaphors are metaphors created for the purpose of its momentary use. An example of unconventional metaphor is using ‘midnight’ to refer to ‘end of life’. In Yeats’ “The Second Coming”, an unconventional metaphor is ‘innocence’ (line 6) which refers to the populace and countries of the world that were enticed or coerced into fighting by the major warring countries. Owen uses conventional metaphors when necessary. Conventional metaphors are everyday metaphors like ‘The foul tornado’ in ‘1914’ (line 3). This is not to say that Yeats does not use conventional metaphors.

**Myths and Symbols:** The poetry of Yeats is rich with myths and symbols through which he often alludes to historical or religious events like the symbolic ‘second coming’ in “The Second Coming” and the allusion to the historical greatness of the defunct Byzantium. Probably, due to Owen’s directness, his poetry contains less or no myth. When he uses symbols, the symbols are usually simple ones like ‘Spring’, ‘Winter’, ‘Summer’ and ‘Autumn’ in “Sailing to Byzantium”.

**Tone:** The poetry of Yeats is often an expression of honesty and humility as evident in “Sailing to Byzantium” where the poet personally pleads that his soul be sharpened. The tone of Owen’s poetry is usually lush and sympathetic. This is because Owen presents direct objects that imprint the effects of the Great War on the minds of the audience almost exactly as the war affected people. This therefore means that Yeats is more euphemistic in his presentations.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Justify the classification “Anthem for Doomed Youth” as an example of war poetry.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Wilfred Owen was a modernist poet whose poem shows the extent to which twentieth century poets espoused the nothingness of life and human experience in general.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have gone through a short description of Wilfred Owen’s life and his war poetry especially “Anthem for Doomed Youth” and “1914”. In studying the poems, an

attempt at the summary is made; the themes and techniques in the poems are also explored briefly.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Compare and contrast the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature*: Penguin.

Classic Poetry (2004). Wilfred Owen: poems. PoemHunters: The World's Poetry Archives, Pp. 4.

Drabble, M.ed(1985). *The Oxford companion to English Literature*. London: Oxford University Press.

Eliot, T.S. The Waste Land (1922). *The Norton anthology of poetry*. Ed. Alexander W. Allison et al. 4th edn. New York and London: Norton Anthology, Pp. 1344 – 56.

Gelo, Omar Carlo Gioachino and Erhard Mergenthaler (2011). "Unconventional metaphors and emotional-cognitive regulation in a metacognitive interpersonal therapy". Society for Psychotherapy Research.

Hollander, J, Kermode, F eds (1973). *The Oxford anthology of English literature*. 2 Vols. London: Oxford University Press.

Owen, Wilfred (2006). "Anthem for Doomed Youth." Norton anthology of English literature: Twentieth Century and After. Vol. F. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, Pp1971-2.

## **MODULE 4**

### **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH DRAMA**

This module focuses on Twentieth Century drama. It examines the plays of Samuel Beckett, George Bernard Shaw, Harold Pinter and T.S Eliot. It shows how modernist playwrights made the 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre experimental and how they rejected the conventions of objectivity and realism of the previous century. The playwrights of the period experimented with new forms that defied the conventions of the previous century. Experimentations in plot, language and form as well as ideology defined the drama of the period. Also, long held universal religious notions and dictates were questioned. This module will therefore explore how the drama of the twentieth century stood out in a bid to reflect the life in England in the post-World War period. The module has four units each unit studies a unique attribute of the Twentieth Century Drama. The first unit explores Samuel Beckett's contribution to the Theatre of the Absurd and his play *Waiting for Godot*. The second unit dwells on George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*. A short biography of the playwright is presented and is followed by a summary of the work and discussion of some of its thematic concerns. The third unit concentrates on Harold Pinter's Drama, especially his play *The Homecoming* which is preoccupied with the freedom of women in the modern world. Unit four discusses T. S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

#### **Module 4: Twentieth Century English Drama**

Unit 1: Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd

Unit 2: George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*

Unit 3: Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Unit 4: T.S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*

#### **UNIT 1: Samuel Beckett's Theatre Of The Absurd**

##### **Content**

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Samuel Beckett

3.2 Theatre Of The Absurd And *Waiting For Godot*

3.3 Themes And Techniques In *Waiting For Godot*

3.4 Characterization in *Waiting for Godot*

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

7.0 References/ Further Reading

##### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Samuel Beckett was one of the prominent playwrights and theatre practitioners of the Twentieth century. He was regarded as one of the late modernist writers and one of the

renowned theatre of the absurd dramatists. In this Unit we shall discuss Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting For Godot*.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the Unit you should be able to:

- Explain the phrase “theatre of the absurd”
- Describe the relationship between the thematic concerns and the dramaturgy of *Waiting for Godot* and modernism.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was born in Ireland on April 13, 1906 to William Frank Beckett a civil engineer and May Barclay. While growing up, Samuel Beckett was the outdoor type who often goes out with his brother and cousin and when he is not, he retreats to his tower with a book. Early in his life, his family noticed a certain moodiness and taciturnity about him. He attended Trinity College where he studied English, Italian, and French. He taught at Campbell College and École Normale Supérieure.

He met James Joyce in 1926 and loved his works and James Joyce became a great influence on his own creative works. He travelled around Europe for a while before he settled in Paris. His first published work “Assumption” is a short story which was published in *Transition* a serial edited by Franco-American writer, Eugene Jolas. He won his first literary prize the following year with the poem, “Whoroscope”. He published *Proust* a critical study of Marcel Proust's work and his only long work on criticism.

In 1933, William, Samuel Beckett's father died and due to the closeness they had, the loss devastated Beckett and he went to Tavistock Clinic in London for treatment by the influential psychoanalyst, Dr. Wilfred Brion who also studied him. This was where he attended a lecture by Carl Jung on the “Never Properly Born” which affected much of his subsequent works including *Watt*, *Waiting for Godot* and *All That Fall*.

He married Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, a French woman in 1961. After the World War II he had a critical epiphany premised on his fear of remaining in James Joyce's shadows. That was when he discovered that his own strength lies in writing about impoverishment, lack of knowledge, taking away rather than adding. He had the belief that to not have the desire to acquire more knowledge is the key to having peace. He argued that desire is the source of human misery and that peace will only be possible when desire is removed all together. He was a playwright, novelist and poet who became known for his works that dealt with the traumatic effects of the world wars. He wrote most of his works in French because he found it easier to write without style, that is, without the conventional boundaries of writing in English language. After writing in French, he would later translate them to English. His works include, *Eleutheria*, *Molloy*,

*The Unnamable*, *Happy Days* and so on. However, *Waiting for Godot* is more widely known than other works by him.

He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 for his writing, which – in new forms for the novel and drama – in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation. From his childhood, Beckett was a private person, who enjoyed his solitude. So much was his love for solitude that when his wife heard the news of his Nobel prize award, she described it as a catastrophe for her extremely private husband. This characteristic as well as his various influences and past experiences made him a natural fit into the theme that defined his famous writings as an absurdist. His writings showed the meaninglessness of life in the post World War period and how there is absolutely nothing but frustration and unfulfilled expectations in life.

His philosophy was that man was doomed to be lonely and that even if God were to exist, He would be as lonely and enslaved and as isolated as man is in a cold silent, indifferent universe. So, in his works, especially, *Waiting for Godot* he lampoons the idea of waiting on the supernatural to solve man's problems or as a way of escape from the world's harsh realities. He is described as an agnostic by most critics of his works and the tone of his writing is often pessimistic and enigmatic. He died in 1989 on 22nd of December, five months after his wife.

### **3.2 Theatre of the Absurd and *Waiting for Godot***

The theatre of the absurd points out to the meaninglessness of life. The modern life is shown as an alienated and hopeless one which is void of meaning and full of confusion. The absurdity of human existence and the struggle to make meaning out of the nothingness of life is the major preoccupation of this theatre. Man is depicted as being helpless and hopeless. The drama that is staged in this theatre is an existential drama that shows that the fate of man is nothing and nothing can be done to change this fate. The plot of the absurdist plays are disjointed or fragmented, repetitive, with absurd characters.

The dramatists of the 20th century through their works show that the modern world does not have any God directing its affairs and men are the controllers of their own fate, though this fate cannot be really controlled as a result man's existence is helpless and hopeless. The terrible experience of the world wars which shows that man's life is perpetually threatened and weak largely influenced the thematic preoccupation of these works. The audiences of this theatre were left to draw their individual meanings from the play they had watched because meanings were not obvious or expressly stated. Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and Arthur Adamov are the playwrights who are known as Absurdist playwrights.

In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* two friends Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for the arrival of Godot. While they wait endlessly for Godot for they do not know when he will come, they discuss the essence of waiting for Godot, they both do not know who

Godot is but Vladimir is keen on waiting for Godot. As they wait they disagree, quarrel, try to sleep, eat, and contemplate suicide and act like friends who are frustrated about life. Two minor characters come along and a young boy tells the two friends that Godot will not be coming again that day but will come the next day. The two friends wait but Godot fails to come.

The theatre of the absurd was not a deliberate or conscious movement so it does not have a manifesto or thesis. The term “Theatre of the Absurd” was given by Martin Esslin who saw a sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition in the works of the absurdist playwrights. As a result of this, different absurdist playwrights have their style of writing and ideology which differentiates their works from the other writers. On the whole, their writings, irrespective of the focus or theme, all show the meaninglessness of life and how man is doomed to be lonely.

Samuel Beckett’s works stand out though, because despite the uniqueness of his works, his plays reflect almost all the features of the Theatre of the Absurd. A feature which separates Samuel Beckett from the other absurdist playwrights is that his main concern lies in the polarity of existence. In *Waiting for Godot* as well as some other plays like *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, polarities such as sight /blindness, life/death, present/past, waiting/ not waiting, going/not going, etc. Also, as seen in *Waiting for Godot* (Vladimir and Estragon), the characters in Samuel Beckett’s plays are often grouped in pairs and are presented as a puzzle for the audience to solve. One of the things that surprised critics at the time was the fact that the audience enjoyed Samuel Beckett’s plays which often do not have much meaning and are a complete digression from the usual writing style.

### 3.3 Themes in *Waiting for Godot*

**Existentialism:** The theatre of the absurd is largely informed by the philosophy of existentialism. Through the dialogue of Vladimir and Estragon it will be discovered that they are trying to make sense out of life. While Vladimir believes in supernatural beings so as to be able to make meaning out of life, he religiously waits for Godot to come and help him out of the entrapment that his life is but Estragon believes in what can be seen in the physical, he believes that man is the only person that could make meaning out of his own life and not some supernatural being. The meaninglessness of waiting for Godot, for a hope and substance in life is seen at the end of the play. Almost every other theme like alienation, nothingness of life, anguish and sorrow, helplessness and so on are all to be found under the umbrella theme of existentialism.

**Friendship:** Estragon decides to wait with his friend Vladimir though he does not believe in the coming of Godot but he keeps his friend company especially as they are in the same shoes of existential statis but though Estragon is more rational about their

predicament he stays with his friend to the end when it became clear to both of them that their waiting was for nothing.

### **Use of Symbols in *Waiting for Godot***

The major symbol in *Waiting for Godot* is the invisible character of Godot. Who is Godot? We never knew who or what Godot is throughout the play but it seems this is one thing that the characters are waiting for to affirm their existence in life, to give meaning to who they are. There have been many speculations to who Godot is but the generally acceptable one is that Godot is a supernatural being, maybe God. The tree on the stage which starts which shows little or no sign of life on the first day starts to bring up leaves on the second day is the only symbol of hope throughout the play.

### **3.4 Characterisation in *Waiting for Godot***

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are archetypes that portray the different world views and individual approaches to issues of spirituality, physical limitations and material accumulation.

**Vladimir:** He is also known as Didi. He understands that he needs a supernatural help in order to find meaning and purpose in his life. He is a foil to his friend Estragon who is only concerned about what he can see or feel physically. Because Estragon is only bothered about physical limitations alone, he cannot understand Vladimir's spiritual inclination especially why Vladimir decides to use scriptural verses to explain their physical condition of helplessness. Vladimir looks like someone who does not know what he is doing as there is no physical evidence to support his claims especially as Godot does not show up but his hope that Godot will come is enough to control Estragon and make him join him in waiting for Godot. Vladimir, in a sense, is Estragon's conscience as he keeps him in check and reminds Estragon that his life is nothing without something to look out for. He constantly reminds Estragon that they must wait for Godot thereby changing Estragon's approach to life.

**Estragon:** He is also known as Dodo and is a foil to Vladimir because as Vladimir is concerned about the spiritual and hopes for a change, Estragon is preoccupied with physical limitations and the present. He complains about a sore foot and he is hungry and thirsty every now and then. His physical limitations and sufferings are never ending and his understanding of the world is about his present suffering unlike his friend Vladimir who thinks about the past and the future. Estragon tries to discourage Vladimir from his quest of waiting for Godot but because Vladimir is constant and committed about finding a purpose, he is not dissuaded but waits to the end. Estragon does not know that physical limitations like the sore foot, hunger and thirst and whatever his body craves for are just distractions that take his mind off the purpose of his existence and the nothingness and hopelessness that this existence is about. Vladimir on the other hand has decided to find a meaning to this existence in outside forces, in spiritual beings whose existence is uncertain.

### Self-Assessment Exercise

With close reference to the play, discuss the theme of existentialism in *Waiting for Godot*.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett brings out the absence of God in the modern world where everyman struggles unsuccessfully to find meaning on his own. The play has been regarded as a tragicomedy especially as the characters talk of serious life issues in a comic and light-hearted way.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this Unit you have learnt about Samuel Beckett and his play *Waiting Godot*. In order to understand the play, the theatre of the absurd is briefly examined. The major themes in the work as well as the use of symbolism are also discussed.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How far would you agree that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is an absurdist play?

### 7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

- Beckett, S. (1982). *Waiting for Godot*. Reprint, New York: Grove Press.
- Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature* New York: Penguin Books.
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. "Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd." Cliff's Notes. Accessed 12 June, 2015.
- Drabble, M. (ed.) (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Esslin, M. (1980). *The theatre of absurd*. New York: Penguin Books.
- European Graduate School. "Samuel Beckett Biography." Online Library. Accessed 12 June, 2015.
- Faulkner, P. (ed.). (1986). *A modernist reading: modernism in England 1910-1930*. London: Batsford.
- Helsa, D. H. (1971). *The shape of chaos. An interpretation of the art of Samuel Beckett*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Lodge, D. (1977). *The modes of modern writing: metaphor, metonymy and the typology of modern literature*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Murdoch University. "The Absurd and Beckett...A Brief Encounter." <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/serge/Research.htm> Accessed 12 June, 2015
- Ward, A.C. (1956). *Twentieth-century literature 1901-1950*. 12th edn. London: Methuen.

## UNIT 2: George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

### Content



- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 George Bernard Shaw
  - 3.2 *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
  - 3.3 Themes in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.
  - 3.4 Characterization in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Self- Assessment Questions
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

George Bernard Shaw was interested in how people survived the harsh economic realities of the modern world. As a successful playwright, Shaw depicts life as he knows it and attacks social hypocrisy while disregarding conventional approach to writing.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Discuss the treatment of female characters in the play
- Relate the themes in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* to modernist concerns.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 George Bernard Shaw**

George Bernard Shaw was born in July 1856 in Dublin, Ireland to George Carr Shaw who was a civil servant and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, a professional singer. He was the youngest child of the family and though he was first tutored by his Uncle who was a cleric, his education was irregular. He developed an early animosity to schools and schoolmasters, tagging the school as a prison and turnkey meant to prevent the children from disturbing their parents. He was not a successful novelist but made his mark as a successful playwright. He was a dramatist, literary critic and social propagandist. George Bernard Shaw stood out in the period for his role in portraying the economic hardship and social imbalance of the time with a vein of humour. He was an ardent socialist who decried the exploitation of the working class. He was known for expressing his views in uncompromising language, a quality which made him a controversial person. Despite his concerns with ideas and issues, Bernard Shaw's plays are vital and absorbing and are spiced with memorable characterisation, a brilliant command of language and dazzling wit. In 1898 his early plays were published as *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. The plays in the 'unpleasant' section were *Widower's House* (1892) which focused on rural or slum experiences with landlords; *The Philanderer* (written in 1893 and produced later in

1902); and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (written in 1893 and also produced in 1902). The plays in the 'pleasant' section were *Arms and the Man* (1894) which satirized the romantic attitude to love and war; *Candida* (1893); and *You Never Can Tell* (written in 1895). These early plays introduced the British world to the activist in Bernard Shaw. The 'unpleasant' plays focused basically on lampooning the experiences of the working class of the society and aimed a veiled attack at the societal system which condones the misbehaviours of the upper class.

In 1901, he published *Three Plays for Puritans*. The plays in the volume were *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), a play which focused on the American Revolution and was successfully produced in New York City; *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899) which clowned historical figures; and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900).

It was in the early Twentieth Century that Shaw wrote his greatest and most popular plays. These plays are: *Man and Superman* (1903), which focused on how an idealistic, cerebral man eventually succumbs to marriage (the play advanced an explicit articulation of a major Shavian theme—that man is the spiritual creator, whereas woman is the biological "life force" that must always triumph over him); *Major Barbara* (1905), which focuses on the fact that poverty is the cause of all evil; *Androcles and the Lion* (1912; a short play), the play is a charming satire of Christianity; and *Pygmalion* (1913), a play which satirized the English class system using the story of a cockney girl's transformation into a lady at the hands of a speech professor. *Pygmalion* has proved to be Shaw's most successful work—as a play production, as a motion picture, and as the basis for the musical and film "My Fair Lady" (1956; 1964).

Among Shaw's later plays, *Saint Joan* (1923) is the one which is the most memorable; it argues that Joan of Arc, a harbinger of Protestantism and nationalism, had to be killed because the world was not yet ready for her. In 1920 Shaw, much criticized for his antiwar stance, wrote *Heartbreak House*, a play that exposed the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for World War I.

Among Shaw's other plays are *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Fanny's First Play* (1911), *Back to Methuselah* (1922), *The Apple Cart* (1928), *Too True to Be Good* (1932), *The Millionairess* (1936), *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939), and *Buoyant Billions* (1949). Perhaps his most popular nonfiction work is *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928).

A major characteristic of George Bernard Shaw's works is that despite the fact that he writes about the harsh realities of life and on very serious topical issues, he presents them with a tone of humour in his plays. His plays use efficiently the comedy tool to show people their experiences and in some situations proffer solutions to the problems in the society. He mocked historical figures pointing out their faults which he does not support and sometimes extolled them. His strong use of language presented in a funny way

without losing the message or toning down the effect made him a renowned writer. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925 and died in 1950.

### 3.2 *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

The play is divided into four acts with just a scene making up each act. Miss Vivie Warren, an intelligent, “strong, confident, self-possessed” young woman of 22, had just finished from college and comes home to get acquainted with her mother for the first time in her life. Her mother Mrs. Kitty Warren (“Mrs.” used in order to hide her true identity that she is unmarried) arranges her meeting with her friend, Praed, a young, handsome architect, and she comes down from London, with her business partner Sir George Crofts, to join them in the cottage garden where the mother and daughter will lodge. Croft is attracted to Vivie, apparently knowing he may not be her biological father as Mrs. Kitty Warren does not disclose the paternity of the child. Vivie is romantically involved with Frank Gardner; a clever and altogether carefree 20 year old youth.

Vivie and her mother do not get along well. Mrs. Warren is described by the author as “domineering, and decidedly vulgar, but, on the whole, a genial and fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman.” (Act 1, n.p). She doesn’t want to accept that Vivie should be treated as a girl with a mind of her own, as a young adult. Vivie is a “sort of perfectly splendid modern young lady,” intelligent, pointedly pragmatic and self-assured, and thus is “so different from [her mother’s] ideal.” (Act 1, n.p)

When with her mother alone at night, Vivie demands her to reveal the source of her income and what she actually does for a living. This is because since she was a child, she had been living either as a boarder in England in school or in college, or living with people paid to take care of her. Her mother stays in Brussels or Vienna and does not let her come to see her there and she only sees her mother when she comes to visit England for a few days; and therefore – she had explained to Praed earlier that day – she hardly knows her mother. After some reluctance and Vivie’s insistence on knowing the facts, Kitty Warren discloses her profession which is the business of managing some brothels throughout Europe and successfully justifies to her daughter why she had to choose such a profession, hinging the justification on poverty and a desire to raise her daughter to be an educated, noble and respectable young lady that she is today. Vivie becomes really proud of her mother and shows understanding on the circumstance of her choice. And that evening, they become closer than before.

Sir George Crofts, on the day following, proposes marriage to Vivie, trying to convince her with what she stands to benefit from his social status as an aristocrat, his financial stakes in businesses, and his business dealing with her mother. Vivie refuses his proposal, saying that she would rather not have his offer of money, position and status. As to his business with her mother (Vivie says), she has asked her mother what exactly that business is and she has told her the nature of dealings. Crofts is taken aback to hear that

Vivie knows the business already but he does not want to be readily taken in as to her having actually known what it is. So he tries to further mystify the nature of the business as some legitimate dealings and from his words Vivie gets to understand that her mother is actually still in the business as at present.

Vivie insults Crofts and he threatens her. Vivie sends an alarm to Frank (her boyfriend) and he appears and threatens to shoot Crofts. Upon being enraged, Crofts tells Frank and Vivie that Frank's father, the married Reverend Samuel Gardner, who has had a history with Vivie's mother, is in fact Vivie's out-of-wedlock father, making Vivie and Frank half-siblings. Vivie discovers that her mother has continued to run the brothel business even though she no longer needs to. She takes an office job in the city, dumps Frank because they may be half-siblings after all while vowing she will never marry, and she disowns her mother. Mrs. Warren is left heartbroken, having looked forward to her daughter taking care of her in her old age.

### 3.3 Themes in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

**Gender (In)equality and Women's Subjugation:** The play depicts the stereotypic image of women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century England. They were expected, for instance, to behave in some genteel, dignified manner, showcase feminine sentimentality and romanticism. Praed, speaking to Vivie, a modern girl of some sort, says:

When I was your age, young men and women were afraid of each other: there was no good fellowship. Nothing real. Only gallantry copied out of novels, and as vulgar and affected as it could be. Maidenly reserve! gentlemanly chivalry! always saying no when you meant yes! simple purgatory for shy and sincere souls (Act 1, n.p).

Women were not expected to be as educated as men or be educated in some fields of study as their male counterparts. They were not as educated as the male folk, not exposed to the same work opportunities that the men were; in one word, they were simply raised to marry. Hence, Praed reacts to Vivie's education in mathematical calculations (which is supposed to be a masculine discipline), and producing recreation interest in only such "masculine" sports as cycling and lawn-tennis rather than romantic view of life – by saying that the educational system is "a monstrous, wicked, rascally system" and is "destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful!" To this, Vivie objects that it would rather be of use for her in the making of herself as a practical person, fully involved in Law and with an eye on Stock Exchange, too. Praed, startled, only exclaims: "You make my blood run cold. Are you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?" Praed, expressing the society's conception of womanhood, does not expect to find Vivie (being a female) a practical person as men are, but of a sentimental, romantic outlook. Hence, she is (Praed says) different from her mother's ideal of her—of course, as well as the society's.

The character of Vivie represents a rebellion and defiance against the society's stereotypical conception of womanhood. When Praed says to Mrs. Warren about her: "You see she has really distinguished herself; and I'm not sure, from what I have seen of her, that she is not older than any of us" (in intellect or character, that is to say)—Shaw brings the Feminist ideology of egalitarianism to the fore through her. Shaw represents Vivie as being a product of a type of gender reformation. Shaw's representation of Vivie is one of his key rebellions against the society's conventions of womanhood in the play. The society expected women to be subjected to their husbands. She rejects two marriage proposals, dumps her boyfriend and takes an office work in the city to be financially independent.

In the representation of the character of Vivie, Shaw does not only attempt a reformation of gender relations, but he also presents a defiant reformation of women's representation in literature and theatre. In Shaw's characterization of Vivie, therefore, he invents a female character that matches up with the conventional representation of male character in literature and theatre, and thereby challenging the conventional pro-masculine space in the English society and theatre/literature at the beginning of the century. Indeed, the era of Modernism in English literature, which the dawn of the century opened, is by and large a violent reassessment and challenge of the existent norms and order in society and literature, one of such being the issue of gender and societal cum literary space.

**Class Division:** Equally crucial and connected to the theme of women's subjugation, in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, is the issue of class division. *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* notes that Shaw's play has been said to be a "critique of the ideological and economic system that produced her [Mrs. Warren], attacking the problematic double standard of male privilege and the deeply entrenched objectification of women" (Dierkes-Thrun). Kitty and her sister Lizzy were brought up in poverty as girls and Anne Jane, one of their two half-sisters, died of lead poisoning working in the lead factory. Speaking of the second half-sister, Kitty Warren tells Vivie: "[She] was always held up to us as a model because she married a Government labourer in the Deptford victualling yard..." (Act 2, n.p). The girl-child is expected to look forward to marrying a wealthy or comfortable man. In other words, her success in life is measured in relation to the class of the man she marries.

Therefore, when the half-sister was "held up as a model to us because she married a Government labourer in the Deptford victualling yard", and it was only "until he took to drink"—that she loses her respectability. The idea comes off with more directness when Mrs. Warren rhetorically asks: "What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man's fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?" (Act 2, n.p). In essence, the female gender tends to occupy a lower class of society's class, in the general sense, than the male gender occupies.

### 3.4 Characterisation in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

**Mrs. Kitty Warren:** she is the eponymous character and heroine in the play who at an early age is driven by poverty to work as a prostitute so as to make ends meet. She becomes a prostitute not because she had a choice or because of moral weakness but because of financial constraints. Miss Kitty Vacasour later known as Mrs. Kitty Warren was born in poverty. In a society that frowns on women stepping out of the boundaries laid down for them, Kitty rises up to challenge the status quo and it is her profession as a prostitute that makes her become a respected woman and able to raise and educate her daughter.

**Vivie Warren:** is Mrs. Kitty Warren's daughter. She is around twenty – two years of age and is portrayed as an independent young lady who is confident of herself and her ideas. She is a graduate of Cambridge. She is an unconventional young lady who has decided to “set up chambers in the city, and work at actuarial calculations and conveyancing” (Act 1, n.p). She is not interested in her mother's ideal of her especially as she does not know anything about her mother. It is during her holiday at the cottage that Vivie learns about her mother's past especially her profession because she lived in the boarding house for a long time. Though she admires her mother's independence and courage she decides to be independent and free herself of her mother's dream or ideal for her. She makes it known to her mother that she intends to take a different path from her mother's.

**Sir George Croft:** he is an old friend of Mrs. Warren and her business associate. He is a man in his fifties and he seems like a “woman's man” (Act 1, n.p). He is dressed in the style of a young man, has a nasal voice, clean-shaven bulldog jaws, and he is a gentleman that has the combination of the most brutal types of city man, sporty and a man about town. Though he knows that Frank intends to marry Vivie, his attraction for the girl makes him propose to her. He is convinced that his personality, financial and social status will make Vivie fall for him but he is turned down. When his proposal turns into insults and threats between the two of them, Croft spills the beans and tells Vivie that she and Frank might be siblings as Frank's father might be her father and it will be a taboo for both of them to marry. Croft's revelation turns Vivie's mind against her mother and she leaves for the city, vowing never to marry throughout her life.

#### Self-Assessment Exercise

Compare and contrast the characters of Vivie and Mrs. Warren

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is read as one of the works typifying society's designation of women roles and mannerism as touching marriage and sexuality. Shaw's depiction of Vivie, is in defiance to such stereotypes.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this Unit you have learned about George Bernard Shaw and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. A detailed summary of the play with the themes of gender and class were discussed.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Examine critically Bernard Shaw's treatment of women and tradition in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature* New York: Penguin Books.
- Drabble, M. (ed.) (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. "George Bernard Shaw Plays." Updated June, 2015. Accessed, 12 June. 2015.
- Faulkner, P. (ed.). (1986). *A modernist reading: modernism in England 1910-1930*. London: Batsford.
- Lawrence, D. H. (2004). "Victorians unveiled: some thoughts on *Mrs. Warren's Profession*" in *Shaw: the annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 24 : 40.
- Lodge, D. (1977). *The modes of modern writing: metaphor, metonymy and the typology of modern literature*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Shaw, G.B. *Mrs Warren's Profession*. EBook by Project Gutenberg, Anonymous Volunteer and David Widger. [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). Accessed, 10 Sept. 2013.
- Ward, A.C. (1956). *Twentieth-century literature 1901-1950*. 12th edn. London: Methuen.
- Wikipedia Encyclopedia. "*Mrs. Warren's Profession*." Wikimedia Foundation, 2013. Accessed, 12 Mar. 2013.
- Wikipedia Encyclopedia. "George Bernard Shaw." Wikimedia Foundation, 2013. Accessed, 12 June. 2015.

## UNIT 3: Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Content

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Harold Pinter
3.2	<i>The Homecoming</i>
3.3	Themes in <i>The Homecoming</i>
3.4	Characterisation in <i>The Homecoming</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Harold Pinter is one of the late modernist dramatists. He is a playwright of the absurd theatre. In this Unit you are introduced to Harold Pinter, given the synopsis *The Homecoming*, and a discussion of some of the themes in the play is done.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- summarise *The Homecoming* and discuss the themes and techniques used in the play
- relate the theme of alienation and loneliness to some of the characters in the play

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Harold Pinter**

Harold Pinter, playwright, screenwriter, political activist, poet and theatre director was born in London, England in 1930 to Jack Pinter a Jewish Tailor as an only child. He studied at Hackney Downs School, The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but did not finish his studies there and headed to Central School of Speech and Drama. He had strong antiwar ideas and refused to be enlisted in the military during the Second World War. He began to write poetry at an early age and his work was highly influenced by Samuel Beckett and T.S. Eliot. His works include *The Caretaker*, *The Servant*, *Accident*, *Mountain Language* and *The Homecoming* (1965) which is considered his masterwork. The play won a Tony Award and was later turned into a film. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 and he won other awards like Companion of Honour, Lawrence Olivier Award amongst others. He married Vivien Merchant but their marriage did not last and he later married Lady Antonia Fraser who was his wife until his death. He died of cancer in 2008. He is regarded as one of the most influential modern dramatists in English Literature.



Harold Pinter's experience of both the Turf war and World War II affected his writing, hence the theme of domination and power struggle in his works. As a young child, he suffered the effect of the world and therefore when he reached the draft age, he objected to being draft into the world. Although he did not have any strong religious belief, he saw himself as a conscientious objector who would not contribute to the continuance of the war. His writing career began in 1950 when two of his poems were published in *Poetry London*, a magazine.

His first attempt at writing a play was unsuccessful though. His first major play, *The Birthday Party* was premiered in London in 1958 but was welcomed to a rave of bad reviews. In 1959, his play, *The Caretaker* had its first London performance and was opened to rave reviews in 1961 in New York City. In the 1960s his screenplay "The Servant" won the British Screenwriters' Guild Award. "The Pumpkin Eater" also won a British Film Academy Award for Best Screenplay. When *The Homecoming* was premiered in London in 1965, Pinter received a lot of accolades for the play. The play was tagged his cleverest play. The following year Pinter was awarded the C.B.E (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) by Queen Elizabeth. *The Homecoming* transferred to New York in 1967 where it won the Tony Award and the Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play.

Pinter was appointed Associate Director of the newly formed National Theatre in 1973. His next play *The Betrayal* was produced against the backdrop of his own scandal about his affairs with Lady Antonia Fraser and the divorce from his wife Vivien Merchant. The play ironically focused on adultery in the literary circle. After the New York premier of *The Betrayal* in 1980, he married Fraser. He continued to write for film and his adaptation of "The French Lieutenant's Woman" was nominated for an Academy Award in 1982. His other screen plays include "The Comfort of Strangers."

### **3.2    *The Homecoming***

*The Homecoming* is a two-act play. The story centres on the house where Max, an ex-butcher, his brother Sam and two of his two sons: Joey, a would-be boxer and Lenny, a pimp lives. Max rules the house with an iron hand. He bullies his household through verbal abuse or even occasionally attacks them with his stick. One night, his eldest son Teddy, a philosophy professor, arrives from America without prior notice with his wife Ruth. Teddy, an academic who was estranged from his family for several years, takes his wife, Ruth, to meet his family for the first time. Ruth likes Teddy's family a lot and may be too much as sexual tensions arise and Ruth decides to stay behind with Teddy's family while Teddy has to go back alone to America. Freddy's mother who was the only woman in the house is dead but the husband (Max) and his sons still remember and long for her

presence. Their wish is fulfilled with the coming of Ruth. When Freddy comes home with his wife, Max thinks his son had brought home a prostitute and the men of the house plans, Freddy excluded, to set Ruth up as a prostitute and earn their living through this. The play climaxed with the revelation that Ruth was a prostitute before she married Teddy. Ruth agrees to this especially as she knows that she will be financially independent. Freddy goes back without his wife to America.

### 3.3 Themes in *The Homecoming*

**Female Subjugation and Independence:** The men in Freddy's all-male family treat women as whores and sluts, calling them all sorts of degrading names. With Ruth's coming, she challenges their superiority especially financially as she becomes their boss. She decides to have a say in whatever plans or proposal the men have for her as a result she challenges the status quo. Ruth is expected to be the whore, providing for the family.

**Power:** Characters in the play all try to exude power one way or the other through violence, intelligence and sexuality. The verbal abuse and violence used by Max and his sons, apart from Freddy, is apparent in the play as they deploy it anytime it suits them. Ruth however decides to make use of her intelligence and sexuality to take control and influence over the men of the house. Ruth had rightly judged that she might not be able to defeat the men with violence, even as they were planning to further control Ruth by making her a prostitute, she uses her sexual advantage and turns the situation to her favour.

**Alienation:** Teddy and Ruth have problems in their marriage and it becomes more evident the longer they stay with Teddy's family. They do not communicate and are emotionally alone though they are married. They also find it hard to be emotionally attached to the people around them. Also, the fact that the members of Max's family love one another is not in doubt, but the lack of communication causes an alienation that is experienced through anger and frustration. Alienation is a strong theme in the play.

**Revelation of Man's Inner Brutality:** The play showed the inner tendency of man to be brutal; a characteristic veiled behind the appearance of civilisation and etiquette people portray. The audience expects lower-class people like Max and Lenny to be obnoxious and cruel but this is same of Ruth who appeared as a cultured lady of the upper-class. The play showed that humans are united in their evil nature beneath the facade of culture and class division that the society institutes.

### 3.4 Characterisation in *The Homecoming*

**Ruth:** She is a married woman who finds herself in a dysfunctional family set up, a family into which she is married but decides to make merchandise of her sexuality. When Ruth is first introduced to her husband's family, we perceive that this is a male-dominated family that has no place for a woman. This perspective is reinforced when we notice the atmosphere of competition and hostility that the family lives in. The father and his sons and his brother that live with them compete, quarrel and fight over almost everything. When Ruth arrives in the house, she is quiet and passive, almost afraid of facing her husband's family but she later decides to change her role from a victim to the challenger.

She is compared and likened to Max's dead wife, Jessie, who was the only woman in the house before her death and before the arrival of Ruth. Jessie was also an unfaithful wife to the extent that the paternity of her sons was doubted. Ruth confronts Lenny especially his sexual confrontations and verbal assaults head on and till the end of the play she decides to change her role from the victimized heroine to a woman who exploits her circumstances to her benefit. This is not to excuse her chameleon-like or ambiguous behaviour especially her promiscuous tendency coupled with her disregard for her husband's feelings or the future of her children. Pinter in a way depicts her as the image of an emancipated and freed woman in a male- dominated world.

**Max:** He is the father of the house and he seems to understand the psychology of women more than every other member of his house. From the beginning of the play it is evident that Max is abusive and does not respect women. The first time he sets his eyes on Ruth, he concludes that Ruth must be a prostitute. Max's attitude of regarding women as sluts and whores rubs off on his family members, especially Lenny and they are encouraged by Max to verbally and sexually abuse women. It is Max who reads Ruth's character correctly "Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it!" (81).

**Teddy:** He is Ruth's husband who decides to take his wife home to his family without thinking of either protecting her or looking out for her best interests. He also does not care so much about his relationship with his wife. He is an academic in the city who has not been in touch with his family in a long time, probably because he is not in good terms with them. Pinter portrays him as a weak man who is not in control of his interests especially his marriage. Ruth's decision to stand up for herself against his family's insults could be as a result of the fact that her husband fails to do so. His brothers Joey and Lenny get intimate with his wife and he does nothing to restore his relationship with his wife. It is Teddy himself who tells Ruth that his family would like her to stay back knowing full well their plans for her.

Though he is weak, he tries to paint a different picture of himself to the audience; that he knows what is happening though he does nothing to change the situation. He tells us "I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works... I can observe it... But

you're lost in it. You won't get me being ... lost in it.”(62). Teddy thinks that being able to see as an academic and being able to write critical works about the nature or mind of men will make him understand what is going on his family or show him to be superior to everybody else. But the question one might ask is how superior is the man whose wife is merchandised by his own family and he does nothing about it but accepts the situation?

**Lenny:** He is portrayed as a bully in the play. He pairs up with Max as the greatest trouble makers in the family. Both of them fight over paper cutting, they both taunt Sam over being a good driver and like his father, Lenny sees women as sluts and whores and he blames them for giving him a disease. He later ridicules his father with questions about his paternity, making us doubt that Max is his true father. The character of Lenny is of importance in the play as it is through his assaults that Ruth becomes a changed woman. Though Ruth was quiet and passive at the beginning of the play, Lenny's sexual advances and insults bring out a new perspective of Ruth's character. She turns out to be a threat to Lenny's masculinity and she dances and kisses Lenny, teasing Joey. Lenny later becomes Ruth's pimp at the end of the play.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

In your opinion, are women given positive depiction in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*? Support your answer with references from the text.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The home coming here is Freddy's home coming to his long seen family but in reality it is a home coming for Ruth who discovers herself and what makes her happy. Though in an unconventional way, Freddy's family also becomes better off with the coming of Ruth.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit we have seen a modern family in action. Through the character of Ruth, a better space is created for women to actualize self in spite of male domination. This is another main feature of the Twentieth Century Drama; where the role of women in the society is reordered from the permissive fringe character to a more central place. Apart from this, the period was a time when a lot of critics started questioning the larger than life poise of some high-class citizens, advocating that all humans are the same.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Discuss how character of Ruth and the portrayal of her marriage both challenge the traditional concept of womanhood and marriage.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature* New York: Penguin Books.

- Drabble, M. (ed.) (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- “The Homecoming: A Study Guide”
- “The theme of power in Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming*”. [123HelpMe.Com](http://123HelpMe.Com). 03 Aug 2013.
- Pinter, H. (1965). *The Homecoming*. London. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd.
- Lodge, D. (1977). *The modes of modern writing: metaphor, metonymy and the typology of modern literature*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Ward, A.C. (1956). *Twentieth-century literature 1901-1950*. 12th edn. London: Methuen.

#### **UNIT 4: T.S Eliot’s *Murder in The Cathedral***

##### **Content**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	T.S. Eliot
3.2	<i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>
3.3	Themes in <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>
3.4	Characterisation in <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-marked Assignment
7.0	References/ Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

T. S Eliot is not only a renowned poet, but also a well-known playwright of the 20th Century. He explores how the political ambitions of man in the modern world could interfere with their spirituality in his play *Murder in The Cathedral*. In this Unit the life of T.S Eliot will be discussed briefly in addition to an analysis of some of the major themes in the play.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Discuss T.S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* as a twentieth century English play
- Discuss the themes and techniques in the play

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 T. S Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St Louis, Missouri to Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Stearns in 1888. He was the youngest of seven children. He attended Milton Academy and Harvard University. He worked as a banker for a while before he joined a publishing firm. He married Vivienne Haigh – Wood in 1915 and after she died, he married Valerie Fletcher in 1957. He was a poet, playwright, critic and editor. His works include *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *The Waste Land*, and *Murder in the Cathedral* among others. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. He was a chronic smoker and had health problems. He died in 1965.

Thomas Stearns Eliot's life was full of contradictions. Although he was an American from St Louis, he moved to England and took British citizenship. Although his life-long dream was to be a poet, Thomas Stearns Eliot went to Harvard to study philosophy. Although his poetry is full of Eastern philosophy, T. S. Eliot converted to Anglicanism.

Even though he was one of the great intellectuals in the world, Eliot read detective fiction and wrote limericks about cats in his spare time. He revolutionised poetry in his time, but now post-structuralist critics see him as a crypto-fascist. These contradictions marked his writing and reflected in his works.

His love for literature grew from his early days. His health condition prevented him from participating in sporting activities in his growing up days. He instead started developing a love for literature finding particularly interesting the tales depicting savages, the Wild West, or Mark Twain's thrill-seeking Tom Sawyer. Apart from his health condition, his love for literature was also fuelled by his birth environment in St Louis. He loved his neighbourhood and credited it with the inspiration for his love for literature. He was particularly inspired by the big river in St Louis. He attended Smith Academy where he studied Latin, Ancient Greek, French and German.

He started writing at age fourteen and although his earliest writings were poetry, he would later start writing plays after he published his renowned poem, *The Waste Land*. Although he published bits and pieces of his trial at play writing but his first major drama piece was *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) written about the death of Thomas Beckett. He also wrote *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), *The Elder Statesmen* (1958) all as commercial plays.

T.S. Eliot's plays stood out for their incursion of both the drama and poetry genres. The conversations between the characters are often in poetic form. His works made use of the tool of contradiction effectively. This tool of contradiction can be seen in his casts doing a thing and claiming to be doing the very opposite. This tool, according to several scholars, is very evident in his *Murder in the Cathedral* where Thomas Beckett refused the advice of the fourth Tempter to release himself to be killed in order to attain the status of a martyr but ended up doing the very same thing. This sets him apart in the literary world and peaked after he published *The Four Quartets*. His works were central to the canonisation of the English literature.

### **3.2 *Murder in The Cathedral***

T.S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is about the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket. He was murdered by the messengers of King Henry II. Becket and Henry were friends and it was Henry who made Becket the Archbishop of Canterbury but Becket changed his disposition and stopped supporting the King but defended the rights of the Church. When Becket's action became intolerable for the King, Henry decided to stop Becket. Becket was accused and tried for misappropriation of funds as a Chancellor. Becket went on an exile to France as a result of this fracas.

*Murder in the Cathedral* opens with the news that the Archbishop will soon come back after spending seven years in exile. The women especially are excited that the

Archbishop is coming back as they feel that Becket's coming will change the political injustice in Canterbury. Henry had been a bad ruler during Becket's absence and the people have been exploited and made to pass through all sorts of difficulties. Three different priests who had different opinions air their views on the coming back of Becket to Canterbury. While the first priest fears that his coming will bring trouble, the second feels that the King and the archbishop will not come to terms and the third opines that what will be will be.

After the arrival of the Archbishop Four Tempters who are the messengers of the King approached Becket and tell him to stop resisting King Henry. The First Tempter advises Becket to 'be easy' so that he could enjoy his life and live in safety, the second offers him wealth and fame so that he will 'thrive on earth', the third offers him power and connection with the Pope, the King, and the Baron while the Fourth Tempter offers Beckett martyrdom, the 'glory of saints' which Becket cowardly accepts as the people of Canterbury will believe that he died for what he believed in. He is murdered eventually by Four Knights inside the Cathedral of Canterbury.

### **3.2 Themes in *Murder in the Cathedral***

**Conflict between the State and the Church:** both the State and the Church are two influential powers in the society and the tensions or unhealthy rivalry that could come when they both compete for power is seen in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Henry and Beckett were friends before the latter becomes the Archbishop but once Becket attains power their friendship suffers as Beckett no longer supports King Henry's governance especially as it affects the Church. The way the Archbishop challenges the authority of the King causes the conflict in the play and Henry decides to put an end to this struggle for supremacy, hence, Becket's murder.

**Murder and Martyrdom:** Beckett did not fall for the other Tempter's offer of an easy life, riches and fame and power if he decides to support the King but he falls for the Fourth Tempter's offer of martyrdom which leads to his assassination. Becket's surrender to become a saint is motivated by selfishness, it is a cowardly act and it could also be seen as suicidal but he could also be seen as a good archbishop who decides to die instead of compromising his faith. The issue of martyrdom and who should be a martyr is really one of the issues that could be questioned in the play.

**Poverty and Oppression:** through the chorus we could see that the people of Canterbury especially the ordinary people are passing through a hard time because Henry had decided to make life hard for them and make them struggle helplessly. Now that Becket is back they feel that there will be relief for them but they also fear for Beckett's fate in the hands of King Henry II.

### **3.4 Characterisation in *Murder in the Cathedral***



**Thomas Becket:** he is the hero of the play and the archbishop of Canterbury who was raised from the position of the Chancellor to the exalted position of the archbishop by the King. He was on friendly terms with the King before he became the archbishop but he is on exile because of the tensions that was present between him and the monarch. Becket decides to interfere in the matters between the Church and the monarch especially the rights of the Church. He is accused of being a proud man who is not willing to submit to the monarch. Becket is more interested in fighting for the rights of the Church and submitting to the will of God than to man's dictates. He carries this belief to the end when he submits himself to be killed and become a martyr.

**Four Knights:** the four knights are the agents of the King to get rid of Becket. They present Becket with different temptations so that he could stop antagonising the monarch. After Becket's assassination, the Knights come on stage to justify the reason(s) they killed Becket. It is clear that though they were successful in getting rid of Becket, Becket is indeed the victor especially as he refuses all worldly riches and glory and decides not to fall into the hands of men but submits to God's will and becomes a martyr that will be honoured for ages to come.

**The Chorus:** they are a very important part of the play. They are the women of Canterbury and their role is "to bear witness" to what happens to Thomas Becket. It is through them that the truth is known about what happened in the past in Canterbury. They are the representatives of the poor, the ordinary people and the voice of Canterbury. The audience is led to reflect on issues about life and death, destiny and martyrdom.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

From your encounter with the Archbishop of Canterbury, describe your understanding of martyrdom

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

*Murder in the Cathedral* could be regarded as one of the major modernist plays that dwells so much on experimentation. The play has been read as a poetic drama especially with its rhythmic verses and repetitions. Eliot makes use of free verse and the chorus to enhance the emotional engagement and set the mood of the play. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, he deploys music, imagery and symbolism to convey the message of the play.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have studied T. S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. You have been exposed to what the play is about through a short summary of the play, and the major themes were briefly discussed to make it easy for you to do a personal critique of the work.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Do you consider T. S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* a good example of a modernist work? Support your answer with convincing references from the play.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Coote, S. (1993). *The Penguin history of English literature* New York: Penguin Books.

Drabble, M. (ed.) (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. London: Oxford University Press.

Eliot, T.S. (1987). *Murder in the Cathedral*. First published 1935, New York: Penguins.

Esslin, M. (1980). *The theatre of absurd*. New York: Penguin Books.

Fairchild, L, Terry. (1999). "Time, Eternity, and Immortality in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* Vol.9 No.1, Fairfield: Maharishi University of Management.

Faulkner, P.(ed.). (1986). *A modernist reading: modernism in England 1910-1930*. London: Batsford.

Hollander, J. Kermode, F. (eds). (1973). *The Oxford anthology of English literature*. 2 Vols. London: Oxford University Press.

Lodge, D. (1977). *The modes of modern writing: metaphor, metonymy and the typology of modern literature*. London: Edward Arnold.

Ward, A.C. (1956). *Twentieth-century literature 1901-1950*. 12<sup>th</sup> edn. London: Methuen.

Wikipedia. "T. S. Eliot." Wikimedia 2015. Accessed 15 June. 2015.