



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE CODE: ENG 426**

**COURSE TITLE: TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**COURSE GUIDE**

**TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**Prepared by**

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## **Table of Contents**

### **ENG TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This 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
  - Assignment file

## **Course Modules and Units**

This course is divided into five 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 and the Age of Change

Unit 2: The Old and New Literature

Unit 3: Modernist Thematic Concerns

Unit 4: Techniques and Style of Modernist writers

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

Unit 1: Virginia Woolf: A Woman at the Fore

Unit 2: James Joyce and Independence

Unit 3: D.H Lawrence and Vitality

Unit 4:Graham Greene and Religion

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

Unit 1: T.S Eliot and 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 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 drama

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

### **Module 5: Introduction to Postmodernist Literature**

Unit 1:The Second World War and Its Realities

Unit 2: Modernism, Postmodernism and Literature

Unit 3: Postmodernist themes and techniques

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

### **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

## Course Overview

This table shows the units and the estimated number of weeks you should take to complete them.

Unit	Title	Week's Activity	TMA
	Course Guide	1	
<b>MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO MODERNISM</b>			
1	Britain and the Age of Change	2	
2	The Old and New Literature	3	
3	Modernist Thematic Concerns	4	
4	Techniques and Style of Modernist writers	5	TMA 1
<b>MODULE 2: THE NOVEL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY</b>			
1	Virginia Woolf: A Woman at the Fore	6	
2	James Joyce and Independence	7	
3	D.H Lawrence and Vitality	8	
4	Graham Greene and Religion	9	TMA2

MODULE 3: TWENTIETH CENTURY POETRY			
1	T.S Eliot and the Wasteland	10	
2	W.H Auden's Pessimistic Poetry	11	
3	W.B Yeats and Modernist Poetry	12	
4	Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"	13	
MODULE 4: TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA			
1	Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd	14	
2	George Bernard Shaw's <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i>	15	TMA3
3	Harold Pinter's Drama	16	
4	T.S Eliot's <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>	17	
MODULE 5: INTRODUCTION TO POSTMODERNIST LITERATURE			
1	The Second World War and Its Realities	18	
2	Modernism, Postmodernism and Literature	19	
3	Postmodernist Themes and Techniques	20	
4	Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>The Remains of the Day</i> .	21	TMA4
	REVISION	22	
	EXAMINATION		

### 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**

This module examines the historical and cultural contexts that shaped the twentieth century literature and how writers engaged these realities in their literary creations. The module comprises four units that help the student understand the issues that modernist writers engaged with as they sought for a new way to write literature. Unit 1 discusses how Britain went through a drastic change in the Twentieth century as a result of the World War and how this change affected people's perception of life and traditions or ways of doing things.

Unit 2 examines the clash between traditional ways of writing literature and what modernist writers proposed as the new and relevant way of representing reality. The essays of Virginia Woolf, on what modern fiction should be, form the foundation of the discussions in this unit.

In Unit 3, the thematic preoccupation i.e. the themes that modernism engages are discussed with the view to understanding the concerns and situation of things in the Twentieth Century and to be able to appreciate why modernist writers represented them in the way they did.

In the last unit of this module, the techniques and style of modernist writers which many readers of modernist texts decried and still criticise in contemporary times as complex and challenging are discussed.

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

Unit 1: Britain and the Age of Change

- Unit 2: The Old and the New Literature
- Unit 3: Modernist Thematic Concerns
- Unit 4: Techniques and Style of Modernist Writers

## **UNIT 1: Britain and the Age of Change**

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The First World war
  - 3.2 Post -War Disillusionment
  - 3.3 Modernism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

According to Virginia Woolf, a prominent female modernist writer, “on or about 1910 human character changed” (3). It changed mainly because of the aftermath of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, the first of its kind, which claimed the lives of so many people. 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. Other influences include Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory which negates the biblical account of creation and made writers to talk of the survival of the fittest, Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis which laid emphasis on the workings of the mind and the writings of Karl Marx. 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 every day. There was a break in tradition and reactions against established institutions like the Church as Christianity became associated with capitalism and the modern spirit believed that there was no absolute truth and that everything 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 “modernist”. 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.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the term modernism;
- discuss the factors that led to the changes in Twentieth century Britain

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 The First World War**

Before the World War, though there were bottled-up conflicts and apprehensions, economies were doing well and there was really no great cause for serious distress but 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. Though it was believed that the war would end quickly it did not and great financial and material resources were lost. 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 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.

### **3.2 Post-War Disillusionment**

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. 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.

### **3.3 Modernism**

In the wake of these happenings, many writers sought for new ways to represent these new realities. Literary modernism 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. 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.

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

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

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Literature reflects life and every literary or creative work has an element of verisimilitude as it feeds from history or real life issues. Literary modernism came up as a response to the realities of the First World War and what we have done so far is to see how writers built on happenings around them in order to reflect the change that the world around them experienced or was experiencing as this is the most important function of literature.

### **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.

## **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. What do you understand by the term 'Modernism'?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Reed, C. (1996). "Redefining and defining" *A Roger Fry reader*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fraser, G.S. (1964). *The modern writer and his world*. London: Andre Deutsch.

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

## **UNIT 2: The Old and the New Literature**

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 19<sup>th</sup> century Literature
  - 3.2 Modernist Aesthetics
  - 3.3 Different Realities and Literary Sensibilities
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In Unit 1, we discussed the change that Britain went through as a result of the First World War. In this Unit, you will be given a brief synopsis of Victorian or 19<sup>th</sup> Century literature. You will also be exposed to 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:

- relate the realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century English society to the concerns of modernist writers;
- discuss the differences between Victorian and modernist aesthetics

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Victorian or 19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature**

19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature was named after Queen Victoria. There were great changes in the political and social life in England during her reign. 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 established Britain as an “empire” and not just a country. The Industrial Revolution affected the socio- economic and political life in England and there were massive Rural/ Urban migration aided by the new railways as many people left the villages for the cities. Because there was a large concentration of people in the cities, there was unemployment, poverty, child labour and riots. Charles Dicken’s *Oliver Twist* was set in this historical background. In the mid-Victorian era, there was a change for economic improvement, and stability and there was optimism in the British Empire and new ideas of scientific inventions and investigations influenced literary production. The literary production of the period was realistic as writers created fictional heroes and heroines 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. The novel became 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.

### **3.2 Modernist Aesthetics**

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. 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 19<sup>th</sup> Century optimism while presenting a profound pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray. 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. Consequently, modernist style celebrates fragmentation and artistic freedom. Individualism and experimentation are also some of features of modernist writing. The whole essence of modernist aestheticism is to present life in its decadence and ugliness. Interior monologue and stream of consciousness are the predominant devices of modernist writing and man is depicted as being disillusioned, confused and marooned in a world that is devoid of order and peace.

### **3.3 Different Realities and Literary Sensibilities**

Modernists vehemently opposed the coherent, finished and unified representations of life in Victorian writings, especially the novel. They saw weaknesses in 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.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

List three features each of Victorian and modernist literatures

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The emergence of modernist writers marked a significant change in English Literature because modernists attempted to free the writer and his imagination. For modernists, different writers have different visions and their imaginations could be different too and as a result, each writer explore a variety of styles and themes without having to conform to any set method of writing or depicting human life or experience. Thus, modernism shows literature as being highly subjective as they reflect these differences.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have 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.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

How would you describe modernist sensibilities and literary style?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

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

Tilltson, G. (1978). *A view of Victorian literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

## **UNIT 3:Modernist Thematic Concerns**

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Modernist Thematic Concerns
- 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 unit..

### **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;

### **3.0MAIN 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.

**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.

**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.

**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 portrayals of life in modernist writing through an inward reflection of the inner consciousnesses of characters.

**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.

**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 their they 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.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

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

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

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**

In this unit, you have been exposed to some of the themes of modernist writing such as; lack of communication, aloneness, solitariness, existentialism, 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**

List five modernist themes and discuss three of them.

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

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.

## **UNIT 4: Techniques and Style of Modernist Writing**

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Anti- Tradition
  - 3.2 Subjective Realism
  - 3.3 Stream of Consciousness Technique
  - 3.4 Convoluted and Fragmented Plots
  - 3.5 Focus on Characterisation
  - 3.6 Autobiographical Narrative
  - 3.7 Open- Ended Conclusions
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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:

- identify techniques that are peculiar to modernist writing
- discuss techniques of modernist writing

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 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.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

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

## **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.

## **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.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Explain four techniques of modernist literature.

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

- Clarke, W. (1976). *A short history of English literature*. London: Evans Brothers.
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## **MODULE 2**

### **THE NOVEL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Let us do a recap of the previous module. You learnt that in portraying the modern period as it was, modernists used different techniques like the stream-of-consciousness to record the 'atoms of life', fragmented and disjointed plots, the radical disruption of linear flow of narrative; the frustration of conventional expectations concerning unity and coherence of plot and character, and the cause and effect logic of conventional plot. They made their stories open-ended; wrote autobiographical and psychological stories. Writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, Samuel Beckett, Robert Brooke, and T.S. Eliot, are among many writers identified with modernism.

This module focuses on the novel in 20th Century Britain. Some of the canonical writers of the time will be discussed in order to show how much of modernism is reflected in their works and the changes they brought into the genre.

#### Content

- Unit 1: Virginia Woolf: A Woman to the Fore
- Unit 2: James Joyce and Independence
- Unit 3: D.H Lawrence and Vitality
- Unit 4: Graham Greene and Religion

### **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 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 will 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 and 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 a multiplicity of several characters and all her characters are connected through other individual thoughts. This fragmented, disordered structure of the subconscious mind

for the modernist writer like Woolf, is the nature of human existence. Life lacks order; it is the human being that introduces 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:** 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 Dalloway112). The British upper classes, especially the governing classes, are 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 class inequalities of their likes.

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**

Summarize Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* provide your opinion 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.
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## **UNIT 2: JAMES JOYCE AND INDEPENDENCE**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 James Joyce
  - 3.2 James Joyce's *A Portrait of The Artist as A Youngman*
  - 3.3 Modernist Features in *Portrait*
  - 3.4 Modernist Themes in *Portrait*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

James Joyce was considered as one of the most influential writers of modernist literature and his works also mark a radical shift from the traditional form of writing that encourage the adherence to certain rules and conventions to one that is experimental and unusual. His works are highly autobiographical and reflect his concerns as a writer, an Irishman and as a human being who adapts and grows as he tries to realise himself and what he desires of life.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- discuss the life and modernist inclination of James Joyce;
- read *Portrait* and bring out the features of modernism in the novel;
- relate these features to what obtains in traditional novels; and

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 James Joyce**

James Joyce was born on February 2, 1882 in Dublin, Ireland. His use of language and engagement with new literary forms showed not only his genius as a writer but opened up a new vista of approaching writing for his contemporaries and generations of writers after him. Joyce came from a big family and was the eldest of ten children. His father was a talented singer whose penchant for drinking affected the family's finance adversely. From an early age, Joyce showed signs that he would be a great literary figure because of his intelligence and passion for literature. He spent his time learning languages and reading the works of Aristotle and Aquinas. From 1888 to 1891 he attended the prestigious Jesuit Clongowes School, but was forced to leave when his family's finance dwindled. He attended a Christian Brothers school for a while but returned to another Jesuit institution, Belvedere College, from 1893 to 1898. He attended University College, Dublin from 1899 to 1902 where he studied Modern European Languages. He left Ireland for Paris in 1902 but returned to Dublin the following year after receiving the news that his mother was dying. He taught in a secondary school for a time in Dublin and left Ireland permanently in October 1904 but visited Ireland for the last time in 1912. His works include; *Dubliners*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Finnegan's Wake*. He died at the age of 59 in January, 1941.

#### **3.2 James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman***

*Portrait* is about the story of Stephen Dedalus, a young Irish man who spends his early years in Ireland till he decides to leave Ireland for Paris to become a writer. Young Stephen goes to a boarding school at Clongowes and becomes terribly homesick. Because he is not athletic and is socially awkward, he becomes an easy target for bullies in school. The bullying becomes so bad that sometimes he falls sick but he does not report to school authorities until later that year when he is unjustly hit by a prefect and he complains to the rector. This action wins him the admiration of his peers and it becomes clear that the young man is maturing and gaining some self-confidence. That Christmas also, he eats at the adult table for the first time where he witnesses a heated argument over politics with John Casey and Stephen's father on one side and Dante on the other. Stephen is forced to withdraw from Clongowes because of his family's poverty. The family moves to Blackrock, where Stephen takes long walks with Uncle Charles and goes on imaginary adventures with boys from around the neighbourhood. When Stephen is a little bit older, the family moves to Dublin, once again because of financial difficulty. He meets a girl named Emma Clere, who is to be the object of his adoration till the end of the novel. His father manages to get Stephen back into private school, Belvedere College, another institution run by the Jesuits.

It is at Belvedere that Stephen realises himself. He becomes a reluctant leader and was successful at acting and writing essays. As a sensitive and imaginative young man he often feels quite isolated and becomes increasingly obsessed with sex. One night, he finally bows to his longings and goes with a prostitute though this was his first sexual experience he soon made this a habit. Though he feels concerned and sometimes feels

oddly indifferent toward this new habit of his but it seems he could not stop patronising prostitutes. During the annual spiritual retreat at Belvedere, he hears three fire sermons on the torment and reality of hell. He becomes terrified and immediately repents of his sins and becomes almost fanatically religious. Later he becomes confused about his new identity and when a rector suggests that he considers becoming a priest, Stephen realises that being a priest is not what he wants. One day, while walking on the beach, he sees a beautiful girl. Her beauty hits him with the force of a spiritual revelation, he realises that he does not need to be ashamed of admiring and having pleasure with the body.

Stephen later proceeds to the University and starts to think about the works of Aquinas and Aristotle and he becomes preoccupied with the subject of beauty and art. Although he has no shortage of friends, he feels isolated. He has come to regard Ireland as a trap, and realises that he must escape the constraints of nation, family and religion. He can only do that abroad. Stephen imagines his escape as something parallel to the flight of Dedalus. The novel ends with Stephen leaving Ireland to pursue the life of a writer thereby gaining independence from the society in order to pursue freely the adventures in his mind as an artist.

### **3.3 Modernist Features in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

**Convolved Plot:** The plot of the novel is not linear but complex. The story has many parts that seem unconnected at times. This fragmented plot makes the novel a bit difficult for the first time reader. Since there is no smooth transition of scene to scene or story to story, the plot is not straightforward. Joyce shows the detailed growth of Stephen Dedalus through the stream of consciousness technique. The reader is brought into uninterrupted thoughts and feelings of the young Stephen through this technique.

**Autobiographical:** The novel is autobiographical because we can see many sides of Joyce in Stephen Dedalus. Joyce selected realities of his life and represented them in his fictional character, Stephen Dedalus. Joyce had experiences with prostitutes during his teenage years and struggled with the question of faith like Stephen Dedalus does in the novel. They both had strict and religious parents and Joyce was the eldest son of his family. James Joyce also attended a Jesuit school – Conglowses and was forced to change schools because of his family's financial problems. They both changed their houses frequently and they both had to distance themselves from political, religious and family concerns so as to realise themselves as artists. The novel also makes a number of references to the politics and religion of early-twentieth century Ireland. When James Joyce was growing up, Ireland was still under British rule and there were tensions between the two countries. Aside this political strife, there was the religious tension, and the majority of the Irish including the Joyces were Catholics and strongly favoured Irish independence while the Protestants who were the minority wished to remain under Britain. Also, around the time Joyce was born, the Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell was spearheading the movement for Irish independence but he was betrayed by his country. Joyce and Stephen's fathers were supporters of Parnell.

**The stream of consciousness:** this is a narrative technique through which modernist writers attempt to present the inner thoughts and emotions of a character so that the readers will know the inner conflicts that inform whatever action(s) the character performs. It is also a medium through which characters externalize their thoughts. In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce makes extensive use of stream of consciousness technique to bring the reader psychologically closer to Stephen's mind. There are many copious examples of this in this novel. For example, after the soul-searching sermon on hell and death; he considers his feelings for Emma and the reader is shown a glimpse of his thoughts:

Shame rose from his smitten heart and flooded his whole being. The image of Emma appeared before him, and under his eyes the flood of shame rushed forth anew from his heart. If she knew to what his heart had subjected her or how his brute-like lust had turned and trampled under his innocence! Was that boyish love? Was that chivalry? Was that poetry? The sordid details of his orgies stank under his very nostrils... his monstrous dreams, peopled by ape-like creatures and by harlots with gleaming jewel eyes... Mad! Mad! Was it possible he had done these things? (Pp 88-89).

These are the thoughts that occupy his mind at this time, they are not words spoken to anyone in particular. They are the result of the shame he feels for his "unholy" feelings towards Emma and other women. The reader would not have known exactly how "dirty" he has been unless through the peek given into his inner thoughts through the stream of consciousness technique.

**The use of epiphany:** An epiphany is an experience of sudden and striking realisation. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce tells the story of Stephen's coming of age and the most important influence on his life was the epiphany or moment of knowing or realisation that Stephen Dedalus has upon seeing a girl wading in the river. Through this epiphany, he feels he has come alive again, free to make any choice and live his life as he pleases (Pp131-133). He becomes happy at his state of aloneness as this helps him to realise himself. He realised that there is nothing wrong in admiring the body and beauty as that is all the world has to offer.

**Characterisation:** As mentioned previously, Virginia Woolf posits in her essay, "Mr Bennett and Mrs. Brown", that the foundation of a good fiction is character creation and nothing else. James Joyce's characters, especially Stephen Dedalus, are well developed. The novelist concentrates on important moments in the life of Stephen where he changes his attitude, where he realises himself and makes certain decisions. The author allows us to see his faults, fears, and even strengths. For instance, when he goes to the bank to collect the prize he has won from the essay competition, we see a restless young man who is not interested in the small talk going on between his father and the bank cashier:

He bestowed them in his pocket with feigned composure and suffered the friendly teller, to whom his father chatted, to take his hand across the broad counter and wish him a brilliant career in after life. He was impatient of their voices and could not keep his feet at rest. But the teller still deferred the serving



of others to say he was living in changed times and that there was nothing like giving a boy the best education money could buy. (73).

Just like any young person, we soon see him on a spending spree, taking his friends out and buying both necessary and unnecessary items. The author allows him to develop into a well-rounded young man who has tasted the good and bad aspects of life.

**Open-ended:** Modernist fictions are usually inconclusive; they are always open-ended. When the novel comes to an end, it leaves us with the feeling that the story continues because the life of Stephen Dedalus has just begun as an artist, away from home and friends, the church and his past. The novel ends on the hope that he finds his artistic voice. And the ending leaves the reader unsatisfied with questions like: what does the future hold for Stephen? Will he succeed out there alone? How will he cope with the realities and challenges of life that he will encounter out there? These are some of the questions left unanswered in the novel.

### **3.4 Modernist Themes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.**

**Independence and the development of individual consciousness:** In order to understand this novel, one needs to pay attention to the centrality of the concept of independence to the development of the story and the life of the young Stephen Dedalus. The novel chronicles the development of Stephen Dedalus from his first moments of childhood consciousness of the world around him to the moment he becomes ready to leave Ireland in order to pursue his artistic calling. The highpoint of his development as a young man is the stage at which he detaches himself from his parents' beliefs, the traditions of the society and religious ideals or religion itself. The use of stream of consciousness makes this novel, a story of the development of Stephen's mind.

The most important aspect of Stephen's development goes on internally and Joyce was able to take us right inside his mind so that we can see the intellectual and emotional development going on beneath the surface. The development of Stephen's consciousness is of great importance in understanding this novel. Stephen is a Portrait of Joyce himself; his development gives an insight into the development of a literary genius. Stephen's experiences hint at the influences that transformed Joyce into the great writer he is considered today. Stephen is transformed when he finally frees himself or gains independence completely from all ties and pressures of his past life and he is excited that he is starting a new life as an artist.

**The search for personal identity:** The novel is the story of the search for identity. This is evident in the title of the novel. But there are moments of emotional uncertainty and confusion as Stephen struggles with the feeling that there is more to him and his life than what he is presently going through but he had a difficult time reaching what it is. His constant feeling of difference and alienation shows that he sees himself as someone unfit in the society he was brought up in. He is not shown as

a perfect hero but as someone who is struggling to find an identity for himself in a country polarised along political and religious lines. Should he identify himself as a Catholic though he questions foundational doctrines of the Catholic Church? What will be the value of an Irish national identity in a country on the brink of revolution?

**Rejection of religious extremism:** Stephen Dedalus is brought up to be devoted to his Catholic background and sent to Catholic schools. As a young man he visits prostitutes intentionally, turning his back on the religious tenets he is brought up with. But after Father Arnall's sermon at the retreat, he is ridden with a sense of guilt and decides to rededicate his life and returns to Catholicism. Stephen later on realises that the decision to sin or pious are two extremes that he needs to balance. So he rejects the Catholic faith because he feels that Catholicism does not allow him to have the full experience of being human and that Catholic doctrines were enslaving. He finally embraces life and celebrates humanity after seeing a young girl wading at a beach. To Stephen, the girl is a symbol of pure goodness and of life lived to the fullest.

**The need for Irish autonomy/independence:** Though Stephen rejects all political, religious and social forces in favour of arts, he constantly reflects on Ireland's place in the world. He concludes that the Irish people have always been subservient people. In his conversation with the Dean of Studies at the University, he realises that even the language of the Irish people really belongs to the English. Stephen's perception of Ireland's docility has two effects on his development as an artist. One, it makes him more determined to escape the boundaries and enslavement his Irish ancestors had accepted. Stephen feels this urge to emerge from his Irish heritage as his own person, free from the shackles that have traditionally confined his country Ireland. Second, his perception makes him determined to use his art to reclaim autonomy for Ireland, using the borrowed language of the English, he plans to write in a style that will be autonomous from England and true to the Irish people.

**The artist and loneliness:** Stephen from the beginning of the novel is a lonely figure and he has always found it difficult to relate with people and at the end of the novel he decides to leave his family and friends behind and go into exile in order to become an artist. His decision is summarized thus:

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do, I will not serve that in which I no longer believe in, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express Myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, Using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use- silence, exile and Cunning”(p.191).

He is ready to pursue whatever he believes in and not be encumbered by the forces that have shaped his early life.

### **Self- Assessment Exercise**

Discuss the characterization of Stephen Dedalus.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce focuses on the spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth of Stephen Dedalus as he questions and rebels against the Catholic and Irish conventions till he finally decides to leave Ireland in order to pursue his artistic ambition. The beauty of this novel is sustained through the modernist aesthetic features that are inherent in the novel from its autobiographical mode to its open-ended nature.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have learnt about James Joyce and his representation of his life in his fictional character, Stephen Dedalus. Joyce's modernist aesthetics is in line with the concerns of his fellow modernist writers as he makes use of stream of consciousness, open ended narrative, convoluted plot, and autobiography. The themes of aloneness, search for meaning and identity, rejection of tradition and religious extremism are in agreement with modernism.

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

Write a two-page essay on James Joyce's use of modernist aesthetics in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

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

- Joyce, J. (1994). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- 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 UP.

## **UNIT 3: 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 *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

3.3 Modernist Features in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

3.4 Modernist Themes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

D. H Lawrence 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*, and

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

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

David Herbert Lawrence was the fourth child his family. His father 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. 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 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 somerumours 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 page on 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.

**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.

### 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 to 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* 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 ASSISNMENT**

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 4: GRAHAM GREENE AND RELIGION**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Graham Greene
  - 3.2 Graham Greene's *The Power And The Glory*
  - 3.3 Modernist Features In *The Power And The Glory*
  - 3.4 Modernist Themes In *The Power And The Glory*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Graham Greene was one of the modernist writers who attempted to show that there was so much evil in the world such that the difference between the good and the bad could be so narrow till it becomes almost invisible. His literary creations, especially *The Power and the Glory*, are to be understood in the light of the effect of religion and authority on man and also the anxiety, existentialism, poverty, alienation, and trauma that marked the twentieth century.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- discuss the life and modernist view of Graham Greene;
- discuss the features of modernism in the novel.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### 3.1 Graham Greene

Graham Greene was born in 1904. He had a troubled childhood and his parents had to send him to a psychotherapist when he ran away from school. His life was marked with despair and boredom as a result of the exposure he had to religious doctrines such as the concept of heaven and hell and the notion of distancing oneself from sin and temptations. He decided to defy all these restrictions by engaging in promiscuity and alcohol consumption. He did not see much out of life but saw life as being full of evil and as a result, he attempted to commit suicide many times. He converted to Catholicism out of intellectual curiosity and also so as to marry the Catholic girl he had fallen in love with. Greene's works are marked with the quest to bring together the relationship between man and his beliefs or religion. His works include, *The Lawless Roads*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *Stamboul Train* and *The Power and the Glory*. He died in April 1991.

### 3.2 Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*

The novel is about the religious suppression and persecution of the Catholic Church and all it stood for by the State, that is, the government. *The Power and the Glory* is set in Mexico at a time when the state believed that the Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, was to be blamed for the lawless and impoverished state of Mexico and that the Church promoted corruption. Priests as representatives of the Church are killed and people who had religious materials, especially the Bible, are either imprisoned or fined. In the opening of the novel, we are introduced to the Whisky Priest who is seen as the only surviving priest in Mexico, running from one place to the other so as to escape from the police and the authorities. The Lieutenant who is like a foil to the priest is determined to hunt down the fleeing priest because he wants to rid his society of every image of corruption and dirt.

In the course of his attempt to hide from the authorities, the Priest encounters people like Maria, the woman with whom he had an illicit affair in the past and Brigitta, the illegitimate child that comes out of the union, most importantly, the Priest meets the Mestizo who later betrays him. The Whisky Priest is determined to carry out his duty as a priest by serving the people and this he continues to do until his death. Despite his sense of duty, the Priest is a sinner, an arrogant man, and an alcoholic who fathers a child. Though he feels guilty, he believes so much in the church and in his calling as a Catholic priest. Underneath the story of the flight of the Whisky Priest is a mini plot about a martyr. The martyr's story is contained in the smuggled religious book which Luis' mother (who is a pious and devout woman) reads to her children. While Luis' sisters listen to their mother's story without questions, Luis finds it difficult to see the martyred priest as a hero but after the Whisky Priest is shot, Luis becomes a Catholic convert who believes that the Whisky Priest is a true hero and he welcomes the new priest at the end of the novel.

### 3.3 Features of Modernism in *The Power and the Glory*.

**Anti heroism:** Modernist works tend to portray characters that are not heroic unlike the traditional literary works. According to Jesse Matz, "characters in modern novels are not heroes: they are rarely singled out for their superior traits, and they are worse

than normal – less beautiful, less accomplished, less intelligent, and less likely than the average person to overcome adversity” (45). This is an apt description of the character of the Whisky Priest in all his flaws and weaknesses; in fact, he gets his name from his habitual drunkenness. He is a priest but a bad one as he breaks the vow of celibacy, commits fornication and fathers an illegitimate child. But it is in this weakness of his, and the fact that he is remorseful and sees himself as not being better than others, that his heroism lies.

**Open ending:** Readers are left in a state of uncertainty as to what will become of the Church after the Priest’s death especially when another Priest is introduced at end of the novel. Should the readers be hopeful that the State has not yet triumphed over the Church, especially as it is Luis the young but strongly convinced convert that opens the door to this new priest or will this new priest also end up like the Whisky Priest?

**Fragmented or episodic plot:** though the plot of *The Power and the Glory* is not as convoluted or complex as what we have in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* or Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the novel is fragmented and the reader will need to be attentive so as bring together the flashbacks and especially the two plots (one is on the fleeing priest and the other is on the hunt being carried out by the government through the police) that run concurrently in the novel.

**Symbolism:** *The Power and the Glory* is full of symbols and images that could be read or interpreted in various ways. The Whisky Priest represents the church while the Lieutenant stands for the state. There are repulsive and unpleasant creatures like vultures, beetles and other crawling animals or insects in the novel which symbolise the unpleasant situation that characterise the life of the average character in the novel. The vegetation and landscape are made up of dark forests and swamps symbolising the gloom and hopelessness of the existence of the people that populate the novel. The depiction of a country side is marked with decay, poverty, hunger, death, sickness and rotteness as against the serenity and natural beauty that is usually identified with the country side.

### **3.4 Modernist Themes in *The Power and the Glory***

**Government versus religion:** A very important departure from tradition that marked the post world war mentality is the shift from the belief in God and all that the Church stood for. There was a communist regime in Mexico when priests were forced to either renounce their faith and abandon their calling or be persecuted and killed. The modern world was concerned with secularisation and liberalism which the Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, kicked against. The Lieutenant, as the agent of the State, is ready to remove all obstacles in his way in his quest to get rid of the priest to the extent that he imprisons or kills anyone suspected to accommodate or help the priest so as to ensure the victory of the state over religion. The priest also decides not to get caught so as to serve the Church for as long as possible. However, at the end of the novel, there is the hope that the state might not triumph over the church after all.

**Duty:** In spite of his sin the Whisky Priest considers himself the servant of God who must do the work of salvation among the Catholics in the province and in the state. He does not take the easy way out like Padre Jones who denounces his faith and marries. This sense of duty makes him miss his boat to Vera Cruz in the beginning of the novel because he needs to attend to a sick woman. He is caught at a time and put in prison for the possession of alcohol. He sees his escape from the police as God's will for him to continue his work among the Catholics. Ironically, it is this sense of duty that the Mestizo exploits as he betrays the Whisky priest.

**Entrapment and existentialism:** The priest is helpless and unable to control his own destiny no matter how much he tries. No matter how much he tries to escape from the province he finds himself, he could not succeed as his sense of duty stops him from saying no whenever he is called to attend to the sick or dying. The Priest's run from the beginning of the novel to the time he is shot is a futile one as this cyclic chase of the priest by the Lieutenant ends in the death that the priest was running away from. The satisfaction that the Lieutenant thinks he will get from killing the priest is not there as unknown to him another chase will soon start because another priest is around.

**Poverty:** The images and description of poverty runs from the beginning of the novel to the end. There is the depiction of a place in ruins, a deserted place with vultures and beetles in abundance, where a poor dentist is trapped and where children are so hungry their bodies cannot carry them. The Priest does not look like a priest and needs to beg for food and accommodation as he runs from place to place. Wine and alcohol are smuggled in and the soldiers cannot march very well because they are malnourished.

**Aloneness and personal trauma:** The Priest is hunted by the state and his own personal guilt haunts him too. He is alone in his misery and calling. Because he is a fallen creature and because he is on the run, he has no friends or family, the people he ministers to accept him because he is a priest and because of their own personal needs, he is like a banished and helpless soul who has no relationship with the world around him.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

Is the Whisky priest a true hero? Support your answer with relevant points and examples from the novel.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* attests to the fact that the church and the state both have their weak points and strong points and that both are important in the lives of the people they seek to care and cater for. Bad eggs like the Governor's cousins and the Chief of Police and other government officials who are responsible for smuggling banned goods are not enough to name the whole government as bad, so also corrupt, bad or greedy priests are not enough to represent the whole church and label the church as bad because every group or movement will always have good and bad people.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have learnt about Graham Greene's life, *The Power and the Glory*, some of the themes and features of modernism that could be seen in the text. This is the last unit of this module and you will be introduced to modernist poets in the next module.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

"*The Power and the Glory* is about the clash of the state and religion". Discuss.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

Greene, G.(1990).*The Power and the Glory*. USA: Viking Penguin.

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

## **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.

## **CONTENT**

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

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

Unit 3: W.B Yeats and Modernist Poetry

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

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. "The Wasteland" published in 1922 was seen as the longest poem in English language. He published "Four Quartets" in 1943. His works are experimental in style and diction. 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.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise**

How modern is T. S Eliot’s *The Wasteland*?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

As shown in this Unit, Eliot’s poem exemplifies the content and form of modernist poetry. His creativity is demonstrated in the way he crafts a poetry that does not have a monotonous focus but is multi-focused and yet interesting.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have been introduced to T.S Eliot’s *The Wasteland* and his style as a modernist poet.

## **6.0 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

“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 Waste Land* 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.

## **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”

##### 3.4 “September 1, 1939”

##### 3.5 An Analysis of “September 1, 1939”

#### 4.0 Conclusion

#### 5.0 Summary

#### 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

#### 7.0 References/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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”.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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 social 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 that they 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”.

### 3.4 “September 1, 1939”

This eight-stanza poem is perhaps one of the most political poems of Auden’s written a few days before the Second World War started on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939. Unlike the personal emotion and loss expressed of the poem studied earlier, “September 1, 1939” focuses on the war that was about to engulf the whole world at that time. He criticizes the hatred which gave birth to the war and calls for a world where love could be shared. He laments:

I sit in one of the dives  
On Fifty-Second Street  
Uncertain and afraid  
As the clever hopes expire  
Of a low dishonest decade:  
Waves of anger and fear  
Circulate over the bright  
And darkened lands of the earth,  
Obsessing our private lives;  
The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night.

In a modernist mode of writing, the poet reflects on the hopelessness and fear that is so palpable with the war that is about to start: “Uncertain and afraid/As the clever hopes expire/Of a low dishonest decade/Waves of anger and fear/Circulate over the bright/And darkened lands of the earth”. The atmosphere is polluted by the “odour of

death” simply because the world has failed to heed the poet persona’s call that ‘We must love one another or die’ (Line 76).

Two influences are noticeable in this poem. First is the imminent war and the fact that Auden had just migrated to the United States of America shortly before he wrote this poem. In consonance with the modernist concerns, the poet persona seems to be critical of the effects of industrialization and technology on the natural environment. He speaks of a space “Where blind skyscrapers use/Their full height to proclaim/The strength of Collective Man (lines 34-36). These huge buildings have used up the natural space and though they seem close to the sky, they are blind, unable to see like humans do and so cannot replace human beings who can see and whose presence engenders a positive change.

However, the poet does not romanticize the presence of humans as he goes on to ponder on the reason for the evil mind that Adolf Hitler had grown up to become. Because Auden was writing historically, he contextualizes this point by making reference to Martin Luther King in contrast to Linz, the name of Hitler’s birthplace, as two people from the same country but with different histories. Ironically, Luther was a protestant Reformer who influenced his generations positively while Hitler is shown in the poem as the evil mastermind with a faulty foundation:

Accurate scholarship can unearth the whole offence  
From Luther until now  
That has driven a culture mad,  
Find what occurred at Linz,  
What a huge imago made  
A psychopathic god:  
I and the public know  
What all schoolchildren learn  
Those to whom evil is done  
Do evil in return.(Lines 12-22).

As a political poet, Auden expresses his mission in the second to the last stanza of this poem: All I have is a voice/To undo the folded lie, the romantic lie in the brain/Of the sensual man in the street/And the lie of the Authority (Lines 67-71). The poet speaks against the “lies” that capitalist governments have told the citizenry and as a poet, his role would be to expose these lies to show the people that their welfare should be paramount not war campaigns or the construction of “buildings” that “grope the sky” (Line 72) because eventually, “Hunger allows no choice/To the citizen or the police (Lines 74-75).

In addition to the above, the image of hopelessness and despair is further heightened by the use of words such as “anger”, “fear”, “death”, ‘mad”, ‘evil”, “rubbish”, “pain”, “vain”, “wrong”, “die”, “stupor”, “despair” and so on.

### **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**

Account for the modernist inclination of W. H Auden

#### **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.
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## **UNIT 3: W.B YEATS AND MODERNIST POETRY**

### 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**

Modernist poetry overtime has been seen as war poetry and in its experimentation 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”.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Discuss the features of modernism in Yeats’ “The Second Coming”.
- 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. He won 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's "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 Yeat'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.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit you have come across a short biography of W. B Yeats. The poem "The Second Coming" has been briefly analysed and some of the major themes and techniques in the poem have been discussed.

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

From your knowledge of modernism, how do you find "The Second Coming"? Support your opinion with copious illustrations from the poem.

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

William Butler Yeats – 402 Poems – Classic Poetry Series. Poemhunter.com.  
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## **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”
- 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 poem “Anthem For Doomed Youth” and the themes and techniques he employed in the poem.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- Discuss your impression of the war from the poem especially the poet’s view of the war.
- Discuss the themes of war that you can find in the poem

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **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”, “Strange Meeting”, “Futility” and “Dulce et 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.

### 3.1 “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.

### 3.2 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.

**Symbolism:** In the last line, “and each slow dusk a drawing – down of blinds” symbolises death.

**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.

### **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”. In studying the poem, an attempt at the summary is made; the themes and techniques in the poem are also explored briefly.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Attempt to analyse “Anthem for Doomed Youth” on your own while paying close attention to the literary devices in the poem.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING**

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## **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 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*.

### **CONTENT**

- Unit1: Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd
- Unit2: George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*
- Unit3: Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*
- Unit4: 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 in 1906 to William Frank Beckett a civil engineer. 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. He married a French woman in 1961. 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 and 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 and died in 1989.

### 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.

### 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 stasis 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 was briefly examined. The major themes in the work as well as the use of symbolism were 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**

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## **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. 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 was not a successful novelist but made his mark as a successful playwright. He was a dramatist, literary critic and social propagandist. 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 youth not long turned 20 years old.

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, proposed 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's reconciliation with her mother ends upon discovering that her mother continues to run her 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 stereotypical 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 are not as educated as the male folk, not exposed to the same work opportunities that the men are; in one word, they are 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 will "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's sexuality is one of his key rebellions against the society's conventions of womanhood in the play. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century women are expected 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 wrung 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 made her able to raise and educate her daughter respectably.

Vivie Warren: is Mrs Kitty Warren's daughter. She is around twenty – two years of age and is portrayed as an independent minded 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 mothers'.

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 at length.

## **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

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## **UNIT 3: HAROLD PINTER'S *THE HOMECOMING***

### Content

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Harold Pinter
  - 3.2 *The Homecoming*
  - 3.3 Themes in *The Homecoming*
  - 3.4 Characterization in *The Homecoming*
- 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:

- Summarize *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.

#### 3.2 *The Homecoming*

*The Homecoming* is a two-act play. 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. Ruth agrees to this especially as she knows that she will be financially independent. Freddy agrees and he 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 have 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 her way favourably.

**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.

### 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 brings 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, is Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming* is an Absurdist play? 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 the depiction of 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.

## **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**

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## **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 *Murder in the Cathedral*
  - 3.3 Themes in *Murder in the Cathedral*
  - 3.4 Characterization in *Murder in the Cathedral*
- 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 the 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 Modernist 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.

#### 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 support 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 Characterization 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**

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## **MODULE 5: INTRODUCTION TO POSTMODERNISM**

In studying 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, it is important to understand the influence of postmodernism on the literature of this period, especially since you have been exposed to the powerful influence of modernism on English literature. Postmodernism in a sense succeeds modernism and it gained prominence within the last two decades of the twentieth century.

This module examines the relevant details of the Second World War (WWII) and its impact on the postmodernist literary movement. It discusses the similarities and differences between modernism and postmodernism. The concerns of postmodernists and the some of their writing techniques are also explored. Two texts that exemplify postmodernist English literature is also discussed.

The first unit of this module highlights the similarities and differences between modernism and postmodernism and their influence on English literature of the 20th Century. In the second unit, we shall examine specific themes and techniques of writing that are peculiar to postmodernist literature.

The third unit focuses on the themes and various techniques of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* while the last unit analyses Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day* as a postmodernist text.

Unit1: Modernism, Postmodernism and Twentieth Century English Literature

Unit2: Postmodernist Themes and Techniques

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

Unit4: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day*.

## **UNIT 1: 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. Postmodernists approach to the realities of the world war is less serious and tragic than the modernists. 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 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, the modernism employed a different aesthetic tradition. The modern fiction lacks a coherent, linear or organic plot, and can be read as being “plotless” oftentimes. 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 modern 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 falls symbolically imply the fall of the community. There 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. In modernism, 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 upheld 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 cannot be ignored in understanding how human relations function (Harvey, 1989). Differences along gender, sexuality, religion, class and race lines are all important and could be

### **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.

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 consciousness 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**

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## **UNIT 2 – 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 felt that literature or any other aesthetic work cannot 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.

#### **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 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- (A) What are the different techniques used by postmodernists? Discuss them.
- (B) How do you differentiate between a modernist and postmodernist writings? Get a list of some Twentieth and Twenty- First century English literatures and list the works under modernism and postmodernism.

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

John Barth. “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, 1996 p.283.

Jesse Matz. *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*. USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

## **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 *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
  - 3.3 Themes and Techniques in *The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie*
  - 3.4 Characterization in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
- 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 characterise 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 postmodernist 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 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 *Memento Mori*, *The Mandelbaum Gate* and *The Driver's Seat* and so on. Muriel Spark died on 13th April 2006 in Italy.

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

In a private school in Edinburgh, six 10 year old students are hand-picked by Miss Jean Brodie to become the crème de la crème of the society. Miss Jean Brodie believes that she is a progressive spinster in her prime and it is her role to bring up these girls to be what she has in mind. The girls were Sandy Stranger, Jenny Gray, Rose Stanley, Mary MacGregor, Eunice Gardiner, and Monica Douglas. From the outset it is clear that these girls have different personalities. While Rose Stanley is famous for sex, Sandy Stranger is known for her great imagination and vowel sounds. Mary Macgregor is famous for her stupidity and Eunice Gardiner is known for gymnastics and excellent swimming skills. While Jenny Gray, Sandy Stranger's best friend, is known for singing beautifully and her ambition to become an actress, Monica Douglas is known for her temper and her ability to do mental Mathematics.

Jean Brodie refuses to teach them what is in the school curriculum. She teaches them out of her own personal experiences, teaching them about the war from the story of her dead lover. She teaches them issues of life from her travel stories and she is more interested in teaching the girls history and arts rather than subjects of science or maths. Her opinions and views about life are to become the girls' views and world views and her influence on the girls was so much other members of staff in the school did not meet the approval of the girls and they could not get along with other teachers especially the females. In the final year in school, the girls took up different interests. Rose gets married, Sandy decides to become a nun, Eunice becomes a nurse, Mary drops out of school and becomes a typist, Jenny also drops out to become an actress, and Monica becomes a scientist. The headmistress of the school, who has been looking for every means to fire Jean Brodie over the years, is helped by Sandy Stranger when she betrays Miss Jean Brodie. Sandy decides to end Jean Brodie's influence over the set's life once and for all when she realises that Brodie has been playing the role of God over them. Till her death Jean Brodie did not know which of the girls betrayed her and she did not know that it was her favourite, Sandy Stranger that did so.

### **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. While she was still the girls' teacher Miss Jean Brodie became emotionally involved with 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.

**Loyalty:** 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 refused to betray Miss Brodie even after they became older and were promoted to upper classes and were no longer under Jean Brodie. Jean Brodie decides at a point to test the girls' loyalty at this is when she decides that Sandy Stranger is the most loyal of the girls. Sandy betrays her and though Miss Brodie did not know it was Sandy that betrayed her, it is apparent that one of the girls would have betrayed Miss Jean Brodie. Sandy does not think that she owes Miss Brodie any loyalty or that she betrays her as she reasons that "it is only possible to betray where loyalty is due."

**Obsession for control:** Miss Jean Brodie is determined to have a set of young girls that she will mould to become the *crème de la crème*. Her obsession for control has psychological impacts on the girls as they become to look and behave like her especially Sandy Stranger. Brodie's control moved to the point that she started assigning roles for the girls and there are instances in the novel where she makes statements about what each girl is to become in the future. She thrusts her opinion about life on the girls and though she tells the girls "never let it be said that I put ideas in your head", what she does in essence is to put a part of her in the girls and to shape and control their approach to life.

**Education:** Jean Brodie believes that education "is leading out what is already there in the pupil's soul". As a teacher, Miss Jean Brodie knows how important education is to the young minds and how much of influence she has on the girls that is why she decides to set them to become the *crème de la crème* though she teaches them out of her own experiences and world view. The difference between curricula education and cultural learning is seen in this novel. While Miss Brodie discards the curricula education for the cultural one, a gulf is created and when the girls got to the upper class they find it difficult to keep up with the curricula education that they were introduced to. In this novel, we also know that there is a good way of teaching and a bad way of imparting knowledge. Miss Brodie's cultural education which she could not remove from her personality and individuality shaped the lives of the girls especially Mary Macgregor and Sandy to the extent that their futures were dictated by what they were introduced to in their experience with Miss Brodie.

## **TECHNIQUES**

**LOSS OF STRUCTURE:** postmodernists emphasise the loss of structure and fragmentation is one of the tools used to show this loss of structure. Postmodernist texts are mostly without structure; they are broken, open, and uncertain and have no continuity. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, there is no structured plot and it is the reader that tries to piece up the different narratives and scattered stories that make up the novel.

**FRAGMENTATION:** postmodernists embrace fragmentation. They know that life itself is marked with discontinuity and void as a result postmodernist writers do not

attempt to change this situation like the modernists will tend to but they celebrate this nothingness. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* there is fragmentation and discontinuity in the narration of events. Sparks make use of flashforwards in her narration and because postmodernists do not try to know the inner consciousness so as to know the truth about a character's situation or an incidence like the modernists, the reader is not given the chance to know the inner consciousness of the characters. We do not know the thought of Miss Jean Brodie, her inner life or that of her students. We only know that Brodie is a complex and eccentric character that wants to shape the life of her selected girls but what makes her to be like this is unknown because no one is knowable and nobody has a single knowable character in a fragmented world.

### **3.4 CHARACTERISATION IN THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE**

**Miss Jean Brodie:** Muriel Spark uses the story of one of her teachers in school, Ms Christina Kay to create the character of Miss Jean Brodie. Jean Brodie is a teacher the Marcia Blaine School for girls in Edinburgh. She is portrayed as an eccentric and impressive teacher who tells the headmistress that she is not interested in the curricula method of teaching. She is not only interested and inspired by fascism and the movement's leaders she is just like Sandy says, "a born fascist". She is an unconventional teacher who selects different girls whose lives she intends to control and play God with. Her words and pronunciations about her chosen girls were like prophesy and some of these girls lived up to her expectation for example, Rose becomes famous for sex and stupid Mary Macgregor's life is wasted in a hotel fire. She is able to get loyalty from her girls and they became attached to her and her ideas. By the time her control influence leads to Joyce Emily's death, Sandy steps in and betrays her to Miss Mackay so that Brodie's influence and havoc on the girls' lives could be stopped.

**Sandy Stranger:** she is Miss Jean Brodie's best girl among the "Brodie set". She is the childhood friend of Jenny Gray and Miss Brodie's confidant. She is known for her small almost non-existent eyes, vowel sounds and insight. She ends up betraying Jean Brodie when she realises that the teacher had set up roles for them. While Rose is to be Mr Lloyd's lover, Sandy is expected to betray her but it is Miss Brodie herself that Sandy betrays. Sandy reports to Miss Mackay that Jean Brodie is a born fascist.

**Rose Stanley:** is famous for sex. She models for Mr Lloyd, the arts teacher and there was a time she models for him in the nude. Miss Brodie is of the opinion that Rose will have a sexual relationship with Mr Lloyd and though she did not, Brodie's anticipation gave her tremendous pleasure.

**Mary Macgregor:** she is the scapegoat among the girls and the least loved. Mary is described as "a silent lump, a nobody whom everybody could blame". She is known for her stupidity and in later years she died in a hotel fire. Brodie did not show kindness to Mary and the members of her set were also cruel to her.

Jenny Gray: she is the best friend of Sandy and she co- author a romantic tale from the stories Miss Brodie had told them about her fiancé Hugh Carruthers. Later both of them made 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.

MrLowther: he is the school's music teacher. He is sexually attracted to Miss Brodie and they both have a sexual relationship for a while. At the end of their relationship he marries Miss Lockhart, the beautiful science teacher.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie has been studied as a novel that discusses fascism. The desire to control the lives of the Brodie set at an impressionable age of ten make Jean Brodie discard the curriculum and mould the girls' lives in a way that destroys their individual personality and worldview. Muriel Spark in this work raises the issues that range from what the right way of education or knowledge is, to matters of loyalty, fascism, love, friendship, the aftermath of war, and so on.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this Unit, you have studied the life of Muriel Spark and her novel The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. A summary of the novel was done. The themes and the techniques as well as the characterisation were discussed.

#### **6.0 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

(A) What are the different postmodernist techniques used by Muriel Spark in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie?.

(B) Discuss the characterisation of Jean Brodie and her students in the novel.

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

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Muriel Spark. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. London: Penguin Group. 2000.

Scanlan M. "The Recuperation of History in British and Irish Fiction" in Shaffer B.W (ed) A Companion to the British and Irish Novel: 1945- 2000, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp 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 *The Remains of The Day*
  - 3.3 Themes And Techniques in *The Remains Of The Day*
- 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:

- (a) Write a synopsis of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*;
- (b) discuss the postmodernist themes and techniques in the text; and
- (c) 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, he and 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*, *Nocturnes*. All of his novels have earned critical acclaim. Ishiguro's novels deal with self-deception, regret, and personal reflection. In 1995, Ishiguro was named to the Order of the British Empire for his contributions to literature especially contemporary British fiction.

### 3.2 THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

*The Remains of the Day*, is about 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 believes 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 ago, himself and Miss Kenton 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 later, she is divorced because of the challenges she had in her marriage especially as she really is not in love with her husband. Stevens looks forward to bringing her back to Darlington Hall to help with his increasing staff problems though his own personal interest in wanting Miss Kenton back in the Hall is hidden till we get to know later in the story that Steven is really in love with Miss Kenton and Miss Kenton herself has tried many times to make Steven know that she loves him and that they should be together. But since Stevens has had trouble since the end of the Second World War in finding a large enough staff to handle the work at the estate and knows the competence of Miss Kenton, he hopes that the woman who is now free of the burden of marriage will oblige and return to the Hall.

Stevens seizes upon the fact that her marriage might be crumbling as a reason to visit her. 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 into his past. It is as if he is creating a mental diary of his life over this trip, aiming to come 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 full plans to bring her back to Darlington Hall and perhaps 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 Darlington Hall to fulfil the remains of his day.

### 3.3 THEMES AND TECHNIQUES IN *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

#### THEMES

The major theme in *The Remains of the Day* is that of Professionalism versus all other relationships. 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.

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.

#### TECHNIQUES

**Flashback and Flashforward:** this is one of the techniques that postmodernists make use of in their narratives. *The Remains of the Day* is narrated in a diary form. This diary is indeed about his vacation from Darlington Hall and how his journey progresses as a result there are series of flashbacks and flashforwards in the novel as Steven's memory serves him. He digresses from one issue and tries to relate it to another in order to convince his readers that he is sure of what he is saying especially in issues that has to do with his profession as a Butler.

**Unreliable Narrator:** Stevens is an unreliable narrator and his description of events in the novel especially about his relationship with Miss Kenton and Lord Darlington is full of inconsistencies. It is clear that Stevens himself is aware that his narrative is full of inconsistencies as a result he is very interested in ensuring that his audience agrees with him. In the novel there are many instances where Stevens will ask his audience if they agree with him or share his opinion about one matter or the other.

**Play:** the postmodernists are of the opinion that human nature and situation cannot be changed and they celebrate this state of helplessness. 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 traditionally. Stevens has always been a conventional man who does not think he needs to be on friendly terms with his boss. Often during Stevens' flashbacks he worried over the idea of his new American

employer wanting to joke around with him. At the end of the novel, Steven changes his view and decides that banter is the key to human warmth

**Fragmentation:** postmodernists also make use of fragmentation like the modernists. In *The Remains of the Day*, there is a fragmented plot especially because of the diary form of the narrative. The novel has no chronological plot i.e it is never given a comprehensive treatment at any one point. Rather, all issues are subject to the drift that takes us from one strand to another especially the record of Stevens' motoring trip leads and drifts from one time to another with a lot of digressions.

**Open or ambiguous endings:** this seems to be more representative of reality as opposed to closed endings, in which matters are resolved and postmodernists also make use of this technique though for postmodernists this only tend to show that reality cannot be known. *The Remains of the Day* does not have what we can call a conclusive ending as Stevens is thinking about how he could enhance his performance as a Butler through the means of bantering.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Kazuo Ishiguro deals with the issue of alienation, betrayal, unrequited love, politics, and class division and so on in a less serious manner. His characters are lonely but not in the sorrowful and mournful way that modernists do.

#### **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 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- (A) How reliable is Steven's story in *The Remains of The Day*. Go through the novel and bring out instances of unreliable narration in it.
- (B) Discuss the postmodernist themes and techniques in the novel.

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

Kazuo Ishiguro. *The Remains of The Day*. 1989 Faber and Faber, 2005.

Jesse Matz. *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*. USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

### **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

#### **PRIMARY READINGS**

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