PGEG S3 02

Modern Drama

SEMESTER III

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. **Prof. Pona Mahanta**, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University
2. **Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami**, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University
3. **Prof. Bibhash Choudhury**, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinator : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor, Discipline of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1	**Dr. Manab Medhi** Department of English, Bodoland University
2-3	**Dr. Pallavi Gogoi**, Discipline of English, KKHSOU & **Dr. Prasenjit Das**
4-5	**Dr. Prasenjit Das**

Editorial Team

Content (Unit 1) : In house Editing
(Unit 2-5) : **Prof. Robin Goswami**, Former Senior Academic Consultant, KKHSOU

Structure, Format and Graphics : **Dr. Prasenjit Das**

Reprint, January, 2022

ISBN : 978-93-87940-38-3

This Self Learning Material (SLM) of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike4.0 License (International) : http.//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Head Office : Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017; Web : www.kkhsou.in/web_new
City Office: Resham Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022

SEMESTER 3
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 2: MODRN DRAMA
BLOCK 1: SHAW AND SYNGE

CONTENTS

		Pages
Unit 1:	**Introducing Modern Drama** The Emergence of Modern Drama, Important Continental Movements, Important Theorists/Practitioners of Modern Drama and Their Works	**7 - 28**
Unit 2:	**George Bernard Shaw: *Candida* (Part I)** George Bernard Shaw: The Playwright, His Life and Dramatic Career, Sources of the Play *Candida,* Critical Reception of Shaw	**29 - 44**
Unit 3:	**George Bernard Shaw: *Candida* (Part II)** Act wise Summary of the Play *Candida,* Critical Commentary on the Play, Major Themes, Major Characters	**45 - 69**
Unit 4:	**John Millington Synge: *Playboy of the Western World* (Part I)** John Millington Synge: The Playwright, His Life and Dramatic Career, Sources of the Play *Playboy of the Western World,* Critical Reception of Synge	**70 - 83**
Unit 5:	**John Millington Synge: *Playboy of the Western World* (Part II)** Act wise Summary of the Play, Critical Commentary on the Play, Major Themes, Major Characters	**84 - 99**

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course takes the learners to some dramatic works of the modern period. As a mode of representation, drama and stagecraft provide an all-important index to the cultural histories of any society. These are some aspects, which the learners studying 'Modern Drama' must try to comprehend. We have included six representative playwrights of the modern era who have enriched the dramatic culture with their explorations of various aspects of human life and society during the later part of the 19th century and the early and mid 20th century. Thus, this course intends to provide you an experience of dramatic writing starting from 1885 to 1960.

Modern drama is a participant as well as a result of a lot of different movements in art and literature taking place in Europe since the middle part of the 19th century. In a post-Darwinian world, conditioned by the growing middle-class values and the growing industrial and urbanised societies, the age-old values associated with human relations, cultural associations, social formations, religious faiths had to undergo a process of vehement and varied examinations and revaluations. Such socio-cultural environment did effect the production of literary and dramatic works. The end of the 19th century witnessed, in the hands of Ibsen, the development of a movement in theatre called Naturalism. This movement gave voice to the recurrent questions of the contemporary times thereby exposing to the audience the hidden dark realities within their own societies. This movement gave rise to the development of many other approaches in modern theatre.

Modern drama in the 20th century developed as a very dynamic field of thematic as well as technical experimentations. While the Realists tried to reflect life on stage as faithfully as possible, the Symbolists played with the props, colour, music and the stage designs to playfully deliver their content. While Brecht's Epic theatre broke the conventions of the stage-space and actor-audience relationships, the Theatre of the Absurd questioned all the conventional understandings of being, life and the purpose of existence. Thus, the field of modern European drama is not only interesting but also extremely thought provoking. They are important for the readers to understand the mind of Europe at different times during the last two centuries.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

This is the first Block of this Course. This Block starts with a description of modern drama in the context of Europe. As you read through the units of this Block, you will find that Modern Drama refers to the whole range of plays produced in Europe since the middle part of the 19th century to the latter half of the 20th. Thus, Modern Drama includes a variety of plays with a large number of dramatists from different countries experimenting with the form of drama with different innovative techniques. As such, it is difficult to cover a huge number of great dramatists starting from Ibsen to Chekov, Brecht to Pirandello within one umbrella term. Even then, they are all considered modern playwrights and their plays modern plays because of certain commonalities exhibited by them. You will get to read that different literary movements and approaches like Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Existentialism, Poetic drama, Absurd Drama—all collectively shaped modern theatre. Besides, many of the 'modern' innovative plays exhibit a complex intertwining of many different theatrical styles as well as theoretical approaches. Thus, it is difficult to find a play dealing with pure Realism, or stark Symbolism, or pure Expressionism in the context of Modern drama. This Block shall start with a reference to the idea of Modern drama in the context of Europe, and then a discussion shall be provided on two modern playwrights George Bernard Shaw and John Millington Synge so that you can have a better understanding of the various characteristics of Modern drama through a reading of the two prescribed plays by these playwrights. This Block has five units, which are as the following:

Unit 1: This unit which serves as an introduction to Modern European Drama will try to address the social and intellectual contexts of modern drama and also trace the technical relationships shared by the co-called modern playwrights. However, this unit shall offer the basic introductory information about modern drama in the context of Europe in general. It is important to read the prescribed plays by situating them in their proper historical contexts.

Unit 2: This unit shall introduce you to the Irish playwright, critic, and pamphleteer George Bernard Shaw who is generally considered the greatest dramatist to write in the English language since William Shakespeare. Following the example of Henrik Ibsen, he succeeded in revolutionising the English stage, disposing of the romantic conventions and devices of the "well-made" play, and instituting a 'Theatre of Ideas' grounded in realism.

Unit 3: This unit, which is to be studied in connection with the previous unit, shall help you to discuss Shaw's play *Candida* in sufficient details. Shaw was well known for his "iconoclastic" views and ideas

of freethinking and socialism as reflected mostly in his vast array of literary works. Shaw is renowned for his contribution to what we today know as “Modern drama” because with plays like *Candida* he broke away from the conventions of the melodramatic London theatre in the 1890s.

Unit 4: This unit shall introduce you to John Millington Synge the author of the play *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Synge is considered the greatest dramatist of the Irish Literary Renaissance. As you finish reading this unit, you will be able to see the qualities of J. M. Synge as one of the greatest playwrights of the modern world.

Unit 5: This unit deals with Synge’s play *The Playboy of the Western World* a three-act play written by the Irish playwright John Millington Synge. In his unsentimental but compassionate portrayal of Irish peasants in this play, and his highly imaginative and poetic dialogue (patterned after the vernacular spoken by the rural population in the west of Ireland), Synge attempted to capture the essence of the Irish spirit, which he described in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* as “fiery and magnificent, and tender.”

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING MODERN DRAMA

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Emergence of Modern European Drama

1.4 Important Continental Movements

1.5 Important Theorists/Practitioners of Modern Drama

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the developmental phases of modern drama in Europe
- understand modern drama against the context of different movements in art and literature
- relate the interconnections between different theatre movements
- get introduced to the different major practitioners of modern drama in Europe

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall introduce you to modern drama in the context of Europe. You will note that modern drama refers to the whole range of dramas produced in Europe since the middle part of the 19th century to the latter half of the 20th. Thus, modern drama includes plays of a large number of dramatists hailing from different countries writing in different periods. As such, it is difficult to cover a huge number of great dramatists starting from Ibsen to Chekov to Brecht to Pirandello within one umbrella term. Even then, they are all considered modern playwrights and their plays modern plays because of certain commonalities exhibited by them. This unit will try

to address such commonalities and trace the intellectual and technical relationships shared by these playwrights. While this unit offers the basic introductory information about modern drama in Europe, it is advisable that the learner read more to expand his/her knowledge. It is important to read the prescribed plays by situating them in the historical contexts. Therefore, the learners must read more about the founding movements and socio-political-cultural contexts of the plays and the playwrights.

1.3 THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN EUROPEAN DRAMA

Modern drama, as a pan-European and North American theatrical practice, had its genesis somewhere around the last few decades of the 19th century. The literary as well as the socio-political environment of the 19th century is characterised by a sense of discontent with socio-cultural and literary ideals, restless criticism and an intense probing into the disturbances and irregularities in the modern world. This ideological and social turmoil of the time did influence pioneers of the modern theatre like Henrik Ibsen, Hauptman or Gorki, Chekhov or Shaw. The fellow and follower dramatists of these pioneers of modern drama in Europe continued with the tradition of protest and revolt and the diversity of experimentations in their pursuit of the dramatic art. The modern theatre, as such, is an enormous enterprise strongly characterised by diversity of themes and techniques as well as a good variety of genres. Different literary movements and approaches like Realism and Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism and Impressionism, Existentialism, Poetic drama, and many other styles have been part of modern theatre. Besides, many plays exhibit a complex intertwining of many different theatrical styles as well as theoretical approaches. Thus, it is difficult to find a play dealing with pure Realism, or stark Symbolism, or pure Expressionism. Whereas Ibsen shows kinship with Realism and Symbolism, Eugene O'Neill's adheres to Realism and Expressionism, and Strindberg appears to be both naturalist and expressionist. American dramatist Tennessee Williams employs several Brechtian techniques including the alienation effect; Weiss incorporates

the Artaudian idea of cruelty within the Brechtian framework of Epic theatre; while Pirandello's attempt at Symbolism makes him a forerunner of the theatre of the Absurd. Theatre in the early 19th century Europe liberated itself from the conventional norms in order to accommodate newer forms of technical and theoretical engagements. These experimentations touched and tested everything that is part of stage production, i.e. acting, music, dance, scenic design, stage lighting, costume design and architecture. Even the interrelationship between the audience and actors present in the theatre underwent varying combinations and alterations.

Modern drama saw its beginning with the advent of realistic drama and realist stage production under the initiatives of Henrik Ibsen, Emile Zola, Bernard Shaw, and Konstantin Stanislavsky. The emergence of realistic techniques of acting and stage performance marks the first phase of modernism in drama. It got extended to a series of interweaving of strands that may be called Ibsenism, Wagnerism, Realism and Symbolism, objective Naturalism as well as subjective anti-Naturalism etc. Subjective anti-Naturalism can later be noticed in Expressionism while objective anti-Naturalism can later be seen in Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht's Epic theatre.

The first guiding force of modern drama was the idea of freedom from the neoclassicist belief that theatre should adhere to certain fixed rules. The modernist revolt against the neoclassical ideals ensured the loss of importance of decorum, questioning of the idea that tragedy deals with the fate of princes and nobles, as well as negated the primacy of the three unities. Victor Hugo's negation of form, subject and style, in the dramatization of reality in his romantic play *Hernani* marks an important milestone in the history of modern drama. This play declares the end of control of the drama by fixed rules, including the absolute separation of comedy and tragedy. He is an inspiration for dramatists to experiment with any kind of material on stage and to employ any kind of form and style. This sense of freedom inspired the Naturalism of Zola or critical Realism of Ibsen or Expressionism of Strindberg. Zola, being inspired by the clinical method of experimental biology, looked at art as a clinical demonstration of human problems. His

parallelism between art and science promoted significant expansion of subject matter of literature and styles and techniques in both fiction and drama.

The reformers of modern drama in Germany were influenced by Zolas's objectives. Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen reshaped German stage by stressing on scenic design, setting and costume. The stage, and the walls of the closed room conveyed the illusion of reality; the authenticity of stage props add to the air of truthfulness. Thus, the stage has been promoted from a mere platform of acting to a site of meaning. Such a change marks a fundamental development of the modern drama. Zola's Naturalism directly influenced Andre Antoine's *Theatre libre, which* dealt with horrific and astonishing effects in drama. On the other hand, the plays of Strindberg and Hauptmann established that Naturalism could transcend the limits of documentary Realism and even embrace symbolic and psychological techniques. The same spirit can be noticed in Stanislavsky, who founded Moscow Art Theatre to promote realist theatrical acting techniques. Chekhov came out as an extension of these precepts of Stanislavsky.

In the early 20th century, with the growing popularity of psychological studies, Realism and Naturalism got integrated with Psychoanalysis. The theatrical works of Ibsen and Strindberg provide significant reflection of this inclination. The playwrights like Ibsen and Strindberg, Chekhov and Shaw, Gorki and O'Casey, Miller and Eugene O'Neill have combined psychological Realism with the anatomy of the motives and values of the whole society in their plays. The importance on technical brilliance by Adolph Appia, the incorporation of the sense of social purpose in the movements like Impressionism and Expressionism, the renewed claims that the stage is a site for exploring and experimenting with fresh forms and ideologies, resulted in an incredible extension of the possibilities of theatre. Subjects and things never discussed earlier were being vehemently brought to the theatrical text. The dramatists from England fully participated in these experimentations, especially after the World Wars. Dramatists like James Birdie, J. B. Priestly, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Frye, Noel Coward, and Bernard Shaw produced some very effective plays written in the realistic mode.

Apart from Realism and Naturalism, which revitalised the dramatic traditions all through Europe, modern drama opened the door for many other different approaches to drama. Symbolism opened the stage for the rhythmic and introspective language of poetry. The embellishments of the stage were imbibed with symbolic meanings. Adolph Appia, Gordan Craig, and Meyerhold, and the other scene designers brought about the complex union of the art. In order to express and sustain and enhance emotions in a play; Wagner drew upon the flexible properties of light and color in the expressions of feelings and emotions. Symbolism shaped the plays of Hauptmann, Strindberg, Claudel, Garcia Lorca, Ghelderode and many other dramatists across Europe. The surrealist fantasies of Garcia Lorca, the grotesque farce of Ghelderode and even the repetitions and pauses in the "static drama" of Samuel Beckett–all depended on symbolist evocations.

Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello revitalised the art of elaborate pretence and make-believe in his works. His successors, who were highly animated by the playfulness of Dadaism and Surrealism, reinvented elasticity in the dramatic form. In the works of Cocteau, Giraudoux, Wilder, Brecht, the fourth-wall of the realistic convention was vehemently rejected. In their hands, drama remained no longer the mirror image of real life; it was something more than common reality. The plays were performed in such a manner that the audience does not forget the performativity of the play and does not mistake the play to be reality. The advent of Expressionism is the outcome of all these experimental techniques whereby the playwrights look into the mind of the character, expose the inner man, through different modes of subjective experience. In his 'dream plays', Strindberg virtually creates a new dramatic dimension. The depiction of external reality coupled with the illogical and frenzied behaviour of the hidden self-results in the theatre of weird angularity and distortion. Fragmented episodes replaced the linear narrative. The idea of heroism and centrality of the single character gave way to multiple and depersonalised abstractions. With the use of epigrammatic and ironic language, the dialogues become nervous and explosive, resulting in piercing soliloquies and bizarre pantomime.

The two World Wars resulted in the development of a sense of anarchy and distrust of readymade ideologies in literature as well as in the theatre. The revival of the grotesque in modern drama indicates the dissolution of moral and spiritual values and norms of the contemporary times. The grotesque and bizarre and the irrational have found their new rational in the Surrealist and Existentialist representation of the crisis of modern man. Here begins the 'Theatre of the Absurd'–a term coined by a Hungarian author and critic Martin Esslin. The playwrights of 'the theatre of the Absurd' like Beckett, Adamov, Pinter, Genet, Ionesco and others share a common view that man inhabits a universe which is devoid of any reason and logic. Man's existence is purposeless, obscure and catastrophic. The modern drama effectively combines different literary movements like Realism and Naturalism, Symbolism and Expressionism, Surrealism and Existentialism to interpret human life in a period torn apart by disillusionment and disintegration in moral and spiritual values.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the factors that influenced the modern playwrights?

Q 2: Trace the growth and development of modern drama in Europe.

Q 3: How did the modernist playwrights revolt against Neoclassicism?

Q 4: How did the "Theatre of the Absurd" come into existence?

1.4 IMPORTANT CONTINENTAL MOVEMENTS

The following is an attempt at explaining the various strands of modern drama in some detail.

Naturalism:

Naturalism can be considered a kind of umbrella term used for various theatrical experimentations undertaken by masters like André Antoine, J. T. Grenin, Otto Brahm, Konstantin Stanislavsky among many others. André Antoine's 'Theatre Libre' in Paris, J. T. Grein's Independent

Theatre in London, Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne of Berlin, and Konstantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre along with several other independent theatres promoted modern playwrights to perform works outside of commercial theatres. Originated in the 1860s France, as a movement influenced by science, Naturalism viewed social behaviour of men as the product of biological factors. It opposed Romanticism's interest in the expression of human emotion and personal experience. Naturalism drew its inspiration from Darwin's theories of the origin, development of species, their struggle for survival, the process of natural selection, and their dependence on the environment. As such, Naturalism's approach to human experiences and relations appears very clinical in nature. Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen is a major exponent of this movement.

Naturalist theatre gave importance to the use of realistic props and realistic acting on stage. Konstantin Stanislavsky was highly interested in realistic acting. For the performance, the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen even put on stage Norwegian furniture in order to help actors merge with their roles. Changes in ensemble acting and vivid crowd scenes were introduced by Georg II, the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826–1914). Naturalism's emphasis on realistic acting fuelled the emergence of a band of modern actresses playing daring female roles. Actresses like Eleanora Duse, Elizabeth Robins, and Eva Le Gallienne often developed their signature styles and roles from women-centric plays like that of Ibsen's.

Realism:

As a literary and artistic movement, Realism attempts to truthfully represent subject matter, without any artificiality and avoiding other artistic conventions or the use of exotic and supernatural elements. As a theatrical movement, Realism is often associated with the representation of the social and psychological problems of ordinary life. It has to be noted here that the line of distinction between Naturalism and Realism in theatre is very narrow and they are often overlapping in their techniques and motives. The Influence of the ideas of Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin and others inspired many artists to theatre from a psychological point of view that focused on the inner dynamics of the characters onstage. Beginning with the Russian

playwrights like Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Ostrovsky and Leo Tolstoy, Realism found avid expressions in the works of Emile Zola in France and Henrik Ibsen in Norway in the late 19th Century. With the emergence of writers like George Bernard Shaw and Edward Albee, Realism dominated most of the theatrical productions of the 20th century in Britain and North America.

In Russia, with the establishment of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, Realism found its first grips much earlier than the rest of the world. The works of Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, attempted to reform the Russian stage which was hitherto been dominated by melodrama. Drawing inspiration from André Antoine's Théâtre Libre and other theatre activists, they opened a realistic theatre company, which later became internationally renowned. The production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in 1898, where Stanislavski played the role of Trigorin, was hailed by the audience and critics for its fidelity in the delicate representation of everyday life, its intimate and ensemble acting, and the resonance of its mood of despondent uncertainty with the psychological disposition of the Russian intelligentsia of the time. The company successfully produced many other plays of Chekhov along with Ibsen and Shakespeare. Stanislavski developed a unified system of acting whereby he trained actors to create reliable characterisations for their performances. This system, which he revised throughout his life, was partially founded on the idea of emotional memory; while performing, the actor focuses internally on the character's emotions. Many connected areas like concentration, voice modulation, physical appearance and skills, emotional memory, observation, etc. were part of this approach. His system became very popular in Russia as well as in the U.S. In the U.S., experimentations with his method began in the second decade of the 20th century and many theatre schools and professional companies have continued it throughout the century.

Symbolism:

With Symbolism, modern drama focused on its evocative and suggestive nature, and it brought to the stage rhythmic, playful and introspective language of poetry. Symbolism did not pay attention to the accuracy of props, unlike the Naturalist or Realist trends, and reduced the

embellishments on the stage to a few draperies or a few curtains of certain specific colours or even to some symbolic gestures. It emphasised mysticism, subjectivity, and suggestion instead of direct, common speech. In the Symbolist movement, the central tendency of dramatic expression was to de-theatricalise the theatre. The use of language and vocabulary also underwent much experimentation. The Symbolist theatrical stage often transformed itself into a complex site of different forms of arts. For expressing the central themes and essence of the play, and to sustain and enhance particular emotions, dramatists like Adolph Appia, Gordan Craig, and Meyerhold, and many others concentrated on the scene design of their plays. Thus, most of their stage designs showed some kind of complex unions of different art forms. Similarly, Wagner experimented with the flexible properties of light and color in is plays. Stages such as Aurélien Lugné-Poe's Theatre de l'OEuvre in Paris championed simple sets over the Naturalists' cluttered stages while Edward Gordon Craig's abstract sets in London parallel Symbolist settings.

The symbolist theatre gave a new emphasis to the creation of new atmosphere and mood in modern drama. Dramatists like Hauptmann, Strindberg, Claudel, Garcia Lorca, Ghelderode and many others made extensive use of symbols throughout their dramatic careers. Symbolism, as a theatrical movement, was associated with Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) of Belgium, Madame Rachilde (1860–1953) of France and William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) of Ireland. The surrealist fantasies in Lorca's plays or the grotesque farce in Ghelderode's plays or even the repetitions and pauses in Samuel Beckett's plays were highly symbolic in nature. Symbolism also drew inspiration from the literary and artistic movement of Dadaism and Surrealism. As an opposition to Naturalism and Realism, Symbolism demanded that drama is not merely a copy of real life, it is something more than what is common and mundane. Symbolist plays are performed in such a manner that the audience has to think beyond what is seen or heard on the stage.

The Avant-Garde:

The term Avant-Grade, also known as Experimental Theatre, loosely connects many experimental approaches to the modern theatre since the last part of the 19th century. This umbrella term covers a great number of theatrical experimentations over a vast period. As part of the movement called 'Futurism' under the leadership of F. T. Marinetti (1876–1944) in Italy, human characters were removed from theatre and puppets, machines, and inanimate objects were placed on stage. In Dadaism, which flourished in the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich during World War I, under the leadership of Romanian Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), nonsense poems, musical pieces were produced and masked performances were made on stage. Surrealism focused on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical and dream theories. *King Ubu* (1896) by Alfred Jarry became an iconic surrealist play. Antonin Artaud (1894–1948) from France was one of the most influential dramatists of Surrealism. He created a Theatre of Cruelty – a primal theatre inspired by ancient rituals. Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) discusses plague, primitive myths, and Balinese "animated hieroglyphics" in the context of curing the decadence of modern life. The avant-garde was also associated with progressive art, particularly related to socialism and anarchism. The Futurists in Italy developed association with Fascism, which functions on extreme nationalism and advocates for war. The Russian futurists participated in the Russian October Revolution of 1917 as socialists. On the other hand, the Dadaists opposed war and embraced socialism in order to destroy class-based societies. The Surrealists often expressed their inclination for the communist parties.

German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) is the most influential political playwright of the avant-garde movements. With a strong Marxist undercurrent of thought, he experimented with both themes or contents and style of his productions and developed Epic Theatre. Epic Theatre uses a technique that interrupts the flow of plot and acting, and transforms the audience into critics rather than mere observers of the spectacle on stage. From Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht learnt the value of using film and other art forms in theatre. His experimentations later led to the collaborative performances on the theatre stage.

Expressionism:

Expressionism was a byproduct of the different types of experimental techniques employed by the Dadaists, Surrealists as well as the larger group of Symbolists. In Expressionism, the playwrights attempt to look into the mind of the character and discover the inner workings of the person. It takes recourse to the representation of hallucinations, dreams and other modes of subjective experiences. Strindberg's 'dream plays' are some important exponents of this technique as they have developed a whole new dimension of modern drama. Expressionism relies on the depiction of external reality coupled with the illogical and frenzied behavior of the hidden self, which results in the development of an environment of weird angularity and distortion. Linear narrative is replaced by fragmented episodes; centrality of the protagonist is replaced by the multiple and depersonalised abstractions; normal conversation is replaced by epigrammatic and ironic language delivering nervous and explosive dialogues.

Theatre and Cultural Renewal: Ireland

The mass appeal of theatre was used by dramatists for different political, cultural and nationalistic purposes. In Ireland, Abbey Theatre in Dublin, under the leadership of Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge (1871–1909), focused on establishing cultural independence from England. Lady Gregory emphasised using Irish language instead of theatrical productions in Ireland. John Millington Synge criticised and subverted the popular romanticised views of the Irish peasantry. His *Playboy of the Western World* created havoc in theatres. W. B. Yeats also participated as a poet and playwright in this Irish nationalist movement.

The Theatre of the Absurd:

Martin Esslin devised and coined the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' to a section of plays written in the 1950s and 1960s. This theatre derived from French philosopher Albert Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus", claims that existence is meaningless and absurd; it ends in "casual slaughter". Playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco produced plays that questioned the

very meaning of man's existence. Most of their plays written in this theatre form share a similar view that man lives in a universe, which is empty of reason and logic. Man's existence is purposeless, it ends purposeless and throughout his existence, he remains confused, spiritually disturbed and obscurely threatened. The essential motive of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' is the reflection of the metaphysical anguish of the contemporary times. In the Post-war modern period, the looming sense of futility and emptiness reflected in the mechanical nature of human beings led them question the purpose of their living. In such a world devoid of reason and logic, man feels isolated as the established values of society, culture, religion fall apart. The Absurd theatre is a strategy to come to terms with that universe.

Absurd writing, as a literary tradition, finds its roots in the Avant Garde experiments in art and literature in 1920s. The Second World War left humanity with the shocking experiences of the disgust, developed with the devaluing of morals, crisis of religious faith, disregard for the socio-cultural conventions and triviality of human life. It can also be perceived as an effort to restore the significance of myths and traditions to the contemporary age by making men conscious of his true condition in this alienated world. The Absurd theatre achieves this by startling human beings out of their mechanical and complacent reality. The authors of the Absurd plays debunked the old forms and standards that cease to be conclusive and lost their validity. The Absurd Theatre is thus an anti-theatre, which rises against the conventional theatre. It is surreal, illogical and without plot or necessary conflict. The dialogues seem unrelated and nonsensical and defy comprehension. Language loses its functionality; it is inadequate instrument of communication and is reduced to meaningless exchanges. 'Silence' as also used by the dramatists as an effective technique to present the unsolved mysteries of human condition. The unsaid meaning is delivered through ellipses, gaps, and half-finished sentences. Disrupting logic and breaking language to fragments, Absurd drama strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational structures in understanding life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Write a note on the basic thematic concerns of the Naturalist theatre.

Q 6: What is understood by the term 'Theatre of the Absurd'?

Q 7: What are the basis characteristics of 'Epic Theatre'?

1.5 IMPORTANT THEORISTS/PRACTITIONERS OF MODERN DRAMA

In this section, we shall discuss some of the important theorists and practitioners of Modern drama.

Henrik Ibsen

The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was the most important pioneering figure of modern drama in Europe. Ibsen emerged as a playwright at a time when Europe was undergoing a spell of drought in the field of successful drama. In Britain, the 19th century was a very prolific period for English literature in terms of poetry, novels and non-fiction; but it was equally barren in the field of drama. Ibsen, hailing from Norway, which did not have any remarkable dramatic tradition, could break that spell of drought and inspired a wave of new writers to experiment with the dramatic form. Ibsen refused to follow the conventional rules of theatre at the time and was determined to forge his own style of drama. There was a growing sense of revolt against the frivolous entertainment on mainstream stages of his time and he could sense the demand by the new intelligentsia for a realistic, serious "thinking" theatre. Ibsen's realist plays, such as *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *Wild Duck*, and *An Enemy of the People*, caused storm in the theatres ad they became highly popular throughout Europe. The success of Ibsen's plays fuelled the formation of new theatres in major cultural capitals like London, Paris and Berlin. Modern theatre soon became an integral part of modern culture in Europe.

Ibsen deviated from the conventional theatrical norms in different ways. He succeeded in innovating three key ingredients – the use of

colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and tightness of plot – that helped him in establishing his own signature in the field of drama. His audience could recognise and relate to the settings and props he used on the stage, and identify themselves with his characters and narratives. This Realism functioned as the decisive factor behind the success of his plays. Ibsen could successfully rouse the intelligentsia's discomfort by confronting them with the social hypocrisies, the conflict between conventional moral values and the changing values in the context of the world after Darwin. The changing human relations in the industrial-capitalist society are vehemently tested in his plays.

His production of *A Doll's House* in 1879 left the theatergoers and critics with tremendous amount of shock and bewilderment because of it subversion of well-established conventions of family relations as well as plot designs. In many cities, the production of the play roused public anger and even he was compelled to revise his ending scene of the play. His *Ghosts* also created disgust among the audience as it exposed the hypocrisies hidden within the polite faces of the middle class civic society. *Ghosts*, with a plot touching upon venereal disease and incestuous relationships, were widely banned in many cities. *Hedda Gabler*, *An Enemy of the People* in 1882 also spoke of the darker aspects of the contemporary society. In his next few plays, *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1887), and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), Ibsen delved into darker and more psychologically complex depictions of human relations and their social existence.

Federico Garcia Lorca:

The celebrated Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) holds a unique place among the greatest dramatists of the 20th century. As a poet and dramatist, he tried to infuse elements of folktale, folk songs into the fabric of the modern times. However, he started his career and also became popular as a poet. His plays written during the last few years of his life made him the most significant voice from Spain in modern drama. Most of his plays portray a dreamlike experience soaked in the mystic Andalusian folklores. His use of bold, profound metaphors and culturally rooted symbols along with the use of music and dance sequences create in his plays a surrealist environment.

With his first Andalusian tragedy *Blood Wedding* (1933), which is an expressionist work that recalls ancient Greek, Renaissance, and Baroque sources, Lorca achieved his first major theatrical success. It is followed by his second Andalucian tragedy, *Yerma* (1934). These plays, including other popular plays like *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936) are basically rural plays, and they draw on classical forms and archetypal characters moulded to a Spanish rural milieu. During the very short life and career, Lorca built a reputation both at home and abroad as a rising socialist, who believed that the purpose of theatre was to question and challenge societal norms. His political associations got reflected very subtly in the reformative, revolt motifs of his plays. Such political affinities may be considered the causes of his mysterious assassination at a very young age during the Spanish Civil War.

Luigi Pirandello:

The Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello (1867-1935), is counted among the peer group of modern European dramatists. Pirandello did not adhere to any one exclusive theatre technique, but his works incorporate elements of Naturalism and Futurism. He was associated with an Italian theatre company through the *teatro del Grotesco* movement, the theatre that adopts the ancient native Italian tradition of *Commedia Dell'arte.* This association provided him with all necessary environments for his experimentations. Among his other plays, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is the most prominent one.

Pirandello made significant use of puppet-like characters in his plays that allowed him to infuse both reality and fantasy. The puppet nature of the characters in h dramatic art provided him with a means of manipulation, which is essential to the realization of fantasies. For this, he had to depend on certain highly skilled methods of acting, including the capacity for improvisation, which was a central method of Commedia Dell'arte. The conflict between life and mask, broken personalities and disjuncted psyches become the hallmark of the plays of Pirandello. He was dissatisfied with the conventional theatricality because he felt that life, which is constantly changing, is distorted and killed when presented on the stage. He believed

that human motives could not be reduced to simple formula; therefore, he wanted all drama to be as fragmentary as life itself. His dramatic technique comprises his command over art of compression, dexterity in the portrayal of characters and sudden climax. His language is often seen fractured. His powerful artistry along with his concepts and attitudes kept his work alive and transformed it into drama.

Bertolt Brecht:

Bertolt Brecht (1896-1956) is considered one of the most important dramatists of the 20th century because of his experiments with the theatrical media as a tool for spreading social and political messages. He appeared on the scene with an entirely new dramaturgic concept, alienating empathy from the stage, destroying the forth wall convention to demonstrate his ideologies. He disregarded emotional identification and purgation on the ground that a play should perturb viewers, prompt their critical faculties, unnerve and jolt them out of complacency. He argues in his article 'On the Experimental Theatre' that the function of the conventional theatre was morally and intellectually degrading because, "the more the public was emotionally affected, the less capable it was of learning".

He formulated what became popular as 'Epic Theatre' whose aim is to arouse the attention of the spectator into the irregularities surrounding them and look beyond the habitual way of looking at a thing. Epic theatre tries to disrupt the difference between the stage and the audience and still unite them in mutual enjoyment Brecht frequently opposed the Naturalistic theatre and believed that the theatre should give up its attempt at portrayal of truth on stage. For him it was important for theatres to create a kind of distancing – a certain degree of separate existence from what was happening on the stage so that the spectators would be able to enter into an unusual dramatic experience and would be able to grasp things rather than be mastered by them. This distancing is attained by what the 'alienation effect' or 'verfremdungseffekt', as Brecht calls it. The reaction of the audience out of this alienation effect forms the foundation of Epic theatre. The plays are woven in contrasting episodes juxtaposed with one another. This structure helps the spectators to see, ponder and criticise the play.

Placards are used to display the theme on curtains. Music, songs interludes are some other alienating devices employed by Brecht. Some of the significant plays of Brecht are *The Threepenny Opera*, *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children, The Good Person of Szechwan, The Caucassian Chalk Circle, The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui.* Among them, *Mother Courage and Her Children* is one of the most popular and highly staged plays of the modern times.

Eugene Ionesco:

Eugene Ionesco (1909 - 1994), is a Romanian-born French dramatist who is basically known for his expressions of the existential questions of the modern man. His one-act "antiplay" *La Cantatrice Chauve* (1949) or *The Bald Soprano* inspired a revolution in dramatic themes and techniques and inaugurated the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. In the most famous scene of *The Bald Suprano*, two strangers while exchanging banalities about the weather, where they live, and how many children they have, suddenly arrive at the astonishing discovery that they are indeed husband and wife. Such a scene is one among the series of scenes where Ionesco deals with the recurrent themes of self-estrangement and the difficulty of communication at the modern times. Ionesco developed the 'antilogical' ideas that he presented in *The Bald Soprano* in a number of plays written recurrently. Plays like *La Leçon* (1951; *The Lesson*), *Les Chaises* (1952; *The Chairs*), and *Le Nouveau Locataire* (1955; *The New Tenant*) were expressive of his recurrent existential questions about being, living, and the fear and horror of death. In *The Lesson*, a timid professor uses the meaning he assigns to words to establish tyrannical dominance over an eager female pupil. In *The Chairs*, an elderly couple gathers empty chairs and awaits the arrival of an audience to hear the old man's last message. Giving the responsibility to speak on his behalf, the old man and his wife commit a double suicide. However, the orator turns out to be dumb can speak only gibberish.

His longer plays like *Amédée* (1954), *Tueur sans gages* (1959; *The Killer*), and *Le Rhinocéros* (1959; *Rhinoceros*) lack the dramatic unity he achieved in his one-act plays. His other important works include *Le Roi se meurt* (1962; *Exit the King*), *Le Piéton de l'air* (1963; *A Stroll in the Air*), *La*

Soif et la faim (1966; *Thirst and Hunger*), *Jeux de massacre* (1970; *Killing Game*); *Macbett* (1972), which is a retelling of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and *Ce formidable bordel* (1973; *A Hell of a Mess*). Among these, *Rhinoceros*, a play about totalitarianism, is considered Ionesco's most popular work.

Ionesco's plays are important because of the fact that they have popularised a wide variety of nonrepresentational and surrealistic among audiences conditioned to a Naturalistic convention in the theatre. His tragicomic farces dramatise the absurdity of bourgeois life, the meaninglessness of social conventions, and the futile and mechanical nature of modern civilization. His plays build on bizarrely illogical or fantastic situations using such devices as the humorous multiplication of objects on stage until they overwhelm the actors. The clichés and tedious maxims of polite conversation surface in improbable or inappropriate contexts to expose the deadening futility of most human communication. Ionesco's later works show less concern with witty intellectual paradox and more with dreams, visions, and exploration of the subconscious.

Samuel Beckett:

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), who wrote in both French and English, is perhaps best known for his plays, especially *En attendant Godot* (1952; *Waiting for Godot*). His most well known works, written between the Second World War and the 1960s were written in French. Beckett's plays revolted against the traditional norms with conventional plot and time and place references. He tried to concentrate on the essential elements of the human condition in dark humorous ways. As a practitioner of the "Theatre of the Absurd", his plays focus on human despair and the will to survive in a hopeless world that equally unintelligible. Bceckett's rise to world fame began with the amazing success of *Waiting for Godot* at the small Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953 and soon he became renowned as an absurd playwright.

Beckett's works are concerned primarily with the morbidity, meaninglessness and purposelessness of human existence. He plays test human beings in extreme situations in order to examine the essential aspects

of human experience. The subject matter of so much of the world's literature – the social relations between individuals, their manners and possessions, their struggles for rank and position, or the conquest of sexual objects – appeared to Beckett as mere external trappings of existence. These are the accidental and superficial aspects that mask the basic problems and the basic anguish of the human condition. The basic problems for human beings are the challenges of understanding life, understanding being, understanding the nature of being, understanding the true nature of our self – the 'I'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what way, did Henrik Ibsen deviate from conventional theatrical representation?

Q 9: Explain briefly Samuel Beckett's contribution to modernist theatre.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

At the end of this unit, we have come across some basic information about the growth and development of modern drama in Europe, the important dramatic movements led by some important personalities associated with drama in Europe. Modern drama is a very dynamic field of thematic and technical experimentations performed by dramatists hailing from different parts of Europe during a period spanning from the middle of the 19th century the latter half of the 20th century. Some of the important movements in modern drama include Naturalism, Realism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Theatre of the Absurd, Political Theatre etc. Ibsen is considered the father of modern drama. Some of the important playwrights of the modern times include names like G. B. Shaw, Garcia Lorca, J. M. Synge, W. B. Yeats, Anton Chekov, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and so on.



1.7 FURTHER READING

Bently, Eric. (1992). *Theory of the Modern Stage*. Penguin.

Brown, John Russell. (1995). The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brustein, Robert. (1991). *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama*. Boston: Little Brown.

Esslin, Martin. (1976). *The Theatre of the Absurd*, revised and enlarged edition, Penguin Books.

Gilman, Richard. (2000). *The Making of Modern Drama*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kuhns, David F. (1997). *German Expressionist Theatre:The Actor and the Stage, Cambridge:* Cambridge University Press.

Nicoll, Allardyce. (1978). *British Drama.* London: Barnes & Noble Books. (6th edition).

Pfister, Manfred. (1991). *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sokel, Walter. (1959). *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth Century Germany.* London: McGraw-Hill.

Willett, John. (1970). *Expressionism.* London: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Williams, Raymond. (1993). *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. London: Hogarth.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The 19th century sense of discontent with socio-cultural and literary ideals… … restless criticism and an intense probing into the disturbances and irregularities in the modern world… …the ideological and social turmoil of the time influenced the pioneers of the modern theatre.

Ans to Q 2: Read carefully about the basic premises of Naturalism, Realism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Absurd and Epic theatre as reflections

of the problems faced by modern human beings in order to address this question.

Ans to Q 3: They declared the end of control of the drama by fixed rules, including the absolute separation of comedy and tragedy… …experiment with any kind of material on stage and employment if different kinds of form and style… …the loss of the importance of decorum, questioning of the idea that tragedy deals with the fate of princes and nobles… …negation of classical three unities.

Ans to Q 4: The two World Wars caused a sense of anarchy and distrust of readymade ideologies… …the revival of the grotesque in modern drama indicating the dissolution of moral and spiritual values and norms… …theatre of the Absurd share a common view that man inhabits a universe which is devoid of any reason and logic… …man's existence is purposeless, obscure and catastrophic.

Ans to Q 5: Post-Darwin social context… …industrial, urban, middle class… …thinking intellectuals… …problems inherent in polite societies… …social hypocrisy… …faithful image of society… …Ibsen's plays.

Ans to Q 6: Martin Esslin… … "Myth of Sisyphus"… …meaning of being… …purpose of life – meaninglessness, purposelessness… …obscure existence – fear, angst… …Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter.

Ans to Q 7: Brecht's alienation effect… …loose plot structure… …no forth wall… …audience as participant and critic… …awareness about invisible problems and realities.

Ans to Q 8: Ibsen introduced three key ingredients–the use of colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and tightness of plot… …audience could recognise and relate to the settings and props he used on the stage… …identify themselves with his characters and narratives… …exposed social hypocrisies, the conflict between conventional moral values and the changing values in the context of the world after Darwin.

Ans to Q 9: Beckett's plays revolted against the traditional norms with conventional plot and time and place references… … presented the essential elements of the human condition in dark humorous ways… …his 'absurd' plays focus on human despair and the will to survive in a hopeless world that equally unintelligible.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. Explore the socio-cultural contexts behind the development of Naturalist theatre in Europe.

Q 2. Write a detailed note on the themes and techniques of the plays of Henrik Ibsen.

Q 3. Do you think that theatre can be used as a political tool? Discuss with reference to the Irish nationalist theatre and Brecht's epic theatre.

Q 4. What are the thematic concerns of the 'Theatre of the absurd'? How do the absurd playwrights experiment with plot and the stage in order to deal with the philosophical questions? Discuss.

Q 5. Write a detailed note on the theatrical experimentations of Luigi Pirandello with reference to the plays you have read.

Q 6. Discuss the significance of cultural symbols in Lorca's plays.

Q 7. Explore how different movements in modern drama are interconnected.

Q 8. How have the movements in art and literature influenced modern European drama? Discuss in detail.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 2: GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *CANDIDA* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 George Bernard Shaw: The Playwright

- 2.3.1 His Life
- 2.3.2 His Dramatic Career

2.4 Sources of the Play *Candida*

2.5 Critical Reception of Shaw

2.6 Let us Sum up

2.7 Further Reading

2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.9 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the playwright George Bernard Shaw
- assess George Bernard Shaw's contribution to Modern Drama
- trace the sources of the play *Candida*
- make a critical assessment of Bernard Shaw as a modern playwright

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall introduce you to the Irish playwright, critic, and pamphleteer George Bernard Shaw. Shaw produced more than fifty-two plays, three volumes of music and drama criticism, and one major volume of socialist commentary. Shaw is generally considered the greatest dramatist to write in the English language since William Shakespeare. Following the example of Henrik Ibsen, he succeeded in revolutionising the English stage, disposing of the romantic conventions and devices of the

"well-made" play, and instituting a theatre of ideas grounded in realism. During his lifetime, he was equally famous as an iconoclastic and outspoken public figure. Essentially a shy man, Shaw created the public persona of G. B. S.– showman, satirist, pundit, and intellectual jester, who challenged established political and social beliefs. Through this unit, you will be able to grasp certain important ideas regarding Shaw the person and the Shaw the playwright.

2.3 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: THE PLAYWRIGHT

It is important for you to know about the life and works of George Bernard Shaw. This section offers a broad understanding of the playwright, and, as is expected, helps steer your interest in the play.

2.3.1 His Life

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was born in Dublin as the third and the youngest child to George Carr Shaw, a civil clerk turned wholesale corn merchant and Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, a music teacher and singer. The family was of Anglo-Irish heritage, and was Protestant by religion. Shaw had a very troubled childhood owing to his father's drinking habits, and even his mother, after her marriage to George Carr Shaw, was disowned by her family. Shaw and his two sisters were mostly brought up by neglecting servants. When he was sixteen, his mother and sisters, Elinor Agnes and Lucinda Frances had left Dublin to live permanently in London. He attended several schools in Dublin but had a dislike for formal education, which he expressed later in a polemical essay "Treatise on Parents and Children". Even as he was reluctant towards learning, he attended the Central Model School and Wesley College in Dublin. He briefly ended his education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. It was only in his later years that Shaw revealed how he was ostracised by Protestant boys for having attended Central Model Boy's School with Catholic students, "a secret kept for 80 years." Left to be with his father, he started work

at the age of 15, as an office boy and later a junior clerk in a firm of estate agents in Dublin for five years.

In the year 1876, fearing that he would never achieve his ambitions as a musician or a painter, he left Ireland to join his mother in London. There he first began work as a music critic in a weekly paper in which he was successful and also began freelancing in writing. In London, he resided with his mother's partner George John Vandeleur Lee who organised operas and concerts and used Shaw's musical talents. Shaw got from his mother the love for music, which became useful for him in London. He became a music critic on the *Star,* a London evening newspaper. He often visited public libraries and particularly the reading room at the British Museum. It was in his reading room that he began experimenting with the form of novel and wrote several novels in between the years 1880 to 1883 but they were not well received by publishers.

From the kind of reading he spent his time with, Shaw was inspired to become a member of the Fabian Society a new socialist organization established in 1884 and became a dedicated Socialist. In London, he joined several debating team in his bid to fight his self-consciousness and following poet P. B. Shelley's example, he turned into a vegetarian. After he heard the American economist Henry George speak, he became a socialist and when he met his Fabian friends Beatrice and Sidney Webb, he joined the Fabian Society. He read Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* to understand socialism in depth and to expand his knowledge.



LET US KNOW

Fabian Society: A British socialist organisation whose purpose was to advance the principles of socialism via gradualist and reformist, rather than revolutionary, means. It is best known for its initial groundbreaking work beginning late in the 19th century and continuing up to World War I. The

society laid many of the foundations of the Labour Party and subsequently affected the policies of states emerging from the decolonisation of the British Empire, especially in India.



Iconoclasm: George Bernard Shaw is well known for his **"iconoclasm"**. An iconoclast is one who attacks popular beliefs or established values and practices. In his time, Shaw was convinced of a necessary moral revolution in the social order and through his works satirised conventional social ideals and institutions.

Shaw was more for a moderate understanding of socialism and was even more convinced of it when he witnessed the violence of **Bloody Sunday** on November 13, 1887, during which the police troops used force to break up the socialist protests in London. This event made him realise that force was indeed ineffective and he felt that it was more important to educate others in Socialist thoughts. During this time, he came to be well received in the literary circles with his publication of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1981).

It was through his Fabian friends that he met and fell in love with a wealthy Irish lady and a fellow Fabian Charlotte Payne Townshend whom he married and remained with her until her death at the age of 86 in 1943. Owing to her insistence, their marriage is said to have remained unconsummated, and in 1906, the Shaws moved into their permanent residence (now known as Shaw's Corner) in a small village in England.

He was intellectually active even at the age of 91 when he joined the Interplanetary Society. Shaw believed in a **universal Life Force**, an energy which, when combined with progressive social awareness, improved the natural man. He defined it as "vitality with a direction". He believed that one could live as long as one wished, as long as they were in tune with this life force. However, at the age of 93, he fell from a tree that he was pruning and broke his hip. Doctors told him that it would not heal. Subsequently, Shaw passed away within a week on November 2, 1950. His ashes were mixed with his wife's and scattered in their garden, around St. Joan's statue.

Shaw had refused a knighthood in 1923, but at the request of his wife had accepted the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925, requesting that the prize money be used as the fund for the translation of the playwright August Strindberg's works. He was of

the belief that “merit in authorship could only be determined by the posthumous verdict of history”. Shaw was also the co-founder of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895, along with his fellow Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Graham Wallas.

Shaw was in many ways the product of Victorian England, although he is also attached with the Modernism in literature. The Victorian period was a time of great literary creativity, what influenced Shaw most was its tendencies toward realism, its confident championing of self-reliance and inner strength, its moral earnestness, its advocacy of charity and social reform, and its patriotic British nationalism. The authors who perhaps best embody all of these things would be the novelist Charles Dickens, the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, and the critic Matthew Arnold.

Bernard Shaw took from Victorianism its moral earnestness and commitment to social reform, but he left behind its nationalism and its confidence that core British values would steer a sure path to a brighter future at home and around the world. Shaw felt that the Victorian version of “realism” was too idealised—it ignored controversial issues, it glorified heroes for the wrong things, and it packaged life too neatly into “well made” stories with predictable structures and sentimental conclusions. Shaw is more in line with the “naturalism” movement which began in late 19th century France, culminating in the novels of Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) and E´mile Zola (1840–1902) and aiming to represent a “slice of life” marked by a detached, objective description of society with careful accuracy of detail and historical background. People, often neglected in previous literatures, such as housewives, the poor, or criminals, were given priority. Whereas naturalist writers often showed individual freewill to be ineffective against the powerful forces of history, society, or biology, however, Shaw strongly believed that creative adaptability, powered by the strength of human willpower, is the “life force” that ensures our evolution as a species. Evolution

The idea of "evolution" was highly charged in Shaw's day. Charles Darwin had published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, detailing the evidence for his conclusion that species (including man) evolved from lower order animals through a process of natural selection and random mutations. The idea that God might not be the sole guiding hand in creation, especially the creation of humankind, scandalised the 19th century and still reverberates today. Shaw was an early supporter of Darwinian evolution, applying the ideas to socialism, women's rights, and other reformist political ideas. Literature and other arts, he strongly felt, could play a part in mankind's evolution to a higher state.

Shaw was also greatly influenced by the German thinker Karl Marx (1818–1883) who developed his socialist theory after observing the lives of the factory workers in the north of England. Marx wrote that economics is the engine of history, and the unfairness of a capitalist society—where business owners are motivated to pay workers as little as possible, and workers do not own the products of their own labour—can only be changed by revolution. Marx's ideas were quickly assimilated into literature and literary criticism, and Shaw consistently applied socialist ideas in his plays, prefaces, and essays. Shaw's socialism shared with Marxism its commitment to social change via economics but remained committed to political reforms within the system and not by revolution from outside it. That said, Shaw did not shy away from celebrating the effects of revolution. After a visit to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in the 1930s, when he met long-time Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, he returned to England convinced that the Soviet Union was leading the world to a brighter future. This conviction, held by many leftist artists and intellectuals of the time—most of whom saw the Soviet experiment as a truly socialist project, rather than the façade for authoritarianism that it ultimately became—was unshaken by evidence of Stalin's "pogroms," or slaughter of countless of his own citizens in order to achieve ''state security.''



LET US KNOW

The playwright who had the most influence on Shaw was the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, who wrote realistic and intellectual dramas about pressing social issues that had never before been discussed on the stage. Shaw details his debt to Ibsen, in the context of Shaw's own socialism, in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891, rev. 1913). Immediately after Shaw's time, his influence on drama was eclipsed by the more symbolic, avant-garde, and impressionistic (although no less politically challenging) work of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) and Samuel Beckett (1906–1989).

In recent years, however, "postmodern" British and American stages have seen a great deal of "Shavian" drama, which are plays that contain intellectual discussion, are based more upon character than plot, and engage the audience with important social issues. It is easy to imagine Shaw applauding heartily for two of the most ambitious and important plays in the last several decades, Tony Kushner's two-part "Angels in America" (dealing with AIDS) and Tom Stoppard's trilogy "The Coast of Utopia" (dealing with the Russian Revolution).

2.3.2 His Dramatic Career

Shaw was a dramatist, novelist, an essayist, pamphleteer, music and drama critic and is known to have written more than 250,000 letters. At the beginning of his literary career between 1879 and 1883, Shaw wrote five novels titled *Immaturity October* (1887), *The Irrational Knot* (1905), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1886) and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1887). The novels however were not well received. Among the short story collections to his credit, the ones that deserve mention are *One of the Lesser Tales is The Miraculous Revenge* (1885) and *The Black Girl in Search of God and Some Lesser Tales* (1934). The latter

resembles the allegory form in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which a Christian convert sets on a quest to find God. Shaw, who is better known for his plays, had penned 63 plays, which were first performed on stage in the 1890s.

In collaboration with William Archer, Shaw began writing his first play *Widower's Houses* which was an attack on the slumlords in 1880s and was performed at London's Royalty Theatre in 1892. The play was included in the collection *Plays Unpleasant* (1898) along with *The Philanderer* (1898) and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898). Shaw's collection titled *Plays Pleasant* (1898) included the plays *The Man of Destiny* (1897), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1898) and *You Never Can Tell* (1897). Among these plays *Arms and the Man* and *Candida* were more popular. *Arms and the Man* is an anti-romantic comedy with the twin themes of love and war in the background of the Serbo-Bulgarian War. Shaw questions the reality of Romantic love and highlights the futility of war and violence. A musical adaptation of the play was called *The Chocolate Soldier* (1908), performed by the German Operetta. The World War I had shaken Shaw's faith in humanity and it found a reflection in the play *Heartbreak House* (1919) written after the war.

The collection *Three Plays for Puritans* published in 1901 contained *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Captain Brassbounds Conversion* (1900) and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901). *The Devil's Disciple* is an interesting play about an outcast from his family and a self-proclaimed devil's disciple, Richard "Dick" Dudgeon, which is set in colonial America. Another collection of Shaw's plays titled Back to *Methuselah (A Metabiological Pentateuch)* (1921) begins with a preface and a series of five plays *In the Beginning, The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas, The Thing Happens, Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman* and *As Far as Thought Can Reach*. These plays are based on the two principles of 'Creative Evolution' and 'Life Force' in which Shaw believed in and the series traces the beginning from the Garden of Eden to that of a futuristic time.

Shaw revolutionised drama and the dramatic art by highlighting the moral, political and socio-economic issues. He had written *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) highlighting the works of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Here he stated the quintessence of 'Ibsenism' was that "there is no formula". Among his well known later plays are *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Saint Joan* (1923).Based on the Don Juan theme, *Man and Superman* is about the romance between two rivals John Tanner and Ann Whitefield, in which Shaw famously focuses philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the 'Superman' (one who is responsible for the creation of values in a world where God is dead).

While the woman-centric play *Major Barbara* is about an officer of The Salvation Army Major Barbara Undershaft and her changing convictions of providing true salvation. This was followed by *Pygmalion* a major success on the stage and which was also adapted most successfully as the musical film *My Fair Lady* earning Shaw an Oscar. The play critiques the rigid British class character centering on a Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle who is trained by a Professor of phonetics Henry Higgins in fluent speech and etiquettes/ manners to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. Shaw is believed to have been considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature for his play *St. Joan*, based on the canonised saint, Joan of Arc. The citation for the Nobel he received in 1925 read: "...marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty".

Shaw had also written criticism on music and drama, several letters and polemical essays such as "Maxims for Revolutionists" (1903), "On Going to Church" (1905), "How to Write a Popular Play" (1909), "Treatise on Parents and Children" (1910), "Common Sense about the War" (1914), "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism" (1928), "Essays in Fabian Socialism" (1931), "Our Theatres in the Nineties" (1932), "Dictators – Let Us Have More of

Them" (1938), "Everybody's Political What's What?"(1944) and "Sixteen Self Sketches" (1949) among other works. He was a journalist and an art critic and wrote for newspapers such as *The Pall Mall Gazette, The World, The Star, The Saturday Review* until he had been well established as a playwright. From 1904 to 1907, Shaw had entered into a successful theatrical partnership with Barker and John Vedrenne at the Royal Court Theatre which accounted for seventy percent of his staged works. Shaw always encouraged amateur playwrights and also encouraged Harley Granville Barker who was twenty one years his junior, with whom he shared one of his closest friendships.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why did Shaw leave for London in 1876? In London, what were the activities in which he was involved in?

Q 2: Name the public honours that Shaw had both refused and accepted state why?

Q 3: Name the significant plays contained in the collections *Plays Unpleasant* (1898) and *Plays Pleasant* (1898).

Q 4: What do you mean by the term 'Ibsenism'?

2.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *CANDIDA*

Shaw's Candida in *Candida* is very similar to Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House*, which centers on the significance of choice in traditional bonds of marital relations in the 19th century. Ibsen's Nora makes the choice of leaving her husband Torvald's home (leaving the play open-ended). She breaks her silence in the play by saying: "We must come to a final settlement, Torvald. During eight whole years…we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things". This play *A Doll's House* was based on the life of Ibsen's close friend Laura Kieler. On the other hand, Shaw's protagonist Candida exercises her freedom of choice at the end of the play to remain with her husband Rev. James Morell, instead of giving in to the young poet

Eugene Marchbanks. To Shaw, Candida was the ideal woman whom he created with an irresistible charming persona. In his letter to Ellen Terry, he wrote, "Candida is the Virgin Mother and none else." Ibsen had influenced Shaw's treatment of the theme of marriage in *Candida*, which was more "an open-ended questioning rather than confident enlightenment".

George Bernard Shaw wrote *Candida* in 1894, but it was first published in 1898 as a part of the *Plays Pleasant.* It is interesting to note that Shaw had subtitled the play as "The Mystery". It is set in the transitional phase between the Victorian period and the Modern age and takes place in London's suburban north east end. The play has detailed stage settings and stage directions as is common to all Shavian plays. It is significant to note that *Candida* as a woman centric play was a huge success when it was performed on the stage and it had interestingly led to a phenomenon of "Candidomaniacs". The central characters in the play are Reverend James Morell a socialist clergyman, his affectionate wife Candida, and a young poet Eugene Marchbanks who is in love with her. Candida plays the central role in raising questions about the Victorian notions of love, fidelity and marriage and through her candid approach to the possibilities of alternate choices redefines her relation with her husband.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Write a note on the sources of the play *Candida*.

2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAW

Bernard Shaw's position as a "classic playwright" tends to obscure the essentially revolutionary nature of his writing. He was often charged with didacticism, for his various reformist agendas, but he was less interested in promoting a particular point of view. As the critic Eric Bentley has pointed out, Shaw's purpose was to investigate the relation between ideas and reality, or, more accurately, between idealism and realism. Exposing hypocrisy was not his goal. Instead, he hoped to demonstrate how human beings are hoodwinked by their own unconsidered actions and

the beliefs. Shaw had the outstanding talent of a dramatist as well as a critic and according to Hermann Bahr, had "the ability to arouse the whole state, the whole nation against him" with his iconoclastic writing. Alfred Kerr observes that he was "a distinct gain for our age." He also states that "opposition was the very breath of his nostrils" and that Shaw, both as a propagandist and a dramatist, asserted the destruction of established morals while infusing an element of comedy in the representation of his ideas. Due to his representation of everyday life, critic Charles Benjamin Purdom called his plays, "a living drama". In defending himself from his critics, Shaw too asserted that as a dramatist realist he had "simply discovered drama in real life." Shaw was not only a moralist or a socialist, he was above all a humanitarian and due to the representations of his ideas ("Shavian ideas"), he was also considered the father of the theatre of ideas. Finally, Shaw was instrumental in revitalising the theatre towards the end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th.

In reference to Shaw's *Candida*, Archibald Henderson notes, "Candida was praised in Paris as a new solution of the feminist problem; and in *St. Petersburg reviews*, Mr. Shaw was rated far above Pinero and Jones, and elevated to the pedestal of fame." Although, Shaw was discouraged that it would take twenty-five long years before the London stage would receive a play like *Candida*, when the play was staged by the Independent Theatre Company in 1897, it was extremely well received particularly because of the reception by feminists. In a letter to Ellen Terry Shaw described his play *Candida* as "the mother play". Raymond Williams in praise of him said, "Shaw is able to tell us, by naming a problem, what each of his plays is about; and the phrase is always an adequate explanation."

It has been easy for critics to point out that despite his allegiance to realism, Shaw's characters sometimes seem more like intellectual concepts rather than real people, especially when compared to the characters in Henrik Ibsen or August Strindberg. Other critics locate this as one of Shaw's strengths: those ideas come alive at the center of his dramas. Shaw's early plays were very popular, but following his questioning of England's participation in World War I, he was suspected of being a German

sympathiser, and he lost support. Shaw kept writing about the war, however, and as World War II was starting, he increased his attacks on capitalist democracy further instigating his enemies. His reputation benefited from the play *Saint Joan* in 1923, a play about the martyr Joan of Arc that suggested criticism of England's cruel treatment of Ireland, that also later propelled him toward the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

After the wars, Shaw's criticisms began to seem more like prophesies, and his critical standing and popularity improved. The huge success of *My Fair Lady*, a musical adaptation of Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, also helped to renew affection for Shaw's work. Some critics denounced Shaw's plays for their preachiness and unsympathetic characters, while others applauded his efforts to raise the tone of British drama, while his depiction of independent women characters found an attentive audience with feminist critics starting in the 1960s. Contemporary observer Sunder Katwala describes Shaw as "a persistent pioneer of both feminism and racial equality," and notes, "Shaw's genius cannot be doubted. Nor his astonishing range, from his major contribution to music criticism to his being the only Nobel laureate to also bag an Oscar."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How does Eric Bentley view Shaw's contributions?



2.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit has helped you discuss the life and works of George Bernard Shaw one of the greatest of the modern playwrights. Although an Irish dramatist, Shaw is now seen as one of the most significant British dramatists of the modern era, and at least until the 1970s with the rise of Tom Stoppard, he is often recognised as the greatest British dramatist since Shakespeare.



2.7 FURTHER READING

Bloom, Harold. (2000). *George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Cardullo, Bert. (1986). "The Mystery of Candida", *Shaw*. 6. Penn State University Press. www.jstor.org/stable/4008127

Dunkel, Wilbur Dwight. "George Bernard Shaw", *The Sewanee Review*. 50.2 John Hopkins University. www.jstor. org/stable/27537270

Hacht, Anne Marie. & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 4.

Henderson, Archibald. (1907). "George Bernard Shaw". *The North American Review.* 185.616. University of Northern Iowa..
www.jstor.org/stable/25105897

Innes, Christopher. (Ed.). (1998). *George Bernard Shaw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jain, Sangeeta. (2006). *Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.

Shaw, George Bernard. (2006). *Candida*. Kansas: Digireads.com Publishing.

Shaw, George Bernard. (1995). *Candida: A Critical Introduction.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Soanes, Catherine. (Ed.). (2004). *The New Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

www. mccarter.org/ Education/ candida

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw

http://www.mccarter.org/Education/candida/

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Ambition to become a musician and painter… …first occupation in London : freelancing… …visiting public libraries… …writing his first novels… …member of Fabian Society… …debate teams… …turning vegetarian… …dedicated Socialist.

Ans to Q 2: Refused Knighthood in 1923… …accepted the Nobel in 1925 on wife's request… …prize money given away for a cause…. …his belief on literary merit.

Ans to Q 3: [*Plays Unpleasant*] : ... ... Widower's House, ... The Philanderer, ... Mrs. Warren's Profession… … [*Plays Pleasant*] : … …The Man of Destiny, ... Arms and the Man, ... Candida, ... You Never Can Tell etc.

Ans to Q 4: Shaw revolutionised drama and the dramatic art by highlighting moral, political and socio-economic issues… …Shaw wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) and highlighted the works of Henrik Ibsen ... ... he stated that the term 'Ibsenism' meant "there is no formula" in a drama.

Ans to Q 5: Shaw's Candida in *Candida* is very similar to Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House* … …both enters on the significance of choice in traditional bonds of marital relations in the 19th century… …Ibsen's Nora makes the choice of leaving her husband Torvald's home while Shaw's Candida exercises her freedom of choice at the end of the play to remain with her husband Rev. James Morell.

Ans to Q 6: He points out that Shaw's purpose was to investigate the relation between ideas and reality… …between idealism and realism… …exposing hypocrisy was not his goal, but he hoped to demonstrate how human beings are hoodwinked by their own unconsidered actions and the beliefs.



2.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What assumptions can you make regarding 'drama of ideas'? Discuss with reference to the plays of Bernard Shaw.

Q 2: Make a comparison of Shaw's artistic achievements with that of the other great dramatists of the 20th century.

Q 3: In what ways did Shaw's works contribute to and/or work against the Modernist aesthetic that developed in literature during his heyday?

Q 4: Read any of the plays by Bernard Shaw and discuss the problems he wanted to see reformed.

Q 5: Discuss the importance of G. B. Shaw as a modern dramatist with reference to the innovations that he brought to the stage.

Q 6: Write in detail about the critical reception of Shaw as a playwright.

Q 7: Shaw was not only a moralist or a socialist, he was above all a humanitarian, and due to the representations of his ideas, he was also considered the father of the theatre of ideas. Discuss.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 3: GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *CANDIDA* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Act wise Summary of the Play

3.4 Critical Commentary on the Play

3.5 Major Themes

3.6 Major Characters

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make a summary of the play *Candida*
- explain the play *Candida* in terms of its different thematic renderings
- analyse the role of different characters including that of the protagonist Candida, who is central to the play
- gain a better perspective into the play through the significant themes

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit, which is to be studied in connection with the previous unit on Bernard Shaw's life and works, shall help you to discuss the play *Candida* in sufficient details. The play is a comedy but it contains some serious themes and issues, as you will soon discover. George Bernard Shaw, who was a dramatist, a socialist, critic, musician and painter, also had a prolific dramatic career and was well known for his "**iconoclastic**" views and ideas of freethinking and socialism as reflected mostly in his vast array of literary works. Shaw is renowned for his contribution to what we today know as

"Modern drama" because he broke away from the conventions of the melodramatic London theatre in the 1890s. His plays are as much read as watched, and he is probably the only dramatist to have been famous first in print followed by his success in theatre. With the kind of voluminous works to his credit, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925 for the play *Saint John* and an Oscar Award in 1938 both for his contribution to literature and adaptations of his plays. The play *Candida* was first published in 1895 as one of the four plays which he termed as "Plays Pleasant".

3.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act-I

The play begins on a fine sunny October morning with a description of the suburbs with the "characterless brick houses" with "front gardens", the Radical Clubs", "stony pavements", the green Victoria park and St. Dominic's Parsonage which is a "semi detached villa" with a resident parson, the Reverend James Mavor Morell. It also contains the stage settings of the drawing room which is the centre of the action in the play. Morel is a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England. He is having a conversation with his typist Miss Proserpine Garnett (Prossy), in the drawing room. Opening his letters, he glances at the dates for his lectures and engagements for the entire week and discusses the same with her as he is very hard pressed for time. Morell's curate the Reverend Alexander Mill (Lexy) enters interrupting but enlivening the discussion. While at her typing, Prossy is vexed at Morell's expressive love for his wife and is rather annoyed at Morell's impatience about his wife's return by 11.45 AM. She states that a man must be concerned about his wife without making a fool of himself like Morell who is preoccupied only about "Candida here, and Candida there, and Candida everywhere."

Prossy and Lexy being left to themselves begin a conversation that leads to an argument. Prossy compares her looks with that of Candida, while Lexy is impressed by Candida's photograph finding her extremely beautiful. Prossy turns sarcastic about Lexy trying to imitate Morell in his dress and conduct.

Mr. Burgess enters unannounced and Prossy goes upstairs to call on Morell. Burgess tells Lexy that his purpose of the visit is rather personal. Meeting his son-in-law, Burgess recalls his previous visit alleging how Morell had turned him out of a contract. What had angered Morell the previous time was Burgess's tender for a contract of clothing supply to a work house and the way Burgess had conducted it. He had forwarded the lowest tenders and had paid starvation wages to the women who prepared the clothing. This had angered Morell because the wages had been so meagre that the women who were Morell's parishioners would have taken to prostitution. Being a Christian socialist he was particular about his ideals and called his curates, his "helpers and comrades", to push forward that mission.

Burgess accepts that he had been wrong earlier but had come to Morell to ask for pardon. He had also raised payments, turning himself into a model employer. There were now no women employees as they were replaced by machines. The machine operating men received the Trade Union rate of payment for their work. For a moment, Morell thought that the old man had changed but becomes wary when Burgess replied that these changes were made in the absence of alternate choices. Burgess insists that it was rather "family sentiment" and "pure friendliness" to be on good terms with him as a good Christian that had resulted in his sudden visit. Yet, Morell does not buy the idea, remains unconvinced, and says, "I won't have you here sniveling about being a model employer and a converted man when you're only an apostate with your coat turned for the sake of a County Council contract."

Burgess tells him that five years before no sensible man would take up with the ideas (of Christian Socialism) that Morell and his crew had taken up, but they had now become very influential. Thus, the quarrel is made up on that note of appreciation and the acceptance of a hand of friendship. This is when Candida enters dressed in bonnet and mantle with a strapped rug, an umbrella in tow, a handbag and a supply of illustrated papers. She is received with affection by her husband who apologizes for having lost track of time to receive her at the train station.

Eugene Marchbanks who had visited her the day before has accompanied her in her journey and is well received too. He was one of James's discoveries and was found sleeping on the embankment. Candida refers to the painting of the Virgin on the wall, which was gifted by Eugene, and she tells Burgess, her father, that Eugene's uncle was a Peer- a real Earl, belonging to the nobility. Eugene even had a seven-day bill for 55 pounds in his pocket when he was found. However, Burgess rather belittles the aristocracy just as he would earlier call Socialism a set of "foolish ideas". It is important to note that in the situation, Shaw presents Burgess as a Capitaist, Morell as a Christian Socialist and Marchbanks as belonging to the aristocratic class. Morell tries to make Eugene comfortable by formally introducing him to Mr. Burgess.

Burgess in his joviality and noisiness takes leave, as he is to catch a city train at 12.25 p.m. Candida is glad to notice that Eugene is courteous to her father. She would have rather minded had he laughed at the good old man, as usually he is ill-at ease, and becomes self-conscious with strangers. Eugene is seated on the sofa with an expression of hopeless suffering and on being asked by her why is he so melancholic since they came in the cab that morning, he answers that it is due to his confusion as to how much he had to pay the cab driver. Candida picking up her handbag excuses herself to take care of the household chores as she has been away for three weeks. Morell then asks Eugene to stay for lunch but he refuses reluctantly saying Mrs. Morell had told him earlier that probably her husband wouldn't ask him to stay back for lunch but if he did, he would only want otherwise. This also shows Candida's frank nature which can be observed throughout the play and it is interesting to note that the name **'Candida'** may be drawn from the word **'candid',** which means frank, truthful or straight forward. On hearing this, in his good humour, Morell adds that usually "an old friend or a truly noble and sympathetic soul" is not an obstacle in a couple's reunion, as a chance visitor is and yet he would rather want Eugene to remain for lunch and be part of the couple's happiness. Morell has very ideal opinions of "a happy marriage" like theirs, and finds "something very sacred in the return of his wife" and wished Eugene to see "what a happy thing it is to be married as he was."

At this, Eugene expresses his cynicism about Morell's belief in his own "happy" marriage but Morell counters it with his cynicism about La Rochefoucauld who had said that "there are convenient marriages, but no delightful ones." This is when Eugene rather puzzling Morell, writhing in wild anger says: "I must speak to you. There is something that must be settled between us." Although, Morell is comforting and patient with him, but when Eugene confesses, "I love your wife" Morell recoils for a moment but the bursts into uncontrollable laughter. He takes it sportingly, laughing about how Eugene was just under twenty and she over thirty and their nature of affection would rather be "a case of calf-love".

Morell asks him not to make a fool of himself but Eugene begins to "stagger" him on purpose, thinking himself wiser over Morell's blind foolishness in the faith of his marriage. Throughout the heated conversation, Morell maintains his "fine forbearance" and tries to comfort him with his preaching oratory. Nevertheless, Eugene in his "boyish crudity of assertion" extends the argument. Eugene then stings Morell with his question: "Is it like this for her here always? A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom, and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching?"

As Eugene is about to leave asking Morell to tell her about his truth, Candida, oblivious of what the two had talked about, enters in her housekeeping attire, and on finding Eugene about to go, requests her husband to ask him to stay for lunch. Eugene gives a knowing look over his shoulder, challenging Morell's move and pretending to busy himself at his table. Morell agrees. Eugene offers his arm to Candida and the two go about setting the table. Act one ends with Eugene declaring, "I am the happiest of men".

Act- II

Act two opens with Eugene, late in the afternoon, being alone and idly passing his time, meddling with the typewriter when Prossy enters with her notebook (in which she takes down Morell's letters in shorthand from his dictation) and sits at the typewriter to start work, without taking notice of

Eugene. Finding Eugene busy with the typewriter, she complains about the stuck key. In the conversation that follows, Eugene's allusion to people who can do business and write letters as always having love affairs offends Prossy because that is precisely the kind of work that she does. She sharply denies having had any love affairs but Eugene is carried away by his poetical talk on the thoughts of shy and unspoken love. As she is by the fire, he talks out to her, of her secret love for Morell following which she blushes. Eugene then questions her if it is possible for a woman to love a man like Morell. At this, she looks him straight in the face and affirms in the positive, leaving him rather dejected in his child's chair. This is when Burgess enters and Prossy is almost taken aback and sets to work. He talks of how Morell is busy receiving a deputation in his dining room and Candida is busy upstairs, educating a young stitcher-girl, teaching her to read out of the Evenly Twins.

Burgess is rather impolite towards Prossy considering her lower status, but in an argument that follows, she stings him with her comment on his Cockney accent. She has been distracted from work and has spoilt a letter along with her mood and consequently, she is unable to contain herself and calls him "silly old fathead." Burgess feels greatly offended and decides to complain against her before Morell. Eugene then tries to soothe Burgess's anger and Prossy goes out hearing the electric bell ring. Here, Burgess and Eugene share a short conversation where Burgess talks about how he doubts Morell's sanity with something "queer" about him and how he is "mad" about acting his ideas out and even having the audacity of calling him a "scoundrel".

Morell calls out to Prossy and comes in with the deputation documents. This is when Burgess takes the chance to make a complaint against Prossy for calling him a "silly old fathead". However, Morell lightens the situation with his usual heartiness, citing her frank nature. This makes Burgess even more angry. Having decided to wait for dinner, the old man asks for a good book to read by the fireside to pass his time. When Morell mentions that Candida would soon be there to give him (Burgess) company after "filling the lamps", Eugene bursts with the wildest consternation. He says: "But that will soil her hands. I can't bear that, Morell: it's a shame. I'll

go and fill them". He cannot bear that Candida is submitted to such drudgery. He argues to stay on the condition that Candida will hand over all the rough work to him.

When Burgess suggests that they keep a servant, Morell talks of how the home looks as if not one but three people have kept it organized and how Prossy and he share her chores. While Eugene questions Morell angrily as to how many servants Morell's father used to keep, Morell returns the question mentioning that one of the great facts of aristocratic existence is the dependence on servants. Actually, what annoys Eugene is the thought that Candida's beautiful fingers would have to dabble in paraffin oil, while Morell would comfortably preach about it, in his usual "everlasting preaching, preaching, words, words, words." At this point, Candida enters with a trimmed ready lamp, filled and ready for lighting; and places it on Morell's table.

Eugene now argues to stay back there only on the condition that she hands over all the "rough work" to him. Candida blames Morell for damaging a scrubbing brush. She hears Morell back giving out a painful cry out of horror. But the young poet in Eugene is now again carried away by his longing to sail her away in a tiny boat far from the world or dream of a chariot to carry them together into the sky "where the lamps are stars, and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day." This reflects Eugene's poetic sensibility against Morell's practicality in the way they looked at life. It is followed by their respective argument about the ideal of life. While Morell finds Marchbank idle, selfish and useless, the latter criticizes Morell for his ideal to preach while allowing his wife to scrub. But he will offer her a small boat to sail away.

Prossy tells Candida that Maria the maid is ready for her in the kitchen and the onions ready to be sliced. Therefore, she pulls along Eugene with her. Burgess in his sudden sentiment talks of how Eugene "talks very pretty" and how the old man himself always had a turn for poetry. At this Prossy warns Burgess's fancy of Eugene, calling him mad and pointing at the queer things he says. Almost short of another argument, Burgess goes out to the garden for a smoke. This is when Morell comes back and takes the chance

of asking her if Prossy if she had been calling Mr. Burgess names and half in fear, she bursts into tears and when he tries to comfort her, she makes a dash at the door.

Candida is quick to notice Morell's careworn, dejected appearance. She lovingly goes near him and asks him if he had been overworking. Candida tells him she does not get one evening with him because he goes out at night to lecture in the congregations. Candida further states that 'his' splendid preaching is what makes the women so enthusiastic about the sermons and not socialism or religion: *"They all have Prossy's complaint", which confounds him. She continues elaborating to her dazed husband saying: "Prossy and all the other secretaries you ever had. Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and peel potatoes and abase herself in all manner of ways for six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? She's in love with you, James: that's the reason".*

She mentions how she has grown fonder and fonder of Eugene and also knows "that though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love" with her. Thus, there ensues an open discussion between the couple about the nature of their marital relation and their mutual understanding. She states that her concern is if Eugene comes to learn what love really is from a bad woman. But, "if he learns it from a good woman then it will be a right: he will forgive me."

To Morell's puzzled quarry as to why he should forgive her, Candida explains saying: "forgive me for not teaching him myself? For abandoning him to the bad woman for the sake of my goodness and purity as you call it!" She feels that James does not try to understand her and that she would give away both her goodness and purity willingly like her shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there was nothing to restrain her. But she also asks him to put his trust in her love for him. Morell feels now that Eugene had been right about his words and she too delightfully agrees to the same saying: "He understands you; he understands me; he understands Prossy."

Eugene's entry with Burgess interrupts their conversation on Eugene. Morell is stabbed by Candida's words: "Your preachings…is merely a fine language with which you cheat yourself and others every day." At this

Morell in his pain goes back to his place at the table while Candida sits on the sofa beside Eugene to ask why he looks so sad. Eugene genuinely feels sad at her cruelty and torture towards her husband. Seeing how Morell's feelings are hurt, he says: "I feel his pain in my own heart." At this point, Lexy comes in, bringing news about the disheartened Guild of St. Matthew having received from Morell, a refusal telegram to preside over a meeting. This unusual refusal surprises Candida who now begins to suspect something wrong, she reacts to his giving up an engagement for the first time in his life. Lexy then confirms if Morell had received their urgent telegram requesting him to change his mind. And this is when Morell says that he has replied them that he cannot go, Candida wants to know the reason. As his reply, Morell says: "These people forget that I am a man: they think I am a talking machine to be turned on for their pleasure every evening of my life. May I not have one night at home, with my wife and my friends?"

Lexy pressures him to relent, fearing that the only available speaker, the President of the Agnostic League would undo all their good work as he insists strongly on the divorce of Socialism from Christianity. This is when Candida coaxes him to agree to go and to cheer him up say's that they would all accompany him too. Immediately, Burgess grumbles at the idea and Eugene is terrified of the crowd staring at them. When Candida says "they'll be too busy looking at James to notice you", Morell meaningfully refers to her earlier remark on "Prossy's complaint" (meaning how all the women are blind in their admiration of him). This confuses Burgess as he thinks that the reference of "Prossy's complaint" meant that Prossy must have complained about him.

This is when Morell asks Prossy to telegraph to the Guild to inform of his coming. At the idea of having to attend the meeting, old Burgess comically feels quite lost before the "instability of the human intellect" in a clergyman's house and having "four in the same house!" for a crazy group! Morell asks for Burgess's company to the meeting and he only relents when Morell offers the possibility of being introduced to the Chairman heading the Works Committee of the County Council, who may have some information

on his contracts. Lexy agrees to go and so does Prossy but authoritatively Morell asks both Candida and Eugene to stay behind in the house and says that he would rather show Eugene how afraid he was by leaving him there in her custody.

This greatly troubles Candida who is unable to understand what her husband tells Eugene but at the same time he also tenderly takes her in his arms and takes leave.

Act III

Act three begins with Shaw's stage directions and settings. It is late in the evening past ten and the lamps are lit. Candida and Eugene sit by the fireside (could also be read symbolically) and the two are left to themselves in the sitting room. While he breaks off in his poetical recitation, Candida is lost in her thoughts and realising that he has been reciting poetry for two long hours and she hasn't been paying adequate attention, she stops him short saying "those sonnets of yours have perfectly addled me" and asks him to put his poetry away. Candida addresses him affectionately as "moonshine" and asks him to sit down on the hearth rug and rather 'talk' and amuse her. In this scene, both of them make a brief conversation. When Candida asks him to say anything that he truly feels, Eugene expresses his love and fascination for her saying: "Candida, Candida, Candida, Candida. I must say that now… I never think or feel Mrs. Morell: it is always Candida".

This is when Morell returns from his meeting and unknowingly interrupts them. On seeing him, Candida rises from her chair to receive him and asks him about his meeting and the whereabouts of the rest. He tells her that they had left early for supper before he could even get away. As Candida leaves the room to tell Maria (the maid) to go to bed, Morell takes a moment to ask Eugene what had transpired in his absence between the two. Eugene takes this too far when he refers to "Candida" by her name in front of Morell and even calls him a "fool", "moralist" and a "windbag". He uses his poetics and heights of imagination to express how she had repulsed him becoming an "angel" with "a flaming sword" barring "the gate of hell"

and feels that Morell can't make a woman like Candida who has "a divine insight", love him by merely being more of a Parson than a proper husband. However, Morell makes a point saying that it was rather his "golden moment" in the pulpit that he earned the "right" to ask for her love.

Morell seizes him and being annoyed with his "poetic fripperies", demands to have his question answered. This is when Eugene says "I would only go to her as a beggar" and at recognising this uttered phrase Morell completes this sentence adding "a beggar dying of cold-asking for her shawl?" because in his earlier conversation with Candida she had repeated the same lines. Perhaps it was due to the influence of Eugene's usual poetic words on her. But Eugene reveals now that on seeing how Candida had tortured Morell, who loved her so much that same morning, he had felt one with him and says that he was now another sort of 'the happiest of men', desiring nothing but her happiness and for which both of them should give her up. He says: "Why should she have to choose between a wretched little nervous disease like me, and a pig headed parson like you?"

When he demands an answer of what had happened during his absence Eugene says: "Well, in plain prose, I loved her so exquisitely that I wanted nothing more than the happiness being in such love. And before I had time to come down from the highest summits, you came in." On hearing this Morell in his misgiving calls Candida "some fiddlestick" wondering if she was already mad enough to leave him for Eugene. He worries about who would protect her, help her, work for her and be a father to her children in his absence. But Eugene calls Morell a "triple fool" saying he himself is the man she wants and that "it is she who wants somebody to protect, to help, to work for—somebody to give her children to protect, to help and to work for. Some grown up man who has become as a little child again."

This is when the door opens and Candida enters, rather amazed at finding them in an argument, and forgetting her wifely tact, she treats Morell as a child, saying: "My boy shall not be worried: I will protect him." When Morell hears the word "protect", he rises uttering the word in his hurt pride. At this, Candida questions Eugene about what he had told him. This indicates

that they (Candida and Eugene) may have had a lengthy discussion of her thoughts and expectations before. Even Morell feels the same doubting Eugene's knowledge about her, of which he couldn't have an idea unless she shared her thoughts with him. On realizing that Eugene may have prompted Morell's anger, Candida vehemently cries shame on him for not holding his tongue. Also, she is very angry with Eugene's misbehaviour with Morell. When Eugene blames it on him, Morell states that Eugene had started the quarrel in the morning. At that time, all the others return from dinner. Lexy is in his high spirits, Burgess is in his jovial best and a smartly dressed. Prossy with bright eyes, apparently from drinking champagne. While Eugene relapses into his shyness, Lexy and Burgess praise Morell's address at the gathering. They reveal that Mr. Burgess had treated them all to a splendid champagne supper at the Belgrave along with the 'Chairman', which shows Burgess diplomatic or even opportunistic side.

This is when Candida brings glasses, lemons and jug of hot water to prepare lemonade, in order to break their drunkenness saying, "You know our rules: total abstinence" (abstinence meaning drinking is not a practice in their household). Soon, except Eugene they all take leave with Lexy accompanying Prossy and Burgess out on his way. Candida with quiet authority asks Eugene to stay behind and sit down, fearing a "terrible scene" now but Morell is rather open to a discussion. This is when Morell says that "she must choose between us now." When Candida asks Morell if he has anything to say, by "bracing himself for the catastrophe" he says that she is his "greatest treasure on earth—if she is really mine."

Morell senses a threat in Candida's voice and she warns him "Take care, James", asking Eugene to leave but Morell instead wishes him to remain. Candida respects this decision and asks him about the entire matter at which Morell is rather lost for words, wondering from where to start. When Morell discloses about what Eugene had told him, he fearfully decries explaining that he was talking simply about King David's wife, who hated him while dancing with all other people. Candida understands what Eugene had tried to mean at the mention of King David's wife. He probably meant that, like her, Candida too despised Morell for moving the hearts of all the

women suffering from "Prossy's compliant" with his mission. Although she loves her husband, she is now misunderstood and Morell asserts that Eugene was indeed right since the morning and had only repeated what she must have shared with him.

Thus, enlightened about the whole thing, she remorsefully questions Morell, "Do you mind what is said by a foolish boy, because I said something like it again in jest?" Morell in his confusion admits that he cannot live tortured with doubts and suspicions, with the "intolerable degradation of jealousy" and from her keeping a secret. That is why both Eugene and he had agreed for her to decide on the truth and choose between them. However, Candida is taken aback with this sudden resolution because probably she didn't think of making choices. At this she feels that if at all, she meant to care about herself alone, it would mean that she would not only make choices but mean a good deal more too. At this, she concludes that she was rather up for "auction" and asks what Morell would bid to have her. On having her feel as if she was up for auction, Morell breaks down into tears.

But, with proud humility, he says, "I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defence, my honesty of purpose for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman." On the other hand, Eugene in his bidding says: "My weakness! My desolation! My heart's need!" Morell's lofty confidence turns into his heartbreaking dread at Eugene's bid and breaks into his anguish. She declares her decision saying: "I give myself to the weaker of the two."

Morell in his confusion of whether it was him that she decides on, asks again to reassure himself. At this, Candida wishes to sit and talk comfortably over it like three friends. She reasons that Eugene was someone for whom no one had cared for since his old nurse died, his clever and fashionable sisters and successful brothers were his parent's favourites. He was always miserable at Eton and his father would have him starve, punish him to return to Oxford, and he always had to live alone without comfort, welcome or refuge, almost disliked and misunderstood. Eugene

consoles himself saying that at least he had his books and Nature for company.

Whereas, she says, James Morell was always the hero of his household, the most "wonderful of all babies" holding his first school prize at the ripe age of eight, captain at eleven etc., all the photographs in his glorious circumstances, being "strong, clever and happy." His mother and sisters didn't let him do anything except for doing well and being an achiever.

Candida says, "Ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one." It is she who builds "a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so". Also, she emphasises how Morell, to tempt her to be with him, offers his strength for her protection, his industry for her livelihood and his position for her dignity among other things. Morell who is overwhelmed like a boy says; "It's all true, every word, what I am you have made me with the labour of your hands and the love of your heart! You are my wife, my mother, my sister: you are the sum of all loving care to me."

She looks at Eugene and questions him if he takes her also as his mother and sisters. In addition, he disgustedly refuses to answer to her question and realises that he is not in the right place. While Morell who is calmed finally with all his fears of losing her at rest, is reluctant to let the young boy leave impulsively but Candida is confident and she says, "Oh, there is no fear. He has learnt to live without happiness". Eugene prepares to take leave saying he is to leave with a "secret" in his heart, which adds to a certain mystery that remains unresolved.

Candida has the last word at the end of the play. Bidding him goodbye, she takes Eugene's face who, divining her loving intention, bends his knee and receives a kiss of blessing on his forehead and takes leave. Then she turns to Morell, holding out her arms to him and they embrace each other. The play thus ends on a mysterious note with the line, "But they do not know the secret in the poet's heart".



LET US KNOW

Anarchist: A proponent of the political philosophy (Anarchism) which defines the state as undesirable or unnecessary and believes in stateless societies based on non-hierarchical free associations. The word derives from an ancient Greek word *anarchos*, meaning "without rulers."

Christian Socialist: An activist who conforms to the mid-19th century religious socialism or Christian socialism, based on Jesus Christ's teachings. Many Christian Socialists believe capitalism to be "idolatrous" as it is associated with greed. The term was first used by a group of 19th century writers like Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley and others.

Communist: A person who conforms to the political and economic philosophy of communism (a higher or advanced form of socialism) in the common ownership, production and distribution of wealth among all. The word communism derives from the Latin word *communis* meaning "shared", "common" or "belong to all".

Fabian Society: A British socialist Organization founded on 4, January 1884 by Sydney and Beatrice Webb in London. The Fabians believed in the principles of socialism by gradual rather than revolutionary means. Some of the members were the Bloomsbury Group which consisted of writers as Leonard and Virginia Woolf and H. G Wells, Annie Besant, Oliver Lodge, Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw among others.

Socialism: A socio-economic doctrine that believes in common or state ownership of property and natural resources so that society as a whole benefits from a social product. This is opposed to capitalism which is based on private ownership and means of production. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel

Women's Liberal Federation: Formed in between 1886 and 1887, the Women's Liberal Federation was a radical part of the Liberal Party during which women were actively involved in politics and were for the voting rights or women's suffrage which was finally granted in 1918.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what ways, does Candida represent the idea of a 'new woman'?

Q 2: Why, according to you, is Candida so important a character in the play *Candida?*

3.4 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

In keeping with the ideas of 'The Woman Question' and the 'Feminist Movement', which was gaining ground during the late 19th century, Shaw had created Candida as a strong willed and a self-sufficient 'New Woman'. In the play, Candida effortlessly engages everyone's affection with her loving and candid nature. She also plays a central role in shaking up the comfortable notions of life, love, and marriage through her approach of a frank and open discussion. She is no more bound to the Victorian conception of women as the "angel in the house" and with an evolving sense of self, asserts her freedom of choice as an individual.

Morell develops a gradual fear of losing his wife to Eugene, who tries to woo her to an alternate life beyond her household duties. Candida's ambiguous treatment to both Morell and Eugene raises significant questions about mutual relations and delves deeper into both the intellect and the possibilities/truths of human nature. In the play, Morell commands a strong presence in the society but is emotionally weak before his wife, yet she depends on him just as he on her. Similarly, Eugene is emotionally strong for his young age and weak in front of Candida, but the two do not depend on each other. Thus in the end, Candida exercises her choice of being with her husband instead of being carried away by Eugene's promises.

Candida is also notably worried about Eugene's perception of love, being careful not to hurt his young notions and she brings out the maternal aspect in her diplomatic handling of him. Thus, Eugene also associates her with the sacred Christian image of the 'Virgin of Assumption' perhaps to highlight her maternal role. It may also be possible, that Candida will have wanted to assert her individuality, to test her faith in her marriage and to

teach both her husband and Eugene a lesson of life. Thus, we find that instead of blindly conforming to her role-playing, Candida also debunks/ defies the Victorian values of women such as "purity" and "goodness" as expected of her, even by her husband. It is important to note that both Morell and Eugene as a preacher and a poet respectively are professional men of words but at the end, it is Candida who has the last word in the play. Although, she upsets the Victorian notions of what is expected of a woman and her propriety, she does not defy her role as a mother, wife and a home-maker but instead revises her role as a woman and also an individual who has a freedom of choice.



LET US KNOW

Realism and Modern (New) Drama:

Wilbur Dunkel states that, **"the demand of the modern theatre is for the new"** and that Shaw is "the most familiar figure to emerge from the modern theatre". It was Shaw's effort to publish his plays for a mass readership, which led to the definition of the Modern or New Drama leading to the reception of drama as texts for reading as well as for performing on the stage. Katherine E. Kelly observes that to bring Modern Drama during the 1980s into the "realm of literature", Shaw prepared editions of his works aiming at the "growing market of literate readers". Thus, Shaw intended to create a position in the emerging "modern" drama by writing and publishing "literary" drama, which was entertaining as well as educative in calling "attention to its commerce with politics, philosophy, science and fiction". The new theatre movement had been established by 1982, replacing the old melodramatic tradition with "real human emotion". When Shaw arrived on the scene, Henrik Ibsen and Oscar Wilde were already well established as leading dramatists and he appreciated Ibsen's works of which he considered *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* as the best. G. K Chesterton opines, "He (Shaw) is so much of an idealist about his ideals that he can be a ruthless realist in

his methods". He emphasized on realistic representation in theatre in which realism was a "revaluation of experience intellectually and not emotionally." This was a reaction against Victorian sentimentality and he notably defended himself as a dramatic realist to his critics by stating that "I created nothing; I invented nothing; I perverted nothing; I simply discovered drama in real life".

3.5 MAJOR THEMES

The following are some of the important themes in the play we are discussing.

The New Woman:

In the late 19th century, a new feminist ideal of "The New Woman" had emerged. It was a term coined in the 1920s and popularized by the American writer Henry James. In the nineties the concept of the "new" had revolutionized New Fiction, New Journalism, New Drama, New Art and Art Criticism, New Politics and other such fields. The most important influence on the ideal came from the Woman's Suffragette movement that fought for women's democratic rights in the 19th century. This had opened up doors of new opportunities for education and employment and women were no more to be confined to their households being dependent economically on their husbands or relatives. Thus, the New Woman challenged the gender roles, which had been traditionally imposed on them, and most women joined Universities, reputed colleges like the Seven Sisters Schools, which were all-women colleges, ventured into modern professions and even joined politics. The new legal rights to property, changes in Divorce law enabled them to exercise their freedom of choice in their marital relations and to define their individuality. Although it was a challenge for the New Woman in the conventional Victorian age to assert themselves and their rights, through education and self-establishment they also gained a new dignity and respectability.

As is explicit in the first act of *Candida*, Prossy has nothing against Candida and rather praises her nature saying she's "nice, very good

hearted". She is in general fond of her and appreciates her real qualities. In Prossy, there is a kind of a feminist streak that can be understood when she tells Lexy: "It must be so nice to be a man and have a fine penetrating intellect instead of mere emotions like us…" In the same discussion, Lexy makes a mention about the New Woman and the Woman's Liberal Federation movement, which was catching up during that time. He says: "Ah, if you women only had the same clue to Man's strength that you have to his weakness…there would be no Woman Question". The play *Candida* reflects how Shaw formulated his views about woman's emancipation in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in which he emphasised the self-respectability of women, and equality with men. He wrote, *"love loses its charm when it is not free…the successful wooer, in both the sexes alike is the one who can stand out for honourable conditions, and failing them, go without".* The Shavian Woman or the New Woman of Shaw, who did not remain behind the times, bore the characteristics of a non-conformist, unconventional and intelligent new woman with an independent mind of her own.

Ideas of Christian Socialism:

In *Candida*, Morell is a powerful speaker in both the religion and politics. His sermons focus on the teachings of the church as well on progressive socialist movements of the time. This blend of spiritual beliefs and political activism is commonly known as Christian Socialism. However, this movement grew out of recognition following the disparity between Christian ideals and the societal effects of capitalism. Christian Socialist parties were usually led by religious leaders unlike other socialist unions and parties whose leaders were secular reformists.

Working Conditions of the Factory workers:

During the 1850's in Britain, the condition of the factory workers was very deplorable. They had could earn two to three times more than the farm workers. Subsequently, by the late 1800's, a huge numbers of workers left English farms to live and work in an urban setting. This change drastically altered their lives as families were separated for up to 14 hours a day, sometimes with each family member in a different factory. The rate of infant mortality rose dramatically due to neglect and malnourishment of the children.

However, despite all hardships, workers continued to flood the labour market. With such an excess of available labour, manufacturers took advantage and lowered wages. Weavers such as those employed in Burgess' factory in the play *Candida* made only about 10 shillings to 16 shillings a week, and children, who worked up to ten hours a day, took home 3 shillings to 4 shillings a week. At that time, a loaf of bread cost about 1 shilling. As early as the 19th century, some of the English recognised the harmful effects of unregulated factory work. Trade unions, workers guild, and political parties fought for reform by regulating working hours, safety standards, and wages. These liberal groups characterised the factory owners as greedy, uncaring, and amoral and urged the workers to unite in protection of their rights. This background is clearly visible in the play *Candida.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Briefly write about the feminist ideal of the 19th century "New Woman".

Q 4: Briefly describe the protagonist Candida in the play.

Q 5: How is the theme of the 'New Woman' significant in the play?

3.6 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The following are the important characters in the play *Candida.*

Candida:

The play is centered on the charismatic and affectionate Candida, addressed also as "Candy is Reverend James Morell's wife and the mother of two young children Jimmy and Fluffy. She is in her early thirties and is in good health, pretty, attractive and well built "with the double charm of youth and motherhood". She is likened to the Virgin of the Assumption in the painting on the wall and her "serene brow, courageous eyes, and well set mouth and chin signify largeness of mind and dignity." She is concerned with the family's welfare and deeply loves her husband. We get more insight into her persona through the compliments or descriptions from the rest of the characters, each of whom has something appreciative to say about her.

The Reverend James Mavor Morell:

He is a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England and actively who is involved with the Guild of St. Matthew and the Christian Social Union. He is Candida's husband. He is in his forties and in appearance good looking with a good forehead, blunt eyebrows, bright eyes, a resolute mouth, being robust in health, and actively energetic. His tastes in reading can be understood by the content of his bookshelves containing volumes of Browning's poems, Fabian Essays, Marx's *Das Capital* Maurice's Theological essays among others. He is very well read a man, a popular orator and a clergyman. By nature he is a mature, pleasant, well-mannered, disciplined and God-loving person and "his well-spring of spiritual enthusiasm and sympathetic emotion has never run dry for a moment." In addition, he is adores his wife, is considerate to others and is very progressive in his thoughts.

Miss Proserpine Garnett:

She is Reverend Morell's typist and secretary who attends to his weekly schedules, takes down and transcribes shorthand notes. Much to her dislike, she is also addressed as "Prossy". She is of about thirty, belonging to the lower middle class and is neatly dressed and busy at the typewriting. Her formal but affectionate nature also turns into a sharp sensitivity as can be gathered from her pert replies and rude arguments with Marchbanks and later with Mr. Burgess. Although she denies in her conversation with Marchbanks, her jealousy for Candida and secret love for Morell is revealed. However, she also admits the good-hearted nature and qualities of Candida.

The Reverend Alexander Mill:

Addressed as "Lexy", he is a young gentleman chosen by Morell as a curate or assistant to him. He is trained at Oxford and his duty is to impart his training for the benefit of the London society, but he comes across as immature. However, he won Morell's confidence, whom he looks up to with his well-intended "dog-like devotion" and hero-worship, and even tries to imitate and at the same time serve with enthusiasm.

Mr. Burgess:

Mr. Burgess is Candida's father and the father-in-law of Morell. He is a man of sixty, podgy in appearance, with a clean-shaven square face and a square beard under his chin, small watery blue eyes, a funny accent and intonation with a casual joviality. By profession, he is an experienced businessman with shrewdness and commercial and capitalist interests. By nature, he is often offensive, coarse, vulgar and ignorant but he is also affectionate and humorous as is revealed in his conversations with others.

Eugene Marchbanks:

He is a young poet of eighteen who is again a discovery of Morell who had found him asleep on the embankment the previous June. He accompanies Candida on her return home, helps her with the luggage, and is well received by Morell. Eugene is of a shy and effeminate nature, with a child's voice, and nervous and lacking in self-confidence. He bears "a hunted expression and shrinking manner that show the painful sensitiveness that very swift and acute apprehensiveness produces in youth". In appearance, his dress is carelessly messy, his nostrils and mouth show a fierce wilfulness and he has a fine brow and large imaginative eyes of a poet. In his torment, he reveals his deep infatuation with Candida, voicing his mental conflict and trying to establish his compatibility and his love for her.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit on Shaw's *Candida*, there is an attempt to analyze the play critically. Besides, an attempt has also been made to know the different aspects of the life and works of George Bernard Shaw and his contribution to Modern Drama. A summary of the three acts of the play *Candida* is also provided to supplement your comprehension of the play's plot development. Candida who plays the central role in the trajectory of the play has been shown under the light of the New Woman and the Shavian heroine as discussed in the themes. The list of characters and the short glossary have helped you in your easy reference while reading the play on your own.

Also, Shaw and his critical, and at times, controversial reception have been included in order to assess the Nobel Laureate's contribution and literary merit. Shavian drama became "a cult of the twentieth century intelligentsia" and George Bernard Shaw is indeed a versatile dramatist of his time. You should have noted that both Ibsen and Shaw used the formula of the well-made play, but reacted against its trite moralising by shifting the emphasis on to contemporary social and moral questions.



3.8 FURTHER READING

Bloom, Harold. (2000). *George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Cardullo, Bert. (1986). "The Mystery of Candida", *Shaw*. 6. Penn State University Press. www.jstor.org/stable/4008127

Dunkel, Wilbur Dwight. "George Bernard Shaw", *The Sewanee Review*. 50.2 John Hopkins University. www.jstor. org/stable/27537270

Hacht, Anne Marie. & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 4.

Henderson, Archibald. (1907). "George Bernard Shaw". *The North American Review.* 185.616. University of Northern Iowa.

Innes, Christopher. (Ed.). (1998). *George Bernard Shaw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jain, Sangeeta. (2006). *Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.

Soanes, Catherine. (Ed.). (2004). *The New Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shaw, George Bernard. (2006). *Candida*. Kansas: Digireads.com Publishing.

Shaw, George Bernard. (1995). *Candida: A Critical Introduction.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

www. mccarter.org/ Education/ candida

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw
http://www.mccarter.org/Education/candida/

3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Shaw was aware of the ideas of 'The Woman Question' emerging in the late 19th century… …Candida is strong willed and a self sufficient … …she engages everyone's affection with her loving and candid nature… …she shakes up the comfortable notions of life, love, and marriage… …she is no more bound to the Victorian conception of women as the "angel in the house" ... ... she asserts her freedom of choice as an individual.

Ans to Q 2: Although, she upsets the Victorian notions of what is expected of a woman she does not defy her role as a mother, wife and a home-maker. Instead, she revises her role as a woman and also as an individual who has a freedom of choice.

Ans to Q 3: New feminist ideal… …in late 19th century revolutionising various concepts… …various fields… …Woman's Suffragette movement... …new opportunities… …breaking traditional roles… …economic independence of woman.

Ans to Q 4: Charismatic… …affectionate… …addressed as "Candy"… …wife of Rev. Morell… …mother of two children… …in her early thirties… …likened to Virgin of Assumption… …concerned with family… …love for husband… …more about her from other characters.

Ans to Q 5: Gender roles challenged... …new legal rights to property… …Divorce law changes… …freedom of choice in marriage… …individuality… …assertion of rights… …new dignity and respectability… …Shaw's views on woman's emancipation… …*The Quintessence of Ibsenism*… …Characteristics of Shavian heroin …



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does Eugene confess to Morell about Candida? How does Morell react to it?

Q 2: Why does Eugene turn angry and argue about the "rough work" that Candida has to do in the household?

Q 3: What is "Prossy's complaint" as mentioned by Candida to Morell? Why does it lead to Burgess' misunderstanding?

Q 4: In the absence of her husband what does Eugene and Candida talk about by the fireside? Why does Morell want Candida to choose between Eugene and him?

Q 5: What do both Morell and Eugene, offer to Candida in order to win her? Elaborate on the comparison that Candida finally draws between Morell and Eugene?

Q 6: What is Candida's decision and how does the play finally end? In what way, Candida's decision upsets the idea of a 19th century women in England?

Q 7: According to you, how does Shaw represent the "New Woman" in *Candida*?

Q 8: Explain what is realism in modern drama with reference to the play *Candida*?

Q 9: How does Shaw represent the 'Shavian Woman' in his play *Candida*? Discuss.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 4: JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE: *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 John Millington Synge: The Playwright

4.3.1 His Life

4.3.2 His Dramatic Career

4.4 Sources of *the Playboy of the Western World*

4.5 Critical Reception of Synge

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.9 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the Irish playwright J. M. Synge
- read Synge as one of the greatest modern playwrights
- trace the sources of his important play the *Playboy of the Western World*
- discuss the reception of Synge as a great playwright

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall introduce you to John Millington Synge the author of the play *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Synge is considered the greatest dramatist of the Irish Literary Renaissance. In his unsentimental but compassionate portrayal of Irish peasants and his highly imaginative and poetic dialogue (patterned after the vernacular spoken by the rural population in the west of Ireland), Synge attempted to capture the essence of the Irish spirit, which he described in his preface to *The Playboy of the*

Western World as “fiery and magnificent, and tender.” As you finish reading this unit, you will be able to see the qualities of J. M. Synge as one of the greatest playwrights of the modern world.

4.3 JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE: THE PLAYWRIGHT

4.3.1 His Life

Synge was born in Newtown Villas, Rathfarnham, County Dublin on 16 April 1871. He was the youngest son in a moderately prosperous family of eight children. Rathfarnham was then a rural part of the county, and during his childhood, he was passionately interested in county life. Synge was educated privately at schools in Dublin and Bray. Later, he travelled to Europe to study music, but changed his mind and decided to focus on literature. Synge entered Trinity College, Dublin in 1889 and graduated with a BA in 1892. He also studied piano and violin at the Royal Irish Academy before travelling and studying music in Germany, Italy and France. He returned to Ireland in June 1894, and moved to Paris to study literature and languages at the Sorbonne. In 1896, he visited Italy to study Italian for a time before returning to Paris. Later that year, he met W. B. Yeats, who advised him to develop an interest in the Irish language and tradition and also encouraged him to live for a while in the Aran Islands and then return to Dublin and devote himself to creative work. Subsequently, from 1898 to 1902, he spent five summers in the Aran Islands collecting stories and folklore and perfecting his Irish, which stimulated his interest in the life style and humour of this isolated community of people. From the notes he had made during this stay was born *The Aran Islands* (1907) which clearly shows his developing interest in the music of speech.

Together with W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, he formed the Irish National Theatre Society, which would in 1904 be established as the Abbey Theatre. Until his death, Synge was one of the directors of Abbey Theatre along with Yeats and Lady Gregory. Synge is widely

regarded as the most influential Irish dramatist of the 20th century, who made his debut in 1903 when his first play *The Shadow of the Glen* caused a stir among audiences and critics alike during its opening run in Dublin. Over the next two years, Synge produced two other plays: *Riders to the Sea* (1904), which is considered to be one of the greatest one-act plays in the history of modern drama; and *The Well of the Saints* (1905), which celebrates the imagination and heroism of the a dissident. However, he became notorious as the author of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), which caused riots in the Abbey Theatre and brought his work to the attention of the wider world for the first time. Two other plays, *The Tinker's Wedding,* written in 1907 and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* staged posthumously in 1910, complete the canon of Synge's plays. Yet besides *The Aran Islands* (1907) before his early death in 1909 he also left a small body of prose of considerable significance which includes an extraordinarily rich compendium of travel essays, now collected under the title *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* (CW II, 187–343), as well as a collection of poetry (1909).

LET US KNOW

In 1901, there emerged "The Irish National Dramatic Society", its main objectives being the production of purely Irish plays, plays written in English by Irish authors, and plays related to Ireland interpreted by local actors under a self-contained board of direction. This society was the outcome of The Irish National Literary Society, which Mr. W. B. Yeats founded in the early nineties. Associated with him from the beginning had been Lady Gregory, whose plays now form an important part of the company's repertoire. Miss Horniman stepped in as the patron, providing them with the little Abbey Theater in Dublin and subsidising the company through all their early struggles, thus lending her personal assistance until the company became independent.

In 1907, the production of Synge's play *The Playboy of the Western World* was followed by a week of rioting in Dublin — because its intention was misinterpreted. Yeats supported Synge and wrote eloquently about his works in various prefaces. A few months later *The Playboy* was enthusiastically accepted in London. Yeats' experience turned ironical, as it was Synge who began to be regarded as the master spirit of the Irish Literary Movement. However, Synge's reputation was short lived, as he died young at the age of only 37.

Synge's life coincided exactly with one of the most pivotal phases of Irish socio-political history, which saw the agrarian unrest of Charles Stewart Parnell's era of the late 19th century that gave way to the revolutionary republicanism that led to the 1916 Easter Rising. His involvement in the turbulent early years of the Abbey Theatre–Ireland's national theatre, was crucial to his life as a dramatist. In addition, with his unique perspectives on his ascendancy and the nationalist cultural revival, Synge could very well diagnose the ills that crippled Irish society and culture.

4.3.2 His Dramatic Career

In 1903, Synge left Paris and moved to London. By that time, he had written two one-act plays *Riders to the Sea* and *The Shadow of the Glen.* These were conscious celebration of the independent spirit of the Irish people. These met with Lady Gregory's approval, and *The Shadow of the Glen* was performed at the Molesworth Hall in October 1903. *Riders to the Sea* was performed at the same venue in February 1904. Both plays were based on the stories Synge had collected from the Aran Islands, and Synge relied on props from the Aran Islands to help set the stage. *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) was based on a story of an unfaithful wife and it was attacked in print by the Irish nationalist leader Arthur Griffith as "a slur on Irish womanhood". Years later, Synge wrote, "When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen* some years ago, I got more aid than any learning

could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen." This encouraged more critical attacks that alleged that Synge described Irish women in an unfair manner.



Threnody: A wailing ode, song, hymn or poem of mourning.

Riders to the Sea (1904) is both a **threnody** and a song of praise to the unfathomable spirit of the Aran Islanders. The combination of the poetic and the realistic is excellently demonstrated by this one act play about a mother who loses her sixth son to the sea. The characters are peasants of the type of people Synge lived with the Aran Islands. They were a rude people, and their struggle against a relentless nature is beautifully told in poetic prose based on their common speech. It was also attacked by nationalists who decried it because of the author's attitude to God and religion. Furthermore, Synge's audience felt that he did a disservice to Irish nationalism for not idealising his characters. However, later critics would attack Synge for idealising the Irish peasantry too much. Despite these attacks, the plays are now part of the canon of English language theatre. *Riders to the Sea* is an example of superb theatre. The characters of this tragedy of the sea are not symbolist shadows but persons in an environment or a milieu of occupations and customs who had similar experiences with the stormy Atlantic off the coast of Ireland. The characters in the play are life-like, and their speech is so much a part of their character. Not to be able to act, indeed, is in their case and in their situation of the play a form of action.

His next play, *The Well of the Saints* was staged at the theatre in 1905, again to nationalist disapproval. Set in the East of Ireland 'one or more centuries ago' it is a comedy in which Synge's ironic pessimism finds expression in the decision of two blind beggars to reject the gift of sight because it had destroyed their illusions. Synge's masterpiece, *The The Playboy of the Western World*, was first performed in the Abbey on 26 January 1907. The comedy centres on the story of apparent patricide and attracted a wide hostile reaction from the Irish public and a riot was sparked off by a mere reference

to an undergarment. One doubts that the Dublin and America riots against the *Playboy* really were caused by Christy's celebrated image of "a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World." Synge's image of west Ireland is joyous in its presentation, but what it reflects is barbaric squalor, credulity, brutal cupidity—a world of drunken louts and their hopelessly desperate women.



LET US KNOW

Riot also sparked off because Ireland was the home of the Christian tradition, her women were models of chastity and purity. Against this are set the 'heroic' aspects of homicide, countless jests on the subject during agrarian troubles. The language of the play was also misunderstood, and Audience broke up in disorder at the utterance of the word 'shift', they thought that it was coarse. The *Freeman's Journal* described it as "an unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men, and worse still upon Irish girlhood". *The Playboy of the Western World* is regarded as his crowning achievement. Although it is not so easy to refuse the iconic status earned by the play, arising out of its infamous first production and as a work of dramatic excellence in its own right, the attention that it routinely received often hints at the deeper and more engaged considerations of Synge's works.

Another one-act play *The Tinker's Wedding* was first performed in 1909. It is a comedy, which portrays a tinker (A person who moved from place to place repairing and selling things), called Sarah Casey with the problem of reconciling her wandering life with the urge to be properly married by a priest. However, Synge initially did not attempt to have it performed, largely because of a scene where a priest is tied up in a sack, which, as he wrote to the publisher Elkin Mathews in 1905, would probably upset "a good many of our Dublin friends". As was obvious, the staging of the play led to lot of troubles as it offended many Dubliners who did not like to see

a priest bundled into a sack. Therefore, following the riot caused by *The Playboy of the Western World,* Synge thought it prudent to stage the play in London rather than in Dublin. Synge's last play was *Deidre of the Sorrow* (1910), a dramatised representation of Irish mythology. It was, however, posthumously staged after Synge had died of Hodgkin's disease.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who was J. M. Synge? Why is his play *The Playboy of the Western World* so important?

Q 2: How did W. B. Yeats influence Synge?

Q 3: Many of the plays by Synge became controversial. Do you agree?

4.4 SOURCES OF *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD*

Synge in the 'Preface' to the play clearly explains that it was born out of his experiences in the countrysides of Ireland. The idea of a man who killed his father being welcomed and shielded from justice by a rural community came from a tall tale told to Synge by the Aran storyteller Pat Dirane. Tall tales are a prominent feature of Irish folklore and are defined by scholar Carolyn Brown as the first-person narratives told as true, but which "challenge the listener's credulity" and which perform "different social functions depending on whether [they are] heard as true or fictional." Both Synge's Preface to the play and the Abbey Theatre's promotional material stressed the fact that Synge had lived among peasants and that the story in the play had actually occurred. When that first audience in 1907 saw fantastical and crude elements in what they had expected to be a piece of realism, they thought that it had offended the politically symbolic Irish peasantry, and rioted. On the other hand, those more prepared to see the play as a piece of fiction hailed it as a great work of art. You may read the following from Synge's own 'Preface' to the play to gain some ideas regarding the sources of this great play you are reading in this unit.

"In writing The Playboy of the Western World, as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, or from beggar-women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin; and I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk imagination of these fine people. Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay. All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand, as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time. It is probable that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his ink-horn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. When I was writing "The Shadow of the Glen," some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. This matter, I think, is of importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form. In the modern literature of towns, however, richness is found only in sonnets, or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life. One has, on one side, Mallarme and Huysmans producing this literature; and on the other, Ibsen and Zola dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words."

The above paragraph clearly explains Synge's purpose of writing this great play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What offended the people when the play was first performed in 1907?

Q 5: Comment on the sources of the play.

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SYNGE

J. M. Synge rendered important influence towards the development of Irish drama by bringing in the Anglo-Irish dialect to the stage, and influencing later playwrights such as Sean O'Casey and Brendan Behan. He remains one of the most revered figures in modern drama, and his plays had a great influence on the modern developments in Theater. In addition, his creation of a stylised language incorporating poetic imagery and vernacular speech patterns that had a profound effect on such writers as William Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett. Critics often gave mixed reviews to Synge's plays when they were originally produced, and the critics from France and Germany quickly embraced him and his style of thinking. Later critics most often focus much on the dialogue, themes, and sources for Synge's plays.

Despite the relatively small corpus of work, Synge's stature has continued to grow steadily among audiences, readers and critics since the time of his death almost a century ago. His plays have been performed frequently and consistently on stages in Ireland and abroad. Besides, many of his works have been translated into other languages. His major prose work *The Aran Islands*, has taken its place as the acknowledged progenitor of the sub-genre of Irish island memoirs. His travel essays are the lesser-documented social and cultural dynamics of the rural Ireland at the close of the 19th century. His stature as a dramatist of international repute was assured early on and it continues to grow as his global influence extends far and wide to the work of Eugene O'Neill, Djuna Barnes, and James Weldon Johnson in America, to Louis Esson in Australia, to Bertolt Brecht and Federico García Lorca in Europe, and to Derek Walcott and Mustapha Matura in the West Indies.

Over the century, Synge's works have been mobilised in the pursuit of nationalist, liberal humanist, formalist, feminist, Marxist, historical revisionist and postcolonial critical agendas. Much intellectual energy has been invested since Synge's own time in recording and analysing the details of his plays in production. The original staging of *The Playboy of the Western World* and the controversy, which surrounded it, are important events in the theatre history of modern times. Synge's plays provide fertile ground for those keen to investigate the dynamics of audience response and the function of the theatre at particular historical moments. Yet the range of productions that Synge's work has inspired also demands critical attention.

Synge's plays helped set the Abbey house style for the following four decades. The stylised realism of his writing was reflected in the training given at the Theatre's school of acting, and the plays of peasant life were the main staple of the repertoire until the end of the 1950s. Sean O'Casey, the next major dramatist to write for the Abbey, knew Synge's work well and attempted to do for the Dublin working classes what his predecessor had done for the rural poor. However, Synge also influenced playwrights like Brendan Behan, Paul Vincent Carroll, Brinsley Mac Namara, and Lennox Robinson. It is also assumed that Samuel Beckett too was indebted to Synge because in his youth Beckett was a regular audience member at the Abbey and was a great admirer of the plays of Yeats, Synge and O'Casey. Synge's use of tramps, beggars and peasants influenced the portrayal of many of the figures in Beckett's novels and dramatic works.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Briefly explain Synge's contribution to Irish drama?

Q 7: Besides being an important event in the theatre history of modern times, *The Playboy* is also important in other ways. Explain.



4.6 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the above account, you have come to know that Synge was an Irish playwright, poet, prose writer, travel writer, and collector of folklore. He was a key figure in the Irish Literary Revival and was one of the cofounders of the Abbey Theatre. He is best known for his play *The Playboy of the Western World*, which caused riots in Dublin during its opening run at the Abbey Theatre. Although he came from an Anglo-Irish background, Synge's writings are mainly concerned with the world of the Roman Catholic peasants of rural Ireland and with what he saw as the essential paganism of their world-view. You must have noted that while writing the play *The Playboy of the Western World*, Synge turned to the speech and imagination of the Irish country people to add vitality to English drama. Subsequently, his language seems to have emerged as rich, poetic, real, and natural. This play is a resounding success both as a comedy and as a 'Criticism of life'. The other point that you have learnt is that the speech of the Irish peasantry also provided him with some of the resources of poetic drama. In this play, the traditional ideas and ideals are undermined by a comic representation of reality. However, what makes this play 'modern' is its undermining of the neat pattern of the well-made play. Synge's plays written mainly between 1903 to 1909 were often accepted by the Dublin audience as strange. Synge too sought to reduce the conventional action by stressing more on ritual than on distinctive ways of speaking the speech of the English and Western Ireland. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, he perfected the Irish comic form.



4.7 FURTHER READING

Bentley, Eric. (Ed.). (2008). *The Theory of the Modern Stage.* London: Penguin Books.

Bloom, Harold. (2005). *Dramatists and Dramas.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

Daiches David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature Vol II.* New Delhi: Random House Publishers.

Gassner, John. (1960). *The Theatre of our Times.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Hacht, Anne Marie. & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 4.

Hoare, John Edward. (1911). "Ireland's National Drama." The *North American Review*, Vol. 194, No. 671, pp. 566-575.

Mathews P. J. (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge.* Cambridge University Press.

Sanders, Andrew. (1999). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J. M. (1995). *The The Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J. M. *The The Playboy of the Western World.* "Know-the-Show Audience Guide" compiled and written by Meredith Keffer for the Education Department of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

Synge, J. M. (1986). *Two Irish Plays: Riders to the Sea & The Playboy of the Western World.* Introduction and Notes by H. H. Anniah Gowda. Delhi: Macmillan.

4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Synge was an Irish playwright, poet, prose writer, travel writer and collector of folklore… …he was a key figure in the Irish Literary Revival… …he was one of the cofounders of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin… … *The Playboy of the Western World* is important for its faithful portrayal of Irish peasantry and also because it caused riots in Dublin during its opening run at the Abbey Theatre.

Ans to Q 2: Yeats advised him to develop an interest in the Irish language and tradition ... ... encouraged him to live for a while in the Aran Islands… …Synge spent five years in the Aran Islands meeting people and collecting stories and folklore… …from the notes he had made during this stay, was born his famous book *The Aran Islands* (1907)

Ans to Q 3: Yes… …*The Shadow of the Glen*, based on a story of an unfaithful wife, was attacked in print by the Irish nationalist leader Arthur Griffith who took it to be "a slur on Irish womanhood"… …*Riders to the Sea* was attacked by nationalists who decried it because of the author's attitude to God and religion… …, *The Playboy of the Western World*, caused riots because of Christy's celebrated image of "a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World… …*The Tinker's Wedding* was attacked largely because of a scene where a priest is shown to be tied up in a sack.

Ans to Q 4: The first audience in 1907 saw fantastical and crude elements in what they had expected to be a piece of realism… …it offended the politically symbolic Irish peasantry who rioted.

Ans to Q 5: In writing the play he used certain words which he had heard among the country people of Ireland… …Synge acknowledged his indebtedness to the folk imagination of the people of Mayo… …he took the imagination of the peasants and fishermen, and the language they used … …he felt that it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form… …but in modern literature of towns, richness is found only in sonnets, or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life.

Ans to Q 6: J. M. Synge contributed to the establishment of Abbey Theatre… …he brought the Anglo-Irish dialect to the stage… …influencing later Irish playwrights such as Sean O'Casey and Brendan Behan… …his stylised language, poetic imagery and vernacular speech patterns had a profound effect on writers like W. B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett.

Ans to Q 7: This play caused riots in Ireland… …this play provide fertile ground for those keen to investigate the dynamics of audience response and the function of the theatre at particular historical moments.



4.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q1: Is Synge's depiction of the Aran Islands sympathetic? Hostile? Condescending? Discuss.

Q 2: Describe the various types of humour and comedy used by Synge in his plays particularly in *The Playboy of the Western World.*

Q 3: Discuss Synge's influence on the growth of the Abbey Theater. What made the Abbey Theater so important for its era, and for Irish national consciousness generally?

Q 4: Examine the history of the Abbey Theater alongside other culturally important Theater groups and art collectives, such as the "Lost Generation" of American expatriates or the art circle surrounding Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground.

Q 5. *The Playboy of the Western World* was considered so offensive at the time of its staging that it sparked riots. Discuss.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 5: JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE: *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Act wise Summary of the Play

5.4 Critical Commentary on the Play

5.5 Major Themes

5.6 Major Characters

5.7 Critical Reception of the Play

5.8 Let us Sum up

5.9 Further Reading

5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.11 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the different aspects related to Synge's Irish background reflected in the play
- identify the major themes of the play and explain how they reflect the major concerns of Synge as a dramatist
- have an idea of the different characters and discuss their role in the play
- assess the play as a landmark in modern drama

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with *The Playboy of the Western World* a three-act play written by the Irish playwright John Millington Synge. This play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin on January 26, 1907. It tells the story of Christy Mahon, a young man running away from his farm, claiming he killed his father. The people of the locality are more interested in enjoying

his story than in condemning his murderous deed. You should note that the Irish dramatic movement produced a number of humorous and sentimental plays of Irish life and history. Subsequently, Synge turned to the speech and imagination of the Irish country people to restore the vitality to English drama. He sought a vocabulary, which was rich, poetic, real, and natural. *The Playboy of the Western World* exemplifies all such qualities. This play succeeds both as a comedy and as a 'Criticism of life'. At the same time, the speech of the Irish peasantry also provided him with some of the resources of poetic drama. In this play, the traditional ideas and ideals are undermined by comedy. However, what makes this play modern is its undermining of conventional social myths, beliefs, and convictions and the demolition of the neat pattern of the well-made play. Even after eighty years of the riot-provoking first performance in (1907), this play retains an extraordinary freshness. Whether it is an accurate representation of peasant life in the impoverished rural west of Ireland seems rather unimportant because what matters is the play's aesthetic originality and it is exalting the persuasiveness of rhetoric over the reductive world of the reality.

5.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

You must have already noticed that the action of the play takes place near a village on the coast of County Mayo during two autumn days. On the first day, the character called Christy Mahon arrives and tells the people of the locality that he has killed his tyrannical father. Overwhelmed by this act of boldness, the villagers lionise Christy. Peegen Mike, the daughter of the owner of the local Shebeen (inn), and Widow Quinn provide him the first pleasure of the company of a woman. Subsequently, Christy wins a mule race and is rewarded with the promise of marriage to Peegen. However, the celebration is cut short by the sudden return of Christy's supposedly dead father, to reclaim his delinquent son. In the end, Christy goes with him but no longer into servitude. Old Mahon respects him now, and Peegen grieves over the loss of her 'playboy' from the West. In the following subsections, you will get to read about the play in more detail.

Act I

A disorderly young man, Christy Mahon, stagger into Michael Flaherty's tavern in rural County Mayo, Ireland. Upon hearing that their sudden visitor is on the run from the law, the curious onlookers, including Michael Flaherty's daughter Pegeen Mike, try to find out his crime. When it was eventually found out that Christy murdered his father with the blow of a heavy spade used to dig potatoes, the locals get awestruck as they reason that a man who kills his father must be strong, brave, and dangerous. Against the protests of Shawn Keogh, Pegeen's meek and God-fearing fiancé, Flaherty engages Christy as a potboy to keep Pegeen safe in dark and lonely nights. Now left alone together, Christy and Pegeen start talking and fall in love with each other. However, they are interrupted by the Widow Quin, who has been sent by Shawn and by the priest, and who is to take Christy away. However, Widow Quin is unable to persuade him to leave and Pegeen kicks her out of the house. Pegeen then puts the tired Christy to bed and retires to her own room.

Act II

Christy is very happy to find himself with a job and a girl. He also draws the attention of the local women, who arrive from the town to marvel at the man who killed his father. Pegeen angrily sends the girls away and frightens Christy with the story of a man hanged that morning. They reconcile until they are again interrupted, this time by Shawn and the Widow, who try to bribe Christy with nice clothes and a ticket to the States. When this ploy to get rid of Christy also fails, Shawn leaves the Widow to attempt to seduce Christy. Unexpectedly, Christy's father, Old Mahon, comes to the pub. Christy hides himself out of shame and the Widow questions the old man. It finally turns out that Old Mahon did not die from the blow by his son, and claims that Christy is lazy, shy, and incompetent. Widow Quin takes her chance by protecting Christy and by sending Old Mahon away on a wild goose chase and vowing to keep Christy's secret. The danger having passed for the moment, the village girls come to take Christy away to participate in the local games and sports.

Act III:

The farmers Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrell are chatting in the pub when Old Mahon returns. Widow Quin, arriving soon after, tries to convince them that the old man is crazy, but the farmers' suspicions are aroused by the man's actual identity. The crowd enters, celebrating Christy's win. Christy, who is now at the height of his confidence and poetic powers, and Pegeen convinces Flaherty that he's a better match for Pegeen than Shawn. Just as it seems that everything is falling into place for the young lovers, Old Mahon returns and chaos ensues. Christy, sensing that public opinion has turned against him for appearing to be a liar, chases his father outside to kill him for good. Now the villagers become entirely hostile, scared they will be arrested as accomplices. Widow Quin and a village girl try to save Christy from hanging by disguising him in a petticoat and sending him off to the states, but he refuses to leave Pegeen. The villagers come back in and tie him up, and Pegeen even burns him. At the last minute, Old Mahon miraculously returns alive and unties his son. Christy agrees to go with his father, but reverses their roles: now the young man is the master and his father the cowed subservient. Christy leaves on a triumphant note, blessing the crowd for having turned him into a "likely gaffer" after all. Devastated Pegeen laments her loss of "the only The Playboy of the Western World."



LET US KNOW

The Revival of Poetic Drama:

From 1860s onwards, spectators and actors were trained in the naturalistic forms of drama. In the hands of Ibsen, Jones, Pinero, Shaw, Galsworthy, naturalist drama became prosaic, matter of fact, realistic and intellectual. Drama became social, critical and thoughtful, its main preoccupations being the problems of marriage, sex, war, poverty, law and justice and so on. The Naturalist dramatists wanted to produce 'the illusion of reality' with a deliberate choice of everyday contemporary situations and ordinary characters. Subsequently, they rejected the older conventions of dramatic speech.

Ibsen gave up verse thinking it to be the 'language of Gods'. Besides, these dramatists believed that poetic dramatists complicated the meaning by using too many metaphors, images and symbols. Thus, it can be argued that the influence of naturalism on stage became the cause for the decline of speech. The visual elements became more elaborate, scenery more powerful and acting more personal. Playwrights such as Synge believed that by becoming over real, drama had lost its essential joy. Besides, the influence of Japanese Noh drama, the plays of Maeterlink, the French Symbolist poets and the Russian ballet, made drama take a turn towards the imaginative and symbolic tendency. It became poetic again.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How would you like to comment on the role of folklore in Synge's upbringing as a playwright?

Q 2: Do you think that Synge arouses only laughter with his use of many humorous elements in the play?

5.4 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

Like many Irish nationalists and literary figures of his time, Synge took a deep interest in the traditional Irish folklore, and the peasants for whom tradition was an integral part of everyday life. Synge nevertheless felt a deep connection between folklore and nature, poetry, and human psychology, and believed that he himself had "[t]hat kind of frank imagination by which folk-lore is created." The deep influence of folklore on both Synge and his play has led to significant crossover between anthropology and literary criticism in the interpretation of *The Playboy*. This reminds one of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the carnival, which is a time of "festive misrule" in which roles and values are inversed. In *The Playboy* too, a murderer is considered a protector, a son rules his father, a "liar on walls" becomes "The Playboy of the Western World." Such 'carnivalesque' acts as an important release for the society.

Synge gained the mastery over writing lively dialogue coupled with colourful imagery. This play is an excellent rendering of his infusion of the speech of the common people with the rich English-language dialect of the Mayo County. You must have by now noted that it was from his five years stay in Aran Islands that Synge had learnt the intonations and speech patterns of the people of western Ireland. However, he also prepared the dialogue with words or phrases common in other parts of Ireland. As he states in the 'Preface': "...As to the imagery, it relies heavily on vivid metaphors and hyperboles. For example, when Michael Flaherty asks Christy Mahon whether he has committed larceny, Christy replies that he has no need to stoop to thievery, for his father "could have bought up the whole of your old house a while since, from the butt of his tail pocket, and not have missed the weight of it gone." Thus, the significance of Synge's plays lies to a greater extent in their use of local languages and dialects. Synge further writes in the 'Preface':

"On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play, every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks. J. M. S. January 21st, 1907."

Another aspect of Synge's writing style is his use of humour most of which grows out of the dialogue. Synge is not concerned with arousing laughter, but he uses **reversal** to reach the central ambiguity and complexity of being in a lost world. The stranger upsets all conventions and ironically, he is later accepted in society. Those on whom we laugh at are also laughing at ourselves because laughter is central to the idea of acting and being. When Old Mahon comes crawling over the floor, Christy cries out: "Are you coming to be killed a third time, or what ails you now?" Although contemporary readers

read the play as a satire on Ireland, it is rather an exuberant folk tale in which the humorous is curiously blended with the poetic.

Although this play is often read as a comedy, there is often an element of pathos in the play, which deals with the self-deceptions of characters in a bleak and distant part of Ireland. The remote Mayo coastline, on which *The Playboy of the Western World* is set, serves to confine an isolated rural community, one which is disturbed by the arrival of a fugitive, a supposed parricide. Words, and the illusion words create, dominate the action. As Andrew Sanders writes: "Christy Mahon's prestige depends not upon a fulfilled deed but on his recounting of a deed which has failed to succeed; his final departure with his thrice 'resurrected' father is accompanied by a final, triumphant act of myth-making in which he declares that he goes away 'like a gallant captain with his heathen slave'. Nothing could be farther from the world of Oscar Wilde."

The chief value of *The Playboy* lay in the fact that it ripped up the smugness of the Irish people, people so pleased with themselves on certain slender grounds, and teaching themselves the much-needed lesson that they are very like the rest of God's creatures. Synge portrayed the Irish people as faithfully as he could, and in his play put in the element of poetry in the Celtic character. He also put in the elements of cruelty, wit and generosity, dullness and greed, gallantry and cowardice, nobility and brutality and so on. The outcry against *The Playboy* was one against its style, against its way of seeing.

5.5 MAJOR THEMES

The above sections have already hinted at some of the themes of the play. Yet, for a better appreciation of the play's abiding interest the following themes are discussed in some detail.

Idea of Heroism:

In this play, among the people of Mayo, the idea of heroes and heroism is truly ambiguous and ironic. For instance, in Pegeen's views, heroes are dangerous and violent men who are set against the background of Holy

Ireland. Soon one discovers that the great talkers are synonymous with bravery and heroism in this community. By the end of Act I, Christy becomes fully conscious of his heroic status and his new self-flourishes after this. It is because of his power of eloquence and exaggerated use of language that the community makes a hero of Christy Mahon. This encourages Christy to develop within himself the illusion that he really is the hero. Ironically, bravery of talk is an adequate substitute for brave deeds in this somewhat sterile community. At the end of the play, however, Christy emancipates himself from all forms of illusion and achieves true heroism and freedom. Christy Mahon also echoes several characters or types from the traditional lore. The criminal or the outlaw as the hero is not uncommon among the groups that have been historically oppressed, because the criminal defies unjust laws and a societal system that keeps the group subjugated. Because of Ireland's long history of colonisation by and rebellion against England, the heroic outlaw is especially strong in Irish mindset and tradition. However, violence in folktales is not limited to criminals, and in many cases, it functions as a ritual rite of passage into maturity. Christy's "murder" of his abusive father accelerates his personal growth. Described by his father as "the looney of Mahon's" and a lazy, good-for-nothing laughingstock, Christy is like yet another folk hero: the foolish, bumbling younger son who succeeds where his older and cleverer brothers fail.



LET US KNOW

In returning to specifically Celtic sources, Christy is also made to resemble the great Irish hero Cuchulainn in some general (and possibly satirical) ways. Cuchulainn is an Irish mythological hero who appears in the stories of the Ulster Cycle, as well as in Scottish and Manx folklore. Both Cuchulainn and Christy are renowned for violent deeds and are relentlessly pursued by women. Both accomplish great feats (Christy's verbal, Cuchulainn's physical) in order to woo their chosen brides. More specifically, "a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself," references the episode in which Cuchulainn is brought down from a battle rage by being confronted with around 150 naked women.

Escape from Humdrum Life:

Christy Mahon acts to change his life—first by cracking his father's skull and second by telling a grand tale, that endears him to his listeners. Neither action, of course, is how a young man in the real world should go about improving himself. However, *The Playboy of the Western World* takes place in a fanciful world that allows the author to do the implausible and the outrageous. Therefore, Christy describes himself as the most admirable of murderers to the rural folk of County Mayo. Ironically, though, Christy really does transform himself in response to the adulation heaped on him. However, his admirers—people hungry for diversion from their humdrum life—do not change; the closest they get to an exciting life is to drink, listen to exciting stories, or attach themselves to a hero, Christy, from the outside. After he returns home, they return to their monotonous life.

Significance of Community Life:

The community represented in this play comes from a small rural village in the west of Ireland. Christy's father Old Mahon describes the people of the community at the conclusion of the play as 'the fools of Mayo'. These people become the major victims of irony and satire in the play. The moral standard of this community is ambiguous and contradictory. They glamourise a man because he claims he has murdered his father. They are unable to accept the true reality at the conclusion. Christy is a hero and man at the conclusion. Yet the villagers fail to see that. At the conclusion of this play, these people are forced to return to their village more imprisoned than ever. Storytelling is an important aspect in this community. It is not the actual deed, which exalts Christy in the eyes of the community, but the manner in which he tells it. This is clear from the comments of Pegeen Mike: 'such poet's talking and bravery of heart.' These people are stifled by the dull, drab quality of their lives and so they use the imagination to escape from reality. They chat themselves out of reality and into fantasy. At the sports, Christy truly does win the games and here fantasy is translated into fact. By the time Old Mahon turns up and exposes the hollowness of Christy's story, Christy is changed in such a way that nothing will displace this new self. From now on, he will be the master of all fights. However, the villagers

are unable to face reality. They expel Christy, as they are unable to accept the fact that they have created the fantasy and now it has become reality.

Comic Aspects of Life:

The first draft of the play was entitled "The Murderer, A Farce". Yet it is not so easy to classify the play as it has many facets. It is a comedy with elements of strong farce especially seen in the resurrection of Christy's father and in the revelation of a massive and mock-heroic lie. Still, the comedy might have resulted in the marriage of Christy and Pegeen, and Old Mahon and Widow Quin. From another viewpoint, this play can be termed as a 'free' comedy in which moral issues are reversed, transcended or ignored. This view is synonymous with what Yeats had said, "In a country like Ireland, where personifications have taken the place of life, men have more hate than love, for the inhuman is nearly the same as the human, but literature which is a part of that clarity that is the forgiveness of sins, will make an understand men however little they confirm to our expectations." The playboy Christy finds his soul through a lie, the 'gallous story' of his parricide. Nothing can be more comic than this in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the important themes that one can identify in this play?

Q 4: In what ways, did Synge become instrumental in the revival of poetic drama?

Q 5: What aspects of Heroism can you find in the play?

5.6 MAJOR CHARACTERS

You must be already familiar with the characters of the play. However, in an attempt to give a more comprehensive analysis of the play, the major characters are given a brief introduction.

Christopher Mahon:

The Young boy who claims to have murdered his father. At the beginning of the play, Christopher Mahon or Christy is ordinary and undistinguished except in his ability to tell a good story—namely the story of how he killed his father.

His tale turns him into a hero to his listeners. Their admiration for him improves his self-esteem. By the end of the play, however, he is not only a better man but also mature enough to realise his individuality. He is the playboy, an offensive simpleton, then a hero and a braggart, living in Kerry before he decides to kill his father with a spade. Then he leaves for Mayo. Between his timid entrance into Mayo by saying "God save all here!" and his exit by saying, "The way I'll go running through a romping time" he learns what it means to being branded as a fraud. The remote coastline of Mayo, which serves as the setting of the play, represents the insular rural community, which is disturbed by the sudden arrival of a fugitive. Christi Mahon's prestige depends not upon a fulfilled deed but on his recounting of a deed, which has failed to succeed.

Margaret Flaherty:

Margaret is the pub owner's daughter, who is pretty and witty, and who takes fancy to Christy Mahon. Her friends call her *Pegeen Mike*, or simply *Pegeen*. She is a bit of a tragic figure by the end of the play, when Christy leaves her community without reconciling with her. She is the heroin and victim. She won her man despite all opposition from her own sex. The marriage had also been approved by her father in a drunken phase. From this union would come, it was hoped, a band of 'little gallant swearers by the name of God.' However, she loses her man, as she states: "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely, I've lost the only The Playboy of the Western World."

Michael Flaherty:

Father of Margaret (Pegeen) Flaherty and owner of the pub in which the action of the play takes place. He enjoys attending wakes (nightlong viewings of corpses before funerals), where liquor and lively talk flow freely. During most of the onstage action of the play, he is attending a **wake** with his friends offstage.

Shawn Keough:

Dull, spineless young farmer who has Michael Flaherty's approval to marry Margaret (Pegeen) who is also his second cousin. She despises Shawn

after Christy arrives in the locality. With the help of Widow Quin, he tries to send him away from Pegeen but in vain.

Widow Quin:

Crafty, opportunistic 30-year-old who makes a play for Christy. According to rumours, she killed her husband and now flirts with handsome guys.

Old Mahon:

Christy Mahon's father. Thanks to his thick skull, he survives Christy's attempts to kill him. Although he has always looked down upon his son, Christy comes to respect him at the end of the play after he reveals himself as a man of nerve.

Father Reilly:

The local Roman Catholic priest. He does not appear in the play, but his presence is nevertheless felt because of Shawn Keough's frequent references to him. Because Shawn is a relative (second cousin) of Pegeen, he needs the approval of the Catholic Church to marry her. Therefore, Shawn is forever worried about how his conduct will be perceived by Father Reilly.

5.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE PLAY:

The Playboy of the Western World is considered by some to be the finest play written in English during the 20th century. Criticism of *The Playboy* typically stresses the thematic opposition between reality and imagination in the drama, tracing Christy's development toward self- realisation as an individual and as a poetic persona. The play's portrayal of his transformation is praised for suggesting a variety of mythological and biblical archetypes. For example, *The Playboy* is often discussed in terms of the central themes and plot structures of the legends surrounding the hero Cuchulain from Irish mythology, and the drama's treatment of patricide is compared to that in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. Some commentators, emphasising the rejection of Christy by his former admirers in the play's third act, have argued that Synge presents him as a Christ figure. However, comic and ironic elements in *The Playboy* have caused critics to debate the degree of

parody involved in Synge's approach to such prototypes. Christy, for example, is also considered a mock or secularised Christ in light of the drama's pagan themes and ironic use of religious allusions and expressions. *The Playboy* has garnered much critical attention for eluding traditional classifications of comedy and tragedy, and is cited as an early example of the modern tragicomedy.

Synge's use of language in *The Playboy* was also important from the first. Writing about the play in 1908, Louis Untermeyer in *Poet Lore* noted, "Wild poetry itself is in his utterance, for although Mr. Synge writes entirely in prose, his sentences are so steeped in similes of the skies that his very commonplaces are filled and coloured with all the nuances of rhythm. The sunlight filters through his lines and the spell of scenic splendour is over all his work."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What kind of mythical and biblical allusions does the play *The Playboy* make?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that *The Playboy of the Western World* is considered by many to be one of the finest plays written in English during the 20th century. You have learnt that criticism of the play typically stresses the thematic opposition between reality and imagination in the drama, tracing Christy's development toward self-realisation as an individual and as a poetic persona.



5.8 FURTHER READING

Bentley, Eric. (Ed.). (2008). *The Theory of the Modern Stage.* London: Penguin Books.

Bloom, Harold. (2005). *Dramatists and Dramas.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

Daiches David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature Vol II.* New Delhi: Random House Publishers.

Gassner, John. (1960). *The Theatre of our Times.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Hacht, Anne Marie. & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 4.

Hoare, John Edward. (1911). "Ireland's National Drama." The *North American Review*, Vol. 194, No. 671, pp. 566-575.

Mathews P. J. (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge.* Cambridge University Press.

Sanders, Andrew. (1999). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J. M. (1995). *The Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J. M. *The Playboy of the Western World.* "Know-the-Show Audience Guide" compiled and written by Meredith Keffer for the Education Department of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

Synge, J. M. (1986). *Two Irish Plays: Riders to the Sea & The Playboy of the Western World.* Introduction and Notes by H. H. Anniah Gowda. Delhi: Macmillan.



5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Synge took a deep interest in the traditional Irish folklore… …he felt a deep connection between folklore and nature, poetry, and human psychology… …this resulted in a significant crossover between anthropology and literary criticism in the interpretation of *The Playboy.*

Ans to Q 2: No… … but he uses reversal to reach the central ambiguity and complexity of being in a lost world… … those on whom we laugh at are also laughing at us because laughter is central to the idea of acting and being... …in many instances the play approaches the spirit

of black comedy as 'Humour is the test of morals, as novice is humorous.'

Ans to Q 3: Idea of Heroism… …Escape from humdrum life… …Significance of Community Life… …Comic Aspects of Life etc.

Ans to Q 4: From 1860s Naturalist drama became prosaic, matter of fact, realistic and intellectual… …Drama became social, critical and thoughtful, its main preoccupations being the problems of marriage, sex, war, poverty, law and justice and so on… … Synge believed that by becoming over-real, drama had lost its essential joy, and subsequently, he turned to poetry to deal with the everyday reality of the common people.

Ans to Q 5: The idea of heroes and heroism is truly ambiguous and ironic in the play… … in Pegeen's views, heroes are dangerous and violent men who are set against the background of Holy Ireland… …for the community great talkers are synonymous with bravery and heroism… …Christy becomes fully conscious of his heroic status and develops within himself the illusion that he really is the hero… …finally he is free from illusions and achieves true heroism.

Ans to Q 6: *The Playboy* is often discussed in terms of the central themes and plot structures of the legends surrounding the hero Cuchulain from Irish mythology, and the drama's treatment of patricide is compared to that in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*… …Some commentators, emphasising the rejection of Christy by his former admirers in the play's third act, have argued that Synge presents him as a Christ figure.



5.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Why does Christy readily tell the people of Mayo that he killed his father? What implications does the story have in the context of the play?

Q 2: Was Old Mahon right in abusing his son on the ground that he was a dandy?

Q 3: In what way, can *The Playboy* be called a modern play? How does it undermine the conventional social myths, beliefs, and convictions?

Q 4: What is a Well-made play? Do you consider the play to be a 'well-made play'? Give reasons for your answer.

Q 5: Give a character sketch of Shawn Keough? Does he have anything in common with Christy Mahon?

Q 6: To what extent is the humour in the play a result of the ways the characters speak in the country called Mayo in rural Ireland?

Q 7: The custom of holding wakes has a long history in Ireland. State the function it serves in the context of the play.

Q 8: What accounts for Old Mahon's acceptance of his son at the end of the play? Why does Christy go home with his father instead of remaining at Mayo and marrying Pegeen?

*** ***** ***



REFERENCES (FOR ALL UNITS)

Bentley, Eric. (Ed.). (2008). *The Theory of the Modern Stage.* London: Penguin Books.

Bloom, Harold. (2000). *George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Bloom, Harold. (2005). *Dramatists and Dramas.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

Brown, John Russell. (1995). *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brustein, Robert. (1991). *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama*. Boston: Little Brown.

Cardullo, Bert. (1986). "The Mystery of Candida", *Shaw*. 6. Penn State University Press. www.jstor.org/stable/4008127

Daiches David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature Vol II.* New Delhi: Random House Publishers.

Dunkel, Wilbur Dwight. "George Bernard Shaw", *The Sewanee Review*. 50.2 John Hopkins University. www.jstor. org/stable/27537270

Esslin, Martin. (1976). *The Theatre of the Absurd*, revised and enlarged edition, Penguin Books.

Gassner, John. (1960). *The Theatre of our Times.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Gilman, Richard. (2000). *The Making of Modern Drama*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hacht, Anne Marie. & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 4.

Henderson, Archibald. (1907). "George Bernard Shaw". *The North American Review.* 185.616. University of Northern Iowa..

Hoare, John Edward. (1911). "Ireland's National Drama." The *North American Review*, Vol. 194, No. 671, pp. 566-575.

Innes, Christopher. (Ed.). (1998). *George Bernard Shaw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jain, Sangeeta. (2006). *Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.

Kuhns, David F. (1997). *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage, Cambridge:* Cambridge University Press.

Mathews P. J. (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge.* Cambridge University Press.

Nicoll, Allardyce. (1978). *British Drama.* London: Barnes & Noble Books. (6th edition).

Pfister, Manfred. (1991). *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanders, Andrew. (1999). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shaw, George Bernard. (1995). *Candida: A Critical Introduction.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Shaw, George Bernard. (2006). *Candida*. Kansas: Digireads. com Publishing.

Soanes, Catherine. (Ed.). (2004). *The New Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sokel, Walter. (1959). *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth Century Germany.* London: McGraw-Hill.

Synge, J. M. (1986). *Two Irish Plays: Riders to the Sea & The Playboy of the Western World.* Introduction and Notes by H. H. Anniah Gowda. Delhi: Macmillan.

Synge, J. M. (1995). *The Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Synge, J. M. *The Playboy of the Western World.* "Know-the-Show Audience Guide" compiled and written by Meredith Keffer for the Education Department of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

Willett, John. (1970). *Expressionism.* London: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Williams, Raymond. (1993). *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. London: Hogarth.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

www. mccarter.org/ Education/candida

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw

http://www.mccarter.org/Education/candida/