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Modern European Literature

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

Prof. Pona Mahanta, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University

Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinators : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor, Department of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1	**Dr. Prasenjit Das**
2-3	**Indrajit Kalita** Department of English, Chaiduar College, Gohpur
4	**Dr. Manab Medhi** Department of English, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

Editorial Team

Content : Units 1-3 : Dr. Manab Medhi

Units 4 : Inhouse Editing

Structure, Format & Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das

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City Office: Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006; Web: www.kkhsou.in

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SEMESTER 4

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 4: (OPTION A) MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

BLOCK 1: IMPORTANT AESTHETIC MOVEMENTS

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION : [Adapted from M. H. Abrams]

This course introduces us to Modern European Literature. However, we shall have to begin by first referring to the different Aesthetic Movements that influenced both art and literature towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Initially, the chief headquarters of the Movements was in France. Opposing the dominance of scientific thinking, and in defiance of the widespread indifference or hostility of the middle-class society of their time to any art that was not useful or did not teach moral values, the French writers developed the view that a work of art is the supreme value among human products precisely because it is self-sufficient and has no use or moral aim outside its own being. The end of a work of art is simply to exist in its formal perfection; that is, to be beautiful and to be contemplated as an end in itself. A rallying cry of Aestheticism became the phrase “art for art’s sake”. However, with modernism, there also emerged varied types of revolt against the established beliefs as contained in various cultural products including literature.

M. H. Abrams has given a comprehensive view of this revolt. He states that literary historians locate the beginning of the modernist revolt as far back as the 1890s, but most agree that what is called high modernism, often marked by an unexampled range and rapidity of change, came after the World War I. The year 1922 alone was signalised by the simultaneous appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation as James Joyce’s *Ulysses,* T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land,* and Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room,* as well as many other experimental works of literature. The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the post-war world. T. S. Eliot wrote in a review of Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1923 that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” In *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot replaced the standard syntactic flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substituted for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a deliberate dislocation of parts, in which very diverse components are related by connections that are left to the reader to discover, or invent.

Major works of modernist fiction, following Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language with the help of Stream of consciousness and other innovative modes of narration. Gertrude Stein—often linked with Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Woolf as a trail-blazing modernist—experimented with automatic writing (writing that has been freed from control by the conscious, purposive mind) and other modes that achieved their effects by violating the norms of standard English syntax and sentence structure.

Among other European and American writers who are central representatives of modernism are the novelists Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, André Gide, Franz Kafka, Dorothy Richardson, and William Faulkner; the poets Stéphane Mallarmé, William Butler Yeats, Rainier Maria Rilke, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens; and the dramatists August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and Bertolt Brecht. Their new forms of literary construction and rendering had obvious parallels in the violation of representational conventions in the artistic movements of expressionism and surrealism, in the modernist paintings and sculpture of Cubism, Futurism, and Abstract Expressionism, and in the violations of standard conventions of melody, harmony, and rhythm by the modernist musical composers Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and their radical followers.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon called the **Avant Garde** (a military metaphor: "advance-guard"); that is, a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to "make it new." By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of social discourse, they set out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matter. Frequently, avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture.

The term **postmodernism** is often applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45), when the effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation. Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the counter traditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by recourse to the models of "mass culture" in film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. Many of the works of postmodern literature—by Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, Roland Barthes, and many others—so blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics. And these literary anomalies are paralleled in other arts by phenomena like pop art, op art, the musical compositions of John Cage, and the films of Jean-Luc Godard and other directors. An undertaking in some postmodernist writings—prominently in Samuel Beckett and other authors of the literature of the *absurd*—is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying "abyss," or "void," or "nothingness" on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended. Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with

the movement known as poststructuralism in linguistic and literary theory; poststructuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous inquirer, into a play of conflicting indeterminacies, or else to show that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the ideology, or of the relations and constructions of power, in contemporary society.

On the basis of the background provided above, this course shall introduce us to some landmarks of Modern European literature. All those writers have greatly contributed to the development of what can be emphatically called World Literature. As with the other prescribed texts of this MA English Programme, we need to be aware of the issues raised in the texts besides also being familiar with the different art aesthetic movements or modes of critical thinking that had a bearing on the emergence of many such works.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with the different Aesthetic Movements, **Block 2** shall deal with Modern European Poetry and Fiction; and **Block 3** shall deal with European Drama.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the Course Introduction, this Block comprises four units that deal with the different aesthetic movements that influenced art and literature of the modern times. It is important that we try to understand these movements so that we can read many of the prescribed texts of this course on the basis of what is learnt from this Block.

Units 1: In this unit, we shall discuss the terms like Impressionism, Realism, Symbolism and Naturalism. The outbreak of World War I and II, and the unprecedented devastation that occurred challenged the foundations of many belief systems, which further led to a great deal of experiments and innovations on the part of the artists. What followed was a plethora of artistic movements finding their places in an ever-changing world—most notably Impressionism, Realism, Symbolism and Naturalism.

Unit 2: In this unit, we shall discuss the idea of Avant Garde and how it introduced many innovative ideas and practices in art and literature. Avant Garde is characterised by non-traditional, aesthetic innovation and initial unacceptability, and it may offer a critique of the relationship between producer and consumer. We shall in this unit also study some of the movements in art such as Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism and Imagism—characterised by their contributions to the Avant-Garde traditions in Europe and other parts of the world.

Unit 3: In this unit, we shall have learnt that the turn of the 20th century was a time rife with unprecedented changes in society. The outbreak of World War I, the possibility of a second War and the devastation that ensued, challenged the foundations of the belief systems in many cultures which led to a great deal of experimentation and exploration by artists with morality and in defining what exactly Art should be and do for a culture. What followed from this was a litany of artistic movements that strived to find their places in an ever-changing world—Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism and Absurdism.

Unit 4: In this unit, we shall discuss the theories of modern drama.

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: IMPRESSIONISM, REALISM, SYMBOLISM AND NATURALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Impressionism

1.4 Realism

1.5 Symbolism

1.6 Naturalism

1.7 Let Us Sum up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the term Impressionism and identify the important impressionist thinkers and artists
- explain the term Realism and refer to the important realists
- discuss Symbolism with reference to the important symbolists
- explore the term Naturalism and identify the works often seen as naturalistic.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Course Modern European Literature. In this unit, we shall discuss the terms like Impressionism, Realism, Symbolism and Naturalism. We must note that the turn of the 20th century also brought in visible changes in the way people began to perceive civilisation as a whole as well as it its overall goal. The outbreak of World War I and II, and the unprecedented devastation that occurred challenged the foundations of many belief systems, which further led to a great deal of experiments and innovations by artists while defining what exactly Art should

be, mean and do for a culture. What followed from this was a plethora of artistic movements finding their places in an ever-changing world—most notably Impressionism, Realism, Symbolism and Naturalism among others. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to discuss these terms with reference to its various specific aspects and important practitioners and how they influenced artistic and literary practices of the 20th century.

1.3 IMPRESSIONISM

As a term, Impressionism is probably derived from French painter Claude Monet's work 'Impression: Soliel Leoant' (first exhibited in Paris in 1874). The Impressionists painters were particularly concerned with the transitory effects of light, and they wished to depict the fleeting impression from a subjective point of view. The French impressionists were the offspring of the realists among the painters. The great realist painter Gustave Courbet held the view that painting is an 'art of sight'. Therefore, it should confine itself to things seen or observed. He strongly opposed Romanticism and could not reconcile to the idea of making a picture out of imagination. Monet made a slight departure and said that pictures were to be 'seen' at the first glance. Because when we see a scene as a whole, the right approach is to see it as a whole before any detail has drawn our attention and made an alteration in the focus of our eye. Painters such as Monet, Sisley and Pissarro are perhaps the greatest impressionists for they sought to capture the fleeting impression of the moment by means of pure spectral colours, which were applied, to the canvass in small irregular brush strokes.

In the field of literature, the term impressionism has been loosely applied to the Symbolists and Imagist poets and to fiction writers using Stream of Consciousness technique. As we have learnt from the previous Semester, the method of the Stream of Consciousness writers such as—James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and so on was to present through vivid peripheral details the immediate impression of experience derived from the senses without analysis or synthesis, the impression as its is seen or felt in a single fleeting moment. Thus, it has been mentioned that impressionism is the way of writing which does not deal with reality objectively but gives the impressions formed by the author. These writers

are primarily concerned with the mental life of the individual and are therefore detached from social, political or ethical problems. Though not the most remarkable impressionist, Marcel Proust is often called a pioneer of the movement. In his "In Search of Lost Time", Proust presented a world of imagination to which ideas, observation, characters and even the author's own character are all subordinate, because human experience has only two spheres: the sphere of recollection and the sphere of anticipation.

In the field of poetry too, impressionism played a major role. According to Alex Preminger, the impressionist poets desired to capture the fleeting impression at the very moment in which sensations are transformed into feelings. Overall, their art is non-intellectual and if carried to the extreme, defies all rational explanation. Instead of naming the thing an impressionist is concerned with, he describes the effect that it produces. According to Preminger, "Impressionistic poetry aspires to the condition of music, but never attains it since words are in themselves symbols and have rarely direct access to the world of our senses. A poem composed of words that have an established meaning simply cannot be regarded as an abstract symphony of moods, since to regard it as such would mean to negate the very properties by which language is distinguished from other modes of expression."



LET US KNOW

The impressionists were not interested in a precise representation; the resulting impression depended on the perception of the spectator. The terms impressionist and impressionism have crept into literary criticism, but they are vague terms, which we might well dispense with. The French Symbolist poets along with English poets like Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons have been called impressionist. The term has also been used to describe the novelist's technique of concentrating on the inner life of the main character rather than on external reality. Abundant examples of this technique are to be found in the work of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: With what were the impressionist painters mostly concerned?

Q 2: What is the nature of impressionist literature?

1.4 REALISM

In literature and art, realism is the element, which is concerned with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears to the normal human consciousness. Thus, the purpose of a realist, as Hamlet stated, is to 'hold the mirror up to nature'. Realism is based on a theory of knowledge according to which the object revealed by sense perception, exit independently of being perceived or known. Thus, in a realist work, the author assumes an objective interpretation of action excluding his own feelings and normative judgement. Thus, in literature, realism is mostly seen as the portrayal of life with fidelity. It is thus not concerned with idealisation, with rendering things as beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting-in any guise, as they are not. Overall, one tends to think of realism in terms of the everyday, the normal, the pragmatic.

One may suppose that most writers are concerned with reality. Most epics for example, though it is often about supermen and improbable heroic deeds; most drama, even when it is very stylised, a great deal of lyric poetry, the vast majority of fictional works and so forth are realistic in several sense. However, we can also assume that some literature are more realistic than others. For instance, most of the poetry written by George Crabbe, Kipling and Robert Frost is more realistic than most of the poetry written by Spenser, Keats and Conrad Aiken. The novels of Zola, Gissing and Theodore Dreiser are much more realistic than the works of Huysmans, Firbank and Ivy Compton-Burnett. However, the imaginative flights of bizarre invention that we find in some of Lucian's works, in *Rabelais*, in Voltaire's *Candide*, in H. G. Well's *The War of the Worlds*, in Ray Bradbury's science fiction stories, are not realistic, though they are excellent fantasy based on reality. Occasionally, a writer manages to keep a beautiful and breathtaking balance on that high wire that joins both worlds.

The realist thought that an artist should concern himself with the here and now, with everyday events, with his own environment and with the movements (political, social, etc.) of his time. The anti-Romantic movements in Germany also concentrated attention on the lot of the common man and on the need to present life with all its wants. In general, we can see clearly enough in the works of Immermann, Balzac and Dickens, for instance, what forms the realist attitude was likely to take. The realist novelists paid particular attention to exact documentation, to getting the facts right, and in many ways were continuing in a more intensive and conscientious fashion what Balzac had been doing in *La Comedie Humaine*. Balzac regarded men as a zoologist might and he expressed the intention of following Buffon's work on zoology in order to write a natural history of man. Zola and Maupassant have also been taken as exponents of realism but it is perhaps more correct to regard them as the supreme analysts of the school of Naturalism. Zola's essays in *Le Roman experimental* (1880) are one of the main statements about Naturalism. Realism began sometime in the 1830s and had gathered momentum by the 1850s. During the latter part of the 19th century, realism was a definite trend in European literature. Outside France, the effects of realism are to be seen in the works of Tolstoy, Gogol and Gorki, and, to a lesser extent, in Turgenev, and also in the work of Gissing and the American novelist William Dean Howells.

As far as drama is concerned, realism in the 19th century was a less extreme form of naturalism. Playwrights who favoured realism – Ibsen is a key figure - rejected the concept of the 'well-made play' with its mechanical artifices and its altogether too slick plotting, and rejected exaggerated theatricalism. Ibsen's influence was very great, especially on Shaw and Strindberg and subsequently on a whole generation of prominent 20th century dramatists; not to mention Stanislavsky and the various adaptations of his teachings in method acting.

In the context of Russia, what is known as Socialist Realism, involved the development of specifically Soviet theatre. Classics were to be interpreted in contemporary terms so that they became more relevant to the people. New plays should be about life lived by ordinary people.

Socialist realism suggested the committed propaganda of writers submissive to a particular political regime. Realism also occurs in another important context, namely psychological realism seen in terms of the use of the Stream of Consciousness method.



LET US KNOW

As M. H. Abrams states that Realism is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways:

(1) To identify a movement in the writing of novels during the 19th century that included Honoré de Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America, and

(2) To designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How is realism perceived in literature? Comment.

Q 4: Write a note on realist novels.

1.5 SYMBOLISM

In course 3 of the previous semester, we have read about Symbolism in some length. Symbolism is a loosely organised literary and artistic movement originating in French among a group of French poets in the late 19th century. Gradually, it spread to painting and the theatre, and also influenced the European and American literatures of the 20th century to varying degrees. The symbolist artists sought to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of highly symbolised language. This movement saw the flourishing of French poets like Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, Henri de Régnier, René Ghil, and Gustave Kahn. Other French poets namely Paul Valéry and Paul Claudel are also often considered direct 20th century heirs of the Symbolists.

We should note that Symbolism originated as part of the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions governing both technique and theme in traditional French poetry as evidenced in the precise description of Parnassian poetry. They wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions and its formalised oratory in order to describe instead the fleeting, immediate sensations of man's inner life and experience. They attempted to evoke the ineffable intuitions and sense impressions of man's inner life and to communicate the underlying mystery of existence through a free and highly personal use of metaphors and images that, though lacking in precise meaning, would nevertheless convey the state of the poet's mind and hint at the "dark and confused unity" of an inexpressible reality.

The Symbolist poets such as Verlaine and Rimbaud were greatly influenced by the poetry and thought of Charles Baudelaire, particularly by the poems in his *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). They adopted Baudelaire's concept of the '*correspondances'* between the senses and combined this with the Wagnerian ideal of a synthesis of the arts to produce an original conception of the musical qualities of poetry. Thus, to the Symbolists, the theme within a poem could be developed and "orchestrated" by the sensitive manipulation of the harmonies, tones, and colours inherent in carefully chosen words. Their emphasis on the essential and innate qualities of the poetic medium was based on the conviction that art was supreme over all other means of expression or knowledge. This, in turn, was partly based on their idealistic conviction that underlying the materiality and individuality of the physical world was another reality whose essence could best be glimpsed through the subjective emotional responses contributing to and generated by the work of art. Works such as Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles* (1874; *Songs Without Words*) and Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1876) sparked a growing interest in the nascent innovations of progressive French poets.

Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro,* published the Symbolist Manifesto on September 18, 1886. Here, he attacked the descriptive tendencies of Realist theatre, Naturalistic novels, and Parnassian poetry. He also proposed replacing the term *décadent*, which was used to describe Baudelaire and others, with the terms *symboliste* and *symbolisme.* Many little Symbolist

reviews and magazines sprang up in the late 1880s, their authors freely participating in the controversies generated by the attacks of hostile critics on the movement. Mallarmé became the leader of the Symbolists, and his *Divagations* (1897) remains the most valuable statement of the movement's aesthetics. In their efforts to escape the rigid metrical patterns and to achieve freer poetic rhythms, many Symbolist poets resorted to the composition of prose poems and the use of *vers libre* (free verse), which becomes a fundamental form of contemporary poetry.

The Symbolist movement in poetry reached its peak around 1890s and began to enter a precipitous decline in popularity about 1900. The atmospheric, unfocused imagery of the symbolist poetry eventually came to be seen as over-refined and affected, and the term *décadent*, which the Symbolists had once proudly proclaimed, became with others a term of laughter denoting mere fin-de-siècle preciosity. The symbolist works had a strong and lasting influence on much British and American literature in the 20th century. Their experimental techniques greatly enriched the technical repertoire of modern poetry, and Symbolist theories bore fruit both in the poetry of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot and in the modern novel as represented by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in which word harmonies and patterns of images often take preeminence over the narrative.

In prose works, the white whale of Melville's Moby Dick is a kind of symbolic creature. Much of the fiction of William Golding (especially *Lord of the Flies*, *Pincer Martin* and *The Spire*) depends upon powerful symbolism capable of more interpretations than one. To these examples should be added the novels and short stories of Kafka, and the plays of Maeterlinck, Andreyev, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Synge and O'Neill.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: How did Symbolism evolve?

Q 6: Who published the Symbolist Manifesto? State the significance of the Manifesto.

Q 7: How did the French Symbolist poets influence the 20th century literature?

1.6 NATURALISM

The term Naturalism is sometimes used loosely as a synonym for Realism and also with reference to works showing interest in, sympathy with and love for natural beauty as in case with the poetry of Wordsworth. Naturalists tend to preach a belief that everything that exists is part of nature and can be explained by natural and material causes and not by supernatural, spiritual or paranormal causes. In literature, it is believed that Naturalism developed out of Realism. The main influences that went to forming a different point of view were Darwin's biological theories, Comte's application of scientific ideas to the study of society, and Taine's application of deterministic theories to literature. Those in favour of a naturalistic approach to and interpretation of life concentrated on depicting the social environment and dwelt particularly on its deficiencies and on the shortcomings of human beings. The 'naturalist's vision of the estate of man tended to be subjective and was very often sombre.

M. H. Abrams states that Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. However, it also denotes a mode of fiction writing that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis. Naturalism, a product of post-Darwinian biology in the 19th century, held that human being exist entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher-order animal whose character and behaviour are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment. A person inherits compulsive instincts—especially hunger, the drive to accumulate possessions, and sexuality—and is then subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class, and the milieu into which that person is born.

The French novelist Émile Zola, beginning in the 1870s, did much to develop this theory in what he called "le roman expérimental" (that is, the novel organised in the mode of a scientific experiment on the behaviour of the characters it depicts). Zola and later naturalistic writers, such as the

Americans—Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, tried to present their subjects with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation, sometimes including an almost medical frankness about activities and bodily functions usually unmentioned in earlier literature. They chose characters who exhibit strong animal drives such as greed and sexual desire, and who are helpless victims both of glandular secretions within and of sociological pressures without. The end of the naturalistic novel is usually "tragic," but not, as in classical and Elizabethan *tragedy,* because of a heroic but losing struggle of the individual mind and will against gods, enemies, and circumstances. Instead, the protagonist of the naturalistic plot, a pawn to multiple compulsions, usually disintegrates, or is wiped out.



LET US KNOW

Zola's influence has been very considerable and is discernible in many plays and novels of the last hundred years. It is particularly noticeable in the work of Maupassant and Huysmans, of George Moore and George Gissing. However, he made his greatest impact in Germany, where Naturalism as a movement was concentrated in one literary school in Berlin and another in Munich. Outside France and Germany, it was apparent in the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gorki, and across the Atlantic in the novels of Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris and Stephen Crane.

Aspects of the naturalistic selection and management of subject matter and its austere or harsh manner of rendering its materials are apparent in many other modern novels and dramas, such as Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* 1895 (although Hardy largely substituted a cosmic determinism for biological and environmental determinism), various plays by Eugene O'Neill in the 1920s, and Norman Mailer's novel of World War II, *The Naked and the Dead.* Movements, which opposed to both 19th century realism and naturalism (though some modern works, such as Joyce's *Ulysses,* 1922, combine aspects of all these novelistic modes), are *expressionism* and *symbolism.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: How does Naturalism view human beings?

Q 9: What do the naturalistic writers try to present?



1.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt about the terms Impressionism, Realism, Symbolism and Naturalism. We have learnt that Impressionist painters are particularly concerned with the transitory effects of light, and they wished to depict the fleeting impression from a subjective point of view. The Impressionist writers are therefore primarily concerned with the mental life of the individual and are therefore detached from social, political or ethical problems. While Realism is the element in literature and art, which is concerned with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears to the normal human consciousness. Symbolism originated as part of the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions governing both technique and theme in traditional French poetry as evidenced in the precise description of Parnassian poetry. Naturalism however tends to preach a belief that everything that exists is part of nature and can be explained by natural and material causes and not by supernatural, spiritual or paranormal causes. In the field of literature, it is believed that Naturalism developed out of Realism. While interpreting many of the European literary works in general and those prescribed for your study in particular, a proper understanding of the terms discussed in this unit shall surely help.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Edn). Thomson Learning.

Cuddon, J. A. (1998). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* Penguin Books.

Web Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/list/10-modernist-art-movements

https://www.britannica.com/art/Symbolism-literary-and-artistic-movement

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: They were particularly concerned with the transitory effects of light… …depiction of the fleeting impression from a subjective point of view… …painters such as Monet, Sisley and Pissarro sought to capture the fleeting impression of the moment by means of pure spectral colours which were applied to the canvass in small irregular brush strokes.

Ans to Q 2: Impressionist literature refers to a way of writing which does not deal with reality objectively but gives the impressions formed by the author… …the writers are primarily concerned with the mental life of the individual and are therefore detached from social, political or ethical problems.

Ans to Q 3: In literature, realism is mostly seen as the portrayal of life with fidelity… …the author assumes an objective interpretation of action… …opposes idealisation or rendering things as beautiful when they are not… …realism means the depiction of everyday, the normal, the pragmatic.

Ans to Q 4: The realist novelists paid particular attention to exact documentation, to getting the facts right… …French Zola and Maupassant have also been taken as exponents of realism… …in Russia, the effects of realism are to be seen in the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorki, and Turgenev… …in the American novelist William Dean Howells.

Ans to Q 5: Symbolism originated as part of the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions poetic technique and theme in traditional French poetry… …the symbolists wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions and its formalised oratory… …to describe the fleeting, immediate sensations of man's inner life and experience…

…they tried to evoke ineffable intuitions and sense impressions of man's inner life… …used highly personal metaphors and images that lacked precise meaning.

Ans to Q 6: Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro* published the Symbolist Manifesto… …The Manifesto attacked the descriptive tendencies of Realist theatre, Naturalistic novels, and Parnassian poetry… …Moréas proposed replacing the term *décadent*, which was used to describe a poet like Baudelaire, with the terms *symboliste* and *symbolisme… …in* their efforts to escape the rigid metrical patterns and to achieve freer poetic rhythms, the Symbolist poets resorted to the use of *vers libre* (free verse), which become a fundamental form of early modern poetry.

Ans to Q 7: The symbolists had a strong influence on much British and American literature in the 20th century… …their experimental techniques greatly enriched the technical repertoire of modern poetry as practiced by poets like W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot… …modern novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in which word harmonies and patterns of images often take preeminence over the narrative.

Ans to Q 8: Naturalism held that human being exist entirely in the order of nature… …a human being is merely a higher-order animal whose character and behaviour are entirely determined by heredity and environment… …a person inherits compulsive instincts—especially hunger, anger, possessiveness and sexuality etc. form the family and milieu into which that person is born.

Ans to Q 9: The naturalistic writers present their subjects with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation… …They choose characters who exhibit strong animal drives such as greed and sexual desire… …the end of the naturalistic novel is usually tragic.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does the term Impressionism signify? Discuss with reference to some of the impressionist works of art and literature.

Q 2: The turn of the 20th century brought certain visible changes in the way people perceive civilisation as a whole. Justify your view with reference to the various art movements in the 20th century.

Q 3: Write a note on the meaning of term Realism. How do the realist writers oppose all sorts of idealisation? Discuss.

Q 4: Symbolism is a loosely organised literary and artistic movement originating in French among a group of French poets in the late 19th century. Discuss.

Q 5: Naturalists tend to preach a belief that everything that exists is a part of nature and can be explained by natural and material causes. Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 2: CUBISM, FUTURISM, VORTICISM, IMAGISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Idea of Avant Garde

2.4 Some Art Movements of the 20th Century

- 2.4.1 Cubism
- 2.4.2 Futurism
- 2.4.3 Vorticism
- 2.4.4 Imagism

2.5 Let us Sum up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the idea of Avant Garde and how it influenced art and literature in the 20th century
- explain the major premises of some 20th century Art Movements namely—Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism and Imagism and assess their contribution to the Avant Garde
- identify the important artists and thinkers associated with the different art movements of the 20th century such as Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism and Imagism.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, our main purpose is to discuss the idea of Avant Garde and how it introduced many innovative ideas and practises in art and literature. The French terms Avant Garde or "advance guard" refers to people or works that are experimental, radical, or unorthodox with respect

to art, culture, or society. It may be characterised by non-traditional, aesthetic innovation and initial unacceptability, and it may offer a critique of the relationship between producer and consumer. We shall in this unit also study some of the movements in art such as Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism and Imagism—characterised by their contributions to the Avant-Garde traditions in Europe and other parts of the world. While discussing the art movements we shall adapt from J. A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary* Theory, M. H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* and *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

2.3 IDEA OF AVANT GARDE [Adapted from Wikipedia]

From the introduction of this unit, we have learnt that Avant Garde is a prominent feature of modernism. It relates to a military metaphor: "advance-guard". The term refers to a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertook, as stated by the modernist poet Ezra Pound, to "make it new." By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of all types of social discourses, they sought to create innovative and experimental artistic forms and styles and introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matter. Frequently, the avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968) and Peter Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) are neo-Marxist analysis both of modernism and of its distinctive cultural formation, the avant-garde.

The avant-garde artists, writers, composers and thinkers were opposed to mainstream cultural values. Many writers, critics and theorists made assertions about the vanguard culture during the formative years of modernism, although the initial definitive statement on the avant-garde was by a New York based art critic Clement Greenberg in the essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939). Greenberg argued that vanguard culture has historically been opposed to "high" or "mainstream" culture, and that it has also rejected

the artificially synthesised mass culture that has been produced by industrialisation. Each of these media is a direct product of Capitalism and as such, they are driven by the same profit motives of other sectors of manufacturing, not the ideals of true art. For Greenberg, these forms were therefore kitsch: phony, faked or mechanical culture, which often pretended to be more than they were by using formal devices stolen from vanguard culture. For instance, during the 1930s, the advertising industry was quick to take visual mannerisms from surrealism, but this does not mean that 1930s advertising photographs are truly surreal.

The members of the Frankfurt School propounded similar views—Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass-Deception* (1944), and also Walter Benjamin in his highly influential "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935, rev. 1939). Where Greenberg used the German word *kitsch* to describe the antithesis of avant-garde culture, members of the Frankfurt School coined the term "mass culture" to indicate that this bogus culture is constantly being manufactured by a newly emerged culture industry (comprising commercial publishing houses, the movie industry, the record industry, and the electronic media). They also pointed out that the rise of this industry meant that artistic excellence was displaced by sales figures as a measure of worth: a novel, for example, was judged meritorious solely on whether it became a best-seller, music succumbed to ratings charts and to the blunt commercial logic of the Gold disc. In this way, the autonomous artistic merit so dear to the vanguardist was abandoned and sales increasingly became the measure, and justification, of everything. Consumer culture now ruled.



LET US KNOW

Avant Garde is an important and much used term in the history of art and literature. It clearly has a military origin ('advance guard') and, as applied to art and literature, denotes exploration, path finding, something new something advanced (ahead of its time) and revolutionary. In 1845, Gabriel-Desire Laverdant

published a work called *De la mission de l'art et du role des artistes*. Here, he wrote: "Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the fore runner and the revealer. Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, what the destiny of the human race is…" During the last quarter of the 19th century, the term and concept appear in both cultural and political contexts. Gradually, the cultural-artistic meaning displaced the socio-political meaning. For a long time, it has been commonplace to refer to avant-garde art and literature. Nowadays, we are accustomed to think of the symbolist poets Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarme as the first members of the avant-garde; likewise the playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd and novelists like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and Nathalie Sarraute.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What does the term Avant Garde refer to?

Q 2: How did the Frankfurt school react to the idea of 'mass culture'?

2.4 SOME ART MOVEMENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

In the following, we shall discuss some of the important art movements of the 20th century.

2.4.1 Cubism

One of the best-known art movements of the Modernist era, Cubism has come to be associated with one name in particular, Pablo Picasso. However, it should be duly noted that Georges Braque was also a leader of the movement and that he and Picasso worked so well off of one another that, at the height of Cubism's reign, their paintings are practically indistinguishable from one another. It's often noted that Cubism was ushered in a definitive movement with the revelation of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*

d'Avignon (1907), which shows nude women in a fractured perspective and which demonstrates a significant African influence.

However, the movement did not receive its name until 1908, when, art critic Louis Vauxcelles depicted Braque's *House at L'Estaque* as being fashioned from cubes. The central aims of the Cubists were to discard the conventions of the past to merely mimic nature and to start in a new vein to highlight the flat dimensionality of the canvas. This effect was achieved through the use of various conflicting vantage points. They painted pictures of common objects such as musical instruments, pitchers, bottles, and the human figure. As they progressed in their work, Braque and Picasso adopted the use of a monochromatic scale to emphasise their focus on the inherent structure of their works. Though commonly associated with painting, Cubism had lasting effects on many sculptors and architects of the time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the central aims of the Cubists?

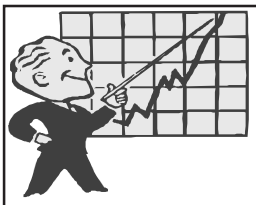
2.4.2 Futurism

Futurism is perhaps one of the most controversial movements of the Modernist era. Initially, it was a literary movement originating in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century. Its long-term influences were to be seen in other arts, particularly painting and music. At a cursory glance, it likened humans to machines and vice versa in order to embrace change, speed, and innovation in society while discarding artistic and cultural forms and traditions of the past. However, at the centre of the Futurist platform was an endorsement of war and misogyny. The term Futurism was coined in a 1909 manifesto by Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944). Marinetti, who founded the periodical Poesia in 1905. The first and major manifesto of futurism was drawn up by him and published in *Le Figaro* in Paris in

1909. Subsequently, several other manifestos followed. They advocated a complete break with tradition and aimed at new forms, new subjects and new styles in keeping with the advent of a mechanistic age. They extolled dynamism, the machine (and machinery in general), speed (there was a speed cult) and the splendour of war and patriotism.

It was however not limited to just one art form, but in fact was embraced by sculptors, architects, painters, and writers. Paintings were typically of automobiles, trains, animals, dancers, and large crowds; and painters borrowed the fragmented and intersecting planes from Cubism in combination with the vibrant and expressive colours of Fauvism in order to glorify the virtues of speed and dynamic movement. Writers focused on ridding their poetry of what they saw as unnecessary elements such as adjectives and adverbs so that the emphasis could rest on the action of infinitive verbs. This technique in conjunction with the integration of mathematical symbols allowed them to make more declarative statements with a great sense of audacity. Although originally ardent in their affirmation of the virtues of war, the Futurists lost steam as the devastation of WW I became realised.

The movement became politically fascistic and also had some indirect effect on Dadaism, Expressionism and Surrealism. It seems not to have had all that much influence on literature except in Russia, where it provoked vociferous activity from 1910 under the leadership of Viktor Khlebnikov (1885-1922). The Russian Futurists were against symbolism, mysticism and the cult of 'pure' beauty. They set out to shock people. The manifesto of 1912 was titled "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" and was intended as a literary and cultural purge. Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy et al. were to be chucked 'overboard'. After the October Revolution, many Futurists had official positions in control of literature but the Party did not care for their avant-garde policies. The movement died out in the 1920s.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who coined the term Futurism? How did the Futurists view human beings?

Q 5: How is the form of Futurist painting?

2.4.3 Vorticism

It was a specifically English artistic movement, since its mouthpiece was the famed London-based magazine *Blast: The Review of the Great English Vortex* (1914 and 1915). Vorticism followed in the same vein as Futurism in that it relished in the innovative advances of the machine age and embraced the possible virtues of dynamic change that were to follow. It was founded right before the start of WW I by the celebrated painter Wyndham Lewis and the ubiquitous modernist poet Ezra Pound. However, whereas the Futurists originated in France and Italy and then spread out over the continent to Russia, Vorticism remained located in London. The Vorticists took pride on being independent of similar movements. In their literature, they utilised bare-bones vocabulary that resonated in likeness to the mechanical forms found in English shipyards and factories, and, in their writings as well as their paintings, the Vorticists espoused abstraction as the only way to sever ties with the dominant and suffocating Victorian past so that they could advance to a new era. However, Vorticism, like Futurism, struggled to cope with the incomprehensible destruction during WW I that was a result of the new machines, which they so highly praised. Some of the early poems of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were also published in *Blast* and Pound used it to elaborate his theory of the image. As WW I came to an end and as the Vorticists like T. E. Hulme and Gaudler Brseska, died in action, Vorticism became limited to only a few by the beginning of the 1920s.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How founded Vorticism? How did they view literature?

2.4.4 Imagism [Adapted from *New Princeton Encyclopaedia*, Page 574]

As a school of poetry, Imagism flourished in England and America between 1912 and 1914, and being marked by the virtues of clarity, compression, and precision. In 1912, Ezra Pound wrote of the "forgotten school of images" that formed around the Bergsonian philosopher T. E. Hulme. Hulme was the founder of a 'Poets' Club' which began meeting regularly in London in 1909, and which was influenced by Hulme's speculations on literary language. Hulme wrote in his essay "Romanticism and Classicism" that the language of poetry is a "visual concrete one…Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive lang."

It was however Ezra Pound who founded the 'Imagist Movement'. Hilda Doolittle recalls in her memoir of Pound that Pound named imagism when he suggested revisions to her poem "Hermes of the Ways" and "scrawled 'H. D. Imagiste' at the bottom of the page" before sending it to the magazine called *Poetry* in October 1912. In November, Pound used the term "Imagiste" for the first time in print when he published the "Complete Poetical Works" of Hulme (five short poems) as an appendix to his *Ripostes.* Poems by "H. D., 'Imagiste'" were published in *Poetry* in January 1913, and in the March 1913 issue, F. S. Flint, quoting an unnamed "Imagiste" (Pound), listed these characteristics of the movement:

- Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective.
- Use of absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
- As regarding rhythm, to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

However, the April issue of the magazine *Poetry* included the best known and perhaps the finest of the imagist poems, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." The climax of the movement came in the Spring of 1914, when Pound published an anthology *Des Imagistes* in England and America*,* which included poems by H. D., Richard

Aldington, F. S. Flint, Amy Lowell, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams. By this time, Lowell was assuming leadership of the movement and began publishing anthologies entitled *Some Imagist Poets* for the years 1915-17. However, Pound repudiated "Amygism," declaring that it was a dilution of the original movement, which violated the second imagist principle, and aligned himself rather with vorticism.

By 1917, Lowell herself felt that the movement had run its course; but her anthologies had kept it alive, and her first two volumes contained prefaces, which, along with the *Poetry* essays, constitute the most deliberate statements of imagist theory. Though the poems themselves often have a merely casual relation to Pound's definition of the image, they place their values in clarity, exactness, and concreteness of detail; in economy of language and brevity of treatment; and in an organic basis for selecting rhythmic patterns. H.D.'s "Storm" illustrates these values:

You crash over the trees,
you crack the live branch—
the branch is white,
the green crushed,
each leaf is rent like split wood.

The imagists' concern with poetic form and technique and their desire for the immediacy of effect that arises from the closest possible association of word and object were in part a program for improving the craft of writing which influenced the formalist poetics of critics like Eliot, Richards, and Ransom. Recent critics have seen imagism as an attempt to create a poem as a single entity, which, unlike a symbolic or allegorical poem, intensifies its objective reality rather than expressing the subjective feelings of the poet. Stephen Spender made the essential point about the influence and importance of imagism like this: "the aims of the imagist movement in poetry provide the archetype of a modern creative procedure."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Who are the imagist poets? Mention the characteristics of Imagist poetry.

Q 8: What are some of the main concerns of the Imagists?



2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have learnt about the idea of Avant Garde and how it revolted against established rules and norms of the society. Avant Garde introduced many innovative ideas and practises in art and literature. As part of the Avant Garde thinking, there also developed various non-traditional aesthetic innovations and experiments reflecting different art and literary movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism and Imagism. A careful reading of these movements will help us to understand the various contours of modernism and its influence on literary practises of the 20th century.



2.6 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Edn). Thomson Learning.

Cuddon, J. A. (1998). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* Penguin Books.

Preminger, Alex. & T. V. F. Brogan. (Eds.). (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton University Press.

Web Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/list/10-modernist-art-movements

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avant-garde

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The term refers to a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately violated the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of all types of social discourses… …they tried to create innovative and experimental artistic forms and styles and introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matter.

Ans to Q 2: The Frankfurt School indicated that "mass culture" refers to bogus culture constantly being manufactured by a newly emerged culture industry… …the rise of the industry meant that artistic excellence was displaced by sales figures as a measure of worth… …a novel, for example, was judged meritorious solely on whether it became a best-seller…

Ans to Q 3: The central aims of the Cubists were to discard the conventions of the past to merely mimic nature and to start in a new vein to highlight the flat dimensionality of the canvas… …they used various conflicting vantage points and painted pictures of common objects such as musical instruments, pitchers, bottles, and the human figure.

Ans to Q 4: Filippo Marinetti… …it likened humans to machines and vice versa in order to embrace change, speed, and innovation in society while discarding artistic and cultural forms and traditions of the past. However, at the centre of the Futurist platform was an endorsement of war and misogyny.

Ans to Q 5: Futurist Paintings were typically of automobiles, trains, animals, dancers, and large crowds; and painters borrowed the fragmented and intersecting planes from Cubism in combination with the vibrant and expressive colours of Fauvism in order to glorify the virtues of speed and dynamic movement.

Ans to Q 6: Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound… they utilised bare-bones vocabulary that resonated in likeness to the mechanical forms found in English shipyards and factories… …they espoused abstraction as

the only way to sever ties with the dominant and suffocating Victorian past so that they could advance to a new era.

Ans to Q 7: Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, Hilda Doolittle… …direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective… …use of absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation… ...composing poetry in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

Ans to Q 8: The imagists were concern with poetic form and technique… …closest possible association of word and object… …It was as an attempt to create a poem as a single entity… …intensified the objective reality rather than expressing the subjective feelings of the poet… …Stephen Spender stated, "the aims of the imagist movement in poetry provide the archetype of a modern creative procedure."



2.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a detail note on the emergence of the Avant Garde as a prominent feature of Modernism.

Q 2: Avant Garde is an important and much used term in the history of art and literature. Discuss.

Q 3: How did the various art movements of the 20th century provide experimental, radical, and unorthodox response to art, culture and society? Discuss.

Q 4: Why is Futurism often called a controversial movement of the modernist era? Discuss.

Q 5: Discuss the important concerns of Imagist poetry with particular reference to the Imagist poets.

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UNIT 3: EXPRESSIONISM, DADAISM AND SURREALISM, EXISTENTIALISM AND ABSURDISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Expressionism

3.4 Dadaism and Surrealism

3.5 Existentialism and Absurdism

3.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.9 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify the major objectives of Expressionism and analyse its impact on literature
- discuss the major premises on which rest the meaning of Dadaism and Surrealism
- make a survey of the concept of Existentialism and discuss how it deals with the existence of men in modern times
- explain the term Absurdism and identify the greatest absurd writers as well as their works

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The turn of the 20th century was a time rife with unprecedented changes in society. The outbreak of World War I, or the supposed War to End All Wars, and the devastation that ensued challenged the foundations of the belief systems in many cultures which led to a great deal of experimentation and exploration by artists with morality and in defining what exactly Art should be and do for a culture. What followed from this was a

litany of artistic movements that strived to find their places in an ever-changing world—Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism and Absurdism. In this unit, we shall try to discuss these movements so that we can explore how they influenced literary activities throughout Europe and other parts of the world in the 20th centuries. We shall read about the movements mostly from M. H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* and J. A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.*

3.3 EXPRESSIONISM

Expressionism, a German movement in literature and the visual arts, which was at its height between 1910 and 1925—that is, in the period just before, during, and after World War I. Its main precursors were artists and writers who had in various ways departed from realistic depictions of life and the world, by incorporating in their art visionary or powerfully emotional states of mind expressed and transmitted by means of distorted representations of the outer world. Among these precursors in painting mention may be made of Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and the Norwegian Edward Munch. Munch's lithograph *The Cry* (1894) depicting, against a bleak and stylised background, a tense figure with a contorted face uttering a scream of pure horror, is often taken to epitomise what became the expressionist mode.

Prominent among the literary precursors of the movement in the 19th century were the French poets Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and above all the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg. Expressionism itself was never a concerted or well-defined movement. Its central feature was a revolt against the artistic and literary tradition of *realism,* both in subject matter and style. The expressionist artist or writer undertakes to express a personal vision—usually a troubled or tensely emotional vision—of human life and human society. This is done by exaggerating and distorting the objective features of the world, and by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling. Often the work implies that what is depicted or described represents the experience of an individual standing alone and

afraid in an industrial, technological, and urban society which is disintegrating into chaos. Expressionists who were radical in their politics also projected Utopian views of a future community in a regenerate world.

The Expressionist painters tended to use jagged lines to depict contorted objects and forms, as well as to substitute arbitrary, often lurid colours, for natural hues; among these painters were Emil Nolde, Franz Marc, Oskar Kokoschka, and, for a time, Wassily Kandinsky. Expressionist poets (including the Germans Gottfried Benn and Georg Trakl) departed from standard meter, syntax, and poetic structure to organise their works around symbolic images. Expressionist writers of prose narratives (most eminently Franz Kafka) abandoned standard modes of characterisation and plot for symbolic figures involved in an obsessive world of nightmarish events.

Drama was a prominent and widely influential form of expressionist writing. Among the better-known German playwrights were Georg Kaiser *(Gas, From Morn to Midnight),* Ernst Toller *(Mass Man),* and in his earlier productions Bertolt Brecht. Expressionist dramatists tended to represent anonymous human types instead of individualised characters, to replace plot by episodic renderings of intense and rapidly oscillating emotional states, often to fragment the dialogue into exclamatory and seemingly incoherent sentences or phrases, and to employ masks and abstract or lopsided and sprawling stage sets. The producer Max Reinhardt, although not himself in the movement, directed a number of plays by Strindberg and by German expressionists; in them he inaugurated such modern devices as the revolving stage and special effects in lighting and sound. This mode of German drama had an important influence on the American theatre.

Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* (1920) projected, in a sequence of symbolic episodes, the individual and racial memories of a terrified modern African-American protagonist, and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) used non-realistic means to represent a mechanical, sterile, and frightening world as experienced by Mr. Zero, a tiny and helpless cog in the impersonal system of big business. The flexible possibilities of the medium made the motion picture an important vehicle of German

expressionism. Robert Wiene's early expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)—representing, in ominously distorted settings, the machinations of the satanic head of an insane asylum—as well as Friedrich Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) are often shown in current revivals of films.

Expressionism had begun to fade by 1925 and was finally suppressed in Germany by the Nazis in the early 1930s, but it has continued to exert influence on English and American, as well as European, art and literature. We recognise its effects, direct or indirect, on the writing and staging of such plays as Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* as well as on the theatre of the *absurd;* on the poetry of Allen Ginsberg

and other *Beat* writers; on the prose fiction of Samuel Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon; and on a number of films, manifesting the distorted perceptions and fantasies of disturbed characters, by such directors as Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, and Michelangelo Antonioni.



LET US KNOW

The term Expressionism refers to a movement in Germany very early in the 20th century in which a number of painters seeking to avoid the representation of external reality and, instead, to project themselves and a highly personal vision of the world. The term can be applied to literature, but only judiciously. Briefly summarised, the main principle involved is that expression determines form. Indeed, according to the expressionists, any of the formal rules and elements of writing can be bent or disjointed to suit the purpose. Expressionism dominated the theatre for a time in the 1920s. Theatrically, it was a reaction against Realism and aimed to show inner psychological realities. The origins of this are probably to be found in Strindberg's *The Dream* (1907) and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907). Wedekind's plays of the same period were also strongly expressionistic. He wrote violent anti-bourgeois plays, three of which are chiefly

remembered: *Spring Awakening* (1891), *Lulu* (1895) and *Pandora's Box* (1902).

Expressionistic theories also affected writers like Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Frantz Kafka. The more involved and exaggerated prose experiments of James Joyce, William Faulkner and Samuel Beckett also bear some traces of Expressionism. Merely sonic and colour effects in poetry and attempts at synaesthesia where much of the sense is sacrificed for the sake of sound as in some of the works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Roy Campbell, Edith Sitwell (like "I Do Like to be Beside the Seaside") might also be described as expressionistic.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the main objectives of the Expressionist writers?

Q 2: What did the Expressionist dramatists try to do?

Q 3: Who are the precursors of the movement called Expressionism?

3.4 DADAISM AND SURREALISM

Dadaism

Dada is a French word meaning a hobby-horse. Dadaism is a nihilistic movement in art and literature that started in Zurich in 1916 by a Romanian, Tristan Tzara, an Alsatian, Hans Arp, and two Germans, Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck, and it continued till 1922. It was seen as "a product of hysteria and shock" and was deliberately anti art and anti sense. One of its most significant and characteristic product was the reproduction of the famous painting *Mona Lisa* decorated with a moustache and an obscene caption LKOOQ by Marcel Duchamp. The term was used to signify everything and nothing, or total freedom, anti rules, ideals and traditions.

Dadaism became popular in Paris following World War I. The war came as a holocaust, traditional values were weighed down and men were at the crossroads of history. During the war, Switzerland gave asylum to

several exiled artists. Poets from different European countries such as Hans Richter, Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp who were sick of the War gathered in Zurich, established a literary club known as 'Cabaret Voltaire' which soon became the forum for a large number of writers. In David Gascoigne's analysis, Dadaism was a delirious revolt against all sorts of accepted norms, "Negativism, revolt, destruction of all values, Dada was a violent protest against art, literature, morals, society. It spat in the eye of the world. Life is a disgusting riddle, but we can ask harder ones, was a Dadaist attitude. To many intelligent men at this time, suicide seemed to be the one remaining solution to the problem of living, and Dada was a spectacular form of suicide, a manifestation of almost lunatic despair."

The basic word in the Dadaist's vocabulary was 'nothing'. The Dadaists opted for psychic automatism as they believed that imagination should be free from the tyranny of reason. Roger Vitrac's *The Mysteries of Love* is a remarkable example of automatic writing. Two lovers are the victim of a hallucination; they see Mussolini and Loyd George cutting off heads. Similarly, in his play *Victor ou les enfants au Pouvoir,* Vitrac narrates a gruesome story of adultery and suicide. In England and America, its influence is discernible in the poetry of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and in the art of Ernst and Magritte. By 1921, Dadaism as a movement was subsumed by Surrealism. However, its influence was detectable for many years.

Perhaps best summed up by the famous Dadaist poet Hugo Ball, the Dadaist goal of art was not to have art be "an end in itself, but [to be] an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in." And surely enough the times of Dadaism were filled with grief, destruction, and chaos, as they witnessed the rampant mass devastation of WWI. The movement was a loosely knit international network that was prominent in Zürich, Switzerland; New York City; Berlin, Cologne, and Hanover, Germany; and Paris. Dadaists were not connected by their styles, mediums, or techniques. Instead, they were connected by their uniform practices and beliefs. They saw themselves as crusaders against rational thought, which they believed to be responsible for the declination of social structures, the growth of corrupt and nationalist politics, and the spread of violence and

war. They challenged and mocked the definition of art and its elitist establishment with such works as Marcel Duchamps *Fountain* (1917), which was a porcelain urinal, and they utilised photomontages, as well as a plethora other artistic mediums, in their public meetings to protest against the nascent Nazi party in Germany. Dadaists fought strongly across the globe against such repressive social institutions, though were written-off by some as merely absurdist and inconsequential based on their plentiful antics and scattered network.

Surrealism

Surrealism as a literary movement began as an offshoot of Dadaism which emerged in 1916 out of disgust with the brutality and destructiveness of the World War I. It was launched as a concerted artistic movement in France by André Breton's *Manifesto on Surrealism* (1924), and set out to engender a negative art and literature that would destroy the false values of modern bourgeois society. Distinguished writers who experimented with surrealistic methods were mostly Frenchmen: apart from Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Peret and Philippe Soupault. While among the surrealistic painters, mention may be made of Chirico, Max Ernst, Picasso and Salvador Dali. The aim of Surrealism was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity, including logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and all control over the artistic process by forethought and intention. To ensure the unhampered operation of the "deep mind," which they regarded as the only source of valid knowledge as well as art, surrealists turned to *automatic writing* (writing delivered over to the promptings of the unconscious mind), and to exploiting the material of dreams, of states of mind between sleep and waking, and of natural or artificially induced hallucinations. The surrealists attempted to express in art and literature the workings of the unconscious mind and to synthesise these workings with the conscious mind. The surrealist allows his work to develop non-logically (rather than illogically) so that the results represent the operations of the unconscious.

The term 'super-realism' was coined by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), but, as mentioned above, it was not until 1924 that the poet Andre

Breton issued the first manifesto of surrealism, which recommended that the mind should be liberated from logic and reason. Breton had been influenced by Freudian analysis and had experimented with automatic writing under hypnosis. The surrealists were particularly interested in the study and effects of dreams and hallucinations and also in the interpenetration of the sleeping and waking conditions on the threshold of the conscious mind, that kind of limbo where strange shapes materialise in the gulfs of the mind. In his second manifesto (1929), Breton explained how the surrealist idea was to revitalise the psychic forces by a 'vertiginous descent' into the self in quest of that secret and hidden territory where all that is apparently contradictory in our everyday lives and consciousness will be made plain. There was a 'point' in the mind, he thought, where, beyond realism, one attained a new knowledge.

Surrealism was a revolutionary movement in painting, sculpture, and the other arts, as well as literature; and it often joined forces, although briefly, with one or another revolutionary movement in the political and social realm. The effects of surrealism extended far beyond the small group of its professed adherents such as André Breton, Louis Aragon, and the painter Salvador Dali. The influence, direct or indirect, of surrealist innovations can be found in many modern writers of prose and verse who have broken with conventional modes of artistic organisation to experiment with free association, a broken syntax, on logical and non chronological order, dreamlike and nightmarish sequences, and the juxtaposition of bizarre, shocking, or seemingly unrelated images. In England and America such effects can be found in a wide range of writings, from the poetry of Dylan Thomas to the flights of fantasy, hallucinative writing, startling in consequences, and *black humor* in the novels of Henry Miller, William Burroughs, and Thomas Pynchon.

The long-term influence of surrealism all over the world has been enormous. Apart from poetry, it has affected the novel, the cinema, the theatre, painting and sculpture. A great many writers have continued to explore the territories of the conscious and semiconscious mind; delving into and exposing the private chaos, the individual hell. In doing so they

have often experimented with stream of consciousness techniques. Surrealistic poetry is now rare, but plays and novels often show the influence of surrealism. From the scores of examples available, one may mention the work of Antonin Artaud, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Alan Burns and B. S. Johnson.

LET US KNOW



As one of the most famous art movements of the Modernist era, Surrealism has come to be remembered for its production of visceral, eye-grabbing and aesthetic images. Leaping off from the absurdist inclinations of the Dadaists and the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud, André Breton, a well-known poet and critic of his time, published "The Surrealist Manifesto" in 1924, in which he declared the group's intention to unite consciousness with unconsciousness so that the realms of dream and fancy could merge with everyday reality in an "absolute reality, a surreality." Although they were best remembered for the work of their painters—such as Jean Arp, Max Ernst, and André Masson—Surrealists worked with a variety of mediums, including poetry, literature, sculpture, and the then-new medium of film.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How did David Gascoigne analyse the term Dadaism?

Q 5: Mention the main aim of Surrealism.

Q 6: What were some of the stylistic innovations of the Surrealists?

3.5 EXISTENTIALISM AND ABSURDISM

Existentialism

The term existentialism means 'pertaining to existence' and mostly derives from the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), especially in his

books *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844) and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848). In these and other works, Kierkegaard was trying to negate a belief that through God and in God, men may find freedom from tension and discontent—a belief that prevailed in much Christian thinking over many centuries. After him, existential thought was greatly expanded at the beginning of the 20th century by Heidegger and Jaspers, whose ideas in turn influenced a large number of European philosophers and in whose work are to be found the sources of atheistic existentialism.

An important feature of atheistic existentialism is the argument that existence precedes essence (the reverse of many traditional forms of philosophy) for it is held that man fashions his own existence and only exists by so doing, and, in that process, and by the choice of what he does or does not do, gives essence to that existence. Jean-Paul Sartre has been a pioneer of modern existentialism expressed through his novels, plays and philosophical writings. In Sartre's view, man is born into a kind of void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence in a 'semi-conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However, he may come out of his subjective, passive situation in which case he would 'stand out from', become increasingly aware of himself and, conceivably, experience metaphysical and moral anguish. If so, he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair. In *L'Existentialisme est une humanisme* (1946) Sartre expressed the belief that man can emerge from his passive and indeterminate condition and, by an act of will, become engaged; whereupon he is committed (through engagement) to some action and part in social and political life. Through commitment, man provides a reason and a structure for his existence and thus helps to integrate society. In 1946, Sartre founded the review 'Les Temps Modernes', a medium for existentialist writings.

Apart from Sartre, some of the main exponents of existentialism have been Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and Jean Wahl. The main exponent of Christian existentialism has been Gabriel Marcel, the philosopher and dramatist, who has written some brilliant critical analyses of Sartre's point of view, and who, in his Existence et objectivite (1921),

was very probably the first to introduce the term existentialisme into the vocabulary of French philosophy.

Absurdism:

Absurdism shares some concepts, and a common theoretical template, with existentialism and nihilism. It has its origins in the works of the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Absurdism is a belief system that was born of the European existentialist movement that ensued, specifically when Camus rejected certain aspects of that philosophical line of thought and published his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The aftermath of World War II provided the social environment that stimulated absurdist views and allowed for their popular development, especially in the devastated country of France. As a philosophy, Absurdism furthermore explores the fundamental nature of the Absurd and how individuals should respond to it. Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning. However, in the field of literature, the term is applied to a number of works in drama and prose fiction, which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd. Both the mood and dramaturgy of absurdity were anticipated as early as 1896 in Alfred Jarry's French play *Ubu Roi (Ubu the King).* The literature has its roots also in the movements of *expressionism* and *surrealism,* as well as in the fiction, written in the 1920s, of Franz Kafka *(The Trial, Metamorphosis).*

As stated above, the current movement, however, emerged in France after the horrors of World War II, as a rebellion against essential beliefs and values of traditional culture and traditional literature. This earlier tradition had included the assumptions that human beings are rational creatures who live in an at least partially intelligible universe, that they are part of an ordered social structure, and that they may be capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat. After the 1940s, however, there was a widespread tendency, especially prominent in the *existential philosophy* of men of letters such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, to view a human being as an

isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning, and to represent human life—in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end—as an existence which is both anguished and absurd.

As Camus said in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity Or as Eugène Ionesco, French author of *The Bald Soprano* (1949), *The Lesson* (1951), and other plays in the theater of the absurd, has put it: "Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless." Ionesco also said, in commenting on the mixture of moods in the literature of the absurd: "People drowning in meaninglessness can only be grotesque; their sufferings can only appear tragic by derision."

Samuel Beckett (1906-89), the most eminent and influential writer in this mode, both in drama and in prose fiction, was an Irishman living in Paris who often wrote in French and then translated his works into English. His plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and *Endgame* (1958), project the irrationalism, helplessness, and absurdity of life in dramatic forms that reject realistic settings, logical reasoning, or a coherently evolving plot. Beckett's prose fiction, such as *Malone Dies* (1958) and *The Unnamable* (1960), present an *antihero* who plays out the absurd moves of the end game of civilisation in a network, which tends to undermine the coherence of its medium, language itself. However, typically Beckett's characters carry on, even if in a life without purpose, trying to make sense of the senseless and to communicate the incommunicable.

Another French playwright of the absurd was Jean Genet (who combined absurdism and diabolism); some of the early dramatic works of the Englishman Harold Pinter and the American Edward Albee are in a similar mode. The plays of Tom Stoppard, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) and *Travesties* (1974), exploit the devices of absurdist

theatre more for comic than philosophical ends. There are also affinities with this movement in the numerous recent works, which exploit black comedy or black humour: baleful, naive, or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called a "tragic farce," in which the events are often simultaneously comic, horrifying, and absurd. Examples are Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Thomas Pynchon's *V* (1963), John Irving's *The World According to Garp* (1978), and some of the novels by the German Günter Grass and the Americans Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and John Barth. Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* is an example of black comedy in the cinema. More recently, some playwrights living in totalitarian regimes have used absurdist techniques to register social and political protest.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is Jean Paul Sartre's view on man's existence?

Q 8: Who were the forerunners of the Theatre of the Absurd?



3.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that modernist artistic and literary movements like Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism and Absurdism—all developed out of the specific socio-historical period of the early 20th century. The outbreak of World War I and the unprecedented devastation it brought challenged the foundations of many established belief systems and order. Finally, this led to a great deal of experimentation and exploration by both the artists and writers who tried to explore what exactly art should be and mean for a culture. The knowledge we have gained from this unit should be used to properly understand the major aspects of each of these movements, while analysing some of the prescribed literary texts of the 20th century.



3.7 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Edn). Thomson Learning.

Cuddon, J. A. (1998). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* Penguin Books.

Web Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/list/10-modernist-art-movements

3.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: To express a personal, troubled or tensely emotional vision of human life… … and human society…. …to exaggerate and distort the objective features of the world… …to offer description of things representing the experience of an individual standing alone and afraid in an industrial, technological, and urban society which is disintegrating into chaos.

Ans to Q 2: Expressionist dramatists tended to represent anonymous human types instead of individualised characters… …replaced plot by episodic renderings of intense and rapidly oscillating emotional states… …fragmented the dialogue into exclamatory and seemingly incoherent sentences or phrases… …employed masks, abstract or lopsided or sprawling stage sets.

Ans to Q 3: Expressionism, a German movement in literature and the visual arts… …main precursors were artists and writers who departed from realistic depictions of life and the world… …they expressed emotional states of mind by means of distorted representations of the outer world… …mention may be made of Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and the Norwegian Edward Munch.

Ans to Q 4: "Negativism, revolt, destruction of all values, Dada was a violent protest against art, literature, morals, society. It spat in the eye of the world. Life is a disgusting riddle, but we can ask harder ones, was a

Dadaist attitude. To many intelligent men at this time, suicide seemed to be the one remaining solution to the problem of living, and Dada was a spectacular form of suicide, a manifestation of almost lunatic despair."

Ans to Q 5: The aim of Surrealism was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity, including logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and all control over the artistic process by forethought and intention.

Ans to Q 6: They turned to *automatic writing*… …to exploiting the material of dreams, of states of mind between sleep and waking, and of natural or artificially induced hallucinations… …to express in art and literature the workings of the unconscious mind and to synthesise these workings with the conscious mind… …to develop non-logically (rather than illogically) so that the results represent the operations of the unconscious.

Ans to Q 7: Man is born into a kind of void, a mud… …he has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence in a 'semi-conscious' state… …he may come out of his subjective, passive situation… …he will experience metaphysical and moral anguish… …he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair.

Ans to Q 8: Irish Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot, Endgame*), French Jean Genet, English Harold Pinter, American Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Travesties).*



3.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the growth and development of Expressionism in Germany and also explain how it influenced art and literature of the 20th century.

Q 2: Expressionism dominated the theatre for a time in the 1920s. Discuss.

Q 3: Discuss the significance of Dadaism and Surrealism as artistic movements of modern times that also made it presence felt in the field of literature.

Q 4: Who is the founder of the Surrealist movement? Do you agree that Surrealism was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity? Discuss with particular reference to of the Surrealist writers wanted to do in their works.

Q 5: Existentialism applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world. Discuss.

Q 6: Write a note on the concept of the Absurdism with reference to contents of some of the well-known absurdist literature.

Q 7: Provide a comprehensive note on Absurd Drama with reference to the major exponents.

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UNIT 4: THEORIES OF MODERN DRAMA

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Emergence of Modern Drama

1.4 Important Continental Movements Influencing Drama

1.5 Important Theorists/Practitioners of Modern Drama

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- 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

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block. In this unit, we shall discuss the theories of modern drama. However, in Course 2 of the previous Semester, we have already discussed in sufficient detail modern drama in the context of Europe. Hence, many of the information provided in this unit shall be repetitive. However, we should assume that a reading of this unit shall help us recollect many of the important aspects related to Modern drama which shall further help us to discuss the prescribed plays in this Course. As we finish reading the unit, we should be in a position to identify the different continental movements and theorists of modern drama. However, for the sake of reference, we shall be also read about some of the Movements in Art and Literature which we have already studied in the previous units of the Block.

4.3 THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN 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.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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

1.4 IMPORTANT CONTINENTAL MOVEMENTS INFLUENCING DRAMA

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 of Norwegian dramatist Ibsen's plays, he 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 characterizations 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 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's 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 gave 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, Adamov, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, 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 2: Write a note on the basic thematic concerns of the Naturalist theatre.

Q 3: What do you understand by the theatre of the Absurd?

Q 4: What are the 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 (1828-1906):

The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen 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 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 of 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 as 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 5: In what way, did Henrik Ibsen deviate from conventional theatrical representation?

Q 6: 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 and some important personalities associated with modern 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, Chekov, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and so on.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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

Ans to Q 4: Brecht's alienation effect… …loose plot structure… …no forth wall… …audience as participant and critic… …awareness about invisible problems and realities.

Ans to Q 5: 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 6: 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: 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 3: Write a detailed note on the theatrical experimentations of Luigi Pirandello with reference to the plays you have read.

Q 4: Discuss the significance of cultural symbols in Lorca's plays.

Q 5: Explore how different movements in modern drama are interconnected.

Q 6: How have the movements in art and literature influenced modern European drama? Discuss in detail.

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Web Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/list/10-modernist-art-movements

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avant-garde

https://www.britannica.com/art/Symbolism-literary-and-artistic-movement

Name of the Paper: Course Code:

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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?
