Module-1

Unit-1 ❑ The Background of the Age

Structure:

1.1.0 Introduction

In this unit we are going to take a look at the important economic trends and political events that define and determine the prevailing socio-economic temper of the early 20th century. The cultural atmosphere of the modern age, as of any other age, was largely the resultant product of these social and economic changes. For this unit, you need to have in mind a time frame spanning the beginning of the 20th century to the 1950s. The time frame chosen is however flexible, for we shall be often going backwards into the 19th century, and sometimes take a peek at the 1960s. But it is not quite arbitrary. Queen Victoria died in 1901, officially ending the Victorian era in terms of history and what we generally call postmodernism begins to grow prominent from the 1970s. By the 1950s high modernism had lost its steam. So you need to understand that the period in focus here is that which lies between the close of the Victorian era and the beginnings of postmodernism. Let us now go into the details of the manifold happenings that this period witnessed.

1.1.1 The Important Terms

You have already come across terminology like modern and postmodern in the Introduction. Let us begin by clearly defining some of these commonly used terms - Modern, Modernity, Modernism, Modernist. The word ‘modern’ from French ’moderne’(Latin ‘modo’) is a time indicating word. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as “Of or pertaining to the present and recent times as opposite to the remote past”. It came into use in English in late Middle English, and you will definitely recall that we have called the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer one of the earliest instances of modernist literature in English. In one sense the history of modern Europe can be said to begin from the 16th. century. The Tudor period is early modern. Modernity is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as ‘The quality or condition of being modern”; its use can be dated to the mid18th century. The simplest way to define modernity is to think of it in terms of new technologies. The concept of modernity is associated with new modes of transport—trains, surface and underground, aeroplanes, motor cars; new media— camera, film, telephone, typewriter; new materials——plastic, steel, man-made fibres like nylon, reinforced concrete, asphalt; new sources of power—petroleum , electricity, the internal combustion engine etc. New technologies drastically changed the way men had lived and worked for centuries. Above all, the concept of time changed beyond measure. Exact time keeping became essential for availing

trains or for factory shifts. world-wide standards of time were fixed in the International Conference on Time in 1912.

The characteristics of modernism are intellectual and cultural. On the intellectual level we can think in terms of an importance attached to the application of reason in all spheres of human activity, secular liberalism, scientific growth, acceptance of individual autonomy etc. In this sense some have called it a continuation by other means of the 18th century Enlightenment project. But modernism also is the name of a European cultural movement which spread through major cities like Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, Zurich, and ultimately to New York. In a sense there were not one, but many modernisms. In fundamental ways, modernism was antagonistic to modernity. The philosopher Theodore Adorno has defined modernism as the form of modern culture that says 'no' to modernity. Modernism was an aesthetic formulation of resistance to the prevailing or hegemonic modes of capitalist modernisation in late 19th and early 20th century Europe. Major modernists, i.e. the writers, artists, musicians of modernism are all anti-modernity and anti- modernisation. Modernism is anticipated from around the mid- 19th century in the art criticism of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, in the impressionist painters who broke away from art tradition by their techniques. In the year 1900 Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published, which would exercise far –reaching influence on 20th century thought, art and culture. The same year saw the birth of quantum physics, challenging the boundaries of classical Physics. 1907 witnessed the public viewing of Picasso's archetypal modernist painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. In 1910 T.S. Eliot's "**The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"** would bring into poetry the modernist element of cultural disenchantment. In 1911 Arnold Schoenberg began composing his atonal pieces. In 1914 James Joyce published *The Dubliners*. What was common to all these different cultural creations in different spheres of art was a strong impulse for **experimentation**, both with form and matter, breaking away from tradition, a refusal to conform to common denominators of audience preference. Difficulty and novelty are the two commonly acknowledged features of modernist art and literature. The modernists were trying, either overtly or covertly, to fight the forces of capitalist production and consumerism. You can thus see that much more than previous phases of cultural-literary history, modernism shows intricate connections with various disciplines of study and ways of life. This perhaps makes it a complex category to pin down by monologist definitions.

1.1.2. Economic and Political Backgrounds

Due to the momentum of capitalist enterprise, the early 20th century witnessed a radical transformation of people's lives in the western world. The modernisation we have talked about was propelled by a generation of big capitalist entrepreneurs —— Henry Ford and Rockefeller in the U.S.A., Lord Leverhulme in Britain, The Krupp family in Germany and many others. England, the world's greatest trading nation at the beginning of the century, exported both capital and manufactured goods. Her share to the world's foreign investment was 43% while Germany's was 13%. In this discrepancy lay the seeds of the First World War. Meanwhile Japan embarked on a project of industrialisation, choosing the German model. This would lead to new power equations later on. Competition from Japan would, in a few more years, break the backbone of Britain's textile manufacture, the original pioneering industry of Britain's Industrial Revolution. The system of assembly-line production introduced by Henry Ford in the Ford Motor Company created a disjoint between the worker and his work. Production was faster and more efficient but the worker felt alienated. The boring repetitive work reduced human beings to mere machine parts. If you see Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* you will notice how Chaplin depicts this dehumanisation of the factory worker. This would emerge as a theme for several important social problem novels of the early 20th. century. Authors like Alan Sillitoe in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the American writer Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle,* or a little later, the playwright Edward Bond would show the degradation and dehumanisation of the working class people in his plays.

But the process was irreversible. Of Britain's total population, 80% came to live in urban districts. Import of cheaper wheat from America or refrigerated meat from Argentina meant the end for millions of acres of arable land, income from landed rents for the aristocracy, and migration of agriculture labourers from their traditional homes. Trade thrived. The banks became richer. But the human implications were far- reaching. There is a veering of interest from nature towards urban and cosmopolitan themes. D. H. Lawrence commented that even the countryman had become a 'town bird' at heart.

The growth of capitalist enterprise meant an expansion of Imperialism. By the beginning of the 20th century the British empire stretched across four continents. The colonies were used as sources of raw materials, markets and as outlets for emigration. However, the Second Boer War of 1902, while it enabled Britain to wrest large parts

of South Africa from the Dutch-speaking settlers, was also a blow to British complacence, with major early setbacks in battle.

On the continent meanwhile, France, Russia, and an industrially advanced and affluent Germany were all arming themselves. By 1894 Germany was already preparing the first version of battle plan to scuttle the alliance between other major European nations. She also backed her ally Austria's repressive measures in Serbia, and the annexation of Bosnia. Tension mounted. Things finally came to a head with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian rebel at Sarajevo on 28th June 1914. A month later Austria declared war against Serbia. Germany invaded neutral Belgium to make a quick move to France. On 5th August 1914 Britain joined France against Germany. Fiftyone months and nine million deaths later, the war finally ended in November 1918. By that time the old Europe and in fact the old world order had changed forever. What had begun on a note of nationalist frenzy brought with it long-drawn despairing years of agony.

1.1.3 End of British supremacy

The high financial cost of the war crippled Britain. Formerly a stable growing economy, a haven for free trade and the world's banker, Britain had to borrow heavily from the U.S. which now became the world's banker. American financial supremacy was confirmed by American technological advances and methods of industrial production. In Britain and the rest of Europe there was initially a spurt of economic boom, spurred by heavy government spending to replace war-damaged resources and pent-up consumer demand. But problems of British economy loomed large. Heavy industrries like shipbuilding and the cotton mills declined. The twilight years had begun for Britain.

1.1.4 Impact of the First World War

A number of social paradoxes were also the resultant product of the war. At a time when millions were dying, the working classes in Britain found their living standards enhanced and their health improved. Working class labour was in high demand. As a result, there was an increase in their political power and their ability to consume. The Trade Unions grew in size and strength.

For the middle classes the impact of war was disastrous. Unearned income from

securities, mostly invested in different European enterprises was wiped out. When the 'head' of a family joined military service, the families were badly provided to keep up their social status. When the soldiers returned home from the front, readjusting to the major social changes proved extremely difficult. Disabled men struggled to survive on meager disability pensions. Marriages broke down. Social equations had changed beyond measure. Economic changes broke class barriers, already weakened during the shared hardships in the trenches.

Women however benefitted from the war. The war revolutionised the place of women in European society. They gained tangible social, political and economic advances. Women were needed not only for nursing but for work in the munitions factories, for secretarial work and school teaching. They could demand wages undreamed of before the war. As adult males of the family joined the war, daughters became more important. In 1918 women's suffrage (voting rights) was granted. The Suffragist Movement had been going on for a long time, the contribution of women to the war effort finally changed the attitudes of the political establishment. One interesting external sign of the growing emancipation of women was the way they began to dress. Many women had worn trousers as uniform— and they continued to wear trousers, delighting in their new found freedom of movement and pockets.

1.1.5 The Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution was an immediate product of the First World War. Deprivations of the Russian peasantry and working classes had been manifest in simmering discontent and sporadic strikes and revolts for a long time. Repeated military defeats, internal chaos, massive food shortage, industrial disruption came to a head with the revolt of the Navy aboard the battleship Potemkin. The Tsar was forced to abdicate and a provisional Government was created. As the news reached them, Lenin and Trotsky quickly returned from exile and the Bolshevik party seized power. In March, the new government of Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty with the central powers on very humiliating terms, primarily to fight the civil war at home. The socialist government and the changes anticipated from its functioning would remain a major point of concern for the western world, with far reaching impact in the following decades. For British writers and thinkers, the implications were many and varied as we shall see later.

1.1.6 The Second World War

A defeated Germany had to agree to very humiliating terms at the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. The French policy was to permanently weaken Germany and the other allied powers did not or could not ameliorate the French attitude. The British economist John Maynard Keynes wrote later that the outcome of the French policy posed a tremendous danger for European politics. He would be proved right within two decades

After the war there was a brief period of economic upsurge, propelled by government projects to restore resources damaged in the war. But the European nations had not quite adjusted to long term, far-reaching structural changes to world economy. American loans to countries like Germany and American investments in Europe had given a boost to Europe's economic recovery. But a high percentage of unemployment continued. With the crash of prices in the New York stock market in October, the Great Depression began in America and quickly spread to Europe. There was an alarming rise in unemployment and spread of poverty. The governments of all countries turned to protectionist policies, raising tariff on imports. In countries where the governments were already weakened by internal political squabbles and economic troubles, right –wing, jingoistic nationalist forces used the opportunity to seize power. The first casualty was Italy. Mounting confrontation between the forces of the political left and right and common people's increasing frustration with the liberal democratic government led to the seizure of power by Mussolini and his Fascist party. While it did not solve Italy's economic problems, the fascists forcibly brought a semblance of discipline in public life. This was done by enhanced spending on arms manufacture, as a result of which, employment immediately shot up. This enabled Mussolini to boldly sell to the crowds the dream of a new Roman empire.

Meanwhile in Germany, the economic slump was aggravated by the cost of welfare measures introduced earlier by the Weimer Republic and the reparation payments Germany was being made to pay to countries like France for its 'culpability' in the First World War. Small and medium businesses failed. The small farmers were resentful at the preferential treatment given to big landowners. Unemployment figures rose to 25% of total populace. The German currency became devalued due to hyper- inflation. The condition was rife for the rise to power of the Nazi party and Hitler, with their promise of 'bread and work'. The next demise of liberal democracy happened in Spain, where an economic recession gave the army the chance to stage a coup, and one of the generals, Francisco Franco established a brutal dictatorship.

Germany, Italy and Japan thought of themselves as the have-not powers since Britain and France enjoyed the largest shares of the colonial pie and started a process of expanding their territorial boundaries. Initially Britain and France tried a policy of appeasement. But with Germany's invasion of Poland, the Second World War began. In a realignment of nations, Italy joined Germany forming the Axis powers, and Japan would later join the Axis powers. Unlike in the First World War, the battles were not confined to European soil; this war spread across continents—to Africa and Asia. The United States, initially reluctant to get involved, helped from the sidelines, but joined the allies after an ambitious Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Stalin's Russia, which equally distrusted Britain, France and Germany, had signed a peace treaty with Nazi Germany, in order to better prepare for war.

When Hitler attacked Russia, the Russians incurred heavy losses at first. The extremely well-prepared German wehrmacht or war machine appeared invincible. From 1943 however the allies began to gain ground. Germany finally surrendered in May 1945. The War ended with Japan's surrender in September 1945, after the U.S. had dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the deadliest conflict in world history, the dead in combat numbered 25 million. For the first time in history the number of civilian dead was greater, numbering around 55 million. Air attacks had destroyed large parts of great European cities. And the horrifying possibility of an ever- present nuclear threat loomed over the world. Winston Churchill said: This noble continent (Europe) contained "a vast, quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gaping at the ruins of their cities and scanning the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny and terror". In fact, as some say, the second World never ended, it only continued in different forms - in the Cold War between America and USSR, in the smaller wars in Korea and Vietnam, in the Russian invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The world of the mid-20th century lived under the threat of 'the finger on the button' of nuclear weapons.

1.1.7 Britain in the 1950s

Immediately after the war the Labour party came to power in Britain and started building the 'welfare state' with state funding of health and education. The government of Clement Atlee followed the policy of gradual rolling up of the British Empire and

India gained her independence in 1947. For financially impoverished Britain it was no longer possible to run the colonial administration which drained the exchequer. Still, Britain and France tried jointly to flex their colonial muscles in 1956, when the Egyptian leader Nasser decided to nationalise the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company which owned and operated the canal. The British and French forces defeated the Egyptian army, but Nasser blockaded the canal. Strong intervention from the U.S. government led to Britain's withdrawal, driving home the point that Britain was no longer a world power. Successive Labour and Conservative governments turned their attention to managing internal issues rather than playing decisive roles in world affairs. The 'mixed economy' continued. Increased public spending led to more employment. Public Housing Schemes gradually replaced the slums. The National Health Service, introduced by the Labour Government in 1947, greatly improved public health. Universal literacy, which had begun with the Education Bill of 1870, spread with increased number of grammar schools and a number of new civic universities developed from local university colleges as in Nottingham, Reading, Southampton, Exeter, Leicester etc. Class barriers, still further weakened by the war, began to disappear for several reasons. The governments, both Labour and Tory, pursued schemes for a comprehensive social security, aiming to take care of citizens 'from cradle to grave'. The principle was that all members of the community should be involved and on the same terms in post-war social policy.

The old upper class, the aristocracy of birth and culture crumbled under the challenge from two opposite groups. The lower middle classes and the working classes, better paid and better educated, were moving upward. At the same time a new aristocracy of money was becoming dominant. The trend had begun in late 19th century. The *nouveau riche* of market enterprise had no sense of the social and moral obligations of the old upper class. The pre-war British Labour Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald said about such people that they "did not command the moral respect which tones down class hatred nor the intellectual respect which preserves a sense of equality even under a regime of considerable social difference". The working classes comprising semi and non-skilled as well as skilled, got higher wages and the markets were boosted by their higher spending capacity. Unemployment sank to very low levels. In fact, the need for more workers facilitated the immigration from former colonies, thereby sowing the seeds of the later rise of racism. The economic recovery led to great rise in consumption. The wartime austerity measures ended and the age of consumerism began. Practically every house had labour saving

devices like the vacuum cleaner and the washing machine, the refrigerator and the 'telly'. Car and house ownership continued to rise among the working classes. In 1957, the prime minister Harold Macmillan said in a speech: "Our people have never had it so good".

All was not well with the society however. The rise in living standards also meant a cutting off of old links of community culture. The new housing projects had improved living standards but they also made families into nuclear units, separated from relatives and familiar neighbourhoods. Old shared ways of community communication like church going declined. Philip Larkin's poem "**Church Going**" written in 1954, brings out a picture of this social paradox. The cinema became the chief mode of entertainment, and was a major factor of the 'Americanisation' of the new generation. The weakening of family and community ties led to increasing frustration among the younger generation, members of which had money to spend and used it for fashion statements and behaviour patterns which gave birth to subcultures, like the teddy boys of the 50s and the mods and rockers of the 60s. The American film *Rebel Without a Cause*, the Alan Sillitoe story *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* – all depict the malaise of the post -war youth.

By the 60s British economy had begun to slow down. Unemployment rose. Race relations, already an issue, with the Notting Hill riots of 1958, grew worse. The economic downturn caused a change in Government policy. The pound sterling was devalued in 1967. Britain joined the European Common Market in 1973. The Tory Government of Edward Heath in 1970 began to cut down Government costs for welfare schemes, a process which accelerated under Margaret Thatcher later. Industries were re-privatised, the Trade Unions were crushed. In the next decades Britain would be a minor force, in economy and International Politics.

1.1.8 A Brief Recap

You must be wondering why you have had to read so much of European history in the preceding sub-sections. It is indeed impossible to understand the why and the what of the Modern Period of literature without comprehending the European background and the emerging power equations therein. The first half of the 20th century saw the gradual diminution of British economic and political supremacy and the rise of the global influence of the United States of America. Great advances in

science and technology improved the living conditions of common men, but also provided lethal destructive powers to warring nations. The two defining happenings of the first half of the century were definitely the First and the Second World Wars. Also, the Russian Revolution of 1917 introduced new power equations in international relationships. As a maimed Europe crept back to normalcy, especially, after the Second World War, the countries in the western world would be divided into the so-called free world and the Iron Curtain countries; and the world continued to live under the shadow of the cold war.

1.1.9 The Intellectual Background: 1901–1960.

The years between 1871, in which the Franco-Prussian war ended and 1914, i.e. the beginning of World war I are sometimes called the *Belle Epoque* or the beautiful era to contrast it with the traumatic experience of the War. It was an era of comparative regional peace, economic prosperity and a sense of optimism. The origins of a 'modernist movement', linking the late 19th. and early 20th. centuries, in painting, music and literature, can be traced back to this time. The French poet Arthur Rimbaud's concern with the 'new in ideas and forms' would also become the major focus of the modernists.

In spite of the 19th century links, there was also a deep dissatisfaction with its important ideas. In Philosophy this was seen in the repudiation of F.H. Bradley's Idealism. In the early 1900s G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell totally rejected him, advocating a realist philosophy. There was a retreat from the comprehensive system-building and metaphysical nature of 19th. century philosophy and a focus on logic and language, as in A.J. Ayers' *Language, Truth and Logic* or Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Another important reaction against the 19th. century can be seen in the changing concepts of Love and Family. Romantic love was seen as a sharp contrast to the spirit of competitive enterprise which drove industrial economy. The family, said to be the bedrock of a stable constitutional government, started being assessed more realistically. Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian prophet of modernity, exposed the warts beneath the veneer of bourgeois civility. Freud too was fascinated by the implications of authoritarian family structures and it would become an important field of his psychological theory.

Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx were arguably the two most influential figures in the first part of the 20th. century. Freud's ideas of the Unconscious, of infantile sexuality, the Oedipus Complex, fetishism etc. would profoundly influence novelists

like Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka on the continent, as well as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, playwrights like August Strindberg, artists like Edward Munch, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte etc. The stream of consciousness technique of narration, characteristic of major 20th century novels, is to a large extent indebted to Freud's ideas about how the unconscious mind yokes together disparate images and feelings. In poetry the Freudian ideas can be tangentially traced, for example, in Lawrence's "**Snake"**, or Auden's "**Miss Gee".** Freudian ideas were actively applied to much literary criticism too, one important example being Ernest Jones' *Hamlet and Oedipus***.**

Marxism had never been very influential in Britain except among minor radical groups The preferred economic viewpoint and programme for intellectuals had always been socialism. British socialism was a mix of Chartist Radicalism, Christian Socialism, Fabian Socialism and William Morris's rather romantic ideas of revolutionary socialism, Robert Owen's Utopian Socialism and Marxist Materialism. The last was the least important. But after the economic slump of the 30s, it gained ground not in action but as an increasingly accepted theory. Arthur Koestler, the Hungarian-British author who gave up his membership of the Communist Party in 1938, later explained the attraction of communism for the intellectuals of the 30s :

"…. born out of the despair of world war and civil war, of social unrest and economic chaos, the desire for a complete break with the past, starting human history from scratch, was deep and genuine."

The 1930s, which W.H. Auden called **The Age of Anxiety**, evoked a desire for a simplifying formula like the Marxist social system. The poets like Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice were left wing thinkers in their youth, and Marxist ideas of working class exploitation and class struggle are covertly present in their early verse.

Read a few lines a few lines from Stephen Spender's poem, "**An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum"**

On their slag heap, these children

Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel

With mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.

All of their time and space are foggy slum.

So blot their maps with slums as big as doom.

No major English novelist was a committed leftist. But even in the works of non-Marxist authors, some basic Marxist ideas can be traced as in the proliferation of working class heroes of Arnold Bennett and D. H. Lawrence. On the other hand, the information about the Stalinist excesses which was already available, and later on, the role Soviet Russia played after the Second World War, disillusioned the majority of British intellectuals. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness At Noon*, both anti-Stalinist and Anti-authoritarian novels, were highly popular and widely read.

On British theatre of the early 20th century there was little influence of Marx. Shaw's problem plays were marked by the spirit of Fabian socialism. Galsworthy explores the issues of class allegiances in *Loyalties* and of clash of interests between the capitalist and working classes in *Strife*, but from a liberal-humanitarian point of view. The kind of innovative changes in acting and stagecraft that Bertolt Brecht, inspired by Marxist ideas, brought about in theatrical production, made an impact on British theatre less for the ideological content and more for its innovative modes of production.

British Literary Criticism however had a rich and fruitful interaction with Marxism. Major Marxist critics of the 1930s were Christopher Caudwell, with *Illusion and Reality* and *Notes on a Dying Culture*, Ralph Fox **(***The Novel and the People*) and Alice West (*Crisis and Criticism*). Significantly, all the books except *Notes on a Dying Culture* were published in 1937, two years before the Second World war, when anxiety and uncertainty were at the highest. A very influential literary critic to emerge from the New Left in the 1950s was Raymond Williams, with *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* in 1952, and his seminal study of culture, *Culture and Society* in 1958. He also pioneered the school of Cultural Materialism.

In the world of science, George Johan Mendel's experimental findings in genetic inheritance gained attention several decades after they were actually made, influenced not only scientific thought but also led indirectly to the warped theories of racial purity in Nazi Germany. An extremely influential anthropological work was Sir James Fraser's 12-volume *The Golden Bough*. Its basic thesis was that mankind progressed from magic through religion to scientific thought. Its controversial views on religion shocked believers, but its treatment of myths influenced nearly all creative writers. W. B. Yeats refers to it in "**Sailing to Byzantium"**, Eliot in the First Book of "**The Waste Land"**. Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, Hemingway, even Freud himself show in their writings the impact made on them by the book.

1.1.10 The Winds of Modernism

The French poet **Charles Baudelaire** is supposed to have first coined the term 'modernity 'in his mid- nineteenth century influential essay: '**The Painter of Modern Life'**. See below for a quote from the essay:

"By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable...This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with."

Baudelaire's own poetry, while still written within the ambience of late Romantic tradition, anticipates modernist poetry in its use of images and symbols in its urban bias and innovative style. Later poets like **Paul Verlaine**, **Mallarme** and **Rimbaud** acknowledge him as a pioneer.

The first remarkable modernist changes however happened in Art. Art began to lose common grounds between the artist and the audience. It no longer expressed the shared perceptions of the community but the unique sensibilities of the artist as an individual. It became self-referential. This was seen in the emergence of Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Abstract Art and many other form-specific styles. In 1924, **Virginia Woolf** famously said in her essay "**Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown**" that, "on or about December 1910, human nature changed". She was indirectly referring to the impact made by a controversial Post-Impressionist exhibition in London, where British viewers for the first time saw the works of Van Gogh and Gauguin. Of course, as Woolf herself went on to clarify, the change was not sudden or abrupt and she had only chosen a convenient date. In modernist art, form was no longer merely a transparent medium, providing a window on the visual world, it was also the content. What Andre Salmon, a major critic wrote about Picasso's iconic modernist work, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* would give you some idea about what the modernists, writer or painters, tried to do: "...the expression of the faces is neither tragic nor impassioned. They are masks almost completely devoid of humanity… they are not even allegorical or symbolical figures". In fact, although there were not one, but many modernisms, what the various artists and writers shared was a concern with the 'materiality' of art. Paint, line, words assumed a new kind of self–sufficiency. The viewer or the reader is not asked to look beyond the work for something to explain or justify.

- The Literary Scene: We cannot get a clear correspondence between the way modernism manifested itself in painting, music and literature. The changes in literature, whether poetry, prose fiction or drama, happened in phases, and not all modern writers were revolutionary modernists in their style. We shall see how the writers of the Modern age responded to the challenges of modernism.

1.1.11 Poetry

Barring the attempts of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, and Robert Bridges at novelty, English poetry of the late 19th century had become overly conventional.

The one poet from the late 19th century who stands as a class apart is **Gerald Manley Hopkins**. His experiments with language and prosody produced a unique poetry which reflected the discords and conflicts of his mind as he strove to come to terms with his religious doubts and despair as a Jesuit priest. His 'sprung rhythm', based on the rhythmic structure of Old English verse, the contrapuntal play of regular metrical form and irregular speech rhythms, his striking imagery and word coinages anticipated and influenced many of the later experiments with poetic form. Read below the first stanza of his '**Pied Beauty'**:

Glory be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;

And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

❑ **Georgian Poetry:** The term is used for the poetry of the years before the First World War mainly to demarcate it from Victorian poetry. Modernist critics have in general assessed the poetry as vapid and stylistically barren as it failed to reflect the literary sensibility which resulted from the trauma of the War and its aftershock. There were anticipations of change as well. Five Georgian Poetry anthologies were edited by **Edward Marsh** and published by **Harold Monro** between 1912 and 1922. The poets included some from the previous generation like **G.K. Chesterton** and **T. Sturge Moore**, but we also find **Wilfred Owen** as well as **Rupert Brooke**,

A.E. Housman, Robert Bridges, **Edward Thomas**. While the lesser poets show the weaknesses of this poetry, in poets like **W.H.Davies**, who in **''The Bird of Paradise''** writes about the death of a prostitute and in **''The Head of Rags''** about a drunken tramp, or **W.W. Gibson**, who contrasts the beauty of the flowers with the abject poverty of a poor old flower seller in **''Geraniums''**, we notice a desire to make the poetry-reading public aware of the brutal realities of life. The following lines are from **''Geraniums''**:

Broken with lust and drink, blear-eyed and ill,

Her battered bonnet nodding on her head,

From a dark door she clutched my sleeve and said:

"I've sold no bunch to-day, nor touched a bite...

Son, buy six-penn'orth; and 'twill mean a bed."

Robert Graves in an essay written in 1949, noted that Georgian poetry as a reaction to Victorianism discarded archaic diction and poetic constructions and avoided all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes and also all sad, wicked, cafe-table themes of the 90s decadents.

❑ **Poetry of the First World War:** A number of poets who participated in the First World War reshaped English poetry in the second decade of the 20th. century. They were **Siegfried Sassoon**, **Julian Grenfell**, **Issac Rosenberg**, **Cecil Day Lewis**, **Edmund Blunden**, **Wilfred Owen** and others. The impact of the war trauma was so great that it eclipsed the high poetic talent of even a poet like **Rupert Brooke**. But since the war experience sharply denigrated his patriotic themes, the control of language which never allows excess of emotionalism in the **War Sonnets**, or the complexity of a poem like **''Grantchester''**, where nostalgia is kept in check by irony, has not been properly appreciated. Read the following lines from Brooke's **''The Soldier''**:

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is for ever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;

A body of England's, breathing English air,

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

In contrast to such glorification, the other extreme too is seen for instance, in one of **Charles Sorley's** sonnets, which is an explicit rejoinder to Brooke's above sonnet:

When you see millions of the mouthless dead

Across your dreams in pale battalions go

Say not soft things as other men have said,

That you'll remember. For you need not so.

Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know

It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?

Two things that stand out from war poetry are, use of strikingly realistic images and an ironic perception of the contradiction between the formal grace of poetry and the chaotic and grotesque encounter with death. Repeatedly, we find ironic references to nature, contrasting it with the battle scenes. Read the following lines from **Wilfred Owen's Spring Offensive**.

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field—

And the far valley behind, where the buttercups

Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up,

Where even the little brambles would not yield,

But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing hands;

They breathe like trees unstirred.

W. B. Yeats criticised the War poets for their lack of detachment. But in the poetry of Owen and Isaac Rosenberg we find a growing sense of detachment, giving maturity to their poetry. Owen is the most versatile among them. His experiments with form, known as para-rhyme, which uses assonance to create a sense of discord, captured the disintegration of war. The strong realistic imagery and the rapid succession of images in Owen and Rosenberg paved the way for later modernist achievement, for example the imagery in Eliot's **The Waste Land**.

❑ **The Imagist Poets**: Imagist poetry was an anticipation of Modernist poetry. The imagist poets in their turn were influenced by the French symbolists of late 19th

century**. The Symbolist Movement** in literature began with the publication of **Charles Baudelaire** 's poetry. Baudelaire himself was greatly indebted to the American poet **Edgar Allan Poe**. The symbolists were reacting against realism and naturalism. They focussed on imagination and dreams and some of them turned to religion and spirituality. Stylistically, poets like Pa**ul Valery**, **Stephen Mallarme**, **Jules Laforgue** wrote in a metaphorical manner, explored the relationship between the form and content of poetry. Laforgue's experiments with the poetic possibilities of speech greatly influenced Eliot.

The Imagist poets favoured precision of images and economy of language. The sense of poetry as a linguistic construct is strongly conveyed through their experiments with form. The group was centred in London. But American poets were also its members. **T. E. Hulme**, in his *Speculations* wrote on the difference between Romantic and Classical poetry, ideas which influenced modernists like Eliot and Pound. An Imagistic Manifesto was announced in **Poetry** magazine in 1913. Among the Imagist poets were **T.E. Hulme** himself, **John Gould Fletcher** and American poets like **Amy Lowell**, **Hilda Doolittle**, Ezra **Pound**. **D.H. Lawrence** and **James Joyce** came under their influence. Imagist poetry, with its focus on precision and economy, freedom from what they called metronomic regularity of rhyme, and the composition of series of discontinuous poems in which the subject shifts from passage to passage passed into the bloodstream of modernist poetry.

❑ **William Butler Yeats**: Yeats' life (1865—1939) spans across two centuries and his poetry bridges two traditions—the romantic and the modernist. Graham Hough has called him 'the last Romantic'. He is also a key figure of modern poetry. Yeats' poetry can be divided into two phases. The early poetry is strongly reminiscent of the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites. In his early poems he is a Primitivist, wandering in the 'Celtic Twilight' (a phrase of Yeats which meant a revival of Ireland's past, its myths, legends etc.). The imagery was drawn from nature, we notice a marked escapist vein, the wish to lose himself in a dream world. *The Wanderings of Oisin*, *The Wind Among the Reeds* and other early poems show an ornate language as well as a primacy of images drawn from nature. In his youth he had been greatly influenced in the magical and the supernatural. But a number of external influences matured him and turned him towards the realities of life and contemporary history. Disappointments in personal life, especially in love, the practical experience of running the Abbey Theatre of Ireland, above all his emotional involvement in the Irish nationalist movement and its violent manifestations, his

ambivalent attitude to it - all these brought in a stronger note to his later verse. In ***Responsibilities*** (1914) he indicated a turning away from his old poetic world. In September 1913, a poem about the workers' strike in Ireland, he used the line "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone" as a refrain at the end of every stanza. Later, in **''An Acre of Grass''** (1934) he would write "Myself must i remake". The remaking went on throughout his life. In the poem "**A Coat**" in *Responsibilities* he wrote :

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

In the poetry that followed, the language became simpler. He remained a master of traditional verse forms, but used a colloquial idiom, a note of detached irony and satire began to creep in, and the images came to have a chiselled brilliance. He was strongly influenced by the Symbolist Movement through Arthur Symons' 1899 book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and that heritage underlies many of his images of art and life, as in the Byzantium poems. But the ability in the late poems, like **Lapis Lazuli** or **The Man And The Echo** show an effortless transmutation of commonplace feeling and experience into great poetry. He said in **The Municipal Gallery Revisited** that he, Synge and Lady Gregory were motivated by the idea that whatever they wrote should be connected to the people of the soil and arise from the daily experiences of life. That would help them record the dreams of noble men as well as beggars on the same level. This would remain his lasting inheritance.

❑ **Modernist poetry**: The new poetry which began from around the second decade of the century was a sharp departure from traditional poetry. It was city poetry—written by and for a city intelligentsia, using city life as a theme. It was influenced by French poetry, particularly of Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. Baudelaire

had been the first major European poet to centre his poetry on the city. His lines in "**Tableaux Parisienne**"

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams,
Where spectres in broad day accost the passer-by!

would be echoed by Eliot in "**The Waste Land"** :

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams,
Where spectres in broad day accost the passer-by!

The two dominant personalities of Modernist poetry are **Ezra Pound** and **T.S. Eliot**. Pound began as an Imagist. He continued to focus on images but the images grew later into non-mimetic clusters which he called 'vortex' Pound's insistence on precision and objectivity, refusal to consider readers' taste or ability for comprehension, defined many features of modernist poetry. His insistence on the distinction between his own feelings and ideas and those in his poems lay behind his exploring of the possibilities of the dramatic lyric in "**Homage to Sextus Propertius"**, "**Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"** and the characters in the *Cantoes*. Eliot has said about his friend and mentor that he "is more responsible for the 20th century revolution in poetry than any other individual".

❑ **T.S. Eliot** however, was the more innovative figure. Even before his association with Pound, in the poems published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, which were written between 1911 1nd 1915, his remarkably flexible technique is clearly seen. His style, as Eliot himself said, was influenced by the verse of Jacobean drama and the free verse of Jules Laforgue . Here, already, we find the features which would define Modernist verse. The poems in *Prufrock* are about city life, not celebrating it, but denigrating. The topics are not matter of long established poetic tradition. The shift in the social orientation of poetry goes further. It is not only that notions of social respectability are not allowed to restrict what is said in poetry; the insistence on economy, concentration, elliptical speech, and intertextuality, the tone of ironic detachment meant that poetry was not going to be made easy for the relaxed reader. This poetry would not provide a self-explaining easy to follow train of thought. Colloquial speech and quote from Dante are juxtaposed, irregular but rhymed lines are suddenly disturbed by striking lines left without rhyme support:

Let us go then, you and I ,
When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherised upon a table

……..

Discontinuous composition became a major characteristic of modernist art. The technique of *Collage*, seen in the art of Picasso or George Braque becomes in Eliot an idiom for the disintegration of European civilisation. In "**The Waste Land"** (1922) Eliot used the 'mythical method' he had admired in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The parts are grouped around the theme of post-war Europe as barren and infertile, a wasteland of spirit, where all values have dried up. The poem explores the realms of myth, and symbols, archaeology, religious faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism in the Upanishads, Psychoanalysis, the associative theory of Gestalt psychology, intertextuality ranging through St. Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, and music hall phrases, musical strains from jazz to Wagner. Many speaking voices and shifting points of view as also the cosmopolitanism in using scraps of languages like German, French, Italian, and a range of unfamiliar geographical references add to the reader's difficulty.

Time is a central preoccupation in Eliot—time as an aspect of individual life, time in relation to generations, or to the discredited idea of progress, time in relation to eternity. In his later poetry after he had converted to Anglicanism as a path to personal salvation, the theme of time remains. "**Ash Wednesday**" still retains the impersonality of the dramatic monologue but the verse becomes more melodic. While the complex allusive manner is still there, echoing Dante and Cavalcanti, Shakespeare, the Book of Common Prayer, the Thirtynine Articles etc. The range becomes narrower. The obscurity of style is much less evident. The influence of the 17th. century devotional poet George Herbert is a strong factor. In the last major poem, *Four Quartets*, the parts were published individually. The first, "Burnt Norton" was written in 1926. The other three were written and published during the second World Wa . Time becomes a central motif while music, especially the music of Beethoven influences the structure. The verse form he used was different. the lines were of varying length, with four strong beats with a pause in the middle. It was challenging, but not confusing to the modern ear. While very complex issues are dealt with, and the allusiveness is still there, the language at first reading seems less obscure:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future ,

And time future contained in time past.

The poem received mixed reactions. Critics like George Orwell felt that the religious preoccupation had led to an extinction of his poetry. Others like C.K. Stead have said that the creative imagination which ran its own course in earlier poetry is balanced and controlled here. But whatever the arguments about religious faith as subject in his later poetry, with his poetry and his criticism T.S. Eliot is the seminal modernist poet, The achievements of Eliot and Yeats , along with others , like pound, the war poets etc. make the 1910—30 period one of the great epochs of English poetry.

❑ **Poetry of the 30s**: The poets of this generation brought in the clarity and rhythm of native English speech along with an involvement with socio-political issues into their poetry. Their reaction to the upper class establishment institutions which had led to the destruction of war turned a number of them, notably **W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis Cyril Connolly** etc. to Marxist ideology. As a result, they have often been called 'the pink generation'. But except for the Scottish poet **Hugh MacDiarmid**, their Marxism was more gestural than deep rooted. The influence of Freud was another important factor, in both Auden and Spender. In **Miss Gee** Auden uses the Freudian idea of sexual frustration causing physical maladies. The poets chose to write on contemporary life, its mundane, commonplace aspects. The verse and diction are studiously kept low key, the logic and syntax are those of ordinary discourse. Their concern with social and cultural disorder is very different from that of Eliot. Eliot saw his own times as part of a large European and universal order. The topicality of the 30s poets is more limited. The hatred for a commercial bourgeois culture is strong, but the remedy suggested is superficial. Tinned minds, tinned breath.

❑ **W.H. Auden:** In spite of his immense talent, his political and psychological concerns about contemporary society, and a high degree of technical skill, his achievement is largely uneven. When his first volume of poems was published in 1930, he was hailed as a striking new voice, with a distinct individual sensibility and style. There were memorable phrases and images like 'The swallow on the tile, spring's green/ Preliminary shiver' (**The Letter**). In his later, more political poems Auden often exploited the form of popular light verse to reach a wider public. But the lightness of rhyme and language failed to carry the deeper meanings. Auden at his best shows an easy mastery of verse style from free verse to a number of lyric forms. His imagery is striking, but sometimes seems to be too consciously smart. But

with Auden, as with other poets of his generation, what we are finally left with are a number of good poems, technically skilful but no major achievement.

❑ **The Poetry of the 40s**: The Second World War, like the first, produced a rich harvest of poetry. A number of major poets were Americans, for example, **Randall Jarrell** (**Death of the Ball Turret Gunner**), **Karl Shapiro (V-Letter**) etc. The major names in British poetry are those of **Keith Douglas**, **Alun Lewis** and **Sidney Keyes**. The memory of the great war poets of 1914—18 seemed to inhibit them to some extent. Perhaps the scale of horror and inhumanity, for which language was inadequate accounts for the comparative scarcity of poems from this war.

The major poet to emerge from the 40s was **Dylan Thomas**. His unashamed emotionalism and verbal rhetoric was totally different from the poetic model of Eliot although he shows a high capacity for juxtaposing words in new and sudden combinations in the Eliotesque manner. His verse is very melodic and his sheer love of words is seen in the way he uses them, without economy and without any care for meaning and appropriateness. The emotions expressed are superficial and the syntax and diction, simply because he is carried away by words, are obscure; but at his best, his poetry is a celebration of life and the richness of language. The lines below are from "**Poem in October"**:

A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill's shoulder,
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
To the rain wringing
Wind blow cold
In the wood faraway under me.

❑ **Poetry of the 50s**: Two anthologies, independently published , assembled the works of the same set of poets in the 50s. They were***, Poets of the 1950s*** (1955) by **D. J. Enright** and *New Lines* (1956) by **Robert Conquest**. The poets chosen were

Philip Larkin, **John Wain, John Holloway, Donald Davie, Elizabeth Jennings Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn,** and **Enright** and **Conquest** themselves. These poets came to be called **The Movement** poets. They did not group together under any particular poetic creed or theory. What brought these disparate poets together was a conscious rejection of the complex, experimental, cosmopolitan, allusive poetry of the modernists like Pound and Eliot, the clever-intellectual Freud-Marx flavoured verse of the Auden generation, and the neo-romantic exuberance of Dylan Thomas. They turned back to traditional metres, used the low-key diction of ordinary speech and chose to write about the humdrum details of lower middle class people, not in terms of irony or ridicule but in a vein of detached empathy. The poets themselves came from the lower middle class, who, in the changed social milieu, had accessed the opportunity of an Oxbridge education and a higher class position. They redefined both the concept of the poet's identity and the relationship between the poet and his readers. The poet was not a prophet nor alienated outsider. He was a common man, living a humdrum life, like other men. He wrote to be read like men like himself. They derided the modernists' contempt for the uninitiated reader. F.W. Bateson, the critic and Oxford scholar put it : "Without the reader's co-operation the poem might as well not exist".

❑ **Philip Larkin** is the major poet of the Movement. Larkin dismissed the idea of poetic tradition, myths or allusions and said that poets who used these were merely airing their erudition. He said, "I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe.." In a letter to Robert Conquest he spoke about the' right method' for poetry as, "plain language, absence of posturing, sense of proportion, humour.."We find that Larkin builds his poems on a structure of commonsense rationality , using colloquial language which builds a bridge between the poet and the reader. Below are lines from one of his best poem, "**The Whitsun Weddings**":

The fathers with broad belts under their suits
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,
The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that
Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.

1.1.12 A Brief Recap of Poetry

British poetry of the 20th century began with **Georgian Poetry**, which used mostly conventional form and diction and confined itself to Romantic themes and motifs. The shock of the Great War impacted on poetry by introducing realistic content in the verse of the **war poets** whose graphic descriptions of trench life, poison gas deaths etc, use of realistic images, ironical challenge to traditional beliefs brought about a change of perspective. The **Imagist poets** with their focus on economy of expression and precision of images, and the **French Symbolist poets**, introduced by the influential book of Arthur Symons, prepared the ground for high modernist poetry.

The poets of the 30s shifted away from the model of Eliot. The major poets had a loose Marxist political orientation, but evince no real feeling for the lower classes. There is a lack of major innovation.

In the 40s the Second World War produced poets who seemed inhibited by the remarkable achievement of the poets of the Great War.

The 50s **Movement poets** rejected the poetic models of three previous generations and wrote in a low-key, rational comprehensible style on commonplace everyday topics.

1.1.13 The Changes in the Novel

The impact of Modernism on prose fiction is seen most clearly in a famous literary challenge posed by **Virginia Woolf**. In her 1923 essay **Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown** mentioned earlier, Woolf presented the theoretic position of the modernist novel. She also stated this theory in a number of other essays like "**Modern Novels**" 1919, "**Character in Fiction**" in 1924, and "**Modern Fiction**" in 1925.She defined the idea of the 'modern novel' against the practices of the previous generation of novelists, particularly identifying the most prominent novelists of the first decade of the 20th century - **Arnold Bennett**, **H.G. Wells** and **John Galsworthy**. Significantly, **D. H. Lawrence** a little later criticised Galsworthy's novels in very similar terms. Before coming to Woolf's or Lawrence's charges against them, we shall begin our survey by looking at the kind of novels these three and other important writers were producing for the late Victorian and Edwardian reading public.

- **Arnold Bennett** wrote prodigiously and his novels were strongly influenced by the French realism of **Flaubert**, and even the naturalism of **Emile Zola**. The locale of most of his popular novels was the pottery towns of Staffordshire – among them are *Anna of the Five Towns*, the *Clayhanger* trilogy and *The Old Wives'Tale***,** which is Arnold's best, but , as **E.M. Forster** commented, while it is a strong, sincere, and well-narrated tale, it misses greatness. Bennett believed that the subject of fiction should be a slice of plain life and the job of the novelist was detailed documentation —so much so, for example, that in the novel *Anna of the Five Towns* he interrupts a dramatic scene between Anna and her future husband with a two-page detailed description of the room in which the conversation takes place.
- **John Galsworthy**'s novels, especially the first of the *Forsyte Saga* trilogy, *The Man of Property*, were immensely popular with contemporary readers. The central theme is property and its effect on personal relationships of the Forsytes. He admitted he was interested in depicting the Forsytes as types of acquisitiveness, to satirise the commercial-bourgeois society and not in the fine differentiation of character from within. Robert Liddel too in *A Treatise on the Novel* (1947) said that the Forsytes were built up from the background. We learn to know them apart from their furniture and their food.
- **H.G. Wells** seems a still clearer example of a novelist committed to objective documentation at the expense of development of individual psychology of character . A pioneer figure in the field of English science fiction with books like *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, he also wrote novels like *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* on lower middle class life and *Tono- Bungay* a social satire criticising the whole of society. Wells had no interest in the novel as art form. He wanted to stimulate thought through his novels. He suggested in *Kipps* (1905) that the business of the novelist was not ethical principle but facts. "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist", he said. What jars the reader of his novels is a very slapdash style, and the curious insubstantiality of characters.
- **Virginia Woolf** was the most vociferous critic of the three Edwardian novelists who, she felt, represented a trend in fiction which was not adequate to present the texture of life. She accused them of being 'materialistic 'and their faithful depiction of the perceived, objective world was achieved at the expense of interest in the perceiver, the human subject with his or her

complex thought processes and emotions. But hints of the change that would transform the novel are found in some at least of those who preceded Woolf and Joyce.

- **Henry James** spanned the end 19th. as well as the early years of the 20th. He was certainly influenced by Flaubertian realism but also by the Symbolists, and Russian writers like **Turgenev**. James repeatedly takes up the theme of story and the problem of the artist in his works like *The Lesson of the Master*, *The Author of 'Beltraffio'*, *Broken Wings*, *The Death of the Lion*. These, along with his important critical work *The art of Fiction* make him an important signpost towards the modernist novel and its form. He was a pioneer figure with his use of point of view, interior monologue and unreliable narrator. Even his minor characters, who are mainly presented through description, like Mrs. Touchett, Pansy Osmond, or Henrietta Stackpole in *Portrait of a Lady*, Aunt Penniman in *Washington Square*, Flora in *Turn of the Screw*, —are never 'flat'. The main characters are not described; they are presented from a particular point of view, for example Isabel Archer's in *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). But the point of view is a shifting one, because in *Portrait of a Lady* the narrative is revealed to us through the consciousness of Ralph Touchett. In *The Ambassadors* (1903) on the other hand, the events are narrated through the perspective of a single character, Strether. The concentration on Strether allows an intimate, detailed examination of the way a character's experiences modify his consciousness and outlook.

- Another important modern novelist is **Joseph Conrad**. Conrad was a Polish expatriate and English, his choice for literary creation was his third language, after Polish and French . The astonishing precision and economy of style which make him a major figure in modern novel, has been ascribed by some critics to this fact. His range of experience as a merchant seaman accounts for the great variety of his novels. *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outpost of Progress*, and *Heart of Darkness* are set in the Congo, *Nostromo* in South America, *The Shadow-Line* in the Gulf of Siam and shipboard life, *The Secret Agent* in the streets of London. There is a strong element of 19th century realism in Conrad. But paradoxically it is a realism that transcends realism by becoming the mirror of the inward depth and complexity of characters. The details, whether of the inner station in *Heart of Darkness* or the descriptive passages on Costaguana's history and geography in *Nostromo*

–become symbols of the 'moral discovery' which, as Conrad believed, should be the object of every tale. His narrative technique broke away from the linear chronological pattern. He presents a story, not directly, but through interpolation between author and subject matter of a narrator through whose consciousness the events are perceived and in whose words and narrative arrangement the story unfolds. In several novels, this narrator is Marlow—-*Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. This results in Conrad concentrating on the means by which reality is perceived; upon its reflection in the individual mind. It is the effect of events on the narrator, his responses to his world, his re-telling of his experience, which forms the substance of the novel. Here we find the modernist eschewing of the omniscient narrator, focus on the psychology of the individual 's inner being rather than on the psychology of the social being. There is also the constant going back and forth in time. In *Nostromo*, the story at points reflects back from a forward point of time whose consequences have become evident. In *Heart of Darkness* the dark of Africa and the darkness of a past Britain, Roman and Contemporary imperialism, the Congo and the Thames converge . The unnamed novelist, at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* says about Marlow, the raconteur, " …to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze"

The First War produced a rich harvest of trend-changing poetry as we have seen. In comparison, British novels on the direct war experience are few. **Ford Madox Ford's** *Parade's End* tetralogy (1924-28), which used his own war experience is a major fictional product, but the modernist upsurge made it, like much else in fiction, seem dated and less memorable to later critics. But the War speeded things up. The changes in western consciousness needed a transformation of modes of expression. David Daiches has said : "… the great surge of experimentation in fiction was in large measure caused by the novelists' search for devices that would enable them to solve the problem of the breakdown of a public sense of significance". Many of the changes date from before the War. You have already been acquainted with **Freud**'s work focussing on the unique importance of the individual's subconscious as distinct from his socially conditioned consciousness. The impact of this can be traced in the modernist novelists' increased concentration on the subjective self. **Einstein**'s suggestion that time was not an independent universal order, but depended for its

measurement and understanding upon the perspective of the individual, finds echoes in the increasingly internalized chronologies of Joyce and Woolf; **Bergson**'s idea that time and consciousness were a continuous, homogeneous flux, the American psychologist **William James**' idea of the free flow of thoughts in the conscious mind, which he called the 'stream of consciousness', as well as **Marcel Proust's** *Remembrance of Things Past* (translation published 1922) which, working through associations of past events with present ones, attempts to regain lost fragments of experience by intermingling memory and present consciousness, led to the invention of a new form, which at its utmost point in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, would go beyond the boundaries of narration.

- **James Joyce** is as seminal a figure in modernist fiction as Eliot is in poetry. In his first published work, the short story collection *The Dubliners* (1914), although all the stories except one were written before 1906, most features of his later technique are already discernible. The absence of the authority of the omniscient narrator, the irresolute, plotless, open-ended narrative structures, the moral uncertainty and linguistic ambivalence, the modulations in point-of view – cumulatively make the stories the first instalment in Joyce's lifelong attempt to explore the ways in which meaning and identity are constructed through language. In the largely autobiographical first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916),while large parts of the novel are vividly realistic, we find the characteristically Joycean linguistic density, extensive use of free indirect narration interspersed by snatches of the stream of consciousness interior monologue as it works out Joyce's creed of artistic objectivity through Stephen Daedalus. In an earlier version named *Stephen Hero*, he explained his idea of the 'epiphany'. *Portrait of the Artist* ends with an assertion of his exile status as he forswears his nationality, religion and family ties. Stephen's theory of the de-personalisation of the artist is similar to Eliot's. Joyce also invites comparison with Eliot in his cosmopolitanism, his dense and variegated allusiveness and the elliptical economy of his style. His most important work, *Ulysses* (1922) has for its subject a day in the life of Leopold Bloom, a very anti- heroic figure. *Ulysses* is simultaneously a triumph of modernist fiction and realism. The characters are realistic, the locale is an actual city, Dublin, and the details are presented in the manner of French and Chekhovian realism. But it soon becomes apparent that it is not how the narrative progresses but how the story becomes, i.e. how language of fiction represents reality, how words are related to the world and the world to words, which constitutes the content of *Ulysses.* In the process

Joyce uses diverse linguistic styles ranging from newspaper headlines, religious catechism of the Catholic church, parody of other literary forms (the book is a gigantic parody of Homer's *Odyssey*), unusual chronological structures, Freud's ideas as well as Jung's idea of archetypes, anthropology, Scholastic philosophy, music. The virtuosity of the style is astonishing. A large part of the novel is written in what Arnold Kettle has called 'shorthand impressionism' which aims to convey the thought track of the character. Objective statements in the third person are mixed with unspoken soliloquy. The stream of consciousness technique of interior monologue—an attempt to find the verbal equivalent for the thought process of a character— is most successfully used in the final chapter of the book. As modernist novelists realised, you cannot isolate an individual's consciousness from what is happening around him and to him. In Joyce's novel the technique is successful because at this point Molly Bloom is half-asleep. Action is suspended and therefore she can dispense with punctuation.

- **Virginia Woolf**, bred in the intellectual milieu of her parental circle, the friend of avant-gardists like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, was very aware that society, literature and art were passing through a tremendous transition. She felt that fictional form must change to accommodate the new concepts of the receptive process of the human mind. In her novels and short stories as well as in critical essays , some of which I have already referred to, she became a standard bearer of modernist practices. She began to discard the well-rounded conclusion in her short stories, three of which were published as *Monday or Tuesday* **(**1921). Reading the Russian writers in translation, she was drawn to **Chekhov**'s technique of leaving matters puzzlingly unresolved at the end of his stories and began to defuse her plots. She also divested her narrator of any kind of authority. She was not satisfied with her first two novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), which have the characteristics of the realistic novel she derided. But with *Jacob's Room* (1922) she felt she was at last finding a way out of structural conventions of plot, genre and accepted style. From her first works to her last, in fiction and non-fiction, her attitude was that of an innovator. Fiction for Woolf was a re-creation of the complexities of experience. She begins to do this by using imagery to connect different moments in a novel so as to form patterns. The narratives become progressively plotless. The themes are not important. In fact, it is difficult to say what the themes of her novels are. The motifs of a trip to the lighthouse and Lily Briscoe's picture of Mrs. Ramsey are the

> binding ideas in *To the Lighthouse*, but the novel is not about them. Her characterisation and her overall technique have been compared with impressionist art, in "her focus on the texture of experience, her attempt at capturing the myriad impressions of the individual consciousness and to weld into a significant whole the apparently diverse and casual elements of a particular scene". (Arnold Kettle)

Woolf's novels explore several modes of modernist creativity. *Mrs Dalloway* works through associations between memory and the present; *The Waves* is a set of soliloquies of six characters, interspersed by nine third person interludes; *Between the Acts*, her last novel, which seems to be about the presentation and performance of a play in an English country house, is full of veiled allusions. Different threads and ideas are dispersed through the narrative, and rhyme words are used to suggest hidden meanings. She examines the link of history with the present and the paradox of relationships. She uses the stream-of consciousness method, its device of interior monologue, and also film techniques of flash-backs, montage, multiple view and close-ups.

- **D. H. Lawrence** seems apparently out of place among the modernists because he continued with the familiar narrative conventions. He has sometimes been credited only with defiantly venturing into hitherto taboo areas of sexual relationships of men and women. Moreover, the moralistic outrage at books like *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his extreme right wing political opinions, his practice of preaching his views to his readers obscured his great achievement to most of his contemporaries. **Lawrence**'s idea about the novel however, show similarity with the major modernists. Lawrence, like Woolf, condemned Galsworthy's characterisation. He said, the characters in *Forsyte Saga* were not truly vivid human beings because of "the collapse from the psychology of the free human individual into the psychology of the social being". Lawrence's most popular book was and is his partly autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*. The Freudian influence is evident in the way he interlinks husband-wife and child-parent relationship. *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* share the characters of the two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun but they are essentially different books. All Lawrence novels have as their focus the theme of man-woman relationship. He wrote in his essay '**Morality and the Novel'**:

"I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about, and that, at present, is the relationship between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one…".

The relationships in Lawrence go beyond the conventional patterns in traditional novels. Frank and genuine human emotions become an assertion of freedom against the corrosive effects of modernity and the industrial society. The rainbow that Ursula Brangwen sees at the end of the novel of that name, like other evocations of nature that we come across in his novels, most of which are written against the industrial background of the mining county of Nottinghamshire, is not simply a romantic description as in nature poetry. It represents the cosmic mystery of Nature to which the positive Lawrence characters, like Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or Ursula or Birkin in *Women in Love* are alive to. Lawrence's technique does not assert itself in the startling way Joyce's or Woolf's does. But his plots are not simply character-in –action. *Women in Love* is not about Ursula's marriage to Birkin. His characters are not, as Lawrence said, " the old stable ego of character". While he never divorces them from society, his intense interest in "the psychology of the free human individual", in the effect on them of powerful emotions, led him to a new fictional style. Pages are devoted to minute examination of the characters' reflections and emotions. The intimacy with which Lawrence seeks to present the inner experience leads to a distinctive intermingling of a character's inner voice with the objective authorial tone He does not use the interior monologue of the stream of consciousness manner, but his extensive use of free indirect discourse, carrying it to ultimate limits, marks him as a master of the modern subjective novel.

There are limitations to any division of writers into specific schools according to their time-frames. Among major writers of the 1920s who cannot be indexed as 'modernist' but are still important, are **E.M. Forster** and **Aldous Huxley**. Forster's works can be divided into two phases. His early novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *A Room With a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910) project the liberal belief that social or individual problems can be solved by a modification of outlook and imagination, by building relationships, so to speak. The later, post-war novels are uncertain and perplexed. The individuals are alienated from society and cannot connect. In *A Passage to India* (1924) not only does the hollow boom in the Marabar caves mock at human values ("Everything exists; nothing has value"), but also, despite their desire to be friends, history stands as a barrier between Aziz and Fielding. **Huxley** too is difficult to categorise. In *Point Counterpoint* (1928) he uses an unusual narrative strategy. Several different 'counterpointed' stories supposedly occurring simultaneously are presented in successive blocks of narrative. This shows a new sort of narrative style, part of the modernist urge for technical innovation. But

works like *Chrome Yellow* (1921) and *Antic Hay* (1923) are more conventional, though very witty presentations of the post-war social , sexual and intellectual mores.

The novel in the early years of the 20th. century, whether or not in the high modernist mode, set itself in deliberate antithesis to the more traditional, formally conservative kind of fiction. They explored new possibilities and techniques of narration, concentrated on subjective consciousness, re-ordered episodes independent of chronology, broke and re-shaped language. As Ezra Pound commented, works such as Joyce's added to the international store of literary technique. The novel seemed poised to conquer new territories of art. In 1924, In *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Virginia Woolf wrote," …we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature." Writing in 1940, in the essay "**The Leaning Tower"** she conceded that her hope had not been fulfilled.

❑ **British Novel from the 1930s to the 1950s**: A survey suggests that the novel in these years seems to have reached a plateau and stayed there. No single novel or novelist can be identified as great or even remarkably unique, although there are important novelists and good novels aplenty. One feature of the 30s novel was a turning away from the aesthetic concerns of modernism towards a direct reflection of contemporary political events and public affairs. Living in a world threatened by economic depression and the looming menace of another war, intensifying conflict between left and right wing politics, these writers felt that modernism was escapist. The Marxist critic **Georg Lukacs** denounced the modernists' rejection of 'narrative objectivity' and 'surrender to subjectivity'. **George Orwell** said that for the modernists "Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words". In reaction they turned back to the mainstream narrative tradition. Through the next few decades, realism, simplicity and a colloquial style predominated.

In the 30s generation, in **George Orwell** most clearly, but also in **Christopher Isherwood** and **Graham Greene**, the novel shows a marked political awareness. **Isherwood** was influenced by both **Forster** and **Woolf**. He uses a lot of interior monologue, for example in the character of Victor, the sensitive young hero in conflict with an older generation represented by Victor, in *All The Conspirators*. One of his important themes is depiction of the Edwardians who survived the Great War and had difficulty adjusting to new social conditions. **George Orwell**, novelist and essayist, shows a strong social awareness. His novels show a meticulous documentary realism which is used to express a strong criticism of social evils His early service

in the colonies, as he wrote in *Burmese Days*, increased his natural hatred of authority and made him fully aware of the existence of the working classes. His novels like *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, written in a strong colloquial style, deal with important public causes. **Orwell**'s novels display a hatred of all attempts, whether left wing or right wing, to curb individual autonomy. He commented in 1946, "…every line of serious work that I have written since 1936, has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism". *Coming Up For Air* is artistically his most successful novel, but his more famous novels are *Animal Farm*, a political fable satirising the betrayal of the Russian Revolution under Stalin's rule, and *Nineteen Eighty Four*, a dystopic novel about the destruction of the autonomous individual under totalitarian dictatorship.

Graham Greene has been called by **William Golding** "…the ultimate twentieth century chronicler of consciousness and anxiety". The central figure in **Greene**'s novels is an anti-hero, middle aged rather than young, living a tedious, routine life, whose meaningless pattern of existence is suddenly challenged by a situation forcing him to face his true identity and moral values. His locales stretch beyond England, to Cuba, Vietnam, Mexico, Haiti, the European cities etc. so that the whole world seems enveloped in an atmosphere of despair and moral decadence. He offers his readers a strong exciting story in the tradition of **Conrad** and **Robert Louis Stevenson**, which serves as a basis for examination of moral dilemmas and psychology of characters. As a result, he is one writer who bridges the gap between the highbrow and the lowbrow novel reader. The popular contemporary thriller undergoes a psychological- intellectual transformation in novels like *A Gun for Sale*, *The Confidential Agent, The Third Man* etc.

In contrast with the mild leftism of **Orwell** and **Greene**, another 30s writer, **Evelyn Waugh's** satirical novels show a commitment to right-wing views. *Scoop* (19380 mocks English communists. However, he was more interested in social rather than political satire. In *Decline and Fall* (1928) he targets the smart, rich social world of his time. The 'bright young people' of this novel, and also of *Vile Bodies* (1930) and *Black Mischief* (1932) live a fashionable, self-indulgent life and rebel against conventional morality. Waugh is a precise observer of society and uses comic exaggeration to create eccentric characters and grotesque situations for his satires.

A very powerful novelist of the 40s was **Henry Green**. **Green,** whose presentation of wartime London in *Caught* (1943) reminds us of the response of the 2nd World

War poets. Like them, he too through his central character raises the problem of how the language of literature could ‘‘cope with experience too violent to transcribe in art”. **Green** circumvented the problem by presenting the violent action through the consciousness and narration of a character. Even as *Caught* is a rare example of a successful British War novel, his earlier novel *Living* (1929) is one of the best English novels about factory life. **Green** avoided the straightforward narration of the 30s novelists. His prose style and narrative organisation are both unusual, creating an opacity of meaning. His prose uses repetitions, odd syntax and gives no indication how the different sections of his narratives relate to one another. **Green** believed that the novelist should communicate obliquely with his readers and so, as the critic Frederic Karl says, “forced his reader into making the novel himself”.

We shall conclude this survey with **William Golding** who wrote till the beginning of the 90s but whose best known book *Lord of the Flies* was published in 1954. The story of a group of boys abandoned on a paradisal island during some future war and their descent into barbarism is a tale of evil triumphant in human nature and history. A similar tale of evil destroying innocence and goodness is told in *The Inheritors* (1955) showing the destruction of innocent Neanderthal man by Homo Sapiens, a more skilled but also sadly more malicious and violent species.

The novels of these decades are strongly marked by a pessimistic attitude. Arnold Kettle, in 1961, accused the 40s and 50s novelists of both narrowness and pessimism. The effect of the Second World War and the Holocaust were certainly enough to destroy any belief in the myth of civilisation and innate goodness of human nature. Also, the context of immediate history would have been a factor. The novelists were inhabiting a society where adjustment was the keyword rather than upheaval. G.S. Fraser suggested in his essay “**The Modern Writer and his World”** that the drab world of war and post-war did not lend itself to the imagination. But the pre-and post war years, if they give us no major innovators, do offer extremely gifted novelists who give their readers a fiction that is sensitive to and deeply concerned with the topicalities of their times.

1.1.14 A Brief Recap of the Novel

Modernism thus brought about major changes in the content and form of the novel.

The 20th. century began with realism dominating fiction in novelists like **Arnold Bennett**, **John Galsworthy** etc. But towards the end of the 19th. century, in writers like **Henry James** we notice formal experiments like shifting points of view, which anticipate the modernists. **Conrad**'s presentation of external events indirectly, mediated by the narrator's consciousness, was an important formal experiment. The major modernists were **Joyce**, **Woolf**, **Lawrence**. After the phase of high modernism, in the next decades we come across which are good rather than great, and the novelists turn back towards more conventional narrative techniques.

1.1.15 Drama in the First Six Decades

When we look at the drama of the period, we have to keep certain things in mind. One was that drama in this period had to contend with the very serious challenge of the film—first silent and then the sound films from the 1930s. For the masses, another popular form of entertainment were the music halls. The music halls were so called because they offered a species of variety programme combining popular songs, dances and short comic sketches in a theatre hall. The popularity of their dramatic sketches contributed to the popularity of the 20th. century one-act play. Another important feature was the development of amateur theatre companies. They did not need government license for performance because they performed only for members and could stage plays which were literary or artistic and which the commercial theatre would not produce. **The Independent Theatre company** of London for example staged **Henrik Ibsen**'s *Ghosts***,** a dramatization of **Emile Zola's** *Therese Raquin*, **George Bernard Shaw**'s *Widowers' Houses*, all very controversial plays. **The English Stage Company** produced **John Osborne's** *Look Back in Anger* for the first time. The fourth significant feature was the influence of Continental drama. English intellectuals, and playwrights in particular, were eagerly interested in what was being done, by **Ibsen** and **Strindberg** in Scandinavia, by **Anton Chekhov** in his plays and by the production styles of **Stanislavski** and **Meyerhold** in Russia, by the French ***Theatre Libre*** or the **Theatre of Cruelty** of **Antonin Artaud** in Paris, or by **Bertolt Brecht** in Germany.

Victorian drama in the commercial theatres of the mid-nineteenth century consisted mainly of sentimental plays, melodramas and spectacular extravaganzas. But a few playwrights began to produce a type of realistic drama. **Thomas Robertson**, in plays like *Ours* (1866), *Home* (1869) *School* (1869) wrote a kind of domestic

drama, which delighted the middle class audience because they could immediately recognise elements of their own life. He also used the language of natural conversation instead of the stilted language of melodramas. **A.W. Pinero** and **Henry Arthur Jones** both wrote comedies as well as serious plays in which they tried to depict the clash of social conventions and personal emotions. But though they had commercial success neither was gifted enough to give new life to the theatre. In the closing years of the 19th. century two playwrights, both of Irish origin, **Shaw** and **Oscar Wilde**, gave British theatre a new breath of life. The themes of **Wilde**'s plays like *A Woman of No Importance*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* etc are sentimental, but the highly skilled manipulation of stage situations, use of paradoxes and witty dialogue brought in a breath of fresh air . The fantastical play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, his most successful play showed how Wilde's impossible quips could also be pointed barbs at social pretensions and hypocrisy.

At the beginning of the century, the stage was dominated by realistic social drama. **John Galsworthy**, in plays like *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *The Eldest Son* (1912), *Loyalties* (1922) criticises social institutions and customs. He avoids condemning individual persons, and focusses on the sense of waste which results from the inexorable movement of institutions like the legal system, as in *Justice*, the failure of mutual understanding between the representatives of Capital and Labour in *Strife*, the essential hollowness of upper class attitudes in *Loyalties*. Galsworthy's plays are marked by a deep humanitarian attitude and are well-constructed, but the plight of his ordinary characters fail to touch deep emotional response. Among other playwrights of realistic drama there was **Harley Granville Barker**. His themes were also social problems, but unlike Galsworthy he focussed on the inner life of characters rather than on social problems. Thus, in *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), which has a theme similar to **Shaw's** *Mrs Warren's Profession*, he emphasizes, not the social squalor or the ugliness of unscrupulous business methods, but the agony and inner turmoil of the central character, Edward Voysey. **John Masefield** tried to write realistic tragedies in plays like *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908) and *Melloney Holtspur* (1923). These plays and playwrights had contemporary success but in revisiting them we find a constant clash between the speech and actions of real life and an intellectually contrived structure. The inadequacy of the English stage of this phase of time is especially evident in comparison with what was happening in the **Abbey Theatre** of Dublin, set up in 1903. The plays of **W. B. Yeats**, **Lady Gregory** and **J. M. Synge** were rooted in Irish soil but still had a strong imaginative approach.

The **Abbey Theatre** presented a wide variety of themes and styles, ranging from Yeats' poetic plays like *The Countess Cathleen, Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Synge's plays melding poetry with the harsh reality of Irish peasantry in *Riders to the Sea* **,** *Playboy of the Western World*, or **Sean O'Casey's** depiction of the impact of nationalistic ideal on the sordid life of Dublin slum dwellers in *The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock.* In fact, when the Abbey company visited England. they received great acclaim for their realism in scenery, dress and language, and above all by their style of controlled acting, avoiding unnecessary gestures or melodramatic delivery.

It was an Irish dramatist who would bring new life to the English stage, though he had no association with the Abbey Theatre. The new phase may be said to begin with **Bernard Shaw's** essay, **"The Quintessence of Ibsenism**", published in 1891. The essay largely misrepresented **Ibsen**, and focussed on only one aspect of the range and variety of **Ibsen**'s oeuvre—his realism. But under the influence of **Ibsen,** Shaw went on to write his **Plays Unpleasant** - *Widowers Houses* on the problem of slum landlordism, and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* on prostitution. In his later plays he went on to write the drama of ideas, using the comic form and intelligent dialogue to debate idea, ranging from anti-romantic views about love and war (*Arms and the Man*) to Bergsonian creative evolution (*Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah*). He devised a style of dialogue, highly polished and witty as well as thought provoking. It was quite artificial, Shaw made no attempt to reproduce the tone, vocabulary or rhythm of natural speech. He was of the opinion that the 'new drama' must compete with the novel and so wrote lengthy prologues and epilogues and his character descriptions become commentaries. In *Pygmalion* in a long epilogue appended to the actual play, he goes on to explain what his dramatis personae would do in future**. Shaw** claimed to write in the tradition of classical comedians like **Moliere**, using drama 'to chasten morals with ridicule'. His plays amused, stimulated, and sometimes shocked contemporary audiences. But as posterity has discovered, they are better read than staged. In plays like *Back to Methuselah*, the debating of ideas results in making the play itself intolerably boring. That is one reason why Shavian plays are seldom revived in theatrical repertoire and why, in spite of reaching the peak of fame, he had practically no influence on later playwrights. Shaw took great interest in the publication of his plays. There were other dramatists of the late 19th. and early 20th. century, like **Arthur Pinero**, **Robertson Jones**, and others who tried to invest their plays with literary quality and as part of that endeavour, tried to revive the reading of plays as a piece of literature by publishing plays.

The development of the **verse drama** in the 1930s was also an attempt to create drama with literary quality instead of merely in terms of stage production. The verse drama was a movement of writers none of whom was closely involved with the theatre. They were also in revolt against the conventions of naturalism, and focussed on the question of dramatic dialogue. Full range of human experience and emotion, they argued, could not be expressed by the limits of probable conversation. **Yeats** in his '**plays for dancers'** and **T.S.Eliot** in his unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* (1927) also tried to search for new kinds of dramatic action. There is a strong dramatic quality in Eliot's poetry and of his verse plays *Murder in the Cathedral* is a major success. But *Murder in the Cathedral* had a special kind of action. Eliot could draw on the formal language and rituals of the church, which suited the verse medium but in other plays, for example *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Elder Statesman*, where he uses contemporary action, often combining it with themes from Greek drama, eg the ***Oresteia*** for *The Family Reunion*, ***Alcestis*** for *The Cocktail Party*, he is successful only in isolated scenes. Also in the later plays he brought dramatic verse so close to everyday speech as to be practically indistinguishable from it , thereby defeating his original purpose of expressing the full range of experiences in verse instead of using language suitable for probable characters. **Christopher Fry** also wrote a number of verse plays, which enjoyed a temporary success, eg. *The Lady's not for Burning*, *A Phoenix too Frequent* etc. His verse however is merely decorative. He made no attempt to address the major problems of suiting verse credibly to the needs of dramatic action. A few other playwrights, like **Lascelles Abercrombie** and **Gordon Bottomley** also ventured to write verse drama. But it was soon realised that the actors used to the naturalistic style were not capable of giving full expression to the language of verse dialogue and the audience too were not receptive to the medium. There were no theatre houses to carry out these experiments either. Gradually the verse drama petered out.

The major change came to the theatre in the mid- fifties. While the commercial theatre was still providing entertainment to the general play-going public with domestic comedies, Agatha Christie's murder mystery plays etc., a feeling was growing that the majority theatre was miles away from the actual lives of audiences. A major breakthrough happened with the production of **John Osborne's** *Look Back in Anger* (1956) in the **Royal Court Theatre**. It did not challenge the form of the established drama, but presented explosive new content. **Osborne**'s theme was an old one : an upper class girl marries outside her social milieu. The novelty lay in the

treatment. The realistic scenes, the vituperative dialogue poured out by Jimmy Porter raging against everything from the British class system to the nuclear bomb expressed the frustration of an entire generation of 'angry young men'. The anti-establishment sentiments and shock tactics deployed by **Osborne** were followed up by a number of the 50s dramatists, eg. **Arnold Wesker**'s plays on life in the Jewish East End (*The Kitchen* in 1959, *Roots* in 1960, and *Chicken Soup with Barley* also in 1960); **Shelagh Delaney's** *A Taste of Honey* in 1958, **Doris Lessing** in *Each His own Wilderness* also in 1958 - explored the social and political landscape. **John Arden's** *Live Like Pigs* was about a vagrant family, and *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* juxtaposed ideals and everyday basic needs. All these playwrights sought to cultivate the realistic drama. Their realism was mainly in terms of the class of their characters and the social message conveyed. They were hailed by critics and , staged mainly in the independent theatres , received an enthusiastic audience.

The works of a new generation of European dramatists like **Jean Anouilh**, **Jean Paul Sartre**, **Eugene Ionesco**, and **Bertolt Brecht** were introduced to English theatre in the fifties. Their varied influences were gradually absorbed and led to new kinds of work later. Within our scope, the other important new development, directly in contact with European drama, was **Samuel Becket's** *Waiting for Godot*. Translated by **Becket** from his original French text, the play premiered in London in 1955. The minimal scenery and action, the dialogue, were all in a distinctly anti- realistic mode. This kind of drama later came to be labeled **'Absurd Drama'**. **Becket** would be followed by **Harold Pinter** with plays like *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and other plays. These plays have been called comedies of menace.

1.1.16 A Brief Recap of Drama

The popularity of British drama in the 20th century was challenged by the likes of the cinema and the music hall. However, it surged forward with the support of amateur theatre companies and further broadened its horizon by incorporating the performances of translations of Continental drama within its pale. It changed gear from the sentimental drama of the 19th century to realistic drama and was simultaneously augmented and challenged, aesthetically and professionally, by the Irish dramatists of the Abbey Theatre. While Theatre of Ideas occupied the stage for many years, Verse Drama also provided a fillip to the aesthetic and literary quality of drama over the nitty-gritties of stage production. By the middle of the century

there was seen a spurt of interest in the socio-political aspects of British life which was reflected in the content of the Angry Young Theatre of the time. The fifties also saw the introduction of the anti-realistic mode on the English stage through the presentation of Absurd Drama which offered sneak-peaks at postmodern theatre.

1.1.17 Trends in Literary Criticism

Amidst such a plethora of literary effusion, Literary criticism becomes an important institution in the first part of the 20th century. The dominant critical idea, developed by **T.S. Eliot** on the one hand and **F.R. Leavis** on the other, was that literary values were at one with living itself. The most important academic influence was that of **Leavis**. Although **Leavis** was often extremely dogmatic and idiosyncratic, his major critical views, for example that literary criticism should shape social sensibility, dominated the academic world for a long period of time, disseminated through *Scrutiny*, the magazine he published and edited from 1923 to 1953. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* and *Revaluations*, his denigration of Victorian poetry as well as of romantic poets like Shelley and his acclaim of Eliot, Pound and Hopkins strongly influenced modern viewpoints. In *The GreatTradition*, his major book on fiction, he argues that awareness of the complexity and importance of moral values advocated by great novelists like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad determine the content and form of their novels. **Leavis** himself was influenced by **T.S. Eliot**, as was another major critic, **William Empson**. **Eliot** tended to undervalue his literary criticism, calling it a by-product of his poetry. But several of his critical ideas were seminal. In "**Tradition and the Individual Talent"** he said that a work of literature must be judged in the context of previous works, by the standards of the past, i.e. tradition. In "**Hamlet and His Problems"** he discussed the idea of the 'objective correlative' which he defined as the only way of expressing emotion in art by finding a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events that shall be the formula of that particular emotion.

As far as general theoretical trends are concerned, **I. A. Richards'** *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) introduced an elaborate theory of text analysis which was generally known as 'practical criticism'. **Robert Graves** and **Laura Riding** in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) and **William Empson** in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) did pioneer work in the field of poetic ambiguity. The school of **New Criticism** which developed in the 1940s to 1960s, was strongly influenced by

Richards and **Eliot**, but in flourished mainly in the universities of the United States. Although **Structuralist criticism** as well as **Russian Formalism** began respectively in France and Russia in the 1930s, their impact on critical studies in England were felt much later, only from the late 60s.

1.1.18 Summing Up

You might feel that this has been an inordinately long unit, but the objective here has been to introduce you to the entire gamut of Modernism. If you go back and forth with this unit and relate it to the texts you will be studying in this Paper, you will form an idea of the linkages that have predominantly worked in connecting the literary scenario to the wider cultural perspectives prevalent from the latter half of the 19th century through the first half of the 20th. With help from your counselor, we are sure you will be able to assay the Modern period of English literature in a befitting manner.

1.1.19 Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Analyse the economic and political background of the first half of the 20th. century.
2. What was the impact of the two world wars on English literature?
3. Which major intellectual influences formed the sensibilities of the modernists?
4. How would you define modernism? Discuss with reference to at least two major modernist writers.

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Analyse the trends in 20th century poetry up to the 50s.
2. Briefly sum up the changes and development in the English novel in the first half of the 20th. century.
3. Write a brief essay on English drama of the modern period.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What was the imagist movement? How did it influence modernist poetry?

2. Can we say that modernism was an international phenomenon?
3. Who were the Movement poets? How did they differ from the modernists?
4. Write briefly on the contributions of : Henry James; Charles Baudelaire; Ezra pound; Dylan Thomas; John Osborne; D.H. Lawrence.

1.1.20 Suggested Reading

1. *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. 7, edited by Boris Ford (Penguin, 1964)
2. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. 7, edited by Boris Ford (Penguin, 1983)
3. *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot* by C.K. Stead (London: Huchinson, 1964)
4. *The Twentieth Century Mind* Vol. 1(1918—45), Vol. 2 (1945——65), edited by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (London, O.U.P.1972)
5. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* by Raymond Williams (Penguin, 1973)