

Block-4

- Unit 1 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*
(Introduction and Stage History)**
- Unit 2 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming* (Reading
the play)**
- Unit 3 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*
(*Supplementary Unit*)**
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Stage History)**
- Unit 5 : Edward Bond: *Lear* (Reading the Play)**
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Unit 1 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming* Introduction and Stage History

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 1.1. Objectives
- 1.2. Introduction
- 1.3. About the Author
- 1.4. Composition and Production History
- 1.5. Context of the Play *The Homecoming*
- 1.6. A Socio-historic Background of the Play
- 1.7. Critical Reception
- 1.8. Summing Up
- 1.9. References and Suggested Readings

1.1. Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to—

- *learn* about the dates and sources of the play.
- *analyze* the contexts of the play.
- *evaluate* the play from different critical lenses.
- *learn* how the play was received on stage over the years.

1.2. Introduction

The play, *The Homecoming*, is a two-act play written by Harold Pinter, first published in the year, 1965. Often recognized as one of the most complex and challenging Post-World War II playwrights, Harold Pinter's plays are widely known for their use of understatement and euphemism, trivial verbal exchanges, inhibition, skepticism, and even silence, to convey the essence of the character's thoughts and beliefs, that are generally layered by their contradictory speech and action. Set in North London, the play revolves around Teddy and Ruth's homecoming after a prolonged stay in the United States and after six years of marriage. The

play was written within a short span of six weeks by Pinter in 1964 while residing in his home in Sussex, a coastal town in Worthing. The setting of the play is in a large sitting room, which remains unchanged all throughout the two acts and the numerous scenes of the play. The play depicts a chaotic family of four men in post-war London and the sexual tension the all-male household undergoes with the presence of a woman after a long time. The woman, Ruth, act as a catalyst to the long-standing power struggle among the men in the family. The play, *The Homecoming*, is one of the playwright's most significant and celebrated works. It has won three major theatre awards and the play was staged widely all across the globe along with subsequent film adaptations as well.

1.3. About the Author

Harold Pinter was one of the most influential modern British playwrights of the twentieth century. He was born on 10 October, 1930, in Hackney, East London. Apart from being one of the most renowned dramatists, he was also a screenwriter, an actor, a director, and also a political activist. Pinter's career as a dramatist began with a production of the play, *The Room*, in 1957. His second play, *The Birthday Party* (1957), is one of his best dramatic works, along with *The Homecoming* (1964) and *Betrayal* (1978). His other works include *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *No Men's Land* (1974), *Tea Party* (1964), *The Basement* (1966), *The Lover* (1962), *Old Times* (1970), *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), and many others. He began composing poetry at a young age of twelve. He became actively involved in the political happenings of his time since the age of eighteen. In 1948-49, he actively opposed the Cold War. He had also been one of the early members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and was in support of the British Apartheid Movement (1959-1994). He was also a member of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and actively supported the anti-war movements in the United Kingdom. He voraciously spoke at the rallies held by the Stop the War Coalition and often made provocative and blunt political statements, earning himself the reputation of being terse, pugnacious and forbidding. Harold Pinter was awarded with over fifty awards, prizes and other honors. Most of his literary works carries a strong political forbearing, either implicit or explicit. His play, *Mountain Language* (1988), was inspired from one of his tour to Turkey where he

witnessed the Turkish suppression of the Kurdish language in the year 1985. He authored a total of twenty-nine plays and fifteen dramatic sketches. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005 and the French Légion d'honneur in 2007. His career as an actor spanned over a period of fifty years, with a wide range of roles on stage as well as in radio, television and films. His last performance as an actor was that of the titular character of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* in October 2006. Harold Pinter is often designated along with his contemporary playwrights as belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd tradition. Pinter, as a director, directed almost fifty productions, not only his own but plays by other playwrights as well, both for the stage and television and films. He became an associate director of the National Theatre in 1973. He died on 24 December 2008.

SAQ:

Q. Do you think Harold Pinter's literary works are influenced by the political events of his time? Discuss. (About 250 words)

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1.4. Composition and Production History

As mentioned previously, Harold Pinter wrote the play, *The Homecoming*, in a short span of six weeks in the year 1964 in his home in Sussex, in the coastal town of Worthing. As noted by the theatre critic, John Lahr, in his essay "Demolition Man: Harold Pinter and 'The Homecoming'", Pinter imagined the bleak, chaotic mood of the play's North London setting in stark contrast to his calm and soothing ambience of his study table overlooking gardens and with the sea within a sniffing distance.

The London Premiere of the play, *The Homecoming*, was held in Aldwych Theatre, on 3 June, 1965, directed by Sir Peter Hall. The first American production of the play took place in New York on 5 January, 1967. The 1967 New York production received four Tony Awards- for Best Performance by a Leading Actor, for Best Performance by a Featured Actor, for Best Direction, as well as for the Best Play. A film adaptation of the play was released in the year, 1973, based on Pinter's own screenplay

and directed by Hall. The play was produced again in 2002, at the Royal Exchange, in Manchester, and was directed by Greg Hersov. A Radio Broadcast of the play was released on air on 18 March, 2007, produced by Martin J. Smith and directed by Thea Sharrock. In 2008, from 31 January to 22 March, the play, *The Homecoming*, was revived at the Almeida Theatre, London. In 2015, the play was performed at the Trafalgar Studios, which was directed by Jamie Lloyd.

Check Your Progress:

1. How long did it take Harold Pinter to compose the play, *The Homecoming*? (About 30 words)

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2. When did the Almeida Revival of the play, *The Homecoming*, take place? (About 30 words)

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1.5. Context of the play *The Homecoming*

Often classified as an absurd play, Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming* is a tale of the return of Teddy, a University professor, to his father’s home in London, along with his wife, Ruth, after six long years in the United States. The play revolves around the chaos and turbulence that the all-male household undergoes with Ruth’s presence, after a long time of having no woman around after Teddy’s mother’s death. Ruth’s presence uncovers an underlying power struggle prevalent amongst the men and exhibits an entangled coalescence of rage and muddled sexuality in the house. The play takes a surprising twist as Ruth decides to stay back with her father-in-law and Teddy’s brothers, after accepting their sexual overtures of having illicit sexual relationship with all of them as well as to work as a prostitute to extend financial support to the family and afford a luxurious lifestyle. Ruth’s decision to abandon her husband and her three children to willingly work as a prostitute defying the conventional role of a mother and a wife was seen as provocative and disturbing in concern with the legitimacy of the

subject-matter of drama and literature of that period. However, what grabs the most attention is the fact that an overtly detached Teddy complies with all of these without any protest or complaint.

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1.6. A Socio-historic Background of the Play

Harold Pinter's theatrical works are significant for the ambivalence of the plots, representation of characters and their intriguing endings. The characters are often seen displaying a bizarre personal psychic bearing of multifaceted emotions such as fear, loneliness and jealousy, hatred and insecurity, sexual preoccupations, intricate within trivial and commonplace conversations. Pinter's plays are highly influenced by the socio-political events of his time. Some popular contemporary themes such as dynamics of gender or sexual predicaments and power pervades in his works. His works were largely significant in portraying the social and historical context of his era, with significant movements like the Gay Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, etc. The second wave feminism also influenced the literary creations of the period as many writers adopted it for their works, including Pinter.

The play, *The Homecoming*, was published during a period of great socio-cultural changes. The 1960s was a significant decade of challenging the age-old customs and traditions that have long suppressed certain particular groups of the masses. It was a time when the Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Rights Movement, as well as the Second-wave Feminism gained momentum, not only in the United States but across the world at large, including London. The play, *The Homecoming*, was largely influenced by the Second Wave Feminism, as it explored themes of gender dynamics, female sexuality, etc. The play revolves around an all-men household and the prevalent power structure that undergoes a shift with the entry of a female character, Ruth, in the play. The second wave feminist movement took place in the later decades of the twentieth century, around 1960s and 1970s which mainly focused on issues of equality for women and gender discrimination. Significant issues that catered to the oppression of women in the perennial patriarchal society such as rape, domestic violence, reproductive right, equal work opportunities as well as equal pay for women, etc, were brought to the forefront and were major areas addressed during the movement. The movement was an attempt to

challenge the age-old perception that women belonged to the domestic space between the four walls of the house, with no right to choose or decide for themselves as well as others, and serve men. It also focused on transforming the negative and inferior image of women, supposedly that of the seductress or the femme-fatale in popular culture to a more positive as well as a realistic one, acknowledging issues of female sexuality and the right to make their own choice. The portrayal of Ruth's character in the play can be interpreted both as a critique of the society as well as a challenge against the persisting stereotypical representation of women of the time. Prior to her marriage to Teddy, Ruth worked as a "model for the body". However, after marrying Teddy and having three children, Ruth became sexually trapped in her marriage and longed for some kind of agency and independence from the shackles of the societal as well as marital conventions. After returning to London, Ruth experiences a kind of sexual liberation and hence overtly accepts Max's offer to stay with the family and not go back to her life with Teddy in the United States.

The 1960's was also a period of sexual liberation movement that focused on the power and politics of sexuality. The 1960's Sexual Revolution challenged the existing societal norms and assumptions regarding sex. With the fight for gender equality and against sexism and sexual abuse of women as the main concerns of Second Wave Feminism, both amalgamated to bring a combined attention to these long neglected topics that are also often regarded as taboos. In the play, *The Homecoming*, the character of Ruth is often interpreted by literary scholars as a femme- fatale female lead, depicted in stark contrast to the image of an ideal subservient woman of that time. She is seen as a manipulative sexually deviant woman who uses her sexuality, through her speech as well as mostly through certain bodily gestures. She readily accepts to sexually serve the four men in the house as well as work as a prostitute to break free from the marital bond with Teddy that she finds sexually suffocative. One argument regarding Pinter's portrayal of Ruth can also be debated to centre on men's fear and terror of the power of female sexuality, implying that an overtly sexual woman can use her sexual prowess to trap and manipulate men. In light of the socio-historical context and the changes the society underwent at that time, Pinter's characters are likely portrayed as a critique of the persisting patriarchal norms and the socio-cultural conventions and beliefs of the age.

Stop to Consider:

The feminist movement comprises of four waves:

The first wave took place in the late nineteenth century and it basically demanded the recognition of woman as human counterpart of man in the patriarchal society and not as an object or property. Its main proponent was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her seminal text, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, came to be recognized as one of the most significant feminist literary text. In 1848, about 200 women assembled in a church and came up with a treaty of 12 resolutions, demanding the basic civil rights as citizens of a state. Their basic goals were asking specific rights for women, such as Right to Vote and Property Rights.

The second wave took place in the late twentieth century, around 1960s and 1970s. The activists during this phase basically questioned the traditional gender roles prevalent in the patriarchal society, especially those led to the suppression of women. Three types of feminism emerged during the time: mainstream or liberal feminism, radical feminism, and cultural feminism. Mainstream feminism focused on reducing gender discrimination and addressing the issue of the access of women in conventionally male-dominated spaces. Radical feminism believed in the inherent differences between men and women and acknowledges it in a positive light. Cultural feminism also upholds a similar opinion and celebrated the “female essence” that is distinct from the male counterparts.

The third wave feminism comprises mostly of the 1990s. This phase of the movement focused on the agency of women and the right to make their own choices. It was more like an extension of the second wave in that they too questioned the traditional femininity and rebelled openly against it. Culturally, it was the era of Guerilla Girls and the Punk Rock Riot, including Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*. While the first and second-wave feminism had largely neglected the issue of racial gender disparities, the third wave feminism paid attention to racial discrimination as well. The phrase, “third-wave feminism”, was coined by Rebecca Walker, a black, bisexual woman, in 1992.

The fourth wave feminism is prevalent in the present time. It mainly focuses on being vocal and expressing the oppression and abuse women faces in almost all sectors, be it domestic or professional. Social media activisms, such as the Me Too Movement are significant activities

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that are part of fourth wave feminism. It focuses on inclusivity of women in domains that were previously regarded as male spaces in terms of education and employment and raises questions on the true meaning of empowerment, equality and freedom. It also addresses the struggles of “colored women” and the oppression they face because of racial disparity. They also raised their voice for the rights of trans-women, for the first time in the history of feminism. Previously, feminism had a pre-specified realm that included only women, biologically recognized female beings. Fourth wave feminism broke free the shackles of gender binary and became inclusive of those who resided on the fringes, struggling for their identity, recognition, and acceptance as part of the mainstream society.

Check Your Progress:

Give a feminist analysis of the character of Ruth? (About 300 words)

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1.7. Critical Reception

The play, *The Homecoming*, has been often considered by many literary critics and scholars to be somewhat baffling and ambiguous. It has been exposed to extensive critical interpretation and analysis since the time it was premiered. The play is entertaining and whimsical and at the same time cryptic and abstruse with multiple layer of meanings underneath simple ordinary speeches. The play vehemently explored issues of power, control, and sexual prowess, in a realistic yet aesthetically explicate manner.

One of the most well-known critics of Pinter, John Lahr, presents an extremely compelling description of the play, *The Homecoming*. He remarked on the significance of words and language in a play and how the play, *The Homecoming*, has changed his perspective on the same. He observed that “[b]efore the play, I thought words were just vessels of meaning; after it, I saw them as weapons of defense. Before, I thought theatre was about the spoken; after, I understood the eloquence of the unspoken. The position of a chair, the length of a pause, the choice of a gesture, I realized, could convey volumes”. He considers *The Homecoming* to be the best theatrical work by Pinter.

Another contemporary critic of Pinter, Ben Brantley, applauded the play's form and plot structure as "nigh-perfect form". Early critics of his time often criticized and condemned the play to lack a well-defined plot as well as neither having any meaning and emotion in the dialogues nor any motivation of the characters. Many perceived the play as perplex and confusing. However, later critics assert that the play, might seem complex and baffling to many readers, but is richly endowed with a multiplicity of meanings that can potentially invoke a multifarious array of interpretations.

Acknowledging Pinter's obscure and ambiguous style of writing, the critic, Harold Hobson, questioned on the truth of Teddy and Ruth's the marital relationship. Teddy's indifference and detachment towards Ruth and his compliance with her decision to stay back and work as a prostitute as well as engage in sexual liaison with her in-laws provoked doubts and debate regarding their matrimony among readers and critics. Hobson interpreted Teddy to be probably pretending to be Ruth's husband, thus giving a rational explanation of his apathetic and unconcerned behavior towards her. Hobson delineated the play to be Pinter's 'cleverest play'. However, he does not completely approve of the portrayal of marriage and marital relationship as portrayed in the play, judging it on moral grounds to be somewhat misleading.

Apart from Hobson, many other critics had also raised question on the validity and truth of Teddy and Ruth's marriage. As Ruth's character gradually unveils herself, it becomes problematic to imagine her as a potential housewife and a mother of three children, whom she simply abandons as she decides never to return with Teddy. The ingenious portrayal of the character of Ruth as a wife and mother is a vehement rejection of the conventional role prescribed to women at that time and is in stark contrast to the respectable drama and literature of the period.

1.8. Summing Up

The play, *The Homecoming*, is Harold Pinter's one of the most critically acclaimed plays. Often tagged as dark, ambiguous and inscrutable, the play has been staged innumerable times since it was premiered in the year, 1965. Pinter is renowned as one of the most influential practitioner of the Theatre of the Absurd and the play, *The Homecoming*, fits ideally in the taxon of this category of drama. *The Homecoming* is also clubbed

under, what is known as comedy of menace, a sub-genre of plays that intends to create humour by means of pun, ambiguity, insult, rudeness and vulgarity. This was evident by the sexual repartees the characters engage with alongside an open proposal for prostitution and sexual liaisons. Pinter was known for his outspoken and vociferous expression of his opinions of some of the most scurrilous subjects in his literary works.

1.9. References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 2 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming* (Reading the Play)

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Unit Structure:

- 2.1. Objective
- 2.2. Introduction
- 2.3. Reading the Play
 - 2.3.1. Act I
 - 2.3.2. Act II
- 2.4. Themes of the Play
- 2.5. Summing Up
- 2.6. References and Suggested Readings

2.1. Objective

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *have* a detailed understanding of the play
- *learn* about the plot and structure of the play
- *analyse* the themes of the play
- *know* how to involve in a close reading of a play
- *learn* about the significance of speech and silence in a play

2.2. Introduction

The play, *The Homecoming*, is a two-act play by Harold Pinter. The narrative of the play focuses on the return or the ‘homecoming’ of a prodigal son to his father’s house in London after six years at the United States. The play is an absurdist work, a common feature of most of Pinter’s literary creations. Though the plot of the play is capable of keeping the audience engrossed, it seemed to lack any rational explanation. The narrative on the superficial level might seem simple, replete with meaningless conflicts and ordinary bickering, but on a deeper level addresses many crucial issues of the modern world, such as identity, power dynamics, familial ties, sexual liberation, etc. In *The Homecoming*, Pinter

typically portrayed his male characters as living in an illusionary world, assuming self-satisfactory roles to claim their authority and dominance over the other characters in the play.

2.3. Reading the Play

The play, *The Homecoming*, revolves around the return of Teddy, a University professor, to his paternal family after six years from the United States. He brings along his beautiful wife, Ruth, whom he married in England before leaving for America and meanwhile had three children with her. However, the all-male household undergoes a shift with the return of Ruth as much sexual tension and chaos ensues with the presence of a woman after a long, extended time.

Though the play, at the literal level seems to mark Teddy's homecoming, but may more symbolically denote the homecoming of his wife, Ruth. As the narrative progresses, we discover that Ruth seems to be trapped in her matrimonial relationship with Teddy and desires some form of sexual liberation. It is back in London that she rediscovers herself and her true identity, after long playing the conventional role of a dutiful mother and a wife. She accepts Max's sexual overtures to stay back and work as a prostitute rather than returning back home to Teddy and their three children. This might symbolically denote Ruth's coming home to herself. The character of Ruth can be interpreted as the only realist character among all men fantasists.

2.3.1. Act I

The play opens in a big living room of an old house in North London, with ascending stairs in view that led to other parts of the house upstairs. The room is decked with minimal furniture like old tables and chairs, two large armchairs, a big sofa and includes a mirror and a radiogram. Act I starts with Max and Lenny on the stage in the living room, on a summer evening. Lenny, a man in his early thirties sat with a newspaper while Max, his seventy year old father comes looking for a pair of scissors to cut something out of a newspaper. However, Lenny pays little attention to his father. Max again asks Lenny for a cigarette to which he again acts dismissive which enrages Max. They mock each other and

exchanges vile insults. Lenny then asks his father about horses and insults Max's cooking. Sam, a sixty three year old bachelor and Max's younger brother enters complaining about his job as a chauffeur. He offers Max some cigars that one of his clients gave him. The trio is soon joined by Joey, Max's youngest son, a man in his middle twenties after a workout at the gym. He talks about his boxing training with Bobby Dodd to which Max mocks him saying that the trouble with him as a boxer is that he "don't know how to defend [himself], and he don't know how to attack" (Pinter 17). The entire conversation revolves around petty, ordinary and meaningless blabbering like the lost scissors, the newspaper, some random passengers of Sam, horses they have no interest in, and the like. Max's outpour of unrelenting aggression on probably every interaction with the other characters on stage marks a futile attempt to assert his superiority over the other men in the house.

Later, that night, Teddy returns with his wife, Ruth. Teddy was excited to be back home after six years, especially with the little change the place have undergone since his departure. He assures Ruth that his family is pleasant and she would love them. Assuming that the other family members are asleep, Teddy insists they should go to bed as well and she can get introduced to them in the morning. However, Ruth decides to go for a walk instead. Max talks about his late wife, Jessie and his old friend, McGregor. Sam subtly hints to about Jessie having an affair with MacGregor.

Lenny comes downstairs as Teddy heads to his bedroom but soon stops. Both the brothers exchange pleasantries but with no warmth or excitement. Lenny was unable to sleep because of "some kind of tick", which Teddy supposes may be the "clock" (25). After some futile attempt of reconciling their past brotherly warmth, both retire to bed. Teddy goes upstairs and Lenny stays in the hall.

Ruth returns from her night stroll and encounters Lenny in the hall. Both engage in petty illogical small talks and Ruth introduces herself as Teddy's wife. He paid little attention to the fact, as if dismissing it totally as he asked, "you sort of live with him over there" (Pinter 29) as she informed him that they were on a visit to Europe. He goes on to narrate a long incident where he almost killed an old lady who tried to take liberties with him, but only the thought of

disposing the corpse later stopped him. There follows a wonderful theatrical power play as Ruth do not lose her calm over Lenny's intimidating narrations but demonstrates a dominating power over him with just a glass of water, making a mockery of the incident he just narrated. Ruth goes to bed leaving Lenny downstairs.

The play moves on to the next morning at "half past six" (Pinter 38). Joey was shadowboxing in front of the mirror as Max enters, complaining. He is upset with Sam being in the kitchen. He remembers the time when their father died and on his death-bed, asked him to look after his brothers. Ruth and Teddy come downstairs. Extremely unbothered and with the least excitement Max inquires if Sam knew of Teddy's arrival home. Even before Teddy had a chance to introduce his wife to his father, Max started verbally abusing her, addressing her as a "dirty tart ... a smelly scrubber ... a stinking pox-ridden slut ... bitch ... a whore ..." (Pinter 41- 42). He scolds Teddy for being back after six years "without a word" and in addition bringing a whore in the house (Pinter 42). He scolds him that they never had a whore in the house "ever since [their] mother died" (Pinter 42). Teddy interrupts Max, clarifying that Ruth is his legally married wife. Joey apologises Ruth for his father's behaviour. Max walks towards Ruth and seemed pleased to know that she's a mother of three children. Max ask Teddy for a cuddle to which Teddy happily approves of. Max finally remarks that Teddy "still loves his father " (Pinter 44).

2.3.2. Act II

Act II opens with Max, Teddy, Lenny, and Sam on stage, lighting cigars. Joey enters with a coffee tray and Ruth serves coffee to the men and sits down with her own cup. Max and Ruth exchange praises, Ruth for the delicious lunch Max prepared and he in turn appreciates her coffee. He tells Ruth about Jessie and how well she raised their children, and inculcated in them all the moral lessons as they grew up. He goes on to narrate their times in the past and how good of a husband he was to Jessie as well as a doting father to their sons. He goes on with his reminiscence at being such a wonderful son himself and a dutiful brother to look after his bed-ridden mother and his invalid brothers. He worked as a butcher all his life and told her about his fascination with "the

chopper and the slab” (Pinter 47). Even with that petty job, he still managed to look after all, abusing them as “a crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife”. He then turns to Sam to abuse his profession as a driver, commenting on how MacGregor was a good driver. He berates Sam for the fact that he didn’t even fought on the war. He swiftly change the subject as well as his tone as he addressed Teddy about how glad he was to have his first-born son back and how happy he was with the marriage and blesses them. Ruth discloses about her past when she used to work as a “photographic model for the body” prior to marrying Teddy (Pinter 57). Lenny tries to engage Teddy in some sort of philosophical speculation but Teddy acts dismissively. He suggests that it’s time to return to America as the children must be missing their parents and Ruth must probably be helping with packing their stuffs. Ruth shows little interest in Teddy’s words to return back. Teddy goes upstairs to do the packing himself, asking Ruth to get some rest meanwhile. Lenny and Ruth engage in some more trivial discussion about clothes, with implicit sexual undertones pervading throughout. Teddy returns after sometime with the cases and hands over a coat to Ruth, ready to depart. Lenny puts a slow jazz on the radiogram and proposes for one last dance to Ruth which she readily obliges. They dances slowly and both indulges in a passionate farewell kiss. Joey enters, delighted to see Ruth with Lenny and calls her a tart. He grabs her and soon both starts caressing each other sexually in the sofa with Ruth beneath Joey, him embracing and kissing her, occasionally looking up to the other men around, including Teddy. Max declared how proud he is of Teddy, for marrying such a lovely woman and making her so happy. He indeed remarks that she’s socially beneath them but he doesn’t seem to mind it because he is a broadminded man. Ruth, unbothered with everything that was going on, asked for some food and drink, whisky perhaps “in a tumbler” rather than a glass (Pinter 61). She inquires to Teddy if his family have read his critical works to which he replied that they “wouldn’t understand” it, perhaps “wouldn’t have the faintest idea of they are about ... wouldn’t appreciate the point of reference ...” (Pinter 61). He further comments that it is not about intelligence that they won’t understand his works but rather it’s a matter of maintaining intellectual equilibrium, to observe and understand an object rather than being an object.

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The following scene takes place in the evening with Teddy sitting in the hall, dejectedly, with his suitcases beside him. Sam tries to strike up a conversation with Teddy reminding him of MacGregor and how Teddy was always his favourite nephew and his mother's favourite son. Lenny enters accusing Teddy of stealing his cheese-rolls that he prepared with utmost care and perseverance, to which Teddy readily admits. Teddy refuses to apologise and confesses that he deliberately did it because he was hungry. The irony here lies in the fact that stealing a cheese-roll has been discussed as a grave mistake over stealing a wife and having sexual liaisons with her. Joey joins them after spending two hours upstairs with Ruth, without getting "all the way" (Pinter 66). Max inquires about Ruth and proposes that it might be good to have Ruth stay with them. Teddy suggests she should go back to her children in America. However, they pay no heed to Teddy's suggestion and goes on to discuss ways of supporting Ruth in the house, financially. Lenny comes up with the idea of Ruth working as a whore so that she can fulfil her necessities and even contribute to the family's expenses, which Max and Joey immediately approved of. Ruth descends downstairs to join the men and Teddy explains to her of his family's plan, constantly suggesting that she should come back with him. She dismisses Teddy and approves to stay back but she had certain specific demands, like, a flat with three rooms, constituting a rest-room, a dressing-room and a bedroom, and an extra bathroom, along with a personal maid, a wardrobe, etc. She demands to sign a legal contract with proper witnesses. Sam discloses MacGregor's affair with Jessie long back and collapses. Nobody helps him and Teddy was upset because he was expecting Sam to drive him to the airport. Nonetheless, he leaves to find himself a cab, leaving Ruth behind to sort out her new life in London. Ruth ascends Max's chair, symbolically usurping him of his authority in the house. Joey sits on the floor with his head in her lap, Max crawls towards her asking for a kiss, and Lenny stands sullenly as the play ends.

SAQ:

Discuss the inherent power structure in the play, *The Homecoming*? (About 500 words)

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2.4. Themes of the Play

The play, *The Homecoming*, though categorised under the genre of absurd drama, does deal with certain crucial issues of the modern society. On a superficial level, the play seems to lack any rational explanation or plot structure or logical dialogues, but on a deeper level it reflects of many socially relevant concerns such as desires, companionship, familial bonding, isolation, liberation, agency, power, and many more. Let us discuss some of the significant themes in details:

The role of women:

In the play, *The Homecoming*, we encounter a duality in the portrayal of women in the play. The two women- Ruth and Jessie shares certain common characteristics, such as, both were married and were mother to three children who performed their motherly duties well and at the same time were engaged in sexual liaison with other men. The play can be seen as a critique of the stereotypical conventional roles assigned to women by the society. The character of Ruth can be seen as that of a seductress, craving some kind of sexual liberation as she desires to break free from the bondage of matrimony. She readily complies to become a prostitute over remaining a mother and a wife. Jessie was a matriarchal figure who is dead long back and left an all-male chaotic household behind. On several instances, we can see Max praising Jessie of how good a mother she had been to their sons, though abusing her at regular intervals or addressing her derogatorily as slut and bitch. This attitude of Max towards Jessie is symbolic of society's approval of women to fit particularly into two categories- a dutiful mother and a wife who faithfully serves the family, or a prostitute who is often seen as an outcast and who is known only for their sexual liaisons with men. Towards the end of the play, Ruth can be seen assuming the role of Jessie to fulfil the absence of a woman, as she decides to stay back with her in-laws, abandoning her husband and their three children.

Masculinity:

The theme of masculinity pervades the play throughout. All the male characters in the play are engulfed in their own ways to showcase their prowess and authority in every way possible. Specifically in the household as portrayed in *The Homecoming*, masculinity reigns like a toxic disease that pervades the entire house, in all the actions and words, and thoughts and values as showcased by the characters. All the men, except Teddy, feel the need to assert their authority and dominance over the other and are in a constant state of power struggle in the play. They criticize, manipulate, abuse, threaten, and bully one another constantly in an attempt to assert their authority at all cost. They try to assert their masculinity through their profession as Max takes great pride in being a butcher and working with his chopper and the slab. He constantly bullies Sam for his profession of a driver, which is less-demanding and not very manly, and even mocks him for not fighting in the war. Lenny's assuming the role of a pimp towards the end of the play can be interpreted in stark contrast to his continuous narrations of violence and dominance that he narrated to Ruth, particularly to intimidate her. Joey, though training to become a boxer is often seen as fragile and effeminate who craved the motherly side of Ruth more than the sexual one. The closing scene where he sits on the floor with his head on Ruth's lap highlights the softer, delicate side of Joey over his alpha-male status quo. Teddy is an exception to the other male characters in the play. He is more inclined to the intellectual realm of being over bodily exhibition. Being a professor of philosophy he believes more in a calculated reasoning of things over emotions and human attachments and bonding.

Silence:

Silence is one of the major themes in many of Pinter's works. One main characteristics of Pinter's writing includes the "Pinter Pause" and the "Pinter Silence" which we will discuss in the next unit. This pause and silence can either be complete lack of verbal uttering or the hesitancy to speak. Teddy is probably the most silent character in the play. His character is in stark contrast to the other men in the play who are constantly engaged in a power struggles to prove their dominance and authority over the others. Teddy's silence can be interpreted as bouts of hesitancy whenever he is unsure of the situation or about his opinions regarding it.

The play is replete with pauses even in between lengthy monologues uttered by characters like Max and Lenny. This creates a fragmentary picture of the incidents they narrate, thus posing a question to the reliability of the events.

Power and Dominance:

Another dominant theme of the play, *The Homecoming*, is power and dominance. The power dynamics is prevalent all throughout the play, in every act and scenes. The desire to assert one’s authority, be it sexually, or verbally, or through actions, shapes the characters as well as the structure of the narrative as all indulges to prove their power and prowess to the best of their capacity in the play. There is a constant competition going on between the characters as they tries to mock and bully the other to prove themselves better and more capable. This power is not conventionally limited to the male characters. The final scene where Ruth ascends Max’s chair is symbolic of her attaining the power and authority over the household that previously rested with Max, thus usurping him.

SAQ:

Discuss the relevance of silence in the play, *The Homecoming*? (About 300 words)

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Give a critical analysis of the character of Ruth from your reading of the play, *The Homecoming*? (About 450 words)

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2.5. Summing Up

The play, *The Homecoming*, continues to be one of the masterpieces of modern drama and the most significant absurd drama in Pinter’s canon. Various productions and newer adaptations of the play have been made all around the globe. Often regarded as a “modern classic”, the play, *The Homecoming*, can often be seen to address questions on the character of Ruth, as whether she is a victim or a vanquisher of toxic masculinity. The

play is now acclaimed as one of the best theatrical compositions of Harold Pinter. However, it did not receive equal admiration at the time of its first production in England at London's Aldwych Theatre, on June 3, 1965. Many critics and literary scholars observed the storyline as well as the plot composition as extremely baffling and enigmatic.

2.6. References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 3 : Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*

Space for Learner

(Supplementary Unit)

Unit Structure:

- 3.1. Objectives
- 3.2. Introduction
- 3.3. Harold Pinter and his literary contribution
- 3.4. Harold Pinter and the Theatre of the Absurd
- 3.5. Some basic characteristic features of Pinter's plays
- 3.6. A few significant plays by Harold Pinter— An Overview
- 3.7. Summing Up
- 3.8. References and Suggested Readings

3.1. Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to-

- *learn* the style and structure of Harold Pinter's plays.
- *learn* about the Theatre of the Absurd
- *analyze* Pinter's literary works in context of the social setting of that time period.
- *understand* the basic features of his plays.

3.2. Introduction

Harold Pinter was one of the major twentieth century dramatists known for his unique style and powerful plays that dealt with many thought-provoking social issues as well as individual human experiences, revolving around themes like power, control and oppression. Pinter's plays are usually absurd and dark and are widely regarded as some of the most influential and compelling plays of his time. Pinter began writing for the stage towards the second half of the twentieth century with his first play, *The Room*, both published and produced in the year, 1957. The play is significant in introducing Pinter as an prominent playwright in the theatrical world, marking the beginning of his illustrious career as a dramatist. This

was followed by many influential works like *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, and many more. Pinter wrote about twenty-nine plays along with numerous screenplays, poems and essays. In 2012, the formerly known Royal Comedy Theatre in London, a theatre he was long associated with, was renamed as the Harold Pinter Theatre in his honour.

Harold Pinter is closely associated with the Theatre of the Absurd movement. He was greatly influenced by the literary works of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett. He follows both Kafka and Beckett in portraying the absurdity of human existence and individual experiences. However, though he is often closely associated with the absurd drama, he is also sometimes related with the generation of Angry Young Men, a group of British Playwrights who emerged in the 1950s. His early dramas, with their dingy atmosphere and mostly working-class settings, combined with the frustration and angst against the society often linked Pinter with this group.

3.3. Harold Pinter and his literary contributions

Harold Pinter was one of the most distinguished modern British dramatists of his time. His plays often explored the absurdity and the anxiety of human life, his characters uneasy and complex, and their dialogues often abrupt and brusque. He is mostly celebrated for his explicit exertion of the dramatic pause as well as silences at times, to convey the characters angst and dread, usually layered beneath simple diction and ordinary speeches.

Harold Pinter wrote his first play, *The Room*, in 1957. Most of the elements in the play marked the style and features that were common in his later works, mostly the ambiguous and cryptic situations that the characters find themselves in. Next, he published *The Birthday Party* in the year, 1960, a play influenced by the theatre of the absurd. He also wrote *The Caretaker* in the same year, a play that brought him ample critical as well as commercial success. His play, *The Homecoming*, published in 1964, was one of his best theatrical works of all times. His later plays include *Betrayal* (1978), *No Man's Land* (1975), and *Old Times* (1970). Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005.

Pinter was actively involved in the politics of his time as well as remarkably candid in expressing his political concerns. Most of his later plays were influenced by the ongoing political events that took place during the time of its composition. Apart from the plays, he also wrote shorter works and dramatic sketches that reflected his political opinions and overtures, such as *One for the Road* (1984).

Towards the last two decades of the twentieth century, Harold Pinter attempted his hand at poetry again, and also worked as a screenwriter and a director, for his own plays as well as adaptations by other writers. Pinter developed an interest in poetry since a very young age, much before he became a playwright, and continued to write in the genre until the end of his literary life. He published a combined collection of his poetry and prose in the year, 1991, entitled *Collected Poems and Prose*. Just like most of his theatrical works, his poetry too.

3.4. Harold Pinter and the theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd is a theatrical genre inaugurated by the European dramatists in the second half of the twentieth century, around 1950s. The term was coined by theatre critic Martin Esslin in his essay, “The Theatre of the Absurd”, in 1960. According to Esslin, Alfred Jarry’s play, *Ubu Roi* (*Ubu the King*), staged in the year 1896, in Paris, marked the beginning of absurd drama in literature. Esslin in his essay brings in Eugene Ionesco’s definition of the word “absurd” as “that which has not purpose, or goal, or objective.”

The Theatre of the Absurd or the Absurdist drama usually comprises of a round narrative structure that starts and ends in the same way with little physical actions involved. Plays in this genre are seemingly illogical, usually comprising of meaningless blabbering and unexpected projection of emotions at conventionally inappropriate situations. This kind of drama generally deals with the angst and the existential crisis experienced by the characters and as extension every other human being in this world.

Major European dramatists associated with the Theatre of the Absurd includes Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet. Harold Pinter joined the canon of absurdist writers with the publication of his first full-length play, *The Birthday Party*, first performed

on stage in the year 1957. He was deeply influenced by the art movements like surrealism and expressionism. Harold Pinter, in his works, explores the absurdity of the human existence. He attempts to address issues like power, control and dominance in the light of the futility of human existence and the experiences they indulge in. Pinter’s works are usually left open-ended with very little physical movement, and often replete with dark humour and ambiguous subject-matter.

Check Your Progress:

What do you understand by the Theatre of the Absurd? (About 250 words)

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3.5. Some basic characteristic features of Pinter’s plays

Harold Pinter is widely acclaimed as one of the greatest playwrights of his time, usually for his unique use of language, raw and unpolished speeches, pauses as well as overwhelming silences, semantic ambiguity and illogical vocabulary to address and express some of the most relevant and significant issues of the modern society. His mastery and expertise lies in his use of ordinary languages and fewer actions to write the most realistic plays of his time.

Pinter’s genius lies in his use of language, which is largely used to convey the absurdity of human experiences in his plays. The significance of language in his theatrical works usually lies in illogical dialogues and events that frame the narrative structure of the play. His plays are often layered with paradoxes, vagueness, oxymoron, irony and repetitions, combined with long pauses and silences. His use of language was so unique that it is referred to as the ‘Pinteresque style’. It comprises of his colloquial use of speeches and pauses at regular intervals to bridge the communication gap between the characters. One key way to understand Pinter’s use of language is not to rely much on the literal meanings of his words but rather to dive deeper to find the true meaning of the text.

The settings of his plays are simple and usually comprise a large one-one room apartment where his characters interact with one another. Power dynamics, identity crisis, existential angst, sexual liberation, communication gap are some of the basic themes of his works.

Absurdity is one of the basic features of Pinter's works. His plays usually follow a non-linear plot pattern and his characters are often found trapped in complex predicaments. Though his characters talk and even deliver lengthy monologues at time, the words usually lack proper meaning and are devoid of any content. The plots hardly follow a chronological order of events, often leaving the readers or the audiences perplexed with the proceedings.

Another significant characteristic of Pinter's work comprises of the "two silences", namely, the "Pinter Pause" and the "Pinter Silence". The pause is often a kind of hesitation, usually something left unsaid to convey the characters temperaments while the silence is a form of crisis or the utter failure to communicate that, at large, structures the narrative of the play. His plays are often grouped under the sub-genre, called, the Comedy of Menace.

Stop to Consider

The *comedy of menace* refers to a body of plays adapted by David Campton, Nigel Dennis, N. F. Simpson, and Harold Pinter. It can be observed as a jocular version of the comedy of manner plays. It is usually a kind of tragic play with comic elements in it. The narrative is generally structured in such a way that keeps the audience or the readers engaged and amused but also at the same time anticipating some terrible outcome to befall the character, thus keeping the viewers at the brink of terror while evoking subtle laughter amidst the scenes. The term "comedy of menace" was coined by critic Irvin Wardle, borrowed from the subtitle of Campton's play, *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*. Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb-Waiter*, *The Caretaker*, are examples of comedy of menace plays.

Check Your Progress

1. What do you understand by ‘Pinteresque’? (About 150 words)

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2. What are the ‘Two Silences’ in Pinter’s works? Discuss. (About 150 words)

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3.6. A few significant plays by Harold Pinter— An Overview

Harold Pinter wrote about twenty-nine plays along with numerous screenplays, prose-pieces, and poems. His best-known plays include *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Homecoming* (1964) and *Betrayal* (1978). His other influential works includes *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *A Night Out* (1959), *The Lover* (1962), *Tea Party* (1964), *The Basement* (1966), *Silence* (1968), *Old Times* (1970), *No Man’s Land* (1974), *Victoria Station* (1982), *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), etc. his dramatic sketches includes *The Black and White* (1959), *Trouble in the Works* (1959), *The Last to Go* (1959), *That’s Your Trouble* (1959), *Interview* (1959), *Dialogue for Three* (1959), etc. his prose-fictions comprises of “Kullus” (1949), “The Black and White” (1954–55), “The Examination” (1955), “The Coast” (1975), “Problem” (1976), “Lola” (1977), “Voices in the Tunnel” (2001), “The Mirror” (2007), etc.

Given below are an overview and literary analyses of some of Harold Pinter’s plays—

***The Room* (1957)**

The play, *The Room*, marks the beginning of Harold Pinter’s dramatic oeuvre. It was written and first produced in 1957 and is often regarded as the hallmark of Pinter’s composing style that is followed in most of his later plays. It is considered as one of the earliest example of “comedy of menace”, which later becomes one of the most prominent features of

Pinter's works. The play is set in a single room, which can be interpreted as symbolic of warmth and security, and the characters include Bert Hudd, Rose, Mr. Kidd, Mr. Sands, Mrs. Sands, and Riley. The room is symbolic of the comfort space inhabited by Rose Hudd, a sixty-year old woman as she wishes to spend most of her time in the room and avoid the outside that she considers cold and dark and threatening. She was living peacefully until a young couple shows at her door-step, inquiring about a room on rent. Mrs. Sand, whose name is Tod (meaning 'death' in German) and her husband, Mr. Sand, might be symbolic representation of the sands of time or the arrival of new generation as the old generation bids farewell. Another significant character is a blind man who lives in the basement of their apartment. The play ends with Rose going blind herself.

The Birthday Party (1957)

The play, *The Birthday Party*, is the first full-length play by Harold Pinter. It was premiered in London in May, 1958. Irving Wardle and many later critics describe the play, *The Birthday Party*, as a comedy of menace drama. Martin Esslin considered it as a prime example of the Theatre of the Absurd. The play revolves around the protagonist, Stanley Webber, a pianist, who resides in a rundown boarding house, in an English sea-side town, not far from London, owned by Meg and Petey Boles, a couple in their sixties. The main action of the plot comprises of a sudden visit by two strangers with sinister motives, Goldberg and McCann, on Stanley's birthday, and apparently turning it into a nightmare. *The Birthday Party* is a three-act play and it basically deals with themes such as identity crisis, inability to communicate, and absurdity of human existence. It is one of the most widely performed and one of the best theatrical works by Pinter.

The Dumb Waiter (1957)

The play, *The Dumb Waiter*, is a one-act play by Harold Pinter, published in the year, 1957. The play is set in a windowless basement, with a tense, cold, eerie atmosphere, that gradually gets transformed into a sealed container or more symbolically, a coffin. The play revolves around two, hit-men, Ben and Gus, and both in many ways resembles Beckett's tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, from his play, *Waiting for Godot*. The play is often considered a modernist, absurd tragic-comedy, as the two hit-men waits in the basement for their assigned target to kill while bickering about illogical and futile stuffs about human existence.

The Caretaker (1960)

The play, *The Caretaker*, is a three-act drama by Harold Pinter, premiered at the Arts Theatre Club in London's West End on 27 April, 1960. Often regarded as a Theatre of the Absurd drama, the play was one of the most critically as well as commercially successful plays of Pinter. It was staged 444 times in the Duchess Theatre, after a month of being premiered. The play dealt with themes of power, innocence, identity, familial ties and corruption and is often regarded as a tragicomedy. Like most of Pinter's other theatrical works, *The Caretaker* is also usually compared to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for its apparent lack of plot and action. The play centres around two brothers, Mick and Aston, who has a sudden encounter with an old homeless tramp, Davies, whom they hire as a caretaker. Davies remains discontent with what he receives for his work and tries to manipulate Aston. However, Mike gets tired of his constant complaining and discovers his sinister intentions and is forced to leave the brothers.

No Man's Land (1974)

The play, *No Man's Land*, by Harold Pinter was written in 1974. It was published the following year, in 1975 and was premiered at the Old Vic theatre in London by the National Theatre on 23 April 1975. *No Man's Land* is a two-act play and is set in North West London, in a large room on a summer night, until the next morning. The play revolves around four characters, Hirst, Spooner, Foster, and Briggs, all of them named after cricket players. Hirst is a rich, upper-class, alcoholic litterateur, who resided in Hampstead, with his servants, Foster and Briggs. The play opens at a night pub in Hampstead where Hirst encounters Spooner and they soon becomes acquaintances, and Hirst invites Spooner to his house for a drink. Through the course of the scenes, it is revealed that they had previously known each other at the University and had shared mutual acquaintances and relationships in the past. A subtle undercurrent of homosexuality runs through the play on various instances.

Betrayal (1978)

The play, *Betrayal*, was composed by Harold Pinter in 1978. The play was inspired partly by Pinter's own illicit extramarital affair with Joan Bakewell, a BBC television presenter, spanning over seven years, from 1962 to 1969. The structure of the play is in reverse chronology, with the

plot revolving around seven-years of clandestine affair between Emma and Jerry, both married and having a family each of their own. Jerry is a close friend to Robert, Emma’s husband, and he is himself married to a woman, named Judith. However, Robert discovers their affair after five years, but still continues to be friend with Jerry. It was Emma herself who have disclosed about her deception and infidelity to her husband, but nonetheless continues with the affair. The play is set in London and Venice, which spans nine years, from 1968 to 1977, in reverse chronology.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Reverse chronology:

Reverse chronology is a narrative structure in which the plot is narrated in reverse order. In this kind of narration, the conclusion is usually the beginning of the story while the plot ends with where the story actually began.

Check Your Progress

How can we associate Harold Pinter with the Theatre of the Absurd? Discuss with reference to his given plays. (About 500 words)

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3.7. Summing Up

Harold Pinter is considered one of the most influential dramatists of the twentieth century and his literary legacy continues to the present day. His plays are widely staged around the globe as well as have been adapted for many cinematic productions. His literary works are widely studied by critics and literary scholars from various academic fields. His style of composition is widely acclaimed for their unique form and narrative structure, with short ordinary speeches and intimidating silences, eccentric characters, and plain and simple plots. He was well-known for his outspoken nature and the provocative remarks he made, be it about literature, politics, or the society as a whole. Harold Pinter’s literary works as well as his social activism are celebrated and are influential even today.

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Unit 4 : Edward Bond: *Lear* (Introduction and Stage History)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Date and Source
- 4.4 *Lear* in comparison with King Lear
- 4.5 Situating *Lear* in Theatrical History
- 4.6 Critical Reception of the Play
- 4.7 Summing Up
- 4.8 Reference and Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- *understand* the age in which Bond writes *Lear*
- *understand* the early critical reception of the play
- *explain* the historical circumstances when the play was written and staged.
- *relate* the stage history of Edward Bond's play *Lear* with other important works of that period

4.2 Introduction

Bond's contribution to the theatrical world starts with one of his most controversial plays, *Saved*, in 1965. Bond shows in the play a murder of a child by a group of people. This truthful and disturbing staging of the scene instantly brings Bond to focus. He is known for the use of disturbing images in the stage and the plays that followed *Saved* prove this tag. Edward Bond's *Lear* is one of the most celebrated plays of twentieth century. The play represents Bond's stark vision of the politics of society and his interpretation of social order in a technologically driven society

where institutions have become more powerful. For Bond, the society that has emerged in the present age, institutes a short of order that makes humans aggressive. This aggression he shows in his plays through the representation of violence. In an interview with Giles Gordon, when asked about the representation of violence in his play *Saved*, Bond states that:

The whole point about the violence in the play is that it was, or, at least I tried to place it, in a context. So, it wasn't the act of violence that was important but the context it was put into, the consequences that came from this violence and the sort of society which the violence indicated. (Bond 9)

In Bond's plays, hence, the use of violence has a certain aim. It is used as a dramatic tool to contribute in the vision of the writer. While the text of *Lear* comes with an "author's preface" in which Edward Bond has tried to give a sense of what philosophical ideas that he will be dealing with in the play, it can be very confusing and at times seem very abstract to apply into the play itself. Jenny S. Spencer writes in this regard that "the abstract, philosophical arguments of his polemical essays can as easily confuse and confound a reader as provide illumination" (Introduction 3). The plays of Bond hence need a very careful interpretation to describe his ideas. This unit will help you to place Edward Bond's play in the literary scenario of late twentieth century English drama. It will set your curiosities in motion regarding the play and also ready you for the understanding and interpretation as we deal with the text in the following units.

4.3 Date and Source:

There is no questioning the fact that Edward Bond's first source for the play is William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear*. However, there is a subtle difference between a different production and a complete reimagining of the text. Bond was aware of his time and its socio-cultural situation which demanded a completely different approach to the text. Hence, although the play and its history has been long dominating the English theatrical scenario, Bond with his unique approach is able to present it differently. *Lear* was first staged at the Royal Court Theatre by English Stage Company on 29th of September, 1971. The character of Lear was played by Harry Andrews.

4.4 *Lear* in comparison with *King Lear*

Space for Learner

In his book, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Jan Kott talks about the grotesque in the modern theatre. Citing the situation of Gloucester's decision to suicide, Kott claims that what makes the situation tragic is its *a priori* conclusion that the gods exist and there is a certain calculation of deeds in the category of good and bad which will be the ultimate judgement of the individual. However, if god does not exist then the meaning of the action will be futile. The situation will be grotesque. Hence, the result of the action will be same as that of Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, where there waiting and action is meaningless unless Godot comes (Kott 149-150). Kott also states in a way that grotesque nature of modernity is similar with the tragic situation. In a way, he is trying to establish Shakespeare and justify his works in the modern stage. Inspired by this interpretation of *King Lear*, Peter Brook's production of the play in 1962 shows a different approach to this Shakespearean classic. Critic Jenny Spencer writes that "Brook's production reclaimed Shakespeare's text for a post-Holocaust age by highlighting (often grotesquely) its bleakest, most Beckettian aspects" (*Dramatic Strategies* 80). This, it seems, opens the gate for Bond's reinterpretation of the play. In contrast to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, you will find that Bond's *Lear*, although pessimistic, prevents the audience to accept the view that the actions in the play were inevitable or a situation as unalterable. Although Bond's *Lear* is tragic but it avoids from the notions of divine justice as well as the absurdity of human condition in a godless society. Instead, Bond's play offers a third solution by taking up responsibility, even in the face of defeat.

Jenny Spencer writes that Bonds adaptation of Shakespeare's play works at two different levels, first is the restoration of the text to function in current society by rereading it, and second is the offering of a new narrative that sticks to the contemporary relevance (*Dramatic Strategies* 81). This is why you will find that the violence that was verbal in Shakespeare, has now found a tangible reproduction in Bond's stage. Spencer writes that:

What separates Bond from Shakespeare on the question of the representation of violence is this constant move from metaphoric to

the literal, from the verbal gesture to the concrete action, from symbolic to physical reality – a movement central to the materialistic poetic of Bond's plays as well as to their didactic function. (*Dramatic Strategies* 83).

The reason behind creating a play that appealed more to the audience's intellect rather than demanding their sympathy is Edward Bond's ingenious vision. If you follow his life, you will find that Bond is a socialist thinker who advocates action rather than a passive endurance. Shakespeare's Lear is a character whose persona is balanced by endurance and it demands an empathetic audience who will acknowledge the suffering without questioning the root of what could have been done to set things right. The violence in Shakespeare's play is justified to some extent rather than questioned. In a programme, Bond states that:

Our own culture is based on the idea that people are naturally violent. It is used to justify the violence and authoritarianism that saturate our state, although in fact it is the state that provokes violence and authoritarianism. [...] But the social moral of Shakespeare's Lear is this: endure till in time the world will be made right. That's a dangerous moral for us. We have less time than Shakespeare. (qtd. in Hern xxvi)

In Shakespeare you will find a progression of self-knowledge and finally a reconciliation with the circumstances. It is by distancing himself that Lear discovers how power is unfair to the poor and less influential. Shakespeare's Lear is ennobled by his suffering and the traditional productions reiterate this fact over and over again. Lear's development throughout the play is short of a pilgrimage which purifies him by making him a humane figure. His ultimate redemption is in the knowledge that the things that he cared about are not worthwhile and thus he emerged as a sane person. However, for Bond, such abdication from duty and passive approach of a figure like Lear is unacceptable. In another interview, Bond insists that:

I very much object to the worshipping of that play by the academic theatre ... because it is a totally dishonest experience ... He's a Renaissance figure and he does not impinge on our society as much

as he should. So that I would like to rewrite the play to try and make it more relevant. (qtd. in Smith 68-69)

The cathartic figure of Shakespeare's Lear, producing a sense of pity and fear in the audience is rejected by Bond. In Bond's play, pity is not just an emotion to enjoy, it has a political purpose. As you will see, in Bond's play, it is the pity that is symbolic of Lear's change in perception and it finally leads to his action. Hence, he decides to demolish the wall and dies in his effort. In Bond, the suffering without action is a sin and a sign of moral degeneration.

You will also see that another major distinction between the two plays is their approach on responsibility. Patriacia Hern explains that it is Bond's understanding that Shakespeare was able to transfer the political problem into a conflict of personal problem; so, when the punishment is served to the individuals who are presented as offenders, the sense of justice and order appears. However, the system that produced the conflict in the first place survives and remains undefeated (Hern xxviii). This for Bond is a major issue with the production of *King Lear*, that he sees as something that his age cannot afford. This is because he reminds time and again that Shakespeare may had time, but our generation does not. Living in the fear of total destruction through major nuclear war, once can only assume the fear of Bond.

Bond has tried to prove that his Lear is very contemporary and he is someone who is willing to take action. Among other things, Bond really believes that morality is always political. A choice is something that is not personal, rather it has far reached repercussions in the society. Hence, it is better to keep in mind while reading Bond plays that the actions of his characters are very important to get an overall understanding of the play. In this regard, Bond writes that:

My Lear makes a gesture in which he accepts responsibility for his life and commits himself to action . . . My Lear's gesture mustn't be seen as final. That would make the play a part of the theatre of the absurd and that, like perverted science, is a reflection of no-culture. The human condition isn't absurd. Lear is very old and has to die anyway. He makes his gesture only to those who are learning how to live. (Hay 54)

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As you can see, Lear’s choice was not a futile decision of a dying man, rather it was a message that even after losing everything and immense suffering, our actions will decide our responsibilities.

Check Your Progress:

Write a short note on the character of Lear in Edward Bond’s *Lear*.
(in 100 words)

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4.5 Situating *Lear* in Theatrical History:

The timing of Edward Bond’s *Lear* is important in order to understand its context. The English Theatre from the 1950s onwards had witnessed many experiments in the stage. In fact, from early forties we see the development of the experimental theatre like Epic Theatre. In the 1950s we saw the development of a complex theatre that was later called “theatre of the absurd” by Martin Esslin. Also, the most influential and relevant theatre of the period came out to be known as “kitchen-sink-drama”. John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* became the representative of this category. So, there were experiments happening at a rapid speed with the stage and new perspectives were welcomed by the theatre goers. The concept of Experimental Theatre was already in the influence at that time. The reality of class consciousness and the influence of socialist thoughts were already present among the masses. Soviet Union and United States emerged after the Second World War as the representatives of two ideologies and the aftermath of war slowly gave way to the aftershocks of Cold War between these two superpowers.

Stop to Consider:

Experimental Theatre is an umbrella term applied to the different kind of theatre that emerged in the influence of Modernity. The idea of what Ezra Pound called “make it new” can be seen as an influence on these new experiments. Two of the prominent writers and their experimental theatres are: Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre and Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty. Other important writers of this ‘avant-

garde' theatre are Konstantin Stanislavski, Gordon Craig, W.B. Yeats, Peter Brook etc. During this period, the dramatists were also inspired by the theatre of the east, that is, Oriental Theatre.

Kitchen-Sink Drama is a term used to refer to the plays in which English working-class life is depicted in a realistic way. The dramatists (in the 1950s) who wrote these social realistic plays are referred as “angry young man”. The examples include John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney, Arnold Wesker etc. You can study *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* by J.A. Cuddon for more insights.

Talking about the plays of Edward Bond and his aesthetics, critic Richard Scharine comments that the time in which Bond's first play *Saved* was performed is important to get an overview of the critical reactions that his works have garnered. The theatre saw a highly vocal criticism of class system in Osborne, stimulating support of socialism in Wesker, and in Harold Pinter it experienced the absurd (Scharine 24). Thus, in Bond, we see a very different form of realism as well as naturalism that deal with the intellectual rather than the emotional. Scharine writes that “Where naturalism supplies us with a detailed background so that we may better understand the motivations of a character, Bond's plays provide a clinically observed set of characters so that we may better understand the motivations of a society” (25).

In his preface to *Lear*, Bond writes that “people who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence” (*Lear* vii). You will find that Bond is concerned with the technological advancement of the age and the destructive powers of H-bombs that still pose a threat to the future of humanity. The time that Bond was writing freshly witnessed the events such as Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. So, the threat of a catastrophic event was always lurking behind and as a concerned dramatist, Bond could not ignore the violence that men have inflicted upon men. He writes that “when the philosophy of capitalism is combined with technological agility the final result isn't culture at all but barbarism” (Hay 51). This is the reason that he rejects the Capitalistic social thinking and advocates for the natural instinctive goodness that human beings have. He agrees that only aggression

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makes people violent, just like other animals and for him the morality that is taught in the society provokes aggression. Hence, his works come at a crucial juncture of history where the right kind of philosophy is important for the social order and peace

Check Your Progress:

Write a brief history of post-war English Theatre with special focus on different trends that emerged at that time. (200 words)

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4.6 Critical Reception of the Play:

Plays like Bond’s *Lear* are very difficult, if not cryptic, to understand for the new readers and it was no different for the first viewers of the play as well. The play was even difficult for the earlier critics to post an immediate comment whether with an intended polemic or a lucrative praise. Also, the critics were hesitant to construe any impression because most of them were wrong about Bond’s earlier play, *Saved*, where the presentation of violence had baffled them. Hence, Gregory Dark, an assistant director under Gaskill, writes that:

We searched for a few intelligent remarks for our front-of-house quoteboards, but these were not all that forthcoming. On the whole, we felt that the critics were scared of giving an outright condemnation ... but obviously did not like the play, so they chose a middle road which satisfied nobody, and really meant nothing. (qtd. in Scharine 184)

The critical opinions regarding the play are diverse and often contradictory. While some critics praised the play outright, others were more reserved in their opinion. Critic Kenneth Herren of *The Spectator* compared it with Shakespeare’s play and called it an achievement, while Benedict Nightingale and Charles Marowitz, from *New Statesman* and *The New York Times* respectively, downplayed the play stating inaccurate psychology and its political naivety (Scharine 184). Sheridan Morley, a

writer and theatre goer, after watching the play in November of 1971, writes:

Mr. Bond's play provides quirky variations on a theme by Shakespeare and the result is at once more violent and less powerful, reduced in ultimate effect. Lear's madness is no longer the root of the play's imagery, and his majesty is gone; in its place there's an infinitely tidy, resounding cold piece of theatre – an empty, sexy, carnivorous play which is undoubtedly the best thing Mr. Bond has yet done but which leaves one (despite a superbly theatrical ending), expecting and needing something more. ... his play is a political and a social tragedy, owing as much perhaps to *Mother Courage* as to the Shakespearian original and finally more heartless than either of them. (90-91)

You can see that the mixed reactions such as the above are not rare to the play. Bond's play can disturb a regular theatre attendant and their attention may always rest on the violence presented in the play. However, the audience in Europe were by then familiar with the unfamiliar that one may see in the stage since they had already recovered from the shocks of absurd dramatists. To follow more on this, you can go to the internet and search Theatre Reviews of that period from various news articles from the internet's archive.

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Check Your Progress:

- Briefly compare Shakespeare's *King Lear* with Bond's *Lear*.

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- Write a short note on critical reception of Edward Bond's play *Lear*.

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4.7 Summing Up

In this unit you are introduced to Edward Bond's *Lear* from the historical perspective. The historical background in which the play arrives is briefly described here. You have learned the vision of Bond regarding the play. With a comparison between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Edward Bond's *Lear*, this unit explains in what ways the two plays differ. Also, Bond's insistence on violence in stage is briefly discussed in this unit and you will learn more about it in the following units. We also learnt how the critics received the play in its early productions. Although Shakespeare and Bond are distanced by many centuries, we discussed how both have approached the characters in representing themes of violence and responsibility.

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Unit 5 : Edward Bond: *Lear* (Reading the Play)

Unit Structure:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Act-wise Summary and Analysis of the Play
- 5.4 Summing Up
- 5.5 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, the readers will be able to:

- *understand* what happens in the play.
- *understand* critically the text and context of the play.
- *comprehend* the nature of Bond's drama
- *explain* Bond's perspective on power and its influence

5.2 Introduction

Lear by Edward Bond is a compelling piece on the nature of mankind and their ability to thrust hatred and violence upon one another. The play is an experiment on the working of power, politics and society. Rooted in the theme of madness and corrupting nature of authority, readers will find that a simple reading of the play is not enough to understand its various dimensions. *Lear* is a journey of a King from existing in the state of paranoid to emerging as the sane old man who, at the end, sees his own foolishness. You will find that the character of Lear goes through phases of madness and at the end, he is consumed by his own sanity. Lear gets killed while trying to undo what he tried to establish at the beginning of the play. You will find that the play is innately driven by the idea of violence. There are images of violent acts that are vehemently depicted and this violence is driven by the moral consensus to uphold power. While reading the play, you should keep in mind that Bond's efforts lie in creating a play that questions the very morality on which the society functions. In the preface of his book, Bond makes a statement on how morality came to be formed

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as our kind of society developed and men learned to harness their instincts. This, according to Bond, becomes an aggression towards self and can only be escaped by one's either becoming suicidal or going mad (Preface Lxi). While reading the play, you should also bear in mind that Bond is writing in a post-war environment and in a world where the chaos has not settled yet. The fears of another war in the backdrop of Cold War between USA and Soviet Union were always lurking then. So, you may relate the use of violence with the aftermaths of war through which Bond has lived. The purpose of the theatre is to appeal to the senses and in case of Bond's plays, as you will see in the following units, the experience directly appeals to reason. Hence, I suggest that you should imagine that you are reading a play by a person who has experienced the destruction of war as well as abuse of power in the wrong hands. So, try to imagine the depiction of the play in your mind as you read.

Stop to Consider

As you become familiar with Edward Bond's idea of capitalist and technologically driven social morality, think how social morality controls our society and our choices.

5.3 Act-wise Summary and Analysis of the Play

ACT I

(A) What happens in Act 1: In the opening scene of the Act 1, we witness a site where a wall is being built by the workers. Two of the workers and a foreman come carrying a dead man. The dead man is another worker. As the foreman and workers cover the body with a tarpaulin, Lear enters with Warrington, his two daughters- Bodice and Fontanelle, an old councilor and an engineer. Lear seems unhappy with the work progress and demands quickening of the matters. He sees the dead man and he is unhappy with the loss of life because it will delay the building of the wall in the estimated time. Lear states that "it's a flogging crime to delay work" (Bond *Lear* 2). He demands a drumhead court-martial of the worker (referred as Third Worker in the dramatic text) whose axe fell on the victim resulting in his immediate death. In the meantime, we get the notion that the wall's construction is opposed by some of the local farmers of the land. After lecturing on the wall's history and intention behind its

making (which is: to keep Lear's enemies, Cornwall and North, at bay), Lear orders a death sentence to the worker by having him shot. We witness that Lear's daughters disapprove of the decision and they reveal that Bodice is going to marry Duke of North as well as Fontanelle is marrying Duke of Cornwall. Since the two sides will no longer be against each other after the marriage, they demand that the worker should be spared. Lear is angry with this new revelation and shoots the worker himself while his daughters declare aloud that their father was ill and he shouldn't have come out. Lear accuses his daughters of plotting against him and angrily leaves the stage with others. The first act ends with Bodice and Fontanelle discussing attack on Lear with their husbands' help.

In the scene two, we are taken to the battleground where Lear prepares for the fight with the army of Duke of North and Cornwall. We are told that Lear's daughters have already joined the dukes. Warrington suggests Lear to surrender himself to his daughters and negotiate a deal but Lear denies the proposal. Warrington also reveals that both of Lear's daughters have written to him separately to betray Lear and each sister wants to betray the other. If he does as suggested, he'll be made head of the army and gets to share their bed. The scene ends with trumpets bellowing as all go out.

In the third scene, we see the Daughters' War Council. The daughters of Lear plot against their father and against each other. The use of the dramatic device "aside" reveals the deceiving nature of each daughter. They are unsatisfied with their husbands in every aspect and plan to murder them in the battlefield. They also plot against each other. The scene ends with both the couple going to bed as the daughters ironically bid good night to each other.

In the scene four, we see that the army of the sisters were victorious and Lear has managed to flee. The scene discloses that both the sisters have failed to execute their plans on the battlefield. They have caught Warrington and Fontanelle orders to cut his throat before he reveals anything to anyone. The sisters torture a bound and hurt Warrington with the help of a soldier. Bodice pokes her knitting needles in the ears of Warrington making him deaf. They order the soldier to let Warrington be free as they perceive that now he is good for nothing. The scene ends with the soldier getting out with Warrington.

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In the fifth scene, we see Lear and his councillor wandering in the woods. The councillor suggests that Lear should surrender to his daughters. The scene also shows Warrington as a wandering man, now wounded and in tattered condition. Lear meets with the grave digger's boy who offers him the bread that he had come to provide Warrington and leads Lear to his shelter nearby. The boy tells Lear that his councillor has betrayed him and left for the town on a horse.

In the sixth scene, the audience find that Lear is fed in the house of the grave digger's son. He has a pregnant wife and offers Lear to sleep in his hut. The audience can see Lear talking to himself. The boy has for himself some land and a well. His wife keeps pigs and the boy tells her that Lear could stay there and help her look after the pigs. The wife shows discontent and is reluctant to trust a complete stranger. The audience can observe that the wife is more cautious than her husband. When Lear is asleep, Warrington comes and attacks him. Lear's arm is cut and he believes he has seen a ghost. The wife and the boy lead Lear inside as Warrington hides in the well.

In the seventh scene, audience see the house of the boy. A carpenter arrives from the village who is in love with the boy's wife. The carpenter leaves a cradle and goes again to fetch his tools. Meanwhile, Lear is asked to leave by the boy's wife. Her name is Cordelia. While arguing, a sergeant and three soldiers arrive looking for Lear. The boy discovers Warrington in the well, almost dead, and when he comes out, he discovers the soldiers. They murder the boy, rape Cordelia as well as slaughter their pigs. They throw the body of the boy in the well along with Warrington's body. While one soldier leads Lear outside, the Carpenter arrives and kills the soldier who was outside. The scene ends with three rifle shots as the carpenter enters the house in search of Cordelia.

(B) Analysis:

There is no doubt that the students of literature are familiar with the character of King Lear firstly through the famous eponymous play by William Shakespeare. We are so familiar with the character of Shakespeare's King Lear that it is almost hard to reimagine Lear in a different society, different time and most importantly, in a different political atmosphere. However, Bond has exactly tried to do that. Writing in a society that has just recovered from the unfathomable horrors of two world

wars, Edward Bond has created a play that not only addresses the misuse of power but in doing so also reveals how power itself is a corrupting influence. Deviating from Shakespeare's romantic and idealistic vision that mostly focused on the character development, you will discover in Bond a more brutal and bleak vision. In the Act I of the play, you find that the struggle of power capture has influenced all the relations and corrupted their purity. While the daughters want to take control of the kingdom even at the cost of their father, Lear seems to be adamant on securing his borders so that he can protect the very establishments that he has claimed winning from others. This Lear we see in the act one is a person without pity and immovable by his blinding sense of power. The corrupting nature of power can be easily perceived from the fact that the sisters, Bodice and Fontanelle, are ready to kill each other to gain it. As one can easily see that the values of the family has plummeted to the depths of mistrust and deceit. In the following lines, Bodice discloses her impressions on her sister as Fontanelle orders Warrington's tongue to be cut before he reveals anything: "(aside). I see my sister thinks like me, I must never trust her" (Bond *Lear* 12). This moral degeneration of relationships is what Bond points at when he talks about aggressive nature of human beings. In the author's preface, Bond answers a question that is most relevant to his time and still resonates in our time as we witness the inhuman aggression of humans towards their own. Bond asks, "then why do we behave worse to one another than other animals?" (Bond 'Preface'Lviii). For him, the immediate explanation is that:

We live in ways for which we are not designed and so our daily existence interferes with our natural functioning, and this activates our natural response to threat: aggression. (Bond 'Preface'Lviii)

Bond here exerts a very important issue that the acts of aggression are result of our distinguished form of living. He believes that human beings have evolved in a certain way and their biological needs of living are different from what the society perpetuates. He states that people are not designed to become the slave of production economy where the ultimate goal is to make profit. Thus, Bond is in opposition with this sort of life where people are blinded by their morality which was there at the first place to justify the violence of men against themselves. This, perhaps, is the reason why Bond in his preface calls the first act as "a world dominated by myth" (Lxvi).

The Act 1, hence, introduces us to the power politics of Lear as a king and establishes the influence of his daughters. The two daughters in this play, much like that of Shakespeare's, are also cunning and decides for themselves. Although, we get the sense that it is not without their father's rigidity on certain decisions that they are forced to do so and this was shown in the play when Lear shoots the worker in the very first scene. However, we see that the two daughters also act in the similar manner once they win the war and establish command. Their brutality is also similar and a bit more sadistic as we see when they torture Warrington. Thus, the Act 1 sets a bleak vision of power and shows what Bond is dealing with thematically. In the following two acts we are to see how Lear's character evolves and with him changes the perception of reality.

Check Your Progress:

How do you think the Act 1 describes the influence of Power?
(Describe within 100 words)

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Stop to Consider:

What are the characteristics that you think differentiate Bond's Lear from Shakespeare's King Lear? Do you think Bond has changed the characters in terms of their nature when compared to Shakespeare's play *King Lear*? Consider the abuse of power in Act 1 from the ethical point of view.

ACT II

(A) What happens in Act 2

The first scene of the second act of the play takes place in a courtroom. We see that captured Lear is up for trial. The judge who was at some point appointed by Lear himself is there to conduct the orders as provide by Bodice and Fontanelle. The whole process puts into question the system of justice. Lear refuses to recognise his daughters. The audience can witness that Lear is talking of things not relevant to the trial and his dialogues are enough to call him eccentric. When Bodice offers him a mirror to identify himself, Lear sees an animal in the mirror who is caged

and writhing in pain trying to get out. Lear describes that it has broken wings and tears run down its face. Lear is quickly taken to his prison cell. After the court is adjourned, we learn that there is agitation caused by the rebel forces of Cordelia and it seems that the forces of Bodice and Fontanelle are losing.

In the second scene, the apparition of Grave Digger's boy, who was killed in the last scene of the first act, appears before Lear. The Ghost fetches the ghost of Lear's daughters. The audience see the ghosts of Bodice and Fontanelles as young girls. Lear talks with them and they put their heads on his knees as he strokes their hair. When he requests them to stay, the ghosts of the daughters leave suggesting urgent duties. The ghost of the boy, however, stays with Lear. Lear states "Cry while I sleep, and I'll cry and watch you while you sleep. We'll take turns. The sound of the human voice will comfort us." (*Lear* 42).

In the third scene, we are shown the rebel forces in the field. A rebel soldier is wounded and a soldier from Bodice and Fontanelle's army is captured by the rebels. Cordelia is among the soldiers and she orders to kill the captured soldier as she thinks he cannot hate enough to join their forces. The scene ends with the rebels marching as the wounded rebel soldier is left alone.

In the fourth scene, we see Bodice and Fontanelle in their headquarters. Bodice has captured the North and Cornwall who tried to desert the sisters and they are put in cells. Bodice suggests Fontanelle to sign the death warrant of their Father. When Bodice is left alone, the audience can see her deeply involved in the movement of her troops. She has halted the work of pulling down the wall as more men are needed to secure other areas.

In the fifth scene, we see Lear and other prisoner being taken to the 'HQ' by the soldiers but they were intervened by the rebel soldiers on the way. Meanwhile, Lear is disturbed because his Ghost companion is lost. Fontanelle is also captured in the scene. Lear and other prisoners are now taken by the Carpenter and his other rebel companions.

In the sixth scene, we see a prison where Lear and Fontanelle are put. The ghost appears again in the scene. His appearance is white and thin. As Fontanelle tries to persuade Lear to protect her, a Commandant and

Carpenter arrive. They declare that Fontanelle's case is closed and shoot her from behind. After Fontanelle's death, a prisoner who is also a doctor, performs her autopsy. In this one of the most violent scenes of the play, Lear sees the innards of her daughter and finds her more beautiful than when she was alive. Bodice is also brought in as a prisoner in this scene. She demands justice in the court but the soldiers also kill her in the scene. In order to make Lear "politically ineffective", his both eyes are taken out with the help of a device. At the end of the scene, Lear is led out by the ghost.

In the last scene of the Act Two, Lear meets a farmer's family near the wall. They tell Lear that as the wall is being rebuilt, they are going to work. The father will work on the wall and his son will join as soldier. Lear, it seems, for the first time sees the foolishness of building the wall. He feels pity for the family and suggests them to run away. Lear says that he is going to write to Cordelia. He claims that she does not know what she is doing.

(B) Analysis:

In the Act 2 of the play, we see the power struggle between the rebel forces led by Cordelia and daughters of Lear who control the current government. In the first scene, when Lear looks at the mirror, he sees a caged animal. He requests to have pity on his condition. The condition of the animal is symbolic of Lear's own state. Lear is now caged and he has fallen from his power but he still is not cleansed from the arrogance that power has put on him. He is trying to escape the reality that he has created for himself and this makes him mad in the eyes of everyone. He is blinded by his power, just like his daughters are blinded when they take control of the government. Lear's madness is the state where he is on the threshold to see beyond what Bond calls "social morality". In the cell when he sees the young apparitions of his daughters, he hopes that this time shall pass and hopes a reconciliation will be achieved. He states that:

"I know it will end. Everything passes, even the waste... And we'll pass each other in the street without shuddering at what we've done to each other." (Bond *Lear* 39-40)

We observe that at the bottom of his heart, he expects his daughters to be better than him. He expects that they will feel pity as he anticipates the same from Cordelia in the Act 3. However, he is denied this emotion both

times. We can witness that the world that Lear was put into was extremely violent. While all the actions seem to tell that human's nature is innately violent, we see the character of Lear as evolving. We realise that from a man who shot a worker in the first act for a petty reason, Lear seem to become more aware of his deeds and more responsible. The ghost of the Gravedigger's boy in this sense, represent the consequence of Lear's deeds. Lear seems responsible for what happened to him. Hence, in Scene Five, Lear is disturbed that he lost the boy and he reveals that all he wants is to help him.

Major incidents take place in the second act and the audience witness the act of violence in subsequent scenes. Lear goes through suffering in this act and while at the end of the scene he physically becomes blind, it seems that his suffering has actually made him morally awaken and for the first time he sees the consequences of violence. It is during the autopsy of his daughter Fontanelle that he realises the innocence of people. He states that:

She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child ... If I had known she was so beautiful ... Her body was made by the hand of a child, so sure and nothing unclean ... If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I could have loved her ... Did I make this — and destroy it? (*Lear* 59)

Critic Daniel R. Jones states that “although uncertain of his responsibility, Lear becomes more aware at this point that he is indeed guilty for the evil of his daughters” (507). This guilt lays heavy on him after Bodice's death because he immediately becomes immobile and withdrawn from the shock. In the last scene, it seems that in the madness of violence and repression, Lear finally has the courage to take responsibility for what is happening to the people. He even agrees that Cordelia does not understand what she has been doing and he feels it is his duty to write to her. This sense of responsibility and the will to act is not present in Shakespeare's Lear. The acceptance of circumstances make Shakespeare's Lear resign into inactivity. Hence, Bond writes:

Shakespeare took this character and I wanted to correct it so that it would become a viable model for me and ... for society ... What I want to say is that this model is inadequate now; that it just does not work. Acceptance is not enough. Anybody can accept. You can go quietly into your gas chamber at Auschwitz, you can sit quietly

at home and have an H-bomb dropped on you. Shakespeare had time. He must have thought that in time certain changes would be made. But time has speeded up enormously, and for us, time is running out. (qtd. in Jones 505)

Hence, by the end of the second act we see a new dawn of change in Lear. This further reflects the agenda of Edward Bond who believes that theatre is a tool to express the reality of society and he uses it to put people into action.

Stop to Consider

You must have found a recurring word while understanding Bond, i.e. 'violence'. You should know that it is a recurring word in the plays of Edward Bond. His 1965 play *Saved* was notoriously criticised for showing a scene where a child is stoned to death by a group of people. The autopsy scene of the Act 2 in *Lear* is also disturbing. To know more about Bond's use of violence, you can read his 'Preface' to *Lear*. To gain more knowledge on his use of stage and his philosophy, you can read *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond* by Jenny S. Spencer.

ACT III

(A)What happens in Act 3:

In the Act 3, we see Lear living in the old house of gravedigger's boy. The condition of the house has deteriorated since the last time the audience saw it. Lear is not alone. There is a young couple name Thomas and Susan who take care of him. Also, there is a young man named John who lives with them. A small man in a dirty condition arrives at their doors. He is a deserter and the ghost of the boy warns Lear. The ghost of the boy suggests that Lear should get rid of him. The man tries to hide his identity but eventually gives in to Thomas' questions. He reveals that he is sick and he ran away from the wall because they punished him there. Some soldiers arrive looking for the deserter, Lear asks Thomas to hide him in the woods. The soldiers search the areas and give warning. Lear assures them that he will inform them if anyone comes his way. The others try to persuade Lear that they should not keep a fugitive but Lear insists and states that:

I came here when I was cold and hungry and afraid. I wasn't turned away, and I won't turn anyone away. They can eat my food while it lasts and when it's gone they can go if they like, but I won't send anyone away. (Bond *Lear* 74)

In the scene two, a few months have passed and we see that there is a gathering of strangers in the house and they are all eager to listen to Lear. After Lear tells them a fable, Thomas leads him to rest a bit. Thomas tells Lear that they should send Ben back to the construction site. Bend supports the idea that he will go to the punishment squad and help other to organize a short of revolution. But Lear is unmoved and gives no comment. Thomas later claims that only talk without the power to change is futile. He even states that:

It's dangerous to tell the truth, truth without power is always dangerous. And we *should* fight! Freedom's not an idea, it's passion! If you haven't got it you fight like a fish out of water fighting for air! (Bond *Lear* 76)

The soldiers arrive with the councillor who was once an associate of Lear. They accuse Lear of keeping fugitives. Lear is helpless as they take the small man away to be hanged. Lear in a dialogue with the councillor accuses that decent men like him are the worst than the murderers and thugs, because in order to be decent, honest and lawful, they fall to the lowest to uphold duty. The councillor warns that Cordelia will not tolerate Lear any longer if he continues his activity. As the soldiers leave, the ghost arrives and tells Lear that he could poison the well so that nobody will live in this place. He tells Lear that Cordelia will visit him tomorrow as Lear lies and falls asleep. John tries to persuade Susan to come with him but she stays with Thomas. John leaves the place and Susan goes inside the house with Thomas.

In the third scene, Lear meets Cordelia and Carpenter. She tells him that he should stop influencing people. She recalls the day when her husband was shot dead and she was raped. She tells that now her government is taking steps to create a new order of life and that he should stop speaking against it. When Lear insists that she should pull down the wall, Cordelia warns that he will be put on trial. Cordelia and Carpenter leave after meeting with Lear. During the conversation, the ghost of the boy is present. The Ghost looks bizarre and he fears death. It is shown that the

ghost's "flesh has dried up, its hair is matted, its face is like a seashell, the eyes are full of terror" (Bond *Lear* 82). In the last part of the scene, we see the ghost being gored to death by the pigs. Lear tells the boy that he should die now because he was already killed long ago.

In the fourth scene, we see Lear going to the wall with Susan. He bids Susan good bye and picking up a shovel climbs up the wall. He tries to bring the wall down by throwing shovels of earth from the wall. The farmer's son, who is now a soldier in duty, recognises Lear. The boy aims his pistol on Lear and shoots him. The play ends with the following stage direction:

The WORKERS go quickly and orderly. One of them looks back. The FARMER'S SON shepherds them off, and marches off after them. LEAR's body is left alone on stage. (Bond Lear 88)

(B) Analysis:

Act 3 is the culmination of all the conflict that was created in the last two acts. Bond's focus in his plays is always on action. Lear in the first act is an irresponsible and ignorant person who does not see the pain and suffering of people. In the second act he suffers some personal losses and loses his eyesight and starts to realise how power has blinded his vision. In the third act, we see a Lear who is willing to take action against the authority. From a person who is violent himself, we see a Lear that stands against violence even at the cost of his life. Bond's play is not only for the entertainment, rather, it demands an active audience that will follow action and ponder over it. Bond states in his preface to *Lear* that "I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future" (Lvii). If you focus on this beginning comment of Edward Bond, you will realise that it is this compelling sense of duty that drives Bond's Lear to act. In this regard, Daniel R Jones in his article on rational theatre writes that:

His (Bond's) Marxist theatre attacks what he believes are society's dominant and too readily accepted myths: that man is innately violent; that science and technology will solve all of man's problems; and that the free-market system is best because it appeals to man's natural aggressiveness. (505)

You have seen that in the last scene Lear is shot dead because he tried to demolish the wall. This seems redemption that he achieved in his life by taking a good action. The death of the ghost in the third act is an important event. In the second act you have seen that Lear was afraid to be away from the ghost and somehow thought that he could help him. In the last Act, when the ghost is gored by the pigs, Lear lets go of the ghost. Lear even tells the ghost that now he should die because he has already been killed once. This somehow points towards the emotion of guilt that Lear felt because the boy was murdered due to Lear's presence in his home. In a way, Lear's guilt is finally uplifted by his action on the wall. It's Bond's final message to the audience that human beings are not violent by nature.

In the act two, when Lear sees the caged animal, he requests his daughters to show pity. The significance of pity is also there in the Act 3. In fact, if you follow the events, you will find that in the Act 1 Lear was devoid of pity when he shoots the worker. In the Act 3 when he asks Cordelia to have pity, she retorts that Lear only knows self-pity. The absence of pity is representing an authoritarian and mechanical society driven by technological advancement. You can discern this from Lear's statement, where he says that:

If a god had made the world, might would always be right, that would be so wise, we'd be spared so much suffering. But we made the world – out of our smallness and weakness. Our lives are awkward and fragile and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad. (Bond *Lear* 84)

Do you think Lear become sane when he finally sees how the wall has caused suffering? In Bond's play, suffering is not personal and every action has a political outcome. It is this responsibility that nothing is personal, even Lear's own suffering, that pushes him to go to the wall. The purged persona of Lear leads to action which he expects will lead to some goodness. It is feeling of 'pity', I think, that purged Lear and he attains what we can say the view of reality. You are free to have your own point of view on this.

Stop to Consider

When you are reading the play, try to engage critically and focus on the language of the play. As an exercise, you can see the Christian references in the text and their relevance regarding the action in the play, especially in terms of the concept of “morality”.

SAQ

1. Briefly summarize the major events of Act 3. (150 words)

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2. Discuss the significance of ghost in the Act 3. (150 words)

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5.4 Summing Up

Edward Bond’s play, *Lear*, is a politically conscious adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, *King Lear*. The play was first performed at a crucial time in the twentieth century when the forces of Capitalism and Socialism were engaged in ‘cold war’. The contemporary cultural, political and philosophical background of the age is essential in order to understand the play. *Lear* presents a society which is violent in nature due to the disharmony between power and rationality. Bond advocates the natural goodness of humans and criticizes the mechanical work culture that innately makes human violent in the play. He has criticized the ideology of power for its corrupting influence. In this unit, we have Act wise discussed the play and tried to analyse with a critical vision the important ideas that Bond has highlighted, a few of which are: morality, law vs power, significance of pity, nature of humans, violence etc. It is suggested that a thorough and careful study of the play will help you understand it better. Also, an open and multi-perspective reading of the play will help you further.

5.5 References and Suggested Readings

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Space for Learner

Unit 6 : Edward Bond: *Lear*

Space for Learner

(Supplementary Unit)

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 About the Author
- 6.3 A Note on Rational Theatre
- 6.4 A Note on Characters
- 6.5 Themes, Style and Settings of the Play
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to

- *understand* about the author and his important works
- *explain* the features and peculiarities of Edward Bond's rational theatre
- *learn* about the important characters in the play.
- *understand* the important themes that are relevant to the play
- *explain* the settings and writing style used by the playwright.

6.2 About the Author

Born and brought up in England, Edward Bond (1934 -) is an exceptional and distinguished dramatist of the post-war Britain. He is not only a dramatist, but also a poet, theorist, theatre director as well as a screen writer. Bond is known for his angry young men era approach and his reformist enthusiasm that he openly dictates in his plays. During the second World War, when the Blitz started, like most of the children Bond was also evacuated to countryside where the devastation was a little less compared to the cities, especially in London. However, the destruction of war was prominent even then. During the war, he witnessed the violence, decimation from the bombings and a consistent fear of danger. This you can

easily related with his plays where he insists on the raw and naturalistic depiction of violence. His close experience with the world war made him realise how men can commit atrocities to his own kind and how the advanced bombs that emerged in the world after the world war with technological development can destroy the earth. You will find in his writing, apart from his drama, that he relentlessly talks about the dangers of a technological society where the fear of H-bombs will always be there.

The show of violence became like an official mark of Bond's plays. If you follow his works and his life, you will find leftist leanings in the author. When the Blitz stopped, Bond returned to London to live with his grandmother. Later in 1946, he was enrolled in Crouch End Secondary Modern School. During this time, one of the remarkable moments that he remembers is watching *Macbeth* in Bedford Theatre in Camded. He writes that: "For the very first time in my life, I met somebody who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I'd been living, the political society around me..." (qtd. in Coult 10). After working in various factories and jobs, he joined the Army as a national service and was "called up in 1953, and sent to Austria as part of the Allied Army of Occupation to work as a clerk" (Coult 10). Already an anti-conservative mindset was working in Bond and he found this institution outrageous. It is in the service that he witnessed the attitude of violence mixed with the behavioral pattern and disciplinary routine. These experiences probably honed the political sense in Bond. By then, he had started trying his hands in writing plays. He was now a labourer and a clerk emerging from a working-class family who had witnessed sudden disruptions due to wars and experienced poverty. In this regard, Tony Coult writes that

The experiences of evacuation and National Service, and his knack for retaining into adult life his childhood sense of justice began to link up with a conscious sense of awareness of class to create an intelligence which was both compassionate and critical. (11)

It is no secret that the experiences of life to some extent shape the vision and approach of the writers. The same can be said of Edward Bond's life and his works. Bond embarked on a journey of writing plays and by 1957 he tried to accumulate all the information about the craft of theatre and educated himself to prepare for the writing. He watched many plays during this period that were available in London. As these visits grew, Bond became familiar with the directors and writers. With the help of Keith

Johnstone and Bill Gaskill, Bond came close to learning the art of the theatre. He was invited to the Royal Court Writers' Group, in 1958, by Johnstone. Gaskill was an established director then and the group was run by him. The group under Gaskill gave introduced the writers to the firsthand experience to the complicated acting techniques with especial attention to the techniques of Konstantin Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht. These exposures have certainly influenced the works of Edward Bond as you have seen.

Some of the major works of Edward Bond are: *The Pope's Wedding* (1962), *Saved* (1964), *Early Morning* (1968), *Narrow Road to the Deep North*(1968), *Black Mass* (1970), *Lear* (1971), *The Sea* (1973), *Bingo* (1973), *The Fool* (1975), *The Woman* (1978), *The Bundle* (1978), and *Restoration* (1981). Edward Bond has also made contributions to the movie business. He worked on the movie adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*, 1968, directed by Tony Richardson, and wrote the screenplay of *Walkabout* (1971), directed by Nicolas Roeg. He has written English dialogues for Michelangelo Antonioni directed movie, *Blow-Up* (1966).

SAQ

Q. Write a short note on the influence of Bond's life experiences in his plays. (150 words)

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6.3 A Note on Rational Theatre

After reading the previous units, you must have acknowledged the fact that Bond's plays are not for mere entertainment, they are rather didactic and written with a purpose. His works have certain devotion to an ideology or you can say a certain logic for life. This devotion is translated to his plays in the form of dramatic representation and this staging of the ideology demands reaction from the audience making them response to it. Following this pattern of writing, Patricia Hern writes that:

Idea, expression, reaction: the pattern is didactic. Bond requires the theatre to teach truths which he feels cannot be taught through the traditional institutions of state, school and church, since these are crippled and corrupted by capitalism and the bourgeoisie, defenders of the status quo. (xii)

For Bond, art is not neutral. He uses it as a political tool. For him, the theatre can reinterpret in the graphic way the underlying processes of economics and politics that are infiltrated in our culture, society and even our traditions. Bond advocates the rationality of the theatrical art because it provides an explanation of rational relationship between people by demolishing the “cloaks of sentimentality, hypocrisy and myth ... it does this partly through its choice of subject – but the important thing is the integrity of its objectivity” (Hay 69). Rationality thus can only come through socialism and not through Capitalism or Fascism because they disrupt the human intellect through denying men freedom. You will find it interesting that Bond believed that only through a classless society, or a society conscious to remove the class order through struggle, free and rational culture can be based. So, his plays are aimed with a purpose, i.e., to create a socialist society and that can be achieved through igniting the intelligence of the people. This is the reason he calls his theatre a ‘rational theatre’ because the myths of the past, that is the reality as we know, which has infiltrated our culture, can only be escaped by using our intellectual capacity. In a letter, Bond writes that

So my theatre isn't emotional or intellectual – it is both, at one and the same time, which is why it is a rational theatre. The priority I gave myself in my plays is this: to help the audience understand the nature of their society, and the consequences to them and others of living in it, by letting the audience be convinced or persuaded of the full human reality of the actor, so that they can accept this as truth, and then demonstrating the destruction or survival of the actor in the further truth of the social situation and the actor's response to it. (Hay 73)

So, his theatre provides a meaning to history through an explanation of human miseries and, as we have seen in *Lear*, evoking in people an urge to take action. He denies the approach of human condition by theatre of the absurd. He believes that human condition is not absurd. This is why, if you study closely, his *Lear* takes action, because he believes that only

taking action can make life meaningful and it is a rational decision because it gives Lear the control of his life and not the course of fate.

Bond's rational theatre is not separate from Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. Both have insisted on a reality that is separated from the dominant narrative of reality as linear as well as unchanging. The conventional classical theatre presented reality in the constructed form of a continuous narrative and focused on the emotional dimension of audience. So, Brecht changed the tools of theatre to represent a history that is not apolitical and independent of human intervention. Thus, Brecht appeals to the intellect of the audience. In a similar way, Bond also wants to orient the views to action but to call the two methods same would be a generalization. Jenny S. Spencer writes that:

Although Bond shares with Brecht his critical aim and several of his "epic" methods, their thematic concerns differ with their historical situation, and their strategies are not identical ... The most important distinctions between Bond's theatre and Brecht's lie in the specific, material reality of the plays themselves, in the different rhythms and references that Bond constructs for his audience. (Introduction 6)

Writings of Edward Bond suggest that he is a committed writer whose writing is socialist in nature and if it does not suggest any solution for the social injustices or problems, Bond made sure that his writing at least points out the wrongs that he perceived in the society. In this regards, one can say that Bond's theatre bears a close resemblance to the plays of Bertolt Brecht who also wanted an active participation from the audience. For Bond, theatre is a platform to address various issues which have cultural and political significance. His ideas are profusely incorporated in his drama where he imagines a social order that is different from what the world has seen. His writing, especially in the case of *Lear*, is of rebellious kind because you will find that he represents a reality that is very different from what one experiences through the ideological mediations. His theatrical reality, just like Brecht's, is an intervened one and devoid of ideology, a sort of eye-opening venture. Hence, you will find that both their plays contain a critical point of view incorporated within the structure.

Spencer writes that "Bond writes consciously artistic plays (fictional, structured and participating in a tradition of literary forms) in

behalf of a society that does not yet exist” (Introduction 6). The emphasis here is laid on the new kind of theatre that Bond has tried to create. He has managed to state through his plays that the reality that we are witnessing is a created account of capitalistic society. He claims it to be a society that is running after production and benefit. Through his plays, such as *Lear*, he tries to show how the society has become violent as:

Men are spending their lives doing things for which for which they are not biologically designed ... This life is so unnatural for us that, for straightforward biological reasons, we become tense, nervous and aggressive, and these characteristics are fed back into our young. (Preface Lxii)

This sense of rupture has been created in our pure biological evolution by the various forms of capitalism. Bond states that this has created a violent society and he tries to criticise that through his plays. Bond even goes on to say that the morality created by this angry society is also a violent one because it is based on the control of our natural self and hence, through moralized aggression, the institutions create aggressive leaders. So, the theatre that Bond has created is by imagining a society that has overcome this interpretation of his. Hence, Bond is speaking for a society that does not exist yet. So:

Bond’s drama must address audiences in the process of change within a society that urgently needs changing may help to account for both the distinctiveness and so-called contradictions of his aesthetic practice. (Spencer 6)

The action in Bond’s play thus follows a pattern of cause and effect. In *Lear*, he presents the experience of characters who are in a historical process due to the choices of the government. It represents a sort of political movement that is demanding action. Bond’s play describes a series of episodes that deal with important incidents which are relevant to propel action. Bond does not waste time on developing the individuality of the character, rather his focus always remains on the choices that the characters have and their consequences. Hence, you will not find long soliloquy in Bond that will reveal the character’s inner turmoil. This, however, does not mean that Bond’s rational theatre rejects emotionality. In fact, he focuses on the dramatic representation of the characters’ experience which will reveal their emotional life. So, the suffering of Cordelia as well as her

emergence as a fierce leader of rebels deal with different emotional state of the character represented in the dramatic way. Hence, you will find Bond insisting on the fact that rational beings are not without emotions.

Space for Learner

SAQ

What similarities and differences did you find between Brecht’s Epic theatre and Bond’s Rational Theatre? (200 words)

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6.4 A Note on Characters:

If you read the original casting that presented the play in Royal Court Theatre in 1971, you will be surprised to know that there are more than fifty people in the act. However, the play of course is not about the life of each of the characters. In fact, as we have already seen, the rational theatre of Bond focuses more on action than on characters. Edward Bond’s characters are an important part of his theatre. His focus may not be on the development of the character through an empathetic point of view, rather he uses the actions of the characters to justify their position. The development of characters through their activity is not new to a drama that shares a close relationship with Brecht’s epic theatre. The action of the characters who represent, according to Spencer, “dark forces” in his plays, are important because you will find that it is their decisions and actions that measure the steps other characters take. These characters hence encourage a political analysis of the play (Spencer 8). One finds that Bond’s characters are not enlightened with the right perspective without any conflict. Character like Lear must go through the conflict in an interaction with the society and that leads their course of action. In the play, *Lear*, it is after his loss power, people and sight, that Lear perceives that the decision to build a wall is wrong and only causing people trouble. So, the characters and their relation with the action is an important aspect of Bond’s theatre. Some of the important characters are described below for your convenience.

Lear: You will find Lear as one of the main characters of the play. The

play starts with him and ends with him on the stage. One can say that the main action of the play involves Lear's development as a character and focuses on his growth of rationality. In the first scene of Act 1, Lear is an arrogant monarch, almost an authoritarian dictator, who is indifferent of the sufferings of others. He is adamant on building a wall which he believes will protect the kingdom even after his death. For this, he is ready to sacrifice people. He is betrayed by his own daughters who marry his adversaries. When he was imprisoned, he goes through sufferings both physical and psychological that garnered change in him. At the end of the play, we see him making a rational decision and acts to correct his mistake. His death at the last scene and his body on the stage is itself a symbol of change compared to the first scene where he murdered one worker.

Bodice: She is the daughter of Lear. She has a sister named Fontanelle. The sisters closely resemble the notorious sisters of *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan. However, Bodice and Fontanelle seem more sinister. In the play, Bodice seems to be cleverer than her sister. She does not trust her sister and both plan to kill each other and rule the kingdom solely when they fight against their father. Her knitting is symbolic of her calm nature. She knits and she plans. At times, her cruel acts are more disturbing. When she jabs needles in Warrington's ears, she enjoys the pain that it caused. She seems more sadistic when she lets Warrington go because he cannot harm without his tongue and ears. When she plans the movement of the army in Act 2, she seems more in control than her sister. She also acknowledges her responsibility and understands the seriousness of it. As compared to Lear, she however does not go through any changes. Blinded by power, she acts the same way her father acted when he was in power. When she is imprisoned, she hopes to negotiate with the government, but she is killed by one of Cordelia's soldiers proving the fact that the new power is as ruthless as she was.

Fontanelle: She is the second daughter of Lear. She is not different from her sister when it comes to cruelty but she is more emotional than her sister. When she is in prison with her father, she tries to persuade him that she will negotiate with Bodice to let him live if he helps her. She is not as calculatedly precise as her sister but she is as cruel as her. When Warrington is tortured by the soldier, Fontanelle enjoys the suffering. She wants the soldier to jump on him and throw him. She almost insists that she wants to hear the sound of him dropping on the floor. She is also killed by

Cordelia's men. During her autopsy, Lear sees the beauty that she had hidden inside her. Although a violent and gut-wrenching scene, Fontanelle's autopsy leads to Lear's realisation of his responsibilities.

Cordelia: She is one of the most powerful characters of the play. She rises to power from being a victim. She is introduced as the wife of gravedigger's boy. When the boy was killed and she was raped by the soldiers of Bodice and Fontanelle, she became a rebel leader. From a powerless character to the most powerful person, her transformation is important to the plot of the play. From the start, she is shown as someone who observes the consequences of the actions. She disapproves of Lear's presence in her house as she thinks he can bring danger. She is proven right when the tragedy strikes their house. When she receives power, she proves that she is no less cruel than the others before her. This is why Lear thinks that a revolution must bring reformation, but what she does is the same.

Gravedigger's Boy: He plays an important part in the play. You have found that the reason of his death is Lear's presence at his house. He is not clever but an emotional being. Later in the play, his ghost visits Lear in prison and accompanies him till the last Act. The ghost is symbolic of Lear's guilt. When Lear finally acknowledges that he cannot help the dead, he lets go of the ghost and asks him to die because he has been killed already. Even after becoming death, we see that the boy's ghost presents a protective attitude towards Lear. He helps Lear through his difficult journey of suffering and pain.

Carpenter: He is a helping hand to Cordelia. He supports her and remains with her during her rebellion. When he is first introduced, he brings a cradle for forthcoming child of Cordelia. The gravedigger's boy even says that he is in love with his wife. When the soldiers rape Cordelia, he arrives at the scene and kills them. He is shown as a savior at that scene but in Cordelia's cruel government, he is also shown as a member.

There are other characters who also play important roles. Duke of Cornwall and Duke of North are shown as powerless figures when compared with their wives. You will find that the women characters in the play are powerful figures. Another important character is the Councillor. He is the representative of administration. He works with everyone that is in power and remains loyal to the government. His statement, that "I've always tried to serve people" (Bond *Lear*78), is ironic because even when

he knows that the government is doing wrong, he cannot go against them because he is a part of the system and powerless. Other minor characters who contribute to the understanding of the whole political and administrative matrix include The Judge, Soldiers, Bishop, Ben, Farmer's Son (who later becomes a Guard on the Wall), Officer and Commandant. The characters like Thomas, Susan and John represent the new generation in the play who seem very similar to gravedigger's boy, Cordelia and the Carpenter when they were first introduced in the play.

SAQ

Do you think that female characters in Bond's *Lear* are more powerful than man? Explain with comparison. (100 words)

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6.5 Themes, Style and Settings of the Play:

In Bond's *Lear* you will find many themes that are handled with the exquisite storyline of the play. We have already discussed the style that Bond wrote in the Rational Theatre section in this unit. Here we are going to see how the nuances of the writing style in Bond play through allusions. One of the major themes of the play is the relation of violence and power. As we have seen that Bond's writing addresses his contemporary society, hence, violence comes naturally to him. In Bond you will find an art that comes close to reality in order to reflect the true nature of society. Hence, the violence in his play is very disturbing and come close to reality. In his play, violence is not a problem but it is a symptom of a society that is aggressive in nature. In the earlier units, we have learnt how Bond approaches the idea of morality. He thinks that it is a tool used to control the instincts of human nature by the people in power and hence the controlling nature of power makes people violent. Hence, violence becomes a response for the sake of survival in people because the society that they live in is unjust and irrational. Such use of raw violence on the stage is also a style of Bond, a strategy it seems, to catch the audience unguarded in order to shake them out of the bourgeois sensibilities that conventional theatre has taught. Instead of sensationalism on stage, Bond's violence is the reality of modern society. We have also seen the corrupting

nature of power. Lear, his daughters and Cordelia, all act irrationally when they gain power. Through this Bond attacks the false morality of the society and points to the fact that this morality is based on the structures of a society that is violent. Although outright political, the plays of Edward Bond also feature complex aesthetics. The violence in Bond's play is not without a purpose, as it has been already stated. If you analyse the play after reading the preface provided by the author, you will find that the narrative encourages a reformative measure. The circumstances presented in the play not only demand a moral action from the characters but it also extends the experience to the audience. Hence the sequential movement of action that lead to shocking and compelling events demand the audience to engage in thinking.

There is also an emphasis on the idea of pity in the play. The world of Bond's play is devoid of emotions. You can see that whoever acts emotionally is either killed or crushed by the powerful. It is the sense of pity that you can say purifies Lear at the end. He even asks Cordelia to have pity on the others which he lacked when we first met him in the first scene of Act 1. The theme of recognition and transformation is also important in this regard. During the autopsy of Fontanelle, Lear sees for the first time the beauty in her daughter. This has led in him a recognition that he is responsible for what his daughters have become. He blames himself for her death as he states to Bodice that "I destroyed her! I knew nothing, saw nothing, learned nothing! Fool! Fool! Worse than I knew!" (Bond *Lear* 60). The moment is you can say a sort of anagnorisis. The death of Bodice in the next moment completely shocks him and makes him silent and withdrawn. This realization and sense of responsibility leads Lear to take action. It is a revolution inside him that led to his transformation.

Stop to Consider:

Anagnorisis is a term that was first used by Aristotle in his book *Poetics*. It roughly means recognition. It is the moment when a character in the play realizes (recognises the truth) something that was not known to him and is potentially of great importance. In classical drama, Anagnorisis is followed by **Peripety**, that is, the reversal or change of fortune. Though Bond may not see the realization in *Lear* as an anagnorisis, it does however leads to the self-transformation of Lear. To find more about the terms, you can look read *Poetics* by Aristotle and M.H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

Space for Learner

Another stylistic feature of this play by Bond is the use of anachronism. It is the positioning of a person or a thing or an event at a different period from its own. It is a placement that stands at opposition with its context. In *Lear*, the time and place in each of the scenes are very important. The time in which Lear lived, suggests an ancient period. However, the building of the wall is clearly an anachronism in the play. There is also the use of guns which does not fit the timeline. Other events include the use of scientific device by the prisoner to pull out Lear's eyes as well as the electric light during the autopsy of Fontanelle. The use of anachronism can be seen as a device of the epic theatre. It is well fitted in the overall aesthetics of the play to give a universal sense of the represented events. It is to affect a sense that the events depicted are applicable to all time.

Although the play is set in 3100 after the creation, his stage uses modern devices and props. The locations in which the scenes occur are varied in the play. There are bleak prison scenes as well as the scenic beauty of the pastoral life. The location of gravedigger's boy's house is representative of English pastoral life. His innocence also contributes to this sense. Although the wall is referred throughout the play, the audience only witness it in the last scene of the Act 3. The wall throughout the play remains a symbolic presence of enclosure, instead of safety (as Lear suggests in the play). The play is a deconstruction of many things that Shakespeare's *King Lear* presented. There are many allusions to the original play; such as the two evil daughters of Lear. There are also other allusions in the play. You can relate the allusion of Bodice's knitting to Madame Defarge's knitting in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.

SAQ

According to you, what are the important themes in the play? Think and write. (150 words)

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6.6 Summing Up

In this unit we have learn about the life and works of Edward Bond. You are now familiar with the events in the life of Bond that helped to shape his vision and writing. You are now familiar with the important themes of the play. We have discussed the major characters and importance with respect to the events of the play. The major style that separates Bond from his contemporary writers is his notion of rational theatre. We discussed the idea behind the rational theatre and the similarities between Bond's theatre and Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. At the end of this unit, you have also learnt the various features of settings and style of writing used in the play. As you have known Bond's interpretation of modern world through this play, you can think of the violence that is present in our world and relate the sense of responsibility that we must have towards it. For Bond only action can lead to change in society.

6.7 References and Suggested Readings

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