B.A. 4th Semester
Paper 8: British Drama: Victorian to Postmodern
Paper Code: 4400404MJ

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Unit I: Key Concepts

1. Realism:

Realism (REEL-iz-um), or literary realism, is an era of literary technique in which authors described things as they are without embellishment or fantastical plots. Works of literary realism shun flowery language, exotic settings and characters, and epic stories of love and heroism. Instead, they focus on everyday lives and people in ordinary times and places.

Realism is also a style of visual art that focuses on producing a photographic quality through realistic lighting, color palettes, and subject matter.

The History of Realism

The advent of literary realism was a direct response to the over-the-top stories typical of romanticism, an extremely popular movement in European literature and art between the late 18th century and the mid-19th century.

France was at the epicenter of realism. The writer Stendhal created pioneering works that realistically portrayed French life. He and others drew on the then-emerging fields of biology and psychology—as well as history, sociology, and the advancing Industrial Age—to craft stories and characters with whom the average reader could identify. Author Honoré de Balzac became a French realism icon with the publication of *La Comédie humaine*, a series of more than 100 interconnected novels showing the reality of French life from 1815 to 1848. Novelist Gustave Flaubert was also highly influential with novels like *Madame Bovary*, establishing a quintessential narrative voice for literary realism.

Realism did not remain a uniquely French phenomenon. It spread throughout Europe, with works like British author George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and eventually the United States. William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, and Horatio Alger, Jr.'s *Ragged Dick* all depict realistic characters from various pockets of American life as they

grapple with war, racism, materialism, and upward mobility. Other American realist authors include John Steinbeck, Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair.

The impact of these early realist authors' works shifted the larger literary focus away from explicitly romantic literature. They made realistic components essential to most genres of writing, even those that don't meet the strictest definition of realism. Though literary realism as a movement died down around the mid-20th century, its impact lives on. Most modern writers seek to create characters and stories with which readers can, to some extent, relate.

But realism is not without its detractors. Critics say it is not possible to portray reality in literature because some amount of imagination and creative license is always necessary. Others argue that all literature—to one degree or another—has realist elements and can thus fall under the definition of *realism*. Finally, there are those who think reality is subjective, which would make a definitive label of realism virtually impossible.

The Components of Realism

Works of realism aims to represent a specific reality. They accomplish this goal by incorporating various components into the narrative, including:

- Realistic characters: Realist writers create characters who are rarely as black and white as the more cookie-cutter protagonists and antagonists of romanticism. In realism, characters are neither entirely righteous or totally corrupt—they are complex, with both positive and negative traits.
- Labor: This concept plays a prominent role in many kinds of literary realism. The protagonist's job is a significant aspect of their identity, whether for good or ill. Matters of heart and acts of monumental courage take a backseat to the more pressing demands of earning a living.
- Internal motivations: In realist works, characters' actions come less from external forces—for instance, honor, chivalry, or a noble effort to right a wrong—and more from internal needs like curiosity, desire, or greed.
- Genuine settings: Writers of realism zero in on specific environments and the impact they have on the story. Their settings lean toward the sobering or the stark, and they tend to be more focused on smaller locations.
- Society: This goes beyond a mere aspect of setting. Societies usually play a significant role in characters' fates. Choices and events are dictated not by a grand idea of personal virtue and valor but by the conditioning imposed by society.
- Straightforward speech: Dialogue is not lofty or overtly cultured. Instead, it reflects the vernacular of the characters of the specific time and place in which the story is set.

- Verisimilitude: This is a philosophy that lends greater credibility and believability to the narrative. It concentrates on the details that accurately reflect human behavior and psychology.

Subgenres of Realism

A writer of literary realism might present their story through any of several subgenres.

Magical Realism

In magical realism, the author integrates mystical or fantastical elements into a realistic setting and worldview. These elements don't significantly alter the story's logic and rationality, but they do add another dimension that gently pushes the boundaries of the possible. As a result, works of magical realism unearth magic in the everyday and celebrate the potential for transcendence amid the ordinary. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a classic example of a magical realist work.

2. Naturalism

Naturalism utilizes scientific thought, especially the theories of Charles Darwin, to illustrate the inescapable influences that shape characters and their experiences. At the heart of all works of literary naturalism is the belief that science explains the conditions of reality and that metaphorical and supernatural elements have no credibility or presence in a story's trajectory. *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck is a popular naturalist work.

Psychological Realism

Works of this genre take an interest in characters' motivation. Rooted in psychological thought, authors examine characters' interior lives—their thoughts, emotions, and mental processes—to provide a fuller understanding of human behavior. One of the best-known works is Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

Social Realism

This era of literary technique involves telling stories about the poor and working classes. Social realism delves into the socioeconomic and political conditions to which these groups are subjected daily. This emphasis allows the author to comment on the political and social power structures that manufacture the challenges unique to characters' demographics. An example of this subgenre is Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

Socialist Realism

These works venerate the struggles of the working classes to support larger socialist ideals. In fact, it was the official literary style in the socialist Soviet Union. An important work in this subgenre is *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky.

Theatrical Realism

Theatrical realism applies to dramatic works written for the stage. Plays in this style aim to make theatrical stories truer to life. Theatrical realism might employ any of the aforementioned subgenres to provide a more authentic grounding for the drama, the characters, and their choices. One prominent play in the theatrical realist style is *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.

- The term "naturalism" has no very precise meaning in contemporary philosophy. Its current usage derives from debates in America in the first half of the last century. The self-proclaimed "naturalists" from that period included John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook and Roy Wood Sellars. These philosophers aimed to ally philosophy more closely with science. They urged that reality is exhausted by nature, containing nothing "supernatural", and that the scientific method should be used to investigate all areas of reality, including the "human spirit" (Krikorian 1944, Kim 2003).
- So understood, "naturalism" is not a particularly informative term as applied to contemporary philosophers. The great majority of contemporary philosophers would happily accept naturalism as just characterized—that is, they would both reject "supernatural" entities, and allow that science is a possible route (if not necessarily the only one) to important truths about the "human spirit".
- Even so, this entry will not aim to pin down any more informative definition of "naturalism". It would be fruitless to try to adjudicate some official way of understanding the term. Different contemporary philosophers interpret "naturalism" differently. This disagreement about usage is no accident. For better or worse, "naturalism" is widely viewed as a positive term in philosophical circles—only a minority of philosophers nowadays are happy to announce themselves as "non-naturalists".[1] This inevitably leads to a divergence in understanding the requirements of "naturalism". Those philosophers with relatively weak naturalist commitments are inclined to understand "naturalism" in a unrestrictive way, in order not to disqualify themselves as "naturalists", while those who uphold stronger naturalist doctrines are happy to set the bar for "naturalism" higher.[2]
- Rather than getting bogged down in an essentially definitional issue, this entry will adopt a different strategy. It will outline a range of philosophical commitments of a generally naturalist stamp, and comment on their philosophical cogency. The primary focus will be

> on whether these commitments should be upheld, rather than on whether they are definitive of "naturalism". The important thing is to articulate and assess the reasoning that has led philosophers in a generally naturalist direction, not to stipulate how far you need to travel along this path before you can count yourself as a paid-up "naturalist".

As indicated by the above characterization of the mid-twentieth-century American movement, naturalism can be separated into an ontological and a methodological component. The ontological component is concerned with the contents of reality, asserting that reality has no place for "supernatural" or other "spooky" kinds of entity. By contrast, the methodological component is concerned with ways of investigating reality, and claims some kind of general authority for the scientific method. Correspondingly, this entry will have two main sections, the first devoted to ontological naturalism, the second to methodological naturalism.

Of course, naturalist commitments of both ontological and methodological kinds can be significant in areas other than philosophy. The modern history of psychology, biology, social science and even physics itself can usefully be seen as hinging on changing attitudes to naturalist ontological principles and naturalist methodological precepts. This entry, however, will be concerned solely with naturalist doctrines that are specific to philosophy. So the first part of this entry, on ontological naturalism, will be concerned specifically with views about the general contents of reality that are motivated by philosophical argument and analysis. And the second part, on methodological naturalism, will focus specifically on methodological debates that bear on philosophical practice, and in particular on the relationship between philosophy and science.

3. Problem Play

The problem play is a form of drama that emerged during the 19th century as part of the wider movement of realism in the arts. As the term 'Problem Play' itself denotes it deals with contentious social issues to expose social ills, and to stimulate thought and discussion on the part of the audience. (Problems) through debates between the characters on stage, who typically represent conflicting points of view within a realistic social context. It is also known as the Drama of Ideas or the realistic drama and this form of drama is the result of growth of scientific spirit as it put emphasis on facts and dispassionate observation of certain issues. The problem plays are somewhat simplistic, didactic thesis plays on subjects such as prostitution, business ethics, illegitimacy, and female emancipation.

There were certain reasons which contributed to the emergence of these problem plays like rapid advancement of industrialization, science and psychology began to dominate all aspects of life

and literature, fading impact of religion on human life, dominance of reason over sentiments. The play writers now dealt with contemporary situations and problems in their plays.

For the first time the social significance of theatre was realised as realism became the outstanding characteristic of British drama. Now dramatists began to write with a purpose to expose the hypocrisy on which our social and family relationships are based.

The Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen gave a new height to this genre whose works had artistic merit as well as topical relevance. His first experiment in the genre was *Love's Comedy* (published 1862), a critical study of contemporary marriage. He went on to expose the hypocrisy, greed, and hidden corruption of his society in a number of masterly plays: *A Doll's House, Ghosts, The Wild Duck, An Enemy of the People*. His plays ubecame very popular in England and paved the way for the rise of the problem play.

The problem play was introduced into England towards the end of the nineteenth century by Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) and Sir A. W. Pinero (1855-1934). These playwrights were influenced by Ibsen but in dramatic talent were not even a patch on him.

In England, George Bernard Shaw brought the problem play to its intellectual peak, both with his plays and with their long and witty prefaces. With all his amazing originality he was highly indebted to Ibsen. In fact his adulatory book on Ibsen *The Quintessence of lbsenism* (1891) was published a year before the appearance of his own first play *Widowers' Houses* the first of the long series of problem plays written by him over the length of more than forty years.

GB Shaw started writing plays to demonstrate that problem plays of the type that Ibsen was writing could succeed on the stage. His plays are full of witty and intellectual discussions of problems in fine and crisp dialogues but having a little action. He was the creator of the drama of ideas. In his famous plays – *Widower's House, To True to be Good, Back to Methuselah, Could, Arms and the Man, Man and Superman* he dealt with social problems and in a realistic manner exposed social evils and vices.

Shaw's contemporary, John Galsworthy also wrote problem plays in the jeast of a social reformer. His first play *The Silver Box* exposes the pernicious problem of class distinction between the rich and the poor. *Strife* deals with the conflict between Labour and Capital. *Justice* highlighted the events in the administration of justice mismanagement in the prisons of England and the cruelty of solitary confinement. *The Skin Game* deals with the different values of the old aristocracy and the new literature business class.

Another important name in problem play writers is Harley Granville Barker who carried the pursuit of naturalism and realism further than any of his predecessors and his plays come closer to ordinary day to day existence, with the futility of which he is much concerned. His plays are discussions of contemporary problems and his themes include the marriage conventions, inheritance of tainted money, sex and the position of women. Among new plays produced at the Court Theatre were several of his own: *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), the most famous, showing Shaw's influence; *Prunella* (1906), a charming fantasy written with Laurence Housman; *Waste* (1907); and *The Madras House* (1910).

4. POETIC DRAMA

As the term 'Poetic Drama' itself suggests it is a kind of drama where verse are spoken instead of normal conversational dialogues. It is composed in poetic form with an intention of dramatic presentation on stage.

The poetic drama is a great achievement of the modern age. It is a mixture of high seriousness and colloquial element. It is the combination of the tradition and the experiment and of the ancient and the new. It is symbolic and difficult. Its verse form is blank verse or free verse. In short, its vehicle is verse, its mechanism is imagery, its substance is myth and its binding force is musical pattern.

Victorian poets attended poetic drama but they could not impart to it real dramatic excellence because the conditions of the stage were not favourable for the stage. It could not be produced either in the 18th century which was an age of great prose writers, or in the 19th century, which was an age of great poets. Only there were signs of the rebirth of poetic drama by 1920 but the atmosphere in which realistic and naturalistic drama prospered was not congenial to the growth and development of poetic drama.

English poetic drama in the present century arose as a reaction to the naturalistic prose drama of Ibsen, Shaw and Galsworthy. By the second decade of the century, this prose drama had reached a dead end. On the whole, this prose drama, in a decadent stage after the best work of Shaw, had failed to grasp the depth, tension and complexity of contemporary life.

Irish dramatists, like W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, also played a significant part in the moment for the revival of verse play. Other great names in the revival movement are John Masefield, Cristopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Cristopher Fry.

At the Abbey theatre W. B. Yeats endeavoured to revive poetic drama, but his genius was lacking the essential qualities of a dramatist. It was T. S. Eliot who firmly established the tradition of poetic drama in the 20th century. The remarkable element of poetic drama is that these dramas were influenced by the religious beliefs or social attitudes of their authors.

W.B. Yeats was against realistic problem play and he was promoted to reconstruct contemporary life through the symbols of ancient folklore and the mythology of Ireland. In order to make the audience concentrate on poetry Yeats went back to the simplicity of Greek theatre and Shakespearean theatre. His early plays *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* deal with the realisation of the spiritual theme. In his most successful play *On Baile's Strand* Yeats achieves an end for which all important drama in this in the century has sought the interpretation of different levels of reality in an integral and controlled structure. His other plays too are rich in poetical intensity.

However, it is T.S. Eliot who, both through his theory and practice of poetic drama, has achieved considerable success in establishing tradition of poetic plays in the 20th century. He had a full understanding of the nature of poetic drama, the difference between verse drama and prose drama, the causes of the failure of 19th century verse dramatists, the problem, technical and otherwise, which face a writer of verse plays in the modern age.

His verse-plays are not concerned with socio-economic problems; they are concerned not with the outer, but with the inner emotional and psychic realities. Thus the core of his first play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, is the psychic struggle of the hero with the temptations offered to him, and that of *The Family Reunion* the psychological guilt-complex of Harry, the hero of the play; *The Cocktail Party* is a study in the awareness of personal inadequacies of married life in the modern context. In these plays, he has also demonstrated the relevance of religion to all human activity. They are all Christian plays, the purpose of the dramatist being, "to train people to be able to think in Christian categories."

Christopher Fry's *The Lady is Not for Burning* is an important experiment in verse technique. it is an excellent comedy. Christopher Fry is a poetic dramatist of originality and daring who has restored to English drama something of the verbal sprightliness and the relish of the exploratory and suggestive use of language that we get in the Elizabethans.

His another poetic play *Venus Observed* is written in simple poetic language and it is an interesting comedy.

Though poetic drama has been written time to time through the various ages of English Literature but it is only during the twentieth century that poetic drama established itself as an important dramatic form.

5. Irish-National Drama

By the late nineteenth century, however, the Irish Literary Renaissance had introduced to the stage the resources of Ireland's long-neglected cultural tradition. The father of this movement was the poet William Butler Yeats. Influenced by John O'Leary, an aging revolutionary and *littérateur*, the young Yeats turned from a career begun in the spirit of late Victorian English letters to the folklore of the west of Ireland and the heroic legends of Celtic literature that were, by the end of the nineteenth century, becoming available in contemporary English translation. In the company of Lady Augusta Gregory, a folklorist and folk dramatist, and Edward Martyn, a landed gentleman with strong affinities for Henrik Ibsen's social, symbolic drama, Yeats founded the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, which, within several seasons, became the showpiece of the national literary movement: Dublin's Abbey Theatre.
The founders of this theater took their cue from the presence of several European precursors: Ole Bull's in Norway (established in 1850), André Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris (1887), Germany's Freie Bühne Theater (1889), J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre in London (1891), and the Moscow Arts Theatre (1897). In contrast with these antecedents, however, Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Martyn were beginning as pioneers. Although this group had a diversity of talents, sensibilities, and inclinations, they agreed on the necessity to replace the caricature of Irish life on the stage with serious and authentic drama, which would be popular yet not ruled by political orthodoxies. They committed themselves to experimentation with an imaginative and poetic drama that would harness heroic legend to the demands of the modern stage. Yeats developed his dramas from indigenous folk and mythic materials, the French Symbolists, Ibsen's poetic dramas, and, later, Japanese Nō drama; Martyn modeled his work on the more social and realistic of Ibsen's works; and Lady Gregory drew on folklore, local history, and heroic sources that she collected or translated, shaping these materials with the techniques of French comedy.

The Irish Literary Theatre opened in May 1899, with Yeats's poetic play *The Countess Cathleen* (pr. 1899) and Martyn's problem play *The Heather Field* (pr. 1899). This initial double bill was to foreshadow the character of the Irish theater's repertoire during the ensuing decades. The company's low-key, naturalistic acting style, led by William and Frank Fay, and the financial patronage of Annie Horniman soon won the Irish Literary Theatre a solid reputation.

By 1904, it found a permanent home on Abbey Street (thus the name Abbey Theatre), and the dramatic movement was attracting many talents in the rising generation, including John Millington Synge, George Fitzmaurice, and Padraic Colum. Meanwhile, under Bulmer Hobson, the Ulster Literary Theatre was providing in Belfast what the Abbey Theatre had begun in Dublin.

Yeats himself experimented with several dramatic styles, including peasant realism, farce, and modern naturalism, but his genius found its true métier in a highly sophisticated drama that combined poetry, dance, mask, and symbolic action to represent a world of ideals and pure passion. These plays borrowed from the Japanese Nō for their form, from Celtic heroic tales for their subjects, and expressed Yeats's view of the primacy of imaginative or spiritual realities of which historical change and the differentiation of humanity are emanations. In all of his work, but most comprehensively in his plays for masks, Yeats's enmity against modern realism can be seen. An attitude of detachment and impersonality shapes his works into intensely ritualized expressions, having affinities with both ancient religious drama and modern absurdism.

In Cuchulain, the central figure of the Ulster Cycle of Celtic tales, Yeats found a symbolic conjunction of the virtues of heroic individualism, eloquence, aristocracy, and pagan self-realization—values that he sought to insinuate into the character of modern Ireland. In his *Four Plays for Dancers* (pb. 1921), and especially in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (pr. 1922), the convergence of Japanese technique and the Celtic subject is most evident. Beyond the plays themselves, with their masterful fusion of private passion and public vision, Yeats's legacy to Irish drama consists of haughty artistic independence and a heightened awareness of the possibilities for verse drama in a hostile age. Following his example, verse drama has had a small but persistent tradition in Ireland, notably in the works of the poet and and in the productions of the Lyric Players Theatre, Belfast.

Before long, however, the Abbey Theatre had developed its distinctive blend of naturalism, romanticism, and poetry, as exemplified principally by the plays of John Millington Synge during the first decade of the twentieth century and of Sean O'Casey during the 1920s. Synge was the first Irish dramatist to successfully combine the influences of Molière's design and humor, Jean Racine's musicality, Irish myth and folklore, and the extravagant dialect of English to be found in the remote regions of Ireland. Synge was the first major success of the Abbey Theatre in realizing its theoretical objectives and becoming the focus of consciousness for the emerging nation. Synge's reputation rests on the output of the last seven years of his brief lifesix plays, two of which, *Riders to the Sea* (pb. 1903) and *The Playboy of the Western World* (pr. 1907), are masterpieces. These plays, in particular, exhibit the characteristic qualities of intense, lyric speech drawn from the native language and dialects of Ireland, romantic characterization in primitive settings, and dramatic construction after the classics of European drama. Three central themes dominate Synge's work: the enmity between romantic dreams and life's hard necessities,

the relationship between human beings and the natural world, and the mutability of all things. The production of some of his plays, notably *The Playboy of the Western World*, aroused public controversy, provoking riots and a bitter public debate over the play and freedom of expression on the stage. In retrospect, *The Playboy of the Western World* is universally acclaimed as one of the classics of dramatic comedy and marks the zenith of the Abbey Theatre's early years. Synge had considerable influence in shaping the style and theme of subsequent Irish drama, as exemplified by the works of Fitzmaurice, Michael J. Molloy, and John B. Keane, and some influence outside Ireland, most notably in the work of Federico García Lorca and Eugene O'Neill.

Although Synge's work was the most accomplished transmutation of Irish rural life into lyric realism, other dramatists in the literary movement made worthy contributions to the style that was to become the hallmark of the Abbey Theatre: Lady Gregory's many comedies based on folklife rendered in humorous and colorful "Kiltartan" dialect, Colum's realistic tragedies of peasant life set in the midlands, Fitzmaurice's fantasies and realistic tragedies set in his native Kerry. These writers had many inferior imitators, and the Abbey Theatre went into a decline. That decline was arrested, however, by the arrival of O'Casey in 1923.

In many ways, Synge's city equivalent, O'Casey, brought the language, the humor, and the sufferings of the Dublin poor to the stage, especially in his three "Dublin plays": *The Shadow of a Gunman* (pr. 1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (pr. 1924), and The Plough and the Stars (pr. 1926). In these works—set against the political struggles of the previous decade—he showed himself a master of tragicomedy and a trenchant critic of personal and national self-deception. When submitting his play *The Silver Tassie* (pr. 1929) to the Abbey Theatre, co-directors Yeats and Lady Gregory rejected it, citing an ill-conceived expressionist second act. An acrimonious public exchange followed, and O'Casey severed his relationship with the Abbey Theatre. His later plays are marked by a more strident Marxism and by less certainty in handling the Irish materials that he continued to employ throughout his long removal to the south of England.

During the 1920s, the talented "second generation" of Abbey playwrights emerged: T. C. Murray, Lennox Robinson, and Brinsley MacNamara. These dramatists helped establish domestic realism as the hallmark of the Abbey Theatre, a preference relayed in Belfast by the Ulster Group Theatre in the 1940s. Murray's work is a stark tragedy. Robinson's range from farce to historical treatments of the decline of the Anglo-Irish class, and MacNamara wrote many popular comedies of small-town life. As the official state theater, the Abbey benefited from a modest subvention but suffered from some restrictions. A fire in 1951 caused a temporary move, remedied in 1966 by constructing the new Abbey Theatre on the same site and realizing Yeats and Lady Gregory's plans for a large, commercial auditorium and a pocket theater, The Peacock, for poetic and experimental works.

It was not entirely a coincidence that in the same year as O'Casey's falling out with the Abbey directorate, Dublin got its second serious theater—the Gate Theatre. Founded by Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir, the Gate Theatre set out to bring European and international classic theater to Ireland, in contrast to the perceived introversion of the Abbey Theatre. Almost immediately, with Denis Johnston's sensational expressionist play about Irish nationalism, *The Old Lady Says No!* (pr. 1929), the Gate Theatre began its signal service to Irish audiences by importing contemporary European and American drama and encouraging much of Irish playwrights' experimental work.

During the 1950s, three dramatists emerged who represented quite different traditions and social sectors: Brendan Behan, a political dramatist from Dublin's working class; John B. Keane, author of many popularly successful folk melodramas; and Dubliner , whose inimitable theatrical genius blends some Anglo-Irish coloration into his dramas of persistence in the face of dissolution and death (most notably in All That Fall, pr. 1957). Behan, whose two plays *The Quare Fellow* (pr. 1954) and *The Hostage* (pr. 1958) were produced by Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Royal, London, gained an international reputation of spirited tragicomedy.

6. The Theatre of the Absurd:

The Theatre of the Absurd is a movement made up of many diverse plays, most of which were written between 1940 and 1960. When first performed, these plays shocked their audiences as they were startlingly different than anything that had been previously staged. In fact, many of them were labelled as "anti-plays." In an attempt to clarify and define this radical movement, Martin Esslin coined the term "The Theatre of the Absurd" in his 1960 book of the same name. He defined it as such, because all of the plays emphasized the absurdity of the human condition. Whereas we tend to use the word "absurd" synonymously with "ridiculous," Esslin was referring to the original meaning of the word– 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; illogical' (Esslin 23). Essentially, each play renders man's existence as illogical, and moreover, meaningless. This idea was a reaction to the "collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures" following the two World Wars of the Twentieth Century (Abbotson 1).

Influences

Absurdist Theatre was heavily influenced by Existential philosophy. It aligned best with the philosophy in Albert Camus' essay The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). In this essay, Camus attempts to present a reasonable answer as to why man should not commit suicide in face of a meaningless, absurd existence. To do so, he uses the Greek mythological figure, Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back down. He repeats this futile cycle for all of eternity. At the end of the essay, Camus concludes that, "One must imagine

Sisyphus happy" (Camus 123). He means that the struggle of life alone should bring one happiness. Essentially, we can find meaning in living even without knowing why we exist.

The absurd dramatists, however, did not resolve the problem of man's meaningless existence quite as positively as Camus. In fact, they typically offered no solution to the problem whatsoever, thus suggesting that the question is ultimately unanswerable.

Themes

While absurdist plays feature a wide variety of subject matter, there are certain themes, or ideas, which reoccur frequently within the movement. These themes are the product of a new attitude that swept post-World War II Europe. It consisted primarily of the acknowledgement that the "certitudes" and "assumptions" of prior generations had "been tested and found wanting, that they [were] discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions" (Esslin 23). Two themes that reoccur frequently throughout absurdist dramas are a meaningless world and the isolation of the individual.

A World Without Meaning

The decline of religious faith in the Twentieth Century is partly responsible for the growing notion that life had no identifiable purpose. Whereas one who believes in the afterlife sees life as a means of getting there, one who does not believe is left to either conclude that there is no purpose or to find an alternative justification for his/her life. Esslin notes that this decline was "masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies" (23). Yet these approaches also appeared flawed, leaving the other option–the assertion that there is no meaning behind human life. In his play, The Chairs, Ionesco capitalizes on this meaninglessness. Throughout the play, the two main characters prepare chairs for invisible guests who are all coming to hear the meaning of life as declared by an orator. The main characters kill themselves just before he speaks and then the audience discovers that the orator is a deaf-mute. Ionesco himself described the subject of the play as, "not the message, nor the failures of life, nor the moral disaster of the two old people, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of the emperor, the absence of God, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness" (qtd. in Esslin 152). This kind of world view is characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The Isolation of the Individual

The playwrights involved with the Theatre of the Absurd were not conscious of belonging to a movement while writing their plays. Ironically, they each thought of himself as "a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in [his own] private world" (Esslin 22). This perspective clearly penetrates their work, as most of the plays emphasize the isolation of the individual, or man's inability to connect with others. Samuel Beckett's //Waiting for Godot// (1952), the most well-known play from the absurdist movement, features this idea. The two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are both tramps who spend the entirety of the play on the outskirts of society. Though they have each other, they are at the same time isolated from one another. One indication of this is that they are never able to adequately communicate; their conversation goes in circles.

Form

The form of a piece of art is often neglected in favor of its subject matter. More specifically, drama is often studied in terms of what it is saying rather than in how it is saying it. (At least this is so in most academic settings because students typically read a play rather than see it performed.) Form, however, is arguably the most important aspect of absurdist plays. It is what separates them from other similarly themed movements, mainly existential drama. Esslin claims that "the Theatre of the Absurd goes one step further [than existential drama] in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed" (24). Essentially, these playwrights were reacting against realism because it did not align with their objectives. They did not want to show life as it really was, but rather, the inner-life of man–what was going on inside his head. Esslin explains that "the Theatre of the Absurd merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own sense of being, his individual vision of the world" (402-403). In order to portray this "personal intuition" the playwrights had to abandon conventional methods and adopt a more poetic, or lyrical, form.

Devaluation of Language

One characteristic of this poetic form was the devaluation of language. The absurd dramatists felt that conventional language had failed man–it was an inadequate means of communication. As a result, the movement of the characters on stage often contradicts their words or dialogue. For example, both acts of Waiting for Godot conclude with the line "Yes, let's go," only to be followed by the stage direction, "They do not move" (Beckett 6). Essentially, the dramatists are trying to emphasize a disconnect between "word and object, meaning and reality, consciousness

and the world" (Blocker 1). Moreover, in doing so they expose how unreliable language is; one can easily say one thing and do the opposite.

Another common way in which they presented the uselessness of language was by having their characters constantly speak in cliches, or overused, tired expressions. One prime example of this is from Ionesco's The Bald Soprano:

Mrs. Martin: How curious it is, good Lord, how bizarre!…
Mr. Martin [*musing*]: How curious it is, how curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence!
(Ionesco 14).

The phrase "how curious it is" has been said so many times, even outside of this play, that it has lost its meaning. Therefore, their repetition of it is empty–they are speaking without actually communicating. Essentially, the dramatists are claiming that language has become a means of occupying time and space rather than a way to effectively communicate with one another.

Lack of Plot

Another poetic aspect of absurdist plays is that they lack a plot or a clear beginning and end with a purposeful development in between. There is usually a great deal of repetition in both language and action, which suggests that the play isn't actually "going anywhere." In Waiting for Godot, the stage directions indicate that Vladimir and Estragon are constantly moving. For example, they repeatedly "rummage" through their pockets and "peer" into their hats (Beckett 4-9). These actions are so frequent, however, that the audience begins to feel as if they are watching the same thing over and over again. They could even be called static actions as they contribute nothing to the flow of the play. Yet this lack of purposeful movement in Waiting for Godot and most other absurdist dramas is intentional. As discussed above, the plays are attempting to portray an intuition which by definition should be an instantaneous or immediate insight. It is "only because it is physically impossible to present so complex an image in an instant [that] it has to be spread over a period of time" (Esslin 404). Therefore, if one does not view the play as a story, but rather as a single idea being acted out, this supposed lack of plot becomes irrelevant.

Conclusion

Above all, the absurd dramatists sought to reconcile man with the modern world. Esslin eloquently states that "the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions–and to laugh at it" (Esslin 429). The absurd dramatists were the first to propagate this idea of acceptance in the face of absurdity. In doing so, they challenged the preconceptions of what does and does not constitute theatre. Essentially, the absurd dramatists redefined the art form and created a space in which succeeding movements could flourish.

Key Figures

- Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)
- Arthur Adamov (1908-1970)
- Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994)
- Jean Genet (1910-1986)
- Edward Albee (1928)
- Harold Pinter (1930-2008)
- Tom Stoppard (1937)

7. Expressionism:

Expressionism was one of the foremost modernist movements to emerge in Europe in the early years of the twentieth-century. It had a profound effect on the visual arts, as well as on music, dance, drama, literature, poetry, and cinema. Rather than depict physical reality, Expressionism developed as a reaction against the prevailing interest in positivism, naturalism, and Impressionism, as artists who were heavily influenced by the work of Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh sought to explore subjective content, finding the visual means to fully evoke or express an emotion, mood, or idea through their artwork.

Expressionism's theoretical underpinnings reside in Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) philosophy and in Wilhelm Worringer's (1881-1965) *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (*Abstraction and Empathy*, 1908). In expressionist works, emotions and tensions were depicted with the help of symbolic color and lines in the belief that both carry their own innate expressive meaning and have psychological and spiritual effects—a strand of thinking pursued by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) in his 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Gordon, 1987).

Expressionism in Literature

Like their visual artist contemporaries, expressionist writers born in the 1880s and 1890s opposed the values of pre-war German Wilhelminian society, and reacted to the developments of

modern urban civilisation. Expressionist writers tried to trigger their readers' imaginations and to evoke their emotions. Though they are all connected via these central lines of theme and effect, the broad variety of literary style and form practiced by expressionist writers makes it notoriously difficult to arrive at a widely accepted definition of Expressionism, a problem mostly put aside today by regarding expressionist literature as a forerunner of postmodern heterogeneity.
In poetry, the effects of urbanisation and mechanisation were expressed by lining up disparate images in paratactical style ("Reihungsstil"), showing the new perceptional demands caused by acceleration, new technologies and media (see the poems of Jakob van Hoddis, Alfred Lichtenstein and Ernst Blass), leading to the "dissociation of self" ("Ich-Dissoziation", Vietta) and to the impersonality of a technicized society (Gottfried Benn, "Morgue"-poetry). Symbolic imagery and synaesthesia are characteristics of the poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler, Georg Heym, Georg Trakl, and Ernst Stadler, all of whom wrote poems in regular form and rhyme as well as free verse. By contrast, August Stramm's poems disposed of conventional language structures.
Authors of expressionist prose likewise discharged conventional patterns of narration and tried new techniques such as stream of consciousness and reflective prose ("Reflexionsprosa"), descending into the minds of their protagonists (Gottfried Benn, *Gehirne*, 1916; Carl Einstein, *Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders/Bebuquin or the Dilettantes of Miracle*, 1912), often criminals or insane (Georg Heym, *Der Dieb/The Thief* and *Der Irre/The Madman*, 1912; Alfred Döblin, *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume/Murder of a Buttercup*, 1909). The Prague author Franz Kafka is often deemed an Expressionist because of the nightmarish visions of individuals lost in bureaucracy and mechanisation he presents, as in the stories "Die Verwandlung" ("The Transformation" or "The Metamorphosis", 1915) and "In der Strafkolonie" ("In the Penal Settlement", 1919) and in the novels *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1925) and *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*, 1926).
Reinhard Johannes Sorge was the first to deal with the generational conflict in drama, showing the clash of values in Wilhelminian society in a family context in *Der Bettler* (*The Beggar*, written 1911, first staged 1917), a subject taken up for example by Walter Hasenclever (*Der Sohn/The Son*, 1914). Carl Sternheim's plays (*Der Snob/The Snob*, 1912) are acid satires on outmoded bourgeois values, whereas other dramatists denounce the inhumanity of mechanisation and individual powerlessness, for example Georg Kaiser (*Gas-Trilogie/Gas Trilogy*, 1917-1920) and Ernst Toller (*Masse Mensch/Man and the Masses*, 1919; *Die Maschinenstürmer/The Machine Wreckers*, 1922), the latter with a highly political stance. Formally, many expressionist plays consist of a series of episodes, or stations, held together only by a central figure ('Stationendrama'). Characterized by declamation and distorted language, expressionist drama tends to reduce characters to mere types or abstractions (August Stramm, *Kräfte/Forces*, 1915). Expressionist theater is often experimental, for example in depicting violence (Oskar Kokoschka, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen/Murder, the Women's Hope*, 1909) or in trying to

generate a synthesis of the arts ("Gesamtkunstwerk"; Wassily Kandinsky, *Der gelbe Klang/The Yellow Clang*, 1909).

Main influences on expressionist literature were Sigmund Freud's psychological insights and especially Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. Of particular resonance was Nietzsche's nihilistic diagnosis of human life and transcendental emptiness, often succinctly conveyed in the mantra "God is dead," as well as his hymnic vitalism (*Also sprach Zarathustra*/*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 1883/85), taken up by Expressionism as an antagonism between apocalyptic visions of modern civilisation versus renewal and rebirth of man.

Given that Expressionism was an urban movement, writers found opportunities to publish their texts or to present them at lectures and recitals associated with places such as Munich, Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna and, especially, Berlin, one of the fastest-growing cities of the time. Many key texts of Expressionism could first be read in the leading periodicals of the movement, such as *Der Stürm*, published by Herwarth Walden as a platform of aesthetic discussion, Franz Pfemferts' politically oriented *Die Aktion*, or René Schickele's *Die weißen Blätter* (*The White Leaves*).

The impact of modern technological warfare and the millions of dead on the battlefields of World War I (1914-1918), where many expressionist writers lost their lives, became central subjects of expressionist literature, giving rise to pacifist appeals and to the politically engaged messianic-activist Expressionism of the post-war years. With the rise of National Socialism in 1933, expressionist literature was banned, not to be rediscovered until after World War II, when texts were republished that have since become accepted as canonical, for example the poetry collection *Menschheitsdämmerung* (*Dawn of Humanity*, 1919; re-edited 1959).

The general decline of Expressionism by the mid-1920s was furthered by the implausibility and vagueness of the messianic stance (see for example the poems of Franz Werfel or Ludwig Rubiner) and the rise of new stylistic concepts (Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit).

Research from the last three decades has stressed the importance of gender themes in Expressionism and the role of female writers such as Henriette Hardenberg as well as the significance of lesser-known authors such as Hermann Kasack or Georg Kulka who were forgotten because their texts had not been included in the major anthologies of their time.

8. Symbolism:

Symbolism is a literary device in which a writer uses one thing—usually a physical object or phenomenon—to represent something more abstract. A strong symbol usually shares a set of key characteristics with whatever it is meant to symbolize, or is related to it in some other way. Characters and events can also be symbolic. A famous example of a symbol in literature occurs in*To Kill a Mockingbird*, when Atticus tells his children Jem and Scout that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird because mockingbirds cause no harm to anyone; they just sing. Because of these

traits, mockingbirds in the novel symbolize innocence and beauty, while killing a mockingbird symbolizes an act of senseless cruelty.
Some additional key details about symbolism:

- Symbolism can be very subtle, so it isn't always easy to identify or understand.
- It can sometimes be difficult to say whether an author *intended* for something to be symbolic or not.
- Symbolism allows writers to convey things to their readers poetically or indirectly rather than having to say them outright, which can make texts seem more nuanced and complex.

Symbolism Pronunciation

Here's how to pronounce symbolism: sim-buh-liz-uhm

Types of Symbolism

A symbol can be a physical object, a character, or an event. Here's a brief overview of how each type of symbolism works:

- Symbolism through physical objects: Most often, physical objects are used to symbolize an idea or concept, as a way of pointing the reader towards some of the basic themes that a work is dealing with. For example, a poet might write a poem about a flower dancing in the wind in order to convey a sense of innocence, harmony with nature, or sheer happiness.
- Symbolism through characters: Sometimes, characters themselves can serve as symbols—of a particular virtue or vice, or of a political ideology. For example, in Edmund Spenser's famous allegorical poem, *The Faeirie Queene*, the female knight Britomart is a symbol of the values of chastity and restraint, traits which many 16th-century readers held in high esteem.
- Symbolism through events: Events can also be symbolic. For example, while a character's long, wild hair might symbolize a period of youth or innocence, a scene in which the character chops off his or her long hair might symbolize a *loss* of innocence—or the sacrifices people have to make in the process of becoming a mature adult with responsibilities. While the act of cutting off the hair is neither an object nor a character, but it would still be an example of symbolism.

Identifying Symbolism

Writers employ a wide variety of symbols to deepen the meaning of their work. Some symbols, though, are much easier to identify than others. It's worth recognizing the ways that some symbols can be obvious, while others might be less so. For example, sea glass might be used as a fairly obvious symbol in one text, and a more subtle symbol in another:

- Sea glass as an obvious symbol: If a character in a story gives her son a piece of sea glass just before she dies, and the son then puts the sea glass on a necklace and wears it every day, that's a pretty clear example of something being symbolic: the sea glass represents the son's relationship with his mother, his grief at her passing, or perhaps even the more general concept of loss. In this example, the author might choose to describe how the son plays with his necklace obsessively in order to convey his ever present grief at the loss of his mother—instead of having to state it outright.
- Sea glass as a less-obvious symbol: If a character in a story delivers a monologue about sea glass in which they explain how something sharp and broken (a shard of glass) becomes smooth and beautiful only through years of being tossed about on the ocean's currents, it might over the course of the story come to be symbolic for the process of growing up or recovering from trauma—but not every reader will necessarily pick up on the symbolism. In this case, sea glass would be an example of a symbol that might be harder to identify as a symbol within the context of the story.

Is a Symbol Purposeful or Not?

In some cases, particularly when a symbol is subtle, it's not always even clear whether the author's use of symbolism is intentional, or whether the reader is supplying their own meaning of the text by "reading into" something as a symbol. That isn't a problem, though. In fact, it's one of the beautiful things about symbolism: whether symbolism can be said to be present in a text has as much to do with the reader's interpretation as the writer's intentions.

Symbol vs. Metaphor

At first glance, symbolism and metaphor can be difficult to distinguish from one another—both devices imbue a text with meaning beyond its literal sense, and both use one thing to represent something else. However, there are a few key differences between metaphor and symbolism:

- Metaphors compare two different things by stating that one thing *is* the other (e.g., your eyes are heaven). This doesn't happen in symbolism, where the relationship between a

symbol and what it represents is not stated explicitly and one thing is not said to *be* the other thing. Instead, a symbol *stands* for or represents something else.

- Whereas a metaphor is used to compare one thing to another based on shared characteristics, symbols *can* but don't *need to* have any characteristics in common with what they represent. For instance, Annie Proulx's story *Brokeback Mountain* ends with one character taking in the smell of a shirt that was once worn by his lost love. The shirt doesn't have any characteristics in common with the lover—it symbolizes him only insofar as it once belonged to him.

Symbolism and Allegory

An allegory is a work that conveys a moral through the use of symbolic characters and events. Not every work that incorporates symbols is an allegory; rather, an allegory is a story in which the *majority* of characters and plot developments serve as symbols for something else, or in which the entire storyline is symbolic of a broader phenomenon in society.

For example, the characters in Edmund Spenser's allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene* are not very complex or *deep* characters: they're meant to embody virtues or ideas more than they are meant to resemble real people. By contrast, Hester Prynne (the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's highly symbolic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*) exhibits a great deal of complexity and individuality as a character beyond whatever she may symbolize, so it doesn't really make sense to say that *The Scarlet Letter* is an allegory about adultery; rather, it's a novel that is *literally* about adultery that has symbolic aspects. In short, all allegories are highly symbolic, but not all symbolic writing is allegorical.

9. Avant Garde:

The term “avant-garde” has a double meaning, denoting first, the historical movements that started in the late nineteenth century and ended in the 1920s and 1930s, and second, the ongoing practices of radical innovation in art, literature, and fashion in the later twentieth century (often inspired by the historical avant-garde and referred to as the neo-avant-garde). Within the context of modernism, historical avant-garde movements (such as Dada, Futurism, Vorticism, Anarchism, and Constructivism) radicalized innovations in aesthetic forms and content, while also engaging viewers and readers in deliberately shocking new ways. Locked in a dialectical relationship between the avant-garde and modernism, as Richard Murphy has written (1999: 3), the historical avant-garde accelerated the advent of modernism, which routinely appropriated and repackaged avant-garde experimentation in tamer forms. As the Latinate term “avant-garde” took

root first France and Italy, and later in Germany and English-speaking countries, the trajectory of the avant-garde's relationship with, or opposition to, modernism has been theorized in a myriad of different, even conflicting, ways across different cultures. Is the avant-garde an extension of, or a synonym for, modernism (as suggested in some early American criticism) or are the two concepts in opposition to each other (as proposed in Italian and Spanish criticism)?

Avant-garde is originally a French term, meaning in English vanguard or advance guard (the part of an army that goes forward ahead of the rest). It first appeared with reference to art in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, and is usually credited to the influential thinker Henri de Saint-Simon, one of the forerunners of socialism. He believed in the social power of the arts and saw artists, alongside scientists and industrialists, as the leaders of a new society. In 1825 he wrote:

We artists will serve you as an avant-garde, the power of the arts is most immediate: when we want to spread new ideas we inscribe them on marble or canvas. What a magnificent destiny for the arts is that of exercising a positive power over society, a true priestly function and of marching in the van [i.e. vanguard] of all the intellectual faculties!

The beginning of the avant-garde

Avant-garde art can be said to begin in the 1850s with the realism of Gustave Courbet, who was strongly influenced by early socialist ideas. This was followed by the successive movements of modern art, and the term avant-garde is more or less synonymous with modern.

Some avant-garde movements such as cubism for example have focused mainly on innovations of form, others such as futurism, De Stijl or surrealism have had strong social programmes.

The development of the avant-garde

Although the term avant-garde was originally applied to innovative approaches to art making in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is applicable to all art that pushes the boundaries of ideas and creativity, and is still used today to describe art that is radical or reflects originality of vision.

The notion of the avant-garde enshrines the idea that art should be judged primarily on the quality and originality of the artist's vision and ideas.

10. Theatre of Catastrophe:

In drama, particularly the tragedies of classical antiquity, the *catastrophe* is the final resolution in a poem or narrative plot, which unravels the intrigue and brings the piece to a close. In comedies, this may be a marriage between main characters; in tragedies, it may be the death of one or more main characters. It is the final part of a play, following the protasis, epitasis, and catastasis.

The catastrophe is either simple or complex, for which also the fable and action are denominated. In a simple catastrophe, there is no change in the state of the main characters, nor any discovery or unravelling; the plot being only a mere passage out of agitation, to quiet and repose. This catastrophe is rather accommodated to the nature of the epic poem, than of the tragedy.[1]

In a complex catastrophe, the main character undergoes a change of fortune, sometimes by means of a discovery, and sometimes without. The qualifications of this change are that it be probable and necessary: in order to be probable, it must be the natural result or effect of the foregoing actions, *i.e.* it must spring from the subject itself, or take its rise from the incidents, and not be introduced merely to serve a turn.[1]

The *discovery* in a complex catastrophe must have the same qualifications as the catastrophe itself, of which it is a principal part: it must be both probable and necessary. To be probable, it must spring out of the subject itself; not affected by means of marks or tokens, rings, bracelets, or by a mere recollection, as is frequently done both in ancient and modern times. To be necessary, it must never leave the characters it concerns in the same sentiments they had before, but still produce either love or hatred, etc. Sometimes, the change consists in the discovery, sometimes it follows at a distance, and sometimes results immediately from it; the last was used, for example, in *Oedipus Rex*.[1]

Among critics, it has long been debated whether the catastrophe should always end happily, and favorably on the side of virtue, or not; *i.e.* whether virtue is always to be rewarded, and vice punished, in the catastrophe. Aristotle, for example, preferred a shocking catastrophe, rather than a happy one; in that regard, the moving of terror and pity, which is the aim of tragedy, is better affected by the former than the latter.[1]

René Le Bossu, a 17th-century French critic, divides the catastrophe, at least with regard to epics, into the unravelling, or *denouement*, and the finishing, or *achievement*; the latter of which he makes the result of the former, and to consist in the hero's passage out of a state of trouble and agitation, to rest and quiet. This period is but a point, without extent or duration; in which it differs from the former, which comprehends everything after the plot is laid. He adds, that there are several unravellings in a piece, each interconnected. The *finishing* is the end of the last unravelling.[1]

In the twentieth century, J. R. R. Tolkien distinguished between what he called the *catastrophe* and the *eucatastrophe*. The eucatastrophe is a classical catastrophe with an unexpected positive outcome for the protagonist. This term was coined to distance itself from the vernacular use of the word 'catastrophe' to signify disaster (which gave the term negative connotations in everyday usage).

11. Comedy of Horrors:

Comedy horror (also called horror comedy) is a literary, television and film genre that combines elements of comedy and horror fiction. Comedy horror has been described as having three types: "black comedy, parody and spoof."[1] Comedy horror can also parody or subtly spoof horror clichés as its main source of humour or use those elements to take a story in a different direction. Examples of comedy horror films include *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), the *Evil Dead* franchise (1981–present), *Gremlins* (1984), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011).

In literature

Horror and comedy have been associated with each other since the early days of horror novels. Author Bruce G. Hallenbeck cites the 1820 short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving as "the first great comedy horror story".[2] The story made readers "laugh one moment and scream the next" and its premise was based on mischief typically found during the holiday Halloween.[2]

Shortly after the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, comedic parodies appeared. Edgar Allan Poe put humor and horror on the same continuum, and many nineteenth century authors used black humor in their horror stories. Author Robert Bloch called them "opposite sides of the same coin".[3]

12. Farce:

Farce is a form of comedy that relies on exaggerated, improbable, or ridiculous situations to entertain an audience. It is typically marked by physical humor, absurdity, satire or parody, improbable scenarios, misunderstandings, and broadly stylized characters and performances.

Genre

Despite involving absurd situations and characters, the genre generally maintains at least a slight degree of realism and narrative continuity within the context of the irrational or ludicrous situations, often distinguishing it from completely absurdist or fantastical genres. Farces are

often episodic or short in duration, often being set in one specific location where all events occur. Farces have historically been performed for the stage and film.

Historical context

The term *farce* is derived from the French word for "stuffing", in reference to improvisations applied by actors to medieval religious dramas. Later forms of this drama were performed as comical interludes during the 15th and 16th centuries.[1] The oldest surviving farce may be *Le Garçon et l'aveugle* (*The Boy and the Blind Man*) from after 1266, although the earliest farces that can be dated come from between 1450 and 1550. The best known farce is *La Farce de maître Pathelin* (*The Farce of Master Pathelin*) from c. 1460, although, at some 1500 verses long, it is among the most unusual.[2] The entire repertoire of typically shorter pieces experienced a heyday in medieval and Renaissance France, where over 200 such comedies survive. Over 70 of these have been translated into English, many of which can be found in these anthologies:

- Axton, Richard, and John Stevens, trans. *Medieval French Plays*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971.
- Boucquey, Thierry, trans. *Six Medieval French Farces*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1999.
- Denny, Neville, ed. and trans. *Medieval Interludes.* London: Ginn, 1972.
- Enders, Jody, ed. and trans. *"The Farce of the Fart" and Other Ribaldries: Twelve Medieval French Plays in Modern English*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Enders, Jody. *"Holy Deadlock" and Further Ribaldries: Another Dozen Medieval French Plays in Modern English*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- Enders, Jody, ed. and trans. *Immaculate Deception and Further Ribaldries: Yet Another Dozen Medieval French Plays in Modern English.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022.
- Enders, Jody, ed. and trans. *Trial by Farce: A Dozen Medieval French Comedies in Modern English for the Stage.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023.
- Mandel, Oscar, trans. *Five Comedies of Medieval France*. 1970; rpt. Boston and London: University Press of America, 1982.

Spoof films such as *Spaceballs*, a comedy based on the *Star Wars* movies, are farces.[3]

Sir George Grove opined that the "farce" began as a canticle in the common French tongue intermixed with Latin. It became a vehicle for satire and fun, and thus led to the modern Farsa or Farce, a piece in one act, the subject of which is extravagant and the action ludicrous.[4]

Unit 2

1. Murder in the Cathedral:

Murder in the Cathedral is divided into two parts, with an interlude separating them. The play begins with the thoughts of the Chorus, a group of common women of Canterbury. They say that Archbishop Thomas Becket has been away from his Canterbury congregation (of which they're members) for seven years. Becket has been away because of religious and political conflicts he came to have with King Henry II. While they miss his presence, the Chorus does not wish for Becket to come back, as they fear his return would stir up old conflicts which might get him killed. Three priests who served the Archbishop in the past then enter the scene, as well as a herald who informs them and the Chorus that Becket is in England, back from France. The Chorus is dismayed, worried that Becket's return will lead to his death, and therefore their own religious turmoil (they'll lose their spiritual leader). The priests, on the other hand, readily welcome Becket back to Canterbury.

Becket enters the scene, and is shortly accosted by four "tempters"—four people who, one-by-one, try to persuade or tempt Becket into adopting certain views on how he should balance his religious power as Archbishop with its associated political power—political power which could either supplement his religious authority or replace it altogether. Becket discounts all the tempters' proposals, thinking that none of their visions for his future are sourced in the higher, spiritual dimension of fate or God's plan. He decides that martyrdom—sacrificing his life in devotion to God—is his fate, and refuses to be tempted by other, more earthly pursuits of political power or worldly, secular desires.

In the interlude, Becket gives a sermon to the congregation of Canterbury Cathedral. He asks his audience to think about sainthood from a divine perspective and reconsider the conventional, human understanding of saintliness as pure, peaceful and gained without torturous hardship, adding that Jesus's disciples became saints only after experiencing great suffering. He ends the sermon by saying that it may be the last time he stands before the congregation, foreshadowing his martyrdom.

In the second part of the play, four knights serving Henry II arrive at Canterbury Cathedral and accost Becket, calling him a traitor to the crown. Before Becket left, the king appointed him to be the Chancellor of England as well as Archbishop. After initially accepting both positions, however, Becket immediately dropped the chancellorship. Further, the knights say Becket then began to abandon all the king's policies which he had formerly supported. Claiming they've been sent by the king, the knights ask Becket if he'll agree to appear before Henry II and speak for his actions. Becket responds by saying that, if the king has ordered such an appearance, then

the public ought to be allowed to know Henry II's charges against him and personally witness his defense against them. The knights disregard this response and move to attack Becket, but the priests and some attendants enter the scene before they get a chance to. The knights leave, promising to return for Becket.

Knowing that the knights will be returning to murder the Archbishop, the priests try to persuade him to go into hiding, but Becket refuses, fully committed to his martyrdom. When the knights come back to the cathedral, the priests bar its front doors, preventing them from entering. Becket, however, demands that the priests open the doors, thereby offering his life up to the swords of the knights and to his own martyrdom, saying it's against the Church's policy to exclude anyone from entering one of its cathedrals. The priests unbar the doors, and the knights enter and kill Becket.

Devastated by Becket's death, the Chorus cries out in painful desperation that the sky and air be cleansed of the death newly sprung upon Canterbury. The priests, however, conclude that Becket's death was a manifestation of fate, and that the Church is stronger for it. The four knights then turn towards the audience and offer arguments in defense of their decision to murder Becket. They describe why they think he was a traitor to the king and also largely responsible for his own death. The play ends with the Chorus asking God to forgive them and have mercy on them for not seeing—at first—Becket's martyrdom as having incredible spiritual significance beyond their own personal concerns. Following the priests, the Chorus evolves to see Becket's death as something caused by a divine source which they cannot understand but which nonetheless merits their faith and devotion.

Character Analysis:

Thomas Becket

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket was exiled from England by King Henry II due to political conflicts which occurred between them seven years before the beginning of the play. Having spent those years in France, Becket has decided to return to England and take up his old position in the Church. Symbolically hinted at by the fact that he's the only character given a proper name in the play (even Henry II is just referred to as "the king"), Becket is the central pivot point of *Murder in the Cathedral*, meaning that every other character can be defined in terms of how they relate to Becket's character and outlook. Becket's staunch devotion to God and fate over anything that occurs in the everyday world of human social and political affairs

makes him into something of a black hole around which the otherwise ordinary humans surrounding him revolve. The priests, while religious, have an idea of fate that conflicts with Becket's decision to become a martyr, though they eventually adopt his outlook. The Chorus, however, totally refrains from having a properly religious acceptance of fate and of Becket's martyrdom, for they fear that their lives will fall into spiritual shambles if Becket dies. The tempters—with their various temptations and arguments—are all defined by how they think Becket should balance and navigate between his religious and political powers. Mirroring the second tempter's position, the king is totally opposed to Becket's devotion to God, as Henry II only cares about his own, political power—over and above that of God. The knights follow in the king's footsteps, murdering Becket because they think his devotion to God is too radical and politically rebellious. Following through with his martyrdom, Becket shuns the world of partial, human values and desires, sending a tectonic shock into the lives around him.

The Chorus: Made up of common women of Canterbury, the Chorus represents the ordinary, "small folk" of the town who look entirely to the Church for spiritual guidance in their lives. They begin the play by expressing regret over **Becket**'s return, believing that it will lead to his death—which would bring them great spiritual despair. They claim to have been "living and partly living" during his seven-year absence, and that they would be more content to go on living in such a tolerably ordinary, everyday state of dissatisfaction than risk facing the overwhelming spiritual ruin which they think Becket's death would bring about. The Chorus therefore begins the play in direct opposition to the priests' excitement about Becket's return: they do not want him to come back. Ultimately, the Chorus's fear is realized—Becket is indeed murdered. While they come to understand his death as fated by God, the Chorus nonetheless sees it as a personal tragedy—they do not see it from a spiritual, impersonal distance like the priests eventually do. Maddened by the death of their spiritual leader, the Chorus ends the play desperately crying out that the environment around them be cleaned of the dark energies which have intruded into their lives.

The Priests: The priests—three in number—represent the clergy of the Church of Canterbury who are under the religious authority of Archbishop Thomas Becket. They begin the play, opposite the Chorus, in high anticipation of Becket's return, and are fully ready to welcome him back to England. They are confident that his presence will be good for the church-going public and the country as a whole. Yet this does not mean that they do not have their fair share of disagreement with the Archbishop. They are wary about his commitment to martyrdom, fearing that his death will spell spiritual ruin for themselves and the congregation. While not as dramatic as the Chorus, they nonetheless worry about losing their religious leader, since the Archbishop is the highest office of the Canterbury Cathedral and responsible for directing the lower clergy.

After Becket dies—an event which the priests forcefully try to prevent—however, they come to see his martyrdom as destined by God, and comprehend it as something that should, in fact, have happened, even if they cannot explain "why" in terms which satisfy human thought.

First Tempter: A former friend of both **Becket** and the king, the first "tempter" encourages Becket to remember the "good old days" before his exile, when there was no political strife yet with **Henry II**. Essentially, the first tempter wants Becket to fix his broken relationship with King Henry II and renew their former friendship. Becket doesn't buy it, saying that what's past is in the past, and the future cannot be guaranteed—implying that he feels unable to unhesitatingly commit to restoring his past friendships, even though he remembers them with fondness. Disappointed with Becket, the first tempter departs saying that he will leave Becket to the "pleasures of [his] higher vices," slightly condescending to Becket's devotion to a higher, spiritual order. The tempter adds that, if Becket decides to change his mind, he'll be waiting to resume their friendship—that he'll remember Becket "at kissing-time below the stairs."

Second Tempter: The second tempter wants **Becket** to take up the role of Chancellor again (Becket left that position before his exile) and abandon his fanatical investment in religion and the Church. He says that those who solely give love to God, and God alone—like Becket—experience only sadness. This tempter therefore represents the exact opposite of the **fourth tempter**, who encourages Becket to shun the political world (of which the Chancellor is a part) and invest himself fully in his spiritual path, in martyrdom. Becket rejects the second tempter's proposal, and calls the Chancellorship a "punier power" compared to his spiritual command as Archbishop.

Third Tempter: The third tempter wants **Becket** to use his power as Archbishop to help him form a coalition of barons and country-lords that will fight to overthrow the "tyrannous jurisdiction" of King Henry II. This tempter sides with Becket's dissent from the crown, and claims that there's no hope for Becket to reconcile with the king. Further, Becket's authority as the Archbishop—if he'd side with the third tempter—would be a great help to this tempter's political cause. Like all the other tempters, the third one's proposal is rejected by Becket; he leaves saying that, in the future, he hopes the king will show Becket the respect the Archbishop deserves.

Fourth Tempter: The fourth tempter encourages **Becket** to pursue **martyrdom**, arguing that he should shun the worldly, political order of the **king** and focus on achieving sainthood. Though Becket doesn't reject the idea of martyrdom, he finds fault with this tempter's reasons for proposing it. The fourth tempter thinks Becket should become a martyr because of the glory and renown associated with the sainthood he'd achieve; he appeals to Becket's emotions and desires, but not to any higher spiritual principle, such as fate or God's plan. While this tempter is the

closest to getting at the core of Becket's outlook on the relationship between politics and religion, and manipulating that outlook, he nonetheless disgusts Becket with his forwardness and appeals to secular notions of glory and fame. Perhaps this tempter reveals to Becket the dangers of his own selfishness and human longing for fame; it's as if the fourth tempter gets too close for comfort by revealing Becket's real, personal motivations for martyrdom. In a way, then, this tempter is responsible for initiating Becket's spiritual evolution towards becoming an instrument of God's will—of fate—and not a puppet of his own human greed.

First Knight: Reginald Fitz Urse, designated as the first knight and described by the third knight as the leader of the group of four, introduces the other three knights when they turn to the audience to defend their decision to murder **Becket**. Urse does not himself offer an argument in defense of Becket's execution, claiming that he's unqualified as an orator, since he's a "man of action," not of words. Urse appeals to the fact that the audience is composed of Englanders, saying that Englishmen "believe in fair play: and when you see one man being set upon by four, then your sympathies are all with the under dog." He also associates critical thinking and rationality with the audience, claiming that, as Englishmen, they will need to hear both sides of the case (they've already witnessed Becket's reasons for **martyrdom**, so now they must hear the knights' justification for murder) in order to arrive at a judgment of who's morally in the right.

Second Knight: William de Traci, designated as the second knight, is the first of the four knights to offer an "argument" in defense of their murder of **Becket**. Perhaps more accurately, de Traci offers an argument in defense of the knights' own moral integrity in order to prevent them from being perceived as villains by the audience. De Traci says that the knights had nothing to gain from Becket's murder—they're "not getting a penny out of this," and the act will bring them no benefits: they'll likely be forced to spend the remainder of their lives outside of England, exiled. De Traci ends his speech by underscoring the knights' totally disinterested

involvement in the murder. They did not want to kill Becket—they just wanted him to comply with the orders of the **king**.

Third Knight: Hugh de Morville, designated as the third knight, begins his speech by echoing Reginald Fitz Urse's comments about the tendencies of English people to be fair and logical in their thinking, refraining from making judgments sourced solely in their emotions. He argues that **Becket** basically conned the king by advocating for all the **king**'s policies and agreeing to take on the office of Chancellor in addition to the role of Archbishop, but then—suddenly, upon being appointed to it—resigning from the Chancellorship. Morville therefore offers not just an argument in defense of his own dignity and morality—like de Traci—but a well-argued, reasoned indictment of Becket's political actions. He gives the most convincing argument from the perspective of the political dimension of the play (versus the spiritual) that Becket was, indeed, a traitor to the king.

Fourth Knight: Richard Brito, designated as the fourth knight, begins his speech by saying that he has nothing to add to the previous speakers' "particular lines of argument." He instead reframes the way **Becket**'s murder has been framed before him (as an execution by the knights) by asking who, indeed, should be held responsible for killing the Archbishop. By asking this question, Brito aims to get the audience to see that Becket was himself fully responsible for his death. Brito describes Becket as suicidal and insane, reminding the audience that Becket himself insisted, against the **priests**, that the doors to the Church be opened and his executors, the knights, be allowed to enter. Though Brito paints Becket in such a negative light, he ends his speech saying that thinking of Becket's death as the result of his "Unsound Mind" is the "only charitable verdict" which the audience could give to a man who, according to Brito, had done a great deal of good for Canterbury in the past—before his spiritual rebellion against the **king**.

King Henry II: Though King Henry II never makes a physical appearance in the play, his presence certainly asserts itself in the characters who do. Challenged by **Becket**'s spiritual

extremism, Henry II's political power represents the secular, even anti-religious dimension in the play. For Henry II, Becket and the Pope's condemnation of his rule is merely a rebellious attempt to discount and restrict his power—he does not understand or accept that Becket's disagreements with his political policies could be sourced in a power higher and more powerful than his own office. Henry II does not comprehend the Church's criticisms of his power as potential insights into how he can achieve a closer relationship to God, or how he could reframe his political role to better reflect God's will and power. Ultimately unwilling to concede to the demands of the Church, Henry II (likely, though it's never explicitly said or confirmed in the play) sends the four knights to coerce Becket into political compliance with his rule. But, shunning the crown in favor of a higher power, Becket doesn't comply. It's ultimately uncertain whether T.S. Eliot intends Becket's murder to be read as a direct order of the king, or a decision made by the knights themselves.

- Good YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqL-GWLJhVs

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2. Pygmalion

Historical Context of *Pygmalion*

The play is set in the early 20th century, at the end of the Victorian period. During this time, London was the capital of the wide-reaching, powerful British Empire. Victorian society was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy, but as the 20th century began social change was on the horizon. Importantly, women had not yet gained many basic rights and privileges. Shaw's comedy of manners, which satirizes the customs and habits of the Victorian elite, plays with and critiques the social conventions of this historical moment

Plot Summary: One rainy night in Covent Garden, London, a crowd of people from various social classes all seek shelter under the same church portico. A wealthy mother (later revealed to be **Mrs. Eynsford Hill**) waits exasperatedly with her daughter **Clara** for her son **Freddy** to find

a taxi. Freddy enters, unable to find one, but his mother sends him back out into the rain to look again. Under the portico, a poor flower-girl (**Eliza Doolittle**) sells a flower to a gentleman (**Colonel Pickering**). A bystander tells Eliza to watch out for a strange man in the back of the crowd taking notes. Eliza thinks that the man is a policeman and that she is in trouble. The man, who turns out to be **Henry Higgins**, steps forward and guesses where everyone is from based on their manner of speech. Everyone is confused and annoyed by the meddlesome Higgins. Eliza thinks he is a policeman trying to get her in trouble and insists that she is "a good girl." Pickering asks Higgins how he can tell where everyone is from, and Higgins explains that he studies phonetics and teaches people how to speak in different accents. He says that he could teach the flower-girl Eliza to speak so well in just three months that she could pass for a noble lady. Higgins and Pickering introduce themselves to each other, realizing that they are familiar with each other's work (Pickering is also a linguist). The rain stops and the crowd under the portico disperses. Higgins and Pickering leave to get dinner together, while Clara and her mother walk to a bus. Freddy finally returns with a cab, only to find that his family is no longer there.

The next morning, in Higgins' "laboratory" at his home, Higgins is showing all of his scientific instruments and tools for recording and studying speech to Pickering. Eliza arrives and offers to pay Higgins for speaking lessons, so that she can learn to "talk more genteel," and get a better job. Higgins doesn't think she can afford to pay him, and scoffs rudely at her. Pickering steps in and bets Higgins that he can't teach Eliza to speak so well that she passes as a wealthy lady at an ambassador's garden party in six months. He offers to pay for her lessons. Higgins likes the idea and tells his housekeeper **Mrs. Pearce** to wash Eliza and dress her in new clothes, though Eliza protests. Eliza refuses to participate in the bet, and Mrs. Pearce tells Higgins not to "walk over" Eliza. Higgins neglects Eliza's feelings, ordering her to live with him for six months and take speaking lessons. Mrs. Pearce takes Eliza away to talk to her in private. Meanwhile, Eliza's father, **Alfred Doolittle**, comes to Higgins' house. He says that he hasn't seen his daughter in months, but learned of her whereabouts from the taxi driver who brought her to the house. He

asks Higgins for five pounds in return for letting Eliza stay with him. Higgins and Pickering are scandalized by Mr. Doolittle's willingness to "sell" his daughter, but Higgins eventually agrees to give him money. As Mr. Doolittle leaves, he runs into Eliza, who has washed and changed into new clothes. Mr. Doolittle calls her "miss" before recognizing her, getting into a fight with her, and leaving. Mrs. Pearce enters and tells Eliza that she has more clothes for her to try on. Eliza leaves eagerly, having seemingly accepted the offer to stay with Higgins.

It is a few months later, at the home of Henry Higgins' mother, **Mrs. Higgins**. Mrs. Higgins is ready to have some friends over and is annoyed when Higgins barges in. Higgins tells her about Eliza and says that he wants Eliza to sit with Mrs. Higgins and her friends and try to act like a lady. Before Higgins leaves, some of Mrs. Higgins' friends arrive: the Eynsford Hills. Higgins at first doesn't recognize them from the portico in Covent Garden. Eliza arrives, and the Eynsford Hills don't recognize her as the flower-girl. Everyone starts to make small talk about the weather, but Eliza makes the mistake of talking about the death of her aunt (in which she suspects foul play) and her father's drinking habit. Freddy seems amused by Eliza, though Mrs. Eynsford Hill is shocked by her conversation. After Eliza leaves, Clara tells her mother that Eliza's speech is a new, fashionable form of small talk. Clara says that manners are only a matter of habit, so there are no right or wrong ones. As the Eynsford Hills leave, Freddy says that he would like to meet Eliza again sometime. Higgins asks his mother whether Eliza was presentable, and she says that Eliza was not. She tells Higgins there is no hope for Eliza to pass as a lady. Mrs. Higgins then cautions her son about treating Eliza like a "live doll," but Pickering assures her that they take Eliza seriously. Higgins refers to Eliza as merely an experiment. Mrs. Higgins worries about what will happen to Eliza when the "experiment" is over.

Several months later, Eliza, Higgins, and Pickering return to Higgins' house at midnight, after a long day and night. They have gone to a garden party, followed by a dinner party, followed by the opera. Eliza successfully passed as a wealthy lady, and Higgins has won his bet. Higgins says he was not surprised by Eliza's success and has in fact long been bored with the wager. He

thanks God that the experiment is over. Eliza is offended at how the two men are speaking of her and throws Higgins' slippers at him, calling him selfish and inconsiderate. Higgins thinks she is ungrateful. Eliza regains her composure and worries about what will happen to her now. Higgins suggests she marry someone wealthy, to ensure a comfortable life, but Eliza thinks of this as a kind of prostitution and rejects the idea. Higgins says Pickering can get her a job in a nice florist's shop. Eliza asks whether her clothes belong to her now, because she doesn't want to be accused of stealing them. Higgins is offended by the question and tells Eliza she has wounded him "to the heart."

The next day, Mrs. Higgins is sitting in her drawing room, when her parlor-maid tells her that Higgins and Pickering are downstairs calling the police. Mrs. Higgins tells the maid to go upstairs and inform Eliza, but not to have her come down. Higgins comes into the room and tells his mother that Eliza has run away. Mrs. Higgins tells him that Eliza has the right to leave his house whenever she wishes. Pickering enters and says that he has spoken with the police about Eliza. The maid announces that a gentleman named Mr. Doolittle is at the door. Higgins doesn't think that this can be Eliza's father, but it turns out to be him, dressed as a gentleman. Mr. Doolittle is upset because Higgins has mentioned his name to a wealthy American named Ezra Wannafeller, who has founded Moral Reform Societies across the world. Higgins joked to Wannafeller that Mr. Doolittle was England's "most original moralist," and Wannafeller left Doolittle money in his will. Mr. Doolittle is angry at having been turned into a somewhat wealthy gentleman. He says his new money has brought him nothing but worries and problems and tells Higgins that now he needs to be taught how to speak proper English. Mrs. Higgins tells Mr. Doolittle that he can care for Eliza now, but Higgins wants to keep Eliza at his house. Mrs. Higgins scolds Higgins and Pickering for how they have treated Eliza and reveals that Eliza is actually upstairs. Mrs. Higgins calls Eliza down. She is very polite to Pickering and Higgins. Pickering is nice to Eliza, but Higgins is angry and rude to her, ordering her to come back to his house. Eliza thanks Pickering for teaching her good manners by example, and tells him that her

transformation was really spurred on by when he called her Miss Doolittle once. Eliza says that she has completely forgotten her old ways of speaking and behaving. Higgins, though, thinks that she will return to her lower-class habits within weeks. Eliza finally sees her father and is shocked to hear that he is going to marry her stepmother. He asks Eliza to come to his wedding. Mrs. Higgins, Eliza, and Pickering all prepare to go to the wedding. Higgins and Eliza are left alone in the room. Eliza says that Higgins only wants her back to do chores and errands for him. Higgins says that he cannot change his rude manners toward her, because he cannot change his nature. He explains that he is rude to everyone, not just her, just as Pickering is polite to everyone. He claims that it is not important to have good or bad manners, but simply to behave the same way toward everyone, regardless of class. Eliza is still reluctant to go back to Higgins' house. She says that she is a slave, despite her expensive clothes. Higgins offers to adopt Eliza or marry her to Pickering, but Eliza wants to marry Freddy Eynsford Hill, which irritates Higgins (he wants her to marry someone of a higher class). Eliza is still angry with Higgins and tells him that all she wants is some kindness from him. She then says that if she can't have kindness from him, she will have her independence. She tells Higgins that she will become a teacher of phonetics, stealing everything she has learned from him in order to take his clients. Higgins is suddenly impressed by Eliza's strength and confidence. Mrs. Higgins comes in to take Eliza to the wedding. As she leaves, Higgins tells Eliza to buy him some things, but Eliza tells him to do it himself. The play ends with Higgins alone in the room, confident that Eliza will do the errand as he asked.

3. Good Scholarly YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tAlz2hLt3A

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3. Historical Context of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

A mid-twentieth century theater movement largely centered in Europe, the Theater of the Absurd invented a new dramatic style designed to express belief in life's ultimate meaninglessness, absurdity, and incomprehensibility and to expose the futility of human rationality. Plays in this movement conveyed these beliefs by incorporating uncomfortable silences, parodying realism, making characters perform meaningless and repetitive actions, mixing comedy and tragedy, avoiding scenes of resolution or enlightenment, and writing dialogue whose copious wordplay and nonsense suggested the meaninglessness of language itself and its insufficiency as a means of communication. Playwrights of the Absurd included Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and Tom Stoppard.

Other Books Related to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

Aside from *Hamlet*, Stoppard's play is also influenced by another major drama: ***Waiting for Godot*** by Samuel Beckett. First performed in 1952, Beckett's play fundamentally changed theater by abandoning traditional ideas of character and plot and by commenting on techniques of play-acting within the play itself. Stoppard's play makes use of many of these dramatic innovations while also referencing ***Waiting for Godot*** more explicitly: like Beckett's, Stoppard's play is built around two men waiting around on stage for action that seems never to come.

Key Facts about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

- **Full Title:** *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*
- **When Written:** 1964
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Literary Period:** Theater of the Absurd
- **Genre:** Tragicomedy
- **Setting:** nowhere; the royal court in Denmark; a ship to England
- **Climax:** Rosencrantz and Guildenstern read Claudius' letter and discover that it orders Hamlet executed.
- **Antagonist:** The Player

Summary of the Play:

Wearing Elizabethan costumes on a blank stage, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are tossing **coins**, all of which land 'heads.' Rosencrantz is unperturbed by the improbable odds but Guildenstern grows disturbed, demanding Rosencrantz think through potential meanings of the unlikely situation. They realize they can't remember a past before tossing coins and have only vague recollection of being called by royal summons. The Tragedians march onstage lead by **the Player**, who sees Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as a potential audience and tries to entice them into buying a performance with the chance to sodomize the lowliest tragedian, **Alfred**. Guildenstern is appalled but the Player maintains that people only go to the theater for crude entertainment full of "blood, love, and rhetoric" (and mostly blood). The Player accepts and loses two futile bets to Guildenstern and agrees to pay with a play. Rosencrantz extracts a coin from under the Player's foot, sees it fell on tails, and, suddenly, the lighting shifts the scene to Elsinore Castle.

A disheveled **Hamlet** and **Ophelia** run on stage for a brief, mute appearance. Then **Claudius** and **Gertrude** enter, welcoming Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and explaining they've been sent for to uncover the cause of Hamlet's recent transformation. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to do so, then, alone on stage, lament the absurd incomprehensibility of their situation. Perplexed by what action to take, they stay passive. The sight of Hamlet prompts them to practice acting in character, but they muddle their names. Just as Guildenstern decides they're "marked," Hamlet walks on taunting **Polonius**. When Hamlet notices Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he greets them warmly but can't tell them apart. The lights black out and rise on Act Two, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are still talking with Hamlet, who explains he's only mad when the wind blows north. Alone, Guildenstern tries to be optimistic but Rosencrantz insists they made no headway with Hamlet, who made them "look ridiculous." They try to figure out which direction's south and wonder if anyone will enter. Guildenstern alludes to an "order" of which they are a part.

Hamlet enters with the Tragedians, who he's booked to play the next night, then exits. The Player is cold towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who left midway through the Tragedians' performance, humiliating them beyond measure. An actor's whole existence, the Player explains, depends on being watched. Guildenstern asks desperately for acting advice to help his and Rosencrantz' efforts with Hamlet. "Act natural," the Player says, and tells them there's no truth, only assumptions. He exits. Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Ophelia enter briefly and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern assure Gertrude they're making progress with Hamlet.

The Tragedians return to rehearse their play, whose plot turns out to be ***Hamlet***'s, including Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths played by actors wearing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's clothes. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are uncomprehending. Entrances by Ophelia, Hamlet, Claudius, and Polonius interrupt the Tragedians' play. The Player calls the play

"a slaughterhouse," bringing out the actors' "best." Guildenstern criticizes spectacular stage deaths, insisting death is simply "a man failing to reappear." The lights blackout. The sun rises on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern alone.

Claudius enters briefly and tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and Polonius' corpse (Hamlet murdered him) but the two procrastinate and, when a scornful Hamlet enters, are unable to make him obey them. Alone, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern despair. Hamlet eventually returns and promises to go with them to England.

Act Three opens on Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Hamlet on the **boat** to England. While preparing their speech to the King of England, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern read the letter Claudius gave them and realize it orders Hamlet's death. They're at first horrified and wonder if they should intervene, but eventually rationalize passivity and feel better. While they sleep, Hamlet steals, reads, and replaces the letter with another.

The Tragedians' appear on the ship as stowaways, pirates attack, and Hamlet goes missing, distressing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Reviewing their plan, they now discover that the letter orders their own execution. They're indignant, then despairing. Infuriated by the Player's calm claims to understand death, Guildenstern stabs him and the Player falls and dies. But the dagger turns out to be fake and the Player stands up, alive and smug, having convinced Guildenstern with the very sort of acted death Guildenstern claims isn't convincing. The Player and Tragedians' gleefully act out various deaths. Lights fade on them. Alone, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's exasperation at death gives way to resolved acceptance. Rosencrantz disappears, then Guildenstern does.

Lights rise on the corpse-strewn end of ***Hamlet***. An ambassador reports that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead and the lights fade out as **Horatio** promises to tell the tragedy's story.

Themes & Issues in the Play:

Death: The odds of the coin toss that opens Act One – an 100-long streak of "heads" – at first seem impossible, the sure sign of a make-believe world. Yet, as the play goes on, it becomes clear that there's nothing really odd about those odds: they represent the probability of human life. Death wins every time. "Life is a gamble, at terrible odds" the Player explains, "—if it was a bet you wouldn't take it." Above all, this is a play about death. Most obviously, the title – *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* - states the death of its protagonists. But the protagonists' deaths are a foregone conclusion even apart from the title, which is in fact a line from *Hamlet*. As characters drawn from another play, the details of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths are already scripted by Shakespeare's play before Stoppard's play even begins. Everyone in the audience knows exactly how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will die from

the first moment of Stoppard's play. By building his play around these characters, Stoppard is thus able to exaggerate the fatedness and inevitability of death.

Yet while death is a sure thing, the play casts it in a fresh, unsettling light. Death itself may be a given, but the *human acceptance* of death is no given, and the characters struggle against death even in the face of its 100% probability. As inevitable as it is, it seems impossible to accept death. In fact, it seems impossible even to describe it properly. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern argue with the Player and Tragedians about what 'real' death looks like. "What do *you* know about *death*?" Guildenstern demands of the Player and, when the Player replies that dying is "what the actors do best," Guildenstern insists death can't be acted because "[t]he *fact* of it is nothing to do with seeing it happen-it's not gasps and blood and falling about." Indeed, the Player recounts that the time he arranged for one of his actors to actually be hung on stage, the audience booed it as a subpar performance.

Impossible to recognize, death thus remains elusive even as the play never stops dreading its inevitability. All the deaths on stage, after all, are staged, be they performances of plays-within-the-play (such as those that occur during the Tragedians' play and the fatal stabbing enacted by the Player) or supposedly 'real' action (such as Polonius' corpse, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths at play's end, or the corpse-strewn final stage). The play's running meta-theatrical commentary (comments about plays made within a play) keeps the audience hyper-aware of this fact. Guildenstern's frequent critiques of staged deaths makes even the gracefully subtle portrayal of his and Rosencrantz' deaths at play's end – a gore-free, sudden disappearance – seem unsatisfying, questionable, eerily incomplete.

Indeed, Stoppard seems committed to producing this sense of incompleteness that, while it fails to deliver a complete understanding of death, completely captures the human understanding of death - which is, of course, quite incomplete. The play portrays awareness of death as the ever-present yet ever-unknown constant in life. "There must have been…a moment in childhood when it first occurred to you that you don't go on for ever," Rosencrantz reflects, "And yet I can't remember it. It never occurred to me at all." He concludes that he can't remember the moment of realization because no one moment exists. Instead, one is "born with an intuition of mortality. Before we know the words for it, before we know that there are words," we know there is death.

ii. Individual Identity: Since death is inevitable, the play goes on to ask, what does one make of a single human life? What is individual identity? Though most of the characters in the play are characters appropriated from ***Hamlet*** (whose characters were in turn based on other literary historical characters), ***Hamlet***'s main characters (Hamlet, Claudius, Horatio, and Ophelia) are here greatly diluted and constantly fade in and out of sight, seeming more like representations of ghosts than like representations of people. In turn, two of ***Hamlet***'s most minor characters – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – are Stoppard's play's protagonists and speak the vast majority of

its lines. The play also foregrounds another minor character by giving Alfred, the lowliest member of the Tragedians, more attention than any of the troupe's other actors. In choosing to highlight his play's characters this way, Stoppard foregrounds powerlessness and lowliness, further emphasizing the helplessness of the individual human life against the prevailing force of death.

Yet beyond choosing to feature powerless individuals and washing out powerful ones, Stoppard's play also questions the specific identities of his characters and suggests that not only is the human self lowly and powerless, but it may not even be a "self." Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's identities prove extremely porous. They are constantly losing track of themselves and mix up their own names, even their own body parts, as Rosencrantz thinks Guildenstern's leg is his in the dark at the beginning of Act Three. When facing exact depictions of themselves in the Tragedians' play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are intrigued but unable to recognize them. "Well, if it isn't--! No, wait a minute, don't tell me….I never forget a face…not that I know yours, that is," Rosencrantz tells the character representing him, then loses his grip of the situation and mistakes the character for himself by implying that the character has almost recognized Rosencrantz whereas it's in fact Rosencrantz who has almost recognized the character: "For a moment I thought—no, I don't know you, do I? Yes, I'm afraid you're quite wrong. You must have mistaken me for someone else," Rosencrantz says.

Other characters struggle, too, to recognize individual identity and Claudius and Hamlet confuse Rosencrantz and Guildenstern while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's conversation with the Player confuses Hamlet's, Claudius', and Polonius' relationships to Ophelia. Stoppard himself once described his play's protagonists as "two halves of the same personality." By presenting characters that seem to flicker back and forth between identities, Stoppard questions the notion of identity at large. If every human individual is condemned to die, what distinguishes one from another?

iii. Absurdity: As a play investigating the central, unknowable mysteries of existence – death and mortal beings' capacity for free will – *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* charts the human struggle to make sense of a universe characterized by utter randomness, harshness towards human life (the universe itself could be seen as the dramatic "bloodbath" described by the Player), and complete apathy towards the human condition. All human meaning is undermined by the meaninglessness of the environment humans are forced to inhabit. The effort to make meaning thus grows increasingly absurd.

The play's use of language reflects the absurdity of human attempts to make meaning, incorporating wordplay and pushing the bounds of sense to demonstrate how difficult it is to convey significance. Dialogue in the play frequently replicates the coin toss revelation: what at first seems absurd is actually reality, what seems false is revealed to be true. It's the play's mode

of presentation that startles the audience into a seemingly new perspective: the already known is seen anew, and seems unrecognizable. As Guildenstern says: "All your life you live so close to truth, it becomes a permanent blur in the corner of your eye, and when something nudges it into outline it is like being ambushed by a grotesque."

Thus, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern frequently misspeak or jumble common idiom, but, listened to carefully, these "mistakes" describe the situation more accurately than the "right" phrasing might. "[O]ver my head body!" Rosencrantz shouts in exasperation, "I tell you it's all stopping to a death, it's boding to a depth, stepping to a head, it's all heading to a dead stop." Though they may first seem like mistakes, his phrasings point out truths: 'head body' describes the living thinking being he is better than the conventional ("correct") expression 'dead body' would; his mis-phrasings of the expression 'coming to a head' end up illuminating the play's actual trajectory towards death. Later, Rosencrantz' description of sunset as "The sun's going down. Or the earth's coming up" rings similarly true.

Furthermore, the play's many instances of mishearing and misunderstanding start to accrue their own sense of accuracy: death, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern repeatedly remind the audience, is the unknown, is beyond the grasp of human perception. When Rosencrantz tries to rationalize death by comparing it to a boat, Guildenstern responds, "No, no, no…Death is…not. Death isn't... Death is the ultimate negative. Not-being. You can't not-be on a boat." By riddling the play with moments of lost meaning, the play's script creates a linguistic experience – 'not-understanding' – akin to the unimaginable not-being of death that renders life in the world so absurd.

Good Scholarly YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49HL2XWC1fA

Free YouTube Movie Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f6gON_OMcQ

4. The Ash Girl by Timberlake Wertenbaker

The Ash Girl is a full-length play by British playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker that reimagines the Cinderella fairy tale as a psychological drama centered on the protagonist's internal battles against self-doubt, loss, and despair. [1] Premiered at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in

2000, the work follows the Ash Girl—living in a household with her absent father, deceased mother, stepmother, and stepsisters—who receives an invitation to a ball from Prince Amir but struggles to believe she can attend or deserve happiness. [2] [1] With assistance from unexpected friends, she attends the event and experiences fleeting joy with the prince, only to realize that lasting fulfillment requires confronting the "monsters" that have embedded themselves in her heart and mind. [3] [4]The play incorporates fantasy and allegory, transforming the journey to and from the palace into encounters with anthropomorphic representations of the Seven Deadly Sins and an allegorical figure of Sadness that tempts the protagonist toward death, while a Fairy in the Mirror contends for her soul; these elements draw from Brothers Grimm influences, medieval traditions, and modern psychological insight to explore the terror and beauty of adolescence. [4] The narrative also introduces multicultural dimensions through Prince Amir, depicted as an exiled figure isolated in a new land, broadening the story's commentary on displacement and belonging alongside themes of self-image, parental expectations, and resilience. [2] Critics have noted its quirky originality, visual inventiveness, and subversive undertones, likening it to an eclectic blend of C.S. Lewis and Sondheim's Into the Woods. [4] [2]Timberlake Wertenbaker, who grew up in the Basque country and resides in London, is one of the United Kingdom's leading contemporary playwrights, recognized for her acclaimed works including Our Country's Good, which received an Olivier Award and a New York Drama Critics' Award. [3] The Ash Girl reflects her characteristic interest in identity, transformation, and the human capacity to overcome adversity, published by Faber & Faber in 2001 and subsequently licensed for performances worldwide. [1]

The Ash Girl is a play by Timberlake Wertenbaker that reimagines the Cinderella fairy tale with psychological depth and allegorical elements. Ashgirl lives in a large old house, huddled in the ashes of the hearth for protection, after the death of her mother and with her father absent, while enduring life under her stepmother and two stepsisters. [4] [11] When an invitation to a grand ball arrives from Prince Amir, addressed to all the daughters of the house, Ashgirl feels a longing to attend despite her isolation and self-doubt. [11] [4]With guidance from the Fairy in the Mirror—who teaches her to see herself clearly and shape her own fate rather than granting traditional magic—Ashgirl finds the strength to prepare for and attend the ball. [12] [13] At the ball, Ashgirl shares a profound connection with Prince Amir, an exiled prince grieving his father's death and struggling with isolation in his adopted land, highlighted by a memorable dance between them. [12] [14]After the ball, on her return journey through a dangerous forest inhabited by the Seven Deadly Sins, embodied as animal-like creatures such as Slothworm, Angerbird, Greedmonkey, and others, alongside the figure of Sadness, who relentlessly tempts

her toward despair and death while the Fairy in the Mirror counters by urging her to choose life and hope, Ashgirl confronts these forces. [12] [14]Upon returning home, she confronts the inner monsters—the Seven Deadly Sins and Sadness—that have insinuated themselves into her heart and mind, threatening to undermine the fleeting happiness she discovered. [4] [12]In order to reclaim that happiness and gain the belief of others, Ashgirl must battle these forces through self-acceptance and resolve. [4] [16] Ultimately, by believing in herself, she overcomes the temptations and achieves a hopeful resolution, defeating the personified vices and affirming her own worth. [4] [16]

Characters

The characters in The Ash Girl combine familiar fairy tale roles with allegorical figures and anthropomorphic animals to reimagine the Cinderella story.[4] The protagonist is Ashgirl, a timid and isolated young woman who lives in the hearth of her family home, enduring oppression after her mother's death and her father's absence.[4][17]Ashgirl's stepfamily includes her domineering stepmother, who pressures her daughters toward social advancement, and her two stepsisters, Judith and Ruth. Judith focuses on scientific pursuits while Ruth prioritizes art, both showing little interest in attracting the prince.[17] Prince Amir, an exiled and isolated prince living unhappily in a new land, hosts a ball with his mother, Princess Zehra, to find a bride, though he remains ambivalent about the arrangement.[4][9]Ashgirl receives aid from her animal friends, including the wise Owl, the helpful but fearful Otter, and two Mice who transform into horses.[17][9] The Fairy in the Mirror acts as an inspirational guide and helper.[4][9]Opposing forces include Sadness, a figure that tempts Ashgirl toward despair, and the animalized personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins: Slothworm, Angerbird, Envysnake, Gluttontoad, Pridefly, Greedmonkey, and Lust.[17][9] Supporting roles are filled by Paul, Prince Amir's ambitious friend, and the enigmatic Man in the Forest.[9]

Themes and analysis

Psychological struggles and inner monsters

In Timberlake Wertenbaker's The Ash Girl, the protagonist's psychological struggles are vividly externalized through the personification of inner demons as the Seven Deadly Sins and the allegorical figure of Sadness, who appear as tangible threats intent on destroying humanity and possessing individuals.[2] These entities represent internalized forces such as self-doubt and depression, actively tempting Ashgirl and seeking to dominate her mind and heart.[18] The Seven Deadly Sins inhabit the forest path to the palace, while Sadness in particular taunts

Ashgirl with promises that death offers a peaceful escape from suffering, creating a direct battle for her soul against the countervailing influence of the Fairy in the Mirror.[2][12]Ashgirl herself is depicted as trapped within her own psyche, plagued by profound insecurity and self-imposed isolation that manifests in her deliberate covering of ashes as a shield against the world.[18] Her melancholic state involves a deep struggle between overwhelming sorrow and a fragile longing for happiness, complicated by an inability to believe such happiness is possible for her.[19] The play frames her journey as a confrontation with these insinuated monsters of the soul, requiring her to actively fight the overbearing presence of Sadness and the other Sins to reclaim agency.[4][12]Ultimately, Ashgirl overcomes her trauma-induced withdrawal and internalized oppression by building self-belief, choosing life over despair, and discovering hope within her heart, allowing her to break free from the personified forces that have sought to define her.[4][12]

Allegory and fairy tale reimagining

Timberlake Wertenbaker's The Ash Girl reimagines the Cinderella fairy tale with a darker, more ominous tone drawn from the Brothers Grimm tradition rather than the sanitized optimism of Disney adaptations, infusing the story with medieval allegory and anthropomorphic elements. [2] [4] The play presents the forest path to the palace as a perilous symbolic landscape inhabited by an animalized version of the Seven Deadly Sins, which appear as hybrid creatures intent on corrupting and destroying humanity. [2] [20] An additional allegorical figure, Sadness, tempts the Ash Girl toward death in a contest for her soul against the Fairy in the Mirror, heightening the narrative's moral and symbolic complexity. [2]This allegorical framework subverts traditional fairy tale mechanics by externalizing vice as active, predatory forces within the journey itself, transforming the familiar quest for the ball into a confrontation with personified threats. [2] Prince Amir further departs from the conventional prince archetype, depicted as an exiled Asian figure isolated and unhappy in his new country, which complicates the expected resolution of romantic fulfillment and introduces exile and alienation into the tale's structure. [2]

Social and cultural themes

The Ash Girl engages with a range of social and cultural themes that resonate with contemporary concerns, using its reimagining of the Cinderella story to examine issues of belonging, family power structures, and personal identity in a modern context.[4][21]Immigration and displacement are central through Prince Amir, portrayed as an exiled Asian who arrives in a new country feeling isolated and unhappy from the outset. He

experiences alienation, does not feel welcomed, and struggles with assimilation, grieving the loss of his father. This reflects broader challenges of cultural displacement and the search for belonging faced by immigrants.[4][12][21]Race emerges as a related dimension, with Prince Amir's Asian identity underscoring experiences of otherness and exclusion in his adopted society. His outsider status amplifies themes of exclusion and the difficulties of navigating differences in a new community.[4]Abuse appears in the familial dynamics, particularly through Ashgirl's subjugation under her stepmother's controlling thumb, where emotional and psychological mistreatment reinforces her vulnerability and erodes her sense of agency. The play depicts how such abuse within the household perpetuates cycles of harm and diminished self-worth.[4][22]Parental expectations weigh heavily on the young characters, as seen in the stepmother's demands that her daughters meet rigid social standards for success and conformity, pressuring them to perform roles that often conflict with their inner realities and contributing to tension and dissatisfaction.[21]Self-image forms a recurring concern, especially for Ashgirl, who battles profound self-doubt and insecurities that make her retreat from opportunities and question her value, requiring her to cultivate belief in herself to overcome internal barriers and engage with the world.[4][12]Relationships are complicated by these intersecting issues, as characters navigate love, familial bonds, and friendships amid personal traumas, loss, and societal pressures, illustrating how unresolved struggles can both hinder and ultimately shape human connections.[21]These social and cultural themes are reflected in the characters' personal struggles, such as Ashgirl's fight for self-acceptance and Prince Amir's efforts to find a place in an unwelcoming world.[4][12]