ਜਗਤ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ
ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਟੇਟ ਓਪਨ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ
ਪਟਿਆਲਾ

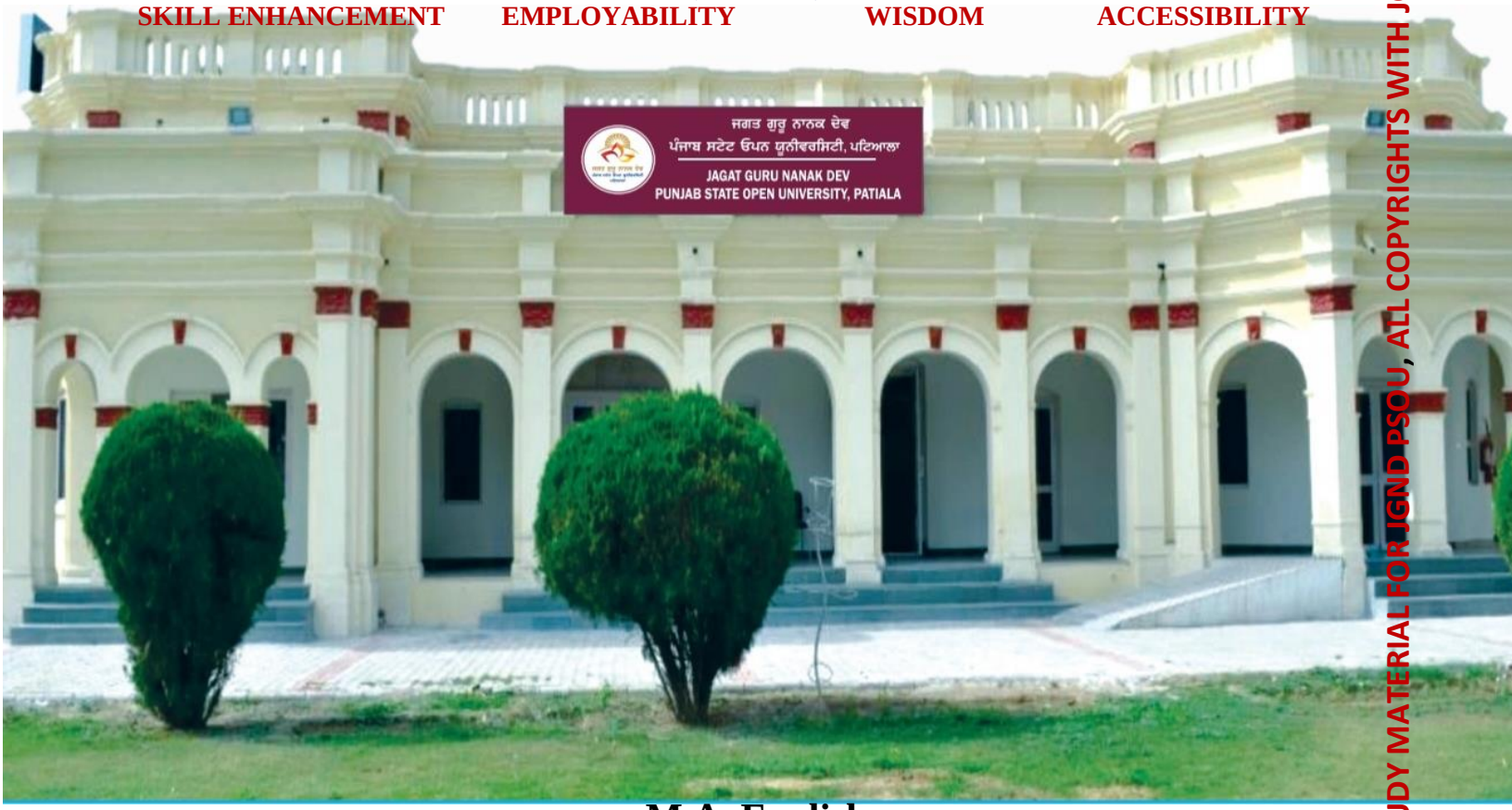
JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

(Established by Act No. 19 of 2019 of the Legislature of State of Punjab)

The Motto of the University

(SEWA)

SKILL ENHANCEMENT EMPLOYABILITY WISDOM ACCESSIBILITY



M.A. English
Semester – II
Course Code: MAEM23202T
Course: MODERN DRAMA

ADDRESS: C/28, THE LOWER MALL, PATIALA-147001
WEBSITE: www.psou.ac.in

SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL STUDY MATERIAL FOR JGND PSOU, ALL COPYRIGHTS WITH JGND PSOU, PATIALA

School of Languages

Faculty

Dr. Navleen Multani
Associate Professor in English
Head, School of Languages
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala

Dr. Tejinder Kaur
Professor in English
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala

Dr. Avtar Singh
Professor in English
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala

Dr. Vinod Kumar
Assistant Professor in English
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala

Mr. Gursandesh Singh
Assistant Professor in English
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala

JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV

PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY PATIALA

(Established by Act No.19 of 2019 of Legislature of the State of Punjab)

Course Code: MAEM23202T

Course: Modern Drama

Programme Coordinator, Course Editor & course Coordinator

Dr. Navleen Multani

Associate Prof. in English

Head, School of Languages

Course Outcomes:

- Analyse the socio-political and historical contexts of the play
- Explore the complexities of identity and self-discovery
- Examine the use of symbolism and imagery
- Evaluate the portrayal of power dynamics and social hierarchies
- Engage in critical interpretation and discussion

JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV

PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY PATIALA

(Established by Act No.19 of 2019 of Legislature of the State of Punjab)

PREFACE

Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala, established in December 2019 by Act 19 of the Legislature of State of Punjab, is the first and only Open University of the State, entrusted with the responsibility of making higher education accessible to all especially to those sections of society who do not have the means, time or opportunity to pursue regular education.

In keeping with the nature of an Open University, this University provides a flexible education system to suit every need. The time given to complete a programme is double the duration of a regular mode programme. Well-designed study material has been prepared in consultation with experts in their respective fields.

The University offers programmes which have been designed to provide relevant, skill-based and employability-enhancing education. The study material provided in this booklet is self-instructional, with self-assessment exercises, and recommendations for further readings. The syllabus has been divided in sections, and provided as units for simplification.

The Learner Support Centres/Study Centres are located in the Government and Government aided colleges of Punjab, to enable students to make use of reading facilities, and for curriculum-based counselling and practicals. We, at the University, welcome you to be a part of this institution of knowledge.

Prof. G. S. Batra,
Dean Academic Affairs

M.A. (English)
Semester – II

MAEM23202T: Modern Drama

MAX. MARKS: 100
EXTERNAL: 70
INTERNAL: 30
PASS: 40%
Credits: 5

Objective:

This course is designed to acquaint the learners with the genre of drama along with its history, types, and elements. It highlights the socio-cultural impact of drama through the ages. The course focuses on the various stages in the evolution of drama as an art form brings out the new trends in dramatic art.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PAPER SETTER/EXAMINER:

1. The syllabus prescribed should be strictly adhered to.
2. The question paper will consist of five sections: A, B, C, D, and E. Sections A, B, C, and D will have two questions from the respective sections of the syllabus and will carry 15marks each. The candidates will attempt one question from each section.
3. Section E will have four short answer questions covering the entire syllabus. Each question will carry 5 marks. Candidates will attempt any two questions from this section.
4. The examiner shall give a clear instruction to the candidates to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.
5. The duration of each paper will be three hours.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

Candidates are required to attempt any one question each from the sections A, B, C, and D of the question paper and any two short questions from Section E. They have to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.

Section - A

Bernard Shaw: *Saint Joan*

Section - B

T.S. Eliot: *The Family Reunion*

Section - C

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*

Section - D

Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*

Suggested Readings:

1. Fielden, John. “Shaw’s Saint Joan as Tragedy”.
2. Twentieth Century Literature. 1957. Unger, Kristin.
3. George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" - A Character Analysis. GRIN Verlag, 2007.
4. Carson, Neil: Arthur Miller (1982) Carrigan
5. Robert W.(ed.) : Arthur Miller: A Collection of Critical Essays (1969)
6. http://swayam.gov.in/
7. http://edx.org/
8. http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/ Master of Arts in English (Semester - II)

M.A. (English)

MAEM23202T: Modern Drama

Section-A

Bernard Shaw: Saint Joan

UNIT I: Bernard Shaw: Saint Joan

STRUCTURE

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction *Saint Joan* George Bernard Shaw

Introduction to the Author

Historical Background

1.2 Plot

1.3 Critical Analysis

1.4 Themes

1.5 Symbols

1.6 G.B. Shaw's Style of Writing

1.7 Structure

1.8 Characters and Analysis

1.9 Questions

1.0 Objectives

The main objective of this unit is to introduce the students to George Bernard Shaw as a writer and his play *Saint Joan.* The plot has been discussed thoroughly to understand certain symbols, themes and structure. By the end of this unit students should be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of G.B. Shaw as a modern writer
- Understand the philosophy of G.B. Shaw as reflected in his plays
- Comprehend Shaw's art of characterisation
- Understand historical, social and religious aspect of the age in which the play was written
- Understand Shaw's use of symbols

1.1 Introduction *Saint Joan* George Bernard Shaw

Saint Joan is a play by George Bernard Shaw, which premiered in 1923 in New York City, United States three years after the Roman Catholic Church officially canonized the historic figure Saint Joan, on whom the play is based. The play, inspired by canonizations of follows Joan of Arc's journey, from winning Orlando to her death in 1431. The play famously reflects Shaw's belief that the people responsible for her death were doing what they believed was appropriate. There is no antagonist in this chronicle play (six scenes and an epilogue). The epilogue overturns verdict of the church in 1456 and canonization of Joan of Arc.

Introduction to the Author

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, Joan of Arc, critic, and political activist. He is considered one of the most quintessential 'modern' playwrights. Along with *Saint Joan*, his other popular plays include, *Pygmalion*, *Man and Superman*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Major Barbara*, amongst others. Shaw was popular for his contentious views on various subjects like the alphabet form, eugenics, along with his opposition to vaccination and organized religion. He denounced both sides of the war during World War I, This led to some unpopularity but it had no effect on his strong influence and his popularity as a playwright rose anyway. Until this day, Shaw remains to be one of the two people who have won an Academy Award as well as the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Shaw was born in Dublin, Ireland. In 1876, Shaw moved to London where he began his self-educating regime as his formal education was disliked by him. He failed as a novelist but was successful as a playwright, polemicist, and orator in the 1880s. Shaw was a primary part and one of the main members of the Fabian Society, which aimed at the transformation of English society through permeation, not revolution. He was heavily involved in most of its activities by being the editor of the book *Fabian Essays in Socialism*.

By 1890s, Shaw worked as a theatre critic for *Saturday Reviews* where he criticized the hypocrisy of Victorian plays. Around this time, he also began to write plays and *Widower's House* was G.B. Shaw's first-ever play, which was also performed in 1892. This followed a string of several realistic plays. Shaw aimed to take a break from the theatrical tradition of Victorian plots and characters and introduce realism in the world of drama. In 1898, *Caesar and Cleopatra* premiered, and it made Shaw popular. Shaw was inspired by Marxism and Socialism, and its effects can be seen in his works, especially those written during this time. Shaw was didactic and did not believe in the 'art for art's sake' movement.

By the 1900s, Shaw was one of the most prominent playwrights on the continent owing plays like *Candida, The Devil's Disciple* and *Caesar and Cleopatra.* In 1903, after *Man and Superman* premiered, his popularity exceeded the European continent and thereon he became an internationally acclaimed playwright. Shaw's philosophy developed and it can be seen in his plays in the early 1900s. Shaw was interested in spiritual development and believed that humanity was the highest evolutionary form of life. His interest slowly began to dwell even in religious consciousness which he explored in *Androcles and the Lion.*

He wrote his most popular work in 1913 with the classic *Pygmalion.* Later on in the 1930s, he would go on to write its screenplay as well and win an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. During World War I, Shaw ceased writing plays and instead began a controversial pamphlet called *Common Sense About the War*. In his articles and essay, he accused Britain equally along with Germany for culminating war crimes and injustice, at the borders and within the nations. This made him a target of much criticism but despite this, his popularity remained intact. In his 1920 play, *Heartbreak House*, Shaw depicts the spiritual degradation of the war supporting Britain.

Joan of Arc's canonization in 1920 awakened a religious curiosity in Shaw, which resulted in his 1923 feminist modern play *Saint Joan*. In the play, He highlights religious hypocrisy along with justifying human meaning as the play is one of his works without any antagonist. The play justifies the actions of every character, no matter how unjust they may be superficially seen.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Shaw delved into tragicomedy and non-real symbols. In 1928 he has also written an encyclopedia book *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. He produced several comedies that reflected his leanings on radical politics. In the 1940s, during World War II, due to his disillusionment with the war atmosphere in London, he left his London apartment and retreated with his wife Charlotte to his country home in Hertfordshire, England. Here, he died in 1950, leaving behind a legacy which made him one of the best dramatists of English Literature.

11.2 Historical Background

In 1914 after World War-I began, Shaw to produced pamphlets titled *Common Sense about the War*. These pamphlets emphasized his belief that all nations participating in the war, no matter what side they have chosen, are equally culpable. In the patriotic atmosphere of Britain at the time, these opinions were vehemently criticized, even by his peers. Shaw was adamant and unapologetic.

Although he was supportive of Ireland's merger with Great Britain in the late 1910s, he along with G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, publicly decried the coercive actions of the British government against Irish rebels. His play during the 1916 and 1917 *Heartbreak House* very openly portrayed his frustration with the war culture in London. The play was not produced in London but on New York City's Broadway. It was received well in America.

After this and a couple more plays, Shaw decided to stop writing for theatre.The canonization of Joan of Arc in 1920 and the ever-growing war culture and sexism, amplified by the growing transnational and transcultural media, inspired Shaw to write *Saint Joan*. It premiered in Garrick Theatre on Broadway on 28th December 1923, away from Britain, as Shaw's reputation there was at its low. Shaw wanted to assess the response of the more contemporary-minded New Yorkers.

The play depicts Shaw's frustration with the war, and his feminist ideas inculcated in him by his wife, Charlotte. Due to the post-war trauma, the rise of psychology and his ideas about feminism, the character of Joan, and the central theme of the play, is considered a proto-feminist work as well as a modernist masterpiece showing liberal nationalism and appropriately criticizing the power of Church's. The different structure of this play in contrast with the traditional three-act structure sets it as an experimental work for which modernist playwrights are known.

1.2 Plot

The play was written in 1932, has a preface and an epilogue, along with six scenes. It showcases a figure of fifteenth-century Joan of Arc, a peasant girl from France who achieved grandeur as a military commander by adhering to the voices of the saints in her head. Joan experiences visions from divine entities like archangels Michael, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret, which she believes are God's messages to her to guide her actions. Even though commanding French forces to victory in many battles, she was burned at the stake for being a heresy. Shaw declared this play as a tragedy, without villains.

In Scene One, on 23rd February 1429, Robert de Baudricourt is concerned as the hens on his farm are unable to lay eggs. Joan tells him that she is instructed to carry a siege on Orleans and requests some of his men to aid her. She also tells him that she aspires to crown the Dauphin as the King of France. She inspires the steward. Although Baudricourt rebuffs, he later is affected by her ambience and agrees. The steward exclaims in delight that the hens have laid eggs in the farm. Baudricourt sees this as a divine sign from God of Joan's vision.

In Scene Two, on 8th March 1429, Joan effectively talks her way inside the palace and is received by the Dauphin in the court. She tells him that God instructs her to aid the 'true king' by rallying the English forces from Orleans and restoring France's eminence. By mentioning the term 'true king', the Dauphin is impressed and flattered so he begins to agree. The Dauphin agrees to let her take the military forces and even gives her the aid of Dunois, the military leader. She also informs him that she will crown him as the 'King of France'. Therefore, as the scene ends, she successfully convinces him of beginning the siege on Orleans by continuing the flattery and making some negotiations.

In Scene Three, on 29th April 1429, Dunois and his page are awaiting the wind to turn to favour them. Joan and Dunois discuss the strategy of the attack where Dunois explains to her the reality of warfare (as Joan asks him to authorize the attack based on sheer will and determination). Joan at first seems relentless and even stubborn. But she convinces them to begin the attack as she believes that God has instructed her to attack at that very time. Her dialogues on the strength of the army and patriotism, inspires them, and they ready the troops for the attack. As the scene ends, they begin the siege and at that very moment, the wind turns in their favour.

In Scene Four, in June 1429, Warwick and Stogumber discuss Joan's unexplained success and the Bishop of Beauvais joins them. Stogumber declares her a witch. Beauvais is worried that her claim of receiving instructions from God directly is undermining Church's power as the mediator. Her beliefs instil national pride in people, which would make Charles answerable only to God. Acknowledging this power of Joan, Warwick believes, this will create a system where the power of the Feudal Lords and the Church is stripped and as King is made responsible only by God and no other entity. Therefore, everyone decide that she has to die.

In Scene Five, on 14th July 1429, the Dauphin is crowned as the King of France at Reims Cathedral, by Joan. Joan learns that many people at the court dislike her and questions Dunois about it. He tells that due to her powers and skills, she has made the other people in important posts very unhappy. Joan desires to go home but before that, she wants to capture Paris, an idea which horrifies the new Dauphin, Charles, as he wants to propose a peace treaty. The archbishop accuses her of the 'sin of pride.' Dunois warns her that during the campaign to Paris if she is captured no one would come to her rescue or ransom her. Although she realises that she is alone, she decides that God will protect her and leaves. The men are dumbfounded due to her pure uncorrupted belief system.

In Scene Six, on 30th May 1431, Joan's trial takes place. Stogumber insists on expediting Joan's execution while the others are discussing the nature of Joan's heresy when Joan is brought to the trial, she endorses her strong belief that voices speak to her, Hence, she declares that the does not require the Church and its priests. Stogumber gets enraged after this. He along with others tortures Joan into acquiescing to her demand and she relinquishes her claim of the voices. But upon learning that whether she relinquishes it or not, she has to spend her life in jail with no parole, Joan's renounces her fake confession and reverts to her original statement. She chooses to

die by burning at the stake instead of spending her life imprisoned. Stogumber demands her immediate execution and the Inquisitor (although he thinks that she is innocent by account of her lack of understanding of the Church) and the Bishop of Beauvais excommunicates her and hand over her to the British administration. An English soldier, taking pity on the young girl, hastily gives her a cross made up joining two twigs. She kisses it before she dies. Stogumber receives a shock after watching a human being getting burnt alive and begins to scream and behave erratically. Later, Bishop Martin Ladvenu reports that before her death he approached her with a crucifix in hand. She warned him not to come close as the burning stake will hurt him. This convinced him that she was not under the Devil's influence.

In the Epilogue, which is set twenty-five years later, Joan is cleared of heresy and brother Martin informs Charles VII. In Charles' dream later, Joan appears and talks to him and the others cheerfully. The English soldier who gave Joan the cross receives a day off from hell every year on her death anniversary. A messenger from the present day (1920) brings the news that the Catholic Church has canonized Joan as a Saint. And as Saints are capable of performing miracles, Joan asks if she can be resurrected so that she lives her life properly this time again. Hearing this, every character slowly leaves the stage without answering, asserting that the world is not ready to accept a saint like her. The English soldier is about to talk to Joan when he is called back to Hell as his 24-hour leave ends. The play ends with Joan despairing if the world will ever be willing to accept saints.

1.3 Critical Analysis

The play's timeline is non-linear. There is no unity of time as each scene takes place at a different time. First, the audience is in 1429, moves to 1431, shift to twenty-five years later and then a small segment is in 1920. This non-linear time structure is very typical for modernist writers who rebelled against clear plots and straight storytelling and formulaic elements like archetypal characters. In this play, there is no antagonist, as Shaw depicts the justification behind every character's action. The protagonist is a diagonal contrast to the typical characters written in the literature before the modern period. Joan is a proto-feminist figure who crosses gender boundaries by donning attires, implied to be masculine. She is a self-trained soldier and a military leader who is skilled on the battlefield. This characterisation of Joan as the strong female lead sets her apart from the feminine women characters created before her who were mostly flat

and had restricted conventional characterisation. Joan's creation of gender-fluid elements is considered modern for the time the play was written yet turned out to be promising as in the modern era women began to don clothes, which were earlier meant for men only.

Joan's nationalism is another essential point in the play. 'France' as a nation did not exist then and Joan's idea of crowning the Dauphin as the 'King' of 'France' is very futuristic and a revolutionary statement, which no matter how aspirational it may sound, was still not so promising for the other supporting characters. Yet, Joan does end up crowning the Dauphin and he becomes Charles the Seventh. This proves her power despite being the sole female soldier in the medieval period.

Joan's power is most exerted when she challenged the authority of the Church. There is a certain unease in the acknowledgement of Joan's claim that she hears voices who speak to her and that these are from God. This is seen right from the first scene when Baudricourt is told by her about her absolute faith in God because of the voices. By claiming that God talks to her, she is reducing the Church's power down to zero and this in turn would imply that her power has the ability to free the King from feudal lords and the church, raising him in the hierarchy. Raising the King's hierarchy will not be as influential as the absence of the Church's and feudal system's power. Their absence of power would imply considerable freedom for the citizens of the 'nation' as taxes would significantly reduce and there will be more room for Freedom of Speech and Expression as well as individual liberty and spiritualism which the Church banned in the name of 'sins'.

The eggs mentioned in the first scene are a symbol of the beginning of a new age. It can be seen that the first few scenes are set in 1429 and 1431. The laying of eggs is the symbolic foreshadowing of Protestantism, which will follow in Europe in the next few decades (Martin Luther published 95 Theses in 1517) and the renaissance would reduce the power of the Church to quite an extent. Apart from this, the renaissance would also bring in a lot of freedom for the individual, something which the play emphasises again and again, through the character of Joan. Modernity always challenged the ritualistic practices of religion, and by challenging the Church, Joan presents the modern pursuit of the pure form of divinity through spiritualism by portraying a deeply personal relationship with God and then having the Church as the diluting mediator. The character of Joan is a representation of pure faith and glory. The resistance her characters

faces is the foremost theme of the point. Her unacceptance comes more from her strong take on faith than it does from her womanhood.

If seen from the modernist's point of view, just like how Joan promotes spiritualism unintentionally, the 'voices' in her head can be characterized as hysteria or schizophrenia due to the sexist world she was growing up in. Her identification of those 'voices' having a divine source is a reiteration of the patriarchy persisting during that era, even in the Church. This is because of the accusations against Joan during her trial also (her wearing 'men's' attire is one of the biggest sins). Apart from this, twentieth century, psychiatrists like Lacan and Freud and their research said that human beings' deepest desires are seen in the form of dreams and/or in extreme and some cases seen/heard in the form of visual or audio hallucinations. Joan's desire to be independent, free from the boundaries set for her as a woman leave a legacy, of powerful, with God's force (amongst others come to her in the form of these 'voices'). Hence, from a psychological perspective, the 'voices' may not be divine at all and everything Joan achieved was inadvertently the deepest desires which were suppressed.

Joan's nationalism threatens powerful figures beyond France but what stands as faith for her, is hubris for the others. She is uneducated but not unintelligent. At the beginning itself, she establishes herself as a skilled military strategist and swordsperson. But despite her skills, at every point, she has been accused of vanity and pride but she addresses her pride. Her faith in God takes her to Paris where despite knowing she will be outnumbered; she chooses to fight. Joan's utter refusal to betray the 'voices' in her head sends her to the stakes. According to the inquisitor, Joan has pride and humility, both, not one or the other as others seem to think. Joan displays an unexceptional amount of self-confidence and self-esteem, which sets the play way ahead of its time due to its liberal and individualistic philosophy. A philosophy like this affects every woman's perception of herself for the better. As opposed to the mainstream texts, which objectify and ridicule women, Joan's characters empower women. Her character was a symbol of resistance against fixed ideas.

Joan's innocence stems from her country life background that does not belittle her intelligence but belittles her cunning. Joan may be smart but she is not clever. Her lack of understanding of the Church and the feudal system stems from her lack of experience and her lack of education is influential. Education is often propagandist of the era's politics. If Joan had

received education, she would not have mentioned the voices. Hence, her lack of education contributes to her death as well as to her legacy. Her innocence makes her ignorant of the envious nature of the system. Her sheer honesty allows her to maintain her integrity, which other characters compromise. Other characters often compromise their own beliefs to fit in the system but not Joan. Conclusively and in summation, her sense of identity, which she is able to maintain despite the murky atmosphere she lives in is her biggest strength. Her belief in the 'voice' (which may be her self or God or voice against the conventions) and refusal to accept the ideology of the tyranny makes her an early protestant and the first protestant martyred by the Catholic Church and feudal system.

Fear is a constant theme in the play. Fear of a revolution and fear of reformation rules every character's mind except for Joan. Through the extensive foreshadowing of the reformation future by giving a glimpse of the modern world and hinting at the renaissance, Shaw is expressing his philosophy of reformation and revolution through the play. He proves that it is true even historically. Human beings have gone through a flux of reformations over and over again to reach the 'modern' twentieth century. Through history reformists have protested for progressive change and even risked their lives like Joan of Arc, Martin Luther, Charles Darwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Malala Yousafzai,

1.4 Themes

Feminism

Joan establishes herself as a Protofeminist. Protofeminism is a concept that anticipates modern feminism in eras when the feminist ideology was unknown. She easily transgresses gender roles and creates a gender-fluid atmosphere, at least around herself, in the medieval era. Her fighting skills, her intelligence, combined with her innocence and powerful faith, make her a powerful character, more empowering than all the men around her. She becomes a good soldier despite having no training and is a skilled military strategist despite being inexperienced. She leads the men around her to victory and wears clothes meant for men. By following her own conscious, Joan becomes an inspiration for women. Joan's clothing threatens to collapse the patriarchal institution of the time. She had the capacity to empower every woman. And what makes Joan even a better feminist than most contemporary feminists is that Joan despite being a strong lady wearing men's clothing is not a tomboy. She still has many qualities, which can be

regarded as feminine. Implying that Joan's personality was never diluted by the culture around her. She was in her own self as a person, who was never shackled by social institutions. As a soldier in medieval Europe, she protected herself from sexual assault and proved to be a trusted military commander.

Religion, Faith, and Spiritualism

In the contemporary world, Joan is regarded as a Catholic saint and is worshipped by Christians everywhere. This play depicts the foremost conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism. It can be even said that she was the pioneer of Protestantism as the reformation movement and the renaissance began some decades after this. On the one hand, Joan, by communicating with God, makes the purpose of the Church redundant, on the other hand, Joan challenges the institution of the Church, which through ritualistic practices dilutes the pure form of religion. Religion, in its social sense, threatens the freedom of people and with Joan's communication with saints and divinity, she demolishes that power structure and liberates devoted Christians by proving that the concept of faith in God must be personal. It is ironic as the same institution that burnt Joan was the one, which canonized her in 1920.

Spiritualism in relation to conscience of Joan, is also pivotal. Joan denies the Church interference. Joan recognizes herself as a Christian, but her personal faith in God challenges the system of organized religion that thrives on fear. Joan's relationship becomes pure with no dilution from the society around her and hence she connects with the divine entity she chooses to call God in a deeply personal and soulful way. Hence, the spiritualism in the play gives way to the modern idea of spiritualism and faith which modernist writers like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, wrote about and yearned for the reason for this was that the twentieth century, religion became impure, organized and fearful. Yet, the archbishop until the end is appropriately justified for his actions. He wanted to save Joan from danger of such system.

Power

Where there is religion, there is power. In the play, the Omnipotent power of God is ridiculed by the interference of the Church, which structures something deeply personal like religion into social fragments and rituals to accumulate power and money. Power in the Godly sense is not the reason for Joan's difficulties. It is the human system of Power which Joan inadvertently threatens gets into trouble. Foucault's theory of power and knowledge says that

both elements are inextricably connected. Joan's lack of knowledge of the social system gives her the power irrevocably to challenge the system since she was never under its influence anyway. Her lack of knowledge helps her to become an empowered woman. This also proves another of Foucault's points that 'power is everywhere'. Joan, a simple country girl is able to challenge the system, and even though, she does not intend to do, it happens because of her undiluted abilities and consciousness. This consciousness brings in the empowering element that also leads to her death though. This shows how the origin of Power cannot be determined.

The main conflict in Saint Joan is built around power clashes. Her allies abandon her because they fear her rise to power will diminish theirs as they have now become an integral part of the Feudal system and the Church. Joan's desire to centralize the King's power leads to a climax of converging powerful forces (where because she is lonely and abandoned, she is crushed by it).

As far as Joan's power is concerned, she gains it due to her pure innocence and high dreams. On another note, Joan's singlehood is also an important factor (as marriage would strip a woman of her agency) which empowers her as she is not answerable to anyone. Her agency which lets her make decisions is essential to her rise to Power as a military leader. After all, although she could not win Paris, she did win Orleans and even crowned Charles VII, which was deemed impossible only a few months ago.

Nationalism

Joan never claims to be nationalistic but her actions pave way for nationalism. By crowing the king, she centralizes him as the ruler of a nation, not of a Kingdom. Winning Orleans and trying to win Paris shows her devotion to a nation, which practically was non-existent. Joan's nationalism is interconnected with her faith. Joan's warfare in the hundred years' war helped determine the position and geography of France and England as nations in Europe. By crowning Charles, she centralizes the power system, which is answerable to him and by winning him territories she creates a clear-cut boundary of what place is France and what is England. Her desire to create a central political system is her biggest nationalistic factor.

1.5 Symbols

Wind

The changing of the wind is seen as a miracle. Miracles in themselves have deeply divine connotations. Joan's claim that her abilities have a divine source is proven correct and the wind is the evidence for that. Besides, the sudden and unexpected change of the wind also provides hope to the 'French' soldiers, which religion is supposed to do in the first place but wasn't doing until they saw the wind. Hence, the completely illogical and climactic incorrect time of the wind proves how faith in God, not in Church can surpass every logic. The true concept of faith and God is clear here and Joan shows the audience what Faith in its pure sense is.

Eggs

Eggs perform a similar function as the wind. Eggs are laid by Baudricourt poultry when he expects it least. In fact, he had almost given up on them laying eggs. This can be seen as a larger analogy of the medieval times had a complete loss of faith as they focused more on rituals and fear of God than faith and belief. The laying of the eggs is a foreshadowing not just of the new Christina awakening brought by Joan but also of the protestant reformation movement soon to follow in a few years by reformers like Martine Luther.

Joan's Heart

Joan's Heart not getting hurt by the fires is a strong implication that Joan can be killed in body but not in her spirit. Her unscathed heart is a metaphor for the legacy she leaves behind, which has inspired people since her birth until today and shall continue to do so. Joan's canonization in the twentieth century where her request to be reborn is rejected and shows her body once again will be hurt by the world, as the world has only worsened during those centuries, not improved. Hence, not her body, but her spirit is desperately needed for the world's redemption.

1.6 G.B. Shaw's Style of Writing

Shaw introduced the 'Shavian style of writing.' This style of writing introduces simple vocabulary to replace the conventional Latin terms, which were used in Literature until then. A hallmark of the Shavian writing system is its wittiness. Shaw introduces irony through language and this can be seen in the epilogue where Joan's rebirth is rejected because she very goodness was the cause of her death and shall be again if she is born and the very institution, which accepted Joan as a saint was the one who also killed her and denied her goodness in the first place.

Shaw provides stimulating dialogues and plot details that set the audience's excitement from the very beginning. This he does by exemplifying the strengths of his characters in the first scene itself. In the first scene of the play, the audience gets a good gist of Joan's mental strength and limitless determination. An example of this is the conversation she has with Baudricourt. In the end of that scene, the mention of fertile hens and eggs sets an optimistic course for Joan's character arc, therefore proving the versatility of the dialogues. Shaw incorporates stage directions and prefaces, which was a very unconventional method of writing plays. His glossaries and explanations create a certain level of ease which would otherwise be difficult to understand for an average reader. His characterisation is deep and detailed, which makes him a realist, rationalist and anti-romantic.

Shaw's plays do not have much action and even in Saint Joan, much of the action happens off-stage, like the Siege to Orleans, amongst other things. Also, Shaw does not have the traditional three unities in his play. The Aristotelian unities of action, place and time – Shaw not only unfollows them but also breaks them. Yet his storytelling engages the audience because by breaking the unity of time, Shaw portrays the future of Joan which shows that goodness does win in the end, even in reality. By breaking the unity of action, Shaw writes thought provoking dialogue through Joan which shows a woman's power in a medieval time. By breaking the unity of place, Shaw teleports the audience to the future which makes him such an efficient and skilled modern playwright. Shaw's rejection of conventional playwriting rules makes him an integral contributor to modernist literature.

1.7 Structure

The play does not follow the traditional three-act structure. It does not unite the classical three Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. Instead, the play's plot travels across time and fast forwards after every scene. In the last scene, there is a transgression of time, and two timelines are simultaneously shown – 1456 and 1920.

The play's structure is as follows – Preface, Scene One, Scene Two, Scene Three, Scene Four, Scene Five, Scene Six and an Epilogue. It does not follow the Freytag pyramid either as the conflict is introduced in the first scene itself with no exposition. And it is also debatable whether the climax is the scene where Joan dies or the one where she learns about her canonization.

1.8 Characters and Analysis

Joan, the Maid

Joan is the protagonist of the play. She is a simple teenager hailing from rural France uneducated and naïve. However, from the beginning itself, she is shown to be quite witty, intelligent and an expert at military strategy. She wins Orleans due to her expertise in martial arts. She shows her superiority by displaying her expertise on where to place cannons. Joan is a faithful Christian who has faith in God not in the Church. Her rejection to accept the Church's doctrine is one of the conflicts, which lands her in trouble. Joan's basic honesty and goodness shine brighter than everyone's hypocrisy. Her denial to accept the system and her faith in herself and God makes her a true soldier and a martyr. She is nineteen when she dies but she dies with the wisdom of a thousand-year-old. And the purity of her spirit is understood when her heart does not burn.

Robert de Baudricourt

He is a gentlemanly squire from Lorraine. He is one of the first supporters of Joan. Because of him, Joan gets her first armour and an opportunity to show her military skills.

The Archbishop of Rheims

At first, he considers Joan a deeply pious and innocent young woman but when he observes that level of her obstinance and self-confidence, he warns her that her 'pride' will make her peers abandon her. He tries to explain to her why the extent of confidence is dangerous and the fact that she is proven correct every time she intends on doing something does not go in her favour. Apart from this, there is also a little envy in him because Joan, not him, crowned the King of France, Charles VII.

The Inquisitor

The Inquisitor is a staunch follower of the ironclad Church doctrines. He gives a long speech on Joan's heresy in the sixth scene. He strongly opposes anyone who dares to subvert the Church's or any institution's power. Therefore, he believes it is just for them to punish Joan because according to him, heresy going unpunished is a sin in itself.

Stogumber

John de Stogumber is the chaplain of the Earl of Warwick. He is the strongest accuser of Joan and simply sees her as a witch and nothing else. He does not even try to understand the

argument about Joan's skills and abilities and how they can bring good change. A most dramatic form of change comes over him when he sees Joan get burnt to death. Afterwards, he becomes a broken, weak man who tries to do good deeds to make up for his actions which led to a person's death in such a brutal manner. The trauma of his involvement never leaves him.

Earl of Warwick

Earl of Warwick is Joan's opponent. Joan's opinion of allegiance to the King given directly is seen as a threat by him as he believes that the serfs are answerable to the Feudal Lords. He demands her death to not let the status quo be affected.

Brother Martin Ladvenu

He is a sympathetic priest who tries to save Joan. He deeply cares for her and worries about her indifference and inability to understand the dangerous politics. He feels that her only sin is ignorance. He holds up the Cross for Joan to see when she dies, and he is also instrumental in her rehabilitation in the next twenty-five years when she is proven innocent. But he does believe that her imprisonment (not her death) is just.

Polangey

A supporter of Joan. He helps Joan get an audience with Baudricourt.

Monseigneur de la Trémouille

He is the commander of the French military forces. He bullies the Dauphin regularly and therefore, resents Joan when she is made the commander.

Bluebeard

He is a believer in Joan after he sees her during the siege and is inspired by her. He is not a religious person, yet he exhibits faith in Joan.

Dunois

The leader of the military forces. He also sees Joan's potential as a military leader and they both even work together but ultimately; he chooses not to save her.

Peter Cauchon

He is a theologian academic who believes in the importance of institutional power. Hence, for him as well Joan is a threat to the system. He takes pride that he never asserted his individual beliefs. And for Joan to express hers is the utmost sin, according to him. Both he and

the Inquisitor strongly believe that individual beliefs must be surrendered to the Church doctrines.

D'Estivet

He is an impatient prosecutor against Joan. He bases his case on pure legalism which confuses and ultimately leads to the uneducated Joan's death.

Courcelles

A priest who helps in accumulating sixty-four charges against Joan including silly ones like 'stealing the King's horse'.

The Executioner

He discovers that Joan's heart wouldn't burn.

English Soldier

He gives Joan the made-up cross before she dies and for this reason, he is rewarded a day off from Hell every year on her death anniversary.

Amongst these, and apart from Joan, The Archbishop, Inquisitor, and Stogumber play an instrumental role in Joan's death. Whereas characters like Brother Martin and English Soldier are important also.

In the long preface, Shaw is very clear about his position on the characters. Every character plays an important role and has a part in Joan's character arc in some way or the other. Every character, being influenced by the social structures around them and having the institutional values ingrained in them, believe themselves to be right. Hence, the play has no Good Vs Evil conflict but more like Good Vs another Good. Every character has their reasons but ultimately those with the institutional power are the 'more Good', hence Joan dies. This is indeed a play without any villain. Though one can analyse that society itself is playing the role of villain and acting against Joan with all its hate.

1.9 Questions

1. Explain the social changes in England and the world, which provoked Shaw to write *Saint Joan*.
2. Evaluate G.B. Shaw's style of writing in *Saint Joan* and compare it with any of his other works.
3. Examine *Saint Joan* as a modern play.

4. Analyse the role of the supporting characters – The Archbishop, Stogumber and the Earl of Warwick, in taking Joan to her death.
5. Analyse the setting from a sociological perspective and the impact of its patriarchy, feudal system, and Church's dominance on Joan's narrative.
6. Explain the theme of power in the play.
7. Explain the major motifs and symbols in the play, which helps in the development of its narrative.
8. Critically analyse *Saint Joan* as a modern play.
9. Explain G.B. Shaw's style and tone of writing with reference to his play – *Saint Joan.*
10. How does Joan's feminism affect the Feudal system and the Church institutions?
11. Comment on the absence of the villain in the play or the role society plays jointly.
12. Examine the characters of Stogumber and the Archbishop and study their beliefs, which affect Joan's life.
13. What is the significance of symbols in the play? Discuss few important symbols, which are helpful in the development of action in the play.
14. What role Dominican priest and the inquisitor plays at John's trial?
15. Critically analyse G.B. Shaw's ideas of heresy and importance of freethinkers in modern society through the play *Saint Joan*.
16. What function does the Epilogue plays in *Saint Joan* by G.B. Shaw? Do you think its absence would have change the nature of the play?
17. Does the play substantiate Shaw's claim that Joan was a pioneer feminist?

M.A. (English)

MAEM23202T: Modern Drama

Section-B

T. S. Eliot: *The Family Reunion*

UNIT II: T. S. Eliot: *The Family Reunion*

STRUCTURE

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction to *The Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot

Introduction to the Author

Historical Background

2.2 Plot

2.3 Critical Analysis

2.4 Themes

2.5 Style and Structure

2.6 Structure

2.7 Characters and Analysis

2.8 Criticism

2.9 Questions

2.0 Objectives

The main objective of this unit is to introduce T.S. Eliot as a writer and his play *The Family Reunion.* The plot has been discussed thoroughly to understand certain symbols, themes and structure with its contemporary relevance. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of T.S. Eliot as a modern writer.
- Understand the psychoanalytic approach to this play
- Comprehend Eliot's art of characterisation.
- Understand the historical and social aspects of the age in which the play was written.
- Understand Eliot's use of religious philosophy and the significance of myths in modern times.

2.1 Introduction to *The Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot

The Family Reunion is a play written by T. S. Eliot. It is written mostly in blank verse. Eliot takes elements from detective plays and Greek drama to depict the protagonist's journey from guilt to redemption. It was first performed in 1939 and was not received well by the audience and critics. Eliot himself was dissatisfied with it. Since then, especially from the second half of the twentieth-century play has experienced a revival from Literature critics, students, and modernism lovers. Many critics have seen similarities between the play's plot with Eliot's personal life, especially his tumultuous relationship with his wife.

Introduction to the Author

T. S. Eliot was a modernist author, writer, poet, essayist, playwright, and literary critic. He is considered the central figure of twentieth-century modernism, notably modern poetry. His poems – *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and plays like *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *Cocktail Party* (1949), are considered prominent texts of Modern English Literature.

Born in America in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot's family was one of the Boston Brahmins. His father was a businessperson but provided his son with the best possible education. Eliot as a child became obsessed with Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*. In 1909, he graduated from Harvard University with a B. A., which he completed in three years instead of four. At Harvard, Irving Babbitt had a significant influence on Eliot. From him, Eliot developed his anti-romantic attitude. In the early 1910s, he went to France to study Philosophy and World Literature where

he studied poets like Dante and Donne. From 1911 to 1914 he went back to Harvard to study Sanskrit and Ancient Indian Philosophy and its traces can be seen in his poem *The Waste Land*. But due to World War I, he could not return to Harvard for his PhD. Examination. Around this time, he met Ezra Pound and both of them developed a strong long-lasting friendship, which is considered one of the most important companionships in the literary world. In 1914 he went to Oxford after receiving a scholarship. In 1915, he taught for a year at Birkbeck, University of London. From here on, Eliot became more of a British than an American and loved London city, although he did always credit St. Louis, his hometown, for inculcating his love for Literature.

Eliot went on to become an editor, a critic, a playwright, and a philosophical poet. The publication of *J. Alfred Prufrock* in 1915 was his first major publication. He worked in several schools in the last 1910s. In 1922, after he published *The Waste Land*, Eliot garnered an international reputation. Pound edited the poem, and it reflected Eliot's Indian philosophical beliefs.

In the years coming, Eliot officially became a British citizen. In the 1920s and 30s, Eliot wrote plays like *Sweeney Agonistes*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Family Reunion*. His most popular play, *The Cocktail Party* was written in 1949. Through his plays, Eliot revived the classical poetic verse drama.

Eliot married twice in his lifetime. On 4th January 1965, Eliot died of emphysema at his home in Kensington, London leaving behind a legacy for being the most notable figure of modern English Literature and of the twentieth century.

Historical Background

The Family Reunion was first performed in Westminster Theatre, London on 21st March 1939 and ran until 22nd March 1939. Eliot was deeply upset with the urban scene in London and the moral anxiety people were facing. The Victorian dilemma of the nineteenth century found its way into the twentieth century due to war trauma and constant violence. In the advent of such faithlessness wherever he went, Eliot wrote *The Waste Land*, which was published in 1922. It garnered him international fame. Eliot went on to write three more plays after this with similar spiritual themes dealing with human guilt, atonement, and spiritualism. *Sweeney Agonistes, Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion.*

The Family Reunion, Eliot intentionally wrote as a Christian revenge tragedy running parallel with the classical epics and plays with similar themes but a different plot. The play contains some great verses, which are even better than the dramatic verses from the Elizabethan times. Eliot wanted to approach a secular audience when the play was first performed. But the lack of the character's motives and desires made the audience feel disconnected and hence, *The Family Reunion* became Eliot's least successful play as compared to his other plays. Eliot tried to introduce a blend of classical and modern to heal the social disintegration the audience was struggling with at the time.

2.2 Plot

The play is set in the fictional town of Wishwood. The matriarch of the house, an ill Amy or Lady Monchensey is hosting her own birthday party with help from her sisters - Ivy, Agatha and Violet and her two brothers – Gerald and Charles. Mary, the daughter of their deceased cousin joins them too. A servant is also present. Amy is waiting for the arrival of her three sons, of which, Harry is the one who hasn't visited her for the longest time - eight years.

Amy is quite ill and her doctor claims that she is alive purely due to her willpower - her will to see her eldest son Harry succeed as Lord Monchensey while she is still alive. Amy is a rich widow who received her husband's wealth after his death some years ago.

The weather is cold in Wishwood and Gerald misses being in the subtropical climate of the East as he used to work in British India. The group is conversing about the difference between their generation and the next. They believe the next generation is very decadent. They ask Mary for her opinion about her generation but Mary, being a thirty-year-old with no marriage prospects feels disconnected from every generation.

After a while, Harry arrives. Agatha is concerned that the change of place might be hard for him to adapt to because he hasn't visited his home for a long time now and his childhood became traumatic because his father died before he left home. His wife has also recently died which makes his visit all the more sentimental. Amy expects Harry to take over the estate since he is the oldest son. Before his arrival, Amy mentions how fortunate it is that they don't have to encounter Harry's deceased wife who died after falling from a ship. Because they always disliked her. The reason for their dislike for Harry's wife is not given but it can be seen that Amy is happy that Harry is single again as she wants Harry and Mary to get married. When Harry

arrives, the family at first is expecting John, Amy's second-born son. So they are surprised to see Harry arrive as he never truly connected with his mother as much as he did with his father.

After his arrival, Harry notices creatures which are noticeable only to him like Eumenides from Greek mythology who haunt the people who are guilty of murder. Eumeinedes are female demonic Goddesses in Greek mythology primarily worshipped by those who wish to seek vengeance. Therefore, indirectly it is implied that Harry sees them, particularly because he believes that he murdered his wife. It becomes clear quickly that he is hallucinating them. Harry is feeling intensely guilty as it is revealed that he was angry with his wife and thinking about killing her when she fell overboard. Therefore, he is unable to understand whether he pushed her or whether she fell accidentally. He questions the reality of that incident. He does have an alibi, which is not explicitly mentioned but implied that he is innocent. But he is unable to believe what truly happened and therefore he hallucinates the creatures due to his guilt. Whether he murdered his wife or not, is never clarified but left to the audience's interpretation. Apart from Harry, Amy's other sons do not arrive as they both were injured in motor accidents.

Mary confesses to Agatha that she wants to leave Wishwood because she feels suffocated as she is not independent. Mary plans to find a job and leave as she feels embarrassed to depend on Amy at the age of thirty. But Mary is aware that Amy does not want her to leave as she knows about Amy's wish to see her get married to Harry. Mary knows that it cannot despite Harry and her being each other's childhood sweethearts. She has accepted that Harry won't marry her and she isn't too eager to marry him either. She asks Agatha for help to find a job but Agatha asks her to wait. Waiting for what? She does not specify. But here Agatha's intentions start to seem suspicious.

Harry and Mary connect and recall their childhood memories but do not connect romantically as Amy wishes. Agatha admits to Harry that when Amy was pregnant with Harry, Harry's father tried to kill Amy and Agatha dissuaded him from doing it. The reason behind this is revealed that Agatha had an affair with Amy's husband a long time ago. Although Amy received Harry's father's wealth, she was never really loved by her husband. Due to that affair, Agatha and Amy are still at loggerheads. And Agatha still harbours some guilt for that.

After this, with the creatures, his wife and father's death, the guilt and now with the news of the affair, Harry's mental health deteriorates. The creatures follow him everywhere although a

doctor is present to look after Harry at all times. With more and more sadness, Agatha and Harry have a talk where she encourages him to leave for his health's sake. Accordingly, Harry soon announces that even he is leaving. He wishes to distance himself from his mother and the estate as he feels that Wishwood and Amy are the reasons for his emotional fragility.

Despite trying to stop him, Harry leaves. Amy tells her brother that Harry is leaving to become a missionary to excuse his sudden departure. But Amy later blames Agatha for stealing Harry 'just like she stole her husband.' But Agatha insists that she did not persuade Harry to leave. Although she and Harry did have a long talk about his inheritance. Therefore, there is an indirect implication that Agatha may be after Harry's inheritance but it is never confirmed. It is revealed that John, Amy's second-born son will receive the inheritance now that Harry has left.

After Harry's departure, Agatha and Mary confess that they could see the Eumenides too. Hence, implying that they too are guilty of something. Agatha's guilt can be understood but Mary's guilt is complex and not easily understood.

Amy soon dies. The play ends with Agatha and Mary praying around her body and then blowing out the candles from her birthday cake.

2.3 Critical Analysis

In the play, Eliot targets the hierarchy within upper-class families and how the young generation is expected to sacrifice not only their dreams but also their mental health in order to sustain the hierarchy. The power structure in the play thrives on fragments of a person's sacrifices over a lifetime. Harry's departure breaks this power structure, which was already quite fragile on its own.

In most of Eliot's plays, the characters are experiencing a redemption journey and here as well characters like Harry, Amy, Agatha, and Mary are at the redemption point of their respective character arcs. There is always a saint-like figure who also plays the 'martyr' because of his past sins. Harry suffers from his lack of perception of reality and his uncontrolled rage, which he never even acted upon. Harry is desperate to find atonement after genuinely believing that he has sinned. The lack of a paternal figure in Harry's life and lack of maternal guidance (despite having a mother) makes Harry's search for atonement into a search for God and a search for some concrete and monolithic faith. Human love, in Eliot's plays, is never enough for his characters (except for Eliot's last play *The Elder Statesman).*

The characters are blind to see Harry's suffering because of their own desires, especially their desires for power over their own lives. Uncle Charles at least tries to understand Harry when he requests that he be told at least what the problem is, only then can he begin to perceive and help in its resolution. Words and faith are intertwined for a spiritualism Eliot, who even in *The Waste Land* mentions *Shantih, Datta, Dayadhavam* and *Damyatta* as ways to an ideal life. That being said, words can be the source of happiness and peace as well as sadness and despair. Harry despairs when he hears his mother's words that she expects him to become the next Lord Monchensey. Mary's words, if not heal, at least help him to an extent as he finds a partner in his sufferings.

The play can be seen in two ways – the realistic (dealing with problems of life) and the spiritual. From the surface, the play is just a story of a family reunion for the matriarch's birthday party where every character is experiencing a mental struggle of their own with a complex history. Delving into these mental struggles comes the spiritual realm of the play. Harry is convinced that the Furies are following him wherever he goes because he firmly believes that he murdered his wife, no matter what anyone says. Through his sufferings and path to redemption, one can see Eliot's preoccupation with the concept of 'original sin 'as mentioned in the bible. Harry's uncertainty about the truth is not as relevant as Harry's wish for that one moment in wishing his wife dead. Here, we see a stark reflection of Eliot's marital problems. The guilt in which Harry is living does not come from the possibility that he may have murdered his wife but from wishing for it. Harry is drowning in despair and his atonement is finding a path to how he can forgive himself. There is a possibility that Harry might be suffering from a genetic curse as the reader understand Harry's father tried to murder his mother but was stopped by Agatha who loved him.

The Eumenides and their transformation into 'bright angels' in a clear reference to the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus. Eliot develops this idea of transformation in this play as well as in *Murder in the Cathedral*. But what must be noted is the connotations that Eliot is trying to say. In *Oresteia, Murder in the Cathedral and in The Family Reunion*, Eliot points out that before atonement there is always suffering and hence the tragic Eumenides transforms into redemption rewarding bright angels.

But Harry's, Agatha's and Mary's confrontation with the Eumenides possess a certain kind of incestuous Oedipus Complex as suggested by Sigmund Freud and unrequited love along with unfulfilled angst of childhood fantasies. In Harry's relationship with Agatha lies his Oedipus complex as in her affection for him he found the essence of motherhood, which Amy failed to provide. Mary is Harry's childhood sweetheart and in her lies this impossible and long-gone possibility of his happiness through love. Both represent an impossibility to Harry – the former is forbidden in reality and the latter is too late.

The climax does some sort of poetic justice as the motif of the curse comes to a symmetrical end. Harry's father's wish is finally fulfilled, although late. Amy has died and now the estate goes to John, not Harry. In the climactic chorus where Agatha and Mary sing, Eliot accentuates the inevitability of the family curse. The question until the end remains unresolved – is atonement for Harry needed, can find atonement and if so, how?

The most interesting part about the play is its ability to impeccably merge dialogues with verses.

2.4 Themes

Family Conflict

This is one of the primary themes of the play. The family conflict here concerns itself more with the inter-generation conflict which is common in almost every family. Therefore, the title having the term 'reunion' actually stands as an irony. The reunion occurs only physically, mentally they couldn't be further. The family is far from the picture-perfect conventional family of the twentieth century. Besides, Amy seems like the only glue which brought everyone together. Her death is a symbolic foreshadowing of the future breakup of the Wishwood estate and the Wishwood family, which after her death is imminent. The titular 'reunion' hence is only a façade everyone is putting up.

Power of a physical place

The Wishwood stands as a haunting past for Harry, Agatha, Mary and even Amy. Returning to that place ignites mental conflicts for all the characters and leads to the revelations of old buried truths and lies about the family. Amy desperately craves a physical reunion at her birthday party, but it quickly deteriorates because of the deep connotations the place brings in for

different members of the family. The place does nothing but repels everyone who comes in proximity to it except for Amy.

Wishwood is a place of physical confinement for Harry and a traumatic place as his father died there. Harry returning to this place means that he is trying to find peace in his life from constant mental turmoil.

Guilt and Atonement

Every main character is ruled by guilt, and it is these actions that determine their character arcs. Harry's guilt of presumably killing his wife, Agatha's guilt of having an affair with her brother-in-law and Mary's guilt of living off of Amy when she is still an unmarried woman in her thirties. The guilt in the family is framed in more of a karmic way (as discussed in Indian religious philosophy) by the playwright as everyone seems to attain a certain sort of poetic justice by the end of the play. This is seen particularly in the case of Eumenides who transforms into an angel later. The guilt has its own destiny, which shapes itself into the characters' redemption. The playwright captures this mental turmoil by projecting the Greek creatures (Hellenism) and turning them into Biblical angels (Christianity). The transformation plays a spiritual as well as a religious role here. Christianity is a major religion in the United Kingdom where the play is set. And Eliot has often criticized organized religion especially the Church for being a materialistic power entity. Here, by showing angels directly being witnessed by the characters with no mediators in between (like the Church), Eliot points out the personal connection with God and religion is meant to have and hence this also delves into the spiritual side of his beliefs. Spiritualism in the twentieth century focused on a personal relationship with a divine entity. The angels symbolize that intimate relationship with God as well as the fact that atonement can be reached without any ritualistic practices. Eliot criticizes the traditional practices of religion while showing the importance of self-examination and regret as necessary parts of achieving redemption.

Sin

Eliot's preoccupation with the concept of sin also extends here. Firstly, and more prominently it is seen in his poem *The Waste Land*. Eliot confuses the audience by showing different versions of sin in the story from which guilt is predominantly derived. In this row first is Harry, who has not sinned if seen from a realistic point of view. His only sin is the thought of

uncontrolled rage, not actual rage. His sin is of the mind or psychological one. Agatha's sin is falling into temptations and betraying her sister by having a relationship with her brother-in-law. Her sin is of the physical body as it was her actions for which she harbours guilt. The only person who has truly not sinned at all, in mind and physical body is Mary. She has not sinned but harbours guilt due to sociological factors. Society has told her that an unmarried thirty-year-old woman is worthless. Hence, the concept of sin in the play and its different versions makes one think about what can truly be defined as a sin. Excluding Mary, who is the bigger sinner between Harry and Agatha? From the looks of the guilt, Harry is clearly suffering more. Agatha despite feeling guilty is not looking for atonement as desperately as Harry is. But her sin affected her sister and she suffered for ages because of the affair.

Curses

Curses are also a significant theme of the play. The Wishwood family is affected by two curses in particular. Harry's father tries to murder his wife and Harry thinks about murdering his just before she dies. Harry's father's wish is also fulfilled in the end when Amy dies. This curse is interwoven in the plot along with the guilt of the character arcs and they perfectly depict the story with all strings being tied as the climax occurs and the end is reached.

The juxtaposition of past and present

Throughout the play, Eliot uses flashbacks a psychological way to see things in modern times. Present and past are neatly interwoven within the lot to tell the whole story. Flashbacks occur through the characters' recollection of the past and through their narration of it, like Agatha telling Harry about his father's wish to kill his mother Amy and Mary and Harry recollecting their childhood memories at Wishwood, amongst others. These flashbacks cause a good amount of upheaval mentally for the characters as Mary slowly gets disgusted with her inability to leave Wishwood, Harry develops a despise for the estate and leaves permanently leaving the estate to his steady younger brother John and Amy is disgusted by her sister and still has been unable to forgive her from 'stealing' her husband away. The flashbacks intertwined with the present also lead to Harry's decision of leaving the estate forever for which Amy blames Agatha for persuading her son.

2.5 Style and Structure

The play is partly in blank verse and partly written in prosaic style. Eliot was inspired by classical Greek verse dramas and loved writing poetic dramas. His verse drama was first seen with *Murder in the Cathedral*. He continued to use this form of writing in his later plays as well. The plot and setting of the play deeply resemble the domestic conventional 1930s drawing room drama, The Greek elements are chiefly seen in the ways Harry's aunts and uncles sometimes exclude themselves from their characters and the plot and sing a commentary on the plot similar to the chorus in Greek dramas. Secondly, Harry can see the Eumenides who are also seen by his servant, Agatha, and Mary. The Eumenides are a reference to the Greek tragedian Aeschylus and his trilogy of plays, Oresteia where he used the Furies as a significant plot element. And lastly, Harry's story is that of seeking redemption after going through a journey of guilt.

The play is divided into two acts and each act has three scenes. The first part takes place in the drawing room during teatime. It sets as an exposition and introduces the characters. And in the following scenes, the plot unveils itself. At first, the play had two acts with three scenes in the first and two scenes in the next. After Eliot got questioned by someone about the fate of the characters, he edited the play and added another scene, the last scene of the second act and the sixth and final scene overall to tie all the loose ends and to do justice to the character arcs. The last scene acts as an epilogue. When questioned about Harry's character and where he eventually goes, Eliot answered that Harry is somewhere on the 'other side of despair,' which means that Harry has found his atonement. This in some way means that Harry's story ends well after he successfully moves on from his turbulent childhood and his traumatic experience with his deceased wife.

The entire play is not in verse but its significant portions are. The portions with verse are mostly written in iambic pentameter. Eliot personally believed that poetic drama was essential in the use of portraying characters who were struggling in the material world and pined for spiritual awakening. He, therefore, uses poetic verse drama to depict human struggles and to emphasise human transcendence from the superficial. Poetic verses can show emotions and the deepest and most hidden sentiments as poetry itself is a very subjective and emotional genre of writing, unlike prose. Through his verse dramas, Eliot successfully revived Elizabethan and the classical Greek dramas. Both these eras were known for being the pinnacle of Western Theatre. Through his revival, Eliot popularised England as the centre of theatre and theatrical culture again.

Therefore. West End was born in London. The credit for the twentieth-century revival of the poetic drama goes completely to Eliot as the best-known verse dramas of this era were *The Cocktail Party* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, not to mention, *The Family Reunion*, also.

2.6 Symbols

Eumenides and Angels

One of the most important symbols of the play – the Eumenides stands for Harry's and Agatha's sins and their mere presence means that they are there to induce guilt into their target's minds, which as far as Harry is concerned, is successful. The fact that Agatha, Mary and Harry's servant can see the Eumenides implies that somewhere, someone has sinned. The transformation of the Eumenides into Angels implies the guilt transforming into redemption the characters are seeking. The Angels symbolize very Christian imagery as well as a victory in Harry's redemption arc as he finally attains salvation by forgiving himself and leaving Wishwood permanently.

Wishwood estate

The Wishwood Estate stands as a symbol for the character's confinement and leaving it implies the characters' ultimate freedom which is exceedingly difficult. As Mary says in one scene, the Wishwood home makes everyone wait and wait forever. She meant Harry's arrival for dinner, but it extends further. Harry can seek redemption only after his confrontation with his childhood confinements. Amy is a dowager who received the Wishwood Estate, which means even as a widow Amy stays within the confines of her husband who hated her. Agatha is in the confines of the dead man whom she loved but never married and now she has to confront her sister. Most importantly, the Wishwood Estate has confined Mary the most as the other characters have some or the other place to go, but not her. Being an unmarried woman, Mary is stuck there as she is not even independent.

Water

When Harry bathes in the hot water after he consults with a doctor who arrived to examine him, he goes in feeling guilty as ever. It is after the bath that he is able to find atonement by leaving the estate permanently. Water is a symbol of cleansing and purity, and it washes away Harry's sins also. Harry's bath is a symbol of his ritualistic purgation, which ultimately frees him from his burdening guilt. Water is also mentioned in the form of sea and rivers, which refers to the scientific memory of water as water has stayed on the planet earth for

millions of years and has been passed through various living creatures. Therefore, through water, the past, present and even the hopeful future are interconnected and symbolized in the play.

Eyes

The Furies' Eye is a symbol of the objectification of Harry's guilt as well as his curse. Harry is the receiver of the watchful eye and is the conscious of the family. Therefore, his leaving the family can be seen as another domino, which led to the breakup of the Wishwood Estate.

Darkness

The darkness symbolized Harry's journey. Harry has to work himself up mentally to prepare for the journey to have the family reunion. His arrival at the 'dark' place called Wishwood Estate is symbolic of his rebirth. But the darkness symbolizes uncertainty too. Will he stay there forever, unable to leave or will finally leave? Ultimately, the darkness does not dissolve into him, and Harry can find light in the form of his atonement and leaves for an uncharted but hopeful path.

Fire

Amy instructs her servants to make a fire. The play is set in March which is usually a season of spring in the Northern Hemisphere where England is located and the play is set. Sacrifices were usually made in spring in ancient civilizations. The fire is a mythological symbol of sacrifices. Harry's spiritual self comes into conflict with his materialistic mother. Hence, the fire symbolizes Harry sacrificing materialistic pursuits like the Wishwood Estate to go on a journey of self-realization and ultimate peace.

2.7 Characters and Analysis

The characters in *The Family Reunion* are of types - Flat and Round.

Flat characters include Charles, Gerald, Ivy, Violet, Dr. Warburton, Sergeant Winchell, Denman, and Downing. They do not have any character arcs as such. They merely wait and watch the actions of the other characters. They are simply caricatures meant to say non-important dialogues. They do not play any part in the main plot of the play. The round characters are Amy, Harry, Agatha, and Mary. Their actions have an impact on the direction of the plot as well as on each other's actions. Each one of them has separate character arcs and their journeys are interwoven with the plot of the play. Their choices affect each other and the play.

Amy

Amy is the dowager and the owner of the Wishwood Estate when the play opens. She is worldly in her manner and follows propriety. She is ill with worldly desires. She expects Mary and Harry to get married but that never happened. She also has a long rivalry with her sister whom she blames for stealing the love of her husband away by having an affair with him. She later again blames Agatha for persuading Harry to leave the Wishwood Estate permanently.

Harry

Harry is a young widower who blames himself for the death of his wife although it is made quite apparent that he never murdered her. He is hinted at having Schizophrenia as he has visual hallucinations of the Greek creature Eumenides constantly. He is drowning in guilt and trying to find ways to redeem himself. His turbulent childhood and his dark relationship with his home – the Wishwood Estate and with his mother. His character attains spiritual attainment by the end of the play as he leaves the Wishwood Estate forever and finds his path in life by forgiving himself.

Mary

Mary is the daughter of Amy's long-lost cousin. She is living with Amy as she does not have any other place to go. Being a thirty-year-old unmarried woman makes her feel disgusted with herself a guilty for living off of her rich aunt. She is hinted at suffering from depression. She feels disconnected from every person she meets and/or talks to. Mary finds some solace after talking to Harry but he also soon after those leaves. By the end of the play, Mary's fate is still undecided as Amy dies.

Agatha

Agatha is Amy's sister. Both the sisters have had a yearlong rivalry because of Agatha's affair with Amy's husband and her brother-in-law. Her intentions are unclear, and she does harbour guilt for her actions but not as much as Harry does for merely thinking something evil. Her position in the play is mysterious as well as precarious. She tells Mary that they must wait. But what Agatha is waiting for is never made clear. Agatha in this way does not even help Mary find a job as she wants to leave Wishwood while Agatha does not.

2.8 Criticism

In this play, Eliot is dealing with religious issues, which were observed by Victorian people and contemporary issues of modern human beings. As a critic, Eliot is trying to build a bridge between these two aspects of human life. Through this play, he is displaying problems of real life, which are emotionally driven rather than putting his characters in romantic settings. He aims to depict the modern dilemma where modern human beings find themselves as confused 'self' in a new industrial age. As Eliot put his characters in a modern setting, he discusses the psychological journey of these characters where they experience, hallucinations, schizophrenia, Oedipus complex and other mental health imbalances. The layers of the human psyche and the situation of humans in modern times are being explored in this play where conscious reality plays a vital role.

The play is about the characters who are returning home but home is not a symbol of comfort here but alienation. The characters in their own way are practicing self-alienation as they are confronting realities but not able to explain them to anyone. Harry is alienated as being the eldest son of the Wishwood Estate he must execute the expiation and the curse. His self-alienation comes from the fact that his wife is gone and he is wandering and wondering where to go with no destination and along with carrying a pang of huge guilt.

Amy is alienated from her family as her sons refuse to visit her and her sister betrayed her by sleeping with her husband. Amy is in a state of desperation for connections and relationships. Therefore, she accepts Mary and even brings her up because she could never connect with her sons and husband, nor her maternal family. Mary performs as the mental fulfilment for Amy by living as an eternal companion and a part-time housekeeper for the Wishwood Estate. Amy wished for Mary to become a permanent member of the house but that could not happen because Harry refused to marry Mary.

Mary, on the other hand, is in self-alienation because she isn't a valued member of the family. She knows that her job to stay at Wishwood is to fulfil Amy's loneliness and desperation and to act as an occasional housekeeper. Her depression is more genuine than other characters because she truly has nothing, no materialistic possessions, and no marital or financial prospects. And when she tries to find a job, Agatha asks her to wait.

Agatha's self-alienation comes from her unclear intentions about the Wishwood Estate and Amy. Her actions do not derive any meaning, especially her persuasion to Harry to leave the Wishwood Estate. Her guilt cannot be believed as it does not exhibit in her actions as Harry's does. Agatha's unclear intentions and her constant presence at the Wishwood Estate are fascinating as well as mysterious to the point that it makes one think about Mary's future.

2.9 Questions

1. Why does Harry feel guilty and what is the effect of it on the development of the plot?
2. How does T. S. Eliot's affinity for spiritualism reflect in the play?
3. Explain the historical background of when Eliot wrote his play *The Family Reunion*.
4. Point out the reflections of the social and political atmosphere at the time the play, *The Family Reunion* was written.
5. Decipher the Greek and Christian elements from the play, *The Family Reunion* and their effects on the plot.
6. Explain the theme of guilt and redemption.
7. Why does Harry suffer from Guilt?
8. Which of the characters are sinners and why?
9. Examine the symbol of Eumenides and Angels and analyse their presence's effect on the characters and vice versa.
10. What kind of a place is Wishwood Estate? Explain with regards to the characters' opinion about the place.
11. Explain the main characters' guilt and redemption journeys as a reflection on modern times.
12. Explain Mary's personality and mental health issues she is suffering in her life.
13. Analyse the play *The Family Reunion* from a psychoanalytic lens.
14. Comment on the ending of the play and how Eliot justifies it.
15. Examine the types of characterisation Eliot uses in the play and what impact does it have on the pla

M.A. (English)

MAEM23202T: Modern Drama

Section-C

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*

UNIT III: Arthur Miller: Death of a Salesman

STRUCTURE

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Modern American Theatre

3.2 American Dream

3.3 Introduction to Arthur Miller

3.4 Arthur Miller's Contribution to American Drama

3.5 Introduction to Death of a Salesman

3.6 Themes

3.7 Symbols

3.8 Summary

3.9 Act-wise summary

3.10 Characters

3.11 Important quotes from the play theme wise

3.12 Act wise important quotes from the play

3.13 Critical opinion on the play Death of a Salesman

3.14 Style and Structure of Death of a Salesman

3.15 Questions

3.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Contextualise the play in the mid-twentieth century literary landscape,
- Contextualise the play among Miller's works,
- Understand the structure of Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman,
- Have an understanding of the symbolism and themes in Miller's play, and
- Critically analyse the play.

3.1 Modern American Theatre

Modern American theatre has its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the rise of naturalism and realism as dominant dramatic forms. Over the years, American theatre has evolved to reflect changes in society and culture, and has been influenced by various artistic movements, including modernism, postmodernism, and avant-garde theatre. In this essay, we will examine the evolution of modern American theatre, its major players and influences, and its current state.

The early years of modern American theatre were marked by the emergence of naturalism and realism as dominant dramatic forms. Playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller explored the complexities of the human experience and addressed social issues such as class, race, and gender. O'Neill, in particular, is considered the father of modern American drama, with plays such as "Long Day's Journey into Night" and "The Iceman Cometh" exploring the darker aspects of the human psyche and the search for meaning and purpose in life.

In the post-war years, American theatre was influenced by the emergence of avant-garde and experimental theatre. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee used non-traditional narrative structures, language, and characters to challenge traditional notions of what theatre could be. Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," for example, eschewed traditional plot and character development in favor of a more existential exploration of the human condition.

The Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s also had a profound impact on American theatre. Playwrights such as Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson explored issues of race and African American identity, while feminist playwrights such

as Maria Irene Fornes and Caryl Churchill addressed issues of gender and sexuality. These plays challenged traditional notions of identity and representation in theatre and helped to broaden the scope of what could be considered "mainstream" theatre.

In the 1980s and 1990s, American theatre was influenced by postmodernism and the rise of the AIDS epidemic. Playwrights such as Tony Kushner and Sarah Kane used non-linear narrative structures and fragmented language to explore issues of sexuality, mortality, and the human condition. Kushner's "Angels in America" is considered a landmark play of this era, exploring the impact of AIDS on American society and the search for meaning and purpose in the face of mortality.

Today, American theatre continues to evolve and reflect changes in society and culture. Playwrights such as Lynn Nottage and Quiara Alegría Hudes address issues of race and immigration, while experimental playwrights such as Suzan-Lori Parks and Annie Baker challenge traditional notions of form and structure. The rise of digital media and social media has also had an impact on American theatre, with plays such as "Privacy" by James Graham exploring issues of privacy and technology in the digital age.

In addition to the evolution of dramatic forms and styles, modern American theatre has also been influenced by changes in the way theatre is produced and consumed. The rise of regional theatre companies and the growth of the off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway scenes has provided a platform for new and experimental works, while the growth of theatre festivals and touring productions has helped to broaden the reach of American theatre beyond New York City. The use of digital media and social media has also had an impact on American theatre, with companies such as National Theatre Live and BroadwayHD streaming live performances to audiences around the world. This has helped to make theatre more accessible and has provided a new platform for emerging playwrights and theatre companies.

However, despite these changes, American theatre continues to face challenges. The rise of digital media and streaming services has led to a decline in live theatre attendance, particularly

3.2 American Dream

The concept of the American Dream has been a central theme in American literature for over a century. It represents the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve success and prosperity in America through hard work, determination, and perseverance. In this

essay, we will explore the origins and evolution of the American Dream in American literature, its various interpretations, and its relevance in contemporary American society.

The concept of the American Dream can be traced back to the early 17th century, when European settlers came to America in search of a better life. The idea of the "New World" represented a fresh start and a chance for people to escape the social and economic constraints of Europe. This idea was later popularized by writers such as Horatio Alger Jr. and James Truslow Adams, who emphasized the importance of hard work and determination in achieving success and prosperity in America.

In the early 20th century, the American Dream took on a new meaning with the rise of industrialization and the growth of the middle class. The idea of the "rags-to-riches" story became a popular trope in American literature, with writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Theodore Dreiser exploring the theme of social mobility and the pursuit of the American Dream in their works. Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," for example, portrays the story of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire who embodies the idea of the American Dream, but ultimately fails to achieve happiness and fulfillment.

The post-World War II era saw a shift in the interpretation of the American Dream, as the ideal of the "nuclear family" and the suburban lifestyle became a central theme in American culture. This is reflected in the works of authors such as Arthur Miller, whose plays such as "Death of a Salesman" and "All My Sons" explore the disillusionment and struggles of the middle class in achieving the American Dream. These works critique the materialistic and conformist nature of American society, and suggest that the American Dream is a flawed and elusive ideal.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement brought new perspectives to the idea of the American Dream, emphasizing the importance of equality and social justice. Writers such as Toni Morrison and James Baldwin explored issues of race and identity in their works, while feminist writers such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem challenged traditional gender roles and the expectations placed on women in American society. These writers questioned the notion that the American Dream was attainable for all, and highlighted the barriers faced by marginalized groups in achieving success and prosperity.

In the 21st century, the American Dream continues to be a central theme in American literature, but with a renewed focus on issues such as globalization, technology, and the environment. Writers such as Dave Eggers and Don DeLillo explore the impact of technology and consumer culture on American society, while environmental writers such as Rachel Carson and Wendell Berry critique the destructive nature of American capitalism and the need for sustainability. These works reflect the changing nature of the American Dream, and suggest that it is no longer enough to focus solely on individual success and prosperity, but that a broader perspective is needed to address the challenges facing contemporary American society.

However, despite its enduring popularity, the concept of the American Dream has been criticized for its exclusivity and its perpetuation of the myth of the self-made man. Critics argue that the American Dream is a false ideal that ignores systemic inequalities and the structural barriers that prevent certain groups from achieving success and prosperity. In particular, the role of race and class in shaping the American Dream has been a topic of debate, with many arguing that the Dream is only attainable for those who are privileged and advantaged.

In conclusion, the American Dream has been a central theme in American literature for over a 100 years.

3.3 Introduction to Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller was a prolific American playwright, widely regarded as one of the most significant dramatists of the 20th century. Miller's work explored the complexities of the American experience and was often marked by themes of family, morality, and the human condition. In this essay, we will take a closer look at Arthur Miller the playwright, his life, his major works, and his contribution to American theater.

Miller was born in New York City in 1915, and his childhood experiences of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe would later influence his work as a playwright. He began writing plays in college and gained early success with his 1944 play "The Man Who Had All the Luck." However, it was his next play, "All My Sons" (1947), that established Miller as a major voice in American theater.

"All My Sons" explored the themes of family, guilt, and the corrupting influence of capitalism, and it received critical acclaim and won Miller the first of his many awards. His next play, "Death of a Salesman" (1949), is widely regarded as his masterpiece and one of the greatest

plays of the 20th century. It tells the story of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who is haunted by his past failures and the realization that he has not achieved the American Dream.

"Death of a Salesman" is a scathing critique of the American Dream, and it has been praised for its complex characters, psychological depth, and innovative use of time and space. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play and has been performed and adapted countless times around the world.

Miller's next major work, "The Crucible" (1953), was a departure from his earlier plays in that it was a historical drama set during the Salem Witch Trials of the 17th century. However, like his other plays, it explored universal themes of morality, justice, and human nature. "The Crucible" was written as an allegory for the McCarthy era and the Red Scare of the 1950s, and it was a powerful indictment of the hysteria and paranoia that can grip a society in times of crisis.
Miller's later plays, including "A View from the Bridge" (1955), "After the Fall" (1964), and "The Price" (1968), continued to explore the complexities of human relationships and the struggles of ordinary people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Miller's work often featured flawed and tragic characters, struggling to come to terms with their own limitations and the harsh realities of the world around them.

In addition to his work as a playwright, Miller was also a respected essayist and political activist. He was a vocal critic of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, and he used his writing to advocate for social justice and the protection of civil liberties.

In conclusion, Arthur Miller was one of the most important and influential playwrights of the 20th century. His work explored the complexities of the human experience, and his powerful and insightful plays continue to be performed and studied around the world. Miller's legacy as a playwright and social commentator is secure, and his contribution to American theater is immeasurable.

3.4 Arthur Miller's Contribution to American Drama

Arthur Miller was a significant figure in American drama, whose work explored the complexities of the human experience and addressed issues of social justice, morality, and the American Dream. In this essay, we will examine Miller's contribution to American drama and his impact on the theatrical landscape of the 20th century.

Miller's early plays, including "All My Sons" (1947) and "Death of a Salesman" (1949), established him as one of the foremost playwrights of his generation. Both plays dealt with the idea of the American Dream and its disillusionment, as well as the impact of capitalism and materialism on American society. "All My Sons" tells the story of a family torn apart by greed and the consequences of their actions during the Second World War, while "Death of a Salesman" is a searing critique of the American Dream and the pressure to conform to societal expectations.

"Death of a Salesman" in particular had a profound impact on American drama and culture. Its portrayal of the tragic hero, Willy Loman, and his struggle to find meaning and purpose in a society that values material success above all else, spoke to audiences across the country. The play's innovative use of flashbacks and non-linear storytelling techniques also marked a departure from traditional naturalistic drama and influenced a generation of playwrights.

In addition to his exploration of the American Dream, Miller's plays often addressed issues of social justice and political activism. "The Crucible" (1953), a historical drama set during the Salem Witch Trials of the 17th century, was written as an allegory for the Red Scare of the 1950s and the fear and hysteria that gripped American society during that time. The play's indictment of McCarthyism and its defense of individual liberty and freedom of expression made it a powerful statement of resistance against the oppressive political climate of the era.

Miller's later plays, including "A View from the Bridge" (1955) and "The Price" (1968), continued to explore the complexities of human relationships and the struggles of ordinary people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. "A View from the Bridge" was a stark and powerful portrayal of working-class life in Brooklyn, and the tension and violence that can arise when traditional gender roles and cultural values are challenged. "The Price" examined themes of guilt, responsibility, and the legacy of the past, as two brothers confront their conflicting memories and emotions in the aftermath of their father's death.

Miller's contribution to American drama was not only limited to his plays, but also included his work as an essayist and political activist. He was a vocal critic of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, and he used his writing to advocate for social justice and the protection of civil

liberties. His essays on topics such as politics, literature, and society were widely read and respected, and he was seen as a moral voice in American culture.

Miller's impact on American drama and culture was significant and enduring. His work helped to redefine the boundaries of traditional naturalistic drama and influenced a generation of playwrights. His exploration of themes such as the American Dream, social justice, and the struggle for individual freedom and expression resonated with audiences across the country and made him one of the most important and influential playwrights of the 20th century.

In conclusion, Arthur Miller's contribution to American drama was multifaceted and significant. His plays explored the complexities of the human experience and addressed issues of social justice, morality, and the American Dream. His work as an essayist and political activist also made him a moral voice in American culture, and his impact on the theatrical landscape of the 20th century was profound. Miller's legacy as a playwright and social commentator continues to be felt today, and his contribution to American

3.5 Introduction to Death of a Salesman

"Death of a Salesman" is a play written by Arthur Miller and first produced in 1949. The play tells the story of Willy Loman, a traveling salesman in his sixties, who struggles to cope with his failures in life and his inability to achieve the American Dream. The play is considered one of the greatest American plays of the 20th century and has been studied and performed extensively. In this essay, we will analyze the major themes and motifs in "Death of a Salesman" and explore how they contribute to the play's enduring significance.

The play opens with Willy Loman returning home from a business trip. His wife Linda greets him, but Willy is visibly agitated and tells her that he was unable to make any sales on his trip. Willy is convinced that success in life depends on being popular and well-liked, and he is frustrated that he is not achieving this. The play then flashes back to various points in Willy's life, including his interactions with his sons, Biff and Happy, and his memories of his brother Ben, who became rich through a diamond mine in Africa.

Throughout the play, Willy becomes increasingly unstable, experiencing hallucinations and delusions. He struggles to come to terms with his failures as a salesman and as a father, and he is haunted by memories of his affair with a woman named "The Woman." Biff, Willy's older son, returns home after many years of traveling and confronts his father about his lies and

failures. In the end, Willy commits suicide in an attempt to leave behind some money for his family and to prove that he is worth something.

3.6 Themes in Death of a Salesman

The American Dream

One of the major themes in "Death of a Salesman" is the American Dream. Willy Loman is obsessed with the idea of success and the pursuit of the American Dream, which he believes is attainable through hard work and popularity. However, he is unable to achieve this dream and becomes increasingly disillusioned with his life. Willy's belief in the American Dream is contrasted with the reality of his life, which is characterized by failure, disappointment, and regret. The play suggests that the American Dream is a false ideal that ignores the realities of American society and perpetuates a myth of success that is unattainable for most people.

Abandonment

One of the central themes in Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is the theme of abandonment. Throughout the play, the characters experience various forms of abandonment, which contribute to their emotional distress and ultimately lead to their downfall.

Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play, is plagued by feelings of abandonment throughout his life. His older brother Ben, who represents the ideal of success and wealth, abandoned him at a young age to pursue his own dreams of adventure and wealth. This abandonment left Willy with a sense of inadequacy and a deep longing for success and recognition.

Willy also experiences a sense of abandonment from his father, who left him and his brother when they were young. This abandonment led to a lifelong search for a father figure, which ultimately leaves him feeling lost and alone.

In addition to these early experiences of abandonment, Willy also feels abandoned by his sons, Biff and Happy. Biff, in particular, is a source of emotional distress for Willy, as he has failed to live up to his potential and has rejected Willy's values and aspirations. Willy's inability to connect with his sons and their rejection of his ideals lead to a deep sense of abandonment and isolation.

Linda, Willy's wife, also experiences a sense of abandonment in the play. She is loyal and devoted to Willy, but she is constantly overlooked and neglected by him. Despite her unwavering

support, Willy fails to recognize her sacrifices and contributions, leaving her feeling unappreciated and abandoned.

The theme of abandonment in "Death of a Salesman" is also evident in the way in which the characters abandon their own dreams and ideals. Willy's obsession with success and the American Dream leads him to abandon his true passions and aspirations. Biff also abandons his dreams of success and instead chooses a life of manual labor and simplicity.

Ultimately, the theme of abandonment in "Death of a Salesman" underscores the loneliness and isolation that result from the pursuit of the American Dream. The characters in the play are consumed by their own aspirations and desires, leaving them feeling empty and abandoned. The play serves as a warning about the high cost of the American Dream and the dangers of pursuing success at any cost.

Father-Son Relationships

Another major theme in "Death of a Salesman" is the relationship between fathers and sons. Willy Loman is deeply invested in his relationship with his sons, particularly his older son Biff. However, their relationship is characterized by conflict and misunderstanding, as Willy fails to understand his son's desires and aspirations. Biff, for his part, struggles to reconcile his own dreams with his father's expectations. The play suggests that the expectations placed on sons by their fathers can be a burden, and that the failure to communicate effectively can lead to misunderstandings and resentment.

Betrayal

The theme of betrayal is a prominent and recurring motif in Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman". The characters in the play experience different forms of betrayal, which contribute to their emotional distress and ultimately lead to their tragic fates.

One of the most significant examples of betrayal in the play is the betrayal that Willy Loman, the protagonist, feels from his own son, Biff. Willy has always seen Biff as his favorite and most promising son, and he has invested all his hopes and dreams in him. However, when Biff discovers that his father has been unfaithful to his mother, he becomes disillusioned and angry, and he rejects his father's values and ideals. This rejection is a major betrayal for Willy, who sees his relationship with Biff as the foundation of his life's work and his sense of self-worth.

Another example of betrayal in the play is the betrayal that Willy experiences from his employer, Howard. Willy has worked for the company for many years, and he has always seen himself as a loyal and valuable employee. However, when he asks Howard for a raise and a transfer to a local office, Howard rejects his request and humiliates him. This betrayal leaves Willy feeling worthless and disposable, and it contributes to his ultimate decision to end his life.

Betrayal is also evident in the way that the American Dream has betrayed the characters in the play. Willy and his sons have all pursued the American Dream, the ideal of success and material prosperity, but they have all been left feeling empty and disillusioned. The American Dream has promised them happiness and fulfillment, but it has only led them to disappointment and betrayal.

The theme of betrayal in "Death of a Salesman" underscores the way in which the pursuit of success and material prosperity can lead to emotional and psychological breakdown. The characters in the play are betrayed by their own ideals and aspirations, as well as by the people around them, leaving them feeling lost, alone, and without hope. The play serves as a warning about the high cost of the American Dream and the dangers of pursuing success at any cost.

Illusion vs. Reality

The theme of illusion vs. reality is central to "Death of a Salesman." Willy Loman is unable to distinguish between reality and his own illusions, which leads to his eventual downfall. He believes that success depends on being well-liked and popular, and he is unable to recognize the reality of his situation. This theme is also reflected in the play's use of flashbacks and dream sequences, which blur the line between reality and fantasy. The play suggests that the failure to confront reality can have serious consequences, and that the pursuit of illusions can be dangerous.

Flashbacks and Dreams

The use of flashbacks and dreams is a key aspect of Arthur Miller's play, "Death of a Salesman." These techniques are used to explore Willy Loman's memories and fantasies, and to show the contrast between his hopes and aspirations and the reality of his life. In this essay, we will analyze the role of flashbacks and dreams in the play and explore how they contribute to its themes and motifs.

Flashbacks

The use of flashbacks in "Death of a Salesman" allows the audience to see key moments in Willy Loman's life that have shaped his character and his relationships with his family members. The play opens with a flashback to a time when Willy was younger and more successful, and this establishes the contrast between his past and present life. Throughout the play, there are numerous flashbacks that show Willy's interactions with his sons, his relationship with his brother Ben, and his memories of his affair with "The Woman." These flashbacks are used to provide insight into Willy's character and motivations and to reveal the underlying causes of his current struggles.

One of the most important flashbacks in the play is the scene in which Biff discovers his father's infidelity with "The Woman." This moment has a profound impact on Biff's perception of his father and on their relationship, as Biff realizes that his father is not the idealized figure he has always believed him to be. The use of flashbacks in this scene allows the audience to understand the full impact of Willy's actions and to see how they have affected his relationship with his son.

Dreams

The use of dreams in "Death of a Salesman" is another important technique that Miller employs to explore Willy's psychology and the themes of the play. Willy's dreams are often surreal and disjointed, and they reflect his deepest fears and desires. They are also used to show the contrast between his hopes and aspirations and the reality of his life.

One of the most significant dreams in the play is the scene in which Willy imagines that he is in a hotel room with "The Woman." This dream reflects his desire for escape and his inability to come to terms with his failures in life. It also shows his guilt and shame about his infidelity and the impact that it has had on his family.

Another important dream sequence in the play is the scene in which Willy imagines that his son Biff has become a successful businessman. This dream reflects Willy's hopes and aspirations for his son and his belief in the American Dream. However, it also highlights the contrast between Willy's dreams and the reality of Biff's life, as Biff has rejected his father's values and aspirations.

Themes and Motifs

The use of flashbacks and dreams in "Death of a Salesman" contributes to the play's themes and motifs in several ways. Firstly, they are used to explore the theme of illusion vs. reality. Willy's dreams and memories are often distorted and exaggerated, and they reflect his inability to confront the reality of his situation. This theme is also reflected in the use of flashbacks, which show the contrast between Willy's past and present life.

Secondly, the use of flashbacks and dreams is used to explore the theme of the American Dream. Willy's dreams reflect his belief in the American Dream and his desire for success and achievement. However, the contrast between his dreams and the reality of his life highlights the false nature of the American Dream and its inability to provide true fulfillment.

Finally, the use of flashbacks and dreams contributes to the play's motifs of father-son relationships and the impact of past actions on the present.

3.7 Symbols in the play

Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is rich in symbolism, with numerous objects and images that represent deeper themes and ideas within the play. Here are some of the most significant symbols in the play:

- The Seeds: The seeds that Willy Loman carries with him throughout the play symbolize his obsession with the American Dream and the idea of success. For Willy, success is something that can be cultivated and grown like a plant, and the seeds represent his hope and determination to achieve his dreams.
- The Stockings: The stockings that Willy gives to his mistress, as well as the stockings that Biff discovers in Willy's hotel room, symbolize Willy's infidelity and betrayal of his wife, Linda. The stockings represent the rift between Willy and Linda, as well as the breakdown of their marriage and family.
- The Car: The car that Willy crashes in the opening scene of the play symbolizes the way in which he has become trapped and overwhelmed by his own aspirations and values. The car, which was once a symbol of freedom and success, has become a burden that he cannot escape.
- The Diamond: The diamond that Willy's brother Ben gives to him in a flashback represents the ideal of success and wealth that Willy has pursued his entire life. The

diamond is a symbol of the American Dream, which Willy believes he can achieve if he works hard enough.

- The Flute: The flute music that is heard throughout the play symbolizes the memories and dreams of Willy's past. The music represents a time when he was happy and fulfilled, before he became consumed by the pursuit of success.
- The Jungle: The jungle that Willy imagines himself in during one of his hallucinations represents the harsh and unforgiving nature of the world around him. The jungle is a symbol of the competitive and cutthroat business world that Willy must navigate in order to achieve success.
- The Rubber Hose: The rubber hose that Willy uses to commit suicide is a symbol of the extreme measures that he is willing to take in order to escape his pain and suffering. The hose represents his final act of desperation and despair, as well as the ultimate failure of the American Dream.

In conclusion, the symbols in "Death of a Salesman" represent the deeper themes and ideas within the play, including the American Dream, the breakdown of the family, and the destructive nature of the pursuit of success. They add depth and complexity to the play, and they help to create a powerful and thought-provoking work of literature.

3.8 Summary of the play Death of a salesman

"Death of a Salesman" is a play written by Arthur Miller, first performed on Broadway in 1949. The play tells the story of Willy Loman, a traveling salesman in his sixties who is struggling to make ends meet and facing a mid-life crisis. As the play progresses, Willy's life begins to unravel, and he becomes increasingly delusional and unable to confront the reality of his situation. Ultimately, he takes his own life, in what is portrayed as a tragic and senseless act.

Act One of the play opens with a scene in which Willy returns home from a failed sales trip, only to be greeted by his wife, Linda, who is worried about his mental state. Willy is clearly struggling, both financially and emotionally, and he is haunted by memories of his past, particularly his relationship with his older brother, Ben. Ben is portrayed as a successful and self-assured businessman, who has made a fortune in the diamond industry in Africa. Willy is envious of his brother's success and constantly compares himself unfavorably to him.

The play also introduces Willy's two sons, Biff and Happy. Biff, the older of the two, is portrayed as a former high school football star who has failed to live up to his potential. He is aimless and directionless, and he is constantly at odds with his father. Happy, on the other hand, is portrayed as a successful and ambitious businessman, who is eager to follow in his father's footsteps.

As the play progresses, Willy's mental state deteriorates, and he becomes increasingly delusional. He begins to have hallucinations and vivid dreams, in which he interacts with figures from his past, including his brother Ben and the "Woman," with whom he had an affair many years ago. These flashbacks and dreams serve to illustrate Willy's inner turmoil and his inability to come to terms with his failures in life.

One of the key conflicts in the play is the strained relationship between Willy and his son Biff. Biff is portrayed as a rebellious and free-spirited young man, who is frustrated by his father's expectations and constant criticism. Biff's resentment towards his father stems from an incident in his past, in which he discovered that Willy was having an affair with the "Woman." This revelation shattered Biff's idealized view of his father and destroyed their relationship.

The play also explores the theme of the American Dream, and the impact of capitalism and materialism on American society. Willy is portrayed as a man who has bought into the myth of the American Dream, and who believes that success and happiness can be achieved through hard work and determination. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that this dream is nothing more than an illusion, and that Willy's obsession with success has blinded him to the true value of his life and relationships.

In the final act of the play, Willy's mental state deteriorates to the point where he is unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. He becomes convinced that his death will allow his family to collect a large life insurance payment, which he believes will provide for them financially. In a tragic and senseless act, he takes his own life by deliberately crashing his car.

"Death of a Salesman" is a powerful and poignant play that explores themes of identity, disillusionment, and the human cost of the American Dream. Through the character of Willy Loman, Miller offers a powerful critique of capitalism and materialism, and a warning about the dangers of buying into the false promises of success and achievement. The play has been widely

celebrated for its powerful characters, its exploration of complex themes, and its ability to capture the struggles and anxieties of the American middle class.

3.9 Act-wise summary of Death of a Salesman

Act One:

The play begins with Willy Loman, a traveling salesman in his sixties, returning home from a sales trip that did not go well. Willy's wife, Linda, is worried about his mental state and is trying to comfort him. Willy is struggling both financially and emotionally, and he is haunted by memories of his past, particularly his relationship with his older brother, Ben, who is portrayed as a successful businessman. Willy is envious of Ben's success and constantly compares himself unfavorably to him.

The play also introduces Willy's two sons, Biff and Happy. Biff, the older of the two, is portrayed as a former high school football star who has failed to live up to his potential. He is aimless and directionless, and he is constantly at odds with his father. Happy, on the other hand, is portrayed as a successful and ambitious businessman, who is eager to follow in his father's footsteps.

Throughout Act One, Willy's mental state deteriorates, and he begins to have flashbacks and hallucinations. These flashbacks and dreams serve to illustrate Willy's inner turmoil and his inability to come to terms with his failures in life. The play also explores the theme of the American Dream, and the impact of capitalism and materialism on American society.

Act Two:

In Act Two, Willy's mental state continues to deteriorate, and his relationship with his son Biff becomes increasingly strained. Biff is portrayed as a rebellious and free-spirited young man, who is frustrated by his father's expectations and constant criticism. Biff's resentment towards his father stems from an incident in his past, in which he discovered that Willy was having an affair with a woman. This revelation shattered Biff's idealized view of his father and destroyed their relationship.

The play also introduces the character of Charley, Willy's neighbor and friend. Charley is portrayed as a successful and self-assured businessman, who is everything that Willy is not. Willy is envious of Charley's success, but he is also unable to accept Charley's help, as it would mean admitting his own failures.

Throughout Act Two, the play explores the theme of disillusionment and the human cost of the American Dream. Willy's obsession with success has blinded him to the true value of his life and relationships, and he is unable to find happiness and fulfillment.

Act Three:

In the final act of the play, Willy's mental state deteriorates to the point where he is unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. He becomes convinced that his death will allow his family to collect a large life insurance payment, which he believes will provide for them financially. In a tragic and senseless act, he takes his own life by deliberately crashing his car.

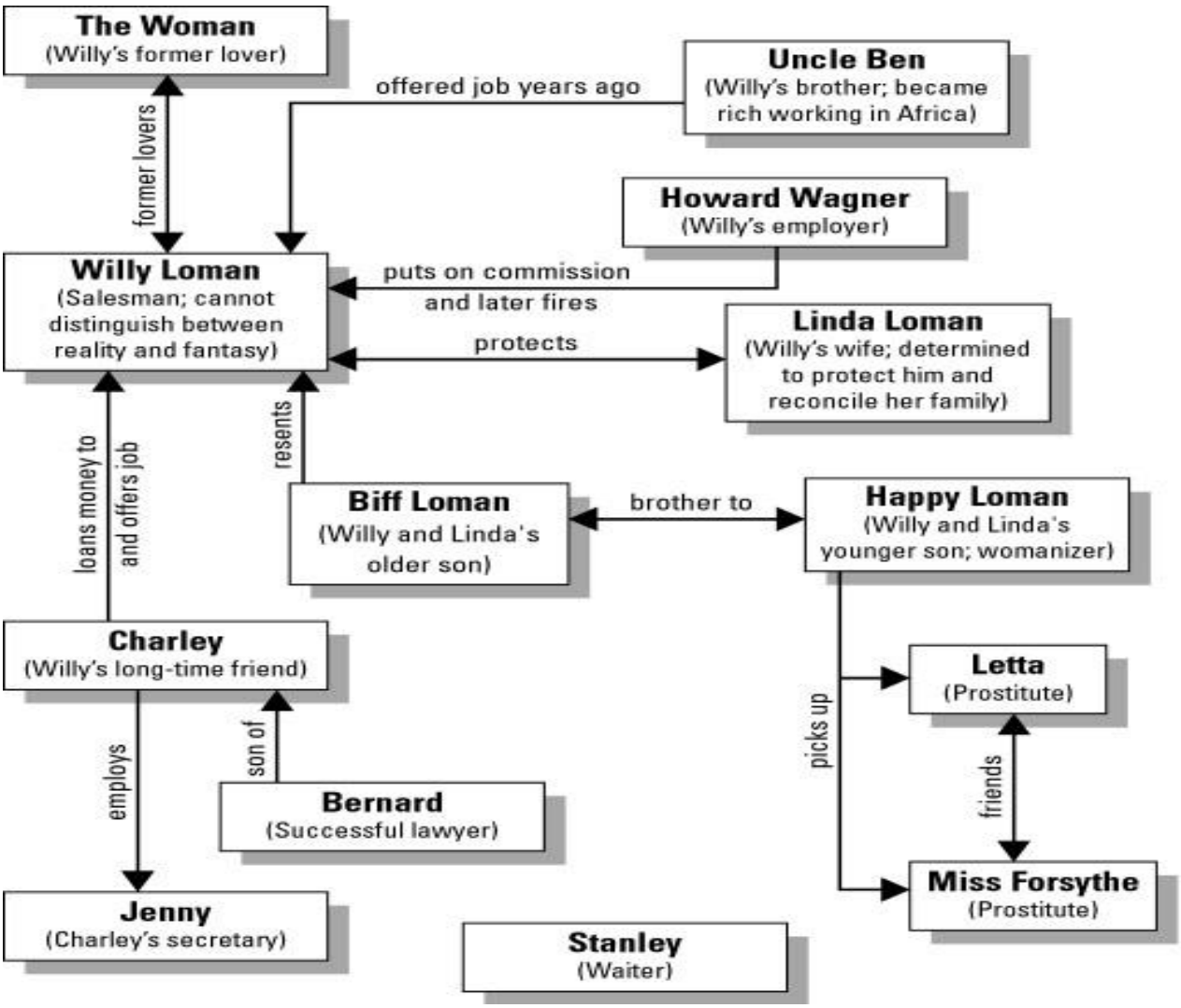
The play ends with Willy's funeral, where his family and friends gather to mourn his loss. The play concludes with Linda's heartbreaking final words to her husband, in which she expresses her love for him and her regret that he was never able to find happiness and fulfillment in life.

Overall, "Death of a Salesman" is a powerful and poignant play that explores themes of identity, disillusionment, and the human cost of the American Dream. Through the character of Willy Loman, Miller offers a powerful critique of capitalism and materialism, and a warning about the dangers of buying into the myth of the American Dream.

3.10 Characters in the play Death of a Salesman

"Death of a Salesman" is a play written by Arthur Miller that explores the life and struggles of a traveling salesman, Willy Loman. The play is a character-driven drama that focuses on the interactions and relationships between the various characters in the play. In this character analysis, we will explore the main characters in the play and their motivations, actions, and relationships.

Character's diagram



Willy Loman:

Willy is the central character in the play and is portrayed as a tragic figure. He is a struggling salesman in his sixties who is obsessed with the idea of success and the American Dream. Throughout the play, Willy is haunted by memories of his past, particularly his relationship with his older brother, Ben, who is portrayed as a successful businessman. Willy is envious of Ben's success and constantly compares himself unfavorably to him. Willy's obsession with success has blinded him to the true value of his life and relationships, and he is unable to find happiness and fulfillment. He is also suffering from delusions and hallucinations that prevent him from recognizing the reality of his life.

Willy Loman is the central character of Arthur Miller's play, Death of a Salesman. He is a complex and tragic figure, whose life and struggles provide a powerful commentary on the human condition, the American Dream, and the consequences of self-delusion and denial. In this essay, I will explore the character of Willy Loman in depth, looking at his personality, his relationships, his motivations, and his tragic fate.

Willy Loman is a man in his sixties, a traveling salesman who has spent his life on the road, chasing the American Dream. He is a flawed character, with a personality that is both likable and detestable. On the one hand, he is charming, charismatic, and affable, able to win over almost anyone with his easy smile and friendly demeanor. On the other hand, he is arrogant, stubborn, and delusional, unable to face the reality of his failures and limitations.

One of the key aspects of Willy's personality is his obsession with success and status. He is driven by a deep-seated desire to be admired, respected, and recognized, and he measures his worth as a human being by the amount of money he makes and the level of success he achieves. This obsession with success leads him to constantly compare himself to others, especially his brother Ben and his neighbor Charley, whom he sees as successful and admirable men.

Willy's obsession with success also leads him to live in a world of illusions and self-delusions. He is constantly lying to himself and others, creating a false reality in which he is a successful and important man, loved and respected by his family and friends. He is unable to face the reality of his failures, both in his personal and professional life, and he resorts to denial and self-deception to protect himself from the pain of his own inadequacy.

Despite his many flaws, Willy is also a sympathetic character, whose struggles and pain are deeply felt by the audience. He is a man who has been battered by life, who has faced many setbacks and disappointments, and who is haunted by the memories of his past. He is a man who has lost his way, who is trapped in a life that he cannot escape from, and who is desperately trying to find a way out.

One of the key relationships in the play is the relationship between Willy and his son Biff. Biff is a former high school football star, who has failed to live up to his father's expectations. He is a man who is lost, confused, and struggling to find his place in the world. Willy sees Biff as his last hope, the one person who can redeem him and make up for his own failures.

However, the relationship between Willy and Biff is also deeply flawed. Willy is unable to see Biff as he really is, and he constantly tries to mold him into the person he wants him to be. He is critical, demanding, and controlling, and he puts enormous pressure on Biff to succeed, both in his personal and professional life. This pressure leads Biff to rebel against his father, and to reject the values and ideals that he has been raised with.

Another important relationship in the play is the relationship between Willy and his wife Linda. Linda is a loyal and supportive wife, who has stood by Willy through thick and thin. She is a woman who is deeply in love with her husband, and who is willing to do anything to help him. However, she is also a woman who is deeply aware of Willy's flaws, and who is struggling to keep him from falling apart.

The relationship between Willy and Linda is a complex one, characterized by love, loyalty, and sacrifice. Linda is the one person who truly understands

Linda Loman:

Linda is Willy's loyal and devoted wife. She is portrayed as a traditional housewife who is supportive of her husband despite his flaws and failures. Linda is the glue that holds the family together, and she is constantly trying to support Willy emotionally and financially. However, her loyalty to Willy also blinds her to the reality of their situation, and she fails to acknowledge the extent of Willy's mental illness until it is too late.

Linda Loman is a crucial character in Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman. She is Willy Loman's wife and the mother of their two sons, Biff and Happy. Linda is depicted as a supportive and loving wife to Willy, despite his many flaws and failures. She is a devoted mother who tries to maintain peace and harmony within her family, while also dealing with her husband's deteriorating mental health and her own sense of disappointment and disillusionment with their lives. In this essay, we will examine Linda's character in depth and analyze her role in the play.

Linda Loman is portrayed as a caring and compassionate wife who is devoted to her husband and children. Throughout the play, Linda is shown as a strong and selfless character who puts the needs of her family before her own. She is the only character who truly understands and sympathizes with Willy, despite his many shortcomings. Linda is patient and understanding with Willy, even when he is ungrateful and dismissive of her. For example, in Act One, Willy

complains about Linda mending his stockings and insists that he will buy her new ones, but she insists that she is happy to do it herself, saying "I don't mind it. I tell you, I don't mind it." This shows her willingness to put up with Willy's demands and her unconditional love for him.

One of Linda's most significant characteristics is her sense of loyalty and commitment to her family. She supports her husband, even when his dreams and ambitions seem unrealistic and unattainable. Linda believes in Willy and his abilities, and she tries to help him as much as possible. For example, she is the one who suggests that Willy ask his boss for a job closer to home, so that he can spend more time with their family. She also encourages her sons to show their love and appreciation for their father, even when he is struggling. Linda's unwavering support for Willy highlights her strong sense of family values and her belief in the importance of staying together.

Another important aspect of Linda's character is her quiet strength and resilience. She endures many hardships throughout the play, including the loss of her sons' respect and her husband's mental breakdown. However, she remains calm and composed throughout, never losing her composure or breaking down emotionally. Linda is a symbol of the stoicism and resilience that are often associated with the American housewife in the 1950s. She is a source of stability and strength for her family, and she never loses hope that they will be able to overcome their difficulties.

However, Linda's character is not without flaws. Despite her loyalty and devotion to her family, she is also complicit in the deception and self-delusion that characterize Willy's life. She knows that Willy is not a successful salesman, but she still supports his illusions and encourages him to keep trying. This suggests that Linda is not completely honest with herself or with her family, and that she is also caught up in the same cycle of self-deception and disillusionment that plagues Willy.

In conclusion, Linda Loman is a complex character who plays an important role in Death of a Salesman. She is a symbol of love, loyalty, and resilience, and her unwavering support for her family highlights the importance of family values in American society. However, her complicity in Willy's self-deception also suggests that she is not entirely honest with herself or with her family. Linda's character is a testament to the complexity of human relationships and the difficulties of balancing individual desires with familial responsibilities.

Biff Loman:

Biff is Willy's oldest son and is portrayed as a former high school football star who has failed to live up to his potential. He is aimless and directionless, and he is constantly at odds with his father. Biff's resentment towards his father stems from an incident in his past, in which he discovered that Willy was having an affair with a woman. This revelation shattered Biff's idealized view of his father and destroyed their relationship. Biff's inability to reconcile with his father also stems from his own failure to find success and his disillusionment with the American Dream.

Biff Loman is one of the primary characters in Arthur Miller's play, Death of a Salesman. He is the oldest son of Willy Loman, a traveling salesman who is struggling to make ends meet. Biff is portrayed as a complex character, who struggles to find his place in the world and reconcile with his father's expectations. In this essay, I will explore Biff Loman's character, his relationships with other characters, and his personal journey throughout the play.

At the beginning of the play, Biff is a 34-year-old man who has been drifting from job to job, unable to hold down a steady career. He is a former high school football star who has never fulfilled his potential. Biff's character is established early on in the play, when he returns home after several years of being away. His conversation with his brother Happy reveals that Biff has been working as a farmhand and has been living a simple life. He also reveals that he has been stealing from his employers, which shows that he is not above breaking the law to get what he wants.

Biff's relationship with his father is a central theme of the play. Willy has high expectations for his son and wants him to be successful. However, Biff resents his father for his infidelity and for putting too much pressure on him to succeed. Biff's disillusionment with his father is evident throughout the play, but it comes to a head in the final scene. Biff confronts his father about the lies he has been telling himself and his family. He tells Willy that he is not meant to be a salesman and that he is not special. This confrontation is a turning point in the play, as Biff finally confronts his father's expectations and tries to move past them.

Biff's relationship with his mother is also important. He has a strong bond with her, but he resents her for always covering up his father's infidelities. Biff feels that his mother is complicit in his father's lies, and he cannot forgive her for it. This tension between Biff and his

mother comes to a head in the second act, when Biff reveals to her that he has been stealing from his employers. This confession is a cathartic moment for Biff, as he finally reveals his true self to his mother.

Biff's relationship with his brother Happy is complicated. Happy is the younger brother who has always lived in Biff's shadow. Happy is also a womanizer who is content with his shallow life. Biff resents Happy for not seeing the world as he does, and for not understanding the true nature of their father. However, Biff does love his brother and tries to protect him from their father's unrealistic expectations. In the final scene, Biff and Happy are left alone on stage, and Biff tells his brother that they need to start over and make a life for themselves.

Biff's personal journey throughout the play is one of self-discovery. He begins the play as a disillusioned man who is unable to find his place in the world. He has always lived in his father's shadow, and he has never been able to live up to his father's expectations. However, as the play progresses, Biff begins to confront his own insecurities and tries to find his own path. He realizes that he cannot live the life his father wants for him, and he must forge his own path. Biff's journey is one of the central themes of the play, as he tries to find meaning in his life and reconcile with his father's legacy.

One of the most important scenes in the play is Biff's confrontation with his father in the final scene. This scene is the culmination of Biff's personal journey,

Happy Loman:

Happy is Willy's youngest son and is portrayed as a successful and ambitious businessman, who is eager to follow in his father's footsteps. Happy is also portrayed as a womanizer who is always looking for the next conquest. Happy's relationship with his father is complicated, as he is torn between his loyalty to his father and his own ambition to succeed in life. Happy is also suffering from his own disillusionment with the American Dream and struggles to find meaning in his life beyond material success.

Happy Loman is a character in Arthur Miller's play, Death of a Salesman. He is the younger son of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who is trying to make a living for his family. Happy is portrayed as a complex character, who is trying to live up to his father's expectations and find his place in the world. In this essay, I will explore Happy Loman's character, his relationships with other characters, and his personal journey throughout the play.

At the beginning of the play, Happy is a 32-year-old man who is working as an assistant in a department store. He is portrayed as a womanizer who is content with his shallow life. Happy is the younger brother of Biff, who was a former high school football star but has been unable to find his place in the world. Happy has always lived in his brother's shadow, and he resents Biff for always getting attention from their father.

Happy's relationship with his father is a central theme of the play. Willy has high expectations for his son and wants him to be successful. However, Happy is content with his simple life and does not share his father's ambition. Happy's relationship with his father is complex, as he tries to live up to his father's expectations but is also resentful of his father's failures. Happy's loyalty to his father is evident throughout the play, as he tries to protect him from the harsh realities of their lives.

Happy's relationship with his brother Biff is also important. Happy is envious of Biff's natural talent and charisma. He feels overshadowed by his brother's success and resents him for it. However, Happy does love his brother and tries to protect him from their father's unrealistic expectations. Happy is also protective of Biff's reputation, as he tries to keep his brother's indiscretions a secret from their father.

Happy's personal journey throughout the play is one of self-discovery. He begins the play as a womanizer who is content with his simple life. However, as the play progresses, Happy begins to question his place in the world and his relationship with his father. He realizes that he cannot continue to live his shallow life and must find meaning in his life. Happy's journey is one of the central themes of the play, as he tries to find his own path and reconcile with his father's legacy.

One of the most important scenes in the play is Happy's conversation with Biff in the final scene. This scene is a turning point for both characters, as they try to find meaning in their lives and start over. Happy tells Biff that they need to make a life for themselves and stop living in their father's shadow. This conversation is a cathartic moment for Happy, as he finally confronts his own insecurities and tries to find his own path.

Happy's character is also symbolic of the American Dream. He represents the idea that anyone can succeed in America, regardless of their background. Happy believes that he can achieve anything he wants, as long as he works hard and plays by the rules. However, the play

suggests that the American Dream is not always attainable. Willy, Happy's father, has been struggling to make a living as a salesman for his entire life. Happy's own journey suggests that the American Dream may not be as achievable as he once thought.

Happy's relationship with women is also an important aspect of his character. He is portrayed as a womanizer who is constantly flirting with his female colleagues. Happy's relationships with women are shallow and superficial, and he does not seem to have any real emotional connections with them. Happy's relationships with women are symbolic of his shallow life, as he is unable to find any real meaning in his relationships

Charley:

Charley is Willy's neighbor and friend. He is portrayed as a successful and self-assured businessman, who is everything that Willy is not. Charley is constantly offering Willy help, both financially and emotionally, but Willy is unable to accept it, as it would mean admitting his own failures. Charley's character serves as a foil to Willy, highlighting the contrast between success and failure and the high cost of the American Dream.

Charley is a character in Arthur Miller's play, Death of a Salesman. He is Willy Loman's neighbor and friend, and he is also a successful businessman. Charley is portrayed as a foil to Willy, as he is a pragmatic and realistic character who contrasts with Willy's idealism and delusions. In this essay, I will explore Charley's character, his relationships with other characters, and his role in the play.

Charley is first introduced in the play as Willy's neighbor and friend. He is a successful businessman who owns a construction company. Charley is portrayed as a pragmatic and realistic character, who is not swayed by Willy's delusions and idealism. Charley is a contrast to Willy's character, as he is a self-made man who has worked hard to achieve his success. Charley's success is also symbolic of the American Dream, which suggests that anyone can achieve success through hard work and determination.

Charley's relationship with Willy is complex. While he is Willy's friend, he is also critical of his delusions and tries to bring him back to reality. Charley is also a foil to Willy, as he is a pragmatic and realistic character who contrasts with Willy's idealism and delusions. Charley tries to help Willy in his time of need, but he also recognizes the limitations of his own help.

Charley's relationship with Willy is an important theme in the play, as it suggests that friendship and success can sometimes be at odds with each other.

Charley's relationship with his son Bernard is also important. Bernard is portrayed as a successful and ambitious character, who is everything that Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, are not. Bernard is also a foil to Willy's sons, as he is successful and ambitious, while Biff and Happy are lost and aimless. Charley's relationship with Bernard suggests that hard work and determination are the keys to success, and that success is not just about talent or charisma.

Charley's role in the play is also symbolic of the American Dream. He represents the idea that anyone can achieve success through hard work and determination. Charley's success is also symbolic of the limitations of the American Dream. While he has achieved success through hard work and determination, he is still subject to the whims of the market and the economy. Charley's role in the play suggests that success is not always attainable, even for those who work hard and have determination.

One of the most important scenes in the play is Willy's conversation with Charley in the final scene. This conversation is a turning point for both characters, as they confront the realities of their lives and the limitations of the American Dream. Charley tells Willy that he cannot continue to live in his delusions and that he needs to face the reality of his life. This conversation is a cathartic moment for Willy, as he finally confronts his own failures and delusions.

Charley's character also serves as a commentary on the role of business in American society. Charley's success as a businessman is contrasted with Willy's failure as a salesman. Charley's success is also symbolic of the importance of business in American society. The play suggests that business is the key to success in America, and that those who are successful in business are the most valued members of society.

In conclusion, Charley is an important character in Death of a Salesman. He is a foil to Willy's character, as he is a pragmatic and realistic character who contrasts with Willy's idealism and delusions.

Ben:

Ben is Willy's older brother who has become a successful businessman in Africa. He is portrayed as a larger-than-life character who represents the ideal of success that Willy is

constantly striving for. Ben's character serves to underscore Willy's obsession with success and his inability to come to terms with his own limitations.

Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" is a classic American play that delves into the complex world of the American Dream and the struggles of an aging salesman named Willy Loman. While Willy is the main character of the play, his son Biff's character and his relationship with Willy are just as significant to the overall themes of the play. Biff's brother Happy and their mother Linda also play important roles in the story, but it is Biff who is most central to the play's main ideas. This essay will examine Biff's character and his development throughout the play, and how his relationship with his father shapes the overall narrative.

Biff Loman is the eldest son of Willy and Linda Loman, and he is a former high school football star. When the play begins, Biff is in his mid-thirties and has spent the last several years wandering from job to job and feeling unfulfilled in his life. Biff's character is introduced as being aimless and uncertain about his future, which is a stark contrast to the promise he showed in high school. His failure to succeed in life has caused a rift between him and his father, who is deeply disappointed in Biff's lack of ambition.

Biff's character is complex, and his past is a significant factor in shaping his current state of mind. When Biff was in high school, he was a star athlete and had dreams of going to college and becoming a professional football player. However, his plans were derailed when he discovered that his father was having an affair with a woman in Boston. This discovery shattered Biff's idealized view of his father and caused him to lose faith in the American Dream. He became disillusioned with the idea of success and stopped caring about his own future.

Biff's disillusionment with the American Dream is a significant theme in the play, and it is closely tied to his relationship with his father. Biff's father has always placed a great deal of importance on material success and being well-liked, and he has instilled these values in his sons. Biff's failure to achieve these goals has caused a rift between him and his father, who cannot understand why his son would not want to be successful. This rift is evident in the play's opening scene, where Willy and Biff have a heated argument about Biff's lack of ambition. Willy cannot understand why Biff would not want to become a successful salesman like himself, and Biff cannot understand why his father is so obsessed with success.

Biff's relationship with his father is further complicated by the fact that he knows about Willy's affair. Biff is the only member of the family who knows about the affair, and this knowledge has caused him to lose respect for his father. However, Biff is also deeply conflicted about his feelings towards his father. He loves his father and wants to please him, but he cannot reconcile his father's infidelity with his own values.

As the play progresses, Biff's character begins to evolve. He starts to take responsibility for his life and tries to make amends with his father. This evolution is evident in the scene where Biff confronts his father about his affair. Biff tells Willy that he knows about the affair and that he wants to forgive him. This scene is significant because it shows Biff taking control of the situation and trying to repair his relationship with his father.

Biff's evolution is also evident in his interactions with other characters in the play. He reconnects with his former boss, Bill Oliver, and tries to secure a loan to start his own business. When he is unsuccessful, he realizes that he needs to take responsibility for his own life and find his own way.

In conclusion, "Death of a Salesman" is a character-driven play that explores the lives and struggles of a family in the context of the American Dream. The main characters in the play are complex and multifaceted, and their interactions and relationships drive the plot forward. Each character's motivations, actions, and relationships contribute to the drama.

3.11 Important quotes from the play theme wise

Here are some important quotes from "Death of a Salesman" as per the major themes of the play:

The American Dream:

- "I've got to get some seeds. I've got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground." - Willy Loman
- "The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell." - Charley
- "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds." - Willy Loman
- "The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." - Charley

Family and Relationships:

- "He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid." - Linda Loman
- "Why did you get American when you have a job?" - Willy Loman to his son Biff
- "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away - a man is not a piece of fruit." - Willy Loman
- "A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man." - Willy Loman

Reality vs. Illusion:

- "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away - a man is not a piece of fruit." - Willy Loman
- "The woods are burning, boys. Don't you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around." - Willy Loman
- "I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England." - Willy Loman
- "Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." - Willy Loman

Betrayal and Abandonment:

- "Biff - he's a lazy bum!" - Willy Loman
- "Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that?" - Biff Loman
- "You've been walking around with a big question mark in your life." - Happy Loman
- "You big bum! You never grew up!" - Willy Loman to his brother Ben

These quotes are just a few examples of the powerful themes and ideas that are explored in "Death of a Salesman." Each quote serves to illuminate the characters' struggles and the issues that they face, making the play a powerful and thought-provoking work of literature.

3.12 Act wise important quotes from the play

Act I:

- "The woods are burning, boys. Don't you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around." - Willy Loman
- "Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am?" - Biff Loman

- "The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is you're a salesman, and you don't know that." - Charley

Act II:

- "Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person." - Linda Loman
- "He had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong." - Biff Loman
- "Why don't you come out West with me? The minute I got a couple of bucks ahead, I was coming out here, you remember?" - Bernard

Act III:

- "I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been." - Biff Loman
- "I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home." - Willy Loman
- "Isn't that - isn't that remarkable? Biff - he likes me!" - Willy Loman
- These quotes provide insight into the characters' struggles and the key themes of the play, including the importance of attention and validation, the dangers of living a false life, and the value of personal connections and relationships. Each quote serves to deepen our understanding of the characters and the play's larger messages.

3.13 Critical opinion on the play Death of a Salesman

"Miller's success in depicting the underlying causes of Willy's decline is due in large measure to his use of language." - Harold Bloom

"Death of a Salesman is the play that refuses to age." - John Lahr

"What makes Death of a Salesman so powerful is its ability to keep us in the present." - David Mamet

"Willy's suicide becomes a final act of defiance against the society that has rejected him." - Christopher Bigsby

"Miller's great achievement in Death of a Salesman is to make the audience feel that they are not watching a play, but rather are living Willy Loman's life with him." - Martin Gottfried

"The play is about the death of an idea, the American dream, and the terrible cost of its failure." - Enoch Brater

"Miller's genius is his ability to show us the tragic in the everyday, to make us see that Willy's story is not just his story, but the story of all of us." - Robert A. Martin

"Miller's masterpiece is a story about the impossibility of being happy in a world that values the wrong things." - Christopher Bigsby

"Death of a Salesman is a play that touches on the universal experience of failure and despair." - Harold Bloom

"Miller's play is a requiem for the American dream, but it is also a celebration of the human spirit." - Martin Gottfried

"In its focus on a flawed but intensely human protagonist, and in its rich, poetic language, "Death of a Salesman" remains a powerful, poignant exploration of the American Dream." - SparkNotes

"The play is an indictment of the American Dream, and of the capitalist system that encourages people to pursue success at any cost." - CliffsNotes

"Willy Loman's death is a tragic commentary on the destructive nature of the American Dream, which promises success to all who work hard and play by the rules, but often delivers only disappointment and disillusionment." - Harold Bloom

"Willy Loman is the quintessential American tragic hero, whose flaws and failings represent the flaws and failings of American society as a whole." - Arthur Miller

"Death of a Salesman is a searing critique of the American Dream and the values that underpin it: individualism, materialism, and success at any cost." - The Guardian

These quotes provide insight into the play's enduring impact and themes, including the American dream, the human condition, and the power of language and storytelling. They offer a range of perspectives on the play's meaning and significance, highlighting its continued relevance and ability to resonate with audiences and readers today.

3.14 Style and Structure of Death of a Salesman

Style:

Realism

Realism: The play is written in a realistic style, portraying characters and events in a manner that reflects everyday life.

Realism is a critical aspect of Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman", allowing the play to speak to the experiences of its audience and to create a powerful commentary on American life and society. By grounding the play in reality, Miller is able to explore complex

themes and characters in a way that feels authentic and emotionally resonant. In this essay, we will examine the different aspects of realism in "Death of a Salesman".

One of the most apparent ways in which realism is evident in the play is through its setting. The play is set in a realistic, middle-class suburb in Brooklyn, New York, which reflects the everyday lives of many Americans in the 1940s. The audience is presented with a typical home, where the Loman family lives. The house is described in detail, with Willy's car and garden being prominent features. This setting is not extravagant, but it is a realistic representation of a typical American home during that period.

The characters in the play are also realistic and relatable. The Loman family is a typical American family, with flaws, hopes, and dreams that reflect those of real people. For example, Willy Loman is a flawed protagonist who struggles with the pressures of the American Dream and the disappointment of his own life. His wife, Linda, is a loyal and loving wife who tries to keep the family together, while his sons, Biff and Happy, are struggling to find their place in the world. Miller's realistic portrayal of the characters makes them relatable to the audience and allows them to see themselves in the Loman family.

The dialogue in the play is another aspect of realism. The conversations between the characters are naturalistic and reflect the way people actually speak in everyday situations. There is no elevated or poetic language, but rather conversations that are sometimes mundane and sometimes emotionally charged. For example, in Act One, Willy has a conversation with his sons about their futures, which is filled with interruptions and small talk. This dialogue reflects the way that real people communicate with each other and creates a sense of authenticity in the play.

The themes of the play are also grounded in reality and reflect the experiences of many Americans in the mid-20th century. For example, the pursuit of the American Dream is a major theme in the play. Willy Loman is obsessed with the idea of success and believes that the key to success is being well-liked. He has spent his life trying to achieve this ideal, but in the end, he realizes that he has failed. This theme is reflective of the American Dream and the pressure to achieve success and prosperity in American society.

The play is also full of small, realistic details that help to bring the world of the play to life. For example, Willy's car is an old, beat-up vehicle that he is constantly repairing. This detail

reflects the struggles of the working class during that period and adds to the realism of the play. Additionally, the way that the characters interact with each other and the small talk that they engage in also helps to create a sense of authenticity in the play.

Overall, realism is a critical aspect of "Death of a Salesman", allowing the play to speak to the experiences of its audience and to create a powerful commentary on American life and society. Miller's realistic portrayal of the setting, characters, dialogue, themes, and details all help to create a sense of authenticity in the play, making it relatable to audiences and allowing them to see themselves in the Loman family. By grounding the play in reality, Miller is able to explore complex themes and characters in a way that feels authentic and emotionally resonant.

Symbolism

Symbolism: The play uses symbols to represent ideas and concepts. For example, the stockings represent Willy's infidelity and the diamond represents his idea of success.

Symbolism plays an essential role in Arthur Miller's play, "Death of a Salesman." Through symbols, Miller portrays various themes and emotions that the characters experience. The symbols used in the play are a reflection of the characters' thoughts and feelings, and they also represent the various conflicts they face. The use of symbols adds depth to the play, making it more than just a story about a salesman's life.

One of the most important symbols in the play is the seeds that Willy Loman carries throughout the play. Willy has a fascination with planting and gardening, which is a metaphor for his desire for growth and success. However, his inability to make anything grow reflects his inability to achieve his dreams. Willy's obsession with planting is shown in his repeated phrase, "The woods are burning, boys, and they are out there planting wheat," which symbolizes his belief that he can still achieve success despite his failures.

Another symbol in the play is the stockings that Willy's wife, Linda, mends. The stockings represent the love and devotion Linda has for her husband. Linda is constantly mending the stockings, which symbolizes her commitment to Willy and her desire to hold their family together, even when everything seems to be falling apart. However, the stockings also represent Willy's betrayal of Linda, as he has had an affair with another woman.

The car is also an important symbol in the play. For Willy, the car represents freedom and success, which he believes he will achieve once he buys a new car. However, the car also

symbolizes his failures and his inability to achieve his dreams. In the play, Willy crashes the car, which symbolizes the destruction of his dreams and his eventual death.

The flute is another symbol in the play, representing Willy's father and his past. The flute music is heard throughout the play, and it symbolizes the memories of Willy's father, who was a successful salesman. The music represents the past that Willy is trying to hold onto, but it also represents his failure to live up to his father's legacy.

The diamond is also an important symbol in the play. The diamond represents Willy's desire for wealth and success, which he believes will make him happy. However, the diamond is fake, and it symbolizes the illusions and false beliefs that Willy holds onto.

In conclusion, symbolism is an essential part of "Death of a Salesman," as it allows Miller to convey complex emotions and themes through simple objects. The use of symbols adds depth and complexity to the play, making it more than just a story about a salesman's life. The symbols used in the play represent the characters' desires, fears, and conflicts, allowing the audience to understand their motivations and emotions. Through symbols, Miller creates a rich and compelling story that continues to resonate with audiences today.

Psychological Depth

Psychological Depth: The play explores the psychological struggles of the characters, especially Willy Loman, and delves into the inner workings of their minds.

Arthur Miller's play, "Death of a Salesman," explores the psychological depth of its characters and their struggles with identity, self-worth, and the American Dream. The play's main character, Willy Loman, is a tragic figure whose psychological state is a result of his beliefs and experiences. Through Willy's character, Miller delves into the complexities of the human psyche, exploring themes of mental health, masculinity, and the search for meaning in life.

One of the central psychological themes in the play is Willy's struggle with his own self-worth. Willy's identity is tied to his success as a salesman, and he believes that his worth as a person is determined by his ability to make sales. When he is no longer able to do so, he becomes depressed and suicidal. Willy's feelings of inadequacy are also tied to his relationship with his sons, Biff and Happy. He is disappointed that they have not achieved the success he believes they are capable of, and this disappointment leads to further feelings of worthlessness.

Another psychological theme in the play is the relationship between Willy and his father. Willy's father was also a salesman, and he represents Willy's past and the ideal of the successful salesman. Willy idolizes his father, but at the same time, he feels he can never live up to his father's legacy. The memory of his father haunts him, and he is unable to move past it. This struggle is reflected in Willy's conversations with his dead brother, Ben, who represents the success that Willy desires but feels is unattainable.

The play also explores the impact of the American Dream on individual psyches. Willy is a victim of the American Dream, which he believes will bring him happiness and success. However, he is unable to achieve the dream, and his failure leads to feelings of despair and hopelessness. The American Dream also affects Willy's relationship with his sons, who he believes will achieve success and fulfill his dream. When they fail to do so, Willy is left feeling empty and disillusioned.

The play also examines the impact of masculinity on individual psyches. Willy's sense of masculinity is tied to his ability to provide for his family, and he feels emasculated when he is no longer able to do so. His relationship with his son Biff is also impacted by his ideas of masculinity, as he is disappointed in Biff's failure to achieve success and become a man.

In conclusion, "Death of a Salesman" is a play that explores the psychological depth of its characters and their struggles with identity, self-worth, and the American Dream. The play delves into complex themes of mental health, masculinity, and the search for meaning in life. Through Willy Loman's character, Miller portrays the psychological effects of the American Dream on individuals and the struggle to live up to societal expectations. The play continues to resonate with audiences today because it speaks to universal themes of the human experience.

Poetic Language

Poetic Language: The play features poetic language, especially in Willy's monologues and flashbacks, which helps to create a sense of lyricism and emotional intensity.

Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is known for its use of poetic language and its ability to express complex emotions through its dialogue. The play is filled with metaphors, imagery, and symbolism, all of which help to create a poetic and dreamlike atmosphere. Miller's use of poetic language is particularly evident in the monologues and flashbacks, which are filled with vivid descriptions and lyrical language.

One example of the play's poetic language can be found in Willy's monologue in Act 1, where he talks about his love for his sons. He describes them as "two great men" and says that they are "magnificent creatures, towering, and majestic." This language conveys Willy's intense love for his sons and his admiration for their potential, while also creating a sense of grandeur and beauty.

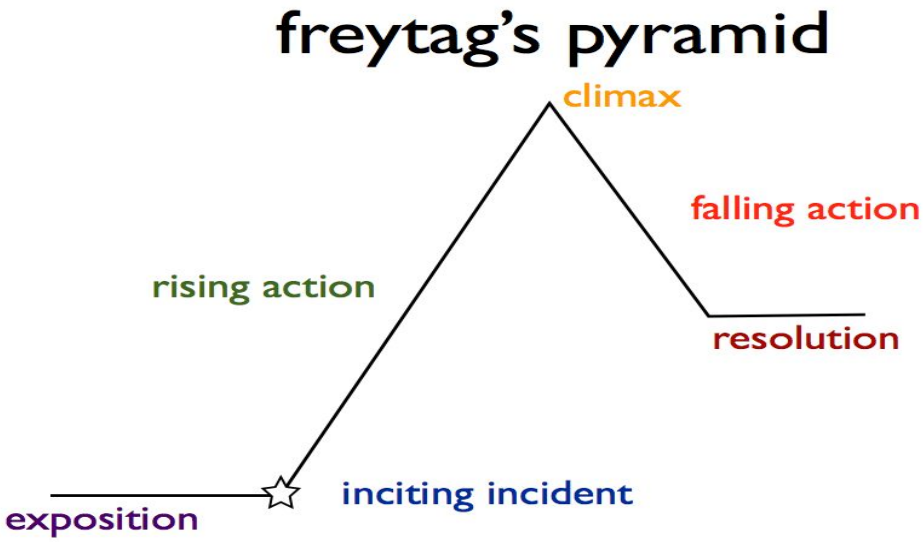
Another example of the play's poetic language can be found in the flashbacks, which are filled with vivid imagery and symbolism. In one flashback, Willy remembers a time when he and his sons were planting seeds in their backyard. This scene is filled with imagery of growth and potential, with Willy saying that the seeds will "sprout up and make a green shoot" and that "someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home anymore."

Miller's use of poetic language in "Death of a Salesman" also extends to the play's stage directions, which are filled with detailed descriptions of the characters and their surroundings. For example, in the opening stage direction of the play, Miller describes the house where the Loman family lives as "an air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality." This description sets the tone for the play, creating a dreamlike atmosphere that is reinforced by the poetic language of the dialogue.

In conclusion, the poetic language of "Death of a Salesman" is one of the play's defining features, helping to create a dreamlike atmosphere that conveys the complex emotions of its characters. Miller's use of metaphors, imagery, and symbolism adds depth and richness to the play's dialogue, making it a work of great literary significance. The play's poetic language has contributed to its enduring popularity and its status as a classic of American literature.

Structure:

Freytag’s pyramid



Freetag's Pyramid is a storytelling technique that consists of five elements: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This structure is often used in literature and film to create a compelling narrative that engages the audience and builds tension.

In "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller, the play follows the structure of Freetag's Pyramid. The exposition of the play introduces the main character, Willy Loman, a traveling salesman who is struggling to make ends meet and support his family. The rising action of the play involves Willy's attempts to regain his former glory as a successful salesman, and his strained relationships with his sons Biff and Happy.

The climax of the play occurs when Willy's illusions about his success and importance are shattered, and he realizes that he has failed to achieve his dreams. This realization is punctuated by his failed attempt at suicide, which brings the play to its emotional peak.

The falling action of the play explores the aftermath of the climax, as Willy's family tries to come to terms with his failures and their own disappointments. This section of the play is marked by a series of revelations and confrontations that lead to a sense of resolution.

Finally, the play ends with a resolution that is both tragic and cathartic. While Willy's suicide marks a definitive end to his story, the play suggests that his legacy and influence will continue to shape the lives of those he left behind.

Overall, "Death of a Salesman" follows the structure of Freetag's Pyramid to create a powerful and emotionally resonant narrative. By using this storytelling technique, the play builds tension and engages the audience, while also exploring complex themes and ideas.

Non-Linear

Non-linear: The play is non-linear, jumping back and forth between the present and the past to reveal the history of the Loman family.

The non-linear structure of Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is an important aspect of its innovative style. The play moves back and forth in time, incorporating flashbacks and dream sequences that provide insight into the past and present experiences of the characters. This structure allows Miller to explore the psychological depth of his characters and to create a sense of disorientation and confusion that mirrors the fragmented nature of the American Dream.

The play opens with a scene in the present, where the protagonist Willy Loman is struggling to make ends meet as a salesman. However, the play quickly shifts to a flashback of Willy's past, where we see him interacting with his sons as children. Throughout the play, these flashbacks provide insight into Willy's past experiences and his relationship with his sons, revealing the roots of his current struggles and disillusionment.

The non-linear structure of the play also allows Miller to explore the theme of memory and its impact on the present. The characters in the play are haunted by memories of the past, which influence their actions and decisions in the present. For example, Willy's memories of his brother Ben, a successful businessman who became rich by exploring the wilderness, inspire Willy to pursue his own version of the American Dream. However, these memories also contribute to Willy's delusions and unrealistic expectations.

The dream sequences in the play also contribute to its non-linear structure, as they represent the internal landscape of the characters. Willy's dreams are particularly significant, as they reveal his innermost desires and fears. For example, in one dream sequence, Willy imagines himself as a successful salesman who is respected by his colleagues and loved by his family. This dream represents Willy's deepest desires and aspirations, while also highlighting the gap between his dreams and reality.

In conclusion, the non-linear structure of "Death of a Salesman" is a crucial aspect of the play's style and content. It allows Miller to explore the psychological depth of his characters, to

convey the fragmentation of the American Dream, and to highlight the role of memory and imagination in shaping our lives. The non-linear structure of the play has contributed to its enduring popularity and its status as a classic of American literature.

Three-Act Structure:

The play is divided into three acts, each of which is structured around a particular theme or event.

While "Death of a Salesman" is often discussed in terms of its non-linear structure and use of flashbacks, it can also be analyzed using a three-act structure. This structure helps to highlight the key turning points and dramatic moments of the play.

Act 1:

The first act of the play is set in the present, and it introduces us to the central character, Willy Loman. We see Willy as a salesman who is struggling to make ends meet, and who is haunted by memories of his past. We also meet his wife Linda, who supports him despite his failures, and his sons Biff and Happy. This act establishes the central conflicts of the play, including Willy's sense of disillusionment with the American Dream, his strained relationship with Biff, and his delusions of grandeur.

Act 2:

The second act of the play is characterized by the use of flashbacks and dream sequences. We see Willy's memories of his past, including his relationship with his brother Ben and his affair with a woman named Miss Francis. We also see flashbacks to Willy's interactions with his sons as children, which shed light on the roots of their current conflicts. This act also sees a pivotal moment in the present, as Biff confronts Willy about his lies and failures. This confrontation sets the stage for the final act of the play.

Act 3:

The third act of the play brings the conflicts of the previous acts to a head. We see Willy unraveling, as he becomes increasingly delusional and disconnected from reality. He has a final confrontation with his sons, in which Biff tries to confront him about his unrealistic expectations and lies. In a climactic moment, Willy decides to commit suicide, hoping that his death will provide financial security for his family. The play ends with Linda mourning his death, and the question of whether Willy's life had any meaning or value.

In conclusion, while the non-linear structure of "Death of a Salesman" is a key aspect of its style and content, it can also be analyzed using a traditional three-act structure. This structure highlights the key conflicts and turning points of the play, and helps to explain the dramatic impact of its climactic moments.

Repetition:

The play features a repetition of key phrases and events, such as Willy's recurring memories of Biff's football game and the phrase "attention must be paid."

Repetition is a notable technique used in the play "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller. It serves several purposes, including emphasizing the key themes and motifs of the play, developing the characters, and contributing to the overall style and structure.

One of the most prominent examples of repetition in the play is the phrase "I'm gonna make it." This phrase is repeated by several characters throughout the play, including Willy, Biff, and Happy. It reflects the American Dream of success and material wealth, which is a central theme of the play. However, the repetition of this phrase also highlights the characters' desperation and disillusionment, as they struggle to achieve their goals and live up to their own expectations.

Another example of repetition in the play is Willy's fixation on his own past and memories. He repeats stories and anecdotes from his past throughout the play, often to the point of obsession. This repetition emphasizes Willy's inability to let go of the past, and his deep sense of regret and disappointment. It also contributes to the non-linear structure of the play, as Willy's memories are interwoven with the present-day action.

Repetition is also used to develop the characters of Biff and Happy. The brothers often repeat each other's phrases and gestures, reflecting their close relationship and shared history. However, this repetition also highlights their lack of individuality and agency, as they struggle to define themselves apart from their father's expectations.

Overall, repetition is a powerful tool in "Death of a Salesman," contributing to its themes, characters, and structure. It emphasizes the characters' struggles with the American Dream, their fixation on the past, and their lack of individuality and agency. By repeating key phrases and motifs, Miller creates a sense of continuity and resonance throughout the play, and contributes to its emotional impact.

Multiple Perspectives:

The play features multiple perspectives on the same events, allowing the audience to see the differing viewpoints of the characters and the subjective nature of memory.

"Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller is a play that explores the American Dream and its consequences through multiple perspectives. The play uses a variety of narrative techniques, including flashbacks, dream sequences, and multiple points of view, to convey the complex experiences and emotions of its characters.

One of the most significant examples of multiple perspectives in the play is the use of flashbacks. Throughout the play, Willy Loman, the main character, revisits key moments from his past, including his career as a salesman, his relationship with his sons, and his affair with a woman named "The Woman." These flashbacks offer insights into Willy's character and motivations, and highlight the gap between his dreams and his reality.

In addition to Willy's perspective, the play also explores the experiences of his sons, Biff and Happy. Through their conversations and interactions with Willy and other characters, the audience gains a deeper understanding of their relationships and struggles, and the impact of their father's expectations on their lives.

The play also uses dream sequences to convey the characters' innermost fears and desires. These dream sequences, which are often surreal and disjointed, reveal the characters' subconscious thoughts and feelings, and provide a contrast to the harsh realities of their lives.

Finally, the play uses multiple points of view to convey the perspectives of different characters. For example, in the scene where Willy is fired from his job, the audience sees the scene from both Willy's perspective and that of his boss, Howard. This technique highlights the difference between Willy's expectations and the reality of his situation, and emphasizes the power dynamics at play in his relationships.

Overall, the use of multiple perspectives in "Death of a Salesman" allows the play to explore the complexity of its characters and their experiences. By presenting the story through a variety of narrative techniques and points of view, the play creates a multifaceted and nuanced portrait of the American Dream and its consequences.

Overall, the style and structure of "Death of a Salesman" work together to create a powerful and emotionally resonant exploration of the American Dream and its impact on the

lives of ordinary people. The use of realism, symbolism, psychological depth, and poetic language helps to bring the characters and their struggles to life, while the non-linear structure, repetition, and multiple perspectives allow for a complex and nuanced portrayal of the Loman family's history and relationships.

3.15 Questions

- What role does the American Dream play in the play Death of a Salesman?
- How does Arthur Miller use the structure of the play to convey its themes and ideas?
- What is the significance of the flashbacks in Death of a Salesman?
- How does the play explore the theme of betrayal through the characters of Willy and his family?
- What is the symbolism of the character of the Woman in Death of a Salesman?
- How does Arthur Miller use repetition in the play to create a sense of tragedy and inevitability?
- What is the psychological depth of the character of Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman?
- How does the play critique capitalism and consumer culture through the character of Willy Loman?
- What is the role of the character of Biff in the play Death of a Salesman?
- How does Arthur Miller use language and dialogue to convey the themes and ideas of Death of a Salesman?
- How does the play use multiple perspectives to create a complex and nuanced portrayal of Willy Loman and his family?
- How does the play use the motif of music to explore its themes and ideas?
- What is the significance of the title Death of a Salesman and how does it relate to the play's themes and ideas?
- How does the play explore the theme of abandonment through the character of Willy Loman?
- What is the role of the character of Charley in Death of a Salesman?
- What role does the American Dream play in "Death of a Salesman"?
- How does the play explore the theme of abandonment?
- What is the significance of the flashbacks and dreams in the play?

- How does the play use symbolism to convey its themes?
- What is the impact of the non-linear structure on the play's narrative?
- How does the play critique capitalism and consumer culture?
- What is the role of repetition in the play?
- How does the play use multiple perspectives to tell its story?
- What is the significance of the play's poetic language?
- How does the play explore the psychological depths of its characters?
- What is the role of realism in the play?
- What is the significance of the play's three-act structure?
- How does the play explore the theme of betrayal?
- What are some of the important quotes from the play, and how do they relate to its themes?
- How does the play use Willy's job as a salesman to comment on larger social issues?

References

- "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller (play)
- "Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman" by Harold Bloom
- "Understanding Death of a Salesman" by Brenda Murphy
- "Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman" by Jennifer L. Smith
- "Death of a Salesman: A Collection of Critical Essays" edited by Robert W. Corrigan
- "The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller" edited by Christopher Bigsby
- "Arthur Miller's America: Theater and Culture in a Time of Change" by Enoch Brater
- "Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations)" by Harold Bloom
- "Arthur Miller: A Critical Study" by Christopher Bigsby
- "Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1950s" by Richard Drain

Critical Comments on Death of a Salesman

- "Death of a Salesman" is a powerful critique of the American Dream and the capitalistic society that propagates it. It exposes the emptiness and futility of a life dedicated solely to the pursuit of material success. - Harold Bloom

- Miller’s use of language in the play is poetic and evocative, adding depth and meaning to the characters and themes. The play also employs non-linear structure and symbolism to create a multi-layered narrative. - Brenda Murphy
- The play explores the theme of betrayal, both in terms of the betrayal of family members and the betrayal of one’s own ideals and aspirations. This theme is central to the play and is conveyed through the characters’ actions and interactions. - Robert W. Corrigan
- The play’s protagonist, Willy Loman, is a complex and deeply flawed character whose psychological struggles are the focus of the play. The play explores issues of identity, self-worth, and the struggle to reconcile one’s dreams with reality. - Christopher Bigsby
- Miller’s use of repetition in the play serves to underscore the themes of failure and disappointment, and to emphasize the monotony and hopelessness of Willy Loman’s life. The play’s structure, which moves back and forth in time, further reinforces these themes. - Jennifer L. Smith
- "Death of a Salesman" can be read as a commentary on the American middle class, its values, and its aspirations. The play’s critique of the American Dream and its emphasis on material success over personal fulfillment has resonance in contemporary society. - Enoch Brater
- The play’s exploration of the human psyche and the struggle to find meaning and purpose in life has made it a timeless work of literature. It speaks to universal themes of identity, family, and the search for meaning that resonate with readers and audiences across generations. - Richard Drain
- "Death of a Salesman" is a powerful critique of the American Dream and the capitalistic society that propagates it. It exposes the emptiness and futility of a life dedicated solely to the pursuit of material success. - Harold Bloom
- Miller’s use of language in the play is poetic and evocative, adding depth and meaning to the characters and themes. The play also employs non-linear structure and symbolism to create a multi-layered narrative. - Brenda Murphy
- The play explores the theme of betrayal, both in terms of the betrayal of family members and the betrayal of one’s own ideals and aspirations. This theme is central to the play and is conveyed through the characters’ actions and interactions. - Robert W. Corrigan

- The play's protagonist, Willy Loman, is a complex and deeply flawed character whose psychological struggles are the focus of the play. The play explores issues of identity, self-worth, and the struggle to reconcile one's dreams with reality. - Christopher Bigsby
- Miller's use of repetition in the play serves to underscore the themes of failure and disappointment, and to emphasize the monotony and hopelessness of Willy Loman's life. The play's structure, which moves back and forth in time, further reinforces these themes. - Jennifer L. Smith
- "Death of a Salesman" can be read as a commentary on the American middle class, its values, and its aspirations. The play's critique of the American Dream and its emphasis on material success over personal fulfillment has resonance in contemporary society. - Enoch Brater
- The play's exploration of the human psyche and the struggle to find meaning and purpose in life has made it a timeless work of literature. It speaks to universal themes of identity, family, and the search for meaning that resonate with readers and audiences across generations. - Richard Drain
- Overall, "Death of a Salesman" is widely regarded as a classic of American literature and an important work of modern drama. Its exploration of themes such as the American Dream, betrayal, and the struggle for identity and self-worth continues to resonate with readers and audiences today.

Overall, "Death of a Salesman" is widely regarded as a classic of American literature and an important work of modern drama. Its exploration of themes such as the American Dream, betrayal, and the struggle for identity and self-worth continues to resonate with readers and audiences today.

M.A. (English)

MAEM23202T: Modern Drama

Section-D

Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*

UNIT IV: Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party*

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Historical Context

4.2 Absurdism

4.3 Philosophical Context

4.4 Introduction to the Author

4.5 Introduction to the Play

4.6 Plot

4.7 Structure of the Play

4.8 Characters

4.9 Themes

4.10 Symbols

4.11 Style

4.12 Criticism of the Text

4.13 Summary

4.14 References

4.15 Questions

4.16 Glossary

4.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Contextualise the play in the mid-twentieth century literary landscape,
- Have an understanding of 'Absurdism',
- Contextualise the play among Pinter's works,
- Understand the structure of Harold Pinter's play "The Birthday Party",
- Have an understanding of the symbolism and themes in Pinter's play, and
- Critically analyse the play.

4.1 Historical Context

"The Birthday Party" was written in the late 1950s when the developed world was mired in a cold war, pitting the communist powers of the Soviet Union against the capitalist United States. At the start of the decade, war had erupted in Korea, pitting communist North Korea and its ally, China, against South Korea and a United Nations 'police force' largely comprised of American troops. Throughout the 1950s, further outbreaks of open warfare were threatened, such as in 1956, when Hungarian rebels pleading for Western assistance were crushed by Soviet troops and tanks. The Space Race was an unofficial competition in which both the Soviet Union and the United States sought to demonstrate that they were technologically superior to the other. Pinter's play reflects the societal anxieties of the time, as well as the sense of unease and uncertainty that characterized the period. The play's themes of power, fear, and the search for identity can be seen as a commentary on the state of the world during that time. Pinter's assertion as an artist was to humanise the world that he was living in but he achieved this by a dehumanisation that implies the "importance of humanity" (Cohn 55-56).

The play was first performed in London in 1958, but it received mixed reviews and closed after eight performances. It was later revised and performed again in 1960, and it received more positive reviews. Eventually, it became a classic in the theatre and considered a masterpiece of Harold Pinter's works.

"The Birthday Party" is also significant in the context of Pinter's career, as it marked a turning point in his writing. His earlier works were more conventional in their structure and themes, but with "The Birthday Party", he began to develop a more distinctive style that would

become known as the "Pinter style." His plays would become more focused on exploring the darker aspects of human nature and the nature of reality, which is evident in this play.

4.2 Absurdism

Martin Esslin considered Pinter's works to be a part of the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. The majority of the plays that make up the Theatre of the Absurd movement were written between 1940 and 1960. These plays were so drastically different from anything that had been done before that they astounded spectators when they were initially performed. Many of them were even classified as "anti-plays". In his 1960 book of the same name, Martin Esslin introduced the phrase "The Theatre of the Absurd" in an effort to describe and categorise this innovative movement. All of the plays highlighted the absurdity of the human situation, which is why he defined it in this way. Although we frequently equate "absurd" with "ridiculous," Esslin was speaking of the word's original definition, which is "out of harmony with reason or propriety; illogical" (Esslin 23). In essence, each play portrays man's life as absurd and meaningless. Following the two World Wars of the 20th century, there was a "collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures," which prompted this concept.

Existential philosophy had a significant impact on absurdist theatre. It most closely matched the ideology of Albert Camus's 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this article, Camus tries to offer a logical justification for why a person shouldn't kill themselves in the face of a pointless, absurd life. He did this by evoking the Sisyphus character from Greek mythology, who was forced to drag a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll back down. Camus states at the end of the essay that "One must picture Sisyphus happy" (Camus 123). Camus's often misunderstood suggestion is that one should be happy despite all of life's challenges. In essence, we can discover meaning in life even if we don't understand why we exist. But unlike Camus, the absurd dramatists did not offer a particularly positive solution to the issue of man's pointless existence. In reality, they frequently provided no solution at all, implying that the question is ultimately unanswerable.

Although absurdist plays cover a broad range of topics, there are some themes or ideas that frequently appear in the genre. The new mentality that swept post-World War II Europe gave rise to these topics. It mainly comprised of the admission that previous generations' "certitudes" and "assumptions" had "been tested and found wanting, that they have been

discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions" (Esslin 23). Two recurring themes in absurdist dramas are the individual's isolation and the meaninglessness of the universe.

The decline of religious faith in the Twentieth Century is partly responsible for the growing notion that life had no identifiable purpose. One who believes in the afterlife views life as a means of getting there, whereas one who doesn't must either come to the conclusion that there is no point to life or find another way to justify it. Until the conclusion of the Second World War, Esslin writes, this decline was "masked by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and different totalitarian fallacies" (23). However, these strategies also seemed to have flaws, leaving the other claim – that there is no purpose to human life – as the only viable choice.

When composing their plays, the playwrights associated with the Theatre of the Absurd were unaware that they were part of a movement. Interestingly, each of them perceived himself as "a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private universe" (22). The majority of the plays place a strong emphasis on a person's isolation or inability to connect with others, demonstrating how deeply ingrained this viewpoint is in their writing.

But the most significant element of absurdist plays is probably their form. It is what sets them apart from other groups with related themes, particularly existential drama. "The Theatre of the Absurd goes one step further [than existential drama] in attempting to create a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed," according to Esslin (24). These playwrights were essentially reacting against reality because it did not fit with their goals. Instead of portraying life as it actually was, they preferred to focus on the interior thoughts and feelings of a person. The Theatre of the Absurd, according to Esslin, "merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human condition, his own sense of being, and his unique vision of the world" (402-403). The playwrights had to eschew conventional techniques and take on a more poetic, or lyrical, form in order to depict this "personal intuition." The devaluation of language was one aspect of this poetic style. The absurd dramatists believed that human dialogue had been hampered by the limitations of conventional language. As a consequence, the characters' actions on stage frequently conflict with their dialogue or words.

The lack of a plot or a definite beginning and finish with a purposeful development in between is another poetic feature of absurdist plays. Language and action are frequently repeated

heavily, giving the impression that the play isn't really "moving anywhere." Since an intuition should be an instantaneous or immediate insight, the plays are trying to depict one. It must be spread out over a period of time "only because it is physically impossible to show such a complex image in an instant" (Esslin 404). Therefore, this supposed lack of plot loses significance if the play is viewed not as a story but rather as the acting out of a single concept.

Dramatic tradition in 20th century

By any measure, the drama produced and performed in the 20th century represents a significant achievement. This era saw a great deal of innovation and experimentation in the field, largely in response to the growth and crises of civilization. The new movements in drama were influenced by concepts such as liberty, equality, and fraternity, as well as a challenging attitude towards art and life. There was a wide range of complex and confusing trends, including the rise of repertory playhouses and associated movements.

One of the most significant developments in 20th century drama was the emergence of new acting schools and theatres, including the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (1903), the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester (1907), the People's Theatre at Newcastle (1911), the British Drama League founded by Geoffrey Whitworth (1919), and the establishment of the Scottish Community Drama Association.

However, the growth of silent cinema in the early 20th century rapidly undermined the traditions of theatre, a trend that was only reinforced by the advent of sound films in the 1930s and television. Translations of foreign works also proliferated during this period and were often at least as influential as English drama.

The drama of the 20th century was influenced by a wide range of historical, social, political, economic, and scientific trends. Two world wars, the Great Depression, technological advancements, and the emergence of new religious movements all had an impact on the field. As a result, the drama of the time was characterized by a diverse and manifold growth of the human mind.

The emergence of new plays and young dramatists with imaginative presentations led to a wide range of new styles and genres, including kitchen sink drama, neo-realist drama, drama of non-communication, absurd drama, comedy of menace, dark comedy, drama of cruelty, and

more. These newer dramatists sought to be sensational, surprising, and shocking, often incorporating controversial subjects such as homosexuality, nymphomania, prostitution, abortion, violence, deaths, disfigurement, and callow humor. They also used popular, up-to-date, topical, obvious subjects and a variety of techniques including song, dance, soap-box oratory, pantomime, and commercial techniques in their play adaptations.

In conclusion, the drama of the 20th century was marked by significant innovation and experimentation, as well as a wide range of new styles, genres, and techniques. This period was shaped by a complex array of historical, social, political, economic, and scientific trends, and the resulting drama reflected the manifold growth of the human mind.

Pinter as a Drama Artist

Pinter's plays are often categorized as 'comedy of menace,' a term coined by David Campton to describe the looming force that threatens one or more characters in a play. Pinter's unique style of blending comedy with an underlying sense of dread is evident in his works, where characters hide their growing anxiety behind small talk. Pinter's plays often involve physical and mental torture, creating an atmosphere of menace that keeps the audience on edge. For example, in The Dumb Waiter, the play's tension builds as the characters engage in cryptic conversations that hint at a larger, unknown danger.

Many of Pinter's works can be interpreted as political metaphors that challenge the abuse of authority. The terror and menace in his plays only culminate when observation is put to an end, creating a sense of ambiguity between dramatic situations and the abstract framing of political facts. In The Birthday Party and The Homecoming, for instance, violent and authoritarian forces dominate the narrative. Sex, for Pinter, is a power struggle and mind-game in which there is no clear winner, but an endless struggle for dominance.

Pinter's plays showcase his use of repetition, repartee, farce, and aggressive joke-telling to create a sense of tension and unease. For instance, readers of The Birthday Party should pay attention to the interrogation scene, the opening scene's repetition, and the use of farce and aggressive joke-telling in The Dumb Waiter.

In Mountain Language, Pinter delves into a political parable that showcases the torture and fate of the Kurdish people. The play is set in a prison for political dissidents in an unspecified time and place. In this hostile environment, communication is impossible, and the

only language that is allowed is that of the oppressor. The mountain people are eventually too terrified to use their language, emphasizing the play's themes of oppression and the suppression of freedom of expression. One may argue that Pinter's plays are characterized by his unique style of blending comedy with menace, creating an atmosphere of unease and tension that is both thrilling and thought-provoking.

Harold Pinter is widely recognized as one of the most influential, thought-provoking, and poetic dramatists of his generation. His unique approach to drama has made him one of the most influential and thought-provoking dramatists of his generation. Through his plays, he explored the complexities of the human condition and the postmodern world, ultimately contributing to the evolution of drama from modernism to postmodernism.His plays are known for their ability to transform everyday speech into dramatic poetry, a skill that is considered his greatest contribution to modern drama. Pinter's ability to use the unspoken words and pauses of his characters to convey their true feelings is one of the reasons why his plays are so powerful and memorable.

Pinter's plays often explore the darker side of human nature and the human condition. Through his innovative Pinteresque technique, he reveals the typical postmodern human predicament in his dramas. Pinter's plays often blur the boundaries between reality and illusion, memory and perception, and truth and lies.

In his earlier works, Pinter utilized modernist elements such as fragmentation, ambiguity, and a focus on the individual to explore the themes of isolation and alienation. However, in his later works, he adopted postmodernist principles such as intertextuality, metafiction, and the deconstruction of meaning to explore the complexities of the contemporary world.

To illustrate this development, this research focuses on three plays that represent the different stages of Pinter's progress as a dramatist. The Room, which represents the comedy of menace, explores themes of confinement and repression, and was one of Pinter's earliest works. Betrayal, a memory play, delves into the complexities of human relationships and was written in the middle of Pinter's career. Finally, One for the Road, which introduces an explicit political theme, is one of Pinter's later works and showcases his postmodern approach to drama.

By analyzing these three plays, this research aims to highlight the evolution of Pinter's dramatic writing from modernist aesthetics to postmodern principles. These plays illustrate how

Pinter employed modernist elements to explore the postmodern human condition, ultimately contributing to the progress of drama from modernism to postmodernism.

Pinter among other Absurdists

Harold Pinter, the British playwright and screenwriter, was heavily influenced by existentialist philosophers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. The existentialist philosophy posits that life is inherently meaningless, and human existence is fraught with anxiety and despair. Pinter's work is often characterized as "Pinteresque," which refers to his unique style of writing that often includes non sequiturs, self-contradictions, and everyday language that defies straightforward interpretation.

Sartre's ideas about freedom and choice are present in Pinter's plays. Sartre believed that humans are born into nothingness and that they must choose to create meaning in their lives. Pinter's characters are often struggling to find meaning and purpose in their lives, and they are frequently thwarted by their own desires and fears.

Camus' concept of the absurd, which refers to the lack of inherent meaning in life, also influenced Pinter. The characters in Pinter's plays are often confronted with the absurdity of their own existence and are forced to grapple with feelings of despair and hopelessness. In his play "The Birthday Party," for example, the characters engage in meaningless conversations that highlight the absurdity of their lives.

Pinter's language is another defining characteristic of his work. His dialogue often reflects the way that people really talk, with awkward pauses, incomplete sentences, and repetitive phrases. Pinter uses language to create a sense of unease and disorientation, making it difficult for audiences to fully understand the meaning of his work.

Overall, Pinter's plays explore themes of alienation, isolation, and the human condition. His unique style of writing and his philosophical influences have made him one of the most important and influential playwrights of the 20th century.

The works of Harold Pinter, the Nobel Prize-winning playwright, are often described as "Pinteresque" due to the unique characteristics of his writing style. Pinteresque refers to the use of language in a way that reflects the irrationality of everyday conversations. This term has become popularized due to the distinctive nature of his plays, where characters engage in conversation that is often fragmented and nonsensical.

One of the hallmarks of Pinter's style is his use of minimalistic language in naturalism, which he combines with the aesthetic expressiveness of Symbolists. His characters' conversations are marked by repetitions, non sequiturs, and self-contradictions, which lead to a sense of unease and tension. Pinter's language evokes the feeling that real-life conversations don't always follow a logical or linear path.

Pinter is an innovator when it comes to language, and his plays reveal how everyday conversations can cause speakers to become alienated from each other. His characters struggle with internal fears, guilt, and difficult sexual desires, all while trying to maintain the neat lives they have built for themselves. Pinter's plays are known for juxtaposing the brutal and the banal, and he is able to create an art form out of sparse language and heavy silence.

In his own words, Pinter has described his works as being about the failure of communication. He believes that people communicate only too well in their silence and what is left unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, with people trying to keep themselves to themselves. Pinter believed that communication was too alarming, and that entering into someone else's life was too frightening. His plays, therefore, reflect the difficulties that people have in revealing themselves to others and the fear of being vulnerable.

Political Activism in Pinter's Life

Harold Pinter has always been known for his political activism and awareness. In 1985, Pinter and Arthur Miller traveled to Turkey on behalf of International P.E.N to meet with writers, artists, and academics who had been imprisoned and tortured for their ideas. These individuals had committed no concrete act against the State, yet their lives had been destroyed. Pinter and Miller also met with the American Ambassador, where they discussed American support for the military regime in Turkey and the conditions in military prisons. When the Ambassador tried to defend American policies, Pinter reminded him of the reality of torture and the brutal methods used to maintain power.

Pinter was never afraid to speak out against injustice, even if it meant offending diplomats or politicians. In 1989, he visited Vaclav Havel in his farmhouse in Bohemia, where he compared the United States to Nazi Germany for its desire for total domination of the world. Pinter strongly believed that artists had a duty to participate in politics and fight against oppression.

In 2005, Pinter received the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he used as an opportunity to criticize the Iraq war and the United States' support for right-wing military dictatorships. In his Nobel lecture, Pinter accused the United States of committing crimes that had been "systematic, constant, vicious, and remorseless." He argued that the United States had manipulated power worldwide while masquerading as a force for good. He called for the prosecution of George W. Bush and Tony Blair by the International Criminal Court.

Pinter's plays often explore political and social issues. In his play, "The Birthday Party," the characters discuss their past experiences, including their childhood memories. This conversation highlights the fragility of memory and the impact of past experiences on the present. Similarly, in "The Homecoming," the characters discuss their past relationships and the influence of power dynamics on their interactions. These plays showcase Pinter's ability to use theater as a tool for social and political commentary.

In conclusion, Pinter's activism and awareness of political issues were integral to his work as a playwright. He believed that artists had a responsibility to engage with the world around them and to use their platform to speak out against oppression and injustice. His Nobel Prize speech and his plays continue to inspire and challenge audiences to this day.

4.3 Philosophical Context

Pinter’s plays have been compared to the work of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, a comparison made even by Martin Esslin when he wrote “Pinter, who acknowledges the influence of Kafka and Beckett, is, like these two writers preoccupied with man at the limit of his being” (255). Simon O. Lesser had claimed that one cannot read Pinter “without facing his similarity to Kafka and his acknowledged indebtedness to him”; both the writers deal with everyday experiences in their texts yet they convert these seemingly insignificant moments into works that deal with deep notions of sanity and life itself. Both the writers share the conviction that the essential aspects of experience are “ambiguous if not unknowable”; and both the writers share a preoccupation with our “fears” and “anxieties” instead of our “hopes” (34).

Lesser compared Pinter’s “The Birthday Party” to Franz Kafka’s works, especially, *The Trial*. Structurally, Lesser discussed how both the texts begin with the protagonist’s birthday and ends with two men taking him away, leaving his fate unspecified. Both the writers are very

candid, with “The Birthday Party” based in a shabby living room “too appallingly real to question” (36).

The subtitle of David Campton's one-act plays, collectively titled The Lunatic Perspective, was “Comedies of Menace” in 1957. Irving Wardle used it on “The Birthday Party” in 1958. He later wanted to take back the label, but it stuck since it was so appropriate. “Comedies of Menace” also works as a play on the term “Comedy of Manners” (Dukore 23).

4.4 Introduction to the Author

On October 10, 1930, Harold Pinter was born in the working-class district of Hackney in London's East End. Hyman and Frances Pinter, both Jews, were his parents. He lived in Lower Clapton for his first nine years, just a short distance from the Hackney Downs School he would subsequently attend. Fascist governments won power in Germany and Italy in the 1930s, and Jews in England were threatened by their racial policies, which were supported by the UK fascists. During World War II, Pinter was evacuated to the countryside, like other children, to Cornwall in 1939, and returned to London in 1944, when the Germans staged a V-2 rocket attack (Dukore 13). After the war, the fascists returned, and Pinter was accosted by fascist thugs on occasions.

He was given a stipend by the London County Council in 1948 to pursue acting studies at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He felt uneasy at RADA because he thought other pupils were more sophisticated than him. Instead of going to class, he wandered the streets while pretending to be having a nervous breakdown, and soon left RADA (14). In 1949 he discovered Samuel Beckett's writing and in 1950 he gave his first professional performance for BBC radio. In 1953 he adopted the stage name David Baron (15). This period also marked his first writings, which were not plays, rather poetry and fiction.

In 1957, Pinter's first play, “The Room” was produced in London. This was followed by a series of plays that established him as one of the most important and influential playwrights of his generation. Some of his notable plays include “The Birthday Party” (1957), “The Caretaker” (1959), “The Homecoming” (1964), “Betrayal” (1978), and “No Man's Land” (1975).

In addition to his work as a playwright, Pinter also wrote screenplays and directed films and stage productions. He also wrote poetry and political essays. Pinter was politically active and was a strong critic of U.S. foreign policy and the Iraq War. He was also an advocate for human

rights and a vocal critic of censorship. Pinter was married to the playwright and actress Vivien Merchant from 1956 to 1980 and later to the actress Antonia Fraser. He died on December 24, 2008, in London after a battle with cancer.

He is considered one of the most important and influential modern playwrights of the 20th century. He is best known for his plays which are marked by their use of silence, pauses, and lack of traditional narrative structure. He often used these elements to create a sense of unease and tension in his plays. Pinter's plays have been widely performed and produced around the world and continue to be studied and admired for their unique style and exploration of the human condition.

Pinter's plays are known for their exploration of power dynamics, particularly in personal relationships. His plays often deal with themes of memory, loss, and the search for identity. He also wrote plays that dealt with political themes, such as the use of torture and the abuse of power. Pinter's writing style has been described as "Pinteresque" and is characterized by its use of minimalism, ambiguity, and a focus on the subtext. His plays are often described as being "comic" in nature, but with a dark and disturbing undertone.

Pinter won several awards during his career, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005, and his plays continue to be performed and produced around the world. His plays are considered classics of the theatre and are studied in many universities and theatre schools.

4.5 Introduction to the Play

"The Birthday Party" is a play written by Harold Pinter in 1957. It is a dark comedy and a study of power, fear and the human condition. The play is set in a seaside boarding house where the two main characters, Stanley and Meg, live. They are visited by two mysterious strangers, Goldberg and McCann, who disrupt their lives and force them to confront their pasts. The play explores themes of identity, isolation, and the nature of reality. It is considered a masterpiece of modern theatre and is considered a classic of Pinter's work.

"The Birthday Party" invited a lot of popular and critical attention for several reasons. One of the main reasons is its use of language. Pinter's writing is known for its use of ambiguity and the way he uses language to create a sense of unease and uncertainty. He often uses repetition and non-sequiturs to create a sense of confusion and disorientation for the characters and the audience. Another unique aspect of the play is its use of symbolism and motifs. The play

is filled with symbols and motifs that are open to multiple interpretations, leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions.

Additionally, “The Birthday Party” is considered a unique play because of its exploration of the human condition. Pinter delves into the deeper aspects of the human psyche, such as fear, power, and the search for identity, and the way these themes are intertwined. Overall, the play's unique use of language, symbolism, and exploration of the human condition makes it a defining work of Harold Pinter's career.

4.6 Plot

“The Birthday Party” is set in a small seaside boarding house in England, where the two main characters, Stanley and Meg, live. Stanley is a pianist and Meg is the owner of the boarding house. The play begins with the arrival of two mysterious strangers, Goldberg and McCann, who disrupt their lives and force them to confront their pasts.

The plot of the play centres on a birthday party that is being held for Stanley, though it is clear that it is not a celebratory occasion. Instead, it seems to be a form of interrogation or punishment. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Stanley is a former member of a criminal organization, and that Goldberg and McCann are there to take him back.

Act I begins in the living room of a boarding-house by the sea in 1950s England. The boarding-house owner Petey and his wife Meg, both in their sixties, enjoy breakfast at the living room table and converse inanely. Meg is a perceptive character who repeatedly questions Petey about his food, his work, etc. Petey tells his wife that two men he met the previous night will be staying at the boarding-house shortly. Meg is initially startled by the news, but she quickly gets over it and assures them that she will have a place ready.

She then shouts to their upstairs lodger, Stanley Webber, who is sound sleeping. She calls him when he doesn't respond, walks upstairs to get him, and then comes back looking a little messy but laughing. Then comes Stanley, a thirty-something guy with beard, scruffy hair, and a sour disposition. Meg is preparing cornflakes and fried bread for Stanley's morning as Petey and Stanley converse about uninteresting subjects. Petey departs for work, and the mood shifts. Meg flirts with Stanley, who mocks her chores and refers to her as "succulent." He pushes Meg away and insults her when she shows love. Then Meg tells him that there will be two males arriving.

Stanley, who has been the only tenant for years, is disturbed by the news. Meg responds by denying that she is dishonest despite his accusations.

Lulu, a young woman in her twenties, comes with a package before Meg departs to go shopping. Meg gives Lulu the go-ahead to retain the Stanley package before departing. Lulu and Stanley have a brief conversation during which they mainly discuss Stanley's lack of passion and appearance. He is referred to as a "wipe out" by Lulu, who then leaves. After washing his face in the kitchen, Stanley exits through the door. Meanwhile, McCann and Goldberg walk into the living area. They are the two guys who had asked for accommodations for the evening.

The fact that Goldberg and McCann have arrived under mysterious circumstances to "finish a job" is immediately evident. Although information is lacking, it appears that Stanley is the job in consideration. Goldberg assures McCann that they are at the correct address and that this job won't stress them out any more than their regular jobs do. Until Meg shows up and greetings are made, Goldberg drones on and on about his uncle.

Meg was quickly put at ease by Goldberg's pleasant disposition and elegant appearance. Meg responds to Goldberg's inquiry about Stanley by stating that he used to be a famous pianist but had to give it up. Stanley's birthday is also revealed by Meg, and Goldberg proposes they throw a party. Meg enthusiastically directs the guys to their room. Later, as Meg comes to put the groceries away, Stanley enters the living room. When she informs him about the two men, Stanley reacts angrily upon hearing Goldberg's name. Even though Stanley insists that it is not his birthday, Meg recommends that he open his birthday present to cheer him up. He opens the box to discover a toy drum with drumsticks to amuse Meg. He parades around the table with the drum hung around his neck, cheerfully pounding it, until his beat becomes erratic and disorganised. He towers over Meg, beating the drum obnoxiously and wearing a deranged look on his face.

Act II begins with McCann tearing a newspaper into five equal pieces at the living room table later that day. When Stanley shows up, the two men uncomfortably exchange greetings. In a composed voice, McCann congratulates Stanley on his birthday and expresses gratitude for the invitation to his celebration. Stanley responds that he would prefer to spend the evening by himself and makes an attempt to depart, but McCann stops him.

McCann becomes agitated when Stanley crosses one of the newspaper strips while he is sitting at the table. Speaking of his background, Stanley implies that he has never been one to start trouble. Stanley is agitated when McCann disputes his claim that they have previously met. When McCann says that he and Goldberg are at the boarding-house on a brief vacation, Stanley becomes agitated and demands to know why they are there. Stanley clutches McCann's arm in desperation, and the man strikes him hard. After being overcome by shock, Stanley gathers his composure and expresses his affection for Ireland, its people, its sunsets, and its police. When Petey and Goldberg walk into the room, he interrupts McCann's request to go with him to a local pub.

Goldberg is introduced to Stanley by Petey before he departs. As Goldberg drones on and on about his past, the atmosphere in the room becomes strained. Despite Goldberg's calming words, Stanley is still on edge and defies McCann's request to settle down. Goldberg's subdued insistence persuades him to recline rather than McCann's threats.

Following Stanley's submission, Goldberg and McCann question him about his past, accusing him of betraying their "organisation," murdering his wife, abandoning his fiancée at the altar, being a space waster, and other things. Stanley responds at first, but the sheer volume of questions quickly leaves him speechless. The inquiries become increasingly absurd and senseless. Stanley finally strikes Goldberg in the abdomen. McCann and Stanley start to threaten each other with chairs, but when Meg shows up and starts playing Stanley's toy drum, they immediately return to being polite. She has on attire for his birthday celebration. She receives a praise from Goldberg, and the tense atmosphere soon disappears as Meg offers a heartfelt toast in memory of Stanley while McCann shines a torch in his face like a spotlight. When Lulu arrives, Goldberg offers a second toast that contains additional reflection.

The party officially starts. While Meg and McCann discuss Ireland, Lulu and Goldberg engage in flirtation. Up until Meg recommends they all play blind man's bluff, Stanley is seated by himself at the table. When it comes to Stanley's turn, McCann blindfolds him, breaks his spectacles, and positions the toy drum in the way that Stanley's foot will smash through it. Meg is about to be choked when Stanley reaches her. Goldberg and McCann remove him, but then an abrupt blackout occurs. The two guys are unable to locate Lulu, who has screamed and fainted, in the darkness. When McCann focuses his flashlight on the table, he sees Stanley standing over

Lulu, seemingly ready to assault her sexually. As the curtain shuts and the men approach him slowly, he giggles maniacally.

Act III begins the following morning, Meg worries that there isn't any breakfast remaining while Petey reads a newspaper at the dining room table. She tries to remember what occurred, but her memory of the previous night is foggy, and she forgets that Petey wasn't there. She sees Goldberg's vehicle in the driveway as she heads out to shop, which makes her nervous. Petey soothes her anxiety.

Goldberg enters the space and sits down at the table as Meg gets ready to depart once more. He ignores Meg's inquiry about the vehicle. Finally, she goes. Goldberg responds to Petey's inquiry about Stanley by saying that Stanley had a nervous breakdown and needs to be brought to a doctor he knows. Goldberg insists Petey just go to work when he wakes up, but Petey wishes to see Stanley. Stanley is attempting to insert his broken spectacles into his eyes, McCann informs Goldberg as he enters the room carrying two suitcases. Petey offers to get a doctor and suggests a method to fix the glasses, but Goldberg ignores him. Goldberg slumps over the table as Petey leaves to minister to his peas and requests to be informed when Stanley awakes.

McCann requests that they finish the work quickly, but Goldberg refuses. Goldberg attacks McCann after McCann shakes his chair and names him "Simey" in a furious manner. McCann calms Goldberg, who then acknowledges his discomfort and his confusion over it. He tells McCann about his father and his own family values before making the odd request that McCann blow into his lips twice. Without hesitation, McCann agrees, and Goldberg is at ease.
Lulu walks in, and McCann disappears. Lulu claims that Goldberg took advantage of her sexually the previous evening. Until McCann enters again and orders Lulu to confess her sins, they dispute about who is to blame. This strange change of events startles Lulu, who runs away. Stanley arrives at the door looking well-dressed and clean-shaven after McCann departs to go get him. Goldberg makes a promise to purchase Stanley new glasses because the two men appear to feel sorry for him. They grill Stanley with kinder inquiries and remarks in a repetition of the questioning from Act II. Goldberg implores Stanley to accompany them, but Stanley can only manage grunting noises.

When Petey shows up, he orders them to halt as they are about to leave with Stanley. They threateningly ask Petey if he wishes to go with them. “Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!” Petey yells before allowing the two men to carry Stanley away. Petey then goes back to the coffee table in the living room and grabs his newspaper. When Meg appears, she queries whether Stanley has yet arrived for breakfast. Petey untruthfully assures her Stanley is still asleep.

The play is filled with symbolism and motifs, and many elements of the play are open to multiple interpretations. For example, the birthday party can be seen as a symbol of Stanley's past catching up with him, or it can be seen as a form of psychological torture. The play also explores themes of power, fear, and the search for identity. Stanley is a character who is in a state of constant fear, and the arrival of Goldberg and McCann only exacerbates this. The play also explores the way that power can be used to manipulate and control people, as seen in the way that Goldberg and McCann exert their power over Stanley and Meg.

In terms of analysis, “The Birthday Party” is considered a masterpiece of modern theatre and is considered a classic of Pinter's work. It is a study of power, fear and the human condition. It's a commentary on the societal anxieties of the time and the sense of unease and uncertainty that characterized the post-World War II era. The play's use of language, symbolism and exploration of the human condition makes it a defining work of Harold Pinter's career.

4.7 Structure of the Play

“The Birthday Party” by Harold Pinter is structured in a non-linear and non-traditional way, which contributes to the atmosphere of unease and uncertainty that pervades the play. The structure of the play can be broken down into three acts.

Act I: The first act establishes the setting and the characters of the play. The audience is introduced to Stanley, Meg, and Pete, who are the residents of the boarding house. We also meet Goldberg and McCann, who later arrive at the boarding house. The act establishes the setting and the characters, but it also creates a sense of unease and uncertainty as the audience is left to interpret the characters' actions and motivations.

Act II: The second act is where the tension of the play begins to build. The audience witnesses the arrival of Goldberg and McCann, who are later revealed to be working for some sort of organization. The characters begin to show their true colours, and the audience is left to interpret

the characters' actions and motivations. The act is full of non-sequiturs, repetition, and ambiguity, which contribute to the sense of unease and uncertainty.

Act III: The final act is where the tension of the play reaches its climax. The characters' true motivations are revealed, and the audience is left to interpret the characters' actions and motivations. The act is full of non-sequiturs, repetition, and ambiguity, which contribute to the sense of unease and uncertainty. The act ends with the characters' pasts catching up with them, and the audience is left to interpret the ending and its implications.

The non-linear and non-traditional structure of the play contributes to the atmosphere of unease and uncertainty. The audience is left to interpret the characters' actions and motivations and to connect them to the overall meaning of the play. The structure of the play reflects the societal anxieties of the post-World War II era, where people were struggling to make sense of a rapidly changing world and were uncertain about the future.

4.8 Characters

"The Birthday Party" by Harold Pinter features a small cast of characters, each with their own unique traits and motivations. The main characters in the play are:

Stanley: Stanley is the protagonist of the play. He is a reclusive and unkempt man who has been living for the past year in Meg and Petey Boles's boarding house. He has come to this seaside town in order to hide from his past life, but he leads an isolated existence and refuses to venture beyond the boarding house. When Goldberg and McCann come to the boarding house and start interrogating him, Stanley is distraught, his aggressive depression turns into a nervous breakdown, and tries to strangle Meg and rape Lulu. He is pushed to the edge by Goldberg and McCann's psychological games, and by the end of the play, he is completely unhinged and allows Goldberg and McCann to escort him away from his sequestered life. His early character traits include being lazy, untidy, and cruel to Meg. There is a feeling that he has sins unatoned for, though the many details of his past are never confirmed – he might be a musician, might have been famous, etc.

Meg: Meg is one of the proprietors of the boarding house in which Stanley lives. Despite her lack of intelligence, she tries to make up for it in fastidiousness, constantly trying to please her guests and establish routines that will impose order on the boarding house. Her connection to

Stanley is particularly bizarre, as she treats him both maternally and romantically. Meg's initial interactions with Stanley are very funny as she rushes to his room and rouses him, calling to him as she would a kid to come down for breakfast (Dukore 30). Meg devotes herself to order and routine even when it doesn't make sense to enforce these everyday practices, such as when she runs out of cornflakes one morning. This naiveté makes it hard for her to see that Goldberg and McCann are intent on psychologically torturing Stanley, so she instead focuses on throwing Stanley a birthday party. On the morning after the party, she acts as if nothing extraordinary has happened, even though Stanley tried to strangle her and then tried to rape Lulu. Petey lies to her that Stanley is still upstairs sleeping when Goldberg and McCann have taken him away for good.

Petey: Petey is Meg's husband and co-proprietor of the boarding house in which Stanley lives. He is an affable man who spends most of his time working at the nearby beach and is sympathetic to Meg's eccentricities. He is the only character who notices a change in Stanley after McCann and Goldberg psychologically torment him, and he tries to stand up for him by yelling, "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!" Petey's character becomes more intelligent as the performance goes on. He understands that Goldberg and McCann are more cunning than they appear to be, and he presumably is aware of the peculiar connection between his wife and Stanley. Petey eventually admits that he will not do much to change the comfortable, delusional life he lives with Meg, despite the fact that he appears to know much more than he lets on.

Goldberg: Goldberg is a charming, swift-talking man who arrives at Meg and Petey's boarding house with his associate, McCann. Goldberg introduces himself as Nat, but he also refers to himself as "Simey" while telling stories. He and Stanley seem to know one another, and Goldberg references the same Maidenhead tea shop that Stanley has already talked about. Goldberg is smooth and socially confident, and he easily wins over Meg by complimenting her dress. He also gains the affection of Lulu, with whom he flirts during Stanley's birthday party.

However, Goldberg has other matters on his mind, focusing first and foremost on psychologically disturbing Stanley and taking him away from the boarding house. Goldberg wants to be the kind of person who's full of wisdom, but he has very little to offer in the way of life advice. He eventually shows a violent, angry side underlying this slick exterior. Goldberg waxes lyrical and nostalgic about his family and the past, which suggests that his issues are tied

to his past. The reader is left to speculate as to how much these delusions serve to both explain and/or fuel his rage and brutality.

McCann: McCann is an Irishman who takes orders from Goldberg and is assigned to locate Stanley Webber and remove him from Meg and Petey's boarding house. He has a confusing past and is a recently unfrocked priest, prompting him to pressure Lulu into confessing her sins. McCann is perhaps more sensitive than he appears, considering that he seems troubled by his final interactions with Stanley. When Goldberg asks for an update on Stanley's mental state the day after the calamitous birthday party, McCann says he won't return to Stanley's room because of the fact that he has gone completely quiet. Despite this, McCann doesn't hesitate to help Goldberg remove him from the house at the end of the scene, carting him away despite Petey's protests.

Lulu: Lulu is a young woman who visits Meg and Petey's boarding house. Before McCann and Goldberg arrive, she tells Stanley that he ought to go outside for some air, prompting him to invite her to run away with him. Later, Lulu comes to Stanley's birthday party and flirts with Goldberg, telling him that she has always liked older men and that he looks like the first man she ever loved. During the game of "blind man's bluff," Stanley attempts to rape Lulu, but Goldberg and McCann stop him. Lulu and Goldberg continue their romantic evening, but Lulu accuses him of having sex with her without having any intention of starting a relationship. McCann enters and tries to get her to confess her sins, driving her out of the boarding house. She is naive and flirtatious, and despite the fact that she originally seems interested in Stanley, she is prone to being seduced by Goldberg's charms. After being sexually attacked, her girlish characteristics turn ironically unsettling.

Minor Characters

In “The Birthday Party” by Harold Pinter, there are several minor characters that play important roles in the play, despite not being central figures. These characters include:

- The Man and The Woman: The man and the woman are a couple who briefly appear in the play. They are portrayed as typical tourists and their role in the play is to serve as a contrast to the other characters who are trapped in their own fears and uncertainty.

- The Soldier: The soldier is a minor character who briefly appears in the play. He is portrayed as a confident and assertive figure who serves as a reminder of the oppressive forces that are looming over the other characters.
- The Policeman: The policeman is a minor character who briefly appears in the play. He is portrayed as a representative of the oppressive forces that are looming over the other characters. He serves as a reminder of the consequences of the characters' actions.
- The Photographer: The photographer is a minor character who briefly appears in the play. He is portrayed as a representative of the outside world and serves as a reminder of the possibility of escape.

These minor characters serve to develop the major characters and the atmosphere of the play, they help to create an environment that is oppressive and uncertain, and they also serve to move the plot forward by adding more tension and uncertainty to the play. They are not central figures but they have an important role in the play, they help to create an atmosphere of unease and uncertainty that pervades the play and they help to create a sense of uncertainty and unease in the audience.

4.9 Themes

Absurdity: Pinter intentionally destabilizes the audience's understanding of his characters and their motivations, obscures what is happening in the plot, and manipulates the dialogue so that it is difficult to understand a conversation's underlying structure. The world appears capricious or evil because things happen and behave in mysterious ways that seem illogical or unmotivated. Nothing can be relied on. What appears to be safe is not. No refuge offers protection. A firearm suddenly disappears. The absurdity of language may allude to the foolishness of human existence. The fear of a threat may allude to man's pain throughout the cosmos (Dukore 25).

Personal histories are frequently ambiguous in plays, as demonstrated by Goldberg's inconsistent claims about his name and occupation. When relating tales of his mother or his deceased wife, he names himself Simey; in another, he uses the name Benny. In a discussion in the final act of the play, he even calls McCann by a different name, indicating that he considers such specifics to be flimsy and unimportant. Petey is perplexed by this abrupt change, and Pinter encourages the audience to share in his confusion. Goldberg and McCann question Stanley before giving him a birthday party, which exposes Pinter's audience to more absurdity. Pinter

makes a conscious effort to concentrate on the questions "What?" and "How?" rather than "Who?" and "Why?" To put it another way, current actions, connections, and strategies are significantly more significant than previous ones (25).

The notion that Pinter cares most about helping the audience understand Stanley's confusion is furthered when Stanley eventually screams when they ask him which came first, the chicken or the egg (Taylor-Batty 26). Pinter forces viewers to accept that these types of details are "meaningless," at least in the context of the play itself, by making his characters' backstories and personal information challenging to comprehend. Pinter's choice to undermine the expository details of the play while giving precedence to absurd ideas makes sense. Because it makes the audience more able to identify with the protagonist, the play's absence of explanation functions as its own expository device. In order to help the audience comprehend Stanley's alienated perspective, Pinter also overstuffs the plot with non-sequiturs and contradictions, making his characters' lives seem unimportant and random.

Fear: The fear of danger is ever present in “The Birthday Party When Stanley learns there will be two visitors, he anxiously inquires about them, paces the space, and insists they won't arrive. Pinter doesn't say why he feels anxious, the fact that he is anxious is important (Dukore 29).

His toy drumming reveals his anxiety as it evolves into frantic banging. Stanley is no longer in control by the time they play a game at his birthday party. Stanley conveys some of his own fears to Meg by convincing her that someone wants to take her away. Meg believes what Stanley says, that there are people who want to transport her in a wheelbarrow to a van. Meg notices Goldberg's large car and is concerned that it is there to take her away. Meg is also afraid of being abandoned. She is concerned that Stanley will abandon the house. This is why she looks after him despite how disrespectful and mean he is to her.

It is ironic that both men who pose a threat to Stanley are afraid. Irony is the use of words to demonstrate the inverse of what is expected. McCann is hired to do a job that will cause Stanley harm. He is one of the men Stanley is afraid of. McCann, on the other hand, is concerned about what he will be asked to do. He begs Goldberg for information, but to no avail. Goldberg is nervous about confronting Stanley after the birthday party and informs McCann that he is not feeling well. Goldberg usually soothes his own anxieties with stories from his childhood that have nothing to do with what is going on at the time.

Guilt: Harold Pinter portrays Stanley as a character saddled with guilt. He is unable to escape his previous life when Goldberg and McCann arrive at the boarding house and hold him accountable for whatever it is they think he's done. Stanley's behaviour becomes increasingly suspicious as Goldberg and McCann interrogate him, and even their presence in the boarding house causes him to behave like someone who has a guilty conscience. Stanley eventually does fall from innocence by attempting to strangle Meg and rape Lulu after Goldberg and McCann accuse him of multiple crimes, suggesting that guilt has the power to completely unhinge a person regardless of whether or not they have committed any actual wrongdoing. Stanley is wary of encountering people from his past, and before Goldberg and McCann even accuse him of anything, he is guarded and suspicious of them. Pinter never clarifies this point, instead choosing to let audience members decide whether or not Stanley deserves the psychological torture they eventually subject him to.

Stanley is interrogated by Goldberg and McCann, who accuse him of both severe and mundane transgressions. Stanley plays into this narrative, accepting the idea that he is inherently guilty and attempting to strangle Meg and rape Lulu during his birthday party. This act suggests that Goldberg and McCann's treatment has driven him to do something he wouldn't otherwise, demonstrating the detrimental, self-perpetuating effects of accepting oneself as an immoral person. Although all humans may feel guilty from time to time, a person should avoid fully embracing him- or herself as inherently corrupt, as this attitude only invites further misbehaviour.

Order and chaos: Meg adheres to a strict daily routine that imposes a pattern on her own life and the entire boarding house. Stanley, on the other hand, recognizes the chaos that has seized the boarding house, but everyone around him considers him crazy. Meg's commitment to order keeps her from seeing the changes taking place in her home, and she fails to recognize the existential and subtle forms of chaos that are disrupting the sense of order she's supposedly imposing upon the household. Pinter challenges the notion that a commitment to order is an indication of sanity, showing that sometimes implementing order for the sake of order is just as insane as plunging into disordered mayhem. Meg's unyielding devotion to order is delusional and maladjusted, and she denies all signs of disruption and disorder, instead concentrating on the

ways in which things have remained the same. Pinter warns the audience against thinking that madness only presents itself in outlandish and stereotypical ways, as it can manifest itself in utterly banal circumstances, too.

Isolation and independence: Stanley Webber lives for a year in isolation to hide from his past, but Pinter highlights the detrimental effects of isolation on his quality of life. Goldberg and McCann use Stanley's isolation to their advantage, forcing him to sit in the middle of the room with the lights off as someone shines a flashlight in his face. Meg gives a speech in his honour, but she hardly says anything of note about Stanley as an individual. Her speech only shows him that no one in the boarding house truly knows or cares about him, and even Meg can't say anything meaningful about him. Stanley leaves the boarding house in silence, destined for a life that is no more interactive or communal than the one he's established in Meg and Petey's home.

Pinter suggests that isolation negatively influences a person's life in the present, but also has adverse effects on their ability to move forward and forge a life of freedom and personal agency. Stanley is forced to sit with a flashlight shining in his face while his so-called friends celebrate him, heightening his sense of loneliness. He is aware of the negative aspects of living in isolation, such as Lulu's insistence that he could use some air. Stanley asks Lulu to "go away" with him, but when she asks where they could go, he balks and says, "Nowhere." Pinter suggests that isolation has rendered Stanley incapable of making simple decisions, making him feel as if life beyond the walls of the boarding house doesn't matter. Stanley eventually leaves his life of isolation, but it is unclear if he is headed towards a better life.

Petey encourages him to stand up for himself and assert his independence, but Stanley retreats into the distance. Pinter confirms that isolation renders people incapable of seizing their independence and functioning as free-thinking individuals.

Language and communication: A concern of absurdists is that language, rather than facilitating genuine human communication, may prevent it. Meaning is more likely to be conveyed not by what is said but by its subtext, what is left unsaid, or the manner in which it is said. In Pinter's work, words tend to obscure the authentic self, whereas silence threatens to expose and expose it. Pinter's characters appear to fear silence.Words are used in non-communicative ways in “The Birthday Party”. For example, there are the inane exchanges between Meg and Petey, who have little or nothing to say to each other when they are alone. They live in the ashes of their marriage,

a situation they refuse to confront. They avoid the truth by saying meaningless phrases that confirm only self-evident and insignificant facts. Their banter begins and ends the play.

Language for others is a deceptive tool, particularly for Goldberg, who uses his fake friendliness to torment Stanley. Goldberg pushes for the birthday party by using deceptive flattery on Meg, an ironic contrast to his more sinister goal, which could be to transport Stanley to be executed. Words are frequently used as physical objects in “The Birthday Party”, as they are in many of Ionesco's plays. In Goldberg and McCann's interrogations of Stanley, they are as tangible as clubs. Their alternating lines even establish a rhythm that mimics striking blows in their inquisitions. Pinter is particularly concerned with the treatment of language as an untrustworthy tool of human expression. It appears to fail completely at the end of the play, at least for Stanley. He is about to be removed by McCann and Goldberg and is incapable of uttering anything other than nonsensical syllables. Only then does his terror become fully apparent.

4.10 Symbols

- **The Birthday Party:** The Birthday Party, as its name suggests, features a birthday celebration—for Stanley, who maintains it is not his birthday. Birthday refers to both the day and the anniversary of one's birth, and in the play, the former is celebrated to help produce the latter. Stanley is transformed by the invaders into a "new man," in McCann's words. On a birthday that turns into a birth-day, he is reincarnated at their hands and transformed into a different kind of person (Dukore 29).
- **The Boarding House:** The boarding house is significant as a backdrop and representation of the identity crisis that several of the characters will experience throughout the play. It is an odd, lonely place where its occupants seem to have been arrested in time. The living room is cramped and stuffy and has only a tiny window by the rear entrance. Petey is the only one of the three who leaves the house to go to work and interact with others throughout their constantly repeating daily routine. Stanley stays inside the entire play and is escorted outside at the conclusion. The boarding house serves as an example of how perception affects reality and disproves the idea of objective truth.
- **Stanley’s drum:** For his birthday, Meg presents Stanley a drum and encourages him to play it. She is thrilled to hear him tap out a beat, but as he keeps playing, Stanley's

rhythm becomes more and more erratic until he beats the instrument in a "savage" and "possessed" way. This is a foreboding sign that the orderly atmosphere of the lodging house is about to disintegrate.

- **The Photographs:** The photographs of Meg and Stanley in the boarding house are used to symbolize the characters' pasts and how they continue to shape and define their actions. The photographs also represent memory and the inability of the self to escape the actions of our past.
- **The Piano:** The play follows Stanley Webber, a former concert pianist and his family-like connections with Meg and Petey, and his failed romantic connection with neighbour Lulu, make him a withdrawn individual, making him an anti-hero (Taylor-Batty 23). The piano in the boarding house serves as a symbol of the Stanley's pasts and the memories he associates with it. It also symbolizes the characters' attempts to escape their pasts, but ultimately being unable to do so.
- **The Chess game:** The chess game played between Stanley and McCann serves as a symbol of the power struggle between the characters. It also symbolizes the manipulation and control that Goldberg and McCann exert over Stanley and Meg.

4.11 Style

The play is known for its unique and distinctive style, which contributes to the atmosphere of unease and uncertainty that pervades the play. Some of the key stylistic elements of the play include:

- **Non-sequiturs:** Pinter's use of non-sequiturs, where characters' statements do not logically follow from one another, contributes to the sense of confusion and the feeling that something is not quite right. The audience is left to make sense of the characters' statements and to connect them to the overall meaning of the play.
- **Ambiguity:** The play is filled with ambiguity, which contributes to the sense of unease and uncertainty. The characters' actions and motivations are often unclear, and the audience is left to interpret them.
- **Repetition:** Pinter uses repetition throughout the play, which creates a sense of unease and uncertainty. The characters often repeat the same phrases or actions, which creates a sense of unease and the feeling that something is not quite right.

- **Symbolism:** The play is rich in symbolism, which adds to the atmosphere of unease and uncertainty. The symbols and motifs used in the play are often open to interpretation, and the audience is left to make sense of them and to connect them to the overall meaning of the play.
- **The use of language:** Pinter's use of language is unique and distinctive, it's often abstract, full of non-sequiturs, repetition, and ambiguity, and it creates a sense of unease and uncertainty that reflects the societal anxieties of the post-World War II era. According to Alice Rayner, “In Harold Pinter's work, the infamous pauses, excruciating silences, and the proclivity for tableaux are instances of delay when the forward motion of events is held and something unspoken happens” (482).

4.12 Criticism of the Text

- **Lack of clarity:** Some critics have criticized the play for its lack of clarity, arguing that the characters' motivations and actions are not always clear. The play's use of ambiguity and uncertainty has been praised by some critics but criticized by others for leaving the audience confused.
- **Symbolism:** Some critics have argued that the symbolism used in the play is heavy-handed and not always effective in conveying meaning. While many critics have praised Pinter's use of symbolism, others have argued that it can be confusing and even distracting.
- **Dialogue:** The play's dialogue has also been criticized by some critics for being stilted and unnatural. While some critics have praised Pinter's use of dialogue as a key aspect of characterization, others have argued that it makes the characters and their motivations difficult to understand.
- **Structure:** Some critics have criticized the play's structure for being disjointed and difficult to follow. The non-linear structure of the play has been praised by some critics for its ability to create a sense of unease and uncertainty, but criticized by others for being confusing.
- **Political allegory:** Some critics have argued that the play is a political allegory that is meant to reflect the oppressive political climate of the time. Others have argued that the play is not meant to be read as a political allegory, and that its themes are universal.

4.13 Summary

In this unit, we have introduced the idea of the Theatre of the Absurd and how Harold Pinter fits into this categorization. We have briefly discussed his play "The Birthday Party" and its plot. In the next chapter, we would analyse the different elements of the text. We have discussed the major themes of the play "The Birthday Party". We have discussed the major and minor characters in the play and how they affect the action and how they are affected by the action of the play. We have also discussed the symbolism and imagery used in the play.

4.14 References

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage, 1983.

Cohn, Ruby. "The World of Harold Pinter." *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1962, pp. 55–68. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1124935.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Harold Pinter*. Macmillan, 1985.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin, 1991.

Lesser, Simon O. "Reflections on Pinter's 'The Birthday Party.'" *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1972, pp. 34–43. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207418.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Harold Pinter*. Macmillan, 1985.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin, 1991.

Rayner, Alice. "Harold Pinter: Narrative and Presence." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 482–97. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207890.

Taylor-Batty, Mark. *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

4.15 Questions

1. How does the use of language in the play contribute to the sense of unease and uncertainty?
2. How do the characters' pasts influence their actions and reactions in the present?
3. What is the significance of the birthday party and how does it relate to the themes of the play?
4. How do the characters of Goldberg and McCann exert power over Stanley and Meg?
5. What is the role of Meg in the play and how does she change throughout the story?

6. How does the play comment on the societal anxieties of the post-World War II era?
7. How does the play challenge the audience's perception of reality?
8. How does Pinter use symbolism in the play to convey meaning and create a sense of unease and uncertainty?
9. How does the non-linear structure of the play contribute to the creation of a sense of unease and uncertainty?
10. What role do the minor characters in the play serve in the development of the main characters and the themes of the play?
11. What is the significance of the setting in the play and how does it contribute to the themes and overall tone of the play?
12. How do the stage directions of the play relate with the development of its characters?
13. How does the play comment on the oppressive political climate of the time, if at all?
14. How does Pinter's use of ambiguity and uncertainty in the play contribute to the audience's understanding of the characters and their motivations?
15. How does the play explore the themes of identity, power and control, and how are these themes represented through the characters and their actions?

4.16 Glossary

Absurdism: It is the philosophical theory that existence in general is absurd. This implies that the world lacks meaning or a higher purpose and is not fully intelligible by reason.

Theatre of the Absurd: It is a post–World War II designation for particular plays of absurdist fiction written by a number of primarily European playwrights in the late 1950s. It is also a term for the style of theatre the plays represent. The plays focus largely on ideas of existentialism and express what happens when human existence lacks meaning or purpose and communication breaks down.

Non-sequiturs: A conclusion or statement that does not logically follow from the previous argument or statement.