



**Subject Code:16ACCEN6**

**PREPARED BY:**

**Mr.S.Ponraj**

**Assistant Professor of English**

**Swami Dayananda college of Arts & Science,Manjakkudi**

## CORE COURSE VI-ONE-ACT PLAYS

### Objectives:

- To help learners understand the salient features of one-act plays
- To make learners comprehend and appreciate various cultures and varieties of presentation in the representative texts
- To expose learners to the sociological and psychological dimensions of characterization

### Unit – I (British)

J. M. Synge : “Riders to the Sea”

### Unit – II (Russian)

Anton Chekov : “The Swan Song”

### Unit– III (American)

Tennessee Williams : “Lord Byron’s Love Letter”

### Unit – IV (Indian)

Asif Currimbhoy : “The Refugee”

### Unit – V (African)

Eisa Kironde : “The Trick”

### Books for Reference:

Elias, M., *Plays in One Act*. Chennai: Orient BlackSwan, 2013.

Sujatha K., ed. *On the Stage: One-Act Plays*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011.

## UNIT-I

### RIDERS TO THE SEA

-J.M.SYNGE

#### PLOT SUMMARY:

The play, set on an island off the coast of Ireland, begins with [Nora](#) bringing in a small bundle with her and telling [Cathleen](#) that these may be the clothes of their brother Michael. The young priest told her a body of a drowned man was found at Donegal, and the body might be Michael's. The sisters are scared to open the bundle of clothes because they do not want their mother, [Maurya](#), to know: Michael has been missing for a week and the family had already lost five men to the sea. They hide the bundle in the turf loft of the cottage.

Maurya is prepared for the funeral for Michael, with whiteboards for his coffin ready at the cottage. She enters the kitchen; she is a woman who is seen lamenting all the time and worrying that her sons will never come back from the sea. Maurya, Nora, and Cathleen discuss the last son, [Bartley](#), who is also planning to go the sea to sell the family horses so they could get some money. Nora and Cathleen are convinced that Bartley should go to the fair at Galway to sell the animals, while

Maurya is still hoping that the Priest will not allow him to go in such dangerous tides.

Bartley enters the cottage looking for a new piece of rope. Maurya tries to stop him, but he says he wants to make a halter for the horses; clearly Bartley plans to go to the sea. Maurya again tries to dissuade him by showing him the whiteboards for Michael. Paying no heed, Bartley changes his clothes, asks his sisters to take care of the sheep, and leaves without receiving any blessings from his mother. It is a tradition in Ireland that the son receives the blessings of his mother before going anywhere, but Maurya breaks this fashion.

Bartley leaves with a red mare and a grey pony tied behind. Cathleen then notices that he has not taken any food and tells Maurya to walk down to the well to give Bartley his food and the blessings. Maurya leaves using a stick that Michael brought, lamenting over how in her family, the old ones never leave anything behind for their heirs, despite that being the general custom.

Once Maurya is gone, the girls retrieve the bundle of clothes from the loft to check if they are Michael's. Nora realizes that the stockings are truly Michael's, because she recognizes her own stitching on them. They count the number of stitches and arrive at the conclusion that Michael was dead and buried.

The sisters hide the clothes again because they think that Maurya will be returning in a good mood since she got the chance to bless Bartley; however, Maurya comes back more distressed than ever. She tells her daughters that she saw Michael on the grey pony; she could not bless Bartley due to the shock. To calm her down, Nora and Cathleen show Maurya the clothes and tell her that Michael has had a clean burial. Maurya's laments are interrupted when islanders bring the body of Bartley into the cottage and tell the women that the grey pony knocked Bartley into the sea, where he drowned.

Maurya gets on her knees near Bartley's body and sprinkles holy water on him. She finally resigns herself to her fate as she claims that she will finally sleep at night because she no longer has anyone to worry about: all the men of her family have died to the sea. The whiteboards that were supposed to be used for Michael's coffin will now be used to bury Bartley. Maurya prays that the souls of her husband, her husband's father, and four sons may rest in peace, and the curtains are drawn.

## **UNIT-II**

### **THE SWAN SONG**

**-Anton Chekhov**

#### ***PLOT SUMMARY:***

The Swan Song is generally the last performance, gesture or work done by the artist in their respective field before dying or getting retirement. And it is considered as the best performance done by that artist during his/her career.

The play was written by the famous Russian playwright and short-story writer, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. The story/play speaks about various aspect of human condition and ironies of life. In short, the writer chekhov is showing the dark and hidden side of the artist/Influencer through protagonist Svietlovidoff.

The play compromises with two characters Vasili Svietlovidoff, a 68 year old theater artist and Nikita Ivanich, the theater's prompter. The character Nikita Ivanich is an old man, with more age than the protagonist.

In play, the protagonist is wildly drunk and stuck inside the empty theatre. So he is narrating his reminiscence with Nikita, a prompter. He shares many sorrow, thores and suffering with the promoter that he faced during his old days. He moans about

his past glories, his handsome age and about women too. While talking he self praises how generous, passionate and dedicated he was with his work. He adds how people used to applaud and wahoo while acting during his young age.

Suddenly he feels low and spills out the unsuccessful love story of his life and gets sad how his lady admirer or lover left him because of his artistic profession. He felt more anxious when he knew that she was impressed with his comic/humour acting but while he approached her she asked to choose between his artistic career or she.

He compares himself with squeezed lemon and broken bottle. He thinks he is losing his acting ability and can't live with truth that how he is getting forgotten in recent days. He is not getting enough shows too.

The actor tells how he is living under the gloomy clouds for many years without any friends and family members beside him. He moans and fears about his impending death.

However, Nikita appreciates and cheers him with his kind words. He consoles Svetlovidoff that he is a great actor and has already left his legacy. He adds you will be remembered in the future as a great actor and a kind soul. Nikita seems quite optimistic about life but the protagonist appears just opposite of it.

At last, while listening to Nikita, Svietlovidoff fills up with great energy and approach Nikita to help him while delivering famous dialogues of Shakespeare play. Finally he feels that he still has more passion and enthusiasm towards acting. Eventually he chose to life, with Shakespeare to guide him.

The last play that he performs discoursing dialogues of Shakespeare with only Nikita as a audience is his Swan Song.



### UNIT-III

#### **Lord Byron's Love Letter by Tennessee Williams: Summary**

There are four characters in this play: the spinster, a woman of forty named Ariadne, the old woman, perhaps her grandmother, the matron and her husband. The spinster and the old woman are in a dark living room. The spinster is sewing and the old woman is doing nothing. The doorbell rings. Perhaps someone has come to look at Lord Byron's love letter.

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)

The old woman goes behind the curtain and the spinster goes to the door. She invites the matron, who has come for festival with her husband. She notices a canary in a very small cage. The canary is not alive, but stuffed. Her husband is outside on the street. She wants to look at Byron's love letter. This letter was written to the spinster's grandmother, Irene by Byron. She met Byron on the steps of the Acropolis in Athens. He spent the final years of his wild life in Greece. He was exiled from England because of shameful talk about his involvement with his half-sister. He was fighting for freedom. He fought against the unbelievers. He swam across the Turkish strait and he also burnt the dead body of Shelley.

The matron goes out to call her husband, Winston Tutwiler. The old woman then asks the spinster to watch them carefully. The matron returns with her husband who has been drinking and wears a paper cap sprinkled with confetti. She tells him that the ladies are going to show them Lord Byron's love letter. The matron introduces her husband and herself to them.

When the matron wants to know how her grandmother met Lord Byron, the old woman replies that she met him on the steps of the Acropolis. She asks the spinster, Ariadne, to read them a passage from her grandmother's diary. The spinster, then says that, like many other young American girls of that day, her grandmother went to Europe. The old woman explains that she was just sixteen and very beautiful and asks the spinster to show them her picture. Looking at the picture, the matron exclaims that she was a lovely girl and that she looks like her daughter. Then Ariadne reads the diary.

Near the end of her tour, her grandmother and her aunt went to Greece to study the classic remains of the oldest European civilization. It was an early morning in Aril of the year eighteen hundred-and-twenty-seven and they set out to

inspect the ruins of the Acropolis. The morning was pure, new and fresh. The sky was clear. The sun was barely up. A breeze disturbed her scarf and the plumes of her hat reflected wonderfully. The papers that morning had spoken of possible war, but it seemed unreal to her. Nothing was real except the beauty and mystery of the ancient city.

The carriage stopped, at the foot of the hill and her aunt was not too good. She had a sore throat that morning. Therefore, she preferred to remain with the driver, but her grandmother started to climb the steep flight of stone steps. Above her there was a man walking lamely. He turned now and then to observe behind him the lovely scenery. Actually, he was watching the girl behind him. Her grandmother was very much impressed by the greatness and grace of his body. He was Lord Byron, the handsomest man that ever walked the earth. When he had reached the very top of the Acropolis, he spread his arms like a young god. It seemed to her that he was Apollo who had come to earth in modern dress.

She walked slowly not to disturb his poetic imagination. But when she was close to him, he pretended not to see that she was coming. Then finally she faced him. Their eye came together. He told her that she had dropped her glove and

indeed she had. As he returned it to her, his fingers, lightly pressed her palm. Then she became quite faint and breathless. She did not know if she should keep on walking. She moved unsteadily and leaned against the side of a column. The sun was very bright and hurt her eyes. Close behind her, she heard that voice again. She could feel his breath.

After this, the old woman tells the spinster not to read the diary any more. She is asked to show them the letter. The spinster says that a short while later Byron was killed in action, defending the cause of freedom. When her grandmother received the news of his death, she went away from the world and remained in complete loneliness for the rest of her life. It was natural for her to do so because a life was completed. She wrote a sonnet to the memory of Lord Byron. The spinster recites the poem. The band grows louder rapidly and passes by carelessly. Mr. Tutwiler, roused from his unconscious state, goes suddenly to the door. He asks his wife to follow him. Then the spinster quickly asks for some money. The matron does not pay any attention to them. She says that she must go because her husband has disappeared in the crowd. They want a little money for the display of the letter. Actually, they earn their living by showing the letter. The matron goes out. The spinster follows her to the door. There is unbearable light and sound. She closes the door and bolts it. The old woman says that they have gone

without paying, and that they have cheated them. She is very angry. Then she tells her granddaughter, Ariadne that her grandfather's letter is lying on the floor.

## UNIT-IV

### **The Refugee is a one-act play written by Asif Currimbhoy**

Introduction: The Refugee is a one-act play written by Asif Currimbhoy against the political upheaving in East Pakistan in 1971. Currimbhoy is quick with his dramatic reflexes to events around him. During 1971 there was an influx of Bangladesh refugees into India and the same year saw the writing of The Refugee. Some critics have grouped it along with Currimbhoy's Inquilab and Sonar Bangla, written in 1970 and 1972 respectively, and called the group 'The Bengal Trilogy'. The themes of The Refugee and Sonar Bangla are connected with the problems of Bangladesh but that of Inquilab is the Naxalite revolt which disturbed West Bengal in the 1960s. Unlike Western trilogies like The Oresteia or The Wesker Trilogy or Mourning Becomes Electra, these three International Journal of Academic Research ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.4, Issue-4(1), April, 2017 Impact Factor: 4.535; Email: drtvramana@yahoo.co.in plays do not have a common theme or common characters, so it is a disputable issue whether the three can be grouped together. The plot centres round Yassin, a young intellectual, who flees to India from East Pakistan after having miraculously escaped the machine guns at the notorious 'intellectual massacre' of university scholars by the Pakistani military ruler Yahya

Khan. He is welcomed to the household of Sen Gupta, who himself was a refugee 24 years earlier and had been the childhood friend of Yassin's mother Rukaiya Sen Gupta looks back with nostalgia upon his home town of Comilla in East Bengal and cherishes sweet memories of Rukaiya, his young love, though he is now the father of two children Mita and Ashok. He is genuinely touched by the sad plight of the East Bengalis and his family shares his sympathy. But as days go by, the number of refugees swell they occupy the open fields, idle sewerage pipes, and even Sen Gupta's garage. Sen Gupta's idealism wanes and now he looks upon the refugees as a threat to his own home and community. But, strangely enough, Yassin remains unperturbed lie occupies Sen Gupta's study, goes for his new job at the university regularly, and does not even talk about his home or the refugees outside. Sen Gupta's son Ashok joins the Mukti Fouj, for "someone has to do the fighting" when able-bodied men from East Bengal choose to remain indifferent and noncommittal. Ramul, the leader of the bunch of refugees outside, appears to be intended as a foil to Yassin, who seems to be happy in his cosy room and job, and seems to have forgotten the fact that he was once a refugee. Mita, Sen Gupta's daughter, who actively associates herself with refugee rehabilitation programmes, accuses Yassin of deliberately avoiding the refugees as if they did not even exist. Life to her means involvement and action. Her confrontation makes Yassin restless and disturbed. He overhears Sen Gupta saying that the refugees exodus is an

undeclared war by Pakistan and that to protect the Hindus who are being persecuted and driven out, India must declare war upon Pakistan. Yassin protests against this. He is a Muslim and still a Pakistani and so his loyalties are with Pakistan. Mita's announcement that cholera has broken out in the refugee camps disturbs Yassin. At night, in the company of Professor Mosin, he goes to the refugee camp for the first time "to look for his conscience" as Mita suggested. They watch Ramul conducting a trial and passing a sentence of death. Yassin interferes and the prisoner is set free. Ramul hints that they are all doomed to death: "Release the prisoner. Let him roam. Give him enough rope, He will hang himself. (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1971, p. 32). Everything seems a nightmare to Yassin, who loses the distinction between reality and nonreality. Later in the night he goes to the refugee camp again, all alone. He helps a young woman bury her dead mother and tells her to pray for his salvation. He comes back home and packs up to leave for his home town. He has a bitter confrontation with Professor Mosin who is worried about the Indian Muslims whose position in India is endangered by the Pakistani Muslims. He bids farewell to Mita who has helped him to find himself and who, he assures her, will remain his ideal across the border just as his mother had been for her father. He takes away Ashok's Mukht Fouj uniform and leaves the house, still unsure whether he is doing the right thing. To lay bare the horrors of social reality Currimbhoy has chosen the dramatic, form of



the one-act play and has provided infinite riches in a little room. But he does not confine his play to one little room, for this one-act play has five scenes, all set in different places and different times. Thus it gives the effect of a fullfledged play of five acts, with a lot of action. In fact, it is more in the tradition of the well-made play popularized by the French playwrights Eugene Scribe and Victorian Sardou. Here in *The Refugee* almost all characteristics of a full-fledged well-made play, consisting of exposition, rising action, climax, denouement and conclusion, and also other ingredients like melodramatic situations, high-flown dialogue, etc. The first scene is expository in nature, establishing the background and introducing almost all the characters. The action slowly mounts to a climax and Mita's hysterical outburst, rousing and inspiring Yassin to shake off his indolence and search for his conscience (Scene III). In Scene IV the devotement begins, and the play comes to a conclusion when Yassin leaves the Sen Gupta household. Mita's melodramatic announcement of the outbreak of cholera and her hysterical speech link Currimbhoy with his well made play models from the West. Mita with uncontrolled voice, Cholera, Cholera's broken out in the refugee camp (Subconsciously everybody looks accusingly, apprehensively, at Yassin, as though he who personifies the refugees brought it in. Yassin flushes, feeling guilty and oppressed once again, without knowing why, without being able to escape his identity, the indelible stamp of the unwanted refugee). Yassin inadvertently

bursting out that “He had the cholera shot on crossing...”(Tie stops, realizes, feels acutely embarrassed.) Wife (softly), Nobody meant you, Yassin (everybody looked at him) Mita continues that Refugees dying like flies. Disease, spreading (breathless) trying hard to contain it, much sympathy from outsiders. (Looking straight at Yassin, the tears at last streaming down her face). They say...at last...(laughing and crying hysterically), the conscience of the world is aroused. At last, in crisis, the conscience. What a word, oh my God, what a meaning. Don't tell me it escaped us all along. The morality of it all. Here we are talking about politics and rescue and refugees and war and even taking sides. It is not the lack of commitment that matters, it is the lack of morality that does. And they must...both aggressor and giver of shelter, search for our own conscience. (Silence and darkness). The scene smacks of overtheatricality, a woman talking at length in an emotional rhetoric, with tears streaming over her face, is a really melodramatic figure. Yassin's second It is however true that Currimbhoy succumbs to the temptation to yield to melodrama, as the instances pointed out earlier prove. He over employs dialogue. Bayapa Reddy's opinion that the language in Currimbhoy's plays helps the Indian spectator to identify himself with the characters may not be fully applicable to The Refugee. CONCLUSION : The playwright is a great humanist and he does not have faith in the politicians. In his plays he tells that the politicians have lost their sanity and have gone into the den of unreason. He also

draws our attention to the refugees problems, which will repeat it a thousand times as long as man indulges in inhumanity to his fellow beings. The Refugee is devoted to the problems of Bangladesh refugees. It is one-act play and presents the time of 25th March, 1971, when talks between Yahya Khan and Sheikh Mujib broke down. The massacre of intellectuals at universities of East Bengal took place, and the first flight of a few thousand refugees occurred across the border into West Bengal. The place of the play is one of the border towns of West Dinajpur District in West Bengal. An upper middle class household the protagonist of the play is middle-aged man of about fifty who brings along a somewhat diffident, emaciated young man in his twenties to the house. He is Sen Gupta and the young man is Yassin. Both the persons are talking about the problems of the Bangladesh refugees. Sen Gupta's wife, Sarala is also very gentlewoman of middle age. She is commonly called "Ma". Sen Gupta tells Yassin that twenty-four years ago the unpleasant partition of the country took place on 15th August, 1947. Sen Gupta is a Professor at the university and he belongs to the intelligentsia group of people. He himself has come to India as a refugee after the partition of the country twenty-four years ago. He is not only intelligent but a great hard worker and with his hard work he becomes prosperous. He occupies a good place in the society. Yassin is also a young refugee who has come from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. He is in the search of conscience in the confusing world of political standards.

Thus the play begins with the problem of refugees. Even Sen Gupta, who was once a refugee, has cold attitude towards the refugees. In the present talk with Yassin, the Professor tells him how the intelligentsia and the Awami League's future leadership were all wiped out barbarously. He wants to keep up the assurance given to his childhood friend Rukaiya. So he is kind to Rukaiya's son, who is no other than nothing.

## **UNIT-V**

### **ERISA KIRONDE – THE TRICK**

**ERISA KIRONDE – THE TRICK** (1968) Administrator, poet, playwright, columnist, critic, editor and teacher, ErisaKironde is one of the prolific writers in the Ugandan literary scene. He has been greatly influenced by the plays of J. M. Synge, the Irish writer. His play “The Trick” is an adaptation of Synge’s play The Shadow of the Glen. It is transposed on to an African setting. The play is about a couple, an old man who has a young wife. The old man fears that his young wife is being unfaithful to him and decides to play a trick on her. He pretends to be dead and waits to see what his wife will do. She accosts a shepherd she knows who offers to marry her as she has come into money after her husband’s death. The husband catches them as they are talking and sends his wife away saying she will have to spend her life on the streets as no one will want to marry her now that she

has no money. A musician is witness to this entire episode. He offers to take the wife with him. He promises her an interesting life even though he is poor and homeless. She takes up the offer as she prefers an interesting and challenging life than a comfortable but boring and meaningless one. The play explores the aspects that goes into a happy marriage companionship, trust and children. The couple in the play does not have all three. The wife feels lonely seeking the company of anyone who passes by the house. The husband does not trust his wife and refuses to share any of his wealth with her. They have no children signifying a lack of emotional bonding between them. At the end of the play the husband thinks he is sending his wife away but actually the wife steps out of the marriage as she believes that the musician can provide a better life for her. The play is also a review of the effects of colonization or any kind of oppressive rule and the need to light for freedom. The playwright examines colonization under the lens of a patriarchal man-woman relationship. It celebrates the woman, thereby the colonized nation, seeking independence and freedom from an oppressive system. Kalekezi is an old man who has lost his youthful vitality. He spends his days in drunken stupor bemoaning the loss of his youth and the good old days gone by. He has shriveled with old age and is not capable of warmth. He does not care for his young wife any more. He depends on her to take care of him and in turn beats her up in his drunken rages. He also suspects his wife of infidelity. He plays a trick on

her to catch her cheating on him. He pretends to be dead to see what she will do. The trick he plays is successful to the extent that he catches her with another herdsman proposing marriage to her. He thinks he has won and throws her out telling her that she will not be able to attract any man because she is penniless and homeless. What he fails to understand is that his wife has decided to step out of the marriage and seek the companionship of Majangwa, the musician. Kalekezi can be seen as a colonial ruler who has outlived his presence in the country he has colonized. He has exploited it and now suspects the loyalty of the colonized people. He exercises harsh controls in the hope that he can contain the dissent brewing within. When he captures natives who he believes are plotting against them he threatens them with economic sanctions. He deludes himself thinking that he still has the upper hand when clearly the native country has made its choice to move away from the clutches of the colonizer and seek freedom