

SUBJECT : ENGLISH

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TOPIC – **MODERN POETIC DRAMA**

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MODERN POETIC DRAMA

In the 20th century an underlying stream of verse drama was running with the drama of social criticism. Stephen Phillips(1865-1915)pioneered this movement with his “Paolo and Francesca”(1899).It is written in a romantic and lyrical vein which attempts to combine the intensity of the Elizabethans with the sobriety of the Greeks, but it lacks dramatic spirit. Drinkwater’s (1892-1937) “ Abraham Lincon”(1918) is also kept on the same footing but it has impressive poetry sung by the chorus. It is remembered also for its fine dialogues painting the vivid portrait of the great American leader against the civil war. Among other playwrights are John Masefield(1878-1967) with his “ Tragedy of Nan” (1909) and other plays and Lawrence

Binyon (1869-1943) with his "Attila" who made significant contribution to the stage of modern poetic drama.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) started his career as a practical dramatist by writing "The Rock"(1949). He wrote all his plays in poetry. His second play was "Murder in the Cathedral"(1935). It was written to be performed in Canterbury Cathedral at the annual festival. It commemorated the death of St. Thomas Becket. Becket was Canterbury's famous martyr who had been murdered in the very cathedral where Eliot's play was first performed. "Murder in the Cathedral"(1935) is closer to being a drama in the real sense than "The Rock"(1949) . It makes a highly effective use of chorus. "The family Reunion"(1939) is the third play of Eliot. His next play is "The Cocktail Party"(1949) which proved to be a success at all levels as a social criticism. It deals with various kinds of self-deception in which even smart people tend to indulge. His "The Confidential Clerk" (1953) and "The Elder Statesman"(1958) also proved to be great success.

Eliot has emphasized time and again that the elements of poetry and drama in a particular play are not two distinct elements but the full manifestation of the same activity. in his "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (1928) he says, " The same plays are the most poetic and the most dramatic, and this is not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expression of one and the same activity." In "The Use of Poetry

and the Use of Criticism(1933) Eliot says that what distinguishes a verse from prose is the variety of levels on which it can be appreciated -“ For the simplest audience there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and the conflict of the character, for the more literary the words and phrasing ,for the more musically sensitive the rhythm and for the audience of greater sensitiveness and understanding meaning which reveals itself gradually”. This meaning, as Yeats said does its work ‘by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space pervading like the intellect but memory and a prophecy. It is at such moments, according to Eliot that ‘we touch the border of these feelings which only music can express’.

Another remarkable figure to enrich modern poetic drama is Christopher Fry(1907-2005). His “A Phoenix Too Frequent”(1946) is full of phrases and images.His other remarkable works are “The Lady’s Not for Burning”(1948) and “Venus Observed”(1950). His use of language with magical touch in his plays is noteworthy.

The most important play of Stephen Spender(1909-1995) are “World within World”(1951) and “the Trial of a Judge” which did not attract much attention ,though critics remarked it as the most effective piece of poetic theatre since Otways “Venice Preserved”

W.H. Auden(1907-1973) and Isherwood(1904-1996) also made their presence in the realm of modern poetic drama with their “The Ascent of F6”(1936) and “On the Frontier”(1935).The plays concentrate upon the common problems of the modern society. The authors are in exploration of the depth of reality through symbolic situations and simplified cartoon characters. “ The Dog Beneath the Skin” is another important work of these writers.

Mr. Nicholson, Miss Anne Ridler and Mr. Ronald Duncan are such dramatists whose contribution to the poetic drama can not be forgotten.
