

CHAPTER-I

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(I)

(John Galsworthy (1867-1933), one of the dominant figures in English literature in the first three decades of the present century, was born on August 14, 1867, at Kingston Hill, Surrey. He was the son of a solicitor and he lived a comfortable life.) He was educated at Harrow and Oxford and he was called to the Lincoln's Inn Bar in 1890. But he soon gave up practice for travelling and writing. John Galsworthy and Ada, his wife, travelled a great deal in America, Egypt, Canada, Austria, British Columbia, New Zealand etc. He met Joseph Conrad during the course of his journey and developed friendship with him. John Galsworthy was an Englishman in the most literal sense, with a characteristic reserve of an Englishman. His wife Ada was a constant source of inspiration for him. His first book, a collection of stories, From the Fair Winds, appeared in 1897, and a novel, Jocelyn, appeared in 1898. The first four publications were issued under a pseudonym, 'John Sinjohn'. The Man of Property, which formed the first volume of his monumental trilogy, The Forsyte Saga, was published in 1906, the year in which his first play The Silver Box, was written and produced. He published twenty novels at fairly regular intervals. The theme of many of his novels as well

as plays is the decline of English gentility, to which Galsworthy himself belonged. His novel, The Man of Property, was a harsh criticism of the upper-middle class. More than any other novelist of his generation, Galsworthy attacked the very foundations of English society. His novels provided the most comprehensive expression of the anti-Victorian climate of the immediate post-war period. He was a prolific writer who handled almost all sorts of genres like novels, short stories, sketches, poems, essays, plays as well as one-act plays.

After the successful publication of some stories and novels, Edward Garnett induced him to write for the theatre. He was encouraged in this field by Ada Galsworthy also. He wrote twenty plays dealing with social problems presented in naturalistic style. He was a dramatist of considerable technical skill. His plays often took up specific social grievances such as the double standard of justice applied to the upper and lower classes in The Silver Box and the confrontation of capital and labour in Strife. His most famous play Justice cause, a prison reform in England. In addition to the twenty full-length plays, Galsworthy wrote seven one-act plays. The Little Dream, an allegory in six scenes, was published in 1911. The remaining six one-act plays, viz. Defeat, The Sun, The First and the Last, The Little Man, Hall Marked and Punch and Go, though presented on the stage at different dates, were published under the title Six Short Plays in 1921. An idea of Galsworthy's critical views can be had from his essay, "Some platitudes concerning the Drama", included in

The Inn of Tranquillity (1912). He wrote an essay, "A justification of the censorship of plays", in 1909. The book, Two Essays on Conrad, was published in 1930. But Galsworthy's reputation rests mainly on fiction as much as on his drama. It must be noted that Galsworthy's career does not include any period when one particular literary genre predominated, even temporarily. It was in the fitness of the things that this prolific writer was elected the first President of the P.E.N. Club in 1921. He received the Order of Merit in June, 1929. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932, the year before his death. Galsworthy died on January 31, 1933, at Hampstead.

Several critics have studied the art of John Galsworthy as a novelist as well as a dramatist. As far as his dramatic career is concerned, one finds it discussed in the following major critical works : (1) Three Studies in English Literature, by A. Cheverillion (1923), (2) John Galsworthy, as a Dramatic Artist by R.H. Coats (1926), (3) A Note on John Galsworthy, the Dramatist, by H.V. Marrot (1929), (4) John Galsworthy, A Survey, by L. Schalit (1929), (5) Galsworthy, the Craftsman by S.H. Davies (1933), (6) John Galsworthy, by Hermon Ould (1936), and (7) The Man of Principle by D. Barker (1963). Recently, Alec' Frechet, a French scholar, wrote a critical book in 1979, which was translated as John Galsworthy : A Reassessment, into English, in 1982. But most of the studies of John Galsworthy's dramatic career concentrate on his major full-length plays. In fact, certain new dimensions of his dramatic art are found in his one-act plays. Unfortunately,

serious thinkers have not taken much cognizance of Galsworthy's one-act plays. It is true that the growth of the professional drama in the first three decades of the present century resulted in the decline of the one-act play. But it has a close relation with the development of the amateur movement. Some extra-literary factors encouraged the development of this genre. However, we do not find a writer merely writing one-act plays as we find an independent short story writer during this period. So it was a dilemma of the dramatists of Galsworthy's generation. They turned to the one-act plays just casually and occasionally. John Galsworthy was aware of the potentiality of the genre of the one-act play, even though he belonged to the early period of the Twentieth Century. Some traits in Galsworthy's one-act plays were perfected later on by the writers after the fifties. His idea of a verse one-act play was utilized by Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot. Some scenes in his one-act plays may be presented effectively with cinema technique on radio as well as television. Some scenes show a close relation with those in the Absurd Drama. Hence, an elaborate study of John Galsworthy's shorter plays is worth undertaking for a comprehensive understanding of his dramatic art.

The present thematic study of Galsworthy's shorter plays intends to explore certain concerns which have not received due attention. The first chapter of this dissertation discusses the

one-act play as a genre and the historical survey of its development. In Part-I of the second chapter Galsworthy's only verse one-act play The Little Dream is discussed. Part-II of the second chapter considers Defeat and The Sun, the two one-act plays dealing with the theme of War. The First and the Last is discussed in Part-I of the third chapter and Part-II deals with three satirical plays, viz. The Little Man, Hall Marked and Punch and Go. The fourth and the last chapter presents conclusions.

(II)

It is difficult to find an exact definition of the one-act play. However, we find much description, rather than many definitions, of this genre. The name itself-a one-act play - explains its nature, fairly accurately. In the first place, it is a play or a drama; and, as such, it belongs to the genus of drama; and thus, it is distinguished from the novel or the short story. Harry Shaw describes this genre in Dictionary of Literary Terms as :

"A play consisting of one-act. A one-acter, like a short story, demands concentration on one theme as well as economy in style, setting and plotting."¹

J.T. Shipley observes in Dictionary of World Literary Terms "The usual one-act piece is to the play as the short story is to the novel. It can stress but one aspect-character, action, back-

ground, emotion - of the many in a full and rounded work. But this gives it great flexibility and variety."²

The word 'one' in 'one-act play' is not merely numerical. It indicates the singleness of situation, character and atmosphere. It emphasizes 'concentration'. The one-act play aims at achieving a singleness of effect within its limitations. The publication of the first series of One Act Plays of To-day in 1924, established a place for this genre. The editor, J.W. Marriott, writes - "It is fortunate that one-act play is now accepted as a legitimate form of dramatic art - as legitimate as short story."³

The sense in which the drama is an artistic whole, in the same sense the one-act play is an artistic whole. However, the methods adopted are different. This difference accounts for the one-act play being considered as a distinct literary form. It is not merely a shortened drama. It is a separate form just as a short story is a distinct form of literature and not merely a chapter from a novel or a summary of a novel. In this sense the one-act play stands in the same relation to the drama as the short story to the novel. As in the short story singleness of effect is an important consideration in the structure of the one-act play. The one-act play does have its 'dominant character' and 'dominant incident' like the short story. According to Helen L. Cohen, "a violent struggle is not necessary to the art of either form."⁴ She refers to the one-act plays of Galsworthy and the short stories of Henry James, to illustrate this point.

The one-act play does possess completeness and independence. The best one-act play is independent, perfect and homogeneous. It is unfair to say that the one-act play is a minor form. Whatever can be achieved in a full-length play, [?] can be achieved even in a one-act play. Besides, it is not proper to suppose that the one-act play is easier to write than the full-length play. The artistic difficulties are equally serious in both forms, or perhaps greater in the one-act play. It differs from the full-length play primarily in length. It has [?] all the elements of the longer play and often carries as great an impact. But the author of the full-length play has enough room to turn in; the shortcomings of the exposition may be atoned for by the brilliance of the complication or the denouement. The one-act play is too short to recover, as a full-length play will sometimes recover, from clumsy exposition or uncertainty of aim. The full-length play attempts to present life as a homogeneous whole. It has a large canvas. The one-act play has the modest aim of dealing with a significant aspect of life - a single situation, a character or a particular atmosphere of life. It cannot enjoy the luxury of a main plot and a sub plot, the alteration of the comic and the tragic strains. The one-act play cannot afford to exhibit any clearly marked stages of development, such as exposition, complication, climax etc. All these stages are merely hinted.

It is comparatively easier to stage the one-act play. Therefore, it has attraction for the writers as well as players. Producers with limited sources prefer this genre. Besides they can try their strength in the one-act play. They get scope for their experiments also. Thus, the one-act play allows convenience as well as challenge.

Until quite recently the teachers of drama began with William Shakespeare, in order to acquaint their students with the dramatic world. J.W. Marriott, the editor of one-Act Plays of To-day (first series), is of the opinion that the newer method of teaching English by means of drama is to study good one-act plays written in contemporary idiom. According to him a taste for drama should be cultivated by means of one-act plays of first rate quality. In his words, "The one-act play is ideal as a first step in the appreciation of drama."⁵

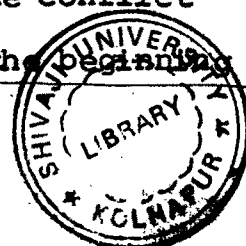
④ The one-act play is conceived as a one-act play and it is developed according to its own requirements and technique. It is a form by itself with laws of its own which impose several restrictions and they determine the nature of the one-act play as a distinct form. It makes limited demands on time and resources. It utilizes its limited but potential power on one factor only. Hence, the playwright has to follow several restrictions. He cannot develop his characters and situations in a gradual manner. He has to present the characters and the story with a few suggestive strokes.

Due to these restrictions, the one-act play very nearly approaches the classical conception of the dramatic art. It has a single main episode, which is either a pure comedy or a pure tragedy. The time of action is equivalent to that of representation. It is confined to a single place. But it is to be noted that the unities are not followed out of respect for the ancient standards. They exist because they help the playwright to achieve an effective communication. The one-act play almost automatically fits into this framework. The employment of a few restrictions is free from classical rigidity. But the one-act play achieves a lot in intensity and concentration. Its very limitations turn out to be its distinct advantages.

The one-act play demands a great skill in exposition of circumstances and personality and it needs utmost economy. Brevity is the guiding principle of this genre. In fact, brevity is the soul of the one-act play - brevity in plot, which cannot be complex; brevity in characterization, which has to be immediately evident; brevity in dialogue, which must be significant from the beginning to the end.

The conflict in the one-act play is often restricted. The time limit does not allow the playwright to build one conflict upon another. The conflict does not lead to the climax step-by-step. The writer usually deals with a single major conflict and resolves it. The motives are often uncomplicated. The conflict in the one-act play reaches the climax almost since the beginning.

SAHJEE SHREEDHAR SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY
SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR.



and tends to remain at the same level throughout. The exposition is brief and it is confined only to those events that have a direct bearing on the plot. The beginning of the one-act play is born with a tremendous potentiality of reference. It attracts the attention of the audience quickly and involves the audience into the flow of the plot. As soon as the curtain goes up the one-act play comes before the audience with intensity and potentiality. The beginning assumes that much drama has taken place already and now it has reached its climax and we are about to start at this stage.

The number of characters in the one-act play is limited. A typical one-act play can be described as a "One-man, one-piece play" which is about a key-character in the grip of a dominant motive for action. B. Roland Lewis in The Techniques of the one-act play writes, "Examination of several hundred one-act plays has revealed that the average number of characters to a one-act play is between three and four."⁶

The one-act play is likely to suffer from theatricality and lack of characterization. It has to forgo depth and elaboration of characterization. The characters in a one-act play are more typical than individualized. They reveal themselves, their dominant trait and motive of action in a flash. There is no time for evolution of the motives of the characters. According to Wayne Philip, "the characters must stand there, recognizable from a minimum of deft strokes and not complicated even in

finality."⁷ The playwright must characterize quickly, often with one line of dialogue. This method of the one-act play at its best is similar to the method employed by Browning in his dramatic monologue. Clayton Hamilton writes in Studies in Stage Crafts, New York (1914), "The author must suggest the entire history of a soul by seizing it at some crisis of its career and forcing the spectator to look upon it from an unexpected and suggestive point of view."⁸

Dialogues in the one-act play must be short and they must have a tone of rapidity. Each sentence must contribute something, hence the playwright attempts a careful use of dialogues all the time. He avoids the changes of style from bare prose to the lyrical and the dramatic, the employment of asides and soliloquies, use of puns and quibbles. Economy and concentration, being the major weapons of the playwright, even incomplete sentences, exclamations, space left between two words, silence and pauses in the one-act play must be meaningful. Harold Pinter's idea of two silences - one, when no word is spoken and the other, when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed - is applicable to the one-act play also.

Stage directions, like the dialogues, become a part of the single and concentrated episode in the one-act play. The writer does not tend to overelaborate the stage directions in the one-act play. They are merely for setting, lighting and essential pantomime or action. They are not used for characterization.

The one-act play exists as well as prospers, in spite of the presence of the drama. Because subtle dramatic aspects of life are better exploited in the one-act play. The identity of the one-act play is felt when such experiences are to be expressed. That is why even a renowned dramatist, like Galsworthy, feels the inner compulsion and resorts to the genre of the one-act play. The full-length play fails to give full justice to an event which may be effective in a limited manner, and which may possess a tremendously meaningful potentiality. Such event belongs to the domain of the one-act play. The strength of the one-act play lies in the presentation of the delicate dramatic moments. Even one-act play reading is a fascinating pursuit. R.J. Rees observes in Supplement To English Literature : An Introduction for Foreign Readers : "Indeed I do not think it would be going too far if one were to suggest that it is scarcely worthwhile studying the one-act play as a literary form unless one is at least going to read some plays aloud, or better still, actually to produce them on a stage."⁹

In powerfully projecting the several present-day conflicts and clashes of interests - social or psychological, institutional or ideological - no form of literature is found more suitable, adequate or popular than the one-act play. A piece of experience that can be so presented and given shape and completeness in about 40-50 minutes is suitable material for a one-act play. The playwright shows his ability first in recognizing and selecting the

most suitable piece. The one-act play is capable of being profound, subtle or poetic. According to the editors of Themes in the One Act Play : "a one-act play is often as funny, as sad, as serious, as a full-length play."¹⁰ The situation in the one-act play can be comic or tragic, historical or pastoral. In England, comic and witty one-act plays are more popular. But the Irish playwrights have exhibited tragic intensity in the one-act plays like Riders to The Sea. However, in the one-act plays of John Galsworthy, we find a blending of the comic and serious tone. The one-act play cannot deal with many aspects at one and the same time. Brevity, of the one-act play means singularity and concentration. This genre certainly lends itself particularly well to grim or comic themes, but in the hands of the writers like J.M. Barrie, W.B. Yeats or Bernard Shaw, it leaves an abiding impression of nobility and beauty. There are enough artistic possibilities in the one-act plays. Its special quality is in the interrelation of human personalities as expressed in the dialogue and the kind of action - movement, grouping, sound, pauses, silences - that falls within the narrow limits of what is possible and effective in an acting area before an audience.

The one-act play can effectively satirize human temperament and human conduct. It can direct satire more effectively than the drama, because the satire in the one-act play becomes sharper on account of unity and concentration. The one-act play can attain the height of tragic intensity. This is illustrated by Riders to the Sea of J.M. Synge. However, the demand for

one-act comedies, has been immensely increasing due to the growth of radio and television. R.J. Rees refers to the B.B.C.'s "Comedy Playhouses" series, which included many short comedies and farces.¹¹

So far as the one-act play is concerned, verse drama has been comparatively rare. In fact, like the lyric, the one-act play can properly grasp the intense mood at a particular moment and it can present the same, more effectively. This potentiality of the one-act play demands that a successful verse play must be a one-act play. Yet, there are few one-act plays in verse, in English literature. John Drinkwater's x = o is a successful one-act play in verse - John Galsworthy's The Little Dream is an attempt to write a poetic one-act play. It was not successful on the stage. But Galsworthy had realized the potentiality of a one-act play in verse.

The one-act play has been steadily gaining ground as a dominant literary form, since the publication of six series of One-Act Plays of To-day, between 1924 and 1934 under the editorship of J.W. Marriott. The modern one-act play has become popular due to Radio and Television. One-act play presented on the Radio has a number of listeners, but not a single man in the audience. It gives a good scope to poetry, free play of place and time, mystery, subtle feelings and imagination. One-act play presented on the TV enjoys all advantages of that played on the

stage. Besides, it can take a lot of liberty with the time and place of action. The requirement for a good one-act play continues to increase in the theatre as well as on the television screen. Therefore, the one-act play, as a literary form, has a well-assured future.

(III)

G.S. Fraser's observation regarding English drama that "Drama in England is constantly coming to a dead halt and then there is usually long interval before drama begins to flourish,"¹² is applicable even to the one-act play, if the history of this genre is traced. In the early decades of the present century there was a small Renaissance in the field of the one-act play. After considering the historical development of the one-act play, one finds that the one-act play is very much the province of the amateur. In one sense, the amateurs had been active since the medieval days. But in the present century there has been a considerable ~~extension~~ of the new companies and hundreds of eager amateur groups, which have encouraged the playwrights. The amateur status of the one-act play is an important fact. According to Hampden, "the one-act play would have been forgotten, but for the amateur movement."¹³

Secondly, even though the origin of the one-act play can be traced to the ancient days, it cannot be ignored that the one-act play is very largely a phenomenon of the present century. It is only since the beginning of the Twentieth Century that the one-act play has developed a vigorous life of its own. A large number of one-act plays belong to the present century. The distinguishing features of one-act play as a form have been shaped in the Twentieth Century only. Of course, there is always a demand for the kind of play which can be performed by a group of amateurs, because they cannot afford to spend time for a full-length play. Hence, it is possible to find the roots of the one-act play even in the past.

The Greeks of the Fourth Century B.C. used to present a 'Satyr Play' as a sort of light relief after the end of a tragic trilogy. It was a sort of one-act play presented before Satyr - a woodland deity in Greek mythology.

The Mystery and Miracle plays presented in the Mediaeval period were quite brief. Several little plays could be combined together to form a kind of cycle. The short individual plays included in cycles were truly one-act plays. Besides they were performed by the amateurs. Of course, there was no question of a professional theatre in the middle ages. R.J. Rees refers to "Balaam and Balak, a miracle play with lively dialogues which was a neat dramatization of a story from the Book of Numbers."¹⁴

During the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century, Morality plays were performed within an hour or less. In such plays the characters used to be personified virtues and vices. The writers used some invented plot rather than a scriptural story. Every man, originally a Dutch play, was translated into English in the beginning of the sixteenth century and it may be called the most famous one-act play in the world.

The Morality plays were serious in tone, but the Interludes performed in the second half of the Fifteenth Century and in the first half of the Sixteenth Century were less serious. They were brief and they had allegorical characters, but the comic or farcical element was prevalent in them. Harry Shaw describes the Interlude as "a short dramatic sketch introduced between the acts of plays or given as part of another entertainment."¹⁵ The Interludes possessed many elements of the one-act play, as they were short and it was possible to present them within half an hour. They required comparatively few characters and they were generally performed in the halls of the noblemen and at the inns of courts. The Oxford English Dictionary speaks of interludes as "commonly introduced between the acts of long mystery plays or moralities."¹⁶ The Interlude may be regarded as a transitional form between the Morality and Elizabethan drama. The Four p's of Heywood is a famous interlude.

The English drama became professional during the Elizabethan period. The one-act play was never at home in the professional theatre. However, some amateurs went around the villages at festivals and presented folk plays with farcical element, for the Englishmen. As the drama developed, the one-act play began to disappear. Sometimes, there used to be a one-act play within a play. For instance, 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is a part of Shakespeare's A Midsummer's Night's Dream. The seventeenth century almost banished the one-act play from the stage. It reappeared for a time in the farces and burlesques of the Eighteenth century e.g. Fielding's burlesque Tom Thumb : A Tragedy.

The European and American writers were attracted to the one-act play in the second half of the Nineteenth century when there were many changes in the presentation of the drama on the stage. The generous play bills often contained two short pieces as well as two full-length dramas. At a later period the standard programme at a London theatre consisted of a full-length play preceded by a one-act play. It was called a "curtain-raiser" and it was used to vary the "turns" in the programme of a music hall also. Harry Shaw defines it like this : "A curtain-raiser is a short play presented before the main performance."¹⁷ It was used in the commercial theatre for making time until the late-dining audience arrived for the main play. Hence it had a subordinate status and it was not considered as an artistic form.

However, there were a few signs of changes in the last decade of the Nineteenth century and they made the foundation for the Twentieth century dramatic world. There are at least three alternative theatres, mentioned by Allardyce Nicoll, which revolted against the commercial systems. In 1891, J.T. Grein's Independent Theatre was started and it gave preference to the performance of plays which had a literary and artistic rather than commercial value. Secondly, William Poe's Elizabethan stage Society, founded in 1894, attempted the rediscovery of Elizabethan staging methods. Thirdly, the stage society began to function since 1899.

From the time of Shakespeare onwards to the end of the last century "English Drama" meant, almost entirely the plays produced in the London theatres. In 1901, Mario Borsa, a theatre loving Italian journalist wrote, "London is overrun with theatres :"¹⁸ But these West End theatres merely aimed at entertaining the public. They did not take any interest in experimentation. According to A.C. Ward, this London monopoly existed mainly for (a) The exploitation of the personality of an actor-manager and (b) The provision of financial profit for a commercial manager.¹⁹ Naturally, the one-act play had no place in such commercial theatres.

The early Twentieth Century witnessed the final culmination of commercialism and the rise of the Repertory Movement and the Little Theatre Movement as an answer to it. This emergence of

the "other theatre"²⁰ affected the amateurs as well as the professionals. The traditional centre of the theatre moved a bit away from London. In the thirties the cinema and in the fifties the television influenced the world of drama to a great extent. All these factors helped the development of the one-act play as a genre.

The Repertory System, already established on the continent began to combat the commercial theatre in Great Britain and America. According to Harry Shaw, "in literature, repertorie refers to the list (or inventory) of plays which a company of actors is prepared to perform."²¹ In Webester's Encyclopedia of Dictionaries Repertory is defined as "pertaining to the stock plays of a resident company."²² The Repertory Theatre Movement developed early in the present century out of a deeply felt need in the provinces to possess a creative theatre of their own. Several repertories grew out of amateur enthusiasm. For the first time since the days of the mystery plays the amateurs began to make real contribution to the stage. Provincial repertories, supported by educated middle-class people, staged the one-act plays before a limited audience. The dramatists writing for the repertories began to show that the lives of ordinary people, Irish peasants or Lancashire miners, provided excellent material for the one-act plays.

The first confident challenge to the London monopoly came from the Irish National Theatre in Dublin, which was a pioneer in the field of Repertory. W.B. Yeats, an Anglo-Irishman, promoted a national Irish Drama. This movement, with its emphasis on Ireland's primitive mythology and its native speech, was run by writers and not by actors. The Repertory of the Irish players was in the beginning mainly composed of one-act plays. The playwrights found the one-act plays convenient to write and the same were suitable for interpretation by their amateur actors. The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, was established in 1904, thanks to the generosity of Miss A.E.F. Horniman, an Englishwoman. She had already financed the productions of Shaw. Besides, later on, she was responsible to establish the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, in 1907, which was the first repertory house in England. Then the repertory idea spread rapidly to Glasgow, Liverpool and Birmingham. The Irish writers like Lady Gregory, Synge, W.B. Yeats, Lord Dunsany were associated with the Abbey Theatre and they wrote many one-act plays dealing with Irish peasant life. Thus, the thematic horizon of the one-act plays in the present century was extended by them. Ireland, certainly, proved to be the salvation of English drama.

The early repertory experiment in London was conducted at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907 by J.E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker. Many of Shaw's plays were presented firstly at the Court Theatre. Hence, it was popularly known as,

"The Shaw Repertory Theatre". The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, assisted by Miss Horniman, was the first repertory house in England. Harold Brighouse, Stanley Houghton, St. John Ervine were the leading playwrights of the Manchester group. Later on, Sir Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre grew out of the originally amateur touring group called the Pilgrim Players. The Liverpool Playhouse was opened in 1911. It was followed by the Lancashire Repertory Theatre.

The Repertory Movement gave an honourable place to the one-act play in the regional theatre at a time when it was dying out in the West End. Under the repertory theatre system many young playwrights got scope to write the one-act play and make experiments with the form. In the first decade the repertory was provincial in the best sense. But the First World War weakened this system, as it did all drama. In the words of Hugh Hunt, "War was a blow as severe as the closing of the theatres in 1642."²³

After the war, in 1918, Mary Kelley of Devonshire, founded the village Drama Society, at Kelley, North Devon, Geoffrey Whitworth founded the British Drama League for the purpose of aiding the amateur companies. Miss Kelley's society was amalgamated with it in 1931. In the twenties and thirties the British Drama League organized annual competitive festivals of one-act plays. John Hampden notes that there were 648 entries in the festival of 1937.²⁴ These festivals have firmly established the one-act play and they have developed the form also.

But by this time Radio and Films (silent films till 1930 and the 'talkie' afterwards) became the popular forms of mass entertainment. Under such circumstances the repertory idea was taken over by small groups that represented the Little Theatre Movement, which stood against commercialism. Harry Shaw in his Dictionary of Literary Terms describes it as "Noncommercial drama, usually experimental and directed to the tastes and interests of limited audience. Such semi professional or frankly amateurish productions, normally supported by community resources (talent and money), seek artistic rather than financial success."²⁵ The Little Theatre and the one-act play promoted each other reciprocally. The Little Theatre encouraged the writing of the one-act play in America and Europe. Low budgets, few actors and limited facilities did demand the one-act play. There was proper interaction between the playwright and performing amateur artists. The one-act play was the natural unit of production in the Little Theatre. Thus, because of the Little Theatre Movement, in the thirties, the West End managers began to move out of the rut of pure commercialism. Most of the developments in the performances, styles of the next two decades, had begun to appear in the little theatres. Several societies like The British and International Dramatic Association, The Poetic Players, The Curtain Group, People's Theatre Society began to function in the thirties. William Saroyan and Thornton Wilder developed and popularized the one-act play in the 1940s. In the 1950s, the theatre of the absurd suited to this form.

Among the variety of different forces - theatrical and extra-literary - responsible for the development of the one-act play in England, the connection between the English playwrights and those of other countries cannot be ignored. As in the field of drama, even in the field of one-act play, a sort of dramatic internationalism is seen. The continental dramatists like Ionesco and Beckett have influenced the English one-act play.

In addition to the Repertory Theatre Movement, (including the Irish Dramatic Movement and the Little Theatre Movement) there are a few associate movements, responsible for the development of the one-act play in the present century. The music halls with their variety programmes incorporated the one-act plays into their multiple bill. Secondly, there has been a revival of the ancient art of mime. Thirdly, there are one-act plays with religious themes. Besides, there are Women's Institutes as well as Children's Theatres.

The one-act play has been facing certain challenges. Before 1914, the silent cinema began to make its impact. In the thirties, the sound film began to attract the audience. But the writers have been facing the crisis in a skilful manner, by employing the cinematic technique. That is why the revolving and multiple stage is used. Even in the field of drama, a playwright like John Galsworthy, tried a free form of short scenes, cinematically linked, in Escape (1926). Richard Hughes combined the technique of the one-act play and that of the cinema in Man

Born to Be Hanged (1924). Cinematic technique is evident in W. Hackett's 77, Park Lane (1928).

In the fifties, the one-act play had to face the rivalry of the Television, which began to deprive even the films of their mass appeal. But the playwrights have been exploiting the medium of television, which appeals to a relaxed and passive audience. The problems of writing short plays for television are different. But many one-act plays on television are presented by way of adaptation from literary or historical sources. There have been dramatizations of many novels in serial form and versions of short stories by Kipling, Maugham etc. The Indian Doordarshan, for instance, presented a dramatization of Maupassant's famous story "The Diamond Necklace", on 15th June 1986. There is an increasing need of the one-act plays for radio and television. That is why even the professional theatre is looking more favourably on the one-act play. Many dramatists belonging to the professional theatre are writing one-act plays. There is even financial inducement for the dramatists, John Ervine wrote in The Organized Theatre (p.150) in 1924 - "many dramatists earn considerable sums of money from the performance of the plays by amateurs.....The author of a popular one-act play told me that it brought him a steady income of 200 pounds a year from amateur performances."²⁶

Besides, it is seen that the one-act play has made some effect on the structure of the full-length drama also. White Washing Julia (1903) by H.A. Jones consists of three acts and an 'epilogue'. The theme in the epilogue is related to the events in the main part of the comedy. Arnold Bennett's Great Adventure (1911) has four acts and each act is divided into two scenes which are like one-act playlets. John Drinkwater used sets of scenes with intermittent chronicles in Abraham Lincoln (1918). Episodic method is used for presenting the subject-matter of the biographical dramas like Clemence Dane's Will Shakespeare (1921) and Rubinstein's Churchill (1925). Even Shaw's St. Joan (1923) is a chronicle play in six scenes and an epilogue. In Blue Peter (1924) of Temple Thurston there are four acts and the first act takes shape as a 'prologue', which itself is shaped like a short playlet. John Galsworthy also made an experiment of using the episodic style in his last plays like The Forest (1924), Escape (1926) and The Roof (1929). However, it must be noted that Galsworthy had written seven one-act plays before making this experiment. In this dissertation the term 'shorter plays' is used in the sense of 'one-act plays'. The abbreviation OED is used for Oxford English Dictionary.

