

UNIT- 3

THE HOUR OF TRUTH

PERCIVAL WILDE

The Play, 'The Hour of Truth', is written by Percival Wilde. The play is taken from 'A Question of Morality and Other Plays'. The Characters are Robert Baldwin, Martha, John, Evie, Mr.Marshall and a maid. The play is an intense psychological study of the corrupting influence of money on people. The plot of the play explores greed from diverse angles. Although all individuals are tempted by money at one point or other in life, this one act play particularly shows how easily people forget their moral values and principles when they are tempted by money. But at the end of the play the reader realizes that money only brings with it isolation, punishment, deception, frustration and endless shame.

PLOT SUMMARY

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Percival Wild's play, "The Hour of Truth" is an intense psychological study on the corrupting influence of money on people. The plot of this play analyses the bad trait, 'greed' from different points of view. This play shows how easily people forget their morals and values before fortune. This story promotes the theme that the good get rewarded and the bad get punished.

The two main characters in this play are Robert Baldwin, the secretary of a powerful bank and his boss Mr.John Gresham, the bank President. Mr.Baldwin represents an everyday American man who works for a living. But his salary is really insufficient to support his family. All of them hold their views on morality and express hope for the American Dream. The play helps us to think positively when the bad get punished and the good get rewarded. The entire course of the play changes , when we find out that Mr. Gresham, Robert's boss is accused of appropriating the bank's money. This becomes a serious issue and it hurts the clients of the bank. When Mr. Gresham is arrested, we immediately lose confidence in his character. Actually Mr.Gresham was a good boss to Mr. Baldwin.

After this incident, readers lose all their love and respect towards Mr. Gresham. They also comprehend the truth how badly money can influence people. Gresham becomes aware of the seriousness of his crime. For the first time in his life, he thinks crooked ways to escape from this situation. He begs Mr.Baldwin to say three words "I don't remember" during his examination on trial. As a reward, he offered him one hundred thousand dollars. It was really an amazing amount of money at the time of the story. It is to be noted that money changes everything except the mind of Mr.Baldwin. It's surprising to see that even his family changes from being virtuous and respectable. They tempt him and compel him to say just those three words. Yet it is Robert who brings the hope back into the story. He goes above the temptation

and admits courageously he cannot accept a bribe. Mr. Gresham was ashamed by Robert's action.

The end of the story is positive because of Baldwin's honesty and integrity of character. This helped him to get a better job in another bank. Mr. Gresham spread out Baldwin's reputation as a decent and dignified man. He also realized that Robert Baldwin was really a good man. It is interesting to note that the readers become aware of the evil effects of money. Above all this play highlights the isolation, punishment, deception, frustration and the possibility of endless shame caused by money. The integrity of character makes our relationship different and that makes all the difference.

Wilde is saying that ordinary people—anyone, in essence—can be corrupted if enough money is offered. It's not that people will say in a straight out way that they will lie and do immoral things for money, but they will find all sorts of nice-sounding and plausible justifications for being self serving. They will dress up immorality in pious words in order to get their hands on cash. The play makes a stark and uncomfortable point that it is easy to find excuses for unethical behavior, inviting us to examine what we would do in a similar situation.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE TITLE

Percival Wilde's play is titled *The Hour of Truth* because the hour following the offer of bribe brings out the truth about the character of the Baldwin family. Mr Baldwin is considered as an honest man by all people. He also thinks that he is an upright man. From the conversation that the family has, we understand that the family members also consider him as an honest man. However when his family puts pressure on Baldwin to accept the bribe, he admits that he refused to take the bribe only because he was afraid of what others would say about him. Thus in reality Baldwin is truthful only after he is offered the bribe by Gresham. It is only then that he realizes that he is not an honest man. Similarly, the other members of the family also realize that their honesty is lost when Mr Baldwin is offered money. They wanted to see Mr Gresham punished before he offered Baldwin money. After the offer of money they try to convince Baldwin that Gresham's fault is minor. Similarly, Gresham who had been dishonest throughout his life, decides to confess his crime during the course of the play. Thus, the title, *The Hour of Truth* is very apt as the play depicts an hour of truth in the lives of some characters who have been dishonest all their lives. The belief that these characters had about their integrity, is smashed during the hour depicted in the play

MAJOR CHARACTERS:

ROBERT BALDWIN:

Robert Baldwin is the protagonist of this play. He leads a simple life with his family. He is working as the secretary of The National Bank. He is an honest, diligent

and hardworking employee. Gresham and Baldwin have been thick friends for over 30 years. Baldwin has even named his son after Gresham. He is a good friend. When his friend John Gresham was arrested for the misappropriation in bank account, Baldwin was not ready to make any kind of compromise. He did not accept his friend's offer and tried to save him. He is a man of principles. It is because of this deep-rooted morality and honesty, he gets a job at the Third International Bank.

JOHN GRESHAM:

Mr. Gresham is the President of The National Bank. He is the corrupt man from the beginning. He has a strong attachment with money. He misappropriates the money from his own bank. His attitude towards money is really selfish. He is ready to do anything for hiding his corrupted nature. He is ready to give and take bribes. He is arrested. Due to the truthful attitude of his friend John Baldwin, he becomes a new man. This shows that he has a will to be a man of honesty by confessing his crime.