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GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
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19th CENTURY FICTION



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Contributors:

Deboshree Bhattacharjee Asst. Prof., Arya Vidyapeeth College	Block I Unit 1
Saurabhi Sarma	Block I Unit 2
Jelly Basumatary Asst. Prof., Don Bosco College, Chapaguri	Block I (Units 3,4,5)
Prof. Pradipta Borgohain Dept. of English, G.U.	Block I (Units 6,7,8)
Dr. Abdul Muhib Islam Asst. Prof., Swahid Peoli Phukan College, Namti	Block II (Units 1,2,3)
Darshana Goswami Asst. Prof., Nalbari College	Block II (Units 4,5,6)
Priyanka Kalita Asst. Prof., Assam Don Bosco University	Block III (Units 1,2,3)
Pranita Kalita Asst. Prof., Radha Gobinda Baruah College	Block III (Units 4,5,6)

Course Coordination:

Director Dr. Manashi Bora Dalim Ch. Das	GUIDOL, Gauhati University Dept. of English, Gauhati University Asst. Prof., GUIDOL
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Content Editor:

Dr. Dolikajyoti Sharma	Dept. of English, Gauhati University
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Format Editor:

Dalim Ch. Das	Asst. Prof., GUIDOL
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Type Setting & Cover Designing:

Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami	IDOL, Gauhati University
Nishanta Das	GUIDOL, Gauhati University

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BLOCK 1

Unit 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO 19TH CENTURY FICTION

Unit Structure :

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Social Background

1.4 Representative writers and their works

1.5 Popular forms of Fiction during 19th century

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1.1 Objectives

This unit is an attempt to familiarize you with the socio-political scenario and representative writers of 19th century fiction. After going through the unit you will be able to-

- Understand the events and the ideologies of the period that shaped the literature of the time
- Know the representative novelists of the period
- Know the forms of fiction popular in 19th century
- Analyse the common themes and motifs in the novels

1.2 Introduction

19th century fiction would include the works of novelists of the Romantic age and those of the Victorian age. Even though the genre of novel emerged and developed in the 18th century but it grew into new sub-genres and became more didactic in the 19th century. The Romantic age introduced new forms of fiction like epistolary, gothic, romance etc. The period saw the works of different writers but amongst them the two most eminent personalities are Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Romantic age was a reaction against the classical and neo-classical tradition of the Augustan age. Literatures of this period were modeled after the characteristic of the imaginative, subjective and emotional in a jargon free spontaneous language. This spirit had a long time effect on the literature of Victorian age. The larger part of 19th century fiction comprises of the works of the Victorian writers. Victorian age in English literature can be specified as the period between 1837 to 1901 that saw the emergence of diverse ideas in the field of science, capitalist society, gender relations etc. In other words, it was an age of revolution. The socio-cultural events of the age got reflected in the fictional works of writers like Charles Dickens, Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde etc. The political, religious and social chaos resulted in a state of uncertainty and pessimism. However the late Victorian agesaw England at its prosperity with imperialist expeditions around the world. All these impetus provided raw materials to the creative writers of the age. Along with the socio-political events, the other prominent event that revolutionized the fictional works was the feminist movement (or concerns). It not only introduced new ways of representing women characters but also saw the emergence of women as prolific novelists. Women novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell, Bronte sisters and George Eliot are exemplary figures in this regard. The earlier notion of ‘angel in the house’ was replacedby the image of the ‘new woman’/’fallen woman’ in Hardy’s novel. In other words, the novel reached its highest peak during the Victorian age with its wide range of themes and sub-genres.

1.3 Social Background

England in 19th century witnessed a host of socio-cultural events that directly impacted the literature of the day. It was an age of revolutions

and reformations that gave birth to a wide variety of fictional works that reflected the transitions taking place. The following are some of the crucial events that took place during 19th century that impacted the lives of its people and influenced the novels of the period:

1.3.1 Industrial Revolution and the working class

Industrial Revolution began first in England because the situation there was conducive to its growth. For example- There was the availability of labours, better working condition, good market structure, British govt encouraged capitalist growth etc. Besides that the rapid expansion of the British Empire also encouraged the people to take money-making as a socially sanctioned pursuit. Industrial Revolution also meant climbing up the social ladder for people of lower class which made it all the more tempting. However, the rate of industrial growth was not the same all over England. For instance, the north of England became the industrial hub while other regions took time because the transition from home-based industries to machine-based industries couldn't be achieved instantly. Similarly, the lives of the working class also didn't improve immediately. The initial years of Industrial Revolution were not much fruitful for the working class who also had to deal with their lack of rights. Even though various Acts and systems came into force, they could not improve the condition of the working class. It was only in second half of the 19th century that some visible improvement could be seen and by the end of the century considerable developments were made in the condition of the working class. The most significant development in the consolidation of the working class was the recognition given to the trade unions followed by the passing of the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and the Factory Act of 1901.

Industrial Revolution gave birth to urbanization. People began to move to the cities in search of job that resulted in restructuring of the industrial areas into bustling urban centers. As a result industrial growth directly impacted the lifestyles of the people of England that brought into effect a new urban culture. The first two cities that became the centre of urbanization were Manchester and Liverpool which also saw the construction of the first modern railway line. The cities also produced locomotives, machine tools, armaments, a newspaper titled *The Manchester Guardian*, music schools and parks besides a profitable business environment like the Liverpool Triangle. However,

urbanization also had its own share of difficulties for the newly arrived city dwellers. Issues of shelter, sanitation and food were serious concerns for the overcrowded cities. Their problems were multiplied by the noise, dirt, chimney smoke from industries as well as the poor working conditions in many places which also gave birth to a sub-genre of 19th century fiction i.e., ‘Condition of England’ novel and Charles Dickens happens to be the best exponent of this category of fiction. In short, Industrial England was a mixture of benefits and difficulties that not only impacted the lives of the people but also introduced a whole new range of fictional works.

1.3.2 Darwinism

Darwin’s theory of evolution was published in his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 that impacted the field of literature and religion diversely. The churchmen were the first to oppose as the theory encouraged people to ‘doubt’ and questioned the basis of their existence. This also impacted the religious life of Victorian England (will be discussed later in details). However, by the end of the century his ideas found gradual acceptance. His ideas of evolution also influenced social science research and culminated into the concept of social Darwinism. As defined by Bibhash Choudhury:

Social Darwinism refers to the attempt to use the ideas of evolutionary biology to explain social behavior; it is the theory that tries to argue that conflicts between persons, classes, countries, communities, or groups are necessary for the sake of progress and social growth. It also suggests that competition is a natural phenomenon rather than a cultural development (210).

In other words, the evolutionary concept of ‘survival of the fittest’ also applies to the struggles in social life that looks at social inequality as similar to biological evolution. As already mentioned, the theories of Darwin also influenced the literary writings of Victorian England especially the work of the writers like Elizabethaeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. For example, Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* represents the subject of ‘survival of the fittest’ through the struggling and tragic life of Tess who finally succumbs to her fate. In this way Darwinism continued to influence the Victorian sensibility and

eventually in the later 19th century it was widely accepted in social and literary circles.

1.3.3 Consolidation of the British Empire

The explorations and expansions of the British Empire had begun as early as in 17th century but the consolidation of the Empire took place in the 19th century. British colonialism had spread to different parts of the world like India, America, West Indies, South Africa and so on. These expeditions began as part of trade practices but soon culminated into political domination over the natives. This shift from colonialism to imperialism led to chaos and revolts as natives were being exploited for their benefit. Each colony had its own share of difficulties and its own way of dealing with it. For instance, even though British Govt. was in charge of the administration of India in the 19th century, they faced the first revolt in the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 followed by many other until India won its independence in 1947. The impact of the imperialist enterprise could be found in the novels of Jane Austen, Bronte sisters and Charles Dickens. It introduced all together a new literary discourse reflecting issues of ‘othering’, identity, slavery, quest narratives and civilizational schemes associated with the imperialistic design.

1.3.4 Religious life in Victorian England

Religious life in Victorian England can be characterized by three main events- Evangelicalism, Darwinism and Oxford Movement. Church going was an important aspect of Victorian life, especially the observance of Sunday, initiated by the strict moral codes of Evangelicalism. Even if the traditional religious orientation was contested, religion remained an important influence in their lives. For example, some of the characters in Hardy’s novel reflect their adherence to traditional beliefs despite the contestation. Nevertheless, towards the end of the age the science-religion debate took a serious turn bringing upon significant changes that was also manifested in the literatures of the period. As mentioned before, Darwinism threatened the foundation of religion and as a result was opposed by the members of the church. However, the Church of England, the main religious institution in Victorian England, was challenged by the development at Oxford known as the Oxford Movement. It questioned the religious doctrines of the Church of England in favour of Roman Catholic practices. Their

argument against the Protestant Church came out in the form of tracts which gave the movement its other name Tractarian Movement. This movement led by Henry Newman, Richard Hurrell Froude, Edward Pusey and John Keble reformed the Protestant Church of England into the Anglo-Catholic Church of England.

1.3.5 Women in 19th century England

Another significant aspect of 19th century life in England is associated with the condition of women. Feminism, though began in late 19th century, flourished more in 20th century that reshaped the identity of woman in society and literature. However, the restricted lives of woman in Victorian society reflect some of the important issues related with the status of woman that was also represented in the novels. Women faced challenges in literary as well as social field. Women writers like George Eliot and the Bronte sisters are examples in themselves about the limitations brought in by the law, education system and the culture of the period. The superiority of the male identity gets manifested in their adoption of male pseudonyms. As evident the public space was not much open to women and the only profession allowed to them was of teachers or governesses. This image of women as governess has been represented in the novels of Austen, Brontes as well as Eliot. However, with Hardy we see women as factory workers or domestic help who were often exploited. He introduced the concept of the fallen women as his heroines were seduced and exploited by the evil minded male characters. Nevertheless his heroines also put up a brave fight against the injustices done to them. Thus with the concept of the ‘angel in the house’, a new concept of the ‘fallen woman’ was introduced in Victorian fiction that brought in questions of chastity and purity of the female characters. In other words, the experiences and problems of women in their professional and domestic life began to dominate the larger part of late 19th century fiction.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Comment on the changing image of women in Victorian society.
2. How did Darwin’s concept of evolution affect the society and literature of the period?
3. Discuss the impact of Industrial Revolution with reference to the works of Dickens and Hardy.

1.4 Representative writers and their works

As now you are familiar with the socio-cultural background of 19th century England, so let us move on towards the representative writers of the age and some of their works. Actually 19th c fiction encompasses within its purview a host of prolific writers whose works define the literary standard of the age. However, in this section we will study about some of the more popular and representative writers like Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Bronte Sisters, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde.

1.4.1 Walter Scott

Born in 1771, Walter Scott started his career first as a poet and then as a novelist with the publication of *Waverly* in 1814. This was followed by other remarkable novels namely *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *Ivanhoe* (1819) and many more. As an inventor of historical fiction, his novels (until 1819) dealt with transition especially with “how the presence of the English has forced changes in the traditional, clan-based fighting life of the Scots” (Peck and Coyle 147). Therefore he wished to leave back a faithful image of the Scottish society through his novels and in the process incorporated characters from all classes of society. His novels represented 17th and 18th century Scotland caught up in its religious, class and power struggles. He adopted the medieval romance tradition of chivalric narratives to represent these issues. With *Ivanhoe* his focus shifted on medieval England and its issues. However, his biggest contribution was to bring Scottish history before the English people to reflect the importance of history and socio-political changes associated with it. He was well known for developing the genre of historical fiction and interlinking it with the conflicts of the society as a whole. His influence could be felt throughout the Victorian age but unfortunately critics in the modern age opine that “he was no artist as a novelist, and as a historian, he chose idealization over accuracy” (217 Chowdhury and Goswami). Nevertheless, he remains one of the greatest novelist of his time and a representative writer of the historical fiction.

1.4.2 Jane Austen

Transitions were part of Jane Austen's life as well for she lived during the time of French and Romantic Revolution as well as the Napoleonic wars. However she chose to write, not on the political changes but, on the transitions in social formation that would highlight the other relevant issues of her time. Her novels might appear to be feminine and romantic as they primarily deal with the theme of love and marriage but within that trivial-looking institution of marriage is imbued a wide range of socially relevant issues that questions the social structure of the age.

Born in 1775, Austen began her career at the age of fifteen with *Love and Friendship* followed by her most famous novels namely *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818). She could be called as the greatest satirist and comic ironist of her times. Her novels are filled with characters of all classes to represent the issue of 'class consciousness' that dictated the social hierarchy of her time. Marriage becomes a tool to represent this division of class that affects the lives of the lovers in her novels. At the same time marriage also functions as a social ladder for the people of middle and lower class. Her novels are social novels falling under the category of 'comedy of manners' fiction that represent the society by ridiculing the manners of the age in a humorous and witty language that makes it very enjoyable to read. Her novels also represent the issues of women like women's right to inherit property, women's only profession as governess or teacher, women's education and most importantly the centrality given to the feelings of her female protagonists. She represented woman as 'rational creatures'. Especially the witty conversation between Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* throws light on the subject of female education and what are the qualities required to be considered as being accomplished. Through this discussion, Austen critiques the limited scope of women in the public sphere as the required skills are domestic in nature like the "knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages... something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice... improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (39). On the other hand Lady Catherine's criticism of the Bennet sisters for not being brought up by a governess indicates further on the importance of social manners and the role of women as governess in imparting education (the above mentioned skills) to women in 18th and 19th century England. Some of her novels are also autobiographical as

the heroines represent some of her own restricted experiences in life. On the whole, Austen strengthened the major model of romantic fiction which is the “Cinderella narrative in which the worthy but disadvantaged heroine wins the noblest hero, with wit, irony, psychological depth, and a hard-nosed interest in property” (856 Birch). Her outspoken and placid heroines are mostly products of the society who also attempt to break boundaries within the scope available to them then.

1.4.3 Charles Dickens

Born in 1812, Dickens had a childhood full of suffering that left a deep mark in his mind which found expression in the life experiences of the characters in his novels. After his father was imprisoned for debt, Dickens came face to face with the difficulties and humiliations faced by a child labour in London when he worked in a blackening factory. This personal experience and the sympathy for the deprived became the source of most of his novels. For example, *Oliver Twist* narrates the life of a penniless orphan and critic the working culture of Victorian society that exposed many homeless children to terrible exploitation. Characters like Bumble or the pickpocket Artful Dodger exposed the criminal minded people of Victorian England to represent the sordid reality of London life. Similarly *Nicholas Nickleby* also expresses Dickens hatred against the exploitation and oppression of children. These major developments connected with industrial England and his personal experience with the legal system also featured in his novels like *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*. His awareness of the unstable state of England and France during the French Revolution gets manifested in the opening lines of his historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, ...

(Dickens 1)

This novel also falls in the category of ‘Condition of England’ novel developed by Dickens, after Carlyle, that represents the exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich and the subsequent rebellion rising out

of that. Dickens also experimented with the bildungsroman, a form of novel that traces the life of the protagonist from childhood to maturity to mark the development of character through experiences of life. Along with *David Copperfield*, the other famous novel of Dickens *Great Expectations* also falls in the bildungsroman category. *Great Expectations* deals with the life of a young boy Pip tracing his journey from childhood hopes to adulthood knowledge. The characters here are moved by desires only to learn their lesson in the hard way. Pip abandons his benefactor Joe Gregery after moving to an elevated lifestyle created out of the wealth he received from an unknown source. Misfortunes befall him and his great expectations fade away when he learns that the source of money was a runaway convict named Abel Magwitch whom he had helped once. He becomes penniless and returns to Gregery to earn honestly. Having learnt his lesson he develops as a character from ignorance to knowledge and finally unites with his love Estella. The cultural and psychological conflicts of the novel make it one of the finest works of Dickens. Dickens was one of the most popular novelists of his time whose fictional works would be published in installments as series that captivated its audience's imagination. He has earned a good reputation for creating life like characters by capturing the idiosyncrasies of speech and manners. Despite a few merry making episodes, his novels were mostly a voice against social injustice and criminality born, at times, out of the chaotic socio-political milieu.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Bildungsroman novel

It is the German term for an 'education-novel' meaning a novel of self-formation or personal development. It is a popular sub-genre of fiction that relates the experiences of a youthful protagonist in meeting the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood. It focuses on the psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood in which the growth of the protagonist's character is important. These novels are also referred to as 'coming-of-age' novels that are built on the themes of innocence, self-knowledge, self-discovery and vocation. Until 20th century, this sub-genre was not widely accepted in English criticism. Practiced by novelists like Dickens, Flaubert or Henry James in 19th century, this sub-genre developed further in the 20th century through the works of D.H. Lawrence, Kipling, Joyce and many more.

1.4.4 Bronte Sisters

The Bronte sisters- Charlotte, Emily and Anne- lived a life of seclusion and were educated primarily at home. Their father Patrick Bronte was the parish priest of Haworth, Yorkshire. The Bronte sisters and their brother Branwell spent their life in the Yorkshire moors which later became the central location in Emily Bronte's only and most famous novel *Wuthering Heights*. Their confined lives made them more imaginative and they explored the realm of fantasy by inventing stories. They would make stories on their imaginary kingdoms of Angria and Gondol and would often write stories and poems. They read and were influenced by the Bible, the works of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and Walter Scott. These and the folk tales shared by their family servant also added to their imagination. Each of the Bronte sisters published their works under a male pseudonym- Currer Bell (Charlotte), Ellis Bell (Emily) and Acton Bell (Anne). The reason for this was the limited scope open to women in the public sphere and the even more limited opportunity to get their works published. Charlotte's first novel *Jane Eyre* was published in October 1847 after many refusals but her real identity was revealed to the publisher only in July 1848. While curiosities increased about the authorship, the sisters continued to use their male pseudonyms. *Jane Eyre* was successful for many reasons like breaking the conventional code in favour of female desire, employing first person narrative and a romantic heroine. According to Chowdhury and Goswami, "it was *Jane Eyre* which led to the feminist concept of the 'madwoman in the attic', developed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in the 1980s" (237). Her other novel *Villette* appeared in 1853 reflecting her memories of Brussels, the place where she studied for a year and later worked as teacher. Their writings that emerged out of their confined life caught the attention of modern feminist writers as expression of unheard and misrepresented feminine voices. Unlike Charlotte, Anne could not claim much to fame and published two novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) on her experiences as governess and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). However, Emily's only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) won wide acclamation as a masterpiece though only after her death. As already mentioned, this path-breaking novel used the moorland as an inseparable entity in the lives of the characters as if bearing witness to their experiences. The novel is about the unfulfilled love story between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff that brings forth a tale of passions, class struggle, violence and mysticism. The other

specialty of the novel is its dual narrative style narrated first by Lockwood, a visitor to the Yorkshire moors and then by Mrs Nellie Dean, the servant to the Earnshaw family. It is regarded as one of the most popular Victorian novels for its judicious balance of gothic and romantic elements as well as the unusual style of narration. As mentioned before, Emily didn't earn this fame during her short lifetime and so Charlotte was the only sibling to achieve recognition during her lifetime. She had a tragic life as she survived to meet the death of all her siblings and bear the burden of loneliness. Her experience as a writer and as a woman was manifested in her biography written by Elizabeth Gaskell that also represents the struggles of Victorian women writers. The works of Bronte Sisters introduced new ways of representing female characters, among other aspects, which was developed further by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

1.4.5 George Eliot

Born in 1819, George Eliot is the pen name of Mary Ann Evans who adopted this male pseudonym to publish her novels without scruples. Like the Bronte sisters, George Eliot also exemplified the struggle of women writers in Victorian period. However, George Eliot was much different than the Bronte sisters in that she was bold enough to break strict Victorian moral and religious codes to live openly with a married man. As a result she drew criticism from the society and had to live as a social outcaste. She established herself as a novelist in 1859 with the publication of *Adam Bede*. This was followed by her most appealing novel *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860 that builds on the theme of love and duty as the unifying element in family. The background was everyday provincial life occupied by realistic and compelling characters. Her other popular works include *Silas Marner* in 1861, *Romola* in 1863, *Middlemarch* in 1872 and *Daniel Deronda* in 1876 each with a unique taste of fiction. *Middlemarch* won her the greatest recognition for its wide-ranging and complex narrative depicting the social, intellectual and political upheaval of the period. She was regarded as the greatest living English novelist by readers as diverse as Turgenev, Henry James and Queen Victoria. During her lifetime she was criticized by male readers for investing her intellectual perceptions into the 'so-called' male areas like science. However, today her works are important subjects of critical feminist analysis to understand her role in opening up new forays for the

portrayal of women in fiction. As in her personal life and her characters in fiction, she broke away with stereotypes to unleash new directions in society. After her death her reputation began to decline but her lost dignity was restored first by Virginia Woolf in her 1919 essay and then by F.R Leavis by including her in his volume *The Great Tradition* in 1948. Leavis praised her by saying that “George Eliot, of course, is not as transcendently great as Tolstoy, but she is great, and great in the same way” (136).

1.4.6 Thomas Hardy

Born in 1840, Thomas Hardy was a novelist, poet and architect who lived in Dorchester, a town that later became the center of his fictitious place Wessex. Hardy published many novels since 1871 but his first great novel was *Far from the Madding Crowd* published in 1874 that had the capricious Bathsheba Everdene as the central character who was loved by three men. It dealt with the themes of love, honour and betrayal set against the realities of a farming community in Victorian England. This was followed by *The Hand of Ethelberta* in 1876 and *The Return of the Native* in 1878. The latter represented Hardy’s preoccupation with the relationship of character with nature. His next major work was *The Mayor of Casterbridge* published in 1886 that very well upheld Darwinian principle of the ‘survival of the fittest’. This is the story of a country labourer Michael Henchard who gets drunk at a fair and sells his wife and child to a sailor. The reformed Henchard becomes the Mayor of Casterbridge but the past begins to haunt him when his wife returns. At the end he loses everything and leaves Casterbridge as a poor man. Hardy’s most famous novel was perhaps *Tess of the d’Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* (1891) that reflected the experience of woman in a rural countryside. The novel is about the life of its heroine Tess, the daughter of a poor west-country peasant. The story evolves from her tragic fate as her life gets caught between her seducer Alec d’Urberville and her puritanical husband Angel Clare. However, the most important aspect of the novel is the representation of the concept of the ‘fallen woman’, a recurrent theme in his novels. Tess is represented as a victim of fate and she suffers because of the hypocritical sexual morality of the time but she is also represented as a fighter as she avenges herself by murdering Alec. The novel also develops on the transition from the agricultural to the industrial. In this Tess can be seen

as nature destroyed by the intrusion of the machine-culture represented by Alec. Like *Tess*, the underlying theme in most of the novels of Hardy is man's futile struggle against the relentless forces that govern our lives. His novels dealt with hypocrisy, defunct social codes, class barriers, flawed characters, rural life, hostile nature and unstable faith. The rural landscape played a significant role in the lives of his characters as the story unfolded against the rustic background. In fact modern critics see his novels as a documentation of the ancient rural ways of life lost in the hustle bustle of modern urban life.

1.4.7 Oscar Wilde

Born in 1854, Oscar Wilde was a novelist, poet, essayist, wit and playwright who wrote only one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890. The novel highlighted the decadent life of late Victorian society. Like Faustus, Dorian also sells his soul and he does so to keep his youth and beauty intact. Lord Henry Wotton appears as his tempter luring him to believe that beauty is the ultimate object to be pursued in life and makes him indulge in sensuality. Upon knowing the vicious path taken by Dorian, Basil (his portrait painter who can be considered as his conscience) beseeches him to pray for salvation but Dorian stabs him in anger. Although he repents in the end but it's too late and he dies as an old withered man while his picture restores back to his youthful image. Initially when the novel appeared in serial form in *Lippincott's Magazine*, it aroused scandalized protest but it also brought out his epigrammatic style before a wide public. In response Wilde wrote a preface when the story was published in book form and claimed, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." (5). Thus the preface upheld his belief in the concept of 'art for art's sake' and also presented a defense of his novel.

SELF ASKING QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the social issues represented in the novels of Jane Austen. How does she portray 19th century England in her novels?
2. In the novels of Hardy chance plays a dominant role in determining the fate of the characters. Examine this statement with reference to any novel of Thomas Hardy.
3. How do the Bronte sisters deal with the women question in their

novels? Is it different than the portrayal made by George Eliot? If so, how?

1.5 Popular forms of Fiction during 19th century

Now that you are familiar with the social background as well as the important writers of 19th century fiction, it is time that you acquaint yourself with some of the popular forms of fictional sub-genres that emerged or developed during the time. Although there are many forms that flourished during the period, as you can understand from the abundance of fiction writers, we will take a closer look at some of the more significant forms for a focused study. Let us then consider discussing the sub-genres of gothic fiction, historical fiction, romantic novels and condition of England novel.

1.5.1 Gothic novel

It is a form of narrative fiction dealing with supernatural or horrifying events and generally possessed of a claustrophobic air of oppression or evil. Its characteristic theme is the strange hold of the past upon the present or the influence of the dark ages of oppression upon the enlightened modern era. In gothic romances or tales the story uses castles, convents or gloomy mansions as the haunted setting. Gothic novel appeared in the 18th century with the works of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. They were succeeded by Mary Shelly (*Frankenstein*) and James Hogg (*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) in the 19th century. The principle motif in these novels is the evocation of psychological torment, guilt, divided self and paranoid delusion. In the Victorian period, the Gothic influence could be found in the novels of the Bronte sisters as well as in some of the novels of Charles Dickens. For example, Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Dickens' *Bleak House* reflect some of the characteristics of gothic fiction. However, a curious revival of the Gothic can be found in the last decades of the Victorian period in the works of Irish and Scottish born authors in which the haunted house is replaced with the possessed body like Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Stoker's famous vampire tale *Dracula* (1897). Thus this genre inaugurated by Walpole was

successfully succeeded by Bronte sisters and Dickens in the 19th century and Faulker in the 20th century.

1.5.2 Historical fiction

Historical novels can be said to have been inaugurated by Horace Walpole's gothic-historical novel *The Castle of Otranto* but it was established as a dominant form of fiction by Walter Scott's 25 Waverly novels. As already mentioned Scott's range of historical settings is wide starting from Scottish novels to the Roman Empire. In the Victorian age, the genre of historical fiction flourished a great deal. Influenced by Scott, many other novelists tried their hands at the form. For example, W. M Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and George Eliot's *Romola* (1863). Towards the end of 19th century, the romantic potential of the genre was explored by writers like R.L Stevenson with his adventure tales like *Kidnapped* (1886) and dark studies in psychology such as *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889). Henry Rider Haggard's adventurous novels like *Eric Brighteyes* (1890) on the subject of Viking raids or *Montezuma's Daughter* (1893) on the issue of the last years of Aztec Empire also included historical settings. The historical fiction continued to have its popularity in the 20th century and holds a special interest for present day readers as well.

1.5.3 Romantic fiction

Romantic fiction can be the category of story where the trials and subsequent triumphs of heterosexual love constitute the centre of narrative interest. Writers in 18th century had experimented with the genre but unease began in early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft when it primarily became a genre of female readership that would perhaps leave them astray by the unrealistic fantasy fiction. However, in early 19th century Jane Austen mocked the potential errors of female reading of romances and strengthened the major model of romantic fiction, the Cinderella narrative. In the Victorian age, Bronte sisters also developed the form. For example, the romance of doomed love in *Wuthering Heights* and the romance of a young woman's climb towards

moral independence in *Jane Eyre*. These models were followed by the much castigated sensation novelists of the end of the century.

1.5.4 Condition of England novel

Condition of England novel refers to those novels of 1840s and 50s that had for its subject matter the impact of industrialization on man and society. These were also known as ‘social problem novels’ or ‘industrial novels’. Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *Mary Barton* (1848) can be said to be the first in this category. The story is about the life of Bartons, a working class family and the crisis arising out of the involvement of John Barton in a murder that is motivated by class difference. On the top of that, the location of the novel is in Manchester, one of the centres of industrial growth (as discussed before). The novel rightfully depicts the dehumanization caused by industrialization and the problems of workers living in slums. This could be seen as the negative impact of urbanisation as well and in such cases the actions (like the murder) of the working class is a result of the difficulties and despair associated with their life. After *Mary Barton*, Gaskell wrote another novel titled *North and South* (1855) exploring the difference between industrial north and leisured south. The other novelist who mastered this subject in his novels was Charles Dickens. As already mentioned, Dickens was sensitive towards the difficulties faced by the working class and children. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, we see the outburst of the weaker section and the under privileged in the form of French Revolution but the novel also highlighted the demerits of industrialization as not every section of society could benefit from this. It gave rise to highway men and other such criminals which the novel depicts justifiably. In *Hard Times*, he caricatures the mechanical and utilitarian way of life in the industrial mill-town of Coketown. Critics have also marked out Dickens’ depiction of the treatment of trade unions and the division between capitalist mill owners and the underprivileged workers of the Victorian era. Other novels of this genre include Benjamin Disareli’s *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil* (1845), Charles Kingsley’s *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850), George Eliot’s *Felix Holt* (1866) and Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* (1849).

These are only a handful of categories but there exists many novels that cannot be categorized within these sub-genres. Therefore you will have to adopt a broader perspective in understanding the characteristics of

19th century fiction to include other categories of novel like the Newgate novel, the silver fork novel, detective novel, the provincial novel, the pastoral and the sensation novels.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Discuss Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as a gothic novel.
2. Discuss the contribution of Walter Scott to the fictional sub-genre of historical novel.
3. How does Dickens depict the impact of industrialization and urbanization in his 'condition of England' novels?
4. How was nature (landscape) represented by the Victorian novelists in their novels? Was it a part of the lives of the character or were they external to it?

1.6 Summing up

Through the above discussion an attempt has been made to familiarize you with the representative writers of 19th century fiction and the events that influenced their work. As you will notice, 19th century has been a very dynamic period in terms of the variety of novels that emerged during the time as well as the socio-political events that took place. The most determining events that also provided raw materials for the novels were the industrial revolution, religion and science debate, and the changing image of women in society. This in turn gave rise to a number of sub-genres of fiction that also influenced the writers of 20th century. Feminism as a movement may have developed in the 20th century but the seeds were sown much before in 18th century and made available for discussion in the 19th century. It was also a period of transition and therefore many unconventional writings also emerged that tried to break away with the decadent social order and brought innovations in writing style as well. On the whole, 19th century fiction can be said to have held up a mirror to society depicting the myriad aspects of the society in transition.

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Unit 2

Issues in 19th Century Fiction

Unit Structure :

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 19th Century Fiction – a brief summary

2.4. Factors affecting 19th century fiction – Industrial Revolution & social reform

2.5 Key 19th century novelists

2.6 Issues in 19th Century fiction

2.7. Summing up

2.8. References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to give you an overall idea about 19th century fiction and the major issues reflected in the novels of 19th century novelists. After going through this unit – you will have an idea about –

- The popular novelist and their works produced during the 19th century
- Key issues/ themes in 19th century fiction
- The characteristics of 19th century fiction

2.2 Introduction

19th Century in the history of English literature is also known as the second creative period of English literature. The literature of this period is basically divided into groups based on the time frame. The first half of the 19th century literature (1800 – 1850) witnessed the emergence of Romanticism in literature. Hence it is also known as the age of

Romanticism. The second half of 19th century literature was influenced by the modern period of progress and social unrest with Victoria becoming the queen in 1837. The Victorian age starting from 1850 to 1900 constitutes the second half of 19th century literature.

2.3 19th Century Fiction – a brief summary

A novel is a form of literature where the characters reveal themselves through a major plot or various sub plots. It does not have a fixed or rigid framework. A novel may start with a crisis and continue with depicting the crisis and end finally after reaching a climax. The primary components of a novel are - character, plot, point of view, setting, style, and theme. The purpose of novel is to

However, before discussing the issues pertaining to 19th century novels, let's try to know about the status of novels in the 18th century, which is particularly known for the rise of English novels.

In the 18th century, the gradual extension of the reading public influenced the literature and this was one among the reasons that contributed to the rise of the novel. It is observed by many 18th century scholars that the increased interest in reading and the expansion of the reading public is one of the reasons. The 18th century is also known for 'Rise of the Novel' due to - increased release of novels, emergence of new novelists, increased speed in writing and an expansion of the reading public.

Some of the leading novelists of this period were –Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Oliver Goldsmith to name a few with the help of whom the novel had successfully established itself as the most effective medium of social criticism and diagnosis. Robinson Crusoe published by Daniel Defoe created a revolutionary beginning in this area by claiming the status of first English Novel. George Sampson described it as the first English novel of 'Genius'. And it was also the period when novels acquired the status of modern form.

The trend was later carried forward with more refinement in the 19th century with the help of novelist's like- Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, Henry James, Elizabeth Gaskell etc.

Besides, the number of audiences for novels also grew enormously during the nineteenth century. In part, this was due to economic factors: the growth of cities, which provided concentrated markets; the development of overseas readerships in the colonies; cheaper production costs when it came to both paper and printing processes; better distribution networks, and the advertising and promotion of books.

The first novels were too lengthy to be printed profitably as finished books. Most of them were released in serialized form which was initially intended for providing entertainment to the reader. However, there was a gradual shift in purpose of the novels from providing pure entertainment to covering a wide variety of contemporary social issues. The whole tendency of this age was towards realism and the novels produced during this period were also no exception to this. The social standards of lower class people and their sufferings ; the then existing social unrest ; conflict in relationship and marriages etc. - the novel became a medium of representing and well critiquing the society with an underlying moral tone.

2.4 Factors affecting 19th century fiction – Industrial Revolution and social reform

The Second Industrial Revolution played a major role in 18th century literature, primarily on its fictions. The middle class expanded, more people became literate and newspapers became popular as a result of which the popularity of novels representing the social realities increased; and it became more accessible to the reading public. After all, the industrial revolution led to massive urbanization and much higher levels of productivity, profit and prosperity.

Another factor that influenced the writings of this period, primarily the fictional works produced during the 19th century, was the various social reforms that occurred. The passing of two reform bills in 1832 and 1867 and the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 and Huxley's *On the Physical Basis of Life* in 1868 seem to have had a great impact on literature of this period. As Walter Houghton rightly observes, “Victorian literature is a virtual catalogue of imaginative responses to a constant succession of shattering developments”.

2.5 Key 19th century novelists

- **Jane Austen (1775-1817)** - She is one of the most celebrated women novelists of the late 18th and early 19th century who had simplified the novel to the extent of making it a true reflection of life. Based on her experience of mingling with common people in small country parishes, she drew characters from ordinary life and tried to represent the lives of common people with all its ups and down, tragic struggles, its passions, ambitions and varied interests. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* are some of the widely read novels by Austen.
- **William Makepeace Thackeray (1811—1863)**- Another prominent novelist of this period, Thackeray tried to present a realistic picture

of his society with all its intrigues and snobbery. Thackeray was a realist and a moralist and a careful observer of his surroundings and tried to satirize the moral evils in his writings. The novels of Thackeray, like the novelist Charles Dickens, give us a realistic picture of all the classes of the English century during the 19th century. *Vanity Fair*, *Henry Esmond*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, *The Virginians* are some of the remarkable novels written by him. *Vanity Fair* is one of the best known novels by Thackeray expressing his own views about his social life.

- **Charlotte Bronte (1816-1885)** – She is another widely read 19th century novelist who had produced some of the remarkable novels like – *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor*, *Shirley*, and *Villette* to name a few. Like Dickens and Thackeray, her novels also depict a realistic picture of the society. Along with realism, there is also a touch of romanticism in her novels which is basically a reflection of sensitive and passionate nature.
- **Emily Bronte (1818-1848)** – She is the sister of Charlotte Bronte and the creator of one of the classic novels of this period - *Wuthering Heights*. This is the only novel written by her *that* centers on the unsuccessful love story between Heathcliff and Catherine and the subsequent episodes of revenge. It's a novel full of uncontrolled passion and emotions.
- **Walter Scott (1771-1832)** – He is particularly known for his first novel *Waverly* that was published in 1814. The novel was a great success earning him immediate fame as the creator of historical novels in English Literature. Although historical romances existed in the preceding ages too, but with his great mastery and art, Scott recreated the past and established the tradition of historical novel as a permanent form of literature, which later followed by the novelists in the succeeding time. His novels were more focused on issues of public interest rather than private matters with a sense of Scottish history and nationalism. *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *Wood Stock*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian* etc.
- **Charles Dickens (1812- 1870)** – With publication of *Pickwick* in 1836, Charles Dickens earned his popularity and fame as one of the most promising figures of 19th century novels. *Pickwick* was followed by *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *A tale of Two Cities*, *Little Dorrit* to name a few where the novelist had tried to represent the sufferings of the poor children and the existing social evils caused by the industrial revolution. With the help of his strong imagination and extreme sensibility drawing characters belonging to various age groups, mostly children – the novels of Charles Dickens tried to

depict the problems of his time. innocent children, grotesque villains, fun makers and

- **Thomas Hardy (1840- 1928)** - He is one of the leading novelists of the Victorian period who added a new dimension to the genre of Victorian novels with his simple, direct and realistic writings. There is an element of pessimism in his novels where he projects people as an insignificant part of this world struggling against fate and nature. Most of his novels are set in the farms, hills and fields of Wessex, an imaginary region drawn into the geography of south and south-west England. *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are some of the famous novels produced by Hardy. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Trumpet Major* are two romantic novels written by him.
- **George Meredith (1828-1909)** – Another popular novelist of this period, George Meredith is a realist when it comes to representing the society of his time. He used comedy to pass the moral lessons through his novels and made fun of the existing vices of that period. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Diana of the Crossways*, *The Egoist*, *The Adventures of Henry Richmond* are some of the interesting novels produced by him.
- **George Eliot – (1819- 1880)** - Mary Ann Evans, who is known by her popular pen name George Eliot, was another leading author of the Victorian period. Eliot was a poet, journalist and a novelist who primarily wrote intellectual novels. In most of her novels she used tragedy to teach moral lessons and hence a sense of depression pervades over her writings. *Adam Bede* was her first novel that was influenced by her childhood memories. *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Mariner*, *Adam Bede*, and *Scenes of Clerical Life* – all these four novels were published between 1858 to 1861 are mainly based on her own experience of life and its people. She took the help of Realism and Psychology to describe the inner struggles of her characters. *Romola*, *Middlemarch*, *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* are some of the interesting novels produced by her during her stay in Italy.
- **Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865)** - **Elisabeth** Gaskell used novel as a medium of social reform. Her two famous novels - *Mary Barton* and *North and South* record the struggle of the poor people working in the factories and her empathy towards them. Her masterpiece *Cranford* is an episodic novel depicting the picture of life in a village.

2.6 Issues in 19th Century fiction

- **Problems of industrialization and urbanization**

The novelist of this century tried to depict the impact of industrialization on society. The problems and changes brought into society by this period of mechanization led to the rise of social problem novels in the 19th century. Industrialization brought a lot of changes to society out of which some of the changes had a negative bearing on the lives of common people. Exploitation of child and child labor, Repressive school structure, dominant role of money, misery of the proletarian classes in large industrial cities, pollution caused by factories and its impact on the health of lower class people – these are some of the major problems caused by the industrial revolution during that period.

One of the remarkable novels revealing the consequences of industrialization and urbanization was *Hard Times* published in 1854 by Charles Dickens. In this novel, Dickens uses fictional characters like - Mr. Gradgrind, Louisa, Mr. Bounderby, Sissy Jupe, Stephen Blackpool and Tom – to portray how the utilitarian system has drained all the goodness of human nature; the power relation between factory owners and workers; the sufferings of factory workers; pollution caused by smoke due excessive use of machinery and its health hazards faced by the lower class factory workers; moral corruption by the factory owners like Mr. Bounderby etc. The novels of Dickens can be considered as documentary evidence about Victorian society.

The novels of this period were written primarily by middle-class writers highlighting poverty, disease, and industrial abuses such as sweated labor, child workers, and factory accidents etc. Along with *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) critiquing New Poor Law, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854–1855) are few examples of social problem novels that focused on the social evils caused by industrialization.

Rural and community life

The 19th century witnessed a massive shift of people from rural areas to urban areas and by the end of this century the great majority of the British were living in towns and cities. The landscape of Britain started to change gradually from a rural society to an urban society with the advent of industrialization in the 19th century. There was an increased growth of cities and urban areas compared to the previous century when Britain had been largely a rural country with one large city, London and few other cities; when most of its population lived in villages and small country towns or ports.

The advent of industrialisation and use of machines in various works affected the life of rural country people in Britain. A lot of changes

affected the lives of people living in rural areas. The adoption of a more scientific approach to farming made many farmers jobless leading to agricultural unemployment. The use of industrial spinning and weaving machines took the jobs of self-employed hand-loom weavers creating a strong sense of depression among the people living in the countryside. Also, majority of land including fields, commons and wastelands were enclosed with the passing of various acts by the Parliament during the period between 1750-1850 making the small landowners and poor farmers landless and utterly helpless; they were left with no option but to work for the bigger land-holders.

However, all these changes brought into rural life have been observed by the sensitive minds of that period that found reflection in their writings. As Walter Houghton rightly observes - Victorian literature is a virtual catalogue of imaginative responses "to a constant succession of shattering developments (.....).

There is a realistic depiction of rural life in the writings of Jane Austen. In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, she portrays an authentic description of country life where people live more freely; where life is seen as unchanging and the migration to towns or urban spaces is seen as a disruption to the normal order. Most of the chief protagonists live in the countryside. Jane Austen, who was the daughter of a farmer and lived for nearly all her life in two Hampshire villages - Steventon and Chawton, tried to capture the picture of country life in her great novels.

In the novels of Mrs Gaskell, the readers find an idealization of village life in her *North and South* (1855) through the heroine Margaret who finds the bustling, smoky town of Milton harsh and strange compared to her tranquil native in the rural south. The novel portrays the contrast between the ugliness of an industrial city with all its artificiality to the innocent lives lived in a pastoral village and the gradual understanding of the tensions and conditions of northern industrial life by her.

In novels like *Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede*, George Eliot represents the country life of Britain by representing the commonplace things. In *Mill on the Floss*, Eliot tries to represent the various aspects of rural and urban life through her chief protagonist Maggie who finally fails to fit in anywhere.

Adam Bede is her first long novel, which she described as "a country story—full of the breath of cows and the scent of hay."

Similarly, both town and country appear in the novel of Thomas Hardy who was born in Dorset but lived in London primarily. His novels depict the quality of life in a rural community and the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In his novel *Tess of*

the d'Urbervilles, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – there are descriptions about the various facets of rural community life and how his protagonists belonging to rural life find it difficult to adjust and belong to the urban industrial life. Be it Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Jude in *Jude the Obscure* and Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – his rural characters can't permanently adjust well in towns. For example, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard goes out to explore the world and earn fame and wealth, but finally he returns being an outcast.

Romance & Love

The influence of romanticism was noticeable in the early 19th century fiction. The novels produced by Mary Shelley and Jane Austen reflect the characteristics of romanticism through the lives of fictional characters. Romanticism is one of the literary movements that had originated in Europe towards the end of 18th century celebrating emotions and sensibility, individualism, longing for the past, love for nature, nostalgia etc. It's a kind of reaction against the rationalism celebrated in the Augustan period.

In most of the romantic novels, there's a strong presence of sentimentalism rather than rationalism; the plots and characters are shaped in a way that focuses more on emotions rather than actions.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) contains both romantic as well as gothic elements. The novel can be termed as a romantic novel as the main protagonist Victor Frankenstein represents the romantic ideals of imagination and innovation. Also, Shelly's portrayal of nature with its beauty and power; the juxtaposition of beautiful and the grotesque, and the strong presence of imagination over reason – these are some traits of romanticism that we find reflected in *Frankenstein*. After all, *Frankenstein* represents the power of feeling and imagination against reason;

Set in rural England, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* deals with the story of romantic yet turbulent love relationship Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of a country gentleman, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich landowner where Elizabeth Bennet accepts Darcy's proposal when she was sure of falling in love with him. In most of her novels, Austen seems to emphasize the concept of marrying for love instead of marrying someone for the sake of marriage.

The novels of Charlotte Bronte and Emilee Bronte are dominated by uncontrolled passion and romance that become the cause of tragedy. *Wuthering Heights* – the only novel by Emily Bronte deals with the themes of love and passion followed by revenge. The chief protagonist Heathcliff was an abandoned child who was brought home by a

gentleman called Earnshaw. Heathcliff made fast friendships with Earnshaw's daughter Catherine and finally both of them fell in love with each other passionately. In the meantime, Edgar Linton fell in love with Catherine and they got engaged. Although Catherine loved Heathcliff passionately, she decided to marry Edgar because of his social status. Following this Heathcliff ran away and came back after only to revenge on and their unsuccessful love story compels Heathcliff to take revenge on Catherine, Edgar and everyone who treated him badly. With the portrayal of their love and revenge, the novel also expresses criticisms of social norms, caste and existing gender biases.

Another novel Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte also deals with the theme of love along with other themes like family, moral codes, independence and struggle for existence etc. The chief protagonist Jane is an orphan who was ill-treated by her relatives. The novel reflects on the inner workings of the protagonist with her struggles to live. Jane is portrayed as someone who never lost the path to righteousness, and when she comes to know that Mr. Rochester, whom she loved passionately, has a wife, so she decides to leave him.

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* also deals with the story of love and seduction. Tess – the chief protagonist who was born in a village called Marlott. Tess, who was an attractive girl, was seduced by Alec d'Urberville to make her life a miserable one. Later her marriage with Angel Clare also fails as he rejects Tess after knowing about her past on the very night of their wedding.

Marriage

The theme of marriage is explored by novelists with all its complications and limitations. The novels of Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, and Emily Bronte deal with the theme of marriage in their novels where their heroines are seen as dependent on marriage for economic and social security. However, in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* through the character of Elizabeth Bennet, Austen has introduced the concept of marrying for love, not just for the sake of marrying. Austen is also critical about the existing concept of marriage as an intuition in her another famous novel *Emma* where the heroine Emma thinks that she does not necessarily need a husband to take care of her.

Relationships and Class Conflicts-

The Victorian novels produced during this period also explore the issue of conflict in various relationships. For example in *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot depicts the conflict between the siblings through the characters of Tom and Maggie. Similarly, we can see class conflicts in *Wuthering's Heights* where Hindley Earnshaw, the brother of Catherine's brother and son Mr. Earnshaw mistreats Heathcliff for being poor and rustic.

Social Position/ Condition of Victorian Women: Another issue explored by the novelist of this period was the condition of women in society. The condition of women, especially middle class and lower middle class women was not good. There were very limited educational and economical opportunities for them along with a marginalized social status. In the novels of Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen – the readers can sense the injustices and prejudices against women prevailing then in society, mostly towards the middle class women; where women are designed to satisfy the demands of their family and husband, expected to sacrifice things for others, and fulfill their socially instructed duties. They were expected to stick to the moral codes in terms of marriage, sex and relationship; be submissive, kind and dutiful and deal with the domestic affairs rather than public affairs. This prevailing outlook towards women had contributed substantially to muffle the women's voice and silence their identity in 19th century England – and this has been critiqued by novelists like Austen and Charlotte Bronte through their writings. For example, in *Emma*, Jane Austen portrays a strong woman voice through her chief protagonist who seems to defy the existing norms and notions related to women. Being independent and wealthy, Emma does not need a man to take care of her unlike most women of her time. Through her character, Austen seems to criticize the institution of marriage.

Cruelty to children/ exploitation of children –

One of the major social evils brought in by the industrial revolution was increase in child labour. Since the financial condition of the working class people was not good, the entire family, including women and children had to work to meet their basic necessities. Families with more children were considered as profitable as there would be more hands to work. The working class children helped their parents in household chores and farming, adding to their overall family income. This aggravated the problem of child labour exposing children to various types of abuses, cruelty and also deprived them of their basic education. The problems of children and the cruelty that they had to experience is vividly represented by Charles Dickens in his novels, as Dickens had personally experienced the same as a child working in factories. In novels like *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *David Copperfield* (1850), he has depicted the various forms of exploitation faced by children in the hands of their employers, school masters and stepfathers etc. For example in *Oliver Twist*, the orphaned child Oliver was deprived of food and comfort; he was about to be sold as a chimney sweeper to Mr. Gamfield. Similarly, *David Copperfield*, records the story of a small boy who has been ill-treated by his stepfather Mr. Edward Murdstone, his schoolmaster and also by his employer. David lost his father when he

was six months old. The novel uses flashbacks and the story is narrated by David himself as a grown up.

2.7. Summing up

After going through this unit, you should have a clear understanding of the primary issues explored by the 19th century novelist. You should also learn about the key novelists that represented Victorian fiction, their significant novels that they produced; how novel as a form of literature can best represent the society with all its goods and evils; the key factors that influenced Victorian literature, primarily Victorian fiction etc.

2.8. References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 3

Jane Austen: Sense and Sensibility

Background

Unit Structure :

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.2.1 Austen's Predecessors

3.2.2 The Rise of Feminist Consciousness

3.3 Biographical Sketch

3.4 Placing the Work

3.6 Summing Up

3.7 Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives:

In this unit the attempt is to give you an overview of the work of Jane Austen, the novelist, as we simultaneously try to reorient our understanding of her works .

With this aim in mind the unit is designed so that you

- familiarize yourself with the author's background
- acquaint yourself with Austen's other works
- evaluate some critical responses and
- critically appreciate the novel.

3.2 Introduction

You are already familiar with the history of the novel before Jane Austen. In a previous block, you would have already been acquainted

with the works of Daniel Defoe, who is considered to be the originator of the English novel. In the eighteenth century, the other novelists of prominence were Fielding, Richardson, Sterne and Smollette.

When Jane Austen took to writing, the novel was a relatively new form, poetry being considered the highest form of literature. Prose was the medium of ordinary communication while poetry was art and capable of sublimity. Poetry being highly preferred over prose had to be the vehicle of the highest thoughts. To cite an example, Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, wrote his great scientific treatise *The Botanic Garden* (.1789-91) in heroic couplets.

Novelists had to convince their readers about the worth and legitimacy of their practice as well as write what pleased their readers. The emerging middle-classes formed their readership and most often these middle-class readers wanted their lives reflected in the novels that were written. So when Defoe, Richardson and Fielding started writing they had to justify their work by calling it 'true.'

Defoe, for example, constantly felt inclined or obliged to present his fiction as true or accurate. *Robinson Crusoe* (1720) was based on the experiences of the famous and eccentric castaway Alexander Selkirk. It claimed to be 'a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it.' Fielding and Richardson, as rivals, had different ways of tackling this issue. Fielding coined a definition of his kind of fiction while describing *Joseph Andrews* (1749) as a 'comic epic poem in prose.' While writing *Tom. Jones* (1749), he claimed to be 'the founder of a new province of writing' and writing a 'History which is superior to all the romances, novels, plays, and poems with which the stalls abound.'" Richardson's response to the problem was different and extremely influential. It is important for you to know that he was the greatest writer of the novel of letters, what is commonly known as the 'epistolary novel.' In his masterpiece, *Clarissa* (1747-48), Richardson presents in great and painstaking detail the transparent illusion that the letters are 'real'.

Stop to Consider

Literary history searches for beginnings' and 'forms'. We have to remember here that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722) were written to parody the popular press and are read today as the precursors of the British novel. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1728) uses exotic and imaginative settings for its parodic purposes. The literary form here was announced as a 'new' one by Richardson and Fielding only about two decades after the travels of Gulliver.

The connection of the 'real' or 'fact' to compositions in prose was a factor of great significance for the novelists writing towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. This urge towards 'factuality' which began as a need, during Defoe's time, to convince the readers, continued with later writers such as Henry James, thus remaining as a convention in novel-writing. In his most famous ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) James uses this convention. Strikingly, Jane Austen, writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, felt no such need. Austen marks a departure from these earlier novelists. For her, fiction can never be a substitute for life itself. Fiction, to her, is intended to correct illusions and not to substitute them by other illusions. All her novels convey, as one of their themes, the errors into which characters fall by their susceptibility to fiction. Implicit in her artistic ideology is the belief that "we all incline to be our own novelists, creating the world in the image that best suits our weaknesses, so that we tend to draw from human relationships and from the literature we perform whatever best nourishes our fictions of ourselves".

3.2.1 Austen's Predecessors

I have begun the section, by suggesting how Jane Austen's approach to her work of fiction was different from that of her predecessors. Austen perfected her own art by adopting the methods of her predecessors. Austen took from Daniel Defoe the art of observation and his love of factual circumstances. Defoe contrives his stories so that they always read plausibly as accounts of fact but he is much less interested in the states of mind of his characters. To Richardson perhaps would go the

credit of bringing emotion into the arena of fiction, of expressing one's conflicts, fears and passions. It was Richardson, as mentioned earlier, who initiated the epistolary novel, which was further refined by Jane Austen in her novels.

SAQ

In the 'epistolary novel' the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters. How does this form capacitate the creation of dramatic interaction ? (75 words)

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How does the form allow the description of the same event from different points of view, to reveal the intimate workings of the mind ? (100 words)

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Name some great novelists who used this form. (Pierre Laclos and Goethe were among them). Jane Austen experimented with this form in her novels. Can you recall some of her novels where letters play an important role? (50 words)

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Eighteenth-century writers especially cultivated irony. It is a form of expression, which suited the strengths of the eighteenth-century mind. It is not much evident in Richardson's writing but it is conspicuous in Swift and Fielding. Swift used irony extensively to expose the contrast between a man's idea of himself as a social being, and the reality of his situation to a detached observer. Fielding used the mode to expose the contrast between the way society behaves and the way it professes to behave, between sham morality and true morality. Swift's Gulliver's

Travels is one of the finest examples of a sustained use of irony. Jane Austen was especially attracted to this device and uses it in all her novels. In fact, an ironic vision pervades the Jane Austen world.

Austen is considered a novelist of manners and in this she was influenced by Fielding. 'I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species', wrote Fielding in Joseph Andrews. Like Fielding, Austen was also interested in manners and species, but for her the main concern was the mental conditioning of individuals by the surrounding climate of manners, and by the ways of the rest of the human species. She resembles Fielding in her frequent implications that values, which receive social acceptance, are often irrelevant or absurd when referred to true human needs. Fielding was a man of the theatre before he became a novelist, and one of his contributions to the art of the novel was his extensive use of animated and dramatic dialogue, an area where Jane Austen specializes.

Two important writers who were important influences on Austen were Samuel Johnson. and William Cowper. Johnson was the greatest man of letters in the literary scene in the mid-eighteenth century and Cowper was the most eminent poet in the last quarter of the century, before the rise of the Romantics. These two writers dominated Jane Austen's youthful horizon: Johnson died when she was eight years old and Cowper when she was 24. Johnson was the prose writer whom she most admired and Cowper, along with Crabbe, her favorite poet. Johnson's reason and Cowper's faith in feeling complement each other like the masculine and feminine principles of her art.

SAQ

Who were the immediate predecessors of Jane Austen ? (20 words)

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What are the different methods employed by the early novelists to justify their work of fiction? (45 words)

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In what way was Jane Austen influenced by her immediate predecessors in her craft? (50 words)

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I will now acquaint you with some of Jane Austen's contemporaries, which will broaden and add to your understanding. The contemporaries whom Jane Austen admired among the poets were the conservative figures: Sir Walter Scott, with his ballads and romances and George Crabbe with his eighteenth-century couplets. Scott was one of the earliest critics of Austen while Crabbe figures in her novels. It, as been said of Austen that she was isolated from contemporary writers. She never met Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Scott and others nor did she engage herself in debates, in articles or magazines. Her personal isolation, from the leading writers of her day, together with the conservatism of her literary tastes, have been taken to imply that study of her work can have little to do with contemporary literary and intellectual debates.

Is such an opinion about Jane Austen true? We shall look into the veracity of such a claim. Since 1970 a number of studies have taken a different stance, arguing that on closer inspection it is discernible that she was not merely a bystander to contemporary events and currents of opinion, but a participant in them. The change in critical opinion has been stimulated by a new interest in the fiction of her contemporaries. On the whole, the fiction of the close of the eighteenth century has been largely ignored, distinguished by only a few minor classics such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1799) and Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). In 1932 J.M.S. Tompkins, in *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*, showed how fruitful the last thirty years of the 18th c fiction actually were. Marilyn Butler in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* has also demonstrated the vigor of this fiction in an ideological context. Thus it would be right to consider Austen at this point, in the context of the intellectual climate in which she was working.

SAQ

What is meant by 'irony' ? Does it only mean dissembling or hiding what is actually the case ? Or is it used also to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects ? (100 words)

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What is the, difference between verbal irony and structural irony ? (50 words)

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The eighteenth century is commonly known as the 'Age of Reason', dominated as it was in its opening decades by Isaac Newton (1642-1727), one of the most influential of all European scientists. Someone who reacted to the sovereignty of reason was the philosopher, David Hume (1711-76), whose skepticism encouraged the view that, however great the respect paid by human nature to reason, it was seldom, guided by it. Human nature is motivated by emotions, induced by the circumstances in which human beings find themselves. Such an ambiguous attitude may either encourage the belief that human beings seldom arrive at sound conclusions about their welfare or it may on the contrary nourish the belief that the cultivation of feeling is what really matters, and that most individuals are in some degree the victims of a society which, in its institutions governed by vested interests, is intrinsically unfeeling. The latter attitude stimulated the trend of 'Sentimentalism', especially in imaginative literature.

David Hume (1711-76): Scottish philosopher and historian, known for the following works: the five volumes of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-48), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *Political Discourses* (1752), and *History of England* (1754-62) in six volumes. Hume's skepticism damaged his reputation in orthodox circles but gave him much in common with French intellectual and literary life.

Hume's essay, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), belonged to *Four Dissertations*, including essays on religion, tragedy and the passions. In

this essay, Hume considers the wide divergence of taste even among people who have been under the same conditions. Hume draws attention to the distinction between judgement and sentiment or feeling which was advanced by some earlier thinkers. This skeptical distinction provided the view that judgements made through understanding refer to something beyond people, to "real matter of fact". Thus there is only one judgement, a correct judgement, which we have the capacity to determine. Sentiment expresses something about the relation between the object and our mental faculties, not anything about the real object. Thus all sentiments are correct. A thousand different sentiments can arise from the same object and none can claim to be more valid than any other. However, Hume does acknowledge consensus in certain judgements and the role of experience in judging which leads to the inference that though the general principles of art are founded on experience, aesthetic judgment are affected by the "finer emotions of the mind". Even while recognizing that beauty and other aesthetic qualities can be subjective, Hume believed that "there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings" , pleasant or unpleasant.

The seeds of The French Revolution of 1789 had been prepared by Sentimentalism, especially through the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau. It had its influence in England too. An influential periodical The Anti Jacobin, founded in 1798, engaged the public in ideological debates as the Revolution hardened and ideological differences Surfaced within. England. These influences were at work in the novels of Laurence Sterne such as Tristram Shandy (1767) and A Sentimental Journey (1768) as well as among writers such as William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft and Robert B age, who believed that social and political reform must derive from Reason. Thus, although sentimentalism had a great public appeal, the play or opposition of reason and emotion tended to confuse the radical intellectual as well as religious circles. You can therefore see that in England, sentimentalism - the cultivation of the emotions and of sentimentality - did not influence public opinion all in one way. It could invite sympathy for others but it could also be egotistic and self indulgent; it could excite desires for social change, but it could also compensate for social disadvantage so as to inhibit reform on either side.

SAQ

What is 'sentimentalism' ? How did it affect intellectuals and society, on the whole ? (100 words)

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It is not surprising, therefore that this sentimentalism is evident in the early works of Austen especially in the creation of her heroines. However, she takes no sides and offers no solutions. In this context one has also to look into the educational scenario of her times. By Jane Austen's time the level of education had steadily risen among women. A major portion of the reading public comprised of women. Since literature was one of the few professions open to them, it is not surprising that women novelists were conspicuous in the years of Jane Austen's youth. Since public roles were still closed to them, most concentrated on the areas of their own social experience. Educated young girls formed the subject of their novels. The novels of Jane West, Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth are all about young girls finding their identities in relation to their own feelings, sense of individuality or to society, implying a balance between reason and emotion. A sensitive reading of such novels will discriminate between those who have achieved such a balance and others who are dominated and thus disfigured by selfishness and infatuation, or by prejudice and adherence to meaningless conventions. Such novels are conservative in that they do not envisage material changes in institutions or the class structure, but they are socially relevant and even progressive in so far as they are concerned with the values by which social relationships should be conducted.

That Jane Austen was influenced by such writers is evident not only from the character of her own work, but also from the mention of three of such writers' novels in her unique passage of polemic while she was defending the novel as a literary form in chapter 5 of Northanger Abbey. The 'Woman' question though not explicitly dealt with in Austen's work, does seem to be the central concern in her novels. Recent criticism finds in Austen's novels rich sites for the adumbration of feminist issues. Two powerful women of her time were Mary

Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, who led eventful lives, compared to the 'uneventfulness' of Jane Austen's. Despite this difference, some critics of Austen's work have sought affinities. Like them, she lived in a period in which increasing numbers of women were forming independent judgments, whether or not they were feminist in sympathy or actively unconventional in their conduct.

3.2.2 The rise of feminist consciousness

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97): known for her most famous work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she dealt extensively with the 'woman' question. *A Vindication* is a rhetorically powerful plea for fundamental changes in society's perception of the function, place and potential of women. She is considered to be the inaugurator of the feminist movement in the 18th Century.

Hannah More (1745-1833): A writer, philanthropist and reformer, her circle of friends included Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole, Garrick and Joshua Reynolds. A leading Evangelical, she supported William Wilberforce in his campaign against slavery. She played a pioneer role in the Sunday School movement. Her famous works include a tragedy, *Percy* (1777) and a didactic novel *Coelebs in search of a wife* (1809).

It is important to consider how rooted was Jane Austen to the England of her times because very often she has been accused of avoiding the important events of her day in her novels. One of the major topics in any discussion of Jane Austen is that of her severe limitation of range and subject harshly interpreted to imply a limitation of knowledge. However, a close reading will show you that the quiet and shrunken life apparently reflected in her novels actually has a large scope and range.

It was a time of upheavals unmatched in European modern history. Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, Imperial Expansion, Napoleonic Wars were some of the eventful happenings. To add to these were the phenomena of contemporary cotton mills, slave plantations, the fearsome London mobs, the guillotine, the battle fields of Austerlitz, Borodino or Waterloo. Such ideas would put into perspective and explain the ideas of the outing to Box Hill or the removal from Kellynch to Bath. Such information as what the Battle of Trafalgar was, what a

landaulet was, and what the Game Laws were in the early 19th century would prove useful in reading Persuasion. Perhaps one may assert that without such knowledge only a little would be lost. But it is also true that the work itself provides, in a strange way that works of art do, a cue or a sense of how we ought to react to the important 'petty' details of the scene.

SAQ

Consider the major events in Austen's time. How do they add to the amplitude of her novels? (100 words)

.....
.....

Was Jane .Austen a mere spectator of contemporary history? (50 words)
[Read her novels closely to interrogate such a view.]

.....
.....

In this section, an attempt was made to give you an extensive knowledge of the literature of the 18th century that shaped and influenced Jane Austen and thereby, to guide you into your reading of a Jane Austen novel. To give you a better understanding of Persuasion, the prescribed novel in your course, in the sections that follow I will give you a biographical sketch of Jane Austen, which will be followed by a discussion of her major novels and the critical reception of her novels at different points in time. Throughout my discussion, I will refer to the Norton (Indian) edition of Persuasion.

Check Your Progress

1. What were the notable features of the early novels ?

(Hint: One of them: the need to persuade the reader that there was a 'tradition' in view.)

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2. Relate the eighteenth-century novel to the distinctions between 'Tact' and 'fiction'. (Hint: Try to relate this to the ideas of the Enlightenment.)
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3. Consider the idea of 'plausibility' as a significant factor in the early novels. (Hint: This comes close to the neo-classical ideal of 'verisimilitude'.)
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4. Place Jane Austen among her predecessors and her contemporaries. (Hint: She learned and adapted many ideas from them all.)
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3.3. Biographical Sketch:

Jane Austen is often considered as a novelist who wrote of the life she knew, who never tried to write the life she did not know. It is also said of her that she lived a rather 'unevenly and 'quiet' life. The fact that she wrote six novels will itself make you wonder whether an 'uneventful' life could produce such a corpus.

It is important to inform you here that the main source of Jane Austen's life are her Letters and a Memoir of Jane Austen by her nephew J.E. Austen Leigh (1870). Most of her letters were destroyed by her elder sister Cassandra after her death, perhaps to protect her privacy. The Memoir to date remains a very significant information source of Jane Austen's life.

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in her father's rectory at Steventon, Hampshire. She was the seventh of eight children born to Rev. George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen. As rector of the parish in Steventon, George Austen instilled in his children respect for

God, good manners and a sense of propriety. Education and a good bearing were highly valued in the Austen home and encouraged by her father. She read widely including the novelists Fielding, Sterne, Richardson and Fanny Burney. Among poets, she read Sir Walter. Scott, Cowper and her particular favorite Crabbe. Her wide reading finds mention in her novels.

Jane and her sister Cassandra were mostly educated at home, though between the ages of seven and nine they attended boarding schools at Oxford, Southampton and Abbey School. Jane shared a close relationship with her sister and this was perhaps the strongest connection which existed in her life. Neither of them married which may explain the bond they shared.

Austen lived in the midst of a lively and affectionate family with occasional visits to Bath, London, Lyme and her brothers' houses. These places also form much of the setting in all her novels. The Austen letters (of which none survives earlier than 1796) covers the period 1796-1817 and gives us to some extent the interests which preoccupied Jane Austen. Austen's correspondents include Cassandra, her friend Martha Lloyd and her nieces and nephews to whom she confided her views on the novel. These letters reveal Austen's fondness for walks in the countryside, her frequent visits to the houses of friends and relatives, periodic balls in the neighborhood; and her fondness for dancing. A distinctive amusement in which the entire family shared was the performance of plays; these were acted in a neighboring barn in summertime, and in the parsonage dining-room in winter.

It is in her letters that we find her views on the novel. In a letter to Anna Austen she wrote: "Three or four Families in a country village is the very thing to work upon." Likewise, her oft-quoted metaphor of the "small square two inches of ivory" was written in a letter to J. Edward Austen, 16 Dec, 1816: "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a -brush as produces little effect after much labour."

In 1801, the Austen family moved to Bath. She lived with her parents until the death of her father in 1805. From Bath the family moved to Southampton in 1806, and in 1809 to Hampshire village of Chawton. A few weeks before her death on 18 July, 1817, Jane Austen was lodged in Winchester where she died of Addison's disease. The first three of her novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey* were written between the activities and pre-occupations of family life

and the last three Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion written in the busy family parlour at Chawton.

Jane Austen's early works are generally studied under 'Juvenilia'. These writings date from 1787 to 1793, when Jane Austen passed from the age of eleven to seventeen. They include short novels, sketches, batches of fictional letters, playlets and a history. Love and Friendship is one of her earliest works, written when she was only fourteen. It is a burlesque on tales of passion and improbable romances. A History of England from the Reign of Henry IV the to the Death of Charles the 1st (by a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant historian) was written a year later when she was fifteen. The History is a lighthearted work, but from this work one can form an idea of young Jane Austen's response, not necessarily to history, but to the standards prescribed in her youth for the education of the feminine mind. History is partly a take-off from Goldsmith's History of England, a work which was written to improve the feminine mind. In Austen's time, history was considered a useful discipline for the feminine mind. In 1792, she tried her-hand in writing stories in which burlesque mingled with the more serious. As stories, they were less successful, but as experiments were rather interesting. Evelyn reads like the description of a dream and has a fable-like quality. Catherine, an unfinished novel, seems to be her first serious attempt at working on a realistic theme discarding romance. Lady Susan is an early work written during the period 1793-1794. A long interval. divides the 'Juvenilia' from the publication of her later more famous novels, which I shall discuss in the next section.

<p>SAQ</p> <p>Make a list of Austen's early work. Try to trace any similarities with her later works in terms of treatment of subject and her style. (75 words)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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No doubt her life was neither glamorous nor startling, but the life she lived gave her enough scope to transmute facts of life to illuminating art. Having lived among people like her great uncle who was Master of Balliol, a father and two brothers who went to the University, two brothers in the Navy and world of finance respectively, and as someone

who visited small and great country houses as well as London, she had more than the usual experience of the world that surrounded her.

Compared to the Victorian women novelists like George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, Austen's experiences were limited in that she scarcely went outside the south of England; she never came into contact with the leading writers of her time and it is even thought that she could not have known much about the gigantic industrial changes in the Midlands and the North. Two other facts that weigh heavily against her in this sense are her unmarried state and that she never lived separately from her family. Marriage, in fact, remains one of her major preoccupations in all her novels.

Having acquainted you with the life of Jane Austen and her early works, I will follow up the next section with the major novels of Jane Austen, on which her fame as a novelist rests. In so far as she is said to have written what she knew, this section would help you to read her major novels in perspective and to ascertain why certain themes predominate over others.

3.4 Placing the Work:

Placing the Text (*Sense and Sensibility*):

During the 1700s and 1800s, in Jane Austen's time, women were not supposed to write novels let alone publishing them. Feminist authors of her time were as yet thought of 'ludicrous and discreet'. She wrote in a time when the life of most women resorted to submitting their individual identities and authority to the obligations as daughters, wives, and mothers. Women were considered politically, economically, socially, and artistically subordinate to men. It was an everyday routine that sentenced numerous ladies to half-lives of embarrassment, forlornness, and misuse. Austen broke through these norms, not through a rebellious movement and revolutionary speeches but merely through her thoughts about everyday life. Jane Austen is sure, not a supporter of what today's feminist movement calls for, but she indeed made some unconventional moves not through her own life but through her novels. Today, we wouldn't necessarily understand how she defied the norms or the significance of this novel in the history of women writers or womankind.

as a whole. But revisiting this novel time and again, reading through the lens of lifestyle during the 20th century – it is clear that Austen was a radical, a rebel and a feminist.

Many female critics of her time argued that Austen's novels portrays women as subservient to men, with little individual authority, subjected to a patriarchal power framework that marginalizes women's role in society. Most of it is true, though, through *Sense and Sensibility*, it is evident that Austen does not just portray women as hopeless and helpless but also tries to showcase feminine manipulation through several characters. She embodied a very manipulative woman in Lucy Steele or through Mrs. Ferrars who financially manipulates, bribes, or threaten others for their own good. The intention with which she exemplifies these characters is to distinguish manipulators from manipulated. She describes these manipulators as deceptive and ill-natured. And then she describes the weak man who subsides to these manipulative women as vain and selfish. By creating these characters and circumstances between them, Austen embodies the fact that domestic happiness is not subjected to money alone, the traditional romantic 'fairy tale' ending is not the reality, the ill-mannered and selfish characters are not punished. In Austen's novel, in the end, the honest and virtuous characters do not end up being rich and live lavishly. Instead, she means to show her readers, that true happiness lies in love, friendship, and family.

More than any other works of Austen, '*Sense and Sensibility*' echoes Austen's jest of the 'ardent effects of brass', for money has always been a topic of survival be it 18th century or 21st century. Interestingly the novel hums with the precise sums of how much money people owe and are owed to each other. Austen in her truest nature is mirroring the constant tension of her times in this novel. The 18th century exemplifies the moral order of the time and the symbol of love and good nature with regard to the community at large. The 19th and 20th century romantic strain challenged this writing for mass and interpret morality in terms of the individual. The writers in this time created a literary history and Austen was one of the pioneers who created one. The gothic era was developing around the same time, stressing the disgust on the insignificances of everyday life. Authors have also started writing for a large women audience, which significantly affected the change in writing style from enlightenment to romantic. Tears and sighs were

considered desirable and 'sensible' while anything relating to rational control was deemed artificial and ignorant. Austen attempts at lessening this affection towards sentimentality by specifying its ill-effects through the example of Marianne and exemplifying the superiority of sense, through the character of Elinor. Consequently, the novel appears to be conservative in the political polarization of the 1790s. It mocked the emotional impulsiveness which to many appeared the true essence of sensibility, source of both French revolutionary intemperance and of failing British bravery.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Gothic novel is a genre of fiction that originated towards the end of eighteenth-century. *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a novel by Horace Walpole which was later subtitled "A Gothic Story" is regarded as the first gothic novel in English Literature. Gothic novels were also contributed by Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford and Matthew Lewis. In the 19th-century the success of the gothic novels peaked with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The contrast between "sense" and "sensibility" is not just a mere fictional thought created by Austen. It has various cultural and historical undertones as well. Austen wrote the novel in a time which was at the brink of transition between two cultural movements: Classicism and Romanticism. Austen's portrayal of Marianne reflects she was the contemporary of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Walter Scott, the luminaries of the English Romantic literary scene. Austen's depiction of Elinor and Marianne thus echoes the inspiration from changing literary landscape that served as a backdrop for her life as a writer.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Romanticism first emerged as the protest against the Industrial revolution in early 18th century, defying technology and science reaped by the 17th Century 'Enlightenment era' in Europe. It began as a genre between 1785 to 1825, during the time Austen wrote her novels. The time was described as 'Counter enlightenment' where emotions, feelings, and imagination took over rational thinking. This allowed one to immerse in antiquity, romances, and landscapes. The same was reflected through the writings of authors of that era.

When we first, read the novel, the intensity of Marianne's emotions and transformation dominates, but if we revisit the novel time and again, we can relate to the subservience and suffering of Elinor. This hints at the culture and mindset of the people in that era as well as ours. The protagonist of sensibility appears to be much more favorable as opposed to those characters that stress the doctrines of sense. Marianne is shown as much a romantic but Elinor has much more to reveal in terms of romance and the truest meaning of love and relationships.

Austen tried to develop the importance of honesty, loyalty and love towards family as the good sense. She did not in any way ridicule the existence of sensibility but exemplified the dangerous effects of excessive sensibility in our lives. Though Austen is famous for mocking the "cult of sensibility" in this particular novel she appears to claim not for the removal of sensibility, but for the development of an equilibrium between reason and passion. She appreciates the character of Elinor and Colonel Brandon, and these were the only characters that did not go through any transformation throughout as they have both 'sense' and 'sensibility' blended together in the perfect ratio. The main theme that Austen wanted to portray through this particular novel is the terrifying effect of sensibility. She was concerned with the excessive 'sensitivity' and portrayal of the same in the romantic novels, which prevailed after the Industrial revolution. The romantic novels of the time turned from the rational establishment to emphasizing the emotional and vulnerable nature of humans.

Nineteenth Century was full of critical reviews of the authors of the time. The critics ranging from the subtle Victorians to fierce romantics were never in agreement. Jane Austen's '*Sense and Sensibility*' has its own share of appreciation and critics. Strangely enough, Austen's warmest admirers have always been men namely Coleridge, Sidney Smith, Tennyson, and Andrew Bradley. Macaulay and Archbishop Whately even compared her writings to that of Shakespeare's.

But the critical reappraisal and fame never came easy. Although Austen was popular and listed amongst the celebrated authors in 20th century, the importance and scale of work was limited during the early stages after publication, mainly due to limited social network and number of works as per Lewes. Only Virginia Woolf would write about her as a significant author every now and then in her essays. She admired Austen for her vivacious and forthright writing, but more so for being a woman.

She places Austen amongst the highest novelist at the time namely Defoe, Dickens, Hardy, and Conrad.

Ian Watt, the literary critic, was one such writer who acclaims Austen's work is a significant second in scholarly, literal, and social history. In his book "The Rise of the Novel" (1957) he entitles Austen as a beneficiary to 18th century philosophical and social developments. Despite her recognition in 18th century empiricism, there was a predominant idealist understanding of her work. She was considered a supreme ironist who deals with showcasing classic morals, instead of historical vision. In 1963, Ian Watt summarized the consensual perspective on her specialty in a historical and universal terms: 'the current perspective on Jane Austen is that she is as a matter of first importance as a basic onlooker of humankind. Her books, he finished up, are presently seen as "a microcosm of some larger moral universe".'

Though studies of female critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and Mary Poovey show a perspective that inevitably takes the reader towards a negative notion of what Austen is not capable of doing, portraying she is complicit in masculine hegemony. They decipher her as a woman author trimmed in by abusive man centric constructions and philosophies. This amusingly addresses the absence of consciousness of other social and social powers past those of sexual orientation. Adverse criticism sang as loudly as the favorable. As Jane's work did not comply with high-colored pictures of life, complicated plots, or supernatural terrors, too many readers saw her novel as tame and commonplace. Madame de Staël pronounced Austen's novels "vulgaires" (commonplace), and Charlotte Bronte said: "The passions are perfectly unknown to her. Some even called her works mere 'dish washings'". However, it was only Peter Knox-Shaw who through his novel "Jane Austen and the Enlightenment" disproves the claims of conservative politicism and religious conformity in the works of Austen. He rather asserts Austen's numerous adherences to Illumination thinking and 'all the more especially to that wary custom inside it that prospered in Britain and Scotland during the second half of the 18th century.

Sir Walter Scott, the great romantic acclaims: "That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to be the most wonderful I ever met with". Robert Southey, artist laureate and companion of himself gave affirmative

praises: "Her novels are truer to nature, and have, for my sympathies, passages of finer feeling than any others of this age".

When it comes to translation, the early translators of Austen gained high literary reputations of their own. In fact, these translators were popular novelists whose works has also been translated into English. Yet Austen's texts were preferably translated by such efficient writers. One such notable translator of *Sense and Sensibility* was Isabelle de Montolieu, the Swiss-French translator. Not just *Sense and Sensibility*, in fact, *Persuasion* was also translated by a German translator, Wilhelm Adolf Lindau. Some other translators of Austen's novels were Carl Karup, Felix Feneon, Emilia Westdahl's. However, the first full translations appeared during 1960s in some parts of Europe, followed by French translations in 1980s and many others (Johnson 427, 428).

Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* have vast readership and are available both in softcopy and hardcover editions around the globe. The new film version of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* have additionally added to its fame as it has been nominated for major awards. Austen has become a social symbol, who currently stands at an exceptional position in the twenty-first century. Authors as Samuel Beckett, Irvine Welsh, and Harper Lee have recognized her impact, and are now called as 'Friends of Jane' on a site whose members are on familiar first-name terms with their favorite novelist. However, in spite of the heterogeneity of her followers, Austen's creative integrity stays unblemished, perceived by readers outside as well as inside the academy (Johnson, Tuite 476).

SAQ

1. What influenced Jane Austen in the writing of novels?

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2. Critically analyze Jane Austen as a novelist.

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3. Why do you think Jane Austen's books are so popular?

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3.5 Summing Up:

Austen did not live an extraordinary life outside the book but she also believed in what she wrote in *Sense and sensibility* quoting 'It isn't what we say or think that defines us, but what we do.' Perhaps, this is why even after two decades, her novels thrived are considered to be one of a kind. The man of that century would not have been able to write this novel, because it is purely a woman's experience in her day-to-day life narrated by a woman in the same situation. Her writing is astonishingly relevant in today's world because no matter how many revolutions we have been through, marriage and money (two main themes of her novel) continue to dominate our lives. Even today, many women can relate to the 'Dashwood sisters'. Indeed, Austen's fiction has aged well. Very interestingly, Jane Austen, an author who partook in a bit of achievement during her lifetime in contrast with her contemporary scholars to be specific, Samuel Richardson, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Walter Scott has superseded them and secured the position of the most appealing writer of the early Romantic period whose books are read for pleasure even to this day. She is viewed as a realist by many critics.

3.6 References and suggested Reading:

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Unit 4

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

INTRODUCING THE NOVEL

Unit Structure :

- 4.1 Objective
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 What happens in *Sense and Sensibility*?
- 4.4 Major Characters
- 4.5 Minor Characters
- 4.6 Summing Up

4.1 Objective

This unit introduces you to *Sense and Sensibility*, the novel under discussion. It will help you familiarize with the various aspects of the text.

The unit is designed to help you

to ‘appreciate’ the novel in its totality of events

to ‘read’ what happens in the novel, *Sense and Sensibility* ?

to ‘analyze’ the characters and their roles in the coherent development of the plot.

4.2 Introduction

Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* was published anonymously in three volumes in 1811. The first volume contains twenty-two chapters followed by fourteen chapters in the second volume and likewise in the

third volume, making fifty chapters altogether. She published it under the pseudonym, "By A Lady". Initially, Austen wrote it in epistolary form (a novel-in-letters) in 1795 and entitled it as *Elinor and Marianne* after the two leading female characters. Austen later transformed the form to a narrative and then the title to *Sense and Sensibility*. As for *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen was influenced from other novelist of the 17th Century writing with similar themes, naming *Life and Love* (1785) by Adam Stevenson and *A Gossip's Story* (1796) by Jane West. What makes it more remarkable is West's romantic sister-heroine, protagonist who has the same name, Marianne as Austen's heroine, Marianne, representing Sensibility. All the narratives written by Jane Austen are about a young lady's advancement towards marriage, and *Sense and Sensibility* is no exemption. It is the story of the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne, daughters of Henry Dashwood by his second wife and their love for Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon respectively. Throughout the span of the novel, the sisters change homes somewhere around multiple; they move to Norland and then to Barton, visits London and Cleveland, return to Barton and afterward move to Delaford. Amongst the two, Elinor is the more inward and domestic while Marianne is the external character. The novel also features two sets of sisters in addition to the heroines. One is Nancy and Lucy Steele and the other pair is Lady Middleton and Mrs Palmer. Also, three brothers who disinherits their kin, namely Mr. John Dashwood, Colonel Brandon's older brother and Robert Ferrars; two women who disowns men - Mrs Smith and Mrs Ferrars; two liberal youthful mothers – Mrs John Dashwood and Lady Middleton; and flawed but thoughtful older mothers – Mrs Dashwood and Mrs Jennings.

A lot of people have the opinion that the novel, *Sense and Sensibility* was to a great extent motivated by Austen's own relationship with her sibling, Cassandra, the senior by three years who resembles the smarter Elinor, while Jane is more similar to the passionate Marianne. (Todd, 4) This gives a very personal connection to the hearts of many Janeites while reading *Sense and Sensibility*.

Austen's novels, including '*Sense and Sensibility*' gives us a portrayal of the everyday lives of women in early nineteenth century England. They additionally pass on a requirement for love and regard in marriage and the subtle mutual love of siblings, all communicating with the 'financial basis' (Todd 6).

STOP TO CONSIDER

Between 1811 and 1816, Jane's novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma* were published under pseudonyms. However, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* was published posthumously in 1818.

4.3 What happens in the novel, *Sense and Sensibility*?

Austen's first published novel, '*Sense and Sensibility*', tells echoing stories of two sisters, Elinor and the younger Marianne exemplify sense (presence of mind) and sensibility (emotionality), respectively. They are forced into impoverishment upon their father's demise. By a previous marriage, Mr. Henry Dashwood had one child and three daughters by his subsequent spouse. Mr Henry Dashwood's son, John Dashwood was provided with good fortune by his mother as well as by his own marriage to Fanny. So, he wasn't in need of wealth. In this way, the progression to the Norland Park was not truly significant with respect to his step-sisters, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret. Before his death, Mr. Dashwood, however, raises his concerns for the Dashwood women to which John promises to increase their fortune additionally to a thousand pounds a-piece that was left behind by the late owner, Old Dashwood.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Early in the nineteenth century, the "law of entail" was a serious matter. According to English law, the estate must descend to the nearest male heir to ensure that the estates are not broken up or passed on to numerous siblings or relatives. For instance, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr. Henry Dashwood inherits the estate of his uncle who was unmarried by the "law of entail". However, he loses it all while on his dying bed as the "law of entail" was simultaneously practiced with "primogeniture" which ensures that the eldest son in a family would inherit the entire fortune upon the father's death. And that is a reason behind the misery of the Dashwoods as John Dashwood, the half brother of Elinor and Marianne becomes the legal inheritor.

As soon as John Dashwood becomes the legal proprietor of the estate, Mrs. John Dashwood arrives with her child (Harry) and their attendants.

She convinces her husband to leave the Dashwoods with a very little allowance, i.e., five hundred pounds each. As the new mistress of the estate, Fanny is often rude towards Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters – Elinor, Marianne and Margaret. Meanwhile, her brother, Edward Ferrars (an eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars) develops an affectionate relationship towards Elinor during his stay at Norland. On discovering Elinor's feelings for Edward, Marianne expresses her disappointment as because she expected him to be more artistic, poetic man and secondly she becomes frustrated when Elinor choose to conceal her passionate devotion towards Edward. When Fanny learns about her brother, Edward's affection towards Elinor, she quickly makes living vulnerable for Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters in the estate. Not long after, the Dashwoods are provided with Barton Cottage in Devonshire by Sir John Middleton, a distant relative.

Elinor is miserable to leave their home at Norland because of her affection for Edward. Once at Barton Park, both the sisters discover numerous new acquaintances while attending Sir John Middleton's parties and other family gatherings including the retired officer and bachelor, Colonel Brandon and John Willoughby, who saves Marianne after she distorts her lower leg while walking down the hills of Barton in the storm. They also meet Mrs. Jennings, the Palmers and several others. Just before meeting Willoughby, Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton's mother expresses that Colonel Brandon is deeply affectionate with Marianne to which Marianne declines as she considers him to be too old. She is rather attracted to Willoughby, a young and a charming man. Willoughby, then openly courts her for a while. Elinor remains critical of Willoughby despite Mrs. Dashwood's consent for Marianne's attachment to Willoughby. When Willoughby gifts Marianne a horse, Elinor chastises her sister accordingly and advices her not to jump to any conclusion too early.

No sooner, the Middletons, the Dashwoods, including Colonel Brandon and Willoughby plan for an excursion. They happily choose to go to Whitwell, a place twelve miles from Barton which belongs to the brother-in-law of Colonel Brandon. But the colonel gets a dire letter which makes him to go without the arrangement leaving the rest disappointed. In spite of the fact that he will not uncover the justification for his sudden takeoff, Mrs. Jennings presumes that the young girl, Miss Williams is Colonel Brandon's biological daughter to Elinor. Just after this episode, Willoughby unexpectedly declares that he should depart for London on business. This leaves Marianne lovesick and miserable as she

couldn't imagine a separation so soon. Notwithstanding, she continues to defend him especially when Mrs. Dashwood comments that they have actually paused their collective reading of the play, *Hamlet* since Willoughby's take off. Marianne consoles everyone including Mrs Dashwood that she expects Willoughby to return within a few weeks.

STOP TO CONSIDER

The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark, also known as *Hamlet* is one of the four incredible tragedies of William Shakespeare. Set at the backdrops of Denmark, the play narrates about prince Hamlet and his revenge against his uncle Claudius, who has killed Hamlet's father with the goal that he could attain his throne and wed Hamlet's mother. The other three tragedies include *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

Edward Ferrars appears at Barton Park. Although Marianne is happy to receive him, Elinor, on the other hand realizes that he lacks all the excitement that a lover should seem to be on such an event. One fine day, Edward discusses his prospects with the Dashwoods and discloses his intention to stay idle despite his mother's high expectations. While Marianne is of the opinion that one need not be bother of prosperity, money or grandeur in order to be happy. Very ironically, Elinor affirms that wealth serves one's happiness. Marianne, thereafter begins fantasizing regarding what they would do had they owned a large fortune. She reveals that she would buy all her favorite books and saves the rest for her marriage to Willoughby. Followed by days of hangouts, dances, and frequent visits to the Middleton's estate located at Barton Park, Edward then, at that point withdraws from the Dashwoods without proposing Elinor that absolutely leaves her dazed. Before long, Charlotte Palmer and her husband visits the Middletons and reveals their viewpoint in regards to Willoughby and Marianne's mysterious commitment. The Middletons additionally have Anne and Lucy Steele, Mrs Jennings family members who later enlightens Elinor concerning her secret engagement to Edward Ferrars. She reveals to her that they had been secretly connected with for a very long time as Mrs. Ferrars, Edwards' mother would object their marriage for not having good fortune. Elinor, then, at that point, guarantees her help to Miss Steele in spite of going through an unbearable pain in her heart.

In the month of January, Mrs. Jennings invites Elinor and Marianne at her place to spend few days in London. At first, Elinor is reluctant but later agrees to go to London for the sake of Marianne who is hopeful about meeting Willoughby. After few days, Marianne and Elinor comes across Willoughby at a party where Willoughby completely behaves strangely to the Dashwood sisters. The following morning, Marianne receives a letter from Willoughby rejecting his romantic relationship with her in the past as he is now engaged to a wealthy lady, Miss Grey. Having heard about the unfortunate news, Colonel Brandon, who was also in London pays a visit to Elinor. He also leaves a message to Elinor hoping to ease Marianne. In the letter, Brandon tells her about the woman he once fell in love. That lady was Eliza, his father's ward. Shockingly, she was constrained into a union with Brandon's senior sibling by Brandon's dad. She does as such miserably just to clear up the family's obligations. Subsequently, she got separated and the marriage finished in outrage. During that time, Brandon was abroad in the Military. He returns only after his father and brother died and subsequently acquired the family estate and soon found Eliza dying in a pauper's home. Thus, he assumed liability of bringing up her young illegitimate girl, Miss Eliza Williams. Colonel Brandon, in the letter, reveals Elinor that Marianne unequivocally helps him to remember older Eliza as far as her earnestness and delicate indiscretion. He reveals all of these specifics to Elinor with a hope that Marianne could be fetched with some reassurance knowing that Willoughby's character is far from what she previously thought of him. Elinor passes this message to Marianne, who then laments the loss of Willoughby's character as an honest gentleman but no longer loves him. Meanwhile, Colonel Brandon's growing friendship with Elinor leaves Mrs. Jennings to emancipate a proposal from Colonel Brandon for the lady. By this time, Marianne has slowly overcome her grief.

A few days later, Marianne agrees to accompany Elinor and Mrs. Jennings to Gray's in Sackville Street. At the jewellery shop, Elinor runs to her half-brother, John Dashwood. He later visits her, the Middletons, Mrs. Jennings as well as Colonel Brandon. He engages himself in a conversation with Lady Middleton as he is keen to learn more about Colonel Brandon. He learns that Colonel Brandon is a man of good fortune who has a property in Dorsetshire. He later congratulates Elinor for her future prospect with Colonel Brandon expressing his good intentions for her and her family. Following this meeting, John and

Fanny decides to host a dinner for the Middletons, the Steeles, Mrs. Jennings, the Dashwood sisters along with Mrs. Ferrars. At dinner, Mrs. Ferrars develops a fondness for Lucy and a strong dislike for Elinor. However, two weeks later, Mrs. Jennings discloses that Fanny became furious when she learned about Edward and Lucy's secret engagement and kicked her out of her house following which Mrs. Ferrars also disinherited her son as he refused to break off the engagement. And that Robert Ferrars would inherit the entire fortune. Edward continues defending his relationship despite of being inherited by his mother as he is more sympathetic towards Lucy unaware of her true interest. As a well wisher, Brandon provides a shelter for Edward at Delaford Parsonage so that he could settle there along with Lucy after receiving the orders.

SLQ

1. What distinguishes Edward from Willoughby?

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2. Do you think money and social class plays a major role in *Sense and Sensibility*?

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3. Why does Elinor decide not to reveal the secret of Lucy Steele? Does she favors her in doing so? Justify your answer.

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In April, Mrs. Jennings goes to visit Charlotte Palmer, her younger daughter who resides at Cleveland. She is accompanied by Elinor and Marianne. During their stay at Cleveland, Marianne goes walking in the rain as she continues to feel miserable over Willoughby’s wedding and becomes ill. Marianne’s fever causes her life at risk. Elinor pens to Mrs. Dashwood alarming Marianne’s critical state and informing her that Colonel Brandon has willingly agreed to bring her home as Marianne desires to see her. The same night, Willoughby comes at Cleveland and expresses that his love for Marianne was sincere and that he regrets for his past doings to Elinor. After Marianne recuperates from her ailment, Elinor discloses her about Willoughby's visit. Marianne understands the intensity of Willoughby's immoral and inconsiderate ways and professes that she wouldn’t have been able to tolerate him even if they would have got married. She also takes a resolution to inculcate Elinor’s courage and good sense. Later, Edward arrives at Barton and discloses that Lucy left him for his wealthy younger brother, Robert after his mother disinherited him. On receiving this news, Elinor burst into tears of joy. On this note, Edward and Elinor tie the knot, and later Marianne marries Colonel Brandon, having gradually come to love and cherish his true passion. Both Elinor and Marianne, thus, continues to enjoy happy marriages as well as a close relationship to each other. The novel, thus ends on a happy note.

SAQ

4. Does Jane Austen prioritizes Elinor’s ‘sense’ or Marianne’s ‘sensitivity’? Support your argument.

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5. What happens at the end of *Sense and Sensibility* ?

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4.4 Major Characters

Elinor Dashwood: Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood’s eldest daughter, Elinor Dashwood signifies half of the title, "sense". She is the most sensible and reserved character. She is considerably affectionate to Edward Ferrars, brother-in-law of Mrs. John Dashwood. She compassionately befriends Colonel Brandon, an admirer of her younger sister, Marianne. She considers the welfare and interests of her family and friends above her own interest and suppresses her own feelings. Even after learning about Lucy’s secret engagement with Edward Ferrars, she believes she must not disclose to anybody despite the fact that it causes her incredible misery. All things being equal, she offers her assistance to them. Overall, Elinor has a control over her emotions, even at the time when she suffers a great adversity. For instance, even though she is in love with Edward yet she tries to subdue her feelings as she believes him to be taken by Lucy. Her emotions are seen only towards the end of the novel when she burst into tears of joy after Edward reveals that Robert and Lucy are married and settled at Dawlish. She then happily accepts Edward’s marriage proposal.

Marianne Dashwood: Marianne is a sixteen-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood. She represents the “sensibility” of the title. She embraces spontaneity, love of nature, and romantic idealism. Austen addresses Marianne’s particular achievement to be piano playing. According to her, love happens only once in a lifetime. She considers Colonel Brandon too old for her and falls in love with a young, handsome Willoughby who is as romantically inclined as her. Marianne experiences the most development within the novel. Her opinions

changes with time. She also finally learns towards the end of the novel that her sensibilities have been quite selfish. She decides her conduct should be more like that of her elder sister, Elinor. She also realizes that what she initially claimed to be love at first sight was an infatuation. At the end, Marianne regards Colonel Brandon's good qualities and eventually marries him.

Mrs. Dashwood: the second wife of Mr. Henry Dashwood and the mother of Elinor, Marianne and Margaret and John Dashwood's stepmother. She is forty years old lady who is left in destitute after her husband's death. Her temperament is much like her daughter Marianne. She too is emotional and often makes poor decisions based on emotion rather than reason. Mrs Dashwood is a kind, caring mother who is not as stubborn and selfish as Mrs. Ferrars and is generally more interested in her daughter's happiness than in their financial status.

John Dashwood: the son of Henry Dashwood by Henry's first wife. He is the half brother of the Dashwood sisters and the proprietor of Norland Park. Initially, he intends to do well to his half-sisters and stepmother by giving them allowances and inheritance. However, he is easily persuaded by his wife to an extent that he even ignores his deathbed promise to his father and leaves the Dashwood women miserable. However, his fondness and goodwill for his half sisters, especially for Elinor is very much reflected throughout the novel.

Fanny Dashwood: the witty, selfish, controlling and manipulating wife of John Dashwood, the owner of Norland Park. She is mentioned to as "Mrs. John Dashwood" or "Fanny Dashwood". She is also the sister of Edward and Robert Ferrars. In the novel, Fanny's character is very greedy and is seen having concerns only for wealth and status rather than love and virtues. She is exceptionally mean towards her husband's half sisters and stepmother, particularly as she fears her brother Edward is affectionate to Elinor. She also persuades her husband not to carry out his plan of settling three thousand pounds on his half-sisters and stepmother.

Edward Ferrars: the eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars and brother of Fanny and Robert. He develops a connection to Elinor Dashwood while his visit at Norland Park. Since he is aware of his secret engagement to Lucy, he maintains a distance from Elinor. He also regrets it when he

realizes that he had never actually loved Lucy. He is disinherited by his mother after he refuses to break off his engagement, out of a sense of obligation. However, at the end of the novel, he is happily married to Elinor, the woman he falls in love at the very beginning of the novel.

Colonel Brandon: a man in his late thirties who is a very close friend of Sir John Middleton. At first sight itself, he is very much in love with Marianne. According to Brandon, Marianne resembles Eliza Williams. Unfortunately, he couldn't marry her as his father arranged Eliza's marriage with his brother. After he went in the military, Eliza suffered numerous setbacks, partially as a consequence of her miserable marriage, leaving behind her illegitimate daughter to him. He also offers Edward Ferrars the Parsonage at Delaford after Edward is disowned by his mother. The Delaford Parsonage, however shelters Edward and Elinor at the end of the novel.

Eliza Williams (mother): the lover of Colonel Brandon who couldn't marry her man as opposed by his father. Instead, she was forced to marry Brandon's brother. Although she gets married, she is not devoted to her husband as she marries him only out of obligations. She later lives a very scandalous life after her divorce with Brandon's brother and leaves behind her illegitimate daughter, also known as Eliza to Colonel Brandon.

John Willoughby: a young, passionate gentleman who is expected to inherit the wealth of his aunt, Mrs. Smith. He charms Marianne with his artistic and cultural sensibilities. He courts Marianne for a while. However, he abruptly takes off for London suddenly leaving Marianne dejected. His aunt, Mrs. Smith discontinues financial allowances for Willoughby after he seduces Lucy Williams, Colonel Brandon's ward. Later he gets engaged to Sophia Grey, a wealthy lady in order to secure his financial status.

Lady Middleton: the wife of Sir John Middleton. She has four children. And particularly dislike people who doesn't flatter her or her children. For instance, she likes the Steeles, who flatters her much more than the Dashwood sisters who neither flatters her nor her children.

Mrs. Jennings: a widow with an ample jointure who is the mother of two daughters, Lady Middleton and Charlotte Palmer. She has a good

sense of humor. Her character combines sound principles and a loving heart. Throughout the novel, she is always anxious to get a good husband for every pretty girl especially for Elinor and Marianne. Her intentions, though good are often misinterpreted especially by Marianne.

Mrs. Ferrars: a very selfish and ill-mannered woman, who is the mother of Fanny, Edward and Robert. She wants her son, Edward to make a figure as a speaker in the Parliament. This ambition is driven by no ideal of civic sense to advance public interests rather to gratify her selfish desires. She has no consideration for Edward's happiness instead she only ponders upon making wealth.

Robert Ferrars: the younger brother of Edward Ferrars and Fanny Dashwood who is the arrogant son of Mrs Ferrars. He is for the most part worried about status and style. He weds Miss Lucy Steele after his sibling is disinherited.

Lucy Steele: a relative of Mrs. Jennings who is clever and selfish. She has been secretly engaged to Edward Ferrars in order to secure her fortune. Ironically, she tells Elinor that she is truly in love with him. However, she leaves Edward after he loses his inheritance to his brother, Robert Ferrars. Thus, she is seen much more cold-hearted than Willoughby in trading lovers only for monetary benefit.

4.5 Minor Characters

Henry Dashwood: a legal inheritor of Norland Park after the death of his uncle, Old Dashwood. By his first marriage, Mr. Henry Dashwood had one son and by his second spouse, three daughters. On his deathbed, he expresses his anxiety for his second spouse and their three daughters- Elinor, Marianne and Margaret before John, his son by his first wife and extracts a guarantee to take care of them after his death.

Margaret Dashwood: Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood's youngest daughter who is thirteen-year-old. She is also described as kind and romantic girl but not predicted to be as intelligent as her sisters in future. She watches Elinor and Marianne fall in love with handsome men and successfully marry them, and dream about her own beautiful love story.

Sir John Middleton: a jovial, generous man who is the owner of Barton Park. As a distant acquaintance of Mrs. Dashwood, he offers Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters a cottage after the unfortunate death of Mr. Henry Dashwood. He is an enthusiastic sportsman who likes hunting. He additionally served in the military with Colonel Brandon. He often hosts gatherings, picnics to enhance interaction between the young people of their village. It is through these events Elinor and Marianne are acquainted with Colonel Brandon, Mrs. Jennings, the Palmers and the Steeles including Willoughby and many others.

Mrs. Smith: the owner of Allenham who disowns Willoughby for seducing Eliza Williams.

Charlotte Palmer: the youngest daughter of Mrs. Jennings. In contrast to Lady Middleton, she was short and plump, had an exceptional lovely face and a very good sense of humor. Her manners were not so elegant as her sibling, Lady Middleton, but they were much more overwhelming.

Thomas Palmer: a sarcastic man who is the husband of Charlotte Palmer. While he barely tolerates his silly wife and is easily bored of her, he is thoughtful and kind towards the Dashwood sisters.

Anne "Nancy" Steele: the elder sister of Lucy, who is less clever than her sister. Due to her slip-of-tongue, the Ferrars family discovers Edward's secret engagement with Lucy.

Miss Sophia Grey: a smart, stylish and a wealthy heiress with whom Willoughby marries to secure his fortune.

Mr. Pratt: Lucy Steele and Anne Steele's uncle who lives at Longstaple, near Plymouth. Also, Edward Ferrar's tutor for four years.

Eliza Williams: the ward of Colonel Brandon. She is the illegitimate daughter of Eliza, divorced wife of Brandon's brother. She has the same name as her mother. She is seduced by Willoughby and after he gets her pregnant, Colonel Brandon has to care for her.

Miss Morton: a daughter of a nobleman with thirty thousand pounds which makes her a woman of higher rank and a larger fortune. She is considered suitable for Edward by Mrs Ferrars only because of her good fortune.

Mr Harris: a pharmacist who treats Marianne when she becomes sick at Cleveland.

4.6 Summing Up

Let us briefly look at some important points to remember:

- Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) was published simply with the credit, "By A Lady".
- *Sense and Sensibility* discloses to us the narrative of the ruined Dashwood family, focusing on the siblings, Elinor and Marianne, who exemplify the two characteristics set out in the title.
- Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are sisters with restricting personalities – Elinor is judicious, rational and capable; Marianne is energetic, sensitive and enthusiastic.
- After Mr. Henry Dashwood's death, his only son, John inherits Norland Park. John's wife, Fanny convinces him to give minimal allowances to his half-sisters and stepmother as she insists not to compromise with their son, Harry's fortune.
- Both sisters become hopelessly enamored, one openly and uproariously, the other all the more discreetly and secretly in any case, it shows up later, with comparative force. Both love before they have social permit to do as such, albeit both feel sure in their souls that their adoration is returned. Their dearest men are Edward Ferrars - a hesitant, great hearted and subtly connected with brother by marriage, and Marianne's beguiling and common Willoughby.
- When Fanny's sibling, Edward Ferrars, begins to show a curiosity in Elinor, John's stepsister, Fanny attempts to prevent any alliance between them as she thinks about her as a lady of no

fortune. She makes the lives for the more established Mrs. Dashwood and her girls so hopeless that they acknowledge the proposal of their family member, Sir John Middleton, to possess a house on his bequest at Barton Park..

- They meet Colonel Brandon, at Barton Park, who is Sir John's thirty-five-year-old friend, instantly fascinated by Marianne. Marianne rejects him as she considers him too old. Instead, she is infatuated to John Willoughby. They both fall in love and are inseparable until Willoughby leaves unexpectedly for London without explaining or declaring himself.
- A week later, Edward shows up at Barton Park. Elinor is firmly attached to him, yet Edward appears to be scarcely keen on her. After a brief stay, he passes on the Dashwoods without talking about anything to give Elinor trust..
- In the meantime, Sir John welcomes Miss Lucy Steele and her older sister to his home. Elinor is stunned to hear from Lucy about her secret engagement to Edward. She additionally reveals to her that they were locked in for a very long time however covered it since Edward's mom, Mrs. Ferrars wouldn't allow him to wed her.
- A while later, Elinor and Marianne are summoned to visit Mrs. Jennings at her place in London. Elinor is reluctant but Marianne desperately convinces her as she is hopeful to meet Willoughby. She is left heartbroken after she encounters him at a social gathering where he completely denies her. She is eventually comforted by Colonel Brandon.
- The Colonel reveals Willoughby's nature to Elinor with the expectation that it will assist Marianne with recognizing Willoughby's actual person and pull out herself from the pain. He reveals to her that he needed to leave Barton Park in the past as Eliza, a girl of his sibling's separated from spouse was seduced and abandoned by Willoughby.
- Elinor and Marianne, then, at that point visits Cleveland, a place between London and Barton Park. At Cleveland, Marianne

catches a severe cold. Mrs. Dashwood shows up to remain with her girl. Likewise, Willoughby, becoming aware of Marianne's sickness, meets Elinor and communicates his second thoughts for treating Marianne so gravely prior. However, Marianne recovers from her cold and returns to home with her mother and Elinor after which she discloses to her Willoughby's story. Marianne remains to be miserable for him, but now she no longer loves him.

- As they return at Barton cottage, Elinor's servant tells her that Mr. Ferrars and Lucy are hitched yet much to her surprise, Edward shows up at Barton Park and tells the Dashwoods that Lucy wedded his sibling rather than him, since their mother disinherited him.
- Edward proposes Elinor and manages to get the consent of his mother, Mrs. Ferrars endorsement for the wedding. Marianne, as well, perceives Colonel Brandon's actual worth in the end, and they get hitched. In this way, Mrs. Dashwood is pleased at the favorable luck of her daughters, and the families live in harmony.

4.7 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 5

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

THEMES AND TECHNIQUES

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objective
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Major Themes in *Sense and Sensibility*
- 5.4 Narrative Techniques
- 5.5 Form and other relevant aspects
- 5.6 Characterization
- 5.7 Summing Up
- 5.8 References and Suggested Reading

5.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to enable the readers

- to ‘analyse’ the novel in terms of its themes
- to ‘identify’ the narrative techniques employed by Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*, and
- to ‘assess’ how these techniques contribute to the overall effect of the novel.

5.2 Introduction

Let me first familiarize you with the term - theme. In contemporary literary studies, a theme is a central topic, subject, or message within a narrative. In other words, the main idea or underlying concept or meaning an author explores in a short story, a novel or any other literary work is called a literary theme. Very often, the readers imply the story’s plot and its moral as the theme. The plot is merely what happens in the story following the chronology of events, and the moral is the learning that the author wants the main character (and by extension, you) to take

away from the novel or any writing. Combining all of these makes up the overall theme, i.e., the series of events and learnings throughout illustrate and enlighten the theme of the story.

5.3 Major themes in *Sense and Sensibility*

Sense and Sensibility is not merely a story of love but the complications and consequences of choices, societal pressures, bequest, and conventions of property in detail. Some of the themes in the novel are-

5.3.1 Love and Marriage:

In *Sense and Sensibility*, love and marriage plays a very crucial role. Austen's protagonists Elinor and Marianne fall in love and both of them want to marry eventually. They both strive to fix several challenges on their way to marriage. Even as teenagers, unlike other women of the time, their emphasis is not solely on wealth, rather love. At the beginning of the story, the two has their own versions of love, driven by their personalities. However, marriage isn't just a matter of love and affection, instead it was more of a political, social, and economic alliance between the families. It also determines who will inherit family fortunes and properties. For instance, Mrs. Ferrars desires that her son marry Miss Morton, a nobleman's ward with thirty thousand pounds which will eventually give her a higher rank and larger fortune. And when Edward disobeys her, Mrs. Ferrars disinherits him and gives it to Robert, Edward's younger brother. Needless to say, women bringing in heavier dowries are considered as better prospects for marriage. Also, Willoughby, when isolated by his aunt, the owner of Allenham, marries Miss Grey just for monetary gain. Likewise, marriage, for some women like Lucy Grey is nothing but a beneficial trade. However, love is also one important part of the novel as Elinor and Marianne ultimately marry for love although Marianne's love for Colonel Brandon isn't love at first sight rather love that develops from affection.

5.3.2 Secrecy and Concealment:

Sense and Sensibility is a novel filled with secrets. This was probably Austen's favorite device. The action of *Northanger Abbey* had in part

relied on what happens when the intentions of others are unknown and misunderstood. Likewise, there are many other examples throughout Jane Austen's work but nowhere so prevalent as in *Sense and Sensibility*. In this novel, almost all the characters are hiding away something for others. For instance, Colonel Brandon kept the story of her first love a secret from everyone especially Marianne who wishes to marry Willoughby. Brandon used to love a woman named Eliza, daughter of Brandon's father who died after parting from an unhappy marriage. He also kept the secret of her first love daughter, who he has eventually adopted, sharing the same name as Eliza falling in the trap of Willoughby. Willoughby himself kept his engagement with Mrs. Grey a secret from everyone while he was completely dishonest to his fiancé regarding his romance with Marianne. Likewise, Edward kept his engagement of four years with Lucy a secret, especially from his mother, Mrs. Ferrars. This secret was later concealed by Lucy, Miss Steele, and even Elinor herself. In this process of concealment throughout the novel, the thing that was kept a secret for far too long and with far too many was the love the character shared with each other. For instance, Edward cannot reveal his love for Elinor until and unless Lucy finally leaves him. Elinor must also hide her suffering on learning their secret (Morgan 191).

5.3.3 Money and Inheritance:

The sluggish and ponderous start of *Sense and Sensibility*, subtleties the Norland family, the bequest and its entail. The Dashwood sisters and their mother were thrown out in relative poverty from their dad's home (after his demise) through the desire of their incredible uncle, who passes on quite a bit of his fortune to their stepbrother and his four-year-old child. Owing to this will, a combination of primogeniture and discretionary lack of regard, the Dashwood sisters tumble from the positions of the landed nobility, living on a country domain yielding 4,000 pounds every year, to become beneficiaries of a yearly 500 pounds.

Favored with a few fortunes, their relative John Dashwood sees everything in financial terms which recommend the extreme of prudential 'sense' are more socially hazardous than the foolish extremes of 'sensibility'. In the excellent discussion, he has with his better half Fanny toward the start of the novel, suggestive of the discourse of the evil sisters with their dad in *Lord Lear*, the deathbed vows to his dad of extensive assistance, at first understood as 3,000 pounds expanded with

1000 pounds a-piece left by their incredible uncle is trimmed down to a periodic present. Setting to the side a verbal guarantee, the inventive Fanny makes a persuading situation regarding patriarchal prudential worry for the single male beneficiary, 'poor little Harry', that overpowers her more vulnerable husband. (Todd 49, 50)

More than any other works of Austen, 'Sense and Sensibility' echoes Austen's jest of the 'ardent effects of brass', for money has always been a topic of survival be it 18th century or 21st. Interestingly the novel hums with the precise sums of how much money people owe and are owed to each other.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Late eighteenth-century society was immensely concerned with wealth and lifestyle. The recurrent wars during the century had intensified the national debt prompting higher taxation demands. This benefitted the wealthy capitalists with enhanced opportunities to lend money to government at much high rate of interest (Morris 35).

5.3.4 Sense:

Sense is perceived as the utilization of motivation to comprehend the world and construct intellect. Elinor addresses "sense" in this novel. Just nineteen, she is her mother's advocate, ready to impact her toward prudence. At the point when Mrs. Dashwood needs to leave Norland Park, it is Elinor who keeps her from acting too hurriedly. She incites Marianne to take a gander at things in a more quiet, more sensible way. However, drawn to Edward, she is mindful and controls her feelings. Elinor can practice limitation upon her sentiments; she has the solidarity to order her sentiments and feelings; she has the ideals of prudence, and she will in general be indifferent despite failure or disappointment. Elinor, the apotheosis of sense, shows us the significance of sense: she isn't saved from the tragedies of hopelessness, however apparently, she can bear them with more prominent composure than her sister; she doesn't make a marriage of convenience, yet a marriage builds on love to a far from a wealthy person. Though not directly, Austen hints at the availability of sense in the character of Colonel Brandon who despite many adversities, maintained his composure and achieve his love not by manipulation or force but by pure love and dedication.

5.3.5 Sensibility:

Sensibility utilizes feelings to understand nature and associate with the sensations of others. Austen's specific investigation of sensibility is represented in the characters of Marianne, who is the encapsulation of insensibility close to the end of the novel. Marianne is defenseless to believing unnecessarily. She is inadequate in self-order, in self-control, and in the ability to monitor her feelings. She overcompensates for her initial need of sense by making, maybe a sensible marriage.

Another part of sensibility was depicted in the novel through too little sensibility of Mrs. Dashwood on account of her high capacity to utilize reason over feeling as her necessary evil. She doesn't have significantly more sense than sensibility as such know her ways to manipulate people and situation with words. Brandon as referred an exemplar of sense in the above context was also a man with controlled sensibility. He exemplifies sensibility several times, although not verbally, especially when he is watching Marianne.

Austen utilizes this novel to show that Sensibility is a valuable way to comprehend and associate with nature just as man, however it should be watched by reality to stay away from the chance of emotional instability overcoming rationality.

5.3.6 Society:

The word 'Society' is recurrently used in the text. Initially, it traces a change between expansion and contraction of the social identities and with that the sympathies of the Dashwoods. Having initially led a life on the family estate of Norland in 'the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance', the late owner retrenched to an introverted lifestyle, fewer outgoings, less socialization with only his sister and housekeeper. Her demise, however, united his life and legacy with 'the society of his nephew and niece, and their children (Morris 34, 35)

Jane utilizes the term 'society' in the primary section and wherever else as per the sense of 'partnership' underlining this by focusing on the solace of social sympathies the senior Mr. Dashwood receives from the decency of heart of his nephew and spouse and the delight added to his life by the happiness of the children. However, in spite of this

experience of expanded social being, his demise seals a withdrawal of personality around a stringently limited idea of possessive self. He ties down the entire of his estate to the ostensible male line, an offspring of four years of age. Consequently, the Dashwood women are expelled from the stable security of their own homes. They were forced to face several unexpected social processes, events, and adversities without being at fault.

5.3.7 Women in society:

In the nineteenth-century English society, women were not socially independent. They were deprived of opportunities in terms of career. Women had no rights to inherit the family estate or property as the society was highly influenced by the primogeniture system. And so they relied upon any male member of the family: a father or a brother. Often, women secured their fortune by marriage. *Sense and Sensibility* starts with the Dashwood sisters (two young female protagonists of the novel) and their mother and youngest sister being expelled from the security of their patriarchal home after Mr. Dashwood's demise. They faces mistreat from Mrs John Dashwood, their sister-in-law upon the inheritance of their father's estate by John Dashwood. In the climax, both the female protagonist - Elinor and Marianne have achieved a larger material place in the world, however, they retained their individual self as social beings, discarding greedy competitiveness and privatized interiority as well. More often than not, in Austen's fiction, the end hints at the beginning of a new, potentially unsensual social order. Realistic rather than idealist, horizontal rather than vertical, and the one that shall have active participation of women and an intelligent public role. (Morris 52).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does Elinor represent 'sense'?

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2. How does Marianne represent ‘sensibility’?

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3. Does Austen portray Elinor’s ‘sense’ as superior to Marianne’s ‘sensibility’?

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4. How is Austen most critical of her society?

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5.4 Narrative Techniques

Austen’s style in *Sense and Sensibility* has been highly individual. She admired the simplicity and accuracy of 18th-century writers and imbibed the learning into her narratives. In the novel, Austen has picked up a technique of omniscient narrative popularized by Fielding. Austen uses sarcasm and irony as a means of moral and social satire. While she is ironic in her style, she gives freedom to characters to grow without

directly implying what she would want you to think or feel. While understanding this novel, you will have to sit with it and read the meaning in between the lines, see a character developing and transforming before our eyes. A clear example of this is seen through the development of Mrs. Jennings's character. Her character was introduced as "Mrs. Jennings was a widow, with an ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and she had now, therefore, nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world" (42). Through this introduction, a perception of an irritable, nosy, and extrovert woman was formed which later through the rest of the novel developed into an amiable character.

Turning from parody to satire in *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane developed her most solemn and also her most complex and rigid of plots. To demonstrate her theme of two versions of sensibility (a controlled, positive, and necessary sensibility in Elinor Dashwood contrasting to an extreme, undesirable, and damaging kind of sensibility in Marianne Dashwood), she required two similar plots along with two heroines/protagonists in the novel (Magee 200).

Austen's sentences were simple yet it contains basic contradictions within them that confuse the reader at first and then let them appreciate the marvelous writer Austen was. This irony keeps the reader involve and gradually reveals the profound insights of the theme and character over time. The best example of this could be seen in one of her descriptions of John Dashwood where she wrote: John Dashwood "was not an ill-disposed young man unless to be rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed." The catch here is the word 'unless' that changes the direction suddenly from the first half of rather a positive statement to the biting negative which was much more than a mere statement of disapproval. The exaggeration articulated in the words "dreadful," and "rob" reveals the strategy of Mrs. Dashwood's rhetoric ability as well as its absurdity. The frequent use of "child" in her conversation conveys how extremely effective she is in exploiting John Dashwood's generosity (Johnson 339). Similarly, when we look at her elaboration of Mrs. Ferrars: "She was not a woman of many words; for, unlike people in general, she proportioned them to the number of her ideas". The first impression created was of disappointment that Mrs. Ferrars is an introvert and not thoughtful enough. But the sudden shift in tone is an inference to the author's own train of thought. Mrs. Ferrars, at the end of the sentence, was deduced to be a genius. The essential reflection, following surprise, a sudden shift intones, and overwhelming insight is more persuasive than a straightforward statement. Austen wants readers to reflect, to read sentences as a whole, to get involved, which was so fresh and innovative in her time.

Despite Austen's constant satire, the narration embodies a greater sense of psychological immediacy which provides the novel with far more verisimilitude. The character of Elinor and Colonel Brandon were rarely treated with irony, their emotions, actions, and observations have gravity that surpasses the irony. Even Marianne (Sensibility) when combined with Elinor's (Sense) thoughtfulness is relieved of sarcasm and treated with seriousness towards the end.

Austen has used contrast with line effect throughout the novel. Sense is contrasted with sensibility. Lucy's selfishness and Willoughby's betrayal are contrasted with Elinor's and Colonel's loyalty. Mrs. Jennings' humorous nature is juxtaposed with Mrs. Ferrar's rudeness. Every single page of the book echoes Austen's sense of humor, low temperament, and thoughts regarding the patriarchal framework of society at the time.

She never tried to make any bold attempt, exaggeration, dramatic scene, and sudden plot twist to the point that it has been said 'nothing ever happens in her works. This itself was an achievement – by narrating the ordinary happenings of day-to-day life as interestingly and sometimes as dramatic as any other novel of surprises, drama, and romance. Rather than using exaggeration and startling events, she polishes her characters and events with utmost detail, patience, and care.

Sense and Sensibility is often assumed to be dramatic conduct that favors women's wisdom over their impulsiveness but Claudia Johnson ruled out the claim a long time ago. The dialect of this book is oddly argumentative, as though Austen herself is angry at the mediocrity of her characters or at the wearing triviality of social life.

5.5 Form and other aspects of the novel

The wave of feminist criticism in the 1970s brought Jane Austen closer to several other women writers, especially to Frances Burney. She has written several novels of manners, popularly, *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), and *Camilla* (1796), all representing the adventurous young ladies who pose etiquettes and politeness but lacks generously in the understanding of the world. Burney's novel depicts women entering society to learn to behave in a 'well-bred' manner and to understand differentiating wrong from right. In this entire process of learning from childhood to the deathbed, often in between they find their true love, usually their mentors or model and many a times tormentor. Austen created a subtle way of depicting this issue rather than the didactic and

sensational way of Burney's. She nails herself in this plot by allowing her protagonists to discover, emerge and transform through ordinary events within everyday life. Whereas, Burney exemplifies young women exposed to extreme tests of sexual and social disgrace, madness, and even death, which ultimately leads to their psychological collapse even before they could realize the errors.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Frances Burney, an English satirical novelist and playwright is also known as Fanny Burney. Her work, *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* has set a landmark in the ground of 'novel of manners'.

A well-written novel is as pleasant a couch as a well-refined comedy, from which along with amusement we can achieve instructions as well. *Sense and Sensibility* is one such novel that deserves this fair praise. Written with a backdrop of serene county life, with the characters that are polished with utmost details, natural, and judiciously supported. The incidents are not dramatic but woven together with the sophistication that draws attention even within day-to-day life. The novel avoids boredom and draws enough interest throughout till the end, which is exceptionally written in accordance with the reader's expectations but careful enough to not undervalue the purpose of showcasing the contrast between 'Sense' and 'Sensibility'. The novel reflects the potential of the author who signifies every character with such detail and knowledge and profoundly blends good sense with the overlooked matters of our lives. (Johnson 313).

The novel is based on the foundation that there is a vital relationship between manners, social behavior, and character. It deals with the domestic affairs of an English family living in a county of the 19th Century. Social and moral manner were the predominant factors used in the framework of the novel. Austen gives the most intricate details regarding the trivial activities of everyday life, making ordinary events dramatic. It ignores the elemental human passions and hints at larger social and political determinations. The striking contrast between how different men and women were perceived in the novel, the contrasting setting of the urban landscapes and county life, the emotions felt

differently in two places. The representation of different class-based on wealth and lifestyle also contributes it to become a novel of manners.

True to its title, the novel teaches how both ‘sense’ and ‘sensitivity’ are important to find happiness. Through the characters, Elinor and Marianne, embodiment of sense and sensitivity, Austen highlights the intricacies of human behavior. Elinor is portrayed as a well-behaved and sensible young lady who takes her grief in her stride and manages to keep her emotional turmoil hidden. On the other hand, Marianne after being abandoned by a suitor finds it terribly hard to cope with the pain. It is during this time that Marianne gets time to ponder upon her extremes and rectify it. And finally this is reflected through her confession before Elinor when she admits to inculcate a calmness like her instead of being impulsive especially in the pursuit of marriage.

5.6 Characterization:

All the characters within ‘Sense and Sensibility’ are categorized into two types – either warm-hearted or cold-hearted. For instance, Lady Middleton is ‘cold’ and ‘reserved’ along with Fanny, who is ‘narrow-minded’ and ‘selfish’. These two characters are fond of each other because they share the same ‘cold-hearted selfishness’ nature.

Within *Sense and Sensibility*, almost all the characters are categorized as either cold-hearted or warm-hearted. In this novel, Fanny is ‘narrow-minded and selfish’ and Lady Middleton is ‘reserved’ and ‘cold’ and they are attracted to each other by mutual ‘cold-hearted selfishness’. In the beginning, Willoughby appears to possess sympathy and warmth but later turns out to be a conspicuous and selfish person. He also shares her romantic tastes in music, literature, and art. Though Marianne gets carried away by the virtue of her temperament, Elinor rightly judges Willoughby as ‘cold-hearted and selfish’. Another character described with competitive self-promotion is Lucy Steele. She surpasses Willoughby in cold-hearted, changing lovers for her financial gain and to live lavishly (Morris 37).

Elinor Dashwood is the major innovation of *Sense and Sensibility* and a new kind of character in English fiction. Jane Austen tells us in the very first chapter that Elinor "had an excellent heart; - her disposition was

affectionate, and her feelings were strong, but she knew how to govern them."(10) Jane Austen discovers the liberty and promise that exists between character and expression through Elinor Dashwood. For instance, Elinor enlightens Marianne regarding the uncertain state of her expectations concerning Edward, while explaining, though, in subdued and careful tones, she involves a confession of love towards Marianne.

Edward loves Elinor although he kept avoiding her because of his secret as well as foolish engagement with Lucy Steele. Even after realizing he is not in love with her, the gentleman's courtesy in him does not permit him to part his ways with Lucy. So, even when in love with Elinor, Edward expects to have to marry Lucy. On the contrary, Lucy is a brilliantly portrayed character: An interesting, intelligent charming but heartless young woman who seduced Edward to secure a spot in upper-class society. She shifts her attention, hopes, and love to Edward's younger brother Robert, as soon as Edward is disinherited by his mother (Morgan 189, 200).

Another character in the novel who upholds a fixed version of meaning and value against the principle is Marianne. Marianne trusts her emotions as the guides to truth and goodness, but in the process, she collapses the difference between feeling and expression, henceforth making her expressions impulsive and inevitable. The conventions of romantic sensibility in the novel are affirmed through her character. The formal certainty is attained not due to the fact that she is more passionate than her sister, rather due to her limited imaginations and bravery. Whatever Marianne does through justifying sensibility reflects the quality of her perceptions and the infallibility of individual knowledge. There is nothing wrong with having a passionate heart but, the principles for determining warmth and goodness do not have to involve an expression of feelings, need not consider the form she values, and definitely, it does not have to be visible at all. "That there may be feelings and situations too complicated to be appropriately expressed through the conventions of sensibility is lost on Marianne. The result is that again and again, sometimes comically and more often seriously, she is callous and thoughtlessly cruel" (Morgan 196). For instance, she is the last to notice Colonel Brandon's deep affection for her, confident that a man who wears flannel waistcoats cannot be expected to feel. Marianne has believed her own forms of judgment and behavior to be natural while her sisters as artificial. She thinks she cannot be wrong. On Elinor's laughing at her for the speed of her intimacy with Willoughby, she makes her version of the alternatives quite clear. Marianne is trapped with the rigidity of her sensible expressions, while Elinor acknowledging the fact that social forms are unreal, makes no error in considering them as human nature. Henceforth, she enjoys the freedom to manipulate those social forms and to learn from the mistakes of others

around her. Marianne believes love is a one-time phenomenon, which certainly answers the frequent mention of the motif of second attachments in the novel. However, loving someone more than twice was not something that happened with Marianne's father only, love gave another chance to Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars and gladly to Marianne herself (Morgan 198, 199).

'Sense and sensibility', yet again delivered us a marvelous character who at first, is far from any complications and has nothing to conceal yet who turns out to have amusing characteristics which one doesn't identify in one's first meeting with her. For instance, Mrs. Jennings, who is introduced as "a good-humored, merry, and fat, elderly women, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy and rather vulgar" is a familiar type yet her crudeness transforms into sincerity after she defends Edward's engagement: "I have no notion of people's making such a to-do about money and greatness" and becomes equally vigorous in her impression of Willoughby's engagement: " he has used a young lady of my acquaintance abominably ill, and I wish with all my soul his wife may plague his heart out. And so, I shall say, my dear, you may depend on it. I have it no notion of men's going on in this way: and if ever I meet him again, I will give him such in dressing as he has not had this many a day". And when John Dashwood announces Mrs. Ferrar's intention of settling Edwards's inheritance on Robert, she comments, "that is her revenge. Everybody has a way of their own. But I don't think mine would be, to make one son independent, because another had plagued me" (Morgan 192). Certainly, Mrs. Jennings appears to be vulgar as soon as her character is revealed but as the plot develops, she emerges to be someone who is not particularly intelligent or sensitive but, nonetheless, is a delight to have known. She is a blend of sound principles and a loving heart. Austen had also given this character a superior kind of thoughtfulness as expressed in comically literal terms. This is very likely when she prescribes "a variety of sweetmeats and olives, and a good fire" as the remedy for Marianne's broken heart and offers free room and board for the disinherited Edward. Also, when Elinor feels obliged to acknowledge that Willoughby had not actually proposed to Marianne, Mrs. Jennings clarifies that Willoughby's actions have declared him to be engaged after all he had taken Marianne to Allenham's house and fixed even the room they were to live in thereafter. Mrs. Jennings through her character and opinions guides us that goodness should not be defined as an adherence to form. Austen allows Mrs. Jennings to have a clearer, more literal vision than the other elegant characters like Fanny Dashwood whose manners suggest a thoughtfulness they don't really have. Mrs. Jennings helped the Dashwood family to recover from Marianne's suffering during their dark time in London offering dried cherries and fine old Constantia wine, and in doing so reveals the criticism of the artificiality and the denial of life

around which such grief involves. Getting to know Mrs. Jennings is one of the pleasures of reading *Sense and Sensibility*” (Morgan 193). For we grow to appreciate Mrs. Jennings to a degree which would have initially seemed unlikely. Mrs. Jennings gave us an alternative to Marianne’s rudeness and manners without heart. She gradually transcends her character from selfish rude to a caring one. This change in character along with Elinor’s endless courtesy to support and help others has reflected the values and politeness that Austen appreciates (Morgan 194).

SLQ

1. What are the two literary devices used by Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*?

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2. What is the main theme of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*?

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3. How does Colonel Brandon’s relationship change over the time?

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4. What is the point of view of the narrator in the novel, *Sense and Sensibility*?

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5. How is “secrecy” one of the main themes in Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*?

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5.7 Summing Up:

To sum up, I have discussed some of the important themes in the novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, which was first published in 1811. This unit also serves an elaborate description on the narrative technique employed by Jane Austen (omniscient narrative) followed by the form of the novel (novel of manners) and a characterization. I hope that the objective of this block has been fulfilled in helping you to understand the novel better and to place Austen in the critical canon.

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Unit 6

Charles Dickens : *Hard Times*

Background

Unit Structure :

6.1 Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Biographical Sketch

6.4 Placing the Work

6.5 Summing up

6.6 References and Suggested reading

6.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to help you in

- placing Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* in its proper context.
- familiarizing yourself with the "Dickens World".
- Appreciating the novel's representative significance apart from seeing
- its uniqueness and distinctiveness.
- discovering the more subtle aspects of Dickens' writing.

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6.2 INTRODUCTION

Hard Times was published in book form in 1854 but before the reader could lay hands on it as a single work, it had already been released in serial form. Serial publication was a uniquely Victorian phenomenon and

this mode of publication is now extinct. In the Victorian period there were many literary and cultural magazines such as Dickens' own Household Words and Master Humphrey's Clock. These magazines catered to a varied range of interests of a growing number of literate and curious readers. These magazines or periodicals contained stories, sketches, satirical commentaries on life and other miscellany. Novels also made their appearance in these magazines, normally in the form of "monthly numbers. " Afterwards these numbers would be collected and published in a single volume or in two or three volumes. The nature of serial publication had significant implications. The most important perhaps was the establishment of an intimate bond between writers and readers. In the case of an immensely popular writer such as Dickens, you could actually substitute the word "reader" with the word "audience" as the later term more effectively conveys the sense of a writer engaged in a public ceremony, conscious of the needs, desires and tastes of a large group of people at the same time. As these novels appeared in periodicals, which contained other matters of general social interest, there was a compulsion for a novelist to be "social" as well, to be treating concerns, which everyone shared, in a manner that would be lucid and enjoyable. If a novelist could get the formula right he could be assured of great and immediate popularity. The formula was often simple. In the words of the novelist Wilkie Collins, Dickens' friend and occasional collaborator or co-author, 'make'em laugh, make'em cry make'em wait.' To give one example to clarify this point by making his readers laugh a bit first, and then by introducing pathos and suspense Dickens managed to rouse the intense concern of his readers for the young female protagonist of his novel the old curiosity shop Little Nell to such an extent that the sales figure of his periodical Household Words rose to 100,000 copies! As you perhaps know, today we associate such huge readership figures with popular magazines, and occasionally, with best-selling crime novels. Serious writing does not normally command a

wide readership. But the wonderful thing about victorian novels was that they could deal with serious themes in a serious way and yet be assured of striking popularity. Now *Hard Times* is a more serious work than most of the other works by Dickens, and was consequently not as popular.

SAQ:

1. What are the 'Victorian' elements of Dickens' writing ? (60 words)

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2. How far can we 'ignore' such victorian elements? (50 words)

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The nature of serial publication or a publication of a novel in numbers also had implications for the plot. Most of the Victorian novels are heavily plotted. This is because in order to sustain the interest of the readers, to keep alive their curiosity or eagerness, a writer would often end a particular number in an intriguing way. If a narrative is packed with moments of surprise and suspense, has lots of twists and turns, it's inevitable that 'plot' - an indicate arrangements of incidents (you will learn more about plot' later) - would be emphasized. The challenge of course is to see that 'plot' does not dictate everything.

For all its unusual, un-Dickensian qualities, *Hard Times* is still a recognizably Victorian work, combining as it does, edification and entertainment, and displaying as it does, the writer's skill in crafting a reasonably indicate plot.

SAQ:

1. What are the different factors that influence 'plot' ? (60 words)

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2. what kind of connection can we make between novel-writing and the reading public? (60 words)

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6.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Now for a few words about the life of this man who created all those memorable if occasionally sensationalistic plots, and who by generously exploiting the possibilities of serial publication, established a unique and truly unprecedented rapport with his readers/audience. Charles Dickens: These words are enshrined in the hearts of all Englishmen. It is not easy for us to appreciate the extent to which this writer has become a national institution in England, apart of English folklore, and a figure comparable in popularity and esteem to another literary giant, the dramatist William Shakespeare, and to other eminent non-literary personalities such as Queen Elizabeth, William Churchill and others. I would like to borrow the simple words of critic Stephen Wall to clinch the point "Dickens became a fact of English life very early in his career, and he has remained one ever since" We, in India" have also imbibed Dickens from our childhood. His popular works such as Oliver Twist and David Copperfield somehow find their way into even school syllabuses, albeit in greatly abridged versions or in translated forms. Then there are the

film versions such as the evergreen musical *Oliver!* and others, all testifying to the writer's universal popularity' If you have seen any of these movies, think of the qualities, which might have struck a sympathetic chord with you. The movies would of course highlight qualities or aspects, which every Englishman could identify with, and which would be of a spectacular, eye-catching nature. Nowadays many of Dickens' movies are on offer as television serials as well. This underscores the fact that Dickens had a very visual imagination, and also had a great sense of drama. Certain aspects of Dickens' life are again part of common knowledge and have actually acquired a mythic or folkloric aura. Dickens' childhood has especially come under scrutiny by biographers. The writer himself has also used his childhood to make memorable observations on the joys and difficulties of growing up. Doesn't it seem wonderful to you that a writer who is one of the most important and highly regarded in the world has written so much about children? Charles Dickens was born on 7 February 1812, at Landsport near Portsmouth to John and Elizabeth Dickens. John Dickens, the father, was a clerk in the Navy Pay, Office. The father's job was a reasonably respectable one, and should have assured the family of a life without any great hardships. However, John Dickens was a somewhat imprudent man and thus got into debt-related difficulties. As a result of this, he found himself in the debtors' prison called The Marshalsea in London in 1824. This proved to be a traumatic event for young Charles. Biographical critics have never wearied of harping on this event for its importance in molding Dickens' character and career. Of course, they have been given the invitation or opportunity to do so by Dickens himself, The novelist has incorporated this miserable episode of his life into the narratives of *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*. In the later novel, there is a haunting portrait of the debtors' prison, The Marshalsea- It becomes a symbol of human degradation, misery and parasitism (the main character William Dorrit, perhaps modeled partly on John Dickens,

becomes indolent and dependent on his younger daughter for having a good and comfortable time). David Copperfield, which is even more autobiographical, reflects the event that was a consequence of John Dickens' imprisonment - the young Dickens' stint in a shoe-blackening factory. While his father was released from prison after only three months, the family continued to be poor. As a result, Charles was monetarily deprived of education and the normal joys of childhood and sent to the blacking factory mentioned above. This experience is rendered in artistic form in David Copperfield.

Stop to Consider

Let me tell you a word or two about biographical criticism here. Very often you will see that a great writer will 'sublimate' a painful real experience through the medium of art. That is, they come to terms with that experience by 're-visioning' it through artistic treatment, which would obviously mean re-creation, not just bare repetition. As you can see, Dickens does it in his novels. Another Victorian novelist, Charlotte Bronte, does something similar in her celebrated autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre*. In this novel you can see the depiction of a school called Lowood, a place of suffering and deprivation for young girls. The novelist has obviously drawn on her memories of the school at Cowan Bridge where she received her early education, and whose harsh and severe routine apparently took the lives of her two elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth. Many more such examples can be found in the annals of literary history. While the 're-presentation' of biographical events may not always be as direct and obvious as in the case of Dickens and Bronte, we may be surprised to find the extent to which novelists have fashioned capacious, panoramic and enduring visions of life in novel form based on their own necessarily limited experiences. But there are also dangers of pursuing biographical criticism beyond a certain point. After all, life is not art, and vice versa. Then again, one can get into

difficulties by trying to demarcate life/biography from art novel. Where does life end and art begin? Recent criticism has also exposed many fallacies about art or narrative being simply a reflection or imitation of social life in general and the life of the writer in particular. You can read path-breaking essays such as "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes to appreciate the limitations of an author-centric approach to literature, the most extreme manifestation of which would be biographical criticism.

SAQ:

1. Explore the triad of author, reader and character in relation to some novel that you have read apart from Hard Times . (50 words)

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2. Also explore the distinction between a real author and the entity known as 'implied author'. (100 words)

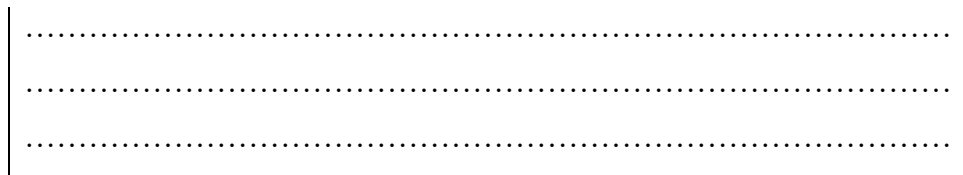
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Anyway, let's go on and see what the noteworthy events of Dickens' life are. While it may be unrewarding to mechanically relate a majority of events in a Dickens novel to real events in his life, there is no harm in being familiar with that life. Such knowledge would obviously make his works seem less alien to a reader.

Fortunately, Dickens did not have to spend a very long time in the factory. He went back to school and afterwards launched his working career through occupations such as being a clerk in a solicitor's office and then a parliamentary and newspaper reporter. He would use these experiences in a creative fashion in many of his novels, ranging from the light and buoyant *Pickwick Papers* to the solemn and disturbing *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. An early exposure to governmental inaction and injustices of various kinds gave a strongly reformist orientation to Dickens' writing from the beginning. The novel under consideration, *Hard Times*, is certainly one that is essentially about injustice, although the nature of proposed reform is open to question. The element of joy and entertainment that is present together with a searching social critique in *Hard Times* and other works is also traceable to facts of Dickens' life. (Once again please note that I am not making out a case for an out-and-out biographical approach to Dickens' works - it's just that it's useful to mine information that is available, and not approach a literary work as an isolated artifact as the New Critics did.) After trying his hand at other forms of journalism, Dickens became a full-time novelist with the publication of *The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club* (1837). With financial success greeting him with each successive work after this, Dickens became free to indulge his passions. This included publishing his own literary and miscellaneous journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and becoming involved with the theatre as writer, actor and director. In 1857 he would stage his best-known play *The Frozen Deep*. Dickens also read his novels aloud to large audiences, an activity which could also be called a theatrical performance.

SAQ:

Consider the difference between reading a novel and having it read aloud. How are descriptive or even reflective passages to be read with 'feeling'? (30 words)



However, involvement with the theatre also seemed to bring unfortunate consequences. Dickens became infatuated with a woman named Ellen Teman, his co-actress in *The Frozen Deep*, and as a result, in 1859 became legally separated from his wife Catherine whom he had married in 1836. However, Dickens would never marry Ellen Teman. There would be other unfortunate events such as the death of his son, Walter, at the age of 22. But these occurrences or events would not stop Dickens' creative flow. He wrote some of his greatest novels in the closing phase of his career, almost in the shadow of these sad episodes of his life.

Dickens also traveled widely. He made two trips to America, which resulted in a work of non-fiction called *American Notes* and a comic novel called *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens also travelled in Europe (the book *Pictures of Italy* came out of that experience) and Scotland. These experiences are memorably described by Dickens' earliest and best-known biographer John Forster in *The Life of Charles Dickens* (Volumes I and II) (1876).

While most of Dickens' novels are city-based or London-centric, there is also a great deal of mobility, with stagecoaches rattling to and fro from the countryside and occasionally a train thundering by. Travel was opening up spaces and horizons in Dickens' world - in this context one remembers the words of a critic such as Ivor Brown: "He [Dickens] lived his early life in a world where distance had meaning." In contrast, Ivor Brown feels, distance has been abolished in modern times. At the risk of making a gross simplification one could say that Dickens and his contemporaries played with space, modern writers play with time. One of the consequences of Dickens' fascination with travel and distance was

that he often posited faith in traveling bands of entertainers apart from occasionally offering exile or travel abroad as solutions for the besetting problems of life. In this context one can mention the roles played by the troop of Crummies in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the waxen works traveling show and the Punch and Judy showmen in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and of course Sleary's Circus in *Hard Times*.

After leading a full life, demanding and rewarding by tum, this great traveler, performer and professional writer died in 1870 at the age of 58.

6.4 PLACING THE WORK

Hard Times is the 10th of Dickens' 14 completed novels (the 15th, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was left incomplete at his death). Therefore you can appreciate that this was a writer who was at the peak of his powers at the moment of composing the novel under consideration, and who would write with the confidence of one who had already struck a rapport with a wide readership through several published works. Novels such as *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield* were already behind him. One could assume that Dickens would be itching to write something new.

Actually, a turning point had already come, perhaps with *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *David Copperfield* (1850). Certainly the critic James Kincaid identifies the latter novel as the crossroad of Dickens' literary career, calling it his farewell to comedy. (this same critic calls the late novel *Little Dorrit* an attack on comedy). Now if this is a turning point or crossroad, what are the implications? What is Dickens leaving behind and what uncharted territory is he trying to enter?

The answer could actually be complex - taking in the new social equations including the changing role of the writer in a rapidly mutating and expanding world - but let me try and simplify it a bit by saying that Dickens became a more solemn and introspective writer after *David*

Copperfield, more aware of the perhaps unchangeable social disparities and iniquities. Now changes are rarely very drastic or dramatic, and it can be argued that David Copperfield's predecessor *Dombey and Son* is more serious than Dickens' famous autobiographical narrative. Nevertheless, the point has been made. I think we can roughly agree with James Kincaid's identification and categorization. After all, look at the novels Dickens writes after *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. Each is a severe indictment of one or more aspects of society; the gaiety and mellow sentimentalism that characterized the early novels has all but vanished; if you want more proof that the late Dickens was a rather different novel-writing phenomenon than the early one, try and read a critical study of Dickens called *Dickens and Kafka* by Mark Spilka. *Kafka* embodies the gray, introverted seriousness of modernism. Spilka's comparative study is based on the late works of Dickens such as *Bleak House*.

If you are at all familiar with the career-graph of William Shakespeare, you will appreciate the fact that a great writer tries hard not to repeat himself. It is common knowledge that Shakespeare begins by writing comedies and ends by writing romances called 'tragi-comedies.' In between he writes problem comedies, history plays, and tragedies.

SAQ:

Try to name some tragedies, some 'romantic comedies', 'history plays', and a problem play by Shakespeare. Recall the dates of these works. (About 50 words.)

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Dickens' career may not be as varied as Shakespeare's, but it's still marked by fairly distinct phases. His first published novel is *Pickwick Papers*, a work that is marked by a strong 18th century literary inheritance. This novel, like another novel in your syllabus, namely *Moll Flanders*, is 'picaresque' in nature. Dickens sheds the somewhat fragmentary picaresque mode after *Pickwick Papers* and writes arguably more unified works such as *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840). Then he tries his hand at a historical novel called *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), a sub-genre he would return to later in his career with *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). This is followed by the hugely comic novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) after which comes the serious turn we have already identified, with *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *David Copperfield* (1850). There is really no going back to the sunny, essentially optimistic mood of early novels such as *Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. *Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864) are all serious, and even brooding, melancholy works.

But they are not rigidly uniform in spirit or form. Of all these novels, *Hard Times* is the shortest. It is indeed a very short novel by Victorian standards, and the compressed length itself is an indication that Dickens was trying out a different kind of novel, with perhaps a slightly different aim in view. While you will be studying two more Victorian novels in this course, not a single one of these three novels is typically Victorian in form. Victorian novels ran to great lengths, often more than 800 or even 900 pages in some editions. They were called 'double-decker novels' by some, and the novelist-critic Henry James termed them 'loose baggy monsters.' What he meant was that they were shapeless in form because of their great length. While recent critics such as Peter Garrett have seen a certain homogeneity and a complexly interwoven unity in some of these sprawling novels by Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray and

Trollope, the feeling does persist that it's difficult to achieve intensity of focus and coherence of purpose in very long Victorian novels.

Perhaps many Victorians, including Dickens, did not even try. If you are used to reading modern novels (whether light or serious) dealing with one thing at a time, you will require a real mental effort (and of course gradual familiarization with Victorian literary culture) to appreciate what the Victorian novelists were trying to do. They wanted to instruct and amuse at the same time. That in itself may not be saying much, because this was also the repeatedly avowed aim of writers in ages as diverse as the Age of Chaucer, the Age of Shakespeare, and the Age of Pope. But the Victorians tried to accommodate their twin ambitions within a grand, extended vision. They packed in large doses of sentimentalism, slapstick comedy, mystery, sensationalism, and melodrama while trying to entertain or amuse. 'Instruction' could consist of simple information (part of the growing realism of the age) on the one hand, but would necessarily also include moralistic commentary through the medium or agency of the third person omniscient narrator. All this should also be seen against a backdrop of a greatly expanded and heterogeneous society whose spokespersons all these Victorian writers tried to be. In Dickens *Bleak House* or *Little Dorrit* and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* there is an attempt to represent the governing attitudes and lifestyles of a great many social classes, some of them newly formed or established, which obviously means a great increase in scope.

Hard Times is different I gave you all the information about the long Victorian novels so that you are in a position to appreciate its uniqueness. The scope of this novel is limited. I suppose you could say that the novel is short because Dickens was not trying to instruct and amuse at the same time. 'Instruct' may be a rather simplistic term to use here, but it's unquestionable that Dickens wanted his novel to be instructive. It's been called a parable, a classification that is quite

revealing. Dickens did not want to dilute his purpose or blur his focus by wanting to amuse or entertain at the same time. Certainly, no Dickens novel can be entirely barren of comicality or amusement, but I can tell you that relatively speaking, *Hard Times* is an austere work.

Check Your Progress

(Attempt answers of about 500 words on these topics.)

1. Show how 'Victorianism' helped to shape Dickens' novels.
2. How did 'serial-publication' affect the novel?
3. What would you understand by 'autobiographical' elements?
4. How far was Dickens concerned with the problems of his time?

6.5 . SUMMING UP

In this unit I have acquainted you with the main events of Dickens' life apart from telling you about phenomena such as 'serial publication' and its implications for the relationship between writer and reader. I also gave you some introductory ideas about *Hard Times* in the expanded context of his corpus, that is, his works as a whole.

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Unit 7

Charles Dickens: Hard Times

Introducing the novel

Unit Structure :

7.1 Objectives

7.2 What Happens in Hard Times?

7.3 The Characters

7.4 Summing up

7.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be given an idea about the main events and characters in the novel Hard Times. Reading the novel for yourself is of paramount importance. You may regard this section as an overview, something in the nature of 'pre-reading', which may also aid re-reading. By the end of this unit you should be able to

- appreciate the text in its totality
- read dickens as a representative writer of his age
- understand the larger issues of his time

7.2. WHAT HAPPENS IN HARD TIMES?

The narrative opens in a classroom, with a stem gentleman lecturing to a bunch of schoolchildren. He says that all education consists of gathering facts at any cost, and that there is no place in it for imagination and fancy. The gentleman's name is Mr. Gradgrind. You will notice that it's a very suggestive name (Dickens is very fond of using somewhat ab□-sounding names for people which reveal their outstanding characteristics). 'Grind' is the process whereby a hard substance is crushed into small grains or particles. Similarly, Gradgrind crushes the spirit of the Children in a metaphorical sense.

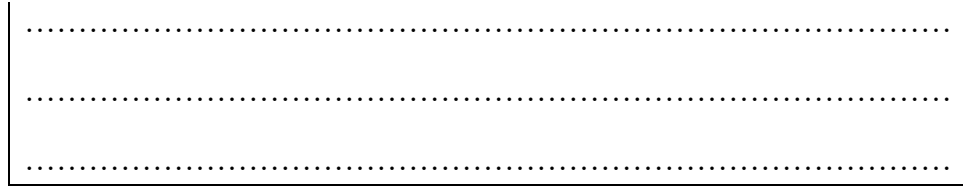
There is another meaning of the word 'grind.' According to the Random House Encyclopedia, the word also means 'to work or study laboriously.' So at worst, the children are crushed by Mr. Gradgrind's brand of education, and at best, they toil slowly and laboriously at their studies.

Gradgrind's ideal pupil is Bitzer, who is able to give an exact scientific definition of a horse (that this definition makes very little sense to us is another matter, and is part of Dickens' satiric vision). At the other extreme is a 'difficult' student such as Sissy Jupe who is unable to define a horse, despite coming from a circus specializing in equestrian feats. Addressing Sissy simply as Girl no. 20, Gradgrind is quite hard on her perceived lack of abilities.

Gradgrind is someone who has consistently pursued the same policy in his home too. His children Louisa and Tom have been taught to lead a very unimaginative life from their infancy -no looking at the stars and moon and wondering about them, no reading of fairy-tales either. Gradgrind's house is also very appropriately called Stone Lodge. There can be no usual childish joy and pleasure in this cold, hard dwelling.

SAQ:

Think of five or six symbolic or suggestive names from your reading of other well-known works of literature and say what the name signifies. To give you an example: There is a character named Allworthy in Fielding's novel Tom Jones, the name epitomizing the man's complete goodness or worthiness. In this exercise, you can alternatively also think of suggestively named houses or places. (50 words)



However, Grandgrind receives a rude jolt when he discovers on his way home from the school that his two 'model' children Tom and Louisa are peeping into the tent of the circus, which has come to their area. Sissy Jupe's father works in this same circus. Mr. Gradgrind has a low opinion of the circus because it stands for an unhealthy, unnecessary free play of the imagination, and also because it is a place for vagabonds. When he chides his children for their misbehavior, it seems that the elder girl Louisa has been particularly affected by their father's harsh methods. She has become a sullen, repressed girl.

After this, another notable character Mr. Bounderby enters the scene. Once again, please note the peculiar, suggestive name. A 'bounder' is an offensive, bad-mannered and dislikable person. This Josiah Bounderby, who is the owner of factories in the town called Coketown, is a good friend of Grandgrind and supports the latter in his mission of giving a dry, joyless education. Bounderby also prides himself on being a self-made man, always going on about how he was abandoned by his mother and then brought up callously and cruelly by a drunkard of a grandmother.

Bounderby also seems to take an excessive interest in Louisa, who seems to be submissive to such displays of interest, but is obviously repelled nevertheless.

Coketown, the imaginary industrial town Dickens creates for his novel, is then described. It seems that life is very monotonous and dreary for the inhabitants of Coketown. Creation of imaginary places is a favorite device for writers. (If you look for examples among other Victorian writers, you will find that Anthony Trollope has created a fictional county called Basset, and that Thomas Hardy has his semi-fictional Wessex.) It does not help matters that the leading pillars of society have a low opinion of the Coketowners.

Gradgrind tries to trace the source of Louisa's waywardness; and he is helped in his search by Bounderby who attributes Louisa's unacceptable

behavior to the presence of the circus-child Sissy Jupe. The two men decide to talk to Sissy Jupe's father. Accompanied by Sissy herself, they go to a public house called the Pegasus' Arms.

They don't find Sissy's father but instead meet circus performers such as E. W.B. Childers, Kidderminster, and the owner Mr. Sleary. They are typically Dickensian minor characters, odd in speech and manners, but genuinely kind-hearted. Their behavior contrasts sharply with that of the hard-hearted Bounderby. A subtle contrast also springs up between Bounderby and Gradgrind, as the latter shows signs of compassion towards Sissy and thus betrays a humanity, which is completely beyond Bounderby. It is discovered that Sissy's father has gone off, no longer able to face the fact that he is becoming a failure as a circus performer, a clown who cannot make people laugh any more. While Mr. Sleary's company is only too willing to look after the orphaned girl, Sissy herself wants to continue her education, and this she can do only by accompanying Mr. Gradgrind to his home. In fact, this is Mr. Gradgrind's condition. He had come seeking Sissy's father with the intention of announcing that she, being a poor pupil (and a source of moral contamination) cannot continue in his school anymore. However, in the altered circumstances, he takes pity on her and makes his offer.

Accordingly Sissy accompanies Mr. Gradgrind to Stone Lodge which now becomes her home, and resumes studying at Gradgrind's school. However, Sissy finds it very hard going. Endowed with both imagination and humane qualities of the heart, she is unable to come to terms with the lifeless utilitarian education that cannot acknowledge the human or emotional side of a problem in its mindless pursuit of statistical facts. Distressed by her shortcomings, she makes a confidante of Louisa. Louisa in turn seems to become somewhat emotionally involved with Sissy, as the latter always waits anxiously for some news of her missing father. As for Mr. Gradgrind, while being obviously disappointed with Sissy's lack of academic progress, he perceives and appreciates the girl's qualities of the heart.

SAQ:

What is the language of descriptions of Sissy? How does it compare with descriptions of Bounderby? (150 words+ 80 words)

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Meanwhile, Mr. Bounderby's designs on Louisa become clear. He proposes to marry her. His housekeeper Mrs. Sparsit perhaps had an intention to marry him herself, but is disappointed in her hopes. However, she strikes a posture of actually pitying her employer for his intention of marrying Louisa. Bounderby's proposal has the full approval of Louisa's father, who has a discussion with his daughter prior to the marriage. Louisa reveals her grievances about her blighted childhood to her father. Mr. Gradgrind has never bothered to see things from Louisa's perspective, to appreciate her feelings. All this Louisa conveys to her father, but Mr. Gradgrind is only very vaguely disturbed by some of the things he hears from his daughter's lips and has no full appreciation of what is wrong with Louisa.

Louisa's brother Tom has also become a factor in the marriage equation. He exerts subtle pressure on his sister to marry Bounderby because he has become an employee in the rich industrialist's bank in Coketown. The increasingly selfish Tom perceives financial advantages in such a tie-up, particularly because he is now somewhat addicted to gambling and needs all the money that his doting sister can give him.

The marriage takes place, accompanied by the usual pompous, boasting speeches by Bounderby about himself. Mrs. Sparsit is moved to Bounderby's bank with a somewhat vague responsibility of overseeing things and is called the Bank Fairy by the sarcastic narrator. Before going on to see what the aftermath or outcome of this marriage is, two other important characters must be introduced.

Once again names are significant. These characters are called Stephen Blackpool and Rachel. You might know that Stephen and Rachel are Christian or biblical names. Stephen was the first Christian martyr according to the New Testament, while Rachel is an Old Testament figure, daughter of Laban and the favorite wife of the patriarch Jacob. In this novel, Stephen and Rachel are hard-working employees in one of the factories owned by Bounderby. There is a strong emotional attachment between the two, and for the suffering Stephen, Rachel

represents spiritual hope and enlightenment. Stephen would marry Rachel, but he is already married to a dissolute, drunken woman. All workers under Bounderby have a hard lot of it, but Stephen's troubles are compounded by his socially unbreakable bond with his wife. Seeking to break this bond, Stephen goes for help and advice to Bounderby, his master. But Bounderby is typically unhelpful, and sends Stephen off with pompous, self-righteous words about the sanctity: of marriage or words to that effect.

Stephen's crisis deepens, as he is isolated from his fellow _workers. A professional trade-union leader and troublemaker named Slackbridge has been inciting the workers to go on the path of agitation, but Stephen would not fall in line. His resistance to the general consensus is due to some promise he has made to Rachel. In any case, he simply seems to be the type who toils quietly, without demanding or protesting: Because of this the malicious Slackbridge turns everyone against Stephen to such an extent that his fellow-workers even stop talking to him. Bounderby. also becomes his scourge. After Stephen repudiates the role of informer that Bounderby offers to him in order to : know what the workers are thinking and doing, the factory owner becomes enraged and dismisses Stephen from service despite knowing that such a mode of dismissal would make it very difficult for Stephen. to gain employment anywhere. Stephen has no other recourse but to leave the place.

As if all this was not enough, Stephen becomes involved in robbery allegations. In the middle of his troubles Louisa had made a trip to Stephen's home accompanied by her brother, to offer the harassed worker some financial help. Unfortunately, that generous gesture of visiting Stephen spells his doom. During this same visit Tom has a separate word with Stephen to the effect that the latter should hang around the bank on a particular night before Stephen leaves. the town. The poor worker does as he is asked to do, and the bank is robbed:

SAQ:

Consult the novel. Which chapters have been covered so far? (50 words)

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Since the robbery is discovered after Stephen leaves town, suspicion falls on him. It's actually Tom who has robbed the bank to pay for his gambling debts, and he had asked Stephen to show himself around the bank so that suspicion would be diverted from him to the worker.

To end the story of Stephen: Rachel and others send for him, so that he can clear his name by coming back to the scene of the crime. However, he seems to delay in coming back, and anxiety grows amongst those who wait for his return. Actually he has fallen into an old and abandoned mine-pit and fatally injured himself. He is discovered by Sissy and Rachel, and is brought out of the pit. However, he dies, looking at Rachel and the starlight above, the two things becoming one in his mind.

Meanwhile, another character has entered the scene, and this is the last important character we will mention. This is a man named James Harthouse, an upper-class 'dandy' and the brother of a Parliamentarian, who has been sent on a somewhat vague mission (the narrator does not specify the exact nature of the work, and perhaps it is not important to the development of the narrative) to Coketown.

A 'dandy' is one kind of a gentlemanly figure. He perhaps harks back to the rake of Restoration. A less obvious ancestor is the Elizabethan courtier, who is a more positive figure and role model. In his book *The Victorian idea of the 'Gentleman'* Robin Gihmour discusses the Victorian fascination with being a gentleman (this actually is the main theme of Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*) and the various types of the gentleman figure. Some such gentleman figures are the self-made man, the true-blue aristocrat, and the muscular Christian gentleman produced in establishments such as Dr. Arnold's Rugby school. The 'dandy' is a more superficial kind of gentleman, obsessed only with sporting the demeanor of a gentleman through dress etc.

His real function in the novel has to do with the role he plays in Bounderby's house. Coming to Bounderby with a letter of introduction from Gradgrind - who has become a parliamentarian as well - he sees Louisa, and is attracted by her strange silence and reserve. Being a cynical, light-hearted man he resolves to conquer her.

Stop to Consider

In the light of what I said earlier about the significance of names in defining character in Dickens, write a few lines on the way the name reflects the character of James Harthouse. Especially be alert to the possibility of authorial irony here.

Being married to an unattractive man old enough to be her father, Louisa seems to fall prey to Harthouse's charms. Also, Harthouse perceives that Louisa's weakness lies in her blind love for her worthless brother Tom. Harthouse makes further inroads into Louisa's heart by apparently taking an interest in Tom's welfare.

Mrs. Sparsit, who continues to be very interested in Bounderby's domestic affairs, observes all this with maliciousness keenness. Being a cunning observer of life, in the first place she probably doubted the place of love and affection in the marriage between Bounderby and Louisa, foresaw troubles, and thus pitied Bounderby. At one point she pursues Louisa to a country house owned by Bounderby .. However, somewhere along the way, Mrs. Sparsit loses her prey. In any case, Louisa holds back from taking the final step that would ruin her in the eyes of society: elope with another man. Instead, after a final meeting with James Harthouse in this country house, she goes straight to her father and lashes him with burning words. After all, it was because of the emotional starvation engendered by his system that she has come to such a pass. She falls unconscious at Gradgrind's feet after her emotional outpouring.

She never goes back to her husband after this. Sissy Jupe enters the scene at this point. Actually, Sissy has been quietly at work all this time. She took great care of the feeble Mrs. Gradgrind before she died. Failing in education, she has become a wonderful success in domesticity. She has been a loving companion to Louis's younger sisters who are therefore brighter and happier children and not as emotionally stunted and deprived as Louisa. Now she takes Louisa into 'emotional custody' as well, promising and hoping to cure Louisa. She also removes one of the causes of Louisa's marital troubles by firmly asking James Harthouse to leave the scene. Impressed by Sissy's quiet authority and sincerity, he has no other option but to comply.

Sissy and the circus-group, much reviled in the beginning by the likes of Gradgrind and Bounderby, take on the roles of redeemers or rescuers towards the end. Mr. Gradgrind is a greatly changed man in the closely moments of the novel. His blind pride in his system has been humbled. Two of his model children have turned out badly, shaming and unsettling him. While Louisa's marriage has failed in the worst possible way, Tom has become a liar and robber, the source of shame to his family and the cause of injury and suffering to an innocent man. Louisa has come home and will probably recover gradually through the healing touch provided by Sissy. It now remains to do something about Tom. Here also Sissy and her group will step in, almost in return for Gradgrind's gesture of taking the orphan Sissy into household.

SAQ:

How much 'psychological motivation' do we find in Dickens's characters? (At least 500 words)

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When Stephen returned and Tom's guilt was discovered, Sissy asked him to escape quietly and take shelter with Mr. Sleary, knowing where he was camping with his circus at this time of the year. Sissy did it the moment Stephen was discovered in the mine pit, knowing that this discovery would immediately result in light being thrown on the identity of the true culprit. The Gradgrind family along with Sissy is now concerned with saving Tom from the hands of the law, as punishment would be harsh for him and devastating for the family. Mr. Sleary rises to the occasion wonderfully. He keeps Tom in disguise, as Mr. Gradgrind and his party discover when they go in quest of him. There is a momentary danger as Bitzer, another of Gradgrind's 'model' pupils, also goes hunting for Tom, hoping to get a reward by bringing him to book. But once again Sleary and the circus come to the rescue. They prevent Bitzer from carrying on the pursuit, and get Tom on board a ship that will take him away from England, far from the reach of the law.

The novelist winds up the narrative by giving the reader a glimpse of what happens to the main characters. Mr. Bounderby, whose hypocrisy has been exposed through the discovery of his gentle and loving mother - which discovery gives the lie to his fiction about being abandoned by the mother and being brutally reared by a wicked grandmother - is further exposed to scorn when Mrs. Sparsit gives him a piece of her mind and leaves for good. It is hinted that Bounderby would die five years from now, but somehow leave a bad legacy behind. Louisa would never marry again, but Sissy's children would love her, and she would try to know her fellow creatures better and help them. Tom is repentant after going abroad, especially about the unworthy and unbecoming way in which he reciprocated his sister's love. At a particular date in the future, he would come back to be reunited with his sister, but would never see her gain, dying alone in a strange hospital. Sissy is perhaps the only to know complete happiness and fulfillment, marrying and becoming the mother of children, as a reward for all the good deeds she has done.

At this stage I will give a list of characters, which may be helpful to you for quick reference. However, at a later stage I shall talk more about characterization, and also its relation to plot.

7.3 THE CHARACTERS

Thomas Gradgrind: The patriarch of a system and a household. Aman who feels that everything in this world can be quantified or measured. Initial descriptions of this character are totally unfavorable. He is described as being bald and square and dry- an inflexible and forbidding figure that fits well into the hard, rigid setting of the school where he makes his first appearance. His gesture of hailing Sissy Jupe as Girl no. 20 also reinforces the initial impressions of dehumanization and dryness. In his obsession with enforcing his utilitarian values Gradgrind neglects the real needs of his children, and to a lesser extent, of his wife who does nothing in the novel apart from feebly echoing the dicta of her husband. A schooling in suffering helps Gradgrind realize his tragic errors, and like another stern Dickensian patriarch, Mr. Dombey in *Dombey and Son*, is emotionally transformed at the end and thus partially redeemed.

Louisa Gradgrind: A complex study in repressed character, a portrayal of inner suffering that was to be increasingly the hallmark of Dickens' later writings. Louisa is a sadly neglected character, not allowed to grow up like other normal children. Her brother Tom faces a similar predicament, but being a boy he can go outside and seek relief (gambling), however degrading that form of seeking relief may be. Louisa is consumed by the fire that rages inside her, a fire that cannot blaze out, given her state of class and gender. No wonder that she is also symbolically associated with fire throughout the novel. The fire in this novel is however destructive as the analogy with the factory fires also demonstrates. (Consult relevant pages in Unit 2 for an analysis of the symbolism of fire in the novel.) Denied love during her childhood, Louisa seems incapable of loving, except to lavish it on her undeserving brother. She has a momentary liaison with the rakish James Harthouse but steps back from the brink of total perdition just in time. Sissy Jupe gradually brings her back to the fold of humanity with her patient ministrations, although in some sense it's almost too late for Louisa.

Sissy Jupe: The novel's moral, symbolic center. A pitiable wretch of an orphan in the beginning, a member of a disdained wandering circus community, Sissy rises in moral stature to become the ultimate redeemer in the novel. Her inability to soak up the knowledge sought to be crammed into her by the utilitarians actually becomes a testament to her human worth. She **m□s** things by their true nature, immediately penetrating the surface of statistical camouflage and discerning the human implications of events. Her ability to empathize with all human beings, seen and unseen, near and remote, helps her in surviving the desertion by her father and in creating a resilience about herself, which becomes her altruistic power.

Tom Gradgrind: He is frequently called the Whelp in the novel, an indication of how low a character he becomes. It's true that once again it's because of the father's close-minded and unfeeling upbringing that he has become what he is, but whatever allowing is made, he still is a most unattractive figure. After all, his and Louisa's failure must be measured against that of Sissy, who also faced a filial crisis but rose above it. There are two acts that Tom is particularly guilty of: his emotional exploitation of his sister that in a way helps precipitate her sickening surrender to the wishes of Bounderby, and his framing of the innocent Stephen for the robbery which he has committed.

He is punished in this very moral tale first through acute fear of detection and consequent self-torment, and then through suffering an early and lonely death, far from his near and dear ones.

Mrs. Gradgrind: She is almost an invisible character in the novel, and certainly a silent one, as she has little say in the way the household is run. A perennially ailing and complaining woman, she makes a relatively early exit in the novel. Her last moments are made bearable only because Sissy is there to tend to her needs.

Josiah Bouldersby: A wonderfully comic creation, although morally a most reprehensible character. Dickens' famed satirical comic powers surge up here with great verve in the presentation of this character. Everything about Bouldersby is humbug and hypocrisy. He has created a myth about a childhood spent in abysmal suffering because of the desertion by the mother and ill treatment by a drunk and wicked grandmother so that his success story of becoming a large and rich manufacturer has a greater shine to it. Despite his boast about his dirt-poor origins, Bouldersby is actually a social snob. He maintains the upper class Mrs. Sparsit simply because she is from a social stratum higher than his and he can show off the fact that someone like her is in his employment. His heartlessness is apparent in his dealings with characters as varied as Sissy, Louisa and Stephen. Bouldersby is a foil to Gradgrind, who is a friend and with whom he has apparent similarities. Bouldersby succeeds in marrying Louisa but his marriage does not last, something that is not surprising at all.

A 'foil' is a character who by contrast helps place an emphasis on the distinctive qualities of another character, generally the main character. Both Horatio and Laertes are in different ways foils to the character of Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet. All three are young men and therefore comparable, but Hamlet's restlessness and tormented nature comes to the fore because of the implicit or explicit contrast with Horatio's serenity and Laertes' decisiveness. Perhaps the most famous example of a foil in world literature is Sancho Panza, whose rustic simplicity blended with native cunning helps to highlight the Olympian Chivalry and utter credulity of Don Quixote.

Kidderminster is nicknamed 'Cupid' after the God of love in Roman mythology and in most representations, is a lovely youth.

Mr. Sleary: Ibis is the owner of Sleary's Circus. He is a character who is one of the best harmonized in this novel of disturbed and maladjusted characters, although his appearance suggests anything but harmony. Aman with one fixed eye and one loose eye, a voice like a pair of broken bellows, and a muddled head which is never sober and never drunk, Sleary is not a very reassuring figure on his first appearance. However, he has his heart in the right place, and this is all that matters. While his speech is difficult to decipher, he communicates the essential values of life effectively enough, with his trademark refrain of 'People must be amused' (amused). After Sissy's father has left in disgrace and despair, Sleary is willing to take the abandoned waif to his bosom. His circus performers comprise a more lovingly knit family than the alienated family members of Gradgrind. When Gradgrind takes in Sissy instead, Sleary is properly grateful and repays Gradgrind by rescuing his son at the end.

E.W.B. Childers and Kidderminster: These are colorful characters in Mr. Sleary's troupe, odd and even grotesque in appearance. The former has dark hair rolled up on the head and short legs and a very broad chest and back. He does a daring vaulting act where he is assisted by the dwarfish Kidderminster, inconceivably nicknamed 'Cupid'.

SAQ:

Are some 'minor' characters merely caricatures? (300 words)

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The physical oddity, however, in no way reflects amoral deformation. Rather, they are again very sound characters in reality and play their parts in ensuring a degree of happiness for the Gradgrind family. The two of them also confront Bounderby in an early scene in the novel and strongly chastise the industrialist for his unfeeling ways.

Stephen Blackpool: You might say that this is the hero of the sub-plot. An earnest, pensive, working-class man, he seems to have got little return from life for all his virtuousness and integrity. Apart from the fact that he works under a ruthless employer such as Bounderby, he knows no conjugal bliss either, being tied to a horribly degenerate wife. Nor does he find solace in the company of his fellow-workers. Since he does not take part in their protesting action, he is boycotted by them. There is no way for him but to be an exile, and finally, to die. His sole comfort is Rachel, although he cannot be united to her in this life. Analogically, he has a kinship with Louisa. Both are victims of the 'system,' society seems to hold out no hope for either of them.

Rachel: The biblically named Rachel is a sweet-tempered and gentle woman; only getting a little angry with Louisa at one point because of her concern for Stephen. She is a ministering angel to Stephen's hag-like drunken wife, and in general a typically Dickensian female angel, selfless and altruistic. She is spirituality incarnate and is a less significant and memorable figure than Sissy whose goodness is less reliant on the perspective of a single character (Stephen) or the comments of the narrator to be convincing, and is more tied to concrete deeds.

Slackbridge: This is a union-leader who does little that is truly functional in the plot except incite the workers to protest and vilify Stephen. In his loudness and trouble-making ways, he is the antithesis of the quiet and selfless Stephen. It seems that Slackbridge is simply a result of Dickens' prejudice against professional trade-union activities and reflects the writer's inability to truly comprehend the complex problems of the emerging proletariat.

James Harthouse: Harthouse seems to come out of nowhere and this is because the setting of *Hard Times* is very confined and the great world beyond, including London, seems remote and vague. While his purpose in coming to Coketown seems a little unclear, his final role is clear enough: it is to tempt Louisa off the path of virtue (note that Stephen also faces a temptation to leave his spouse). He succeeds only partially, however, and is finally ousted from the scene by Sissy. Harthouse has affinities with Dickens' other indolent gentlemanly types such as Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, Richard Carstone in *Bleak House*, Sidney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Eugene Wrayburn in *Our*

Mutual Friend. James Harthouse is a less substantial character than any of these, but Dickens' fascination with such characters is understandable because he sought a compromise between the self-destructive languidness of such people and the dehumanizing toilsome ways of others who make life a joyless, unimaginative grind.

Mrs. Sparsit: In a rather bleak novel, Mrs. Sparsit along with her employer Bounderby provides a few laughs. They are both part of the social comedy of the novel, a legacy of Dickens' earlier optimistic phase of novel writing. Mrs. Sparsit is a pretentious, parasitic and selfish character that watches the human drama around like a vulture, especially in her later role of the 'Bank Fairy.' She is especially mindful of what her rival Louisa does, and almost wills the latter into taking the final step with Harthouse that will complete the young woman's ruin. Disappointed in her hopes of Bounderby, and facing some abuse and mistreatment from the industrialist towards the end, she gets a bit of her own back by calling him a 'noodle' and storming out of his life.

7.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit I have given you a brief introduction to the novel, mentioning the important events and characters in the novel. Not too much happens in this novel, but whatever happens is reasonably well connected together. Similarly there are not too many characters, but they are important and so you should remember all of them.

7.5 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 8

Charles Dickens: *Hard Times*

Themes & Techniques

Unit Structure :

8.1 Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 The Themes of Hard Times

8.4 Plot, Point of view, Narration and Characterization

8.5 Comedy and Vision

8.6 The Symbolic Imagination

8.7 References and Suggested Readings

8.1 OBJECTIVES

This is a particularly important unit because this is where you will learn about what is really there in the novel *Hard Times* and how Dickens conveys or communicates this 'what' to the reader. Be also especially alert to the questions in this section, as by answering them you will get a good grasp of the novel. However, by the end of this unit you will be able to

- understand Dickens's themes and techniques in *Hard Times*
- name the different elements that made up this novel
- Understand the themes of the novel
- Evaluate the narrative and formal technique employed in the novel

8.2 INTRODUCTION

As suggested above, there is a 'what' in the novel, as there is in every novel. This 'what' consists of the various themes and concerns that the

writer has chosen to deal with. Regarding 'choice' of subjects, however, there are qualifications to be made. No theme can be entirely a writer's own. After all, he lives in a particular society at a particular point in time, and he will feel a compulsion to include the themes and concerns relevant for his times. I don't even mean this in a narrow social sense. No great writer passively echoes his contemporary concerns. However, he is conscious of his place in the literary tradition, which is of course nourished by the prevailing social mores. Dickens' predecessors and contemporaries derived certain themes from their observation of society and participation in social processes. Over a period of time these became the stock of available literary themes and motifs.

This does not mean, however, that a writer is denied possibilities for exercising his or her imagination due to an allegiance to the social order and the literary tradition. Just keep in mind that words such as 'originality' and 'imagination' are not to be comprehended or used in a simplistic or obvious sense. A writer could be original and imaginative, but it does not mean that he isolates himself or that he writes about things, which nobody has heard of or thought about. You could say that total originality is only possible for a madman! Actually in the 18th century 'originality' was indeed equated with madness.

While many of the themes are 'given,' the author still has a freedom in choosing the themes and subjects that would suit his purpose or vision.

Stop to Consider

Let me give you an interesting little exercise at this juncture. Following is a catalogue of certain themes. Choose three themes keeping in mind two facts: 1) You are a writer living in a complex, modern age, and 2) The themes you have chosen can be properly blended and can be dealt with in the same narrative.

The Catalogue: terrorism, commercialism, patriotism, sports, travel, racism, anger, hatred, generosity.

Some of the above themes are arguably universal, applicable or relevant at all times. Patriotism, anger, hatred and generosity would fall into that category. Some of the others, such as terrorism and commercialism are

more specific to the modern age. It can also be argued that 'terrorism' and 'commercialism' are broad, overarching subjects, while 'anger' and 'hatred' are themes proper, and it is some kind of combined chemistry between the two that propels the narrative. Then again, there are problematic terms such as 'patriotism.' It can be argued from one perspective that this is an eternal concept that anyone at any time can identify and identify with. However, you might know that in our times 'patriotism' has become a construct, almost a commodity, created by the powers-that-be for their own interests such as winning elections or selling products emblemizing and exhibiting national pride. With some of these things in mind, write a small narrative with the potential to be expanded into a full-length novel. I am sure you will be challenged by some of the above difficulties and will also appreciate the nuances of novel writing.

Anyway, the point is that writers will choose a theme or a combination of themes to write a novel. You could say that the real test of originality or distinctiveness lies in the methods a writer employs to bring alive the themes, expanding their meaning and implications, and presenting them coherently in one unified 'package,' that is, the narrative. These methods are the techniques of the writer.

8.3 The Themes of *Hard Times*

The Russian Formalist critic Boris Tomashevsky says that "To be coherent, a verbal structure must have a unifying theme." In his essay entitled "Thematics," Tomashevsky also explores the relationship between theme and story and plot. While in the above citation verbal structure signifies literary works such as a novel, short story or poem, for the sake of convenience let us also talk about the structure of a structure such as the novel. The novel may have many themes or ingredients (the 'what' referred to in the beginning of this unit), but without a plot this 'what' will remain vague or puzzling for the reader and will hardly convey any meaning. It's the plot or plotted quality of a novel that ensures the firmness and lucidity of its structure. Modern writers have challenged the necessity of plot, but that belongs to another line of inquiry pertinent to a different kind of novel.

We will talk about structure in this sense (plots and stories) later. Let's go back to the issues I touched upon at the beginning of this section - themes. To quote Tomashevsky again: "The work as a whole has a theme, and the individual parts also have themes." Let us now look at *Hard Times* in the light of this remark. That is, let us look at some of the individual themes.

From your study of Unit 2 you can actually form an idea of the themes chosen by Dickens. What are some of these themes? Education, for one. Childhood, for another. When you read the novel, you will be greeted by these themes in the very first few pages of the novel. Actually, Dickens has combined these themes in the novel. They are mutually dependent or yoked together as is quite natural - after all in most cases it's children who are educated.

Dickens was very concerned with these two interconnected themes throughout his career. To be a good individual, it's important to have grown up as a happy child. Such a happy childhood also entails receiving an education, which, instead of fettering the imagination, sets it free. Unfortunately, in Victorian England, children seldom receive such healthy and emancipated education. Elsewhere in his career Dickens has vividly portrayed the physical brutalities and atrocities inflicted on children. Here, he deals with the mental aspect, exploring the way Utilitarian education constraints children from attaining their true potential.

Utilitarianism in England is primarily associated with the thoughts and postulates of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73) according to whom virtue is a matter of utility, and a good action is that which brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Goodness and even morality then become synonymous with usefulness, and the goodness of institutions is judged by the yardstick of utility or usefulness. Another aspect of utilitarianism, as propounded by Jeremy Bentham, is that the interest of the smaller numbers is sacrificed in the interest of the majority. People thus cease to be individuals and become mere numbers and statistics. Sissy Jupe is thus called Girl No. 20 by Gradgrind in class. The students in turn are also taught to regard people and their experiences in terms of numerical proportions.

Let's stop here for a moment. "Education of Children" is arguably the theme. However, there are many other minor or subsidiary themes in the novel. Some of these themes are: industrial unrest, ambition, sexual growth and repression, spiritual solace, philanthropy, parasitism and hypocrisy. We have to now look at these themes before going back to the theme "Education of Children"

Let's look at the theme of industrial unrest' first. The Industrial Revolution really gathered pace in the 19th century and irrevocably transformed the face of England. People's lives changed for the better in many respects due to The Industrial Revolution, but there were 'downsides' or negative developments as well. Many people were uprooted from their homes and became wanderers. (You will come across this phenomenon at the beginning of The Mayor of Casterbridge.) Then there was the exploitation of factory-workers by the owners. Throughout the early part of the 19th century there were agitations and strikes by workers demanding higher wages and better living conditions. While things had stabilized to an extent in the 1850's, the times were not entirely quiet. In fact, Hard Times was written in the backdrop of strikes by workers at Preston, Lancashire, which Dickens saw for himself in 1854.

SAQ:

1. How do we identify a 'theme' in a work? (100 words)
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.....
2. How do we evaluate the importance of setting in a novel? (100 words)
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3. What happened during the Industrial Revolution? (300 words)
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Bounderby is an industrialist and a banker. While he himself was poor to begin with, he has no sympathy for the poor. His attitude towards workers and children is equally harsh. While he encourages his friend Gradgrind not to show any leniency towards school children such as Sissy Jupe, he follows the same practice towards his own workers. He is always suspecting his workers of harboring a secret desire of wanting to be fed on 'turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon,' which is his way of saying that they expect more than they deserve. While keeping them eternally poor, he himself leads a very luxurious lifestyle. Such a discrepancy is very symptomatic or representative of troubled owner-worker relationships in the period just before and during the times in which *Hard Times* was written.

The attitude of the workers to such severity and unkindness varies. The path of violent and acrimonious confrontation is represented by the professional trade-union leader Slackbridge. With high-flown rhetoric he virtually goads the workers to go on the warpath. However, it seems that Slackbridge is just a troublemaker. Through the use of suggestive language the narrator clearly shows that he does not have the best interests of the factory-workers at heart. These are the words with which he is described:

He was not so honest, not so manly, he was not good-humored; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. An ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression, he contrasted most unfavorably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes. (Book the Second, Chapter 4)

A man much lower in most respects to the men he is supposed to guide is not likely to do much good. Dickens seems to giving the workers ground for legitimate protest through the depiction of the industrialist as a hard-hearted tyrant, and yet at the same time seems to be suggesting that the path of agitation will get them nowhere. At the opposite pole to Slackbridge is the idealized figure of Stephen, who believes in simply doing his job quietly and not taking a confrontationist attitude.

Victorian novels very often encompass a very long span of time during which people are born, get married, die, and in between also grow or develop in different ways. Even a short novel such as *Hard Times* is no exception. The question of growth or development is hinted at through the very choice of the titles of the three Books in the novel: Sowing,

Reaping and Garnering. While these terms are biblical in inspiration and therefore carry moral and spiritual overtones, Dickens also seems to have more mundane, and even psychological aspects of growth in mind. The novel is greatly, if obliquely concerned with the growing womanhood of Louisa. Actually you will notice that Louisa is presented somewhat ambiguously, the ambiguity the result of the notorious Victorian reticence regarding sexual matters. She appears as a child in the beginning but is kissed by Bounderby who clearly has designs on her. The theme of repression or stifled growth is quite marked in her case, right from the beginning: 'there was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction other face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn ... 1 (Book One, Chapter III,). Throughout the novel we associate Louisa with fire. However, as suggested by the words above, this fire is internal, perhaps the self-destructive fire of one whose normal growth to a state of maturity is impeded by stem and restrictive parenting.

A theme allied with 'growth' is 'ambition.' Much of Victorian fiction concerns itself with men (and in rare cases women) striving to attain material goals of various kinds due to the vertical mobility rendered possible by the consequences of the Industrial Revolution 'Ambition' provides the essential dynamics of many Victorian novels. However, ambition can also be misdirected or ill conceived. Characters such as Bitzer represent false or dangerous ambition in the novel. Trained to promote his personal wellbeing at any cost by the apostle of Utilitarianism, Mr. Gradgrind, Bitzer turns against his own mentor in a late moment of the novel. Bitzer is a stark reminder that ambition can get out of control and engulf society lethally.

Stop to Consider

Identify the characters who seem to embody ambition in various guises and the characters who seem without any ambition. Do you think you can begin to define Dickens' value-scheme by making such a classification or division? Does it seem that Dickens' sympathies lie with the characters who have no ambition?

Dickens being a very social novelist, it's not surprising that he would explore various ways in which human beings are bound to one another or interact with one another. An extremely baneful or negative kind of relationship is parasitism. In a biological sense, a parasite is a creature or organism that physically lives off another creature or organism. Extended to the social sphere, parasitism means not doing any work, and exploiting others. Mrs. Sparsit, a woman with upper-class pretensions, exploits her employer Boundrby's social snobbery and vanity and thus leads a good life in his household without doing anything. Louisa's brother Tom is another parasite.

Like Mrs. Sparsit, he is also nominally employed (once again by none other than Boundrby) but seems to do precious little to justify his employment. He exploits his sisters generosity and love to the hilt, and takes money from her both before and after her marriage to pay for his gambling. James Harthouse is also a kind of social parasite. While his role and occupation are not precisely defined, he represents a recognizable and recurrent type: the upper-class man who disdains to do honest work for a living or is quickly bored with any form of occupation.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the 'plot' of the novel help to bring out its 'theme'?
2. Explore Dickens' attitude towards Utilitarianism.
3. Compare Slacksbridge with Stephen Blackpool.
4. What is the picture of the Industrial Revolution drawn by Dickens?

Then there is the haunting theme of spiritual solace or salvation involving Stephen and Rachel. Stephen is an earnest and virtuous worker, but he faces a genuine trial of the spirit. Tied to a drunk, dissolute woman for a wife, Stephen would try to find bliss with Rachel, the woman he really loves. However, he finds it difficult to dissolve his marriage, and it seems that he wishes the death of his wife. It's Rachel who saves him from this sin. There is always a halo around Rachel, and for Stephen, she represents spiritual grace and redemption: 'As the

shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachel, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life.'

There are also other themes such as hypocrisy and altruism, with Botnlderby embodying the former and Sissy Jupe the latter. I suggest that you make the reading experience more meaningful for yourself by unearthing more themes and connecting those themes to one another and to the concrete happenings and event in the novel.

Now to talk about the guiding theme of the novel. Is it utilitarianism? While some may call it a theme, indeed the theme of the novel, I am calling it the subject because it's a real, historical concept, which lends itself to various themes in the novel. However, the seamless and artful manner in which it is projected into the narrative is undeniable. For example in a particular discussion with Louisa, Sissy Jupe reveals the heartless aspect of Utilitarianism. She says that when she was asked about the percentage of people who died when 'only' 500 people out of 100,000 died by fire or drowning, she said 'nothing,' because this percentage was nothing or meaningless to 'the relatives and friends of the people who were killed.' (i, ix). Hers is the humanist position, concerned with the preciousness of each individual life set against the lifeless, statistical stance of the Utilitarian who cares nothing about individual suffering in his obsession with calculations and measurements.

You can see that the concept of Utilitarianism has been applied in the field of education and industrial relations. The implications of this rather mechanical philosophy or concept has been more fully explored in the educational than in the field of industrial relations which perhaps reinforces the view that it is education which is the most important theme of the novel. The novel begins with the scenario of a hard, arid institutional education being imparted to a group of children (mere numbers for the educator Mr. Gradgrind) and ends with another kind of education: the wisdom of the human heart. The positions are ironically reversed. The educator becomes the educated. Through harsh experience and suffering Mr. Gradgrind learns that the pursuit of happiness at the cost of other members of the community, a single-minded focus on numbers rather than on the peculiar needs and abilities of each individual, the sacrifice of the heart at the expense of the development of the mind together make for a very unsound and destructive education. He sowed the seeds of his own failure and defeat by trying to turn even his own children into 'model' pupils through the application of a

mechanical philosophy, and he reaps a bitter harvest at the end when the ruined figure of Louisa returns to him to accuse him for the devastation he has caused in her life.

However, to identify a theme such as 'The Education of Children' is not to establish the supremacy of such a theme over all other themes once and for all. While you will have to address some of the above thematic issues, you may identify some other theme as the dominant or major one. Even if you find yourself talking about some of the same things regarding education that I have said just now, you may give another name to your theme.

Another thing to notice is that the themes I have identified are not isolated and separate. I have already mentioned that the theme of ambition is related to the theme of 'growth'. In some senses, 'parasitism' is also related to 'ambition' - it is the dark obverse of ambition. While over-active characters such as Bitzer incarnate ambition at its extreme, good-for-nothing fellows such as Tom hanker for the good things of life but would not work, and can be designated as parasites. It's also notable that Tom's model is the lethargic James Harthouse.

A great novelist will choose themes relevant to his vision - some will be partly chosen for him or her by the age, e.g. 'growth' and 'ambition.' But what is important is how he combines these themes to produce a totality, a coherent structure. 'Thematics' is a useful word to hint at this process of combination of various themes. However, we also need to look at the technical aspects of narrative such as 'plot' and its relation to 'story,' manipulation of point of view, and symbolism and imagery to appreciate how the themes and motifs are connected in the novel.

However, you should also identify some themes for yourself and see how they are connected.

Stop to Consider

There are some themes on the left and some on the right See how you can blend a theme from the left hand column with one from the right hand column and then bring it to life by using textual evidence extensively.

Left Column

Right Column

Spirituality	Parenthood
Avarice	Factory Life
Generosity	Life of the Rich
Isolation	Circus Life

8.4 Plot, Point of view, Narration and Characterization

In this section we will talk about Dickens' handling of plot and other related matters such as point of view, narration, and the relation between plot and character.

First of all, what is 'plot' and how is it different from 'story'? Let's start with the well-known distinction provided by the great 20th century novelist E. M. Forster in his little critical book *Aspects of the Novel*. While story is 'a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence,' a plot 'is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.' The elementary but telling example given by Forster is the following: Story: The king died and then the queen died; Plot: The king died and then the queen died of grief. In plot, causation (here 'grief') overshadows the time sequence or chronology (here 'then', elsewhere 'afterwards,' 'after that' etc.).

Russian Formalist critics such as the one mentioned earlier, Boris Tomashevsky, have coined the terms *fabula* and *sjuzet* to make the distinction between story and plot. I mention this to underline the importance of understanding one against the other. In some ways the two are complementary, but in another sense they are also antithetical. As Tomashevsky himself points out, "The weaker the causal connection, the stronger the purely chronological connection."

SAQ:

1. What does the causal element do to a story-line ? (80 words)

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2. How do we find out the 'chronology' in a story? (100 words)

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3. What are the elements of any story? (100 words)

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As for yourself, try to think of things that 'really' happened to appreciate the STORY (and in reality, things always do occur chronologically, one after another), and to appreciate PLOT, observe the way the events are presented to you.

The well-known narratologist Robert Scholes calls plot the dynamic, sequential element of narrative. What this implies is that narrative is not a simple or mechanical business of one event precipitating another event, which in turn invariably causes another event. Causality may be a striking feature of plot, but it is simplistic or mechanical only in the most elementary kind of narrative such as a fairy-tale. Some authors are of course heavily reliant on this plot-principle to set in motion their narratives. Thomas Hardy is one such author, and while studying *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, you can identify the chain of events starting from the sale of Susan Henchard by Michael Henchard to the death of the latter. Hardy is by no means a simple-minded author, and if at times the causality or causation process in his novels seems too inevitable, remember that this reflects his deterministic philosophy of life one aspect of which is that human beings contribute to their own downfall by setting off a train of events over which subsequently they have no control.

The causality aspect identified by E.M. Forster can be played around with. In another novel of this course, *Wuthering Heights*, you will notice that there has been a reversal - you first see the effect (Heathcliff's

ownership of Wuthering heights and his mastery over everyone there), which whets your appetite for finding out the cause (arguably, Hindley's ill-treatment of Heathcliff, although other causes can be found). This is also what I meant by saying that plot is the way events are presented to the reader. In the very beginning Emily Bronte chooses to present a scenario that actually belongs to a rather late moment in the story.

Wuthering Heights is a daring and experimental novel that heralds modernist experimenting in narrative resulting in a disappearance of the 'plot.' Perhaps she was unusually alive to the mystery and complexity of human life which cannot be neatly encompassed within an Aristotelian plotting framework with its markers of a dear chronological beginning, middle, and end. Hardy and Dickens offer more traditional plots. To turn our attention now to Dickens, you can safely say that he follows chronology - this is a writer who begins at the beginning and ends at the ending. The beginning in *Hard Times* is the childhood of characters such as Tom, Louisa and Sissy, and the end comprises of the marriage of Sissy and the death of Tom. The middle has moments such as Sissy's struggles, Tom's degradation, and Louisa's marital woes.

This is of course not all there is to *Hard Times*. It has been justly praised for its artistry, and the artistry consists of the fabrication of a compact and coherent plot with few if any superfluous incidents to deflect the reader's attention. But before going on to analyze the plot of *Hard Times* a few more general and introductory remarks will be in order.

I said that there is a 'what' in a novel and also a 'how.' In terms of our discussion in this section you might say that the 'story' with all its events is the 'what,' and the plot is the 'how' and even the 'why.' How has the story been presented? Has the writer begun at the beginning or plunged us into the middle of the action? Is there some exposition or is the beginning abrupt, even though chronological ordering has been followed? Are there simply impressionistic vignettes or broad snapshots of society or are there deep-delving probes into the minds of the characters?

Stop to Consider

Impressionistic vignettes: Deriving from Impressionism, an art movement beginning in the 1870's characterized chiefly by

concentration on the general impression produced by a scene or object and by the use of unmixed primary colors and small strokes to produce the illusion or impression of actual reflected light, impressionistic vignettes are short, graceful sketches which convey general impressions rather than objective reality.

You might find it fruitful and interesting to try and isolate the combination of different kinds of writing in a novel: character-description, scene-description, dialogues, pure narration, etc.

Why do the characters act the way that they do? You will of course try to answer these questions in relation to *Hard Times*.

However, you can also see 'plot' as a synthesis, a totality, and not merely a progressive, action-oriented arrangement. 'Synthesis' is the word that the Aristotelian critic R.S. Crane uses while talking about plot: '(plot is) the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thought that constitute the matter of his intention.' He then says that there can therefore be plots of action, of character, and of thought.

By borrowing his concepts and vocabulary we can also say that it is possible to have a plot of action, character and thought. That is, in a complex narrative, these three elements may be blended or synthesized to present a deep study of certain aspects of human existence in a comprehensive and artistic way. For Aristotle, plot is all-important, and predominates over characterization. A modern Aristotelian such as Boris Tomashevsky talks in the same vein when he says that 'The protagonist is by no means an essential part of the story. The story, as a system of motifs, may dispense entirely with him and his characteristics.'

Tomashevsky gives a lot of importance to what he calls 'motifs' which are basic to the formation of a plot. A motif is 'the irreducible: smallest particle of thematic material.' The examples he gives are: 'evening conies/ 'Raskolnikov kills the woman,' 'the hero dies,' and 'the letter is received.' Some motifs recur in literature, migrating from tale to tale, and form the basis of comparative studies. In relation to the consideration of the function of the hero, Tomashevsky says that he is the means of stringing motifs together.

By downplaying character and giving primacy to action, we will not be able to account for the success of a novel such as *Hard Times*, however. In fact, a really important exercise for you is to detect the main actions or events of *Hard Times*. While I leave you to identify such events, I should tell you that in contrast to other novels such as *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, or even Dickens' own *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*, the action in *Hard Times* is not plentiful. The other two elements identified by Crane, namely character and thought, have definitely to be taken into account while reading *Hard Times*.

By now you will have appreciated that plot is not a mere progression of events, nor simply a concatenation of such events. Plot in the deeper sense eschews mere linearity or straightforward progression. It comprises of the variety of incidents, and the right blend of surprise and suspense, the creation of tension in the minds of the reader, and aesthetically satisfying resolution. While plot is clearly to be demarcated from description (e.g. travelogues) where the focus is on the spatial rather on the sequential, plot can include meaningful description.

Victorian novelists reveled in packing their narratives with a variety of incidents, and in confronting the reader with a high degree of suspense and surprise. What are the circumstances of *Oliver Twist's* birth (*Oliver Twist*)? Why is Madame Defarge so vindictive (*A Tale of Two Cities*)? Who is Pip's benefactor? (*Great Expectations*) What is the identity of the solitary woman who appears almost out of nowhere in the beginning of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*? And in *Hard Times*, who is the mysterious old woman who hovers near Bounderby's residence? Due to the way the novelists crowded their narratives, the novels are called heavily plotted. Many novels are multi plot novels, that is, they have several plots or perhaps subplots connected to and commenting on the main plot. The challenge for them was to see that no incidents were left hanging or unaccounted for, and that character was somehow not isolated from plot. They did not always succeed in meeting the challenge successfully. People have quarreled with the unwieldy plot of *Henry Esmond* by William Thackeray, *Romola* by George Eliot, and some of the long, early novels of Dickens.

SAQ:

1. Why is the plot so important ? (50 words)

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2. Which parts of a novel help it to move a heap with the story? (80 words)

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3. What are the names of other famous novelists? (30 words)

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In a shorter novel such as *Hard Times*, the dangers mentioned above are not as great. It's less difficult to keep track of events or the destinies of characters. However, sometimes in a more compact or tightly constructed novel, plot can give the impression of being mechanical. True artisticly consists of conveying lifelikeness or vitality even while exercising economy or restraint. Decide for yourself whether the plot of *Hard Times* is too contrived and merely admirable in a mechanical sense, or whether the subtlety of the novel actually makes you unaware of the plot-process.

While by talking about plot it is implied that the focus is exclusively on the work itself and the way it is structured through a certain interrelationship between the various elements of narrative, I should tell you that 'plot' is sometimes used in a more global or broader sense. Critics such as Peter Brooks, borrowing Freudian terminology, talks about 'masterplot.' and more relevantly for us, about 'official' plots of education and progress. Another critic, Gillian Beer, invokes the term 'Darwin's plots' to describe Victorian evolutionary narratives. Plot in this

sense demonstrates a correspondence between the impersonal structuring process inherent in a specific narrative, and social issues and concerns beyond it. At a larger, macro-level, plot can stand for an entire world-view or philosophy. Thus the intricate perfection of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* is supposed to correspond to God's perfect design, His creation of the world. That was Fielding's aim anyway, and he certainly succeeded in creating a kind of perfect plot that could claim to be 'divine' in its achievement despite all the realistic and secular concerns that

the novel cradles. At a slightly more immediate level, certain plots are peculiar to an age, and are available to the writer for selection and treatment (as are themes - remember what I said about themes being partly chosen for the writer by an age in which he lives?)

Some of the plots current in Dickens' age were the sensation/mystery plot, the evolutionary plot or and the plot of education and advancement. Dickens very often incorporates all these plots in the same novel. *Hard Times* is no exception. It deals with the progress of children such as Tom, Louisa and Sissy. The plot is about the impediments they encounter, as also about the gradual revelations of their fates. It also has to do with the creation of anxiety, tension, expectation etc.

How coherent is the plot of *Hard Times*? As already indicated, this is a tight, compact work. It's neatly divided into three Books, the first two of which are almost equal in length. The main themes are kept in view almost all the time, so that there is little danger of the plot going astray. By this I don't mean that you can exactly foresee what is going to happen at the end. (Regarding this see the discussion over the elements of 'surprise' and 'suspense', which follows a little after this) However, expectations roused at the beginning are fulfilled in the end. The lifeless education proudly and assertively imparted by Gradgrind can come to no good, we feel, and we are vindicated in our suspicions and apprehensions when we see his system (and his family!) in a shambles at the end of the novel. The Book headings also give us a fair idea of the direction or trajectory of the narrative: Sowing, Reaping, and Garnering. In other words the plot elaborates the biblical dictum or adage that as you sow, so shall you reap (and garner).

Causality, which I have identified as a basic plot-principle, obviously operates powerfully in the novel in keeping with its spirit of displaying the unhappy consequences of human pride, arrogance, insensitivity or

greed and irresponsibility. Gradgrind's neglect of the inner or emotional needs of his children lead to the warping of their characters. Both become repressed and secretive characters. Tom's way out is to go elsewhere, so to speak, while Louisa turns self-destructively inward. While Tom gambles in secret, away from the eyes of his family, Louisa simply broods alone, keeping her true feelings smoldering but hidden. This then leads to the hopeless financial entanglement of Tom, and the poignant conjugal calamity of Louisa.

SAQ:

1. When is a work described as having a 'tight' structure ? (80 words)

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2. How does a writer bring in 'realistic' details even while there is a 'plot' which is maintained ? (80 words)

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3. Why does a writer 'divide' a work into 'Books' and 'chapters' ?(50 words)

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There is an important sub-plot in the novel, and this involves the story of the suffering worker Stephen Blackpool. Sub-plots, or mini, subsidiary plots and a plenitude of minor narrative strands w□ the staple of Victorian fiction. These enhanced color and variety, and almost in the

tradition of Shakespearian drama, reinforced the lessons and insights of the main plot. The sub-plot of Stephen is arguably less dynamic than the main plot. While it spans Stephen's life from the moment when he tries to free himself from his miserable and meaningless marriage to his death, nothing much really happens in his story. He is a doomed character from the beginning, and there is rarely a glimpse or hint from the narrator that his story will turn out all right after all. That is to say, there are no turns in the narrative, no reversal or twist that drastically seem to change things for him. It proceeds in an exorable, deterministic fashion. It is no surprise when he is martyred to another man's folly and perfidy, true to his name. This part of the novel is full of reveries and bouts of contemplation. Dickens however takes the trouble to see that Stephen's plot is not isolated from the main plot. In fact, throughout the entire narrative Dickens tries to relate everything to everything else. As far as Stephen's plot is concerned, it is crossed by the plot involving the Gradgrind children. When Louisa visits Stephen at the moment of the latter's great distress after the dismissal from service by Bounderby, with the intention of giving him financial help, her brother also accompanies her with a very different motive. We might say that the plot thickens at this juncture, as one narrative line joins another narrative line. As stated in an earlier Unit, and as you see from your own reading of the novel, Tom gains a pledge from Stephen to be seen near the bank prior to the robbery. Stephen obliges, and after the robbery, suspicion falls on him. When he comes back summoned by Rachel to clear his name, he falls into the old mine-pit and dies. Tom's plot of degradation thus becomes entwined with Stephen's plot of martyrdom. Dickens arranges things in such a way that the same set of events extracts maximum sympathy for Stephen while showing Tom at his worst and thus bringing down opprobrium on his head.

There is a more subtle connection between the plots of Stephen and Louisa. Both are unhappy and neglected 'children.' Stephen is the hapless victim of the callous tyranny and unsympathetic attitude of his master, the malevolent father figure of Bounderby (employer-employee relations are often seen in parent-child terms or with the use of filial metaphors) while Louisa is martyr to the insensitive and dogmatic policies of her father Gradgrind. These two patriarchs, one head of a real family and the other head of a metaphorical family, wreak destruction in the lives of those under their protection. The plots of Stephen and Louisa are thus connected through what we might call analogical correspondence, and remind us of R.S. Crane's formulation of the plot of

thought At the same time, in the interests of unity and homogeneity it is important that the plot lines of these two major characters should physically converge, that they should have at least one real encounter. To simply hint at an emotional parallel between two major characters is not really Dickens' purpose, as this would make things too abstract.

Stop to Consider

Do you think that Mr. Bounderby's life with Mrs. Sparsit comprises another sub-plot? Assuming that it does, identify the main features of this plot, and show how Dickens connects it to the main plot.

These days we talk much about open endedness, positing it as a virtue for novels striving for complexity. In such novels the author offers the reader the liberty of choice and a variety of options at the end. Open endedness is a striking feature of modern and postmodern novels. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* John Fowles plays with and perhaps parodies alternative possibilities of ending a novel. However, this aspect is not totally unknown in earlier, more traditional novels either. Once again, *Wuthering Heights* is a prime example. The reader oscillates at the end between Lockwood's and Nelly Dean's interpretations regarding whether Heathcliff and Catherine quietly slumber or roam the landscape like restless spirits. As for *Hard Times*, there is just a touch of ambiguity about the final fate of Bounderby ('Did he see any faint reflection of his own image making a vain-glorious will, whereby five-and- twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age, each taking upon himself the name, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, should for ever dine in Bounderby Hall, for ever lodge in Bounderby buildings ... '), but otherwise this is a novel which is quite emphatically closed or rounded off. Dickens ... here is quite faithful to the Victorian practice of accounting for each prominent character. Closure is also summy, you might say, and nothing more remains to be done or said.

Before going on to other aspects of *Hard Times*, just a few words about 'suspense' and 'surprise' will be in order as we have been talking about plot progression and readerly involvement and expectations.

'Suspense' and 'Surprise'

These two are often key elements of traditional plots, and are given adequate importance by narratologists. By talking about the emphatic closure of narrative, I am perhaps emphasizing the inevitability that seems to be structured into traditional novels. This inevitability whereby things progress causally from a suggestive or promising beginning to its destined end is undoubtedly a feature of Dickens' plot. But he also juggles with suspense and surprise to enliven things, to introduce a necessary element of uncertainty or undecidability. The two concepts may seem antithetical, but are actually closely related or mutually interdependent. Suspense is a state of non-knowledge, while surprise, as a form of revelation, is knowledge. The state of non-knowledge will ultimately lead to some knowledge. However, the process cannot be totally predicted. In fact, the chain of events may lead off in quite different directions from what is anticipated or foreshadowed. Perhaps David Lodge puts his fingers on the crux of the matter with this observation: 'But the twists must be convincing as well as unexpected.' While many narratives do not keep the reader guessing about possible outcomes, the mystery novel or the detective novel relies heavily on what the critic Seymour Chatman calls the suspense-surprise complex.

In a serious novel such as *Hard Times*, suspense and surprise cannot be for mere readability, although Dickens draws on this technique to grip the reader's attention here and elsewhere in his career. There is some suspense regarding the identity of the old woman, albeit not of the intense kind that contributes to the creation of a certain atmosphere typical of the pure mystery novel. The surprise however is big and important: the woman turns out to be Bounderby's mother. This surprise is actually a kind of ending to Bounderby's mythical account of his life as one that begins in the gutter after the abandonment by his mother.

Check Your Progress

- Analyze the elements of suspense and surprise in the incident of Tom's robbery of the bank. How does Dickens manipulate suspense and surprise here?
- Are there any great surprises at all? What kinds of emotions are generated in the reader through the use of the suspense-surprise complex?
- Explore the different functions of 'plot'.

- How does the Stephen Blackpool plot connect to the main plot? What is the result of this connection ?

Now let us discuss another very important aspect of narrative technique, namely 'point of view'. It may seem to you like a simple everyday concept, and so it is, if you apply it in an everyday sense. However, this is a crucial aspect of the experience of literature. According to David Lodge, 'The choice of the point(s) of view from which the story is told is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions.'

Put simply, point of view is the way a story gets told. Thus think of the way things will change for the reader if *The Mayor of Caster bridge* is narrated from Donald Farfrae's point of view and if *Wuthering Heights* is told from the servant Joseph's point of view, and you will appreciate the force of Lodge's statement.

Wayne C. Booth identifies three kinds of point of view. One is the literal, as when we talk about seeing things through women's eyes. The second is the figurative, as when we talk about someone's worldview, involving ideology, philosophy, conceptual system etc. We may thus talk about Hardy's point of view being pessimistic, Eliot's point of view being moralistic etc. If you want an example from the non-literary sphere to comprehend the concept, here is an expression such as "George Bush's point of view comes across as being very aggressive."

Of course, an author need not confine himself to one point of view, and very often, he does not. It's only when the narration is in first person that such confinement is more or less complete. In most cases, it's through the manipulation of different points of view that the author achieves complex effects and is also able to display a variety of human behaviors and motives.

Stop to consider

As indicated above, point of view is not simply a matter of giving an individual's way of looking at things as against another individual's. It's an intricate artistic choice, and the choice is normally between the following two basic categories: i) The First Person Point of View and ii) The Third Person Point of View.

There are again sub-divisions within these categories. For instance, in certain First Person narratives the narrator may be a secondary character as in Edward Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, or he may be the main protagonist surveying but also participating in the action at the same time, as in Dickens' *Great Expectations* or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Can you think of other, more intermediate, positions? What about Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*? Isn't he an observer and participant at the same time?

The Third Person point of view is again divided between the omniscient and the non-omniscient. In omniscient point of view we have the narration from an impersonal source or voice (not a character) who speaks in the third person ('Old Stephen descended the two white steps ... ') and who knows everything. Much of 18th and 19th century fiction belongs to this category of narration. Being omniscient, such a point of view sweeps between character and character and ranges over large chunks of experience, often presenting a very diverse picture. In many instances of traditional fiction, such omniscient narration is also very intrusive. That is, the narrator is not just content on reporting or describing, but also feels impelled to analyze or comment on the events narrated. Henry Fielding's jocosely intrusive intrusions in novels such as *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* are legendary and valued for their own sakes, and not because they throw any light on the events depicted. The 19th century realist novelist George Eliot intrudes in a different, far heavier way. She often steps in with her arsenal of philosophical knowledge and wisdom and elaborates the implications of what she has reported or described.

At the other extreme are the non-omniscient narrators of Ernest Hemingway and many other modern authors. This is an extremely objective form of narration whereby 'knowledge' of the states of mind of the characters or their emotions, feelings and motives are withheld from the reader because of the fictional illusion that the narrator does not know.

These are not watertight categories. Thus another possible category related to the non-omniscient mode of narration is the limited point of view exemplified by the novels of Henry James. Here the narrator confines himself to the experiences or thoughts and feelings of a single character or at most a few characters. However, because the style of the novel puts us in contact with the refined sensibility of James himself, this mode of narration is somewhat akin to the omniscient point of view at times. In any case, we do not have here the Hemingway kind of Spartan objectivity of presentation, which mostly uses dialogue or externalized descriptions of setting and character. Henry James has

famously talked about 5 million ways of telling a story, guided and controlled, however, by a single center of consciousness. This center of consciousness he usually locates in one single character of a fairly high degree of sensibility, such as Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of A Lady*.

SAQ:

What is 'point of view' and what is its function? Relate this to *Hard Times*. How does 'point of view' affect readers' responses?

Here we may introduce a related distinction between 'showing' and 'telling,' perhaps first widely formulated by the critic Wayne C. Booth in his seminal work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 'Showing' is essentially a dramatic or non-intrusive way of conveying a narrative. The writer leaves the reader to make his or her own judgments or assessments on the basis of the events or dialogues presented. In the 'Telling' mode the writer is not so reticent, and in the guise of the third person narrator steps in frequently to comment and analyze. 'Thomas is frightened' may be regarded as an instance of 'showing', while the statement 'Thomas is frightened, unfortunately' is an example of 'telling' as it comes with a little additional comment.

Showing is an objective notion, and as Wayne C. Booth points out, since Flaubert, the impersonal and objective is held superior to the 'direct appearance by the author' in telling. In some ways Booth tries to contest this view through his explorations of various works, observing, for example, that what is 'told' in Fielding is superior to 'shows' by imitators of James and Hemingway - both believers in non-intrusion or non-interference by the author.

Stop to Consider:

What are the implications of all this for our reading of *Hard Times*? Decide for yourself whether this novel falls into the category of 'telling' or 'showing'. Actually, what you may find is that there are instances of both in the novel. Thus identify some effective instances of 'telling' and 'showing' and explore their implications for the emergence of some fundamental insight.

This novel, like most of Dickens' other novels, is conveyed through the use of the Third Person Omniscient narration. However, the work is marked by a lot of restraint. Instances of intrusive comments are not as many as in some, other novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* where such comments are often laden with sentimentalism and thus spoil the effect.

One great example is the character of Sissy Jupe. This is a character who exemplifies the golden heartedness that Dickens often idealizes and sets against the intolerable burden of living in a world crawling with swindlers, thieves, tyrants and even murderers. There must have been tremendous temptations to step in here in the persona of the third person narrator and sing paeans in Sissy's praise. However, Sissy's healing powers are presented with tact, delicacy and economy. For a long time in the novel, Sissy is actually out of sight, although she is unquestionably the moral center of the novel. Towards the end her presence is once more substantial as she is very active on behalf of the Gradgrind family. Apart from providing selfless love and care to the ravaged Louisa she also helps the Tom to escape to the safe sanctuary of Mr. Sleary's circus. On learning about this later bit of goodness this is the reaction of the grateful Mr. Gradgrind, the man who had judged Sissy so harshly in the early part of the narrative: 'He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, "It is always you, my child!'"(III, vii,)

Stop to Consider:

Dickens rarely uses the 'first person point of view'. Except for *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* (partially) and *Great Expectations*, he always uses the 'third person omniscient point of view'. Why do you think this is the case?

This is a good example of showing as against telling because the reactions -the feelings and thoughts - of a character are used rather than the narrator's own comments on Sissy, to draw the reader's attention to Sissy's redemptive powers. There is no question that the mode of narration is omniscient: look at the way the all-knowing voice ranges from the state of the working-class denizens of Coketown to the mental landscape of Louisa. However, this omniscience is kept in check and regulated effectively. Necessary satirical comments are passed on the

negative attitudes prevailing towards the working poor, but not much is revealed about what Louisa thinks. Since he leaves it to the imagination, the impression that Louisa is seething inside and is hurt and tormented is somehow stronger.

Point of view can be manipulated to regulate our sympathies. Thus, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* our sympathies swing from Henchard to Elizabeth and back to Henchard. The novel is predominantly seen from the perspectives or points of view of these two characters. However, in *Hard Times* point of view is a tricky matter. Whose point of view are we really getting? Is it Gradgrind's? Louisa's? Stephen's? You will find that unlike many other novels, including several by Dickens himself, there is no single protagonist. While Sissy is the moral or idealized center, she does not occupy much space in the narrative. While hers is a significant presence, things are rarely seen from her perspective. On the other hand, one person whose point of view we get in fairly sustained way, is Stephen Blackpool. However, he is somehow not as important a character in terms of the effects of his action upon the narrative. What does it then imply?

Stop to Consider

Methods vary from novel to novel. It is important that one sees things from Pip's and David's points of view in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* as these are novels primarily about growth of character through various encounters and experiences. Growth of character is also important in *Hard Times* - but it is blended with other themes and in any case, is not presented in the kind of sustained way that we see in the other two novels. It is therefore less important to see the world through the children's eyes. Because of the compactness of this novel, no single point of view is presented in a prolonged manner.

Manipulation of point of view is thus not possible or even necessary. Nonetheless, interpretive exercises involving various points of view can be indulged in. Does the novel open with Mr. Gradgrind's point of view? What are the devices interpolated by the author for us to become critical of such a point of view? Whose point of view seems to become dominant after Gradgrind's fades from view? Is Bounderby a character completely seen from the outside, a character without a point of view? What are the reasons and implications? Why is there a feeling that there is some artistic failure in the presentation of Stephen's point of view? Is there a missing point of view in this novel partly about industrial unrest, that is, of the aggrieved worker? Try and answer some of these questions

and you will find that you will get close to capturing the spirit of the work.

While I have already given you a list of characters in the novel, let me just talk a little bit about characters in relation to plot. Formalists and structuralists talk about character as merely functional - they are simply requirements of the plot or structure. That is a limited view, but quite helpful when we analyze eventful narratives. An event becomes animated when we experience it through the agency of a character. The wife-sale in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a pivotal event, and it obviously gains resonance through the participation of two principals Michael Henchard and Susan. This odious event is possible because Henchard is an impulsive and also often cruel man, while Susan is the eternal victim of fate or circumstances over which she has little control.

Hard Times offers less number of dramatic events, but here too you can see the close correspondence between character and plot. Bitzer appearing as a nemesis figure at the end where the plot is reaching a climax has been prepared for in the initial presentation of his character. He is an ambitious, calculating and selfish character. A model pupil of the Utilitarian system that actually advocates selfishness and heartlessness, he is the system's ironic vengeance on the main proponent, Mr. Gradgrind. Also his chasing of Sissy in Chapter Five has in some ways established him as an aggressive character. Try and find other examples whereby character seems to contribute to the successful and convincing presentation of an event, which crucially belongs to the overall plot dynamics.

SAQ:

How is characterization achieved? How are plot, characterization, point of view connected? (50 + 50 words)

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.....

All good writers, however, have to strike some balance between mere functionality of a character and what one may think of as the character's intrinsic vitality and even lifelikeness. Sissy and Gradgrind are successful creations because they have important roles to play in the main narrative but are memorable characters in their own rights. Sleary, with his odd looks and ways, is another such character. Characters are

memorable not only because they are funny or have odd tricks of behavior but also because they are representative or embody some important trait or even worldview or philosophy. Thus Gradgrind stays in our mind as a hard, unswerving upholder of the Utilitarian philosophy. Dickens does his best to make the negative features of this mechanical philosophy vivid to us the readers. This is one of the early descriptions of Gradgrind: 'The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve.' The description runs on, appropriating even the setting to present the portrait of a dogmatic character ramming down a lifeless, boring education into a group of helpless children. At the other extreme is someone like Sleary whose very looseness of appearance is a favorable affirmation of his flexible and friendly philosophy of life.

While growth of character is a theme in many Victorian novels including *Hard Times*, there is an elementary formal consideration. For instance, Boris Tomashevsky distinguishes between the static character and the dynamic character, a distinction, which roughly corresponds to E.M. Forster's famous classification or division of flat and round characters. Static characters remain exactly the same while a dynamic character changes throughout the narrative.

Stop to consider

Try to identify which characters in *Hard Times* are static and which are dynamic. More importantly try to see how even static characters can contribute to the plot dynamics.

This aspect can be seen in a slightly different way. Sometimes there is an initial description of a character, which tells you a lot about that character. However, in certain other cases there is no such set description and you simply have to wait for the unfolding of events to appreciate what the character is really like, and obviously, how she or he grows. As David Daiches puts it, 'Should the personalities of characters in fiction emerge from a chronological account of a group of events and the characters' reactions to those events, or is it the duty of the novelist to take time off, as it were, in order to give a rounded description of the characters at the point when they are introduced into the story?' Daiches feels that the initial description of Michael Henchard is not really revealing, and that one is dependent on the unfolding of events to come to an assessment of the character. The portrait of Henchard is complete only when his story is complete.

The other way is to give adequate descriptions of the character or say all the important and necessary things about him. After that our interest switches to the presentation of the events and the suitability of the characters to the events.

What about *Hard Times*? Do you think that we have a full description of Gradgrind at the beginning and that the rest of the narrative simply bears out or reinforces the impressions we get from this initial description? What about Louisa? Is there any proper description of her character at all? Daiches actually feels that the best novels combine both. There is a description or portrait of the character in an early moment, but it's the course of the events, which will determine character. Try and apply this to a reading of character in *Hard Times*. Look closely at whatever description of character you are presented with, and then try to relate it to subsequent developments. How many of the traits of the characters are modified in the light of the later events? How many of these traits or features are actually focused by the events? You can appreciate that some of the above concerns are related to the plot and point of view-related issues of 'surprise' and 'suspense' and 'showing' and 'telling.' Do you see the connections? I will leave you to think about them.

Stop to Consider

One somewhat controversial way to make the assessment of character interesting for you is to accept the cues offered by Seymour Chatman. He feels that at one level characters are verbal constructs only, but we should not impose limits on the way we can expand and open up these constructs. In his own words, 'should we restrain what seems a God-given right to infer and even speculate about characters if we like? Any such restraint strikes me as an impoverishment of aesthetic experience.' It may be absurd to ask how many children Lady Macbeth had, but the question whether she was a good mother is perhaps more legitimate, because such a question impels us to consider 'goodness' in the context of the world of Macbeth. Similarly, do we think it would be rewarding for you to speculate the kind of life Sissy led with her father (some of this life is reported to us) and how this life compare!> to the life Louisa leads with her father? What about James Harthouse? What was his life in upper class society like? Have those experiences any bearing on the novel?

8.5 COMEDY AND VISION

Dickens is hailed as the most imaginative Victorian writer, and one of the most imaginative writers of all time, in all of literature. The imagination is first of all a great comic imagination. This imagination manifests itself in the ability to create unforgettable and hilarious characters and situations. Sometimes these characters and their ridiculous ways are fitted into the narrative schema and sometimes they exist in their own rights, perhaps in some indefinable way contributing to a vision of the world which is sanguine and renewable through the power of laughter. Dickens' comedy is a joyous assertion of life, life seen in its bewildering, even grotesque variety and fullness. The chaotic energy of eccentric characters have as much a legitimate part of life as things like order, discipline and responsibility, Dickens seems to feel. While some of these comic characters are negative, they hardly ever leave behind a bitter memory. The author seems to identify with their waywardness and violent eccentricity, or often throws himself into their creation with great gusto. Many of his comic villains such as Jingle in *Pickwick Papers* and Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* end up doing less damage than pillars of society or greatly admired characters such as Murdstone and Steerforth in *David Copperfield* or Merdle in *Little Dorrit*.

However, in *Hard Times* Dickens' comic powers are on the wane. He does not quite succeed in making Sleary a funny character. Bounderby is a successful comic creation, but he is almost the only one. This is an amazing fact, because the success of Dickens' narrative very often depends on the various acts and gestures of comic characters.

SAQ:

1. Why do you think Dickens's comic powers are muted in *Hard Times*?(60Words)
2. Is it some artistic failure on his part, an exhaustion of vitality, or is it a deliberate strategy to posit a non-comic vision of the world? (60 Words)
3. Does the recession of comic powers also have something to do with the changing times? (60 Words)

8.6. THE SYMBOLIC IMAGINATION

Dickens is also distinguished from his contemporaries in his use of figurative language. Imaginativeness is not necessarily confined to the ability to create symbols and we can legitimately talk about the 'realistic imagination.' Still, it's undeniable that the abundant use of metaphors and other forms of figurative language is a striking and unforgettable part of Dickens' repertoire and helps to explain the extraordinary appeal he makes to the imagination of readers. In contrast, most of his great contemporaries such as Anthony Trollope and William Thackeray rarely, if ever, use symbols. Even in the somewhat austere *Hard Times*, there is a fair sprinkling of symbols and metaphors. Let us now look at some of these.

Dickens has a way of using a dominant symbol in a novel which registers a particular mood or creates atmosphere, and even projects a view or vision of the world. The fog in *Bleak House*, the prison in *Little Dorrit*, and the river in *Our Mutual Friend* are examples. However, it's doubtful if there is any such dominant symbol in *Hard Times*, although a case can be made out for 'fire.'

Fire and its related element smoke do figure quite insistently in the novel. All good novels will provide a realistic justification for including an item or element, which may then be expanded to resonate symbolically. Fire is perfectly natural in *Hard Times*, an industrial novel. There are factories belching smoke and fire. Dickens' quick imagination appropriates this simple and mundane fact and transforms it into an extremely visual and suggestive tableau:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. (Book I, Ch V)

This is no mere ornamental or perfunctory use of symbols. The symbolic imagination is here working to animate an entire world, with the invocation of words such as 'savage' and 'serpent.' It is commonly said

about Dickens that he makes the inanimate landscape come alive, while very often people are shown as becoming puppet-like or wooden. It's as if in urban, mechanized society people's life passes into objects.

Fire is not confined to its natural sphere, the factory world, and actually invades the lives of people as a consuming, destructive force. We see this particularly in the case of Louisa, who always sits in a dark corner of the house, watching the sparks of the fireplace. As already pointed out in an earlier Unit, the fire is a thing smoldering inside, representing her self-repression and frustration. Fire is potentially a creative element, but in the uncongenial clime of *Hard Times*, it stands for monotony and slow destruction, for both factory 'children' and real children such as Louisa.

Stop to Consider:

How many instances of symbolic fire can you find in the novel? What is Tom's reaction to Louisa's rapt observation of the fire in the corner and Gradgrind's reaction to her observation of the Coketown fires?

Something slightly akin to, but not exactly synonymous with fire is light. Light is a more positive symbol in the novel. The character of Rachel is insistently associated with light, so much so, that she is almost an unreal, symbolic character. The chapter called "Rachel" begins with the phrase 'A candle faintly burned in the window,' and soon after, the suggestion innate in the literal event is caught in the transfiguring expression 'the light of her face shone in upon the midnight of his mind.' (Book I, Ch xiii) If any doubt at all lingers about the role that Rachel is to play or about the relation between light and her character, it is removed by the concluding sentence of the chapter: 'As the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachel, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life.'

The clarity of the symbol of light does not betoken its effectiveness or success.

' Light is applied in a very conventional and uncomplicated way to the character of Rachel. She herself does not really come to life and seems condemned to play a merely symbolic role. In contrast, the symbol of

fire seems more potent, as its ambiguity challenges us to come up with interpretations that will do justice to the complexity of Louisa's situation. Also, the symbol is not simple, straightforward and unidimensional - after all, we have to link the private fire of Louisa with the greater fire raging in the novel; primarily in the factory scenes.

While Dickens can be magnificent in evoking the reality of a situation through the usual realist methods of detailed, item-by-item description, he also has frequent recourse to the use of symbols and metaphors. This sometimes helps him in hinting at truths and states of existence beyond the pale of

quotidian perspectives, for example, when he uses light to signify transcendence of earthly woes and the efficacy of divine judgment as against the impotence of secular judgment (he is more successful in this regard in other novels such as *Great Expectations*). In general, symbols and metaphors- powerful tools to stimulate the reader - seem to extend or expand his meanings.

Check Your Progress:

1. Apart from the symbols of light and fire what other symbols can you find in the novel? Locate and analyze at least two more symbols in terms of their effectiveness in illuminating character or advancing plot.
2. What are the various consequences of adopting different points of view? Illustrate your answer with instances from *Hard Times*.
3. Apply the concepts of 'showing' and 'telling' to *Hard Times*.
4. Explain the relation between character and plot with reference to either Bitzer or any other character in the novel.
5. Evaluate the characterization of Sissy Jupes or Gradgrind.
6. Explore the failure of the 'comic vision' in *Hard Times*.

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BLOCK 2

Unit 1

Charlotte Bronte: *Jane Eyre*

Background

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Charlotte Bronte: The Novelist
 - 1.3.1 Her Life
 - 1.3.2 Her Works
- 1.4 Critical Reception of Jane Eyre
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objective:

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Learn about the life and works of Charlotte Bronte
- Understand how Jane Eyre has been critically received through time
- Evaluate Charlotte Bronte as a novelist

1.2 Introduction:

This unit deals with Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* which has been regarded as one of the classic texts of Victorian literature. Of the four novels written by Charlotte Bronte, namely, *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, *Jane Eyre* stands out as the most powerful fictional works of the author and when it first appeared it was praised by critics for its freshness and vigour. The novel is autobiographical in the sense that we find some evident resemblance between some of the facts of the

life of the protagonist and that of the author. We also find how the world of the writer's personal life is, in some ways, related to the world of the novel. As you go on reading the unit, you will soon discover that it is indeed a powerful narrative with a series of discoveries, which are surprising, shocking and horrible at times, and, of course, can, in the words of one of the earliest reviewers, "make the pulses gallop and the heart beat, and feel the eyes with tears".

1.3 Charlotte Bronte: The novelist

1.3.1 Her Life:

The eldest of the famous Bronte sisters, Charlotte Bronte was born in Thornton, Yorkshire in 1816, to Maria and Patrick Bronte. The family moved from Thornton to Haworth when Patrick was appointed a curate to a church at Haworth Yorkshire in 1820 until his death in 1861. After the death of their mother in 1821, the charge of taking care of the children devolved on to their aunt Elizabeth Branwell. In 1824, Charlotte was sent to Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire, along with three of her sisters Emily, Maria and Elizabeth. Starvation and lack of hygiene made life at Cowan Bridge difficult; Charlotte's physical health began to deteriorate when two of her sisters died. Following this tragic death of two of his daughters, Patrick Bronte brought back his daughters to Haworth parsonage. The children Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell got together, and imaginatively created a world of their own and started their apprenticeship as writers in the form of articles, poems and stories. We must understand that though Charlotte led a more or less secluded life, this collaborative exercise of the siblings in imaginative and creative engagement had a strong bearing on her later literary career.

You should note that before turning to fiction, the Bronte sisters wrote poems. Like her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte experimented with the form of long narrative poems and dramatic monologue, both characterise Victorian poetry. She decided later to abandon poetry in favour of the most popular genre of the period the novel. It is important to note that this shift in her mode of writing indicated an overall shift in the literary taste in 1830s and 1840s. The Bronte sisters lived in the gloomy landscape of the northern moors and shared a life of fantasy and retreat from the ordinary world. But through

journals and newspapers, they also got access to the contemporary political and ideological debates, neither were they aloof from the wind of European Romanticism. On the Bronte sisters' imaginative engagements, Richards Church writes in *The Growth of the English Novel*: "The children set up worlds of their own, Charlotte and her brother Branwell (soon to die of drink and boredom) inventing one called Angria, a pure fairyland; the other inhabited by the younger sisters Emily and Anne, a more grim and moral estate called Gondal. All of them wrote copiously of adventures in those imaginary countries there were no other outlets for the girls."

Charlotte had her education at Row Head too, and from 1839 to 1841, she had found engagements as governess in many houses. In 1842, she and Emily went to Brussels and enrolled in a boarding school. During this time, Charlotte, Emily and Anne brought out a collaborative poetry collection under the pen name of Cureer, Ellis and Acton Bell. In the mean time, their aunt Elizabeth Branwell died, compelling them to come back to Haworth. Charlotte, however, made a second visit to Brussels, but eventually a lonely and homesick Charlotte made a final comeback in 1844. In the meantime, their only brother died, who was a suspected opium eater. It is, thus, important to note that a tragic undercurrent characterised the course of Charlotte's private and familial life; death took away her mother, aunt and her siblings (we shall in fact see later how death becomes a theme in the novel *Jane Eyre*). So, the writer's experience of the ravages of death is partly responsible for lending an air of loss and melancholy to the novel. The first published novel by Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, got success and it eventually made her reveal her identity. She became close to a high social circle and became friends with writers like Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, W.M. Thackeray and G.H. Lewes. Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father's curate in 1854. Soon after marriage her health declined rapidly and in 1855, at the age of 38, she breathed her last.

Stop to Consider: Charlotte Bronte took the pseudonym Cureer Bell. In fact, the Bronte sisters thought it fit to present them to the world in disguise. Among the literary circles of the period, a strong gender prejudice was prevalent; writing was supposedly a male enterprise. So, assumption of a male pseudonym would ensure acceptability of the work among the literary circles. Besides, the Bronte sisters wanted anonymity

because of their own introverted nature; this inwardness pushed them to the realm of imagination.

Check your Progress:

1. Write a note on the literary environment in which the Bronte sisters developed their creative self.
2. What does the fact of Charlotte's taking a pseudonym signify about the patriarchal set up of the contemporary society?

1.3.2 Her Works:

The seclusion of the Haworth parsonage had a strong bearing on the works of Charlotte Bronte. Not only Charlotte, this isolated situation of their home had a potent influence on the creative endeavours of all the Bronte sisters. They were, however, not detached from the contemporary social and political atmosphere. They had a shared life in Yorkshire parsonage, and were close observant of the political and ideological debate that reached them through the contemporary journals. In their early stage, the sisters evolved an elaborate fiction about the fantasy kingdoms of Angria and Gondal. This earlier Gothicism and Romanticism, however, did not remain an exclusive trait of their work because as Andrew Sanders states, "in their adult fiction obvious escapism is diminished in the face of an oppressive and isolating present."

During the Victorian period the novel emerged as a dominant literary form. People with diverse sensibilities turned to novel writing. Still, it was basically the question of man in society and the attending moral issues in a particular social context that became a continuous preoccupation of most of the writers. This basically 'social' orientation of Victorian novel spared some writers who sought to give vent to personal emotions, and sought to take shelter in the realm of the private. Charlotte, as with other Bronte sisters, too had the inclination for private emotions. Charlotte wrote her first novel *The Professor* in 1846. William Crimsworth, the protagonist of the novel, is an orphan; he leaves England to seek his fortune in Brussels. He falls in love with a puppet teacher in Brussels and eventually marries her. What you should note is that fact that the manuscript was rejected six times by publishers

and was posthumously published by the firm Smith, Elder and Co. in 1857. This novel is based upon her experience as a language student as well as a teacher at Brussels. The basic objection to the novel was with regard to the incidents and its failure to appeal to the readers.

Jane Eyre was published in 1847, under the pen name Cureer Bell and it achieved immediate success. Apart from the social issues it deals with, the narrative by itself was fascinating with its remarkable power to provoke and surprise. The writer's own passion, dreams, frustration are all imaginatively transmuted into fictional incidents, but the novel obviously transcends the autobiographical into a kind of fictional wish-fulfillment. The narrative is characterized by a sustained emotional temperament as well as its many moments of revelation. Shirley (1849) is a Condition of England Novel set at the time of Napoleonic wars and is concerned with labour relations. In the novel, Robert Gerard Moore is a mill owner and he introduces a labour-saving machinery in the mill. The laborers turn against him and attempt to destroy the mill and to take his life. In order to raise funds, Robert proposes to Shirley Keeldar, an heiress, but she refuses, and marries his brother, Louis. One notable aspect of the story is its portrayal of a distinctive woman character. The character of Shirley Keeldar was affirmed by Elizabeth Gaskell as a representation of Emily Bronte. The novel raises question of woman and how she is confined to limited opportunity The feverish note of Jane Eyre is heard in Villette. Unlike in Shirley, it avoids political backdrop, but marks a return to emotional life. Charlotte's experiences at Brussels formed the materials for The professor, but after the novel's failure, the same materials were now reworked into Villette. Here the narrator Lucy Snowe loses her family and the means of financial support; she leaves for Villette and finds employment with Mme Beck as a governess and then as a teacher in the latter's school. Among the vain and frivolous students, Lucy in turn succeeds in establishing her authority. She has a tempestuous relationship with M. Paul Emmanuel, Mme Beck's cousin. Ultimately he establishes her in a school before leaving for West Indies. The novel has received critical acclaim as it explores the theme of isolation, repression, gender roles and cross-cultural conflict. But all the works of Charlotte Bronte might not be of the same literary merit, as the critics have upheld Jane Eyre as her best fiction. But by going through all of them one will find certain common preoccupations—the question of woman, gender relation, search for happiness, and the portrayal of the writer's own private experiences.

1.4 Critical Reception of *Jane Eyre*:

Jane Eyre attracted contemporary reviews which were on the whole favourable but some unfavourable comments such as those of Elizabeth Rigby were pertaining to the so called anti-Christian elements contained in the novel. There was another reason for disapproving Charlotte Bronte's work—its frank treatment of passion. An early review of the book which appeared in *The Examiner* called Jane Eyre 'sound and original' in ideas and 'straightforward' in style. *The Western Review* called Jane Eyre 'the best novel of the season' and praised its style. A significant comment came from George Henry Lewes in *Fraser's Magazine* (December, 1847) when he said that he 'wept over Jane Eyre' and added that 'reality—deep, significant reality—is the great characteristic' of the book. But he also mentioned its faults: there is 'too much melodramas and improbabilities.' In the Victorian age itself, despite the middle class morality, there were admirers of Bronte's great book with no less a person than Queen Victoria herself calling it 'a wonderful book'. Thackeray said: "It interested me so much that I have lost a whole day in reading it" and thus attested to the captivating quality of Jane Eyre. Over 70 years later, Virginia Woolf wrote, on re-reading the novel that "we open Jane Eyre and in two pages every doubt is swept clean from our minds". Still later critic Hugh Walker praised the novel for successfully combining romance and realism out of scanty materials. Literary historian Ifor Evans mention the novelist's power to create an atmosphere of terror and of mystery around the figure of Mr. Rochester. Early reviews agreed on the novel's power but had passionate argument over the morality or otherwise of its effect. Swinburne in his "A Note on Charlotte Bronte" (1877) wrote eulogistically that Charlotte Bronte's 'genius' was superior to that of George Eliot while Leslie Stephen, disagreeing with Swinburne, found that she did not develop a "harmonious and consisted view of life" and Stephen's views have prevailed among the critics during the following 80 years. Lord David Cecil, a much later critic, brought about a reevaluation of Charlotte Bronte's works but found her being confined to "the world of her own inner world". F.R. Leavis, in his seminal book on English novel *The Great Tradition* (1948) wrote not so favourably about Charlotte. It was, however by 1977 that critical opinion on Jane Eyre had changed to have pointed out the 'conscious artistry' of the novel and analysis of the

unrealistic elements of the exploratory novel. It is thus a testimony of the novel's innate strength that it has inspired critical opinions from the Structuralist, Marxist, Historicists, Feminist critics including the Cultural Materialists.

Thus, with the passage of time, critical appreciation of the novel has undergone some noticeable changes. For example, there were many stage versions of the novel in 19th century. However, even in the twentieth century the text has been seen as a rich resource by filmmakers. Richard J Dunn writes that the readings of Adriana Rich and Sandra Gilbert greatly influenced the late twentieth century criticism of Jane Eyre. Rich sees the novel as the story of a powerless woman in the high Victorian period. Sandra Gilbert focuses on Jane's encounter with Mrs. Rochester as the central focus of the novel. In subsequent periods, the novel has been adapted into musical opera, film and other visual productions. After its publication, the novel created a stirring among the readers and critics, and there had been a lot of speculations as to the real identity of Cureer Bell. The novel has been able to sustain the interest of readers down the ages and especially in the twentieth century we have seen numerous adaptations of Jane Eyre into cinema, musical versions, radio show versions and television versions. The novel has been adapted into silent films like *The Castle of Thornfield* and *Jane Eyre* in 1915, *Woman and Wife* in 1918, *Orphan of Lowood* in 1926, among others. Some of the sound films adapted from the novel are *I Walked with a Zombie* in 1943, *Jane Eyre* in 1943 starring Orson Welles as Mr Rochester and Elizabeth Taylor as Helen Burns, a Hindi film named *Sangdil* starring Madhubala in 1952 etc.

1.5 Summing Up:

By the time when you come to the end of this unit, you must have realized that a notable difference in imaginative quality separates this novel by Charlotte Bronte from those of her contemporary English novelists. The earlier chapters of *Jane Eyre* rest largely upon Charlotte's experiences of the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, and of her own life as a governess.

In the next units you will learn that Charlotte's personal experiences had a profound bearing on the novel. For example, Charlotte was well experienced with the English country life of the Northern England, of boarding

schools and its educational practices and the work of a governess. She had been unhappy in her love life and remained unmarried. She had little experience of the social life and manners of the aristocratic or wealthy and had hardly travelled. So, finally you have understood that much of the novel *Jane Eyre* was written out of her own limited knowledge and experiences.

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Unit 2

Charlotte Bronte: Jane Eyre

Introducing the Novel

Unit Structure :

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 What Happens in the Novel

2.4 Bronte's Art of Characterization

2.5 Summing Up

2.6 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives:

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Know about the storyline of the novel
- Evaluate the major events in the novel
- Assess the characters in the novel

2.2 Introduction

You should note that the form of the novel is that of a Bildungsroman which is basically about the protagonist's growth and maturity into adulthood. Jane, the protagonist, is a thinking and sensitive woman. The novel is a serious social critique as it lays bare the contradictions of the social indifference on the basis of one's financial standing. The moral aspect of the novel is intimately related to the portrayal of a protagonist who is seen deeply contemplative, acutely observant and, many a time, unyielding with respect to the pressures of external circumstances. Besides, the element of gothic fabricated in the novel duly illustrated through the character of Bertha Mason served as a reminder to the extent in which Gothic fiction of Romantic period made an impacted on Jane Eyre. The legacy of the Gothic fiction can be felt in the novel's creation

of a solitary, brooding atmosphere, and the air of fearsome mystery, as well as in some crucial incidents in the story. With this prelude, let us move on to the storyline of *Jane Eyre*.

2.3 What Happens in the Novel

Jane Eyre is a ten year old orphan who has to live a miserable life at Gateshead Hall being subject to severe oppression and torment by Mrs. Reed and her children. Having lost both of her parents when she was a baby, Jane has become the sole responsibility to Mr. Reed, her maternal uncle. It was he who on his deathbed directed Mrs. Reed to look after the girl and treat her as her own child. After the death of Mr. Reed, Mrs. Reed considered Jane as more of a liability, and oppressed and tormented the little girl. Thus, Jane spent her childhood years being a victim of neglect, abuse and physical and mental torture at Gateshead. One day when Jane's cousin knocked her down and she retaliated, Mrs. Reed punished her by sending her to the Red Room—a gloomy chamber where Mr. Reed had died, and which was rumoured to be haunted. Young Jane could not stand the horrific experience of the Red Room and she lost consciousness. Consequently, she developed a dangerous illness. However, she regained normalcy gradually with the care of the sympathetic family apothecary Mr. Llyold and Bessie, the sharp-tongued nurse at Gateshead Hall.

Mrs. Reed could not bear to have Jane within the house and continued to despise her. Having made the necessary arrangements for sending Jane to Lowood School, she consulted the proprietor, Mr. Brocklehurst for getting the little girl vigorously trained in the institution. Jane studied diligently at Lowood and became a favourite of her superiors. During her stay at Lowood an epidemic broke out, causing many deaths. Sickness and starvation infested Lowood. Mr. Brocklehurst strictly ensured this condition of starvation among its inmates, prescribing it as a condition for Christian way of life. The investigation of the epidemic finally helped in improving the atmosphere. After completion of her studies at Lowood, Jane was retained as a teacher. However, she grew weary of her monotonous life and advertised for a position as governess.

Jane was engaged as governess by one Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield near Millcote. Jane had one pupil to teach at Thornfield named Adele Varens—a ward of Mr. Edward Rochester. Jane was

pleased and became much comfortable with the quite country life and the serene ambience that Thornfield offered.

Jane was appointed governess in the absence of the master Mr. Rochester. Mrs. Fairfax informed Jane that Mr. Rochester was a robust traveler and that he seldom visits Thornfield. By chance incidence, one day while taking a stroll, Jane met Mr. Rochester who accidentally fell off his horse. Mr. Rochester appeared to be a sober and moody person. He confided to Jane that Adele was the daughter of a French dancer who not only deceived him but also deserted her daughter. One night Jane was alarmed by a strange noise and found that Mr. Rochester's room was open and his bed was set ablaze. When she attempted to arouse all the inhabitants in the house, Mr. Rochester commanded her to keep quiet about the whole affair. The mystery did not unfold at that time, but she later came to know about a strange tenant who laughed like a maniac; she believed it to be Grace Poole, seamstress employed by Mr. Rochester.

Mr. Rochester had the habit of attending parties. One day he informed the people of Thornfield that he was soon bringing a party of guests home. Miss Ingram, the daughter of Lady Ingram, was the centre of attraction in the party. Mr. Rochester was known to have courted Miss Ingram. During the party the guests treated Jane with disdain due to her humble position in the house. In the mean time, Jane fell in love with Mr. Rochester, but she saw that he was only interested in Miss Ingram. One evening, when Mr. Rochester was away, the guests played charades. Here a gypsy fortune teller appeared to read the palm of lady guests. When it was Jane's turn to see the fortune teller, she was quite reluctant, yet somewhat inwardly excited as to the fortune teller's predictions with regard to her link with Mr. Rochester. To her utter dismay, her relation with the gypsy turned out to be much revealing. The fortune teller exactly articulated her feeling and it was discovered afterwards that the fortune teller was Mr. Rochester in disguise.

Furthermore, stranger named Mason arrived at Thornfield to meet Mr. Rochester on some business matter. That night the person was mysteriously wounded supposedly by the inhabitant of the third floor-Grace Poole.

It remained another mystery to Jane.

As fate would have it, news came from Gateshead that Mrs. Reed was on her deathbed and was willing to see Jane. Jane immediately returned

to Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed handed a letter to Jane saying that her uncle John Eyre had asked her to send Jane to him for adoption. But, Mrs. Reeds then sent him false information that Jane had died at Lowood. Now on her death bed, Mrs. Reeds was being haunted by a sense of guilt for withholding such information which would have led to Jane's adoption by Mr. Eyre and consequently his inheritance. After the death of Mrs. Reed, Jane came back to Thornfield which seemed now like her own home. One night in the garden, Jane was embraced by Mr. Rochester, and he proposes to marry her. Jane was first hesitant, given the fact that Mr. Rochester's romantic link with Miss Ingram was very much in the air. Mr. Rochester then revealed that he had forsaken Miss Ingram after having a test on her love for him in order to find out how much she cared for him and not for his wealth. Rochester told Ingram that he was to be destitute soon. On hearing his she chose to avoid and Rochester came to know that her real interest was in his money. Finally, Jane accepted the proposal. They planned for a quiet ceremony at the village church. She wrote to her uncle in Madeira about Mrs. Reed's deception and also about her prospective marriage with Mr. Rochester. Before wedding, Jane had another mysterious experience. She saw a repulsive looking woman in her room ripping off her wedding veil. Mr. Rochester tried to convince her that the whole thing was nothing but a figment of her imagination whereas the very next morning she found the torn veil in her room. Anyway, at the church during the pronouncement of the vows, a stranger declares that there was an impediment to the marriage. He presented a document which stated that Mr. Rochester had married Bertha Mason in Jamaica some fifteen years ago. Mr. Rochester admitted the fact and he conducted the party to the third storey chamber, where they found Grace Poole, the attendant, and Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester. It was this mad wife who injured her own brother Mr. Mason, set ablaze Mr. Rochester's bed and tore apart Jane's wedding veil.

Being heartbroken, Jane decided to leave Thornfield for good despite the fervent requests from Mr. Rochester. She found herself, after two days, utterly desolate on the moors of a north Midland shire. Being penniless, she slept in the open field, starving and had to literally beg for food. Luckily enough, she got shelter in the house of St. John Rivers and befriended his sisters Mary and Dian, who nursed her back to health. In the new household she assumed the name of Jane Elliot and refused to divulge anything about her past, except her link with Lowood School. Eventually Mr. Rivers found her a place as mistress in a girl's school. It

was through Mr. Rivers that much to her surprise, she came to know about the death of her uncle at Madeira, leaving for Jane an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds. She learned that St. John and his sisters are in fact her own cousins. Jane was utterly happy and jubilant at such a pleasant discovery of her kin. She promptly offered to divide the inheritance with her cousins.

During this time, St. John was about to go to India as a missionary; he offered her a proposal of marriage much to Jane's astonishment. He plainly admits that he does not love her; he admires her for her qualities and thought her to be a deserving companion for his prospective missionary works. Jane refused the proposal. She was greatly indebted to his kindness but the thought of a marriage prospect was out of the equation. Initially though Jane agreed to go to India, she however, rejected the marriage proposal because she could not forget her first love Rochester. She returned to Thornfield only to find the whole mansion in a dilapidated condition. From the neighbours she came to know that one stormy night, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester set the whole mansion on fire, as a result of which she died. Mr. Rochester tried his best to rescue her but badly injured his hand and also lost his eyesight in the act. Now he lives at Ferndean, a lovely farm some miles away from Thornfield. Jane went to the farm, and saw from a distance how the blind Rochester was trying to walk. Jane told him about St. Joan and how his marriage proposal was rejected by her. Jane and Rochester then got married; after two years Jane regained his eyesight and could see their first child.

2.4 Bronte's Art of Characterization

Charlotte Bronte's strength as a novelist lies more on her creative imagination, a vitality that every page of the novel 'burns and breathes with', to borrow from David Cecil than on characterization. Her major characters such as Jane Eyre, Lucie Snowe, Caroline Holstone, Shirley Keeder are all fully drawn and elaborately furnished but the secondary characters are mostly seen through the narrow lens of the protagonist's temperament and therefore, they exist in so far as they relate to her. Another weakness of her characterization is that she is rather ineffective in the portrayal of the male characters. They are conceived as rather too feminine or too full of masculine vanity. But she is particularly successful in portraying the character of Jane.

Some of the important characters of the novel are discussed with more detail in the following sections.

2.4.1 Jane Eyre

...Jane Eyre, the principal character of the novel, is one of the most talked about characters in Victorian fiction. The novel charts out her growth and development from a child to that of a mature woman. Jane is initially projected as a dependant— first on Mrs. Reed then on Mr. Brocklehurst, then on Mr. Rochester and St. John. This dependence, though circumstantial, helps her to move on in life while at the same time making her aware of the tribulations of life. As a poor little orphan, she was made to feel that she is at the mercy of others. After Mrs. Reed's punishment of Jane at the red room, it was Brocklehurst who offers to hone her personality as a passive, receptive and suffering individual by offering contrasting images of heaven and hell as Jane's only alternative. At Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst's dismissive ways and pronouncements of inhuman and harsh norms find a certain Christian vocabulary. When, for instance, he inquired about twice serving a lunch against the norms of the institution, Miss Temple confessed to it, and he retorted:

You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying.

This awareness of being dependent is a constant reminder that Mr. Rochester imposes on Jane from time to time. But right from her childhood Jane had a bit of mental independence or self respect. Her little act of rebelliousness against her cousin after he hit her is a manifestation of her self esteem. When Mrs. Reed commands her children not to mix up with Jane who, to her, is 'not worthy of notice', her reply was straightforward: 'they are not fit to associate with me.'

The Lowood School episode is significant if we look at the moral and intellectual development of Jane. After a terribly secluded life at Gateshead Hall, it was at Lowood that she comes to terms with some good people, like Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Helen Burns was a senior student at Lowood. She was disgracefully flogged and was sent to stand in the middle of a room full of people by a teacher named Miss Scatcherd. She was an embodiment of endurance and restraint. She talks

to Jane about the New Testament lesson to love one's enemy and this lesson of Christian forgiveness strengthens her in forgiving Mrs. Reed. In fact, it was her closeness with Helen Burns and Miss Temple that it prepared the ground for Jane to enter a wider realm of experience and it also gave her a sense of her worth.

At Thornfield Hall, independence of mind and self-reliance was essential to Jane as, among other things, she is to make a crucial choice: whether she would stay with Mr. Rochester or leave him after she learns about his past life. He implores her to stay with him with a heart full of repentance and with utmost sincerity. Of course, she decides to leave, implying a troublesome aftermath for Mr. Rochester and an uncertain future for herself. What is important however is how Mr. Rochester is made dependent on Jane's verdict. In the Moor House episode, she consents to accompany St John to India on missionary work, but she is also unambiguous in articulating her refusal of his proposal for marriage. This very act of refusal once again establishes her integrated and independent selfhood.

Many critics feel that the character of Jane Eyre is a self portrait of Charlotte Bronte although the author herself has denied it. One critic Laura Hinkley, finds a parallel in Jane's love for a married man and Charlotte's love for Mr. Rochester. Jane's love is passionate but she would put her feelings aside to live a life of struggle. On the whole, despite the affinities between Jane and her creator, what is important to remember is that in Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte has presented a complete person and a woman of moral superiority.

2.4.2 Mr. Rochester

Mr. Rochester is a complex character. His actions and ways actually pave the way for a number of interpretations. As the owner of Thornfield house, he entrusts upon Jane the task of teaching Adele, daughter of a French opera dancer Celine Varens. As affirmed by the child's mother, Adele was his own daughter. But he did not give the small child his love as father. Rather, he seeks to discharge his duties impassionately. It was the bitterness arising from Celine Varens' breach of trust with him that lends him this coldness towards Adele.

Mr. Rochester is an avid traveller and as Jane has been informed by Mrs. Fairfax, he is seldom seen at Thornfield Hall. He loves to enjoy party and the company of woman. He is somewhat sadistic with respect to his ways to Jane. He is aware of how Jane loves him still he talks to her

about his prospective marriage with Miss Ingram. He is well aware of how Jane is attuned to his home; yet he commands her to leave Thornfield Hall, something that aggrieved her. He reminds her that she is a dependent being, and that once Miss Ingram becomes his wife she should shift elsewhere. What is more, he even commands her to go to Ireland and find a new situation at a specified household. Though afterwards he confesses that he sought to arouse Jealousy in the mind of Jane, his ways nevertheless has caused her emotional disturbance.

Mr. Rochester has some qualities that can be called antiheroic. He is dark and ugly looking, his rough appearance and impulsive action make him singularly unsuitable for Jane's acceptance. Charlotte Bronte's account of Rochester's character is seen in her letter to her publisher: "Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self indulgent; he is ill educated, misguided; errors, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live, but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it..."

2.4.3 Bertha Mason

Bertha is the mad wife of Mr. Rochester. He had married her in Jamaica, West Indies, fifteen years back, when he was quit a young man. According to him, however, it was a plotting designed by his brother and his father to get thirty thousand pounds, something of which he was completely unaware. Initially, Bertha's sensual beauty fascinated him, but after marriage he discovered that she was mad. As revealed by him to Jane, Bertha's mother was mad too. She was brought back to Thornfield Hall, and imprisoned in the third story attic. Grace Poole was engaged to keep a constant vigil on Bertha.

Bertha tried to come out of her chamber when Grace Poole was unaware, and once she set ablaze the bed of Mr. Rochester, and attempted murder of her brother Mr. Mason. Further, she tore the wedding veil of Jane. It indicates two things: Bertha has a certain murderous hatred against the male, and she senses Jane as her rival. It is significant that she is rather heard and sensed than seen. It is evident that it was not out of love but lust that propelled Mr. Rochester to marry Bertha. Paradoxically, however, Mr. Rochester's prime accusation against her was her coarseness; she is "at once intemperate and unchaste". On the other hand, he locks her up in a room and goes forth on a life of sexual adventure.

Bertha Mason, in many ways, stands as antithesis to Jane. Her sinister revenge motive stands opposite to Jane's composure and self-restraint. She is physically strong, violently willful, demonic— qualities which are not acceptable in a Victorian wife. Many feminist critics, however, see Bertha as Jane's alter ego, an embodiment of her repressed anger.

2.5 Summing Up

2.6 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 3

Charlotte Bronte: Jane Eyre

Themes and Techniques

Unit Structure :

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Major themes

3.4 Narrative Style

3.5 Critical Reception

3.6 Summing Up

3.7 References and Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Understand the novel through analysis of its themes
- Learn about the narrative techniques of the novel
- Learn about the critical reception of the novel

3.2 Introduction

Jane Eyre was published in London in 1847 by Smith, Elder & Co. under the pseudonym Cureer Bell. Charlotte Bronte completed

writing the novel by August, 1847. By then, her first novel *The Professor* failed to gain literary success. She accepted the criticism of the novel by W.S. Williams, reader for the firm of Smith & Elder, of the "want of varied interest in the tale", and offered the same firm her second novel with the conviction that the novel would avoid the weakness of the first one. The author considered the suggestion of the publisher regarding the title of the work, and finalized it as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. It was printed and published by 19th October, 1847. A second edition, containing some corrections made by Bronte and a preface dedicating the novel to Thackeray, was published in 1848. Her communications with the publisher of the novel provide useful information as to the literary taste of the time and how the writer negotiated the issue. As Charlotte Bronte writes:

Perhaps, too, the first part of *Jane Eyre* may suit the public taste better than you anticipate, for it is true and truth has a severe charm of its own. Had I told all the truth, I might indeed have made it far more exquisitely painful- but I deemed it advisable to soften and retrench many particulars lest the narrative should rather displease than attract.

3.3 . Major Themes

3.3.1 Country Life and the Seasons

The novel unfolds in a picaresque manner with the mention of cold winter wind and rain which disrupt the evening walk of the Gateshead people. Winter brings coldness, despair and gloom as the narrator says in Chapter 1:

I studied the aspects of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and

storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

Description of the seasons and the landscape establishes a visceral parallel in Jane's casual outing which forms a part of her routine at Gateshead Hall. Attending the Church was an important aspect of the country life. Despite the new religious skepticism promoted by the scientific discoveries, the Church still played an important role in Victorian society. However, to Jane, church going, especially in winter Sundays, was a kind of torture.

We set out cold, we arrived at church colder; during the morning service we became almost paralysed.

The seasons, thus, provide an apt décor for human drama to take place; the changing seasons corresponds to the changing situations and shifting moods of the protagonist. When Jane is cleared of the false charge against her at Lowood, and she got inner strength to improve herself academically, there is the beautiful description of the 'onset of summer'. In the same vein, the description of nature is equally picturesque in Jane's first encounter with Mr. Rochester: "...something of daylight still lingered and the moon was waxing bright; I could see him plainly."

Later, it is the 'splendid summer' and a beautiful natural setting with 'sweet briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink and rose' that provide a background for Jane's romantic engagement with Mr. Rochester.

3.3.2 Confrontation of the Social Classes

The first confrontation in the novel which is between Jane and the Reeds can be seen as confrontation of two different social classes.

Mrs. Reeds obviously represented the higher stratum while Jane represents the poor class. Mrs. Reed's aversion of Jane is not just rooted in the girl's unyielding and observing, unsubmitive nature. The act of transgression of social decorum befitting a class gets illustrated in her husband's sister low marriage of which Jane is the outcome. On her death bed, Mrs. Reed called for Jane, yet she still retains her old class prejudice:

Mrs. Reed took her hand away, and turning her face toward me, she remarked that the night was warm." There is no trace of repentance, except of the fact of her deliberate misinformation to Jane's uncle; but, rather there is the renewed expression of her former class prejudice:

"...Are you Jane Eyre?"

"I am Jane Eyre."

"I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands—and so much annoyance she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition..."

The most vivid confrontation of class can be seen in the Gateshead Hall episode. Jane becomes the victim of physical and emotional torture and it was expected of her to remain rooted in her own class standing. The strictures of class norms which Mr. Brocklehurst tried to imbibe in Jane in a huge theological framework presents contrasting version of heaven and hell as the only options lying before Jane.

Another important issue associated with class is property and inheritance. The novel shows Jane's passage through different material atmospheres which are also different stages of her intellectual, moral and

emotional development. She starts as a poor girl, and could at best expect to become a governess; but towards the end sudden endowment of inheritance from her uncle of Madeira at once raises her social status. Finally in terms of class status, she becomes finally at par with Mr. Rochester. It is therefore interesting to see how the novel, among other things, also unwittingly maintains equilibrium with respect to class when there is the question of two people's emotional bonding.

3.3.3 Redemption and Forgiveness

The first encounter between Jane and Mr. Rochester is significant as it symbolically enacts another important theme of the novel: an individual's moral and ethical 'fall' and the need of rescue through redemption and forgiveness. Mr. Rochester falls off his horse when Jane was out walking and she offers him a helping hand. Mr. Rochester is not a righteous person; he is vulnerable to temptations and adventurous in a perverse way particularly in relation to women-First it was Bertha whose dark sensuality appealed to him. Then there was the French dancer Celine Varens by whom he had a daughter. Then he approaches Miss Ingram, daughter of Lady Ingram. Mr. Rochester himself was aware of his transgressions which he sought to atone for; an instance of his atonement being the onus of Adele upbringing which he personally took care of. The theme of sin and redemption as related to Rochester's conduct is present in the novel. Rochester asked Jane to be his mistress but Jane's pure love for him showed him the path of redemption, which came much later after his going through a huge punishment. He became blind physically only to see clearly what Jane as a person has to offer.

3.3.4 Domination and Dissidence

Jane Eyre is about domination, repression, imprisonment or loss of freedom and at the same time it is also a tale of opposition, dissidence, or search for identity and freedom. Through different stages of development of the protagonist's entry into an independent womanhood, the narrative offers different images and instances of domination, subjugation and imprisonment. To Jane, Gateshead Hall becomes a sort of prison with the imposition of the norms by Mrs. Reed. Jane becomes anxious to shift to Lowood as it would at least relieve her of the compulsion of having to endure oppression and humiliation at Gateshead Hall. However, Lowood School appeared to be another kind of imprisonment.

..Jane is a great rebel throughout the novel though the nature of her dissidence markedly changed in later life. At Gateshead, when her cousin John Reed knocked her down on the floor and injured her, she fought back rather than withdrawing from the confrontation and this led to her imprisonment in the red room. The novel offers a telling the long-term imprisonment of Bertha Mason in the attic at Thornfield Hall much later in the narrative

Language can also be a vehicle of dissidence. There is a passage in the Gateshead Hall episode where Jane speaks to her aunt with utmost freedom and courage, revealing Mrs. Reed's torturous ways and giving vent to her own emotion:

I will never call you aunt again as long as I live if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.

It was such a powerful discourse that it compels Mrs. Reed to soften her tongue, as she said: "Is there anything you wish for, Jane? I assure you, I desire to be your friend."

The most vivid and significant image of imprisonment and dissidence is reflected in the case of Bertha Mason. After their marriage, on discovering the mental condition of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester imprisons her in the attic under the care of Grace Poole. Bertha tries to come out whenever Grace Poole is drunk, and attempts to kill her husband. Finally, she puts the entire mansion at Thornfield into flames and kills herself leaving Mr. Rochester blind and crippled.

3.3.5 Search for Home and Family

A conspicuous aspect of the novel from the thematic standpoint is the concept of home and family. The novel unfolds when Jane is an orphan under the care of the Reeds. Gateshead Hall did not give her a semblance of hope as in finding a home and a family due to the lack of emotional intimate bonding among the members of the household. In the case of Mr. Rochester too, the terms—home and family—seem to lose connotative value. It is in the final chapters of the novel that we find him making sense of the idea of a true home and family after marrying Jane. This sense of loss of home and family moulds Jane's nature in a positive way. She has nothing to fall back upon; she was compelled to struggle with circumstances and situations and to make significant decisions of life; and thus she establishes herself as an independent and self-reliant individual. Jane comes from a poor background; yet she has much less craving for riches than for a real home and relations. Her uncle of Madeira bestows upon her an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds posthumously. But she resolves to divide the inheritance equally with

her cousins. It is the 'discovery' of her cousins that truly delighted her rather than the material accomplishments.

When somebody is in need of the shelter and comforting presence of a family, any human intervention to such a quest is seen as an ethical blunder. Mrs. Reed in her last days could not bear the pangs of conscience because she supplied to Jane's uncle misinformation about Jane when he had offered to adopt the girl. Jane's uncle's initial offer of adoption is significant; it could have meant for her home and family- a possibility which Mrs. Reed deliberately averted.

3.4 Narrative Style

As has been indicated by the full title of the novel, it is a first person narrative told from the viewpoint of the eponymous character, Jane Eyre. Technically, in a narrative where the character presents his/her own story, we have to set apart the narrator and the character for the purpose of analysis. We shall discuss the relation between Jane the narrator and Jane the character in the world of the events narrated. An important fact about the narrative style of Jane Eyre is that the Narrator is aware that what he/she narrates is a written narrative. There are instances where the narrator directly addresses the reader with the word "reader" as the narrator declares at the end of the book: "reader, I married him." Because the novel is technically autobiographical, self-presence is an important criterion to assess the reliability of the narrative. The realism of the novel basically hinges on the 'presence' of Jane in a situation. This self-presence enables the narrator to describe things, even gives her the power to record, observe, assess and criticize the 'other', be it event, people or situation. Again, it also enables the narrator for self-presentation.

One interesting fallout of this first person viewpoint is that sometimes there is a rupture between Jane's self-presentation and her

received image in other people's mind. For instance, Rochester describes his own impression of Jane when she comes to Thornfield: "I find you full of strange contrasts, your gait and manners were restricted by rule; your air was often diffident, and altogether that of one refined by nature, but absolutely unused to society, and a good deal afraid of making herself disadvantageously conspicuous by some solecism or blunder; yet when addressed, you lifted a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye to your interlocutor's face; there was penetration and power in each glance you gave." He claims that Jane may be stern and repressed, but we cannot figure it out from Jane's self-presentation. Some crucial narrative information are not part of Jane's felt life; it has been supplied by other agency. There are occasions where Jane receives other's stories. It is Mr. Rochester who informs her facts of Adele's parentage, the deception of Celine Varens to him, and more importantly, the story of his past. And in all this, Mr. Rochester presents himself more as a victim than as a victimizer. Mr. Rochester narrates how he was fooled by his father into marrying a 'mad' woman for monetary gain. The way Mr. Rochester presents his story also carries an implicit justification for his act of imprisonment of his own wife. Bertha does not have a point of view, neither an intelligible voice which can only be heard from a distance.

Another aspect of the novel's narrative strategy is its retrospective nature. It is told from a much later point of time. Towards the end, the narrator says 'I have now been married ten years.' It is only at this point that the perspective of the narrative is defined as the voice of thirty year old Jane. In some points distance is perceived between Jane the narrator and Jane the character in the world of the events, as in chapter 2, the narrator contemplates on the turmoil in the mind of the young Jane: "what a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance was the mental battle fought! "However, there is also no obligation to maintain a

narrative distance throughout the novel; there is in fact a flexible play with narrative distance, and you will see that it is necessary in the creation of an atmosphere of mystery and gothic horror in Thornfield Hall. This creation of the atmosphere of horror would not have been possible when the reader perceived a gap between the experienced narrator and the ignorant character. With regard to the mysterious events in Thornfield Hall, the reader is given as little narrative information as Jane herself knows. It leads to revelation: revelation to Jane as much as to the reader.

The abundant use of symbolism, imagery, and the supernatural elements adds to the stylistic mastery of Charlotte Bronte as a writer. If you read the text you will find that occasionally the narrative rises above the commonplace and receives an extra infusion of poetic flavour. The splitting of the great chestnut after Rochester's false marriage proposal is clearly symbolic of a portent. Most interestingly, this is followed by the nightmarish visit of Bertha Rochester to Jane's bedroom two nights before the actual marriage, the tearing of the wedding veil that is planned from the upcoming ceremony that will certainly betray both the real wife and the girl falsely betrothed. It is extraordinary that the climax of the story hinges on the telepathic appeal Jane receives from Rochester just at a time when she was ready to submit to St. John.

3.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Jane Eyre attracted contemporary reviews which were on the whole favourable but some unfavourable comments such as those of Elizabeth Rigby were pertaining to the so called anti-Christian elements contained in the novel. There was another reason for disapproving Charlotte Bronte's work—its frank treatment of passion. An early review of the book which appeared in *The Examiner* called Jane Eyre 'sound and original' in ideas and 'straightforward' in style. *The Western Review*

called Jane Eyre 'the best novel of the season' and praised its style. A significant comment came from George Henry Lewes in Fraser's Magazine (December, 1847) when he said that he 'wept over Jane Eyre' and added that 'reality—deep, significant reality—is the great characteristic' of the book. But he also mentioned its faults: there is 'too much melodramas and improbabilities.' In the Victorian age itself, despite the middle class morality, there were admirers of Bronte's great book with no less a person than Queen Victoria herself calling it 'a wonderful book'. Thackeray said: "It interested me so much that I have lost a whole day in reading it" and thus attested to the captivating quality of Jane Eyre.

Over 70 years later, Virginia Woolf wrote, on re-reading the novel that "we open Jane Eyre and in two pages every doubt is swept clean from our minds". Still later critic Hugh Walker praised the novel for successfully combining romance and realism out of scanty materials. Literary historian I for Evans mention the novelist's power to create an atmosphere of terror and of mystery around the figure of Mr. Rochester. Early reviews agreed on the novel's power but had passionate argument over the morality or otherwise of its effect. Swinburne in his "A Note on Charlotte Bronte" (1877) wrote eulogistically that Charlotte Bronte's 'genius' was superior to that of George Eliot while Leslie Stephen, disagreeing with Swinburne, found that she did not develop a "harmonious and consistent view of life" and Stephen's views have prevailed among the critics during the following 80 years. Lord David Cecil, a much later critic, brought about a reevaluation of Charlotte Bronte's works but found her being confined to "the world of her own inner world".

F. R. Leavis, in his seminal book on English novel *The Great Tradition* (1948) wrote not so favourably about Charlotte. It was, however by 1977 that critical opinion on Jane Eyre had changed to have pointed out the

'conscious artistry' of the novel and analysis of the unrealistic elements of the exploratory novel. It is thus a testimony of the novel's innate strength that it has inspired critical opinions from the Structuralist, Marxist, Historicists, Feminist critics including the Cultural Materialists.

—Thus, with the passage of time, critical appreciation of the novel has undergone some noticeable changes. For example, there were many stage version of the novel in 19th century. However, even in the twentieth century the text has been seen as a rich resource by filmmakers. Richard J Dunn writes that the readings of Adriana Rich and Sandra Gilbert greatly influenced the late twentieth century criticism of *Jane Eyre*. Rich sees the novel as the story of a powerless woman in the high Victorian period. Sandra Gilbert focuses on Jane's encounter with Mrs. Rochester as the central focus of the novel. In subsequent periods, the novel has been adapted into musical opera, film and other visual productions. After its publication, the novel created a stirring among the readers and critics, and there had been a lot of speculations as to the real identity of Cureer Bell. The novel das been able to sustain the interest of readers down the ages and especially in the twentieth century we have seen numerous adaptations of *Jane Eyre* into cinema, musical versions, radio show versions and television versions. The novel has been adapted into silent films like *The Castle of Thornfield* and *Jane Eyre* in 1915, *Woman and Wife* in 1918, *Orphan of Lowood* in 1926, among others. Some of the sound films adapted from the novel are *I Walked with a Zombie* in 1943, *Jane Eyre* in 1943 starring Orson Welles as Mr Rochester and Elizabeth Taylor as Helen Burns, a Hindi film named *Sangdil* starring Madhubala in 1952 etc.

3.6 Summing Up

Ever since its first appearance, *Jane Eyre*'s popularity could not only be attributed to the adroit portrayal of the eponymous character but

the other aspects of the novel, notably the themes, which throws significant light into the socio-political ramifications of the then English society. In this unit, we have discussed the themes as well as narratives techniques used in the novel. we have also offered you an estimate of how the novel fared in the historical trajectory of critical reception. For more about the novel and the author, you may go through the books and materials listed below.

3.7 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 4

Through the Looking-Glass

Background

Unit Structure :

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Carroll's Predecessors
- 4.4 Biographical Sketch
- 4.5 Placing the Work
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives

This unit gives you an overview of the Victorian Age and the novels that were written in this age. The unit also gives a biographical sketch of Lewis Carroll and his works in the context of the major trends of Victorian novel.

By reading this unit, you will be able to

- familiarize yourself with the major trends of Victorian novel
- familiarize yourself with the life and works of Lewis Carroll
- critically approach *Through the Looking-Glass* in its literary backdrop

4.2 Introduction

Since you have read about the novels of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens in the previous units, you must have familiarized yourselves with the evolutionary journey of the novel from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. You have also learnt about the socio-economic contexts in which the novel originated as a literary genre. The very contexts of social and economic transition in which the novel emerged, marks its close connection with social realities. While Daniel Defoe's novels are journalistic in narrative style, those of Richardson and

Fielding too depict reality as closely as possible. Jane Austen’s novels too imitate the moods and manners of the English middle-class society of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The Victorian Age (1837-1901) witnessed a number of rapid changes and the old world order seemed to be abruptly replaced by the new order. This rapid pace and enormous scale of social, political, religious and philosophical changes had an all pervading impact and this is very well depicted by the novelists of the time. Many a timeless novels were written in this period, such as *Great Expectation*, *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, etc., to name a few.

Stop to consider

In the Victorian Age, the realistic novel reached the optimum height of popularity among the readers, boosted by an unprecedented proliferation of printing presses and printed materials like newspapers, periodicals and political pamphlets. With this, the number of reading public increased a thousand times and there was a new enthusiasm among them to know more and more about their surrounding realities, be it social, economic or political. In this regard, the novel served two purposes, it entertained as well as it informed. This unprecedented popularity and demands for stories drawn on facts make the Victorian Age coincide with the heyday of English novel.

SAQ

What were the circumstances that made novel the most popular literary genre in the Victorian Age?

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4.3 Carroll’s Predecessors

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) can be considered foremost among the Victorian predecessors of Lewis Carroll, followed by W.M. Thackeray, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot and George Meredith, etc. Besides, depicting the true happenings of human life, these novelists are also driven by a sense of moral pursuit, and there is a relentless quest for ‘truth’ in a situation of doubt and speculation. A striking feature of Dickens’ novels is that though he drew inspiration from the eighteenth

century novelists, his novels are firmly rooted in the social conditions of his time, which is better known as ‘The Condition of England’, coined by the Victorian prose writer Thomas Carlyle. Regarding the influence of the early novelists on Dickens, Andrew Sanders comments, “Whereas Dickens’s fictional roots lie in the novels of Defoe, Fielding, Smollett and Goldsmith (as we know from the novels of his own and of David Copperfield’s early reading), he was uniquely equipped to transform eighteenth-century models into the fluid, urban fiction of a new age.” (Sanders 412) In his novels, Dickens draws vivid pictures of the working class people, aspirations of the lower middle class people, sights and sounds of London and its surrounding areas together with addressing some perennial issues of human condition, which makes his novels transcend their own times.

Stop to consider

A significant feature of Victorian literature is the emergence of women novelists like the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, etc. The Bronte sisters (Charlotte, Emily and Anne) lived lives of seclusion and hardship in the Yorkshire moors and though each has her own way of writing, their novels are a blend of escapism, romanticism and realism of a very poignant kind. Charlotte Bronte’s novels particularly highlight the gender question in Victorian society. They had to publish their works either in male or in androgynous pseudonyms. While Charlotte and Emily took the names Currer and Ellis respectively, Anne took the pseudonym Acton. Marian Evans was another significant woman novelist of the era, who is better known in her male pen name George Eliot. Her *Adam Bede* is a detailed depiction of rural life in the pre- industrial phase. Again, Eliot’s another famous novel *Middlemarch*, set in the years (1829-32), delineates an urban life and the conflicts of public and private lives. Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels also portray various aspects of life in Victorian society.

Check your progress

Write about the contribution of the women novelists of the Victorian Age

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Being the second longest reign by a single monarch, and stretching for about sixty years, the Victorian Age is the most eventful period of

English history. Queen Victoria became the empress of the largest empire, as a result of massive colonial expansion in the Indian subcontinent and in Africa. The three Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884 paved the way for consolidation of democracy, industries grew at a much faster pace than ever and education became accessible to all classes during this time. All this created a general mood of complacency and optimism. However, this sense of positivity was destabilized from time to time by a growing class division and a nihilism boosted by Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. As the century was drawing to a close, this disquiet became more profound and its reflections were visible in literature's turning away from realism to naturalism, aestheticism, fantasy, horror, mystery, science fiction, etc.

Stop to consider

The impact of this increasing pessimism is explicitly felt in the novels of Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad. Both the novelists dwell upon the themes of human fallibility, hostile nature and omnipotence of fate. Novels of Thomas Hardy like *Tess of d'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure* express his fatalism, while Joseph Conrad brought in drastic experimentation in narrative style. He abandoned the linear narrative of the realist fiction and adopted an ambiguous and indirect narrative structure. The other remarkable novelists of the era like R. L. Stevenson, Samuel Butler, Oscar Wilde, etc. too showed more interest in experimenting with technique and content of fiction. Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* reflect the extreme negativity of the time, while his *Erewhon* is a combination of utopian fantasy and satire. Wilde's infamous novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* encapsulates his philosophy of Aestheticism and his belief in the beauty of art and ugliness of reality. H. G. Wells pioneered science fiction, while R. L. Stevenson popularized fantasy and travel based novels.

Lewis Carroll belongs to this transitional phase of Victorian novel and he creates an altogether unique genre by mixing fantasy, nonsense and playful satire in his poems and novels. Carroll's contemporary Edward Lear too took to nonsense prose and limericks, instead of following the conventional modes of narration.

SAQ

How does the late Victorian Era mark a departure from the early Victorian Era?

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Check your progress

Write a note on Victorian realist fiction.

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4.4 Biographical Sketch

Lewis Carroll is the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who was a mathematics professor at Christ Church College, Oxford. He was born in the year 1832, in the rectory of his father Reverend Charles Dodgson. His mother was Frances Jane Lutwidge, a patient and gentle lady. He went to Rugby School for early education, and later on obtained a scholarship to study mathematics in Christ Church College, Oxford. After graduating in mathematics in 1854, he became a don or a lecturer at the same college. He took holy orders at the Church of England and was ordained a deacon there, for which he remained unmarried all his life.

The most interesting aspect of Lewis Carroll's life is the way he juggled between two very opposite preoccupations- he dealt with rational subjects like mathematics and religion on the one hand, and explored nonsense and fantasy in his novels and poems for children, on the other. Dodgson wrote from a young age and contributed his writings in magazines like *Mischmasch*, national publications like *The Comic Times*, *The Train*, *Whitby Gazette* and the *Oxford Critic*. Though he published his poems anonymously, he used his pen name for the first time in 1856 for his poem "Solitude". His fascination for word play is evident in his pseudonym too, as he translated Charles Lutwidge into Latin as Carolus Ludovicus and then reversed and retranslated it into English.

Stop to consider

It is said that Charles became close to the family of the Head of Christ Church and spun stories to entertain his young daughters. He was especially close to eight year old Alice Liddell, who is said to be the inspiration for his two famous novels, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). The first one, popularly known as *Alice in Wonderland*, has the status of a legend, standing between the fantasy of children's literature and the deeper, perplexing logic of adult literature.

What David Daiches comments in this regard is noteworthy, “Lewis Carroll (pen name of C. L. Dodgson, 1832-1898) produced in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) much more complex and sophisticated children’s books, where below a surface of attractive and quaint adventure lay rich patterns of parody, irony, sentimentalism, and symbolic suggestiveness which can keep the most cunning modern analytic critic fully occupied.” (Daiches 1086)

Lewis Carroll’s *Sylvine and Bruno* was published in 1895, it intertwines two plots set in two alternative worlds – one in rural England, the other in a fairyland. The English society is shown here in a satirical light from the fairytale world and it is a combination of social novel, fairy tale and discussion on ethical issues. Though it had a unique and ambitious design, it was a failure. Another important work by Carroll is *The Hunting of the Snark*, a fantastical poem, also known as a “nonsense poem”. It is about an adventure of a group of nine businessmen and one beaver, who sets off to hunt the shark. Though it received mixed reviews from critics, the readers well received the poem

SAQ

Which aspect of Lewis Carroll’s life do you find very interesting?

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Check your progress

Write about the professional and literary career of Lewis Carroll

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4.5 Placing the Work

In this unit you I will tell you about the other novel of Lewis Carroll, that is, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). As I have already mentioned, the character of eight year old Alice, the protagonist of the novel, is inspired by a real child called Alice Liddell, with whose family

Carroll used to spend his hours of leisure. Alice and her sisters always demanded new stories from him and he not only invented stories for them, but also illustrated those stories with paper and pencil. In the novel, Alice accidentally falls into a rabbit hole and plunging deeper and deeper into the hole, she finally lands on the wonderland and she confronts a series of strange and unnatural incidents, meets queer animals and characters. Many are of the view that Alice's fall into the hole is her transformation from childhood to adulthood as she goes on a long and solitary journey without the help of the elders. Alice's story also reminds one of Proserpina's passage from innocence to experience, as Proserpina too accidentally falls into the mouth of a hole and is eventually kidnapped by Pluto.

Stop to consider

In the Wonderland Alice meets characters like the Gryphon, the Mock Turtle, the Dormouse, the March Hare, the Queen and King of Hearts, the Duchess, etc. and she finds it very confusing that the inhabitants there do not follow the basic and familiar rules of language, but use language according to their own whims. This again hints at the arbitrary nature of language itself, and the unnatural link that exists between words and the things they stand for. Therefore, though, superficially, their conversations and utterances sound nonsensical, they have a deeper sense and meaning. Carroll playfully handles all the stylistic devices like synonyms, homonyms, homophones, metaphors, onomatopoeias, etc. to lend a humorous effect to his story and also to make the readers aware of the complex interplay of meaning and context in our day to day use of language.

Alice is disappointed with the inhabitants of Wonderland since they treat her like a child. For every child wants to be treated like adults, and Alice too is no exception. This is an important aspect of child psychology that Carroll highlights through this reaction of Alice. Children too have their own way of looking at things; but the adults do not recognize it and this creates a gap in communication between children and adults. Besides, the novel also satirizes the rigidity, incongruities and exclusivity of English social and administrative system of Carroll's time. These systems are extremely Anglocentric and not open to outsiders, as Alice as an outsider in the Wonderland does not understand the rules and etiquettes of that place. These issues have been given serious concern by the novelist under the garb of a fantasy tale for children and this makes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* stand apart in the vast body of creative literature of the Victorian Age.

SAQ

Which aspect of child psychology is highlighted by Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* ?

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The overwhelming popularity of this novel inspired Carroll to write its sequel, that is, *Through the Looking-Glass*, which is equally engaging, full of so called irrational yet interesting happenings, language games and number games. We shall discuss various aspects of the novel such as plot, themes and techniques, in the following units.

Check your progress

How does Carroll's first novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* present the prevailing social problems of his times?

4.6 Summing Up

In this unit, you have had an overview of the Victorian Age and general trends of Victorian fiction. You have learnt that novel became very close to real life and society in the first half of the Victorian Age, but realism no longer remained the preferred mode of narrative of the later Victorian novelists. Novel gradually broke away from realism, as the late Victorian writers, including Lewis Carroll, experimented with the narratives modes like fantasy, mystery, science fiction, etc., to explore the inner layers of human psychology and the abstract nature of truth.

4.7 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 5

Through the Looking-Glass

Introducing the Novel

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 What Happens in the Novel (Plot)
- 5.4 List of Characters
- 5.5 Summing Up
- 5.6 Suggested Reading

5.1 Objectives

By reading this unit

- you will know about the plot or the sequence of events of the novel
- acquaint yourselves with the major and minor characters of the novel

5.2 Introduction

Like his first novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll sets his second novel *Through the Looking-Glass* in a fantasy land. Alice, the protagonist of the novel enters a dream land and undergoes all the bizarre experience there. She is accompanied by the Red Queen from the Looking-Glass House to the top of a hill and she exclaims that she in fact arrives at a landscape designed as a vast chess-board and its squares are divided by brooks and hedges, "I declare it's marked out just like a large chess-board." (38) Though Alice is happy to play as a pawn, she

expresses her desire to be a queen. After some harrowing adventures, Alice does become the queen, but she does not find it to be happy and fulfilling at all.

5.3 What Happens in the Novel (Plot)

The novel *Through the Looking-Glass* has twelve chapters. The first chapter is “Looking-Glass House”, which introduces Alice and the setting in which Alice’s dream takes place. Alice is an eight year old girl who likes to live in a world of dreams and fantasy. As the novel opens, Alice is seen talking to her black kitten Kitty. Alice also talks to Kitty’s mother Dinah and sibling Snowdrop. Though the cats never say anything except purring, Alice keeps talking to them supposing that they respond to what she says. In the beginning of the novel, Alice sits in the arm-chair of her living room in a wintry evening, when snow is falling outside. Inside, the fire is lit in the fireplace and Alice sits snugly as she talks to the kitten in a half asleep and half awakened state. Kitty is playing with a ball of yarn, messing up everything and Alice scolds her for that.

Alice gradually slips into a world of dreams and she feels that she arrives there through the looking-glass that hangs over the mantelpiece. Since she reaches there through the looking-glass, she calls this new place the Looking-glass house.

Stop to consider

Entering the Looking-Glass house Alice finds that the room is not very tidy and many ‘unnatural’ things are happening there. Alice sees the ‘chessmen’ walking about the room in pairs. She finds the Red King and the Red Queen, White King and the White Queen and the pawns. As the White Queen rushes violently, she knocks the White King and the King falls upon the cinders. But he recovers and slowly starts walking. Alice takes pity on him and lifts him to help him reach his place faster. But the King is afraid to be held by something in the air. It appears that none in the room sees Alice, or hears her words. Then Alice finds a book and turning over the pages, she sees a poem written in mirror-image. First she cannot read the words but holding up a mirror to it she sees that the name of the poem is “Jabberwocky”. Alice suddenly realizes that she has spent a long time in the room and so she goes out to see the garden.

SAQ

How does Alice enter the Looking-Glass Land?

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Check your progress

What does Alice experience in the Looking-Glass House?

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In the garden Alice finds that the flowers can talk there. But to Alice’s disappointment, the flowers criticize her, besides criticizing each other. Alice also meets the Red Queen there; but in the garden, the Queen is half a head taller than Alice, while in the room she was only three inches high. Alice discovers herself and the Queen on a vast chessboard and Alice expresses her desire to be a queen. The Red Queen says that if she reaches the Eighth Square, Alice will become a queen. And, suddenly, both Alice and the Queen start running. But surprisingly, even after running breathlessly fast for a long time, Alice and the Queen stay in the same spot where they started. Then the Queen directs Alice how she would reach the Eighth Square and vanishes saying, “And in the Eighth Square.....feast and fun” (42)

Stop to consider

In the third chapter Alice makes a survey of the whole area that she has to cover while moving to the Eighth Square and suddenly she discovers herself inside a train. The guard asks her for a ticket, but she cannot produce any and says that she is not meant for that train journey at all. As the train goes up in the air to cross a brook, Alice is so frightened that she catches hold of a beard of a Goat. But the beard melts instantly and Alice sees only a Gnat in front of her. The Gnat shows her the other insects- the Rocking Horse Fly, the Snap-Dragon Fly, etc. It also makes some joke, but instead of being happy, tears roll down the Gnat’s eyes. The Gnat sighed and sighed and vanished. Then Alice walks up to a field and meets a Fawn. Though they ask each other’s names, they forget their own names. Alice takes the Fawn into her own arms, but the Fawn suddenly discovers that he is with a ‘human child’, so he jumps off and

darts away as fast as he can and shouts from a distance, “I’m a Fawn.”(54)

Check your progress

Narrate what happens between Alice and the Fawn

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Alice continues to walk and stops in front of a house, with two finger posts in front, directing the same way. Alice wants to reach the Eighth Square before it becomes dark, but stops in front of the house to say “How d’ye do?” to Tweedledum and Tweedledee. She sees that the two brothers are standing under a tree holding each other’s necks. They were about to fight a battle as Tweedledee spoilt Tweedledum’s rattle. But just then they see a ‘monstrous crow’ flying over them, and they were so frightened that they almost forgot about the battle. As they see Alice, Tweedledee reads a long poem to Alice, “The Walrus and the Carpenter.”Then the three of them start arguing about the characters in the poem and suddenly hear somebody snoring nearby. They follow the sound and find that the Red King in deep sleep, snoring loudly.

Stop to consider

Tweedledee and Tweedledum consider Alice to be a stuff in King’s dream and say that if they wake the King up, she will vanish like a blown out candle. Alice now wants to take leave of them, but Tweedledum remembers his rattle and tells Alice what happened to it. Their battle for the rattle resumes and Alice criticizes them for fighting for such a small thing. But they are determined to fight and get ready with their armours and weapons like a saucepan, a sword, an umbrella. Etc. Just a big cloud covers the sky and the brothers think it to be the big crow and they are afraid terribly; they run as fast as possible and vanish. Alice too walks into the wood and stops under a tree and suddenly catches a shawl that comes flying in the wind.

SAQ

Why was Alice confused while talking to Tweedledum and Tweedledee?

In Chapter ‘V’ the White Queen comes running after her shawl. The Queen has pins all over her and Alice offers to put the shawl ‘straight’ for the Queen. The Queen tells Alice that she lives backwards and she can remember things before they happen. Alice finds everything very confusing, but she continues her conversation with the Queen. Once again, a gust of wind blows the shawl away, but this time the Queen catches it on her own; Alice asks if her bleeding finger is better. The Queen keeps uttering “better” in such a way that at the end it sounds like the bleating of a sheep and looking around, Alice finds that the Queen vanished and she is inside a dark, queer kind of shop, and a sheep is sitting there in an armchair, wearing a big round pair of spectacles. Though the shop is full of things, whichever shelf Alice looks at, it becomes empty. The sheep is knitting with fourteen pairs of knitting needles and it almost looks like a porcupine. Those needles then turn into oars and now Alice and the sheep are in a boat and Alice is rowing it. After some time they are again inside the shop and Alice buys an egg from the shop.

In Chapter VI, the egg becomes bigger and bigger, and more and more like human, with eyes, a nose and a mouth. Alice is sure that it must be Humpty Dumpty himself. He sits on a very narrow wall and Alice fears that he would fall from there anytime. Though Alice tried her best to please Humpty Dumpty, he seems to be disappointed with her. But when she asks him to explain the meaning of the poem “Jabberwocky”, he readily agrees and explains it. After listening to Humpty Dumpty’s explanation with patience and takes leave of him, and just then there is a heavy crash that shakes the forest through and through. This sound is actually made by the White King’s men soldiers, who come in thousands, to put Humpty Dumpty’s broken pieces together. Alice would have surely been crushed by them, had she not got behind a tree to save herself. Alice then gets out of the wood and finds the White King busy writing in his memorandum book. Then the King’s Anglo-Saxon messenger comes to give him the news that the Lion and the Unicorn are into a big fight over the crown of the King himself. Both Alice and the King go to watch the fight, but it ends without any result.

SAQ

Where does Alice meet Humpty Dumpty?

Check your progress

What is the speciality of Humpty Dumpty’s character?

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In chapter VII Alice meets the Red Knight and the White Knight; both quarrel for Alice, but the Red Knight gives in and departs from the scene. The White Knight accompanies Alice to the last brook, crossing which means reaching the Eighth Square. She crosses it and lies down on the soft meadow on the other bank out of excitement. Suddenly she feels a heavy thing on her head, which happens to be the golden crown. Next chapter shows Alice being hailed as the queen and a feast is thrown in her honour. But the Red Queen strictly instructs Alice to follow some ‘queenly’ conducts, which Alice finds very difficult to cope with. In Chapter XII Alice wakes up and keeps talking to Kitty, and she is still confused who dreamed the whole dream after all, she herself, or the Red King? The novel concludes with a poem that mentions the actual context of the novel, that is, the story was told to three children who wanted to listen to a story.

5.4 List of Characters

Except Alice and her cats, all the other characters in this novel are actually chess pieces, there are thirty two of them all, sixteen white and sixteen red. Alice’s sister is mentioned a few times, but she does appear in the action of the story. Almost the entire event takes place in the Looking – Glass land, which is actually a chess board, these pieces are introduced with much importance as ‘dramatis personae’ as in a play and their positions are clearly specified, as arranged on a chess board so that readers can visualize a chess board and how the pawns and pieces move on the board as the story progresses.

White		Red	
Pieces	Pawns	Pawns	Pieces
Tweedledee			
Unicorn	Daisy	Daisy	Humpty Dumpty Carpenter
Sheep	Haigha	Messenger	Walrus
W. Queen	Oyster	Oyster	R. Queen
W.King	“Lily”	Tiger Lily	R. King
Aged man	Fawn	Rose	Crow
W. Knight	Oyster	Oyster	R. Knight
Tweedledum	Hatta	Frog	Lion
	Daisy	Daisy	

Let us begin with Alice first:

Alice is the seven and half year old protagonist, who visits the Looking-Glass Land in a dream. Alice likes fantasy and day-dreaming; she is a child with strong imagination and has a habit of supposing things and “pretending”. She continuously talks to her three cats and though sometimes she is irritated by their nonchalance, she does not seem to mind it much and goes on talking to them. In the novel, two aspects of Alice’s character and circumstances become visible- her loneliness and her process of growing up. The other members of her family remain invisible and she is left alone with the cats. This shows the loneliness of children’s world and the difficulty that they find in communicating with others.

Stop to consider

In the Looking Glass Land this difficulty becomes more intense as she finds it extremely difficult to make herself understood to the inhabitants there. This shows how the fear and anxieties of our real life get reflected in our dreams where the subconscious mind

becomes more active. Alice's process of growing up is also associated with her anxiety about her own identity. For example, when the Fawn asks her name, she forgets her name. On another occasion, Tweedledum says that she is only a stuff of the Red King's dreams. However, in spite of all her anxieties, Alice has an ambition to be the queen and is ready to fulfill all the conditions to be a queen. For, she knows that occupying a queen's position in social hierarchy will bring honour to her. In a way, Alice's struggle to cope in the Looking-Glass Land can be seen as an adult's struggle for survival too, for, individuals often find themselves in hostile environments and continuously struggle to come out of those circumstances. In the novel too we see Alice trying her best to remain polite, maintain the right etiquette and not to disappoint anybody.

SAQ

How is Alice's journey in the Looking-Glass Land associated with her process of growing up?

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The White Queen is one of the bizarre characters that Alice meets in the Looking-Glass Land. She cannot pin her dress properly and is seen running after her shawl all the time. Her hair too is tousled and Alice tries to help her dress properly, it is not of much help. The White Queen disappears at the end of Chapter V, but towards the end, when Alice finally becomes a queen, she meets her again. But her unkempt appearance does not change and the Red Queen blames her poor upbringing for this look of disarray. She is in perfect contrast to the Red Queen, who insists on queenly manners all the time.

The Red Queen is the authoritative queen whom Alice meets in the Second Square. Though she is rude and finds fault with Alice every now and then, it is the Red Queen who tells Alice how to become the queen and how Alice will reach the Eighth Square. She tells Alice about the queenly manners that Alice must adopt if she wants to be the queen. She seems to be whimsical to Alice in her manners because while talking

with Alice, she abruptly holds her hand and asks her to run fast. And though they run breathlessly fast, they are at the same place when they stop. When Alice says that in her country one reaches a different place after running for a while the Red Queen says that things are different in the Looking-Glass land, “it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place.” (40)

Check your progress

Write a character analysis of the Red Queen

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Stop to consider

Humpty Dumpty, the egg-shaped individual from the nursery rhymes, is an important character in *Through the Looking-Glass*. He has an air of self-complacency while he looks condescendingly at others. He puts Alice in discomfiture either by asking her perplexing questions or by answering her questions in a roundabout manner. His position on the high wall shows his downward attitude to others. But the wall is not only high, it is narrow too and Humpty Dumpty cannot sit there for a long time. Alice asks him in her good-natured curiosity, “Don’t you think you’d be safer down on the ground?” (89), at which Humpty Dumpty only laughs and says that there is no chance for any mishap at all. Ironically, he has a great fall and is shattered into fragments and could never be put together again although the White King sends all his men and knights to bring Humpty Dumpty into one piece.

The White King is a static kind of character and Alice finds him writing in his memorandum book. He looks weak and hungry and asks for ham and sandwiches to reenergize himself. As Alice keeps talking to him, his messenger Higha arrives and reports that the Lion and the Unicorn are fighting for the crown. The King says, “and the best of the joke is, that

it's *my* crown all the while!" (106) This shows that he does not have enough control over his own position of power and authority

Tweedledum and Tweedledee are the twins that Alice meets in the Fourth Square. They are identical to look at and Alice can see only "DUM" and "DEE" embroidered on their front collars and supposes that each got "TWEEDLE" embroidered on their back collars. They too, like Humpty Dumpty put he in embarrassment by asking questions about manners and common sense. Like many of the characters in the Looking- Glass land, the twins too show utter disregard of her. For example, when she wants to know about the road that leads out of the woods, they only show interest in reciting poetry to her and Tweedledee begins to recite the longest poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter".

Check your progress

Write a note on the characters of Humpty Dumpty and Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

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The Red King, the Red Knight and the White Knight are three other minor characters of the novel. The Red King sleeps and snores perpetually, while Red Knight fights with the White Knight for Alice. The Red Knight wants to keep Alice as a prisoner but the White Knight comes as her rescuer. They decide to fight a battle following the Rules of Battle, but Alice sees that instead of fighting, they only fall on their heads. After some time, they shook hands and the Red Knight gallops away. The White Knight then offers to see Alice safe to the end of the wood The Sheep is the elderly shopkeeper of the queer shop, where Alice buys an egg and eventually it turns to Humpty Dumpty. Alice also briefly goes for rowing with the sheep.

Stop to consider

Though Alice's three cats, Dinah, Kitty and snowdrop never interact with her, she is all the time busy with them. Dinah takes all the

motherly care for her kittens and at the beginning of the novel we see Dinah cleaning Snowdrop, the white kitten. While Kitty is restless and mischievous, Snowdrop is quiet and innocent. Lily is a white pawn and the White Queen's baby daughter. Because she's too young to play chess, Alice takes her place as a pawn.

SAQ

Which nature of Alice is highlighted by her habit of talking to her cats?

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The Lion and the Unicorn are two other characters who fight continuously and they are said to be the symbols of England and Scotland respectively. There are also the flower characters like the Tiger-lily, the Rose, Daisy, etc., whom Alice finds very rude since they quarrel among themselves and criticize each other and also criticizes Alice. Along with these characters, various food items on the dinner table too are introduced as humans, in the dinner party thrown in the honour of Queen Alice.

Check your progress

How are the Red King and the White King, the Red Knight and the White Knight are contrasted against one another?

5.5 Summing Up

In this unit we have discussed the plot of the novel and acquainted ourselves with the characters. We have seen that the novel begins with Alice talking to her cats and then falling asleep and starting to see a dream. In her dream Alice becomes a queen in the Looking-Glass Land. The last chapter shows that Alice wakes up and again starts talking to her cats. The concluding poem indicates that the story of Alice is actually told to three children who go for boating recreation in a July evening and want to listen to stories.

5.6 Suggested Reading

Auerbach, Nina. "Alice and Wonderland: a Curious Child" *Victorian Studies*, 1973

Kincaid, James R. "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland" *PMLA* 1973

Unit 6

Through the Looking-Glass

Themes and Techniques

Unit Structure :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Major Themes
- 6.4 Narrative Technique
- 6.5 Form and other Relevant Aspects, etc.
- 6.6 Characterization
- 6.7 Summing Up
- 6.8 Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives

By reading this unit, you will be

- able to have an idea regarding the major themes, techniques and forms of the novel.
- able to have some idea about Lewis Carroll's way of characterization in the novel *Through the Looking-Glass*.

6.2 Introduction

So far, we have learnt how Lewis Carroll weaves reality and fantasy in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In this unit we shall throw some light on the major themes of the novel and also the technical and formal devices that Carroll uses to contrive the plot. It is interesting to see how Carroll uses fantasy to refer to the real life circumstances, and even though there is profuse use of sarcasm, irony and satire, he keeps all of them under the subtle guise of a child's dream and a game of chess.

6.3 Major Themes

In the novel *Through the Looking'-Glass* we encounter a number of themes such as growing up, individuals' adjustment with one another, individuals' adjustment in the society, life as a lonely journey, communication gap, arbitrariness of language, irrationalities and incongruities of human condition, and so on. By bringing in these themes and combining them with the mode of fantasy, Carroll highlights the incomprehensible nature of reality itself, subverting the solid base of realist fiction that explores 'knowable' reality. Alice's journey into the Looking Glass land is her journey into a new land, which is half known and half unknown to her. Though she finds the manners of the people of the new land somewhat weird, she tries her best to adapt herself to the norms of that society. Critics are of the view that this experience of Alice is like a child's negotiation with adult behaviours. For, children are often criticized by the adults for not imbibing the right etiquette, but they too appear odd and imperfect in children's eyes. This is what Carroll shows, as Alice tours across the Looking Glass Land and acquires new knowledge of the adult world. And this she does on her own, as none from her known world, especially her parents and acquaintances help her in this regard.

SAQ

What does Alice's journey in the Looking-Glass Land symbolize?

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Stop to consider

Identity is another important theme in the novel. It is interesting to see that in the Looking Glass Land, everybody has a distinct identity and each is very conscious of individual identity, but they do not seem to acknowledge Alice as someone with her own identity, especially Humpty Dumpty and Tweedledum- Tweedledee. Humpty Dumpty comments that Alice's age and name, both are wrong, while Tweedledum- Tweedledee says that she can be a part of the Red

King's dreams. However, Alice too is very conscious of her own separate self and insists that she only wants to dream her own dream, "I don't like belonging to another person's dream." (113) When the Red Knight wants to make her a prisoner, then too she reiterates the same thing, "I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be a queen." (115)

The illusive nature of reality is another interesting theme of the novel. It is really intriguing that people like to escape to the world of dreams, if they are weary of their real life; but then the emotions of real life get reflected in dreams. For example, even while dreaming, Alice is aware of her real life, and, even while awake, she likes to pretend that she is dreaming. For, she still treats Kitty as the Red Queen. And the most "serious question" is, Alice still cannot decide whether the Red King is a part of her dream or she is a part of the Red King's dream. And, after all, dreams are part of real life itself.

There is also the theme of disharmony, contrasted against a set of strict rules. Let us not forget that the entire plot is set on a chess board, and everybody is supposed to adhere to the rules. But in spite of the rules, things do not seem to be going right in the Looking Glass Land. Extreme examples of this disharmony are Humpty Dumpty's fate, the White Queen's helplessness, the White Knight's oddity. Situations of sudden chaos and confusion too enhance this sense of things falling apart. All these themes represent Carroll's contemporary English society, which is known for hypocrisy, prejudice, parochialism.

6.4 Narrative Technique

The narrative of *Through the Looking-Glass* is designed according to story within the story technique. The first chapter shows Alice in her room near the fireplace, and she is busy talking to her cats; but the snug, warm atmosphere in her room makes her falls asleep and dreams the dream of the Looking-Glass Land. Thus the first chapter provides the frame of the story. In the concluding chapter Alice wakes up and comes back to reality, with thoughts and memories from her dream. However, the poem with which the narrative ends, is the outermost frame of the

story. This poem shows that Alice’s story has been actually told to three children on a boat.

Stop to consider

Two major symbols have been used as the primary narrative design of the novel- the symbols of the chess board and that of the looking glass. The chess board is a perennial symbol of contriving, manipulating and strategy making and in this novel it is basically used as Alice’s journey towards her goal and the various hurdles and phases she has to overcome to reach her goal. The looking glass here is the symbol for alternative reality, that is, reality can be perceived from different perspectives. In the Looking-Glass Land, everything appears in reverse order and every character has her/his own way of perceiving things which may not necessarily match with others’ ways. Everything that Carroll presents in the novel only reflect human situation and human experiences, only the mode of presentation is different.

Check your progress

What is the significance of the symbol of the looking- glass?

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6.5 Form and other Relevant Aspects, etc.

As for the form of the novel, the first thing we notice about is its formal symmetry. The pattern of chess board lends this sense of symmetry. For this reason, the novelist has to keep the major characters in pairs. This binary arrangement of characters too gives neatness to the form of the novel. This immaculate formal unity supports the basic purpose of foregrounding the theme of irrationality and utter breakdown of communication.

Stop to consider

Carroll also makes subtle uses of irony and satire in the novel. For example, when Alice becomes the queen after reaching the Eighth Square, there is rejoicing and merrymaking and welcome songs are sung in her honour; but whenever she wants to do something, the Red Queen interrupts and instructs her to behave in a queenly way. Her repeated reminder to Alice to remember who Alice is, hints at Victorian obsession with social position. Alice finds that being a queen is not a happy experience at all and she no more wants to be the queen, so she pulls the table cloth and shakes the Red Queen, blaming her as the cause of all mischief. Humpty Dumpty is an example of arrogance and self-complacency and Carroll satirizes this aspect of the Victorian middle class society through his character. Word puzzles are also profusely used by the novelist with two purposes- to stimulate children to learn language and also to comment on various features of language itself. Besides, Carroll at one place, Carroll stretches the last sentence of a chapter and uses the remaining part as the title of the next chapter and puts a full stop there. Carroll uses acrostics too here and there. For example, the first letters of each line of the last poem spells Alice Pleasance Liddell, the name of real Alice.

SAQ

How does Carroll use irony and satire to hint at real life experiences even in a fantasy novel?

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Check your progress

Write about the major themes of *Through the Looking-Glass*.

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6.6 Characterization

We have already discussed the important features of the character in Unit 2 and have observed that in his characterization, Carroll has basically shown the individual and typical oddities of people. While some portrayals are satirical, others elicit pure humour. For example, we may mention the character of the White Knight, who is the ultimate example of maladjustment, “Whenever the horse stopped (which it did very often), he fell off in front; and whenever it went on again (which it generally did rather suddenly), he fell off behind. Otherwise he kept on pretty well, except that he had a habit of now and then falling off sideways;” (119) Through these portrayals, Carroll also reveals some ironies, paradoxes and ambiguities of life; for example, the Gnat likes to crack jokes, but only to be more and more unhappy. Again, the White Queen is always disheveled and less assertive though she is a queen. While Red Queen is both assertive and authoritative, the Red King is lost in perpetual slumber.

SAQ

Which character from the novel have you found most interesting?

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Check your progress

What are the purposes that Carroll fulfills through his way of characterization in the novel?

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6.7 Summing Up

In this unit we have seen how Lewis Carroll innovated and blended many technical devices to create his own kind of literature, which in a way subverts Victorian insistence on logic and coherence. Thus, by combining fantasy, nonsense, satire and irony in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll not only resists realism but also defies categorization altogether.

6.8 Suggested Readings

Auerbach, Nina. "Alice and Wonderland: a Curious Child" *Victorian Studies*, 1973

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass*, Fingerprint Classics, New Delhi, reprint 2020

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature* (Volume IV), Allied Publishers Limited, New Delhi, 1969

Kincaid, James R. "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland" *PMLA* 1973

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1994

<https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/alice/literarycriticism>

BLOCK 3

UNIT 1

Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*

BACKGROUND

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Biographical sketch
- 1.4 Novelist's other works
- 1.5 Placing the text
- 1.6 Summing up
- 1.7 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

This unit attempts to acquaint the learners with the life and seminal works of Thomas Hardy, who is a pioneering Victorian novelist, Modern poet and a short story writer. This section will prepare you to approach the prescribed text from several dimensions.

With this object in mind the unit is framed to

- *familiarize* yourself with the biography of Thomas Hardy
- *identify* Hardy's significant works
- *assess* the relevance of Hardy's work in the Victorian context.
- *examine* the novel from a critical purview.

1.2 Introduction

Thomas Hardy is one of the most dynamic and versatile writers of Victorian as well as of the Early Modern era. Hardy's literary presence may be seen in his many ground-breaking literary works in the form of novels, poems, and short stories. Most of his novelistic exercises encompass a rigid denunciation of Victorian morality. Because of his bold and fearless revelation in his novels, most of his literary ventures were subjected to severe scrutiny. Despite the fact that Hardy is classified as a fin-de-siècle writer, he brilliantly bridges the gap between the two eras (Victorian and Modern) in terms of spirit and style. In an era when the novel was regarded as a representative genre, Hardy's contribution, along with that of his Victorian contemporaries, was significant. His contemporaries like Charles Dickens, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters often depicted Victorian conservatism and social hierarchy in their novels. However Hardy stood beyond the oppressive angles of the society and hence can be perceived as a social reformer.

His skill as an architect in real life is profoundly evident in his literary fabrication of characters and settings. Hardy is primarily celebrated for his surreal depiction of landscape as he extends a cinematographic view of his settings. His fictional Wessex adds pastoral flavour to the various characteristic dimensions of his novels.

SAQ

Who were Hardy's contemporary writers? What were their major preoccupations in the novel? (70 words)

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Hardy's novels are particularly an exposition of pessimism and darkness which are rooted in the social gaze. In his novels, circumstances play a vital role. An individual is not always in control of his or her life but it is the circumstances that govern it. It is this assertion which becomes a primary subject of enquiry in Hardy's fictions. The Victorian world

tends to dictate the mind of most of Hardy’s characters in his fiction. However, the protagonists of Hardy are mostly idiosyncratic individuals who never succumb to the set norms and conventions. Hardy’s minute observation of Victorian society is amply reflected in his literary endeavours. Because of his conspicuous estimation of the Victorian double standardness and hypocrisy, Hardy’s works are often subjected to numerous criticisms and contentions.

SAQ

Why does Hardy make the characters' hearts suffer with pessimism and gloom? (40 words)

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The Victorian age is also known as an Age of novels. The age witnessed material prosperity and commercial growth at the economic forefront. With the industrial revolution, and the Great Exhibition of 1851, England cemented its position as a global power and further this gave rise to a new commercial enterprise. With the establishment of railways in 1825, several new avenues were opened for the country to venture. It was an age marked by prosperity. However, the age also witnessed a miserable degradation in the social condition of the new industrial cities. The evils of the Industrial revolution degraded the living condition of the working class. The growth of slums and exploitation of the cheap labour class was evident.

Such occurrences are widely depicted in novels by prominent Victorian novelists like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Emile Bronte, Thomas Hardy etc. Victorian society was directed by an obsession with social hierarchy and class consciousness. It deeply relied upon social conventions and Victorian morals. The concept of the “Angle in the house” was deeply valued as established Victorian morals. Hardy explored these Victorian dimensions like fallen women and iconoclastic themes in his novels. His characters are mostly questioning characters who interrogate the norms set by stereotypical Victorian outlook.

Hardy's graphical Wessex correlates with the grandeur of his thematic subjects. His delineation with the natural setup often evokes the essence of Wordsworthian sublimity and romanticism. Though Hardy is perceived as a Victorian as well as a modern writer, in terms of his naturalistic depiction it would not be wrong to perceive him as a Romantic figure too. He was an ardent admirer of the great Romantics who had a lasting impact on his later works. His genius handling permeates across the three ages. He mostly identifies his works with the supernaturalistic tendencies of the great Romantics in considering nature as the divine. Most of his works are placed in the milieu of inner conflict and his defiant outlook, which enables his characters to succumb to undesirable and perilous consequences.

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Hardy's characters are typically placed outside the Victorian world in terms of their characteristic traits. His women characters are mostly bold characters who stand beyond the Victorian 'mannerism'. They are presented as New woman who are much ahead of their times. Characters like Tess, Bathsheba, Eustacia and Sue are placed in stark contrast to an ideal Victorian woman. This is done to criticise the biased Victorian social constructs.

SAQ

Why does Hardy capitalize Wessex in his works? Comment on the significance of Wessex. (60 words)

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1.3 Biographical sketch

1.3.1 Life of Thomas Hardy

This section entails concise biographical information of the writer Thomas Hardy. The personal as well as literary transition which enabled him to attain the position of a representative writer of the period is comprehensively discussed with reference to some of the events occurring in his life. Some of the literary achievements have been referred to testify Hardy's position as an eminent novelist. Let us have a glimpse of Hardy's life and his prominent literary works.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), was born on 2nd June 1840 at Higher Bockhampton near Dorchester in Dorset. The eldest son of Thomas Hardy and Jemima Hardy, Hardy was a dedicated and inquisitive individual right from his tender age. His father, also named Thomas Hardy, was a self-employed stonemason. He wanted his son to learn violin and be a building consultant. His mother however was an avid reader who encouraged his love for reading. Much of Hardy's literary likings were nourished by his mother since his early childhood. Mitchell Millgate, a noted biographer of Hardy remarked "Hardy was a born bookworm, that and that alone was unchanging in him.." At the age of 16, he was apprenticed to be an architect under a local architect named John Hicks. His interest in reading was simultaneously nurtured along with his architectural training. Although under Hicks' guidance he evolved as a successful architect by designing many local houses, churches and his personal home Max Gate, apparently his career as an architect gave way to his literary pursuits.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Many characters of Hardy are borrowed from his real life. His experiences as an architect helped him to design his work with utmost care and precision. Characters like Stephen Smith, Elfride, the rural residents of Dorset resembles to some of his remarkable characters. Furthermore, his Wessex becomes a replica of the place where he was born and spent most of his time.

In 1862, on account of his architectural training, he visited London and was enchanted by the culture of London city which was much alien to him. This visit triggered his interest in writing and he began composing

poems. He spent five years in London to resume his architectural orientation under the guidance of Arthur Bloomfield, a noted architect. It was in London he was exposed to the works of many literary scholars like Herbert Spencer, J.S. Mill, John Ruskin and Charles Dickens. These exposures inspired him in his later works. Although Hardy started his literary career with poetry, he gradually began to write novels by 1867. His first written novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* failed to find a publisher and was never published. However, with his first published work *Desperate Remedies* (1871) there was no looking back for the author. The fruit of his authorial success was reaped with the publication of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) which ushered his literary journey. With his next work *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) Hardy witnessed tremendous fame and commercial success. His gradual fame as a writer enabled him to quit architecture and devote himself solely to writing.

Hardy's stay in London was a kind of pilgrimage for him as it enabled him to introspect on his earlier belief and ideas. It was in London that his prior religious belief dwindled and he withdrew himself from the institutional Christian faith. His cynicism is embodied in most of his pioneering works like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* where he portrays the inclination of the characters to lead purely by self-interest.

In 1868, on his professional trip to St. Juliot, Cornwall he met Emma Gifford whom he eventually married in 1874. He settled with his wife at Max Gate, the villa which he had designed himself. With Emma, initially Hardy's most of the creative faculties were encouraged as they attended opera theatres and visited places of artistic inspiration and aesthetic getaway. Gradually their relationship turned sour and they remained estranged. During the years spent with his wife, he travelled and lodged mostly in London and his home Max Gate in Dorchester. This gave him an exposure to perceive the social hierarchy which was widely prevalent in London society. Though he belonged to a middle-class family he realised the class differences which demarcated Victorian society. It is this first-hand impression of the class system in London society that becomes his extensive preoccupation in most of his works.

Although the marital relationship was not a blissful one, his relationship with Emma inspired many of his poems after her death in 1912. Two years later in 1914, he married Florence Dugdale who was a woman with literary ambitions. She served as a secretary to Hardy and

eventually, both got married. It is widely speculated that Hardy's biography *The Life of Thomas Hardy* was Florence Dugdale's composition. However, eventually, it was known that Hardy wrote the biography himself and Dugdale just typed the manuscript of the same. The second marriage too resulted in failure.

Hardy and Wessex

Hardy uses the setting of Wessex in a majority of his novelistic pursuits. Wessex is a fictional region created by Hardy in which his novels are basically set. It is a topographically exquisite realm with a rustic essence in it. Many critics speculate the inspiration of Hardy's Wessex to be from Southwest England and they estimate the inclusion of countries like Berkshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon. The clarity of Hardy's Wessex was obtained with the publication of Hardy's map of Wessex which resembled to parts of England but with bizarre names. The idea of Wessex is much inspired by Hardy's observation of his native place in Dorchester. His experience of artistic places which he visited with his wife triggered a new scene in Wessex. Thus Wessex is an amalgamation of Hardy's vision and real places he witnessed in his life. Wessex is a dreamy world with a suburban landscape abundant with Austrian pines and extended greenery of Hardy's imagination.

Hardy invests a lot of time in designing the Wessex setting for his novels. The poetic and surreal description of Wessex elevates its position from a mere geographical setting. Wessex allows the characters to evolve themselves from their existing precarious state. The fictional countryside of Wessex allows room for characters to identify their real selves and interact with the natural world. The setup and scene of Wessex is an embodiment of Hardy's philosophy. The absurdist occurrence in the life of the characters finds meaning in the sensible representation of rural Wessex. The fictional aspect of Wessex withstood the realistic setup.

Wessex apart from being a geographical location holds a symbolic and cultural significance in Hardy's novels. Wessex is blended by a splendid location and culture of the natives. The region becomes symbolic of the challenges the characters encounter. The intrusion of the outside affair corrupts the tranquillity of the region. Thus, Wessex becomes an embodiment of Hardy's mastery over picturesque setting, progressive plot and innovative characters who flourish amidst nature's bounty.

Stop to Consider

Many of Hardy's novels were affected by his love relationships. It is speculated that most of the love connections depicted in his works are a reflection of his personal affairs. His romantic relationship with Tryphena Sparks as well as Emma Gifford bears resemblance to many of his woman characters. Furthermore, his own Dorset experiences are incorporated in his creative Wessex. Hardy's religious ideologies also become a subject matter in most of his novels.

1.3.2 Awards, Accolades and Recognition

During his literary tenure, Hardy was conferred with many prestigious awards. In 1905, he was honoured as the most outstanding British author by the University of Aberdeen. In 1910, he was conferred with the Order of Merit. Because of his incredible contribution to literature, he was nominated for Nobel Prize in Literature. He also received honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford. His success as a writer is also testified by the gold medal which he received from the Royal Society of Literature. Apart from these awards, he earned many rewards in the form of appreciation from his contemporaries like George Meredith, Robert Graves, Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden. In 1934, in a letter, Ezra Pound remarked: "Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died."

Towards the final phase of his life, Hardy led a secluded life in his country retreat-Max Gate as he remained frequently ill by 1927. Succumbing to his ill health he died on 11 January 1928. Because of his fame, his death evoked heartfelt mourning across the country and world. After his death, his heart was buried by the side of his first wife Emma Lavinia Gifford in the cemetery of St. Michael's Church in Stinsford, while his body was cremated in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey on the same day as per his will. His funeral in Westminster Abbey was attended by many important personalities from the literary as well as the political field.

Stop to Consider

Thomas Hardy was a Victorian novelist with a modernist outlook. We have to remember that though Hardy started his professional career as a trained architect, he later shifted his entire focus to novels and poetry. He found extremely difficult to find a publisher for his amateur works. But apparently with *Far From the Madding Crowds* (1874) he received tremendous fame and financial success.

1.4 Hardy's Literary works

This section will give you a brief overview of Hardy's prominent novels. The succinct discussion on the novels will help you to understand Hardy's engagement with some of the recurrent themes of his novels. It will also enable you to understand the reception of Hardy's works by critics and scholars. The section will emphasise on Hardy's proficiency as a novelist and establish him as a representative writer of the era.

Hardy's literary career can be categorised into three phases: The initial phase can be marked as a dormant literary period as most of his works remained unacknowledged. In this stage although he began to compose poems, he failed to find a publisher to publish his works. During this stage his focus primarily rested on his architectural endeavours and thus his literary writings failed to mark its presence.

The second stage can be regarded as the most productive stage in Hardy's literary career. This phase was characterised by his successful literary productions in the form of publication of fourteen novels inclusive of his masterpieces like *Far From the Madding Crowd*(1874), *The Return of Natives* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) etc and many short stories. This phase assured Hardy's position as a towering figure in the literary world. It is in this period of literary prosperity that we witness Hardy's farewell to fiction writing pertaining to hostile remarks for novels like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*(1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

The final phase was featured by an acclaimed role as a poet with some of the path-breaking poetic productions. This stage showcased Hardy as a representative poet with some of his remarkable poems like "Darkling Thrush", "Neutral Tones", "The Voice", "Wessex Heights" etc. Though

Hardy initiated his literary career with poetry it is at this stage that saw Hardy's maturity as a poet.

Recurrent themes of Hardy's novels at a glimpse

Though Hardy started with a failed career in poetry, his novels uplifted his role as a brilliant litterateur. It is because of his innovative way of addressing some of the social issues carved with an individual's sense of discretion, his fictions are held in high regard. Hardy's novels are mostly novels of characters and landscape. The rural backdrop in his novels works in tandem with the development of the plot and characters. His characters encompass an emotional inclination which at times conflict with the social consciousness. His characters are more an agent of fatalism as most of them are driven by a strong sense of fate and destiny. They seem to oscillate between the sense of fate and a sense of social responsibility. His works are widely known for their forceful and vigorous exposition of the Victorian social condition. Although Hardy resorts to using profanities in his novels, yet his delineation seemed much ahead of the Victorian society.

A brief overview of Hardy's prominent novels are given below:

The Poor Man and the Lady: Thomas Hardy's earliest effort in fiction was seen in his first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*. However, the novel was never published as it was vehemently rejected by many reputed publishing houses of the time such as Tinsley Brothers, Macmillan and Chapman & Hall. This eventually led him to destroy the manuscript of this first composition. Though his first novel, which Hardy eluded to be a socialist novel, was never accepted for publication, George Meredith the reviewer of the work anticipated Hardy's literary potential from his first work and found his writing quite promising. He saw a literary resemblance of Hardy's work with that of Wilkie Collins and George Eliot who had already established themselves as reputed novelist of the time. Meredith observed a spark in Hardy's work which was yet to be evolved in his maiden work. He advised Hardy to polish his writing skills in order to attain artistic refinement and to focus more on the construction of the plot.

Desperate Remedies: By the next work Hardy implemented Meredith's suggestion and conceived his next novel *Desperate Remedies*, which bore replication of Wilkie Collins' plot structure. The novel focuses more on plot development than the characters' progress. It is based on

the romantic exploits of Cytherea Graye and Edward Springrove and the complications which unfold with the progress of the plot. There is an element of a murky mystery and gothic essence in the novel which charges the anticipation of the readers. Critics like Gordon Hall Gerould remarked: “Hardy imitated Wilkie Collins in *Desperate Remedies* and learned how to manage the narrative.” As his first novel was rejected on the grounds of inadequate plot structure, he strengthened the plot in this work. However, this novel was also subjected to negative remarks as critics objected Hardy’s depiction as obscene and too sensational. Hardy himself was dismissive of this novel in his autobiography as he found the work to be superfluously charged in terms of its construction. The first edition of the novel was published anonymously in three volumes by the Tinsley Brothers in 1871. Although the plot and the theme of the novel was rejected as being unpleasant, but there were commentaries on this work which acknowledged the buzzy setting and psychoanalytical vent. This second novel *Desperate Remedies* definitely prepared and nourished his later novelistic skills.

Under the Greenwood Tree (1872): The second published and the third written novel of Hardy *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) can be considered to be the first work of Hardy which gained him acknowledgement and consideration as a novelist. It was published anonymously by Tinsley Brothers in 1872. However, one year later in 1873, the novel was published with Hardy’s authorship in America. The novel attracted several readers because of Shakespeare’s association with the title of the novel. The title of the novel is borrowed from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, which was a pastoral drama. The novel is also enriched with a profound pastoral setting with the lush greenery of rural life. Hardy blends humour, skill and scenic elevation to add a pastoral flavour to the plot. The romantic and harmoniously designed plot revolves around the love story of Dick Dewy, a sincere choir member of the church, and Fanny Day, a self possessed, frolicsome lady. As the novel dealt with a lyrical and melodious serenity interwoven by a pastoral extravagance it accumulated lauds from many critics. Michael Millgate rightfully defines this novel as “nearly flawless”. The novel anticipates the conception of Hardy’s Wessex in his upcoming novels.

A Pair of Blue Eyes: This novel was the first novel to be published with Hardy’s name on it, unlike the previous three novels which were published anonymously. The work reflected a manifestation of Hardy’s mature handling of novelistic exercise. He uses the technique of

withholding information in the novel to keep the suspense of the story intact. The story of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* uses some of the autobiographical elements as it is based on the romantic relationships of Stephen Smith, who was a young architect assistant just like Hardy himself, and Elfride Swancourt whom he met while he was on his architectural mission to restore the church. Elfride bears some resemblance with Emma Lavinia Gifford. The novel entails issues pertaining to the class differences that serve as an obstacle for the lovers to unite. The novel also deals with the theme of a triangular love affair. It substantiates Hardy's growing interest in Darwinism as the story reflects that a man is a product of the social environment. Hardy allots a bold space to the heroine in this novel as she transcends the Victorian norms to save her second suitor, Henry Knight from death. Hardy's depiction of a strong and powerful heroine thus envisages his upcoming novels like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, which have self-conscious and thinking woman characters.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874): It was Hardy's fourth written novel and first popular success. It is based on a pastoral tale. *Far from the Madding Crowd* heralded Hardy's literary success and it skyrocketed his fame to a whole new level. After the success of this novel, he felt his literary career was on track and thus he gave up architecture to focus primarily on writing. The title of the novel is borrowed from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard". The novel, like the poem, entails the decadence of rural culture at the hands of rising urban civilization. In the novel, Hardy presented an asserted woman who takes a commanding position in her life and relationship. Hardy's Bathsheba is an independent and capable woman. She adheres to the paradigm of the new woman. The setting and storyline of the novel remind one of Austenian plot with themes of love and marriage acquiring a centre stage. However, Hardy's woman character is guided by her own choice compared to Austen's heroines who are products of their social class. Bathsheba, a woman of nineteen years strives to conquer the heart of all her suitors with her assertive and witty nature. Although Bathsheba attempts to retain her individuality, the dominant patriarchal values eventually consumes her independence. Hardy conceived the idea of his fictional Wessex with this novel with its rich dreamlike illustrations of the rural setup. Hardy's inclination towards Darwin's social environment and its impact on man finds ample space in this novel. The novel despite several barriers ends with the romantic reunion of Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak.

The Return of the Native: The Return of the Native which came out in twelve monthly instalments is Hardy's one of the most popular and widely read novels. The plot of the novel is based on a complicated love relationship between the central characters: Miss Thomasin Yeobright, Diggory Venn, Eustacia Vye, Wildeve, Clym. The clandestine nature of love heightens the complications of the plot, thereby creating an enigma and suspense throughout the narrative. Though the narrative is filled with a lot of upheavals, Hardy presents an unconventional heroine who attempts to negotiate the tension between the traditional values and her personal desires. Eustacia is governed by self-fulfilment and her rebellious nature makes her a non-conformist to the patriarchal Victorian tradition. He presents the Victorian society's gaze which perceives such women as devilish and fallen women. The native who is being referred to in the story is Clym whose return to Egdon Heath triggers the action in the novel. The setting of Egdon Heath is embodied as another character as Hardy devotes a lot of time to show the transformative role of the place. The place can be perceived as a personification of another character who celebrates along with the celebration of the dwellers and mourns their loss.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles: One of Hardy's most controversial and popular works Tess of the D'Urbervilles shows a bold take on the paradoxical Victorian patriarchal society by Hardy. The novel titled after a woman character is all about a young girl named Tess who has encountered different phases of life and has been compelled to take decisions not conditioned by choice but by circumstances. Hardy showed the journey of Tess' life which was passing out of her control. Tess while working in a house met Alack who eventually raped her. She returns from the place and years later she met Angel who befriends her and later both gets married. However, there was something that was disturbing Tess. On their wedding night, they decided to share each other' past. Angel accepted his past affair with a woman but the moment he learns about Alack he feels devastated and leaves Tess. The hypocrisy of Angel affects Tess' future life completely. The subtitle of the novel "Pure Woman" is given by Hardy in order to show Tess as perfect, pure, and a subject of sympathy. Hardy faced a lot of criticism for the novel as he was dealing with a character and society where certain parameters of assessment were faulty. Tess is more a victim of fate and chance as she is often viewed as an object of desire by the male characters in the novel. Hardy wanted to present Tess as a symbol of purity which was quite conflicting for many critics and thus, the novel

was subjected to hostile disapproval. Thus, Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* can be perceived as a harbinger of the later feminist movement of the twentieth century. Along with this novel, *Jude the Obscure*(1895) is another work which is often categorised together for being the most controversial works of Hardy.

Comment on Hardy's recurrent issues addressed in his seminal novels. (50 words)

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How are Hardy's characters products of fatalism? (60 words)

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Check your progress

1. How does Hardy treat landscape in his works?
2. How Hardy's real life experiences influenced his fictional work?
3. Have you noticed Hardy's treatment of the women characters?
4. What have you found revolutionary in Hardy's prominent works?

Wessex Poems (1898): The fifty-one poems published under the Wessex poems in 1898 introduced Hardy's position as a representative

poet of the era. Though Hardy had already introduced the profound exuberance of the rural lifestyle and landscape in his novels, his poems contributed furthermore to further celebrate the sublimity of the place. After giving up his career in novels this is the first poetic volume assembled by him. These poems convey a great variety in their subjects and he sings about his perception of life. Although his initial attempt in poetry with this collection was also subjected to negative remarks however eventually with his later matured poems he cemented his position as a poet. Some of the famous poems from this collection are “Ambel”, “Hap”, “In Vision I Roamed”, “In a Wood” etc.

Hardy’s short stories: Hardy published over 50 short stories. He is praised for his collection of stories like *Wessex Tales (1888)*, *A Group of Noble Dames (1891)*, *Life’s Little Ironies (1894)*. The versatility, innovative content, subject and style testifies to Hardy’s calibre as a short story writer. Apart from this, he also tried composing a poetic drama of nineteen acts and 130 scenes titled *The Dynasts (1903-08)* which was based on the history of Napoleonic wars. Though he wrote plenty of short stories, his position as a short story writer is always underrated.

Hardy’s other works of considerable merit includes:

- *The Hand of Ethelberta (1875-76)*
- *The Trumpet Major (1880)*
- *A Laodicean (1881)*
- *Two on a Tower (1882)*
- *The Romantic Adventure of a Milkmaid (1883)*
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)*
- *The Woodlanders (1887)*
- *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved (1892)*

His volumes of poetry comprises of:

- *Wessex Poems (1898)*
- *Poems of the Past and Present (1902)*
- *Time’s Laughingstock (1909)*
- *Satire of Circumstances (1914)*
- *Moments of Vision (1917)*
- *Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922)*
- *Human Shows (1925)*

- *Winter Words (1928)*
- *The Collected Poems (1930)*

1.5 Placing the text

In this section, you will be introduced to the novel *Jude the Obscure*. It will also help you to approach the text from a critical purview. Among all the other texts described above, *Jude the Obscure* is the one text which is often anthologised as one of the most controversial novels by Hardy. It invited numerous negative and harsh remarks from the audience. As per the review of the newspaper *The Pall Mall Gazette*, the book was considered to be nightmarish and ‘a titanicly bad book’. It even extended an alternative title of the book as “Jude the Obscene”. However, the reception of the novel by modern readers tends to be quite conflicting with the earlier criticism of the work. Though published in the form of a magazine in the initial state it didn’t fail to grab the attention of the readers due to its never addressed issues on class, gender, religion and marriage so boldly. His fearless exposition on such delicate matters subjected him to critical scrutiny. The titular modification of the text itself showcases Hardy’s baffling situation while finalising a perfect title for the novel. Originally, the first draft of the novel was compiled as *The Simpletons*, and then it ran in episodic form as *Hearts Insurgent* in the *Harper New Monthly Magazine (1894-95)*. However, by the time it was published in its book form in 1895 many modifications in the narrative were made.

Stop to Consider

Many reviewers lambasted the novel *Jude the Obscure*, calling it wicked and sinful. The book was burned by the Bishop of Wakefield because it was considered blasphemous by them. The work's agnostic protagonists and their nonconformist handling of Victorian ideas provided ground for furious criticism.

Based on the psychological and moral growth of the eponymous hero of the novel, *Jude the Obscure* traces the life of this young man who meets numerous challenges on his way towards accomplishing his dream. It

presents some of the most powerful characters ever depicted by Hardy. The novel is about the quest of a young man named Jude Fawley who aspires to study in Christminster, a nearby town of his village. During his childhood days, as an orphan, Jude stayed with his baker aunt who seems to be of some support but she often cursed him throughout which indeed doubles his misery. His childhood reminds us of a typical Dickensian setup which shows the hardship of a young boy who tries to earn a livelihood in a harsh world. Under such circumstances, Richard Phillotson, the local schoolmaster serves to be a guiding light who tries to uplift him from his present hardship by infusing a dream in him; a dream of being a scholar, a dream of being a respectable member of the society, a dream to earn a living and education in Christminster. As the novel opens Jude is acquainted with the educational opportunities in Christminster by Phillotson who was leaving his native town for Christminster to pursue his education. This impending journey of Phillotson created an awakening in him to take up his ambition of studying in Christminster, which rendered to be a replica of Oxford in Hardy's Wessex. Christminster serves to be a driving force in his life which excited him to dream of venturing into the sophisticated and learned world of Christminster. As days went by he nurtured his plan by preparing himself for the other world. He trained himself in classical languages to formulate a composed identity of his for Christminster. However, fate had other plans and amidst undesirable circumstances, he married Arabella Fermour, a young voluptuous lady. She duped Jude into marrying her for her false pregnancy. The marriage based on deception failed to survive and both mutually parted ways. The separation further enabled Jude to concentrate on his lifelong ambition of studying in Christminster.

Christminster plays a very symbolic role in the entire narrative of the novel. It serves to be an embodiment of glory and light for Jude. The majority of the action takes place in Christminster which was once perceived by the protagonist as synonymous with Jerusalem. The distant light of Christminster attracted him since his childhood. But the harsh reality of Christminster devastated him as he was never embraced by the place because of his social position. In pursuit of his dream, he was exposed to a reality which he never felt would have existed. Christminster failed to accommodate his dream and his entire childhood dream was battered in seconds. As the narrative progresses in Christminster it turns gloomier and eventually leads to a tragic end.

As the novel traces the plight of the young boy and his shattered dream, the parameters of assessing the text as a traditional *bildungsroman* stand conforming. Along with the physical development, the psychological growth and the changing perception of life for Jude makes the novel a perfect example of a “coming-of-age” story. Though it is the quest for education that initiates the action but it is also a spiritual realisation in a complex realm that further shapes his distinct identity.

Hardy’s representation of the strong woman characters in a dominated patriarchal society enables one to approach the text from feminist angles. As the age witnessed the revolutionary work of J.S.Mill’s *The Subjugation of Women*, Hardy’s preoccupation with women characters was much influenced by such contemporary works. The notion of “new women” holds relevant in analysing the contrasting position of Sue as well as Arabella. Arabella often imbibes the essence of a typical Victorian woman while Sue refuses to conform to the traditional roles imposed upon woman. Sue is an independent and self made woman whose choices are determined by her will and not by conventions. While determining the relation of Jude and Sue, the novel attends some of the issues on marriage in the Victorian world. The novel seems to trivialize the institution of marriage. The failure of marriage of all the characters conveys a deep interrogation on rigid Victorian structure of matrimony. Ironically marriage is thought to be a mandatory obligation for the Victorian woman. By placing the characters with carnal affections outside wedlock, Hardy invites harsh response from his contemporaries. Hardy’s rebuttal on the Victorian social framework affirms his non-conformist and recalcitrant outlook. For such direct commentary his works became a subject of rejection for the Victorian readers. Nevertheless, with the later interpretations of the novel by modern reader and critics, it is now deemed as a classic of Thomas Hardy.

How does Hardy treat the subject of marriage in <i>Jude the Obscure</i> ? (30 words)
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Check your progress

1. How does Hardy handle the delicate issue of ambition, education and marriage?
2. Have you noticed how Hardy is exploring the concept of New Woman?
3. What is Jude's quest based on?
4. How does Hardy play around with contrasts in the novel?

1.6 Summing up

The Introductory section of the unit on the Background has thus acquainted you with Thomas Hardy as a pioneering writer along with his recurring themes explored in his masterpieces. The introduction to his regular preoccupations in his novels will help you to contextualize Hardy's works. Hardy as a social critic extends his revolutionary opinion through his characters to highlight the biased social constructs of 19th century society. His central characters explore an unconventional space to reject the stereotypical impositions of Victorian society. The socio-cultural condition of the Victorian world becomes a contesting ground in Hardy's works. Moreover, the elevation of nature is also evident through a divine representation of Wessex. All these reflections will serve as a precursor to our reading of the text under consideration- *Jude the Obscure*.

In the second section of the unit you have familiarized yourself with the biographical information of the author which serves noteworthy from his novelistic pursuits. His real-life experiences in Dorchester become amply reflected in his novels. His fictional representation of Wessex encompasses the scenic elevation of Dorchester. Apprenticed to be an architect, Hardy from his childhood was profoundly interested in reading and his knowledge of architecture and craftsmanship helped him design his narrative plots with utmost precision. His life in London gave him exposure to the literary world and existing social prevalence which he was unaware of. Furthermore the major texts of Hardy are briefly overviewed in a compact manner to *help you* understand Hardy's

handling of characters and themes. Apart from his novels, his poems are briefly mentioned to dwell upon the versatility of the writer. All these elucidations made in the section will *enable you* to approach any text of Hardy from an autobiographical framework along with your subjective interpretations of the text.

The final section on *Jude the Obscure* has introduced you to the relevance of the text. By reading the section, you are in a position *to assess* the novel from a critical dimension. As you read the novel, you will have an insight into Hardy's assessment of the Victorian world, as he tries to portray the regressive side of 19th-century society. The possible interpretations of the work were referred to in this section which will be also explored in greater depth in the next few units. Although the novel was vehemently criticised as "immoral" by critics, it is by far the most read and analysed work of Hardy.

Thus, a reading of the novel becomes imperative to explore the other intricacies addressed in it. A relative estimation of Hardy's other work is highly recommended to enhance your understanding of Hardy's work in general. This will further lead you to a better comprehension of *Jude the Obscure* as a groundbreaking work of Thomas Hardy.

1.7 References and Suggested Reading

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UNIT 2

Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*

Introducing the Novel

Unit Structure :

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 What happens in the Novel (The Plot)
- 2.4 Major Characters
- 2.5 Minor Characters
- 2.6 Summing Up
- 2.7 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives

The unit will introduce the novel *Jude the Obscure* with a special emphasis on the textual analysis. It will give you an extensive understanding of the plot and the characters with reference to the period in which it was written. Associating the work with the context will enable you to grasp the issues cohesively. Therefore before proceeding with the textual interpretation I would refer to the conditions surrounding the Victorian novels in the beginning of the unit.

Adhering to this objective the unit is designed to make the learner

- *understand* the issues addressed in Victorian novels
- *read* the text of *Jude the Obscure*
- *estimate* the action of the characters and how it contributes to the progression of the plot
- *interpret* the novel using a subjective understanding that will allow readers to make their own opinions on the work.

2.2 Introduction

Thomas Hardy, widely recognised as the late Victorian author dominated the age which is known as the Age of Novel. Novel writing throughout the Victorian era was noted for its experimental styles. With the arrival of the Pre-Raphaelite Group, the Victorian era promoted the supremacy of realism, utilitarianism, and aestheticism, and most of the products of Victorian literature imbibed the idea of "art for art's sake." The aesthetic spirit is embodied in Hardy's prioritization of the lofty landscape which allured the mind of the readers. Given the surreal representation of Wessex, Hardy's tendency to spiritualize nature becomes overtly visible.

The Victorian world influenced much of the Victorian literature encompassing the religious relevance of John Keble and the Oxford movement, Darwin's renunciation of religious discourses and the political as well as feminist principles of J.S. Mill. The distinctiveness of Victorian novels is modelled on the incoherent situations that reflect the age's conflict. The rationalism and high morality of the Victorian world enhance the Victorian crisis as evoked in many Victorian novels.

In the Victorian novels, a shift in character was evidently noticed. It embarked on the character's development more than the plot or action of the novel. The characters have the ability to sabotage the plot's steady progression. Many Victorian novels used the serialised version of the novels to check the reaction of the readers. These stories were published in instalments in the form of weekly and periodical magazines. The reaction of the readers would lead to a change in the storyline of the plot. This helped the authors to reframe the remaining plot as per the desire of the readers.

The late Victorians like Hardy and George Eliot embarked on the elevation of rural representation. This served as a reaction to the deadening interest in the countryside in the face of industrialization. The shift from agrarian to industrial and commercial preferences is lamented by the late Victorians. Hardy's profound celebration of the rural Wessex serves to be a reaction to the long depression in the face of industrialisation. Such depiction shows an attempt to preserve the essence of rural England in Victorian novels.

A conspicuous observation of the change in the perception of life with the advent of Darwin's theory is deeply explored in the novels of the nineteenth century. Dismantling the set religious models they tend to show the characters as a social individual who are products of the society in which they live. Darwin's principle on "survival of fittest" becomes the guiding principle of many novelists.

The era also witnessed a growth in sensation fictions by the 1860s which was grounded on a non-conformist attitude towards hollow set conventions. The focus in such novels was to depict the social anxiety and dilemma in the hands of the prevalent conventions. Depiction of clandestine affairs and intrigues become the subject matter of such novels. These revelations bring an element of shock as these are beyond the occurrences of normal society. Wilkie Collins' *The Women in White* is a classic example of the genre. Hardy's early sensation romances imitate Collins and it is quite evident in many of his literary endeavours.

Another subject matter which encircles the work of many Victorian novels is the portrayal of the New woman in fiction. Although the portrayal of unconventional women flared up intense reaction from the audience, it served as revolutionary in the Victorian context. . Such issues found a wider currency in works of Hardy as his female characters are a radical woman who questions the set institutions. His works speak for the female sexuality in its boldest sense which attains a backseat in traditional novels. His work addresses the gap between sexual desire and social convention. Such depiction also raises the question of marriage in the 19th century. Marriage was an unavoidable obligation for women, and those who did not marry were deemed cursed and fallen. Young Victorian women were to contemplate their marriage as it was considered central to their lives. Marriage was held in high regard in Victorian culture since it was considered a "civilised" society, and physical contact outside of marriage was considered a sin. Such actions were devalued in society and anyone found engaging in such actions were expelled from the society. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* imbibes some of the revolutionary take-ups on marriage which was felt by many critics as an audacious attempt by the writer who tried to hurt the sentiments of the Victorian people.

Many social changes and reforms occurred during this period, yet many hollow Victorian ideas were repressive of these reforms. According to Honore de Balzac, no reforms can bring about change until citizens' spirits are lifted and they internalise the changes that correspond to

scientific advancement. However, many orthodox ideas were strongly ingrained in Victorian culture. The literature of the time is used to illustrate or question the significance of such tendencies and Hardy explored these tendencies in his works.

2.3 What happens in *Jude the Obscure*

So far from the discussion cited above you have framed an idea as to how the Victorian novels addressed some of the delicate issues on life and society. Now, before approaching the plot of the novel, let me ask you to think about the present society in which you reside and contrast it with Victorian society. Have you got some idea as to how the nineteenth century differed in terms of the traditional approach towards life? Now, while reading the plot you will be able to decipher the psychic dilemma that the characters undergo. But, before that, I would advise you to read the novel so that you can interpret the aspects of the novel from multiple approaches. As Roland Barthes in his essay *The Death of the Author* says a text is “..multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original blend and clash”, our target will not be to find the original meaning of the story but to analyse it from the cultural and subjective perspective.

Part I: The book *Jude the Obscure* is the bleakest tragedy of Hardy. It is set in different locations, a few of which are placed in Hardy's composed Wessex. The novel opens with Part First which is set in Marygreen. The local schoolmaster, Richard Phillotson is moving to Christminster for his further studies. The villagers offer him help in packing and transporting his goods to “the city of his destination”. To name his possessions, he had few articles, a stack of books, and a piano which he had trouble in shifting. Because of his humble nature, the villagers were deeply saddened by his departure. Jude Fawley, an eleven-year-old orphan, was affected more than the others by the schoolmaster's leaving since he was emotionally attached to him. Jude assisted with the packing and suggested temporarily keeping the piano at his aunt's fuel house. While leaving, Phillotson explained to Jude why he needed to go and how essential his university degree was to him. He indicated that education in Christminster would enable him to live a better life. The final words from the schoolmaster to Jude were “be a

good boy, remember; and if you ever come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance' sake”(11)

STOP TO CONSIDER

The beginning of the novel reminds us of a traditional *bildungsroman* novel. A bildungsroman traces the overall growth of an individual from his childhood. The novel traces the growth of Jude Fawley. Phillotson's dream gradually becomes Jude's dream and he prepares himself to be a scholar. Jude's journey of being a scholar in the opening chapter of the book can be compared to Pip's journey of being gentleman in *Great Expectation* as both the characters have a similar childhood.

Jude stayed with his aunt Drusilla Fawley who earned her living as a baker. Jude used to assist her with different home tasks, but her complaints often irritated him. While talking with the visitors, Drusilla informs them of Jude's book addiction, which he shares with his cousin Sue Bridehead. The woes and worries continued to mount for Jude as he was dismissed from his job of scaring the birds off from Mr Troutham, the farmer's field because he led the birds to peck at the corn. These undesirable incidents make him yearn and dream for Christminster-“The heavenly Jerusalem”. Eager enough in the evening he ascended to the roof of the Brown House to have a far off glimpse of the city of Christminster, and prepares himself to chase his passion. On his return, though he was terrified by the scary scene of the impending night, the sight of the church appeased him. The hazy view of Christminster made him passionate and he starts fancying the place day and night. To self-motivate himself, he envisioned Mr Phillotson's whereabouts and current existence in Christminster.

Stop to consider

Christminster is more than a geographical location for Jude. It becomes a means to escape the dreads of life. The very idea of Christminster delighted him and sparked an awakening in him. Phillotson is the source of inspiration for him who transports an inherent passion for learning in Jude. Jude is also instilled with the desire of attaining greater social

mobility through Christminster. As a result, his main purpose in life becomes to reach Christminster.

Jude's fantasy of Christminster—"a city of light"—became known to the locals, and one day a pedestrian carter informed him that Christminster was a hotspot of erudite intellectuals, and that the residents spoke, "On'y strange tongues utilised before the Flood." This aroused his curiosity in learning "strange tongues."

SAQ

What does Jude's dream mean to him, and how does it affect his identity?

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With this knowledge, Jude begins to orient himself in order to fit into the Christminster culture. Jude's initial idea was to seek assistance from a physician who travelled much as part of his job. He approached Physician Vibert, with whom Jude had doubts due to his dubious drug therapies. However, he was overjoyed to learn from the Physician of the people's interest in classical language in Christminster. Despite his promise to provide Jude with Latin and Greek grammar books in exchange for advertising his medications to the villagers, the doctor deserted Jude. Meanwhile, Mr. Phillotson, sends for his piano and Jude secretly keeps a letter in the piano asking for grammar books before dispatching it. After few days he received his bundle of joy in the form of two thin books from Mr. Phillotson. His self-training begins as he strives to learn two alien languages, Latin and Greek. His learning journey also leads to self-discovery as he is introduced to the importance of Christian divinity and becomes a devout Bible reader.

Days and years passed while he worked as a stonemason in Alfredston for the next three years to collect money for Christminster, returning home on weekends to Marygreen. On his way back to Marygreen one fine day, as he was absorbed by Christminster's thoughts, an unusual incident occurred. He was hit in the ear by a pig's pizzle. Three young

women had pulled a joke on him. One among them caught the attention of Jude who was physically attractive and perfectly proportionate in her appearance. The lady was Arabella Donn. Jude was smitten with her physical beauty, and he urged her to meet on the following day to which she readily agrees. With his gradual infatuation towards Arabella, the dream of Christminster slightly starts fading. Jude and Arabella begin to meet one another and spend time together. Although Jude was still unsure and sceptical about his infatuation, Arabella was confident and she decided to marry him. On the advice of her friends Sarah and Anny, Arabella resolves to seduce him and trick Jude into believing she is pregnant and pressure him into marrying her. After almost two months of courtship, Arabella informs Jude of her false pregnancy which baffled Jude. He became trapped within two worlds of Christminster and Arabella. However, his dream of Christminster attained a backseat as his marriage with Arabella became his top concern. Jude gradually finds Arabella's artificiality in terms of her look and behaviour, as well as her fake pregnancy. Jude was betrayed, yet he could never be impulsive with her, despite his futile attempt to kill himself. Jude knows his marriage was a mistake as his disagreements with Arabella escalate, and he learnt from his aunt that no marriages in his family have ever survived. Utterly disgusted, he led a disturbed life full of disillusionment. Arabella sells everything they own as she decides to move to Australia along with her parents. This finally allows Jude to return to his previous dream after many setbacks in life.

Stop to consider

Although Jude was an ardent learner his attraction towards Arabella shows his sensuous desire. He eventually realises his shortcomings, but his tenacity and dedication enable him to refocus on his ambition. Jude is a modest man who has little aspirations in life. He just has one expectation: to complete his university studies in Christminster.

SAQ

What do you think about Arabella's personality? Make a remark about her intrigues.

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Part II: Set in Christminster, the abode of his dream, Part II of the novel entails Jude's long-awaited yet startling experiences. Three years after his estranged relationship and the completion of his apprenticeship as a stonemason he finally entered the door to his happiness-Christminster. He recalls his cousin Sue Bridehead whose photograph he saw at his aunt's place. Sue was a resident of Christminster. Soon after arriving, he starts looking into colleges and the whereabouts of Mr. Phillotson as well as his cousin Sue. Gradually he is pushed to reality as the captivating thought of the city of Christminster starts fading once he reaches there. To earn a livelihood and to gather some money for his studies he works under a stonemason. He manages to find Sue and was astonished at her simplicity and saintly appearance. However, he is hesitant to meet her since he is already married and their union would be blasphemous because they are cousins. Jude's perception of Sue as a traditional, pious woman is maintained as he learns that Sue attends the morning service in the Cathedral-church of Cardinal College frequently. Sue, paradoxically, is an unusual lady who is not religious and is largely guided by her inner intuition, which may be at odds with the established religious beliefs.

Hardy's representation of the New Woman is evident through the portrayal of Sue's character. Her affinity towards established social conventions is frequently lacking. Her views are in direct opposition to those of the social institutions. She is an eccentric lady with atypical characteristic traits. Her unorthodox nature makes her a woman much ahead of her age. She initially refuses to be swayed by Victorian morality. As a result, her future has been jeopardised, and a tragedy is on the horizon.

Jude's affection for Sue becomes deeper, and he begins to resent himself for previously surrendering to Arabella's sexual maze. When Jude and Sue meet, they found their mutual familiarity with Mr. Phillotson. Jude discovers out that Mr. Phillotson is still a schoolmaster and his ambition to attend a university has failed. Jude's idealised expectation of Christminster slightly dwindles. As Sue lost her job because of her nonconformist behaviour, Jude recommends her to work for Mr. Phillotson as a pupil-teacher. Mr. Phillotson hires Sue as an apprentice. Jude falls for Sue and seeks to spend time with her. Consequently, he is repulsed by Mr. Phillotson's interest in Sue, but his current marital status prevents him from intervening.

As Jude approaches Christminster, his earlier notion of the city disintegrates. The city of Christminster is now brimming with crumbling, grey-stoned, and dun-roofed structures. The city's atmosphere was too depressing for Jude, and he considered it less romantic. The harsh reality of the city shatters his expectations, and he is thrust into a disillusioning reality. He was not accepted by the city. His anxiety was further amplified by his social position. Sue was the only source of comfort for him. The only solace he could derive at Christminster was from Sue.

Jude concentrates on his primary objective and applies to five institutions, obtaining only one response. The response advised him to pursue his career by sticking to his work as a stonemason. Jude was taken aback by this shattering reality of Christminster and resorts to alcohol. Betrayed by the false expectations of the land of dreams Jude returns to Marygreen to take up life as a clergyman. His feelings for Sue, on the other hand, haven't changed, and the two continue to meet occasionally.

Check Your Progress

1. Is Jude an ambitious man?
2. What is Jude's dream all about?
3. What are the obstacles he encounters in pursuing his dream?
4. How did Christminster receive Jude?

Part III: In Part III at Melchester, Sue entered a Training College. Jude's anguish is compounded when he hears about her upcoming marriage to Phillotson. Meanwhile, Jude devotes himself to his venture as a priest. Simultaneously, he learns from his frequent encounters with Sue that she is more of an unconventional lady with rebellious ideas against societal conventions. Sue and Jude passionately fall in love with each other but their past commitments and relationships act as a hurdle. Learning about Jude's marital status Sue decides to marry Phillotson though she remained perplexed about her feelings. Sue gets married to Mr.

Phillotson and both decide to stay at Melchester while Jude, returns to Marygreen, bereft. Coincidentally Jude meets Arabella in a public bar in Christminster and hears about her recent marriage in Australia. Although Jude met Arabella he was passionately inclined towards Sue. Their recurrent meetings triggered their growing emotions towards each other. Sue admits her disliking for Mr. Phillotson as a husband and curses the “dreadful contract”.

Stop to consider

The novel is a critique of the institution of marriage. The failure of the characters to have a happy married life exposes the hollow institutional impositions. Marriage is used as a tool to attend to one’s personal ends. Arabella marries Jude to conform to society’s compulsion of marriage, she marries Cartlett for social position, Sue marries Richardson as a means of diversion from Jude, she returns to Phillotson as a means of repentance. All the marriages in the novel are guided by a particular condition. However, Sue and Jude are driven but their unconditional love.

Part IV: In Part IV, the idyllic landscape of the town of Shaston reflects the ecstatic mind of the lovers. It is the place where Sue works as a teacher. Jude comes to visit Sue in Shaston. With the demise of Aunt Drusilla, both Jude and Sue meet at her funeral and this gives rise to a new beginning. Jude gives up his second aspiration of being clergy and burns all his religious books: “.binding of Jeremy, Taylor, Butler, Doddridge, Paley, Pusey, Newman and the rest had gone to ashes”. Jude gets rid of his entire hypocritical ideal and his love for Sue makes him an “ordinary sinner”. Sue gradually began to maintain distance from Phillotson as she has devoted her heart to Jude. Sue had an aversion to Phillotson, and one day when she discovered him in her room, she sprang out of the window. She later decides to leave Phillotson by requesting his freedom, which he grants, and she moves in with Jude. Sue and Jude set out on their new adventure. They never married despite their choice to be together. Sue and Jude opt to stay at Aldbrickham since it is a new environment for them to begin their lives. Sue was hesitant to physically involve with Jude, even though they agreed to stay together. Back on Shaston, Phillotson becomes the subject of ridicule for letting his wife leave with her lover. As he falls sick Sue comes to meet

him and nurse him. Quite unwillingly Phillotson decides to divorce her so that she could marry Jude.

Part V: In Part V Jude and Sue are bound by Platonic love, yet they are wary of marriage. Meanwhile, Jude and Arabella also divorce, but Sue and Jude refrains from developing any sexual relationship. Although they were free from their past contracts, yet they chose to live with no strings attached at Aldbrickham. Sue reveals her scepticism towards marriage as marriages never survived in their family. One day Arabella reappear to see Jude and this upsets Sue. She is tensed and detests him from meeting her as for her Arabella was back only to trap him. Sue vows that she will give herself to him and marry him if he does not go to Arabella. Jude embraces Sue and drops his wish of meeting Arabella. However, Sue repents for her rudeness and decides to meet her the next day. Arabella informs Sue about the significance of marriage and advises her to marry Jude. However, this could not convince Sue and she tries to reconsider marriage with Sue. Their marriages get delayed.

The life of Jude and Sue changes when one day Jude receives a letter from Arabella stating about their son and sends him to be taken care of by his father. The son nicknamed Little Father Time (although he has no name) was born in Australia and now arrives to stay with Sue and Jude. Sue receives him affectionately and decides to get married to Jude. The cursed past of unsuccessful marriage running in the family obstructs her from taking a firm decision of marriage. Sue feels an impulse to delay the marriage as he gets repelled by any incidents taking place around her. This makes them subject of criticism by the people. This hampers their life and they had to make ends meet.

Stop to consider

Sue and Jude are victims of fate and circumstances. The characters seem to be destined to meet their doomed end. The circular form of development in the characters depicts the doomed fate of the protagonists. Jude's doomed fate is triggered by his personal choices which were in dispute with society. Their inner conflict has turned into a survival struggle. The protagonists are in a tough predicament, which is influenced by their social status and personal decisions. They are society's products, but when they fail to conform to society's expectations, they become lost.

Jude is dismissed from his current job of re-entering the Ten Commandments in little church. His personal relation with Sue affects their professional life as they are perceived as “sinful” in the eyes of the people. They decided to leave the place to escape the harsh remarks of the local people. Despite the fact that Jude and Sue have never harmed or cheated anybody and have done what was right in their eyes, the residents of the place make their life miserable.

How do you think society treated Sue and Jude’s relationship? (60 words)

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Little Father Time often remains gloomy by the occurrences in Sue and Jude’s life. Years later, as Jude and Sue lead a nomadic life, Arabella meets Sue as her husband died and she resorted to religion for survival. Realising Sua and Jude are happy, she pledges to win Jude back. Meanwhile, Sue and Jude have two children and are expecting a third. Jude grows sick and is attended by Sue. On the other hand, Jude has lost all hope in religion and dissociates himself from any ecclesiastic related work. Later, he announces his intention to relocate to Christminster, which he considers to be the centre of the universe.

Part VI: The last part, Part VI of the story is set in Christminster again and the struggle to find accommodation still continues because of their non marital status. Jude is not allowed to stay with Sue and the children and therefore stays separately. The situation utterly disturbs Little Father Time and he curses himself: “I ought not to be born”. He is enraged by his parent’s decision to have so many children despite their difficulties: “Then if children make so much of trouble, why do people have’ em?” The next morning Sue goes to meet Jude in the nearby inn and as they return she witnesses a horrifying sight. The bodies of the youngest children were discovered hanged from two hooks by a piece of cord around their necks, while Father Little Time's body was discovered hanging from a nail. By the ghastly scene, Sue faints. A note from Little

Father Time was found stating “Done because we are too menny”. Before committing suicide, Little Father Time strangled the two children.

SAQ

Comment on the traumatic crisis that Little Father Time encounters. (70 words)

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Sue blames herself for the whole thing and later that night she delivers a dead baby. She repents for her action and as repentance decides to return to Phillotson. As Arabella pays a condolence visit, Sue informs her that they were never married and considers staying with Jude a sin. She makes the decision to leave Jude out of conscience, not because she dislikes him. Phillotson learns about Sue’s condition and agrees to accept her. Jude is shattered into pieces after hearing his “guardian angel”- Sue’s weird decision and condemns her. Phillotson wins Sue back. Jude suffers from illness during Sue’s departure. Meanwhile, Arabella attempts to seduce Jude again but is resisted. He resorts to alcohol and Sue unwillingly submits herself to Phillotson physically, as a means of self-punishment of the long committed “sin”. While Jude was drunk, Arabella tricked him into marrying her again for financial stability.

SAQ

What is Sue’s take on marriage? (50 words)

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Compare and contrast between Sue and Arabella's attitude towards life, society and marriage. (60 words)

Jude expresses his desire to see Sue and arranges to see her at church. Sue congratulates him on his marriage but Jude becomes repulsive. Jude makes an ineffective attempt to persuade her to stay with him, but she rejects him. She does, however, allow him to kiss her one final time. As his final hours draw near, Jude is on his deathbed, while Arabella continues her hunt for a new spouse. She starts flirting with Physician Vibert. On the day Jude was going to die, Arabella dolled up to appeal to the other males. She cursed him for passing away just as she was ready to join the Remembrance Day mass outside. Sue refuses to see Jude on his funeral day, and Arabella declares Sue will forever be restless without him till she dies: "She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!"

SAQ

What are the factors that culminate to the tragic end in the novel? (70 words)

2.4 Major Characters:

Jude Fawley: The eponymous character Jude is the first protagonist of the novel. He is an unsophisticated young boy who aspires to be a scholar in Christminster. Jude, as an orphan, stays with his aunt Drusilla who sees him as a burden and mostly curses him. As a sensitive character, Jude mostly empathises with birds and animals. He is a passionate learner who nurtures his dream by self-preparing to be a scholar. He grows curious to know and learn what Christminster is made up of and therefore, develops his knowledge of the classical language. His life often oscillates between his intellectual pursuits and personal obligations. His sudden marriage with Arabella shifts his focus from his dream. The dubious vows of the marriage flatten and Jude returns to his earlier pursuits. However, the economic condition debar him from fulfilling his dream and he strives to continue his life as a stonemason. Christminster fails to accommodate him but he succeeds in fixing his place in Sue's heart. His failed relationships and financial struggle multiplies his woes and life had much more hardships to offer.

Amidst all hardship, Jude resorts to religion but is denied as he has forsaken the sanctioned social norms. Nevertheless, he possessed a sensitive personality who fails to understand the malignity in others. Despite being fooled by Arabella several times he continues to help her. Living out of wedlock with Sue paid him more than he could bear. Society's disapproval enables them to relocate from one place to another. Though Jude is passionate about Sue yet his failure to adhere to the social rules brings about his doom. Amidst the social pressure, the lovers separate and Jude finally succumbs to his grief at the failure to unite with Sue eternally. Jude's miserable end evokes his failure as a dreamer, as a lover, as a father.

Sue Bridehead: The second protagonist of the novel is Sue Bridehead who is a cousin to Jude. She is a charming, bold and buoyant character who lives life based on her personal ideologies and choices. Although a non-conformist in spirit Sue often remained perplexed about her choices. The external occurrences mostly influence her thoughts. Her capricious decisions bring gradual turmoil in several lives. Sue becomes emotionally and romantically inclined towards Jude, but disregards marriage with him. Her witty nature subjects her to have a commanding position in the lives of many. Sue's loveless marriage to Mr Phillotson

could not help her but think about Jude and she decides to live with Jude out of wedlock. However, the firmness in her decision is often invisible as she baffles with her choices. She dislikes Phillotson, yet marries him, comes to Jude yet resists uniting physically, she rebukes Arabella and instantly regrets. Defining her character within the set age, she conforms to be a New Woman because her thoughts are more revolutionary and unconventional. Sue detaches herself from any form of religious structure and indulges in acts that are profane.

Sue was dismissed from her first job as she was caught storing objectionable statues of classical divinities while serving at a store that sells religious products. The affinity towards religious standards seems to be missing in Sue. She marries Phillotson in a very undesirable situation and later moves in with Jude. Though they are tied by a strong emotional bond, circumstances compel them to part. However, being an agnostic who rejects religion, a transition in her is evident at the end as she surrenders before religion and accepts her “sin”. She blames herself for the horrifying death of the children and returns to Phillotson. Although her heart belongs to Jude she decides never to return to Jude.

Arabella Donn: Arabella is a self-obsessed woman who stays along with her father, a pig farmer. She tricks Jude into marrying her by plotting her fake pregnancy. Arabella is a flirtatious young lady who is more of an opportunist. Arabella is mostly driven by her physical drives. She persuades Jude into marrying her but after some time her true nature is revealed. Her nonchalant attitude disrupts Jude’s life. Arabella partially obstructs Jude from accomplishing his dream.

Leaving Jude midway, she shifts to Australia and clandestinely marries Cartlett for money as he is a manager at a hotel in Sydney. She sends her first child with Jude, Little Father Time to Jude to be taken care of. On her return from Australia, she urges Jude to meet her and obstructs Jude from meeting Sue. Though Arabella betrays Jude in many ways, Jude still treats her with respect and often favours her. She becomes an agent to remind Sue about the significance of marriage.

After her second husband’s demise, Arabella urges to intrude in their life but fails to. However after Sue and Jude parts she again tricks Jude into marrying her but regrets being Jude’s nurse during his sickness. While Jude was struggling through his life, Arabella starts flirting with the physician. She was more concerned about her enjoyment than Jude’s severe ill health.

Richard Phillotson: From being the inspiration to the rival of Jude, Phillotson holds a very significant part in the novel. As the novel opens, he is a schoolmaster at Marygreen and is packing for his journey to his dream city Christminster. He was well-loved and respected by the natives because of his cordial nature. He is the first inspiration of Jude who infuses the dream of being a scholar in him. The dream of Phillotson to study in Christminster acts as a prequel to Jude's primary storyline. Jude dreams of himself to be a reflection of Mr. Phillotson. Phillotson sends Jude books on classical grammar. Although he seems to be ambitious like Jude, he fails to be accepted in Christminster and leads the rest of his life as a teacher.

At Christminster while Jude and Sue meet him he fails to recollect Jude but have a faint memory of his days in Marygreen. At Jude's request, Phillotson hires Sue as an assistant teacher and gradually makes amorous advances to her. Despite knowing Sue's weakness towards Jude, he marries Sue. However later he lets her stay with Jude. Though his fellow friends criticise him for endorsing adultery he never puts pressure on Sue. Phillotson becomes a source of Sue's penance. Towards the end, Sue and Phillotson consummate yet it continues to be a loveless marriage. Phillotson's life is similarly marked by failure, as he fails to fulfil his ambition and to win Sue's emotional affection.

2.5 Minor Characters:

Drusilla Fawley: Drusilla is the baker aunt of Jude who stays at Marygreen. She is the only remaining relative of Jude and Sue. Jude's childhood was much impacted by the ill-treatment of the aunt and this in a way stimulated Jude to weave and work on his dream. She raises Jude and becomes an agent who links their ancestral history to the present. She informs Jude about how the tradition of failed marriage runs through their family. She debarred him from developing any kind of romantic relationship with Sue. Technically Drusilla's death brought the lovers close and they became emotionally connected.

Little Father Time: He is a gloomy and melancholic child of Jude and Arabella. Little Father Time considers that his parentage is a mysterious one and he undergoes a severe crisis throughout. He was sent by his mother Arabella to be looked after by his father. Sue develops a cordial

bond with him the moment he calls her mother. The struggle of both Sue and Jude was deeply observed by him. Little Father Time blames himself and wished he was never born at all. It was he who brought the tragic end to the family by killing his brothers and himself. According to him he thought they were multiplying the woes of their parents as they were too many.

Dr. Vilvert: He is the local physician who was well known to the local people at Marygreen. He had travelled extensively. Though popular among the rustic population Jude was suspicious of his befooling nature. Vilvert became a source of information to Jude who could give information about Christminster. He promised to fetch some grammar books on classics from Christminster provided Jude promotes his medicines in the village. However he fails to fulfil the promise. Later he is seen flirting with Arabella as her husband was dying.

2.6 Summing Up

In this unit, I have attempted to give you a comprehensive idea of some of the recurrent Victorian issues which will give you a direction to read the novel. Furthermore, the plot will give you an extensive understanding of the situation, course of action and the context in which the novel is placed. The role of the major and minor characters are briefly analysed for you *to comprehend* their contribution to the progression of the plot. As the reading of the text is a prerequisite condition for you, the plot and the character analysis will help you *to recapitulate* the major occurrence in the plot. Thus you will be able *to estimate* the action of the characters and *formulate* your interpretation of the text. The textual interpretation will also help to frame the themes and techniques.

2.7 References and Suggested Reading:

Adams, James Eli. *A History of Victorian Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Chesterton, G.K. *The Victorian Age in Literature*. Open Road Media, 2015.

Gerber, Helmut E., Davis, W. Eugene. *Thomas Hardy: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1973.

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Penguin Books Ltd, 1895.

UNIT 3

Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*

THEMES AND TECHNIQUES

Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Major Themes
- 3.4 Narrative techniques
- 3.5 Form and other relevant aspects etc
- 3.6 Characterization
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *analyse* the prominent themes of novel
- *describe* the narrative techniques employed in the novel
- *assess* the art of characterization framed by the author in the novel
- *interpret* the relevant issues addressed in the course of the novel

3.2 Introduction:

After a reading of the plot and the character portrayal in the previous unit, you are in a position to analyse the text from a critical perspective. The themes and techniques evident in a novel inform us about the condition of the characters and the prevalent situation to some extent. Apart from this, the socio-cultural context of the age mostly governs the perception of the reader while analysing the text. Although the New Critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley's *Intentional Fallacy* prevents us from interpreting the text from the biographical and social conditioning of the author, a prior understanding of the context becomes quite

convenient while interpreting the techniques. However, a subjective interpretation of the text is much more welcoming. A question which often bothers you is how to identify the recurrent narrative techniques and themes in a novel? This can be done by acquainting oneself with the prominent works of the concerned author. Most of the writers direct their attention to recurrent themes employed by them. For example, in an Austenian text the theme of love and marriage is recurrently explored. Similarly in a Dickensian fiction the theme of suffering and pathos of a child is constantly present. So, a frequent familiarization of the writer's work serves as a prerequisite to the interpretation of the work.

Now in terms of Hardy's exposition of some recurrent themes, his previous masterpieces become an essential point of reference. His artistic achievement is embodied in the path-breaking themes that his works evoke. His recurrent themes include a deep concern of the social paradigms and a lurking reality of the Victorian world. The issue of identity and authority upholds the tussle in the characters' minds. Delineating with the issue of fate and destiny Hardy's narrative progression endows the circumstantial crisis of the characters.

The next section will discuss some of the prominent themes that become evident in the course of the narrative. Apart from the themes it will also examine the techniques employed in the novel for its aesthetic outcome.

3.3 Major Themes:

3.3.1 Ambition:

The theme of ambition becomes the base of the novel. As the characters are driven by their respective missions, the narrative unfolds the subversive angles of such ambitions. The aspirations of the characters are built by a need to overcome the ongoing hardships in their respective lives. The primary aim of the characters is to attain a life of happiness and fulfilment. This is only possible if they explore the opportunities which are set in Christminster. Mr. Robert Phillotson inspires Jude about the prospects available in Christminster. He shifts in order to pursue his dream of studying at Christminster. However, the hollow halo of Christminster serves only as a futile inducement as it failed to fulfil not only his dream but also to provide a lifetime of satisfaction. Phillotson's dream was half way obstructed as he ended up being a schoolmaster, the same profession which he was into at Marygreen. His life in terms of his ambition seemed to be circular in motion as not much progress in terms of his career is evident at

Christminster. Similarly Phillotson's hardship becomes a reflection of Jude's predicament. Christminster was a driving force for Jude from his early childhood. Jude, like a fly, was enamoured with Christminster's light. His only purpose in life was to observe and learn about life in Christminster. This goal would create a contrast between his current state of distress and his future existence in Christminster, which would be full of unlimited delight. The only option to get him out of his potentially ill situation is to go to Christminster. D.H Lawrence, in his analysis of Jude's position, considers that his need for formal education is "not a store of learning, nor the vanity of education, a sort of superiority of educational wealth ... he wanted ... to find conscious expression for that which he held in his blood." (Lawrence 499-500) As a result, his desire to attend Christminster would benefit not just his academic achievements but also his otherwise dismal life. This goal has the potential to pull him out of his hopeless condition, and it is this idea that drives the novel's action. What Christminster stands for did not fit him, and his prior desire was replaced with a new one: to live an emotionally rich and love-filled life with Sue.

3.3.2 Relationships:

The novel delves into several types of relationships. Some relationships are motivated by selfish goals, while others are driven by an inexplicable connection. Jude's relationship with Arabella and Sue is based on flesh and spirit respectively. Arabella's relationship with Jude is mostly prompted by sexual attraction. She entices Jude for her selfish ends. She hoped that her marriage to Jude would allow her to travel into uncharted territory. But her failed fulfilment leads to her quest for new relationships. Relationships are very fragile as no relationships survive in the novel in an outright sense. Despite the fact that Jude's relationship with Sue is unconditional and exclusively guided by love, it failed to endure owing to external circumstances. Sue and Jude's connection is more platonic than physical, thus no otherworldly structures could bind them other than love. Similarly, Phillotson's attraction to Sue began as an erotic desire, but it evolved into respectful treatment towards Sue's choices. Relationships are torn apart first by unintended repercussions, as in Jude and Arabella's connection, then by a loveless link in Sue and Phillotson's relationship, and last by a surrender of guilt in Jude and Sue's relationship.

Stop to consider

Jude's success and failure are determined by the dichotomy between his ambition and his relationship. The fall of one causes the rise of the others, much like a measuring scale. His ambition takes a backseat once his relationship is prioritised. The moment his relationship with Arabella falls apart, his return to the previous dream provided an avenue for him to cope with his personal loss. However, both the junctures give way to his predestined fate.

3.3.3 Marriage:

Marriage in Victorian society becomes an indispensable matter of obligation. It was perceived as a social necessity for women. Unlike the present world where women have considerable rights and choices at their disposal, the Victorian world hardly offered any choices for women. Marriage was a means to attain social and economic status in society. The novel massively delineates the theme of marriage as it closely examines the marital relationship of all the central characters. It overtly examines the hollow dictums surrounding the Victorian conventions. Hardy, as an iconoclast places his characters against the knotty marital convention of Victorian society. Marriage is viewed as a way of obstructing one's autonomy and choice in the story. Hardy destabilises the marital relationship between the characters. The failure of marriage is evident not only through the characters but also through the catastrophic marriage which runs in the family of Jude and Sue. Sue strictly opposes marriage as she considers marriage to be a “clumsy, sordid iron contract” thereby reducing it to a mere agreement. The initial marriages in the novel are unproductive as Arabella tricks Jude to marry her and Sue marries Phillotson in a fit of resentment. These marriages are passionately motivated by materialistic inclination or retribution. For Arabella, marriage brings security and stability. She adheres to the conventional gender roles as she fails to see existence beyond her male counterparts. The novel trivialises the whole notion of marriage through Arabella's character. While her husband was on his deathbed, her quest for the next suitor begins. As the plot progresses it shows the triumph of love over marriage. Through the failed marriages depicted in the novel, Hardy interrogates the institution of marriage. It is past marriages that hinder the spiritual union of the lovers. Although the novel concludes with the reunion of Sue and Phillotson, it becomes more of a compromise for Sue thereby destabilising the social institution of marriage which is held in high regard in the Victorian world.

3.3.4 New Woman:

The theme of New Woman is evident primarily in the representation of Sue's character. Sue is a haughty, bold and intellectual woman who is much ahead of Victorian times. It is through Sue's characters Hardy anticipated the advent of the feminist movements which challenged the way women were perceived and treated in Victorian society. Sue becomes Hardy's mouthpiece to comment on the hollow Victorian morality which hardly regards women's choice. Sue is a representation of the new women as she stands beyond the structures constructed by the Victorian patriarchal society. Her obstinacy is obvious from the moment she first appears in the story. She dismantles societal morals by stocking naked sculptures, to the chagrin of the ecclesiastical organisation to which she was posted. Sue is portrayed as a decision-maker for herself and also most of the time for Jude. Sue becomes an embodiment of Jude's dream as his previous dream of being a scholar or attaining a life of happiness culminated into his foreseen union with Sue. Ironically, her evasive behaviours create some inconsistency about her self-absorbed and narcissistic attitude. She prohibits Jude from meeting Arabella but is not ready to marry him as she is against conventional structures like marriage. Sue transgresses from the fixed attributes imposed on Victorian women. Her fear of succumbing to the conventional traits debar her from accepting the structure of marriage. She retains her identity and strives never to compromise her choices at the cost of social acceptance. As the age witnessed numerous reforms in woman's position such as Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, Married Women Property Act 1870, Hardy through his new woman characters envisage the change in women's position. Sue is a liberated, educated woman who tries to break free from the stereotypical gender roles. Though she dismantles the traditional Victorian gender roles, yet her position as a new woman is quite contesting from her action in the end. Although Sue strives to retain her individuality and choice, the feeling of guilt and morality consumes her in the end.

Stop to consider

Sarah Grand used the term "New Woman" in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," which appeared in the North American Review in March 1894. The term was used to signify thinking women who turned away from oppressive agents of society. Feminist thinkers considered New Woman as an "icon to represent the political woman". They advocated for personal liberty, sexual freedom and equality of

women at the social as well as political front. They question the traditional societal standards that are enforced on women. The concept of New Woman carried the interest of many Victorian writers like George Gissing, Henrik Ibsen and most importantly Thomas Hardy. New women, according to feminists like Elaine Showalter, Sydney Grundy, and Sarah Grand, are educated, independent, brave, and non-conformist women.

3.3.5 Fate, Chance and Destiny:

The novel's overall plot revolves around the subject of fate and destiny. The majority of acts are dictated by fate and chance rather than choice. Individuals' lives are not always in their control, but rather are controlled by their assigned fate. Jude's life and career trajectory were sliding away from him. Jude is trapped within his cursed fate. He gets caught in the middle of a class struggle the moment he entered Christminster. Jude was unaware of the complex nature of the outside world-Christminster. Fatalism grips the protagonists as they become victims of their fate despite their indomitable will and attempts. His awful luck combined with his impoverished state made his life miserable. Jude, despite his best efforts and training as a scholar, is unable to fit in at Christminster. Despite his deep love for Sue, he is unable to completely win her heart. Notwithstanding his aunt's warnings, he was doomed to engage in an incestuous relationship after enrolling at Christminster. This leads to his impending misfortune. Given their bad luck, the protagonists struggle to keep their dream alive. Ignoring Christminster's rejection, Jude maintained his optimism. Likewise, the other characters were doomed to a life of misfortune. Aunt Drusilla becomes the messenger of misfortune that runs through the family- "The Fawleys were not made for wedlock". Little Father Time curses his doomed existence and considers himself as the epitome of bad luck. The fate of the children is the result of the bad luck which runs through the family.

Check Your Progress

1. Examine the themes in *Jude the Obscure*.
2. Do you consider Jude to be a victim of fate or victim of choice?
3. How does Sue fit into the cultural space of a 'New Woman' in the Victorian society?
4. Consider how the subject of marriage is treated, both in terms of the marital bond and marriage of the minds.

SAQ

Relate the themes of the novel with some other minor instances in the novel.
(50 words)

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3.4 Narrative techniques**3.4.1 Point of view and Narration**

The use of perspective in a story is a crucial component of narrative theory. It's a technique in which an author chooses to tell a story's explicit happenings through a narrator. In every work of fiction, the narrative point of view is extremely important since it gives the entire story a sense of perspective. The narrative structure of the novel depends much on the perspective adopted by the author. In narratology, Gerard Genette uses the term “focalization” in place of point of view and defines it as “general presentation of the standard idea of “point of view”. The way action in the novel is portrayed depends much on the way it is narrated by the narrator. The role of the narrator becomes to introduce the characters, the setting and recount the situation in the narrative to the readers. The author’s authority in a text is replaced by the narrator in the narrative.

The most widely adopted framework of the point of view revolves around the first person narrative and the third person narrative. The first person narrator extends narrow access to the storyline as this kind of narrative is an internal part of the narrative. The first person narrator or “internal focalization” mostly includes a character from the story from whose perspective the entire action is presented to the readers. This narrator’s gaze becomes narrow as he extends a one-sided view of reality. The focus of the narrator is based on his understanding of the action and a character. Most of the autobiographical novels as well as epistolary novels adopt this form of narrative to portray the occurrences based on personal understanding and comprehension.

The next division of utmost significance is that of the third person narrative or the omniscient narrative. This kind of narrative has a god-like narrator who is an external observer of the incidents taking place within the narrative. The omniscient voice intrudes not only into the physical space of the activities in the character's life but also into the psychological space. Apart from being the informer of events such narrator also extends commentary on the action and situation of the narrative. In Genette's conception, such narrative is termed as "zero focalization" as the narrator keeps a safe distance from the imaginary world he describes while providing information on it.

In the novel *Jude the Obscure*, the focalization adopted is of an omniscient perspective. The shifting third person narrative extends the crisis that the characters in the novel suffer by allotting due space to all the characters. The all-knowing narrator provides access to Jude's and Sue's conscious understanding of the challenges they face. Although the characters internally struggle throughout the narrative, the narrator extends ample scope for the readers to formulate personal interpretations of the situation and characters. While tracking the progress of Jude on his journey of life the disembodied narrative voice serves more as a confidant to the readers as he furnishes details that otherwise is only accessible to the character. The external narrator endows panoramic information about the people of Marygreen which sets the base of the story. From the first chapter, the narrator's voice establishes a striking contrast between rural Marygreen and the realm of dreams-Christminster. The focal point of the narrator shifts from the setting to the prime figures of the narrative. The narrator's voice envisages the challenges that wait for Jude.

SAQ

Is the novel's narrator a trustworthy source of information? Use examples from the text to back up your claim.

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The beginning corresponds to what will unfold in the end. The novel's narrator frequently relieves the readers with his witty and humorous

remarks. Though the novel is filled with characters' circumstantial upheavals the narrator strives to make the structure uniform with his intrusive observations. The absence of any judgement from the narrator allows the readers to admire the protagonists' perseverance while criticising the fault they inherit. The narrator is well informed about the unconditional love between Jude and Sue which is evident in his comments: "She was nearer to him than any other woman he had ever met, and he could scarcely believe that time, creed, or absence, would ever divide him from her." Based on the gaze of the narrator, though Sue was made up of numerous flaws his inclination towards Sue's characters is evidently portrayed. The obligations imposed on her by the social framework become the reason for her fall. The narrator does justice in depicting all the characters with utmost precision by shifting the focus from one character's take on the events to another's perspective. This changing perspective of the narrator induces the characters to re-evaluate the conventional standards and interrogate the moral structure established in Victorian society.

Most often the narrator detaches himself from the emotions of the characters and this allows the readers to perceive the characters from a subjective view. As he tries to influence the fate of the protagonists, the narrator continuously reminds the readers of their tragic history, which casts a shadow over their present lives. The genealogy of unsuccessful marriages in the family is frequently invoked by Aunt Drusilla. Hence the narrator also serves to be a mediator between the past and the present events. The narrator establishes his acquaintance with the different settings and informs the readers how each setting ushers in a fresh beginning for the characters. The first section, "At Marygreen," presents the fresh beginning of Jude's dream, while the second section, "At Christminster," declares the new beginning of life at Christminster. Similarly, "At Melchester" opens with "a new idea-the ecclesiastical and altruistic life". The narrator conveys the slow disintegration of the beginning with a grim disposition of what severity was to follow. Rather than simply providing a didactic conclusion, the narrator allows the readers to explain the riddle in the characters' intentions. The framework of the story divides the readers, with one party advocating the protagonists' point of view and the other group upholding the didactic imperative. The narrator extends a diplomatic stance as his relentless judgements cater to the understanding of the divided readers. The omniscient narrator sometimes acts as a product of the Victorian society who is obsessed with conventional morality and at another time stand by the characters' bold and courageous defiance of societal standards. He is often sensitive towards Jude and his consistent failure and helplessness make the narrator remark empathically on Jude's situation. He refrains

from commenting anything on Little Father's suicide out of sorrow or reluctance to pass a judgement on the situation. Hardy's expansive narration allows the characters to join in with the narrator's viewpoint. Sue's character has been objectively identified by nearly all the characters, as well as the narrator's personal observation. However, what Sue essentially embodies is reflected through her voice and action. There is a constant change evident in the choices the characters espouse. By refraining from interfering, the narrative voice reveals the conscious dilemma that the characters experience. The distanced narration allows one to contemplate the situation and place the characters amidst the crisis. Being an impartial observer, the omniscient narrator mediates between the world of the characters and the expectations of the readers. However, Hardy's narrator aggravates the punishment by proclaiming their choice as sin from the Victorian perspective but at the same time empathizes with the suffering of the characters.

SAQ

Comment on the narrative strategies adopted in the novel *Jude the Obscure*.
(50 words)

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3.4.2 Narrative Structure:

Although the themes of the story were subjected to hostile criticism, Hardy's artistic arrangements and narrative formation deserve considerable merit. Hardy's mastery in architecture is certified in his acute construction of the plot. The meticulous handling of the narrative strategies shows his skills borrowed from architecture and thus showcases a proper integration of architecture and literature. The adoption of a circular plot that begins at Christminster and concludes at Christminster demonstrates the geometrical organisation of the plot. Similarly, Sue started her life with Phillotson unwillingly and returns to him reluctantly. Paradoxically, Arabella's quest for a male counterpart is a continuous process; from the moment she is introduced, she is seen flirting with Jude, and at the conclusion of the story, she is shown flirting with the physician. This circular motion of narrative is evident not only in terms of the plot progression but also in terms of the

characters' fate. The triangular relationship of Jude entails the circular progress where he hardly rises above his misfortune. The relationship that forms the geometrical structure is also measured by the love rectangle. The quadrilateral arrangement of relationships contours the extended line of connection. The centre of this arrangement is Jude as he forms the essential point of contact for all the characters. It started with Jude's connection with Phillotson, followed by Jude's sexual inclination towards Arabella and then his romantic conjunction with Sue and ultimately Sue and Phillotson's coupling. However, the entire geometrical formation collapses as non-fulfilment dominates the entire structure. The circular structure of the narrative is equally qualifying in terms of failure as it begins with Jude's failure in achieving his dream and ends in as a failure in life.

The novel is about Jude's growth, and the changes in his personality are thoughtfully mirrored throughout the narrative structure. This makes the narrative essentially a *bildungsroman* text as the readers trace the psychological growth of the protagonist. We get the idea from Jude's childhood that he is a voracious student with a penchant for grasping information about the actual world. Apart from this he trains hard to learn language and culture which are alien to him. However, as the narrative progresses, Jude begins to lose his comprehension of the real world, which is considerably more contrary to the fantasies he has created in his mind. The shrewdness of the real world pushed him into the margins. Jude is preyed upon by a number of agencies, including Arabella, Christminster, Sue, and, most significantly, his fate. His innocence is reflected in the beginning when he was betrayed by the Physician who promised him to aid with some books on classics. In his character, the theme of both innocence and experience is evident. The narrative is designed in such a way that these two issues can be treated together. However, his innocence could not help him escape his misfortune and his experience served no role to avoid the ill fate that was to follow. Many critics rejected the book considering its inbuilt tension which is much in conflict with the existing society. Although the beginning of the novel seems to be quite promising as a traditional *bildungsroman* as it attempted to depict Jude's quest for a life of fulfilment but the narrative subverts as it traces more the decline of the protagonist. Thus, the form of the novel mirrors a subversive *bildungsroman*.

Stop to Consider

Eminent critic Frank R. Giordano Jr. in his article "'Jude The Obscure' And The 'Bildungsroman'" remarks "It is a work which begins with the initial assumptions of the form about personal development and apprenticeship for

life in a comprehensible society; and it employs the basic conventions of plot, character, situation, and setting. But the novel concludes by reducing the assumptions to absurdity after dramatizing an inevitable and intolerable conflict between the developing individual and the society he has outstripped intellectually, emotionally, and morally. In Jude's suicidal rejection of his world, as in his earlier dismissal of Sue, he asserts most emphatically and tragically his final awareness that, for him, continued life in society is no longer possible" (589)

Many critics view Jude as a tragic figure because of the obscurity he imbibes. Critics like D. H. Lawrence, Arthur Mizener, and Albert Guerard in their respective studies on Hardy essentially consider the play to be an outright tragedy. Guerard in his analysis of the situation encircling Jude considers his socio-economic-psychological-religious-ethical stance to be the primary reason for his fall. The narrative is furthermore influenced by the structure of a tragic drama. The tragic elements in the narrative are evident in terms of its techniques, structure as well as themes applicable. In spite of Jude's tragic flaws, he is able to retain the sympathy of the readers. The tragic fall of Jude replicates the fall of a classical tragic hero. David Cecil, Hardy's biographer comments on *Jude The Obscure* "The world Jude lives in is a world without joy. It is Hardy's only book without any humour, any picture of pleasure. Jude starts life as a normal man, with normal instincts, but not for one instance does he enjoy himself." (Cecil 134) The exposition in the novel is introduced to the readers the moment he conveys his dream of studying in Christminster. The plot of the novel entails a reversal of the scene the moment Jude is thrust into the realities of Christminster. Thereafter, the beginning initiates Jude's rising action of moving to Christminster, and the moment he reaches the place the conflict is introduced in his inability to accommodate in the city and thus leads to the further course of action. Throughout his attempt to fit into the place, a series of events occur that highlights Jude's tragic flaw. Like in a classical tragedy the climax of the novel takes a turning shift that determines the fate of the character. The climax of the death of the children decided the downfall of the tragic hero that eventually led to his ultimate fall. Conforming to the structure of classical tragedy *Jude the Obscure* becomes a classic example of a tragedy.

The narrative structure of the text adheres to the trend of the time by infusing Darwin's theory of social adaptation. Jude suffers from the crisis that rules Victorian space. With the advent of Darwin's philosophy, the earlier religious beliefs witnessed a tremendous setback. The Darwinian ideology of survival of the fittest proved detrimental in

the case of Jude as he neither could adapt himself to the changes and nor could adhere to the moralistic conventions. This psychological displacement had a profound effect on the character. Characters like Phillotson, Arabella and Sue strived to adapt to the social environment and withstood the challenges discreetly. Apparently, Jude had to be eliminated as he failed to transform his mind and spirit as per the need of the time.

SAQ

Consider the impact of the social environment in Jude’s character. (60 words) (You can refer to Social Darwinism)

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3.5 Form and other relevant aspects

An age that witnessed the popularity of realist novels, Victorian literature embarks on issues related to the contemporary real world. As Hardy tends to imitate the realist cult in literature, he highlights much of the malpractices in Victorian society. His works essentially become an agent of social criticism. The novel depicts the bleak and pessimistic side of human life placed in a complicated world. The pessimism is asserted due to the existentialist crisis suffered by the majority of the characters. Such displacement is conspicuously evident in Little Father Time’s character who fails to have a proper identity. His troublesome name is equally conflicting with his identity. He is denied any identity by his parents as well as by society. This entails an identity crisis that affects him till the end. It is this sense of disgust that claims the life of his siblings along with his own life. Hardy’s modernity is evident in the representation of the crisis faced by the characters.

SAQ

Comment on the identity crisis of Little Father Time. (50 words)

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The form of the novel is juxtaposed with vivid modern formations to depict the psychological displacement of the characters. Thus his novels imbibe the linear arrangement of plot like his precursors and anticipate the modern concerns like alienation, anxiety and absurdity of his successors. The novel proceeds with a chronological movement of Jude's life till his death. The situation under which the characters grapple anticipates the later existentialist narratives of the following era. Jude suffers from an existential crisis throughout the novel, as he is compelled to alienate himself from every location, and the improbable coincidences that occur in his life become disastrous. Hardy adopts the technique of repetition which is manifested in the circular motion of the form. The circular form of the novel within which the characters are trapped is demonstrated by Jude's constant failure in career and love, Sue's constant rejection of marriage on several changing grounds, Arabella's coincidental encounters with Jude, and the repetition of the second part "At Christminster" and the sixth part "Christminster Again." The characters seemed to be locked down within the same consciousness, space and cursed fate. These repetitions serve as a literary device that highlights the helplessness of the characters by establishing a literary coherence.

SAQ

Give some insight into the significance of the literary device of repetition in the novel's narrative development. (60 words)

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Hardy's arrangement of the form of the novel includes adoption of the partial epistolary form. The use of the epistolary or letter form lends an expression to the characters' dilemma and displacement. The letters shared between the characters precisely yet concisely present the motive of the sender. The epistle format depicts the intimacy between the

characters and the troublesome relationship of the couples. The brief and succinct letters between Sue and Jude testify the intimacy and unconditional love that binds them together. Sue and Phillotson's letters, meanwhile, illustrate the compromise and gap that exist between them. These letters enable the readers to perceive the characters from an emotional as well as rational angle.

The novel also adopts the form of dramatic monologue that was popularized by Browning in Victorian poetry. The use of this style in fiction allows characters to convey their innermost anguish without interruption. It helps the readers to penetrate into the mind of the characters and understand their mental conditioning. Jude's underlying anguish and predicament are conveyed through internal monologues. Using internal monologue Jude expresses his inner feelings aloud in order to direct it to the listener: "Hence I must next concentrate all my energies on settling in Christminster...I must save money, and I will; and one of those colleges shall open its door to me..." (37) This monologue lends expression to Jude's yearning for Christminster. The employment of such a device shows Hardy's anticipation of modern literary forms like the stream of consciousness to evaluate the mind.

The narrative of *Jude the Obscure* also employs the form of satire to criticize Victorian society's obsession with marriage. Through Sue and Jude's relationship Hardy underscores the hype on the Victorian endorsement of marriage. Failure in all the conjugal relationships in the novel shows a satiric treatment of marriage. Probably Hardy's unhappy marital relationship enabled him to explore the theme of marriage with such repugnance. Jude's disgust for the custom of marriage was recognised the moment he discovered his conjugal vows to Arabella were fake and worthless. Hardy mocks such societal impositions by putting Sue at the centre of marriage rejection. The novel is a critique of marriage as it reflects on marriage as a temporary inducement and permanent compromise- "a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort". The ironic treatment of marriage ignited many debates among contemporary critics and readers.

3.6 Characterization

In any work of fiction we read the art of characterisation plays a determining role. Characterisation refers to the style of representation used by the author to portray a character. Characters are people which are portrayed by the writers for the readers to interpret their action in the

course of a narrative. The progress of the characters in a novel determines the changing situation in a plot. However, not all characters in the course of action imbibe a dynamic space. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) E.M. Forster extends a contrasting role of characters in terms of their action by referring to the flat and the round characters. The flat characters mostly entail simple, palpable characters that undergo hardly any change in the narrative. These are typically minor characters that lack development in the course of the story. On the other hand, a round character is a complex character who undergoes numerous transformation from the beginning to the end of the narrative because of the experiences he encounters in the narrative. These characters are basically reflection of authors' imagination represented by an artful mastery. According to Aristotle, character forms one of the main elements of the six parts in a tragedy. However he reduces the role of characters for human action as the action governs the role a character. Aristotle opines "they include the characters for the sake of their actions". An effective characterization enables readers to empathise with the occurrences of the story thereby formulating a verisimilitude space. The characters mostly carry the baggage of culture and explore a multidimensional space. One dimensional or monologic perception will deny the existence of the other interpretations the characters embody. Michael Bakhtin's polyphonic gaze enables one to consider the character's pluralistic traits which widen the perception of the readers. This enables the readers to perceive the characters as not only a product of the author's creation but also as a social, cultural and linguistic product which is capable of conveying multiple realities.

In Hardy's novels the characters are the driving force of the novels. His characters mostly explore the dynamic space that internalises the changes surrounding them. His central characters often grapple with an inner conflict because of the external differences and attempts to resolve the conflict. Often Hardy's characters struggle with their inner self because of choices unapproved by the social structure. His characters are determined individuals who aspire to accomplish something. His art of indirect characterisation enables the readers to decipher the object of the plot. Hardy's depiction of action extends ample scope to reveal the personality of a character. Hardy's art of characterization is formulated in such a way that it effectively creates an impression in the mind of the readers. His characters adhere to the paradigms of a recalcitrance space. They are mostly bizarre characters placed in a peculiar world who strive to cling to the values imposed on them. His characters suffer from a Kafkaesque crisis and hopelessness which are inherently nightmarish—"the world resembled a stanza or melody composed in a dream; it was

wonderfully excellent to the half-aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full walking;...”

Stop to Consider

Kafkaesque connotes a sick environment in which everything appears to be nightmare-like and out of control. The phrase refers to the universe shown in Frantz Kafka's stories, in which the protagonists are caught in a stressful and mundane situation. The protagonists become enslaved by their own inner thoughts and consciousness. They are suffocated by a strange force that extinguishes their existence.

Hardy's novels are headed under the collection “Novels of Character and Environment” as his characters are placed at a centre stage amidst the rural serenity of Wessex. Hardy's fascination with fate and destiny is evident in his major works. The characters attempt to demonstrate useless effort in the face of an unavoidable fate. Hardy's nonconformist perspective is mirrored in the characterization of most of his characters, which first oppose religion but ultimately grow subservient to orthodox traditions owing to circumstances and fate. Characterisation implies the mode of representation that the author adopts to portray a character. In Hardy's representation of characters, the readers are made to follow the process through which a character is organised and presented. In *Jude the Obscure*, there are several fluctuations in Jude's characters yet he fails to understand the complex nature of the world. He is a static character as he fails to change during the narrative and he begins a failure and ends as a failure.

Jude is a country bumpkin who is trapped within a world which is harsh and heartless. Hardy manages to hold and get the readers to respond to Jude not as a villain, but as a victim. This is Hardy's characterisation strategy. Jude is in a triangular relationship. However, the evaluation of Jude is not only on the basis of who he is and how the people are who are associated with him, but when Jude is placed beside them his innocence as well as obscurity is magnified. He is easily persuaded and manipulated by others. Arabella easily persuaded him for marriage, Sue influenced him in her decisions, and the Physician lured him with the offer of the books in lieu of promoting his medication. Both the women characters play a crucial role in his life. Hardy's characterisation incorporates the craft of contrast as he introduces characters with contrasting traits in order to highlight the inherent attributes of both. In the novel, Sue is placed contrary to Arabella-one personifies spirit, the other flesh and both become central to Jude. The ideologies of the

characters are placed against each other and thus Hardy's technique of contrast renders an impressive characterisation.

The characters predominantly embody resoluteness and stability amidst crisis and their defiance generates severe uproar among critics. Jude's individuality remains consistent throughout his life, even as he undergoes different phases in life. Despite the fact that he creates a different sort of self in response to the shifting backdrop, his integrity is retained. Hardy keeps Jude in the centre and makes the circumstances operate through the modes that make the readers contemplate the crisis. This is Hardy's craftsmanship. He uses a cinematographic technique of *establishing shot* while describing the characters as he pays utmost detail to the ambience and external activities taking place around the characters. The moment Sue is introduced she is presented as pious and religious. The surroundings enhance her purity and Hardy's painting in words evokes a surreal representation of the heroine. The gradual shift in Sue's character from being a pious to an unorthodox lady is cautiously handled by Hardy without degrading her character. Hardy's characterisation is combined with a note of sympathy towards his character who succumbs to their inevitable fate.

Different phases of Jude's life resembles to the structure of Greek tragedy. Jude is more an Aristotelian tragic hero who meets his tragic fall because of his multiple errors of judgement. As Aristotle views that the movement from ignorance to knowledge is of utmost importance for a tragic character, Jude's life was drastically transformed the moment he learns about Arabella's intrigues after marrying her. Arabella's hypocrisy ruined Jude's future completely. His focus on career got shifted to marriage. Jude could not reverse his life. His past blemished relationship with Arabella shatters his future with Sue. Thus, Jude often cursed himself of succumbing to Arabella's seduction. Jude is a typical tragic character in Aristotelian sense as Hardy essentially follows the structure of Greek model. According to Aristotle, mimesis is central to human existence and imitation is as natural as breathing. He considers art as an imitation of nature. The way things around us are being understood is through imitation. In the novel, Jude attempts to imitate the dream which Mr. Phillotson upheld. The reversal of fortune takes place the moment he learns about Arabella's intrigues. This reversal brings a drastic change in his life as there is no returning back. The future incidents in Jude's life were massively dependent on this *peripeteia*. The cause of his own punishment or his fatal flaw is his obscurity and injudicious stance. The cathartic outcome or release of emotions is generated by the disturbing death of the children. The

feeling of guilt at the demise of his children and failure in life leads to his tragic end.

SAQ

Comment on the tragic flaw in Jude’s character. (50 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. Is Jude a flat character or a round character?
2. What makes Jude a tragic figure in its classical sense?
3. What makes Sue a “New Woman”?
4. How do the characters react to the conventional social structure of the Victorian world?

Because of the path-breaking and revolutionary take-ups in the narrative, the novel witnessed vituperative responses from many contemporary critics and readers. The novel was deemed wicked and immoral by several organisations. The Bishop of Wakefield burnt the book because of its blasphemous content. The hysterical attacks on the book led Hardy to consider that Jude the Obscure “completely cured me of further interest in novel writing”, and this brought closure to Hardy’s novelistic pursuits.

3.7 Summing up

Thus, the unit provided a thorough examination of the core themes, techniques and issues of the novel which forms the backbone of the novel. The issues discussed above will thereby enable you to have a broad understanding of the contentious concerns addressed in the novel. The comprehensive discussion on the themes will extend an in-depth meaning to the story. The different techniques used in the novel have been discussed in order to have a better grasp of the text's aesthetic elevation. The work has been examined from a variety of perspectives,

giving plenty of room for the reader to interpret the novel in a subjective manner. The unit is designed to assist you in appreciating the content as well as the thematic arrangement of the novel *Jude the Obscure*.

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Unit 4

Oscar Wilde: The Picture of Dorian Gray

Background

Unit Structure :

4.1. Objectives

4.2. Introduction

4.3 Wilde's Predecessors

4.4 Biographical Sketch

4.5. Placing the Work

4.6 Summing Up

4.7 Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives

In this unit the attempt is to give you an overview of the works of Oscar Wilde, the novelist, as we simultaneously try to reorient our comprehension of his works in all the diversity.

- Hence, the unit has been framed so that the students
- make themselves familiar with the background of Oscar Wilde.
- get themselves acquainted with the other works of the author
- evaluate some critical responses, and
- critically interpret the novel

4.2 Introduction

It is to be noted that Oscar Wilde is not only a novelist. In fact, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is his one and the only novel. By the time he happened to write, the novel was an established literary form having flourished in the hands of the Victorian legends like Dickens and Thackeray. He was one of the strongest exponents of Aestheticism-an artistic movement in support of the art for art's sake concept.

When Wilde started writing the novel, it was a fully entrenched form in England and was thriving too. To talk about the structure, theme or inspiration; he had numerous examples to learn from. He never had to struggle with anything like the novelists of the formative period of the novel. What he had to struggle with was something very different, we shall discuss about it later on. But Wilde's time, the late Victorian period, was slightly different from the time of Dickens and Thackeray. Socially and economically too there were enormous development in and around England. America saw some extensive success in architecture and stylish artistic raise in all many areas. There was upliftment in people's tastes regarding culture and lifestyle in general. When Wilde was moving about in America delivering his lectures, he witnessed a lot more of the changing nature of art and culture. He was slowly attracted towards the developing aestheticism.

Stop to consider

The Victorian Age can be called the age of the English novel because in no other age other than this was the genre of novel seen so successful and ripe. Novels were read by all age groups, during all seasons of the year, and at all places of the nation!

Dickens' *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times* and *Tale of Two Cities* gave the readers enough reflections on the social and family issues of the present Victorian England, while Hardy's Wessex and his characters like Henchard and Eustacia gave the readers a soothing relapse into the uncertain yet fascinating aura of human destiny.

Although there was good prose written and emphatic poetry written by giants like Tennyson and Browning, the Victorian age will still be known mostly by the novels. Before this successful flowering of

fiction in Victorian age went the hard work of the pioneers. Keeping Defoe as the supreme school, what Fielding and Richardson did for forwarding the might of the novel form can never be underrated by the successors as their toil to build the base had been diminished substantially. As a woman, even Jane Austen worked hard to Make the readers realize that Even prose can be a medium to express those human thoughts which are regarded as Sublime by the worshippers of Poetry.

Thackeray was another talented author who was, somehow, never capable of achieving his due success and popularity. As Dickens, he too began his career as a journalist and he created his characters in realistic manner, but he had his unique mode of dignified writing. He was fond of travel and lecturing. He was a great contributor of some reputed magazines of that time, after which he invested more time and mind towards writing novels. These varied experiences made him a serious and notable novelist of the nineteenth century, not so prolific though. His esteem rests basically on *Vanity Fair*.

The late Victorian England saw a few transformations in the way people accepted the literary forms, especially captivating was the ideas propounded by the supporters of the Aesthetic movement. They were against the notion that literature must necessarily have some moral thought or lesson. They went on to believe and propagate the art could very well be for its own sake. The growth in the readership and the rise of the middle class were highly responsible for the subsequent success of the novel. But the period after this great flowering of the novel saw a shift in the tastes and preferences of the readers now who would like to think and see facts in different ways.

If we go to see the issues dealt by the most successful writers of the Victorian age, each one of them carried out their task in their unique style and technique; and it is this diversity in the treatments of these novelists that had rendered the age such a lively and fragrant one! Presenting and thereby criticizing the contemporary issues and problems went a long way to attract the readers' attention and applause. He was a strong Londoner and one of the reputed urban writers hence. His empathetic presentation of the characters in distress and suffering

STOP TO CONSIDER

Before proceeding to read and analyze any text in your syllabus you must make sure you gather enough idea about the starting point of the genre called the novel and what stages it underwent to reach the present status of the astounding success. Beginning with Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Swift's Gulliver's Travels, flying with Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot up to Meredith and Stevenson there had been innumerable stages of this literary form.

4.3 OSCAR WILDE'S PREDECESSORS

As an individual artist or writer Oscar Wilde can be said to be from the late Victorian times. But as a novelist he does not have proper predecessor from the preceding age. This is so because his evolution as a writer was more from a rather slowly successful writer made popular more from his lecture programmes and his association with the aesthetic movement. Besides, his foray into novel writing came only once and with a completely different tinge of the average human being.

It is noteworthy to mention here that Wilde was quite different from his predecessors- both in form and in content. This is not only because he came to write after the Victorian age was nearly over, but also because he belonged to the group of artists who supported the art movement and its emphasis on aesthetic values of art rather than on any fixed moral end. His obsession with the aesthetic values of life and the philosophy regarding artistic pleasure made him unique and glaring at once.

SAQ

Do you remember *Doctor Faustus*? What are the special features of the play that captivate your mind? (75 words)

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Name some writers who were similar in style and content with Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*. How will you assess the Experimental attempt of Wilde in writing this novel?(75 words)

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What idea have you formed about the theme of the present novel? (50 words)

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The 19th century writers were very much concerned about the realities of their time. A common factor between both the 18th Century and the 19th century was that the readers were directly addressed by the novelists. As poetry was regarded as the highest form of literature in the age prior to this, it was far from easy for the novelists to convince the reading public that prose could be equally a dignified mode of expressing thoughts and emotions of human life. There were various modes of literary expression like satire and parody. After Defoe, Aphra Behn and Bunyan were striving to shape the English novel. As it suggested by the success of these early novels by Malory, Swift, Behn and Richardson; it can be understood very well that the growth of the middle class was a factor which contributed to the growth of the novel form in England.

The Great Victorian novelists were all masters in the tasks of characterization, realistic portrayal of human life and the presentation of the real society of the contemporary world. Readers were captivated by the themes and stories of common people to whom they could easily relate. What the other writers were doing in their creations was not what Wilde followed or took inspiration from directly. Of course some elements of supernaturalism and the gothic are found exhibited in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where the reflections of Mary Shelley and Ann Redcliff can be perceived. Furthermore, in the treatment of the innermost self of the characters we may bring to mind the psychological

novels of Henry James. But while the predecessors dealt with the feelings, thoughts and motivations of the characters, Wilde always attempted the literary study of art in its crudest form and the human perception of beauty through the ideals of Aestheticism. He was not much into the conforming to the literary modes of the classical and theological writings of the older times.

We cannot forget about the epistolary novel of this period. Richardson's *Pamela* and Fielding's *Tom Jones* are perfect examples of this form where the story is told in serialized mode through documents. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy too contributed with their talent to the English novel.

SAQ

Name a few predecessors of Oscar Wilde.(50 words)

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Why were the novelists required to convince the readers about the excellence of the novel form? (50 words)

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In what ways was Wilde different from his predecessors? (50 words)
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Let us now learn about some of the contemporaries of Oscar Wilde. This will aid us in understanding the milieu of the age as well as in appreciating Wilde’s work better. Now, Wilde was not a prolific novelist, he was a dramatist and a poet first. Wilde was always excessively in controversies regarding his disputed relationships with men, he had to face trials and was subsequently sent to imprisonment for homosexual inclination as it was a crime during that time. If we try to know about his inspiration and the people around him to make him a writer will come in the list the flamboyant and art loving figures that belonged to the aesthetic movement. His friends and contemporaries included Sir Max Beerbohm, Aubrey Beardsley, James McNeil, Lily Langtry, etc. Much of the unwanted attention he got was from his love affair with the much younger Lord Alfred Douglas.

Wilde was already writing poems and short stories from the beginning of his writing career the early part of which he relished his lectures and poems. In 1887 he published a book of short stories. In 1891 he published a collection of essays. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in the same year in 1891 in a monthly magazine in a serialized form. Although this novel was a genius, the critics were really bitter in expressing their objections against the alleged immortality of the book. His talent was undoubtedly tough to be ignored, but still he had to face

tremendous disgrace regarding his personal life and living style and his open support for the celebration of beauty at any cost.

As with his predecessors, Wilde was not much in common with his contemporaries too. He had a motivation to protest against the prevalent injustice and odds in our society. He also voiced in support of the women and their rights. Besides, in regard to themes in his writings as well he never tried to concentrate on any didacticism in his art. He merely stressed on the pleasure that can be perceived from art and the representation of beauty. Wilde attempted to lift the burden off of all artists and writers by giving them free scope to express their ideas and thoughts. This had, many a times, landed him in difficult situations.

SAQ

Name a few contemporaries of Wilde. (30 words)

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Why did Wilde face so many problems? (50 words)

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The Pre –Raphaelite artists can be said to be the precursors of the new artistic revival. Romantic poets Keats and Shelley too can be regarded as somewhat ahead in this forthcoming movement in the world of art and literature. The romantic quality with varied shades lead towards the idea containing freedom of art from moral binding making art far less answerable to anything or anybody. The members of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were art critics, poets and English painters, and they believed that art and painting should be free from all bondages. They focused their attention on the use of intense colours, added details and completeness of art.

Walter Pater (1839-1894) He was an English essayist and a critic of art and literature. He was known for his special styles in expressing his thoughts. His preoccupations with art and literature led him to write a lot about Renaissance. He was an admirer of Romanticism and exemplified his artistic and intellectual ideologies in many of his writings like essays and and reviews. He has also forwarded the opinion that music is the only art form where the form and the subject appears to be one- “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.”

Like Wilde, Walter Pater too was surrounded by controversies and accusations. Often the genius and the success of a writer is marred by such factors. Pater’s most influential and most controversial work was the short conclusion (to Renaissance). This attempts tothat our physical lives consist of scientific procedures andforces in constant movement. According to him, “the whirlpool is still more rapid”

Pater, like Wilde, appeared to the critics as being a promoter of ‘hedonism’ and immoral values. The group of some ... critics strongly disapproved of “The Renaissance”. Margaret Oliphant reviewed it dismissively, George Eliot ...it as “quite poisonous in its

false principles of criticism and false conceptions of life.”In 1876 Mallack mocked Pater’s message in a satirical novel *The New Republic*, portraying Pater as a typically pretentious English aesthete.

After gaining much attention, success and popularity in the promising group of Oxford around 1879-80 Pater withdrew one of his essays from an edition. Prior to this he had also tutored the talented G. M. Hopkins who went on to become one of the indispensable part of Victorian poetry. A few Pre-Raphaelites were also among his friends. Directed by the apprehension that his *Renaissance Conclusion* could be misinterpreted as immoral, he started displaying his thoughts through fiction. So, Walter Pater can be counted as a contemporary and as an inspiration to Wilde and his aesthetic motivations.

Stop to consider

Aestheticism

One of the most vibrant of the art movements, Aestheticism found its philosophical foundation in Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. He began his spontaneous outburst about the independence of art; the status of art not being burdened by any responsibility of preaching as such is what thinkers of his school proclaimed. The bohemian slogan “art for art’s sake” became a cardinal doctrine among the supporters of the Aesthetic movement. Benjamin Constant was the first to coin this phrase ‘I’art pour I’art’ in French in 1804, which means ‘art for art’ or ‘art for art’s sake’. But later it was rendered popular by the French philosopher Victor Cousin during the 1890s. The followers of Aestheticism believed that art should be allowed to be on its own, for its own sake without having the freight of morality or any social concern of teaching some moral lesson. Art for art’s sake also expresses the thought that art should possess something of an inherent value in itself which is independent of its subject matter, or any political, social, cultural or ethical importance. According to these artists, art should be judged on its own criteria, based on the fact whether it is beautiful and pleasant or not. Art should be judged on the basis of its capacity to excite the minds of the viewers or readers not only in content but also in techniques of using colours, structures, etc. Otherwise, what do art survive for at all? Wilde has

said, "All art is quite useless." Originating from France travelling to Britain saw this concept as very popular and as a reaction to the rigid morality in the realm of art and literature of that time.

Out of all the members who belonged to the group of Aestheticism, Oscar Wilde was by far the most popular and the strongest exponent. In his Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has written, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." Although this attracted innumerable questions for himself, he attempted to amalgamate art with beauty and saw no such need as to be morally correct or any such plausibility. His ideas were highly accepted and they were capable of changing the lifestyle and the perception of the people towards life and art in the late nineteenth century. In his popular lectures as well as in his writings such as poems, essays, plays and the only novel he has attempted to speak against the various social illnesses of the time. He has attacked the customs, baseless beliefs, mannerisms and class divisions of the Victorian society which happened to be a part of the so called morality of the age. Wilde exhibited great descriptive power and his talent has posed immense influence on the London society by telling that people were overworked with the moral limitations imposed on them and this robbed them off their true happiness. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* Oscar has shown the false notion of morality and the pretentious attitude of the characters towards the institution of marriage which was merely for the sake of show celebrated but otherwise suppression for women.

SAQ

Who were the exponents of aestheticism? (25 words)

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express that only polished sensuous pleasure should be sought from art and not the conventional notion of the fables or so. A piece of art may not be really 'useful' but it should be still a source of pleasure and happiness to the readers or audience; therein lying the sublimity of the same. At times art can be allowed to remain crude because nature is cruder than art, they believed. Beauty and the celebration of it was a significant motto of this group of artists, even in Dorian Gray Wilde tries to represent beauty as being more valuable than even one's life. In his great works of literature Oscar tried to present all conducts which went opposite to the contemporary social order of that time. He was irritated by the hypocritical behavior of the noble circle of England and this can be seen as a reason that he displayed overdoses of some so called unacceptable issues in his writings. In reality though, worse social situations existed underneath in some communities. Only because of his outspoken and cruder portrayal of his ideas Oscar was always betrayed by his time.

Stop to consider

Coventry Patmore wrote a poem "The angel in the House" in which the ideal stereotyped woman is symbolically presented as a theological representation of Mother Mary. In the Victorian society, double standard was very common; it was rather a part of that age. Woman's sexuality was regarded as non-existent whereas men were free to exercise their sexual needs.

The Victorian age was hypocritical and often too severe in its principles of morality. They distinguished between the genders on the basis of social status. The practice of strict moral and religious behaviour of the Victorian people is regarded as an important part of common life of that time. Females were expected to be meek and morally more consistent than the men. Men could yield to temptation while women were bound to be strong. The economic and social status of an individual mattered the most. Expressing sexuality was strictly prohibited. So much so that women were supposed not to know much about their own body, the anatomy of the sexual system and childbirth too. This kind of a pristine mind was expected from the people, especially the women folk. And in such a scenario Oscar Wilde came as a virulent wave of open sexuality. He had to suffer continual harassment all his life because of this trait in his personality.

SAQ

Describe some of the aspects of the Victorian society. (50 words)

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Like Dickens who wrote about the travails of the common man of England, Oscar criticized several Victorian aspects in his writings. In Tale of two Cities and Hard Times and Bleak House Dickens has portrayed the difficulties brought about by the massive industrialization in the social and economic life of the people. The economic gap between the rich and the poor kept growing rapidly and the weak section was hit terribly by miseries. The perils of the prison life have been depicted by a few Victorian writers. Wilde too has criticized the Victorian society in many ways. Whatever he might have been termed as, he was a liberal individual. He never supported any kind of unhealthy bondage for human beings. He spoke for women as the editor of a magazine too. He questioned the very institution of marriage. The artificial and actually hollow Victorian society and its arrogance have been critiqued by Wilde. He wrote on the prison life of England in “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”. The so called earnest manner of living is adequately attacked by him in his most successful play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The false

values like decency, godliness, chastity were part of the hypocrisy prevalent among the people. Commercialism had sunk deep into the society visible through increasing number of crimes and anti-social activities like prostitution.

Women had to bear the burden of decency, morality and family but no legal rights over property and children were there for them. Mary Wolstonecraft's *Vindication on the Rights of Women* went a long way to support the causes for women but could not usher in much results. Women were merely possession of men, let alone acquiring any sort of ownership.

Check your progress

1. What was the attitude of the Victorian society towards women?
2. Comment on Dickens's portrayal of the problems of the life surrounding him.
3. Do you think Wilde was too outspoken in expressing his views and ideas in his writings?
4. Mention some of the evils of the age in which Oscar Wilde lived.
5. Comment on the Aesthetic movement as an integral source of inspiration for Victorian art and literature.

4.4 Biographical Sketch:

Let us now discuss about the life of Oscar Wilde- one of the most amazing writers of English literature.

Now a feeling very close to my heart is that the moment I think of Oscar Wilde as an individual, lots of alluring thoughts come to my mind at once regarding the scandals and confusions he might have had to go through. After reading his masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest* at a very young age I was so impressed that I tried to read more about him. Although not so mature, to learn about the strange matters of homosexuality was a whole new experience as it was a subject which was still not so widely accepted as it has been in the last decade or so.

I hope you must have, by now, got anxious to know about Oscar Wilde- the per par say. I also look forward to find you all get equally excited while getting enlightened on this indomitably spirited artist.

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was an Irish poet, playwright, essayist and novelist. Beginning with poems and essays he came to be recognized as a successful and leading writer in the 1890's in London. His lectures delivered around the world contributed to his popularity and he was viewed as an artist not to be ignored as such.

Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 in Dublin at Westland Row. He was the second son of William Wilde and Jane Francesca Elgee – one was an eye and ear specialist and the other an intellectual. Oscar's father was inclined towards scientific aspirations and his mother sacrificed her own artistic interests and talent in order to raise the family comfortably.

It is not mandatory to mention but Oscar's father too had many scandals in his personal life. He used to have innumerable illegitimate affairs and is believed to have fathered many illicit children. As a distinguished doctor, Oscar's father received Knighthood after which they upgraded to a better social life.

Oscar's only sister Isola who was two years younger to him passed away at the age of 10 and this incident stimulated Oscar to write a poem in her memory- "Requiescat". This can be termed as the beginning of a talented literary journey.

At ten years of age Wilde went to Portor Royal School at Enniskillen. In school his brother was more popular while Oscar remained an introvert and loved his own company than the schoolmates. He showed great talent in his young days and was able to win a scholarship to enter Trinity College at the age of seventeen; he studied there for three years. In Trinity he was inspired by professor Mahaffy who was a well known scholar in Greek literature. This is how Oscar grew up to be an expert in Greek literature.

After Trinity Collge at Dublin, Oscar seized another scholarship in 1874- this time to Magadalen College in Oxford. Although Professor Magadalen had sown the seeds of aestheticism and the obsession for beauty was aroused in him, this remained in Oxford as he got engaged in academic progress and got noticed too.

After "Requiescat" Oscar Wilde began his journey as a poet around the year 1875. Nest couple of years produced many poems from him; out of them he won the prestigious poetry prize at Oxford University in his final year. The poem was "Ravenna".

After his father's death while he was studying in Oxford, Oscar's mother left Dublin. Wilde left for London after finishing his studies. His brother Willie happened to be a journalist who helped Oscar to get acquainted with editors and publishers for his future writing career. Oscar published his first play *Vera* in 1880 which dealt with the Nihilistic ideas of Russia, but it was not allowed to be performed in London. In 1881 he published his collected poems and earned unpleasant response from the learned circle.

In his beginning years in London when he stayed with an artist companion Frank Wills Oscar's unusual appearance and behavior was a matter of discussion for many. After *Vera* and *Collected Poems*, Wilde faced economic crisis and he had to demote himself to cheaper lodgings in Tite Street.

Oscar went for lecture tours in America and got popularity but the critics and the press were never pleasant towards him. Frustrated, he left for Paris and completed *The Duchess of Padua*. Sadly, this too was not a success. He returned to London only to revisit America for repeated lectures. Next that he came to London, he resolved to make a mark and a serious livelihood as a writer. Meanwhile he married Constance Mary Lloyd in 1884. By this time he was used to a sophisticated lifestyle and finally not stable, it was a difficult time for him to maintain himself. Ironically, he was a popular person by that time, but still he was unbelievably poor. It was really disastrous that he was unable to manage a family of two. He worked as a reviewer of a gazette and later was the editor of a magazine for women, but left these jobs too.

It took him couple of years more to taste real success as an author. A collection of short stories, a collection of essays and the contracted form of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were published and earned him the attention of a greater readership. "*Dorian Gray*" is an excellent piece of fiction but he earned a lot of notoriety too. Next that followed were his brilliant plays- "*Lady Windermere's Fan*", "*A Woman of No Importance*" and "*An Ideal Husband*". His best work was "*The Importance of being Earnest*" (1895). These plays brought him unprecedented success and a lot of monetary profit. His talent and intelligence got widespread recognition and his plays received appreciation in the incessant performances.

SAQ

Write a note on the early academic life of Oscar Wilde and its bearing on his later literary career. (75 words)

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Troubles entered his life never to depart. Oscar's slack lessons became a subject of contempt for every person he knew and also among the common people. His sexual predilections led to endless stories and he was severely accused of homosexuality. He too was never being defensive about himself but rather he continued his companionship with male prostitutes and similar people. Events went so far that he was charged of homosexuality by the Marquis of Queensberry-whose much younger son was in relationship with Wilde. Answering the charge Wilde filed a criminal case against the Marquis. Unfortunately it was Oscar evidence against whom was so heavy that he was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for two years in 1895.

You must be disturbed by the thought that homosexuality led to such tragic consequences for an individual as talented and successful as

Wilde. It is true homosexuality is not a taboo in today's world. But sadly, Wilde's time was not so liberal and such a biological status of an individual was a serious crime and Wilde fell prey to such a situation. While in prison he wrote an apologia "De Profundis" and after his release he wrote "The Ballad of Reading Gaol". In these pieces he can be seen as a different person altogether. After facing the cruel realities of life in prison he almost forgot his unaccepted thoughts and ideas of life. Oscar's tragedy can be said to be the result of his association with a notorious flamboyant celebrity – Alfred Lord Taylor. Although a nice person, he was a procurer and brought Wilde close to young men and Wilde spent all his money on them. Oscar's wife was devastated to know about his homosexual links. It is true he was not a homosexual from his early life; he had fathered two children with his wife. It was his companionship with people with sexual excesses that slowly led him towards such painful experiences. Another close friend of Oscar was regarded as a sodomite.

It is unfortunate that Marquis vowed to defame, humiliate and take revenge on Oscar and he was successful by employing private spies and collecting people to stand as witnesses against Oscar in court. The Government imprisoned Oscar and also auctioned all his assets. Oscar was left with nothing when he was released from jail. His wife had left too, only Ross received him. They left England forever towards France after which Oscar published a strong letter about the prison life in a newspaper. This letter later led to many reforms in the prison system of Britain.

The last days were unbearable for Oscar. His mother and wife were no more. Dejected, he left all hopes and abandoned all activities in life. He found no hope left and started having severe headache and finally died on November 30, 1900 in Paris. An illustrious career ended in an immense tragic manner.

4.5 Placing the Work:

We shall discuss about the major works of Oscar Wilde. He has authored only one novel, the present one. In order to know about his basic themes and topics it is pertinent to go through his significant writings. Moreover, since *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is his only work of fiction and we are here to deal specifically with fiction we are, sort of, bound to

refer to his other genres of writing to find a context for this novel. Much of his thoughts and his ideas are represented in his plays which are specimens of the working mind of an intellectual genius. You all can delve deep into his rich mind to find out what our present novel has in similar to his other works.

Like many other authors of Irish origin, Oscar Wilde was a prolific writer who, by dint of his extraordinary talent and vision, marked a distinguished place in the minds of readers of all time. Although never in the safest part of the literary circle, Wilde has always been an artist who speaks against all odds in the society through his writings.

Wilde was not limited to a single genre of literature; his talent was rather visible in diverse areas like poems, essays, and plays and novel. He has also written epigrams. In short, he has penned spontaneously on a wide range of subjects and all of his works are worthy of thought and perusal. Wilde began writing poems at an early age when his sister died. He dedicated the poem to her. During the 1880s he had established himself as a distinguished author. In 1878 he wrote a poem naming Ravenna in seven parts. It is about a person who reaches a city and the different life of a city. He keeps remembering the village life and by the end of the poem happens to pay a tribute to the city life.

"Poems" was the first collection of poems by Wilde. It was published during the time when he was touring America for his lectures. This work can be rightly said to be the stepping stone for his career.

The Happy Prince and Other Tales (1888) was a collection of short stories written by Wilde for children. There were stories named 'The Selfish Giant', 'The Happy Prince', 'The Nightingale and the Rose' and 'The Remarkable Rocket'. This collection took him towards a level of recognition.

Next year he published another significant work- "The Decay of Lying- An Observation" This has remained one of the most well known essays of Wilde. This essay expresses strong aesthetic ideals through the conversation of the two characters Vivian and Cyril. Oscar has displayed his ideas about art through these two men who argue about the means, scope and motives of art. Here can be perceived the support for Romantic ideals against the extreme morality of the Victorian society.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is the sole fiction work coming from the pen of Oscar Wilde. Although he had to bear extreme criticism and

discomfort regarding the moral issues of this novel, it went to become one of the highly acclaimed works of English fiction of all times.

Another story was “The Model Millionaire” which dealt with the subjects like goodness, friendship, love, affection, gratitude etc. it shows how human life is full of struggles and happiness too. Another collection of stories was “The Canterville Ghost and Other Stories” out of which “The Canterville Ghost” was a witty representation of human life. Other stories are equally appealing in this collection.

Intentions (1891) was a collection of essays which presented the opposite of his themes and ideas expressed in “The Decay of Lying”. This work was also a new step for his slow fame as a writer. Around the time of writing “Intentions” he was at the height of literary form and fame. Oscar’s wit and intelligence were clearly visible in these essays ranging from topics on art, criticism, etc. He also attacks the society for the rigidity shown to the general public of that time.

Salome (1891) is a one-act play about the Biblical story of the stepdaughter of Herod Antipas. The original production was in French in 1891, the English translation came after three years. It was banned from being staged owing to its anti religious shades.

“The Sphinx” (1894) is a controversial poem which presents the mythological setting of various questions forwarded by a young man about many objectionable beliefs and religious ideas.

SAQ

What were the early writings of Oscar Wilde?

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Next few years saw heavy production in the hands of Oscar Wilde. The plays were published one by one with motivation to criticize the evils of the society and defying the norms which upset the happiness and free growth of the individuals. In 1892 came *The House of Pomegranates*-a collection of essays and *Lady Windermere's Fan*- a play about the nature of women. The protagonist is suspicious about her husband as having some illicit relation with someone else. This play mocks the rigid moral codes imposed by the Victorian society on the women folk.

A Woman of No Importance came in 1893 with an attack on the English upper class society. In this play is shown how the Victorian society sets absurd roles for women and the expectations from them.

1895 was a crucial year for Wilde with the publication of two comic plays *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the later turned out to be his masterpiece. This play portrays the indulgence of the so called noble society. The characters hide their identities to escape their responsibilities in a very trivial manner. This play is a real pleasure to read. "De Profundis" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" were written after his tragic imprisonment as we have discussed in the biography.

The works of Oscar cannot be categorized in any way; each one is unique in itself. Although he is an essayist and a playwright in his identity, his mettle is fully perceived in his single novel *Dorian Gray* Which portrays such a charming character Dorian gray who is dear and exciting to us even after being so hateful at times!

There have been numerous recent studies on Oscar Wilde even after the centenary of his death in 2000. Around this time David Foster Wallace has once said echoed on Oscar Wilde's contention that "a true artist takes no notice whatsoever of the public" in these words: If you think about...the size of the audience or how much it will appeal to the reader, you go nuts fairly quickly". Ian small of the University of Birmingham and a few of his acquaintances have also contributed to the studies on Oscar Wilde and other factors related to his writings. We talk of these

Check your progress

1.Criticism of Oscar Wilde, especially regarding his homosexual inclinations, has been extremely severe. Forward your views on this

area.

2. Is it tragic that a talented and intelligent personality like Oscar had to meet such a painful end?

3. Do you think Oscar's personal life had a bearing on his writing career?

4. Comment on how Wilde managed to maintain his writing on so many genres of literature?

4.6 Summing up

Here in this last section I want to sum up my first unit which was to introduce you to the writer and the writing of Oscar Wilde.

The first part of this unit is an attempt to bring you close to those factors that will lead us to be able to read Oscar's novel in proper contexts. We also discussed in this part in what condition the novel form was available to Oscar Wilde when he took to write this single novel amidst his other genres of writing. We have talked about making a study about what and how Oscar contributed to novel writing in England. His perspective, as we shall perceive in the novel deeply, was not at all a conventional perspective. His views on beauty and its transitory nature have brought about much wider scope for speculation and discussion. His personal experiences of life are also more bitter than sweet. So, I have tried to arouse in you some interest and motivation to learn about the characteristics which led Oscar Wilde to become what he is known for. I have also attempted to bring to your minds the eagerness to read any author in newer lights added to the conventional ways to interpret them.

In the next part there is the detailed discussion on Oscar Wilde's predecessors, contemporaries and the characteristics of every single thread related to him as the very extraordinary author. What he achieved as a poet and as an essayist and a playwright; how he matured through his popular lectures and what brought about the creation of his masterpiece *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This section goes through the other forms and most of the representative novelists of Oscar's time.

Next part deals with the life of Oscar- he is definitely one of the rare artists who began showing his intellectual illumination right from his childhood. His parents were illustrious individuals although the father was a scandalous person whose shadow seems to have fallen on Oscar himself. How he was capable of showing his merit in learning Greek and how he achieved many valuable scholarships show what a talented writer he was with an equally restless mind that was hard to be dominated.

One of the indispensable aspects of Oscar's life which has been discussed at length is his association and the radical promotion of the Aesthetic Movement. The values and principles of Aestheticism were forwarded to a great extent but Oscar owing to which he had to face immense hardships after he expounded his ideas and thoughts about freedom and authority of art to be art itself.

The following section has tried to discuss the major literary works of Oscar Wilde ranging from poems, essays, plays and finally the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. His basic themes and techniques are touched upon with a reading as to whether his other works have any resemblance with the novel or not.

As said and mentioned, I would like to tell you that you should read the text at least once. When I said I was mesmerized about Oscar in my early student days, I was anxious to read more and thereby know more about him. No narration, no notes and no reference can equate to guide you as much as your first hand reading will do. So, do read the novel and let's go ahead together towards the second unit.

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Unit 5

Oscar Wilde: The Picture of Dorian Gray

INTRODUCING THE NOVEL

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objective
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 What happens in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?
- 5.4 The Characters
- 5.5 Minor characters
- 5.6 Summing up
- 5.7 References and Suggested Reading

5.1 Objectives

This unit introduce you readers to the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The discussion should begin by familiarizing you with some points of view to be kept in mind while reading any piece of fiction. After his general approach it will be better to move on to the text here.

This unit has been framed to

- assist you in reading the novel
- to acknowledge the novel in its entirety of plot, character and structure
- to assess all the characters in relation to the proceeding of the events, and
- to recognize those qualities in the novel which make Wilde special in his writing.

5.2 Introduction

Wilde has already been shrouded in controversy. Already he is a highly talented author; often his aura is underrated by different issues he had to deal with in his personal life. When he wrote the Victorian era was over and their sensibilities too were giving way to new thoughts of a few outspoken writers akin to Wilde in thoughts and opinions. Besides, in order to study and make any assessment of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we must keep in mind that he has written only one novel, the present one. So to know his style of writing we have to refer to his other genres of writing, especially his plays. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the masterpiece credited to this intelligent mind. Prior to this too, he had written numerous poems and stories on different subjects. Moreover, as you have learnt in the previous unit, Oscar Wilde and his works were never received in ordinary manner. Owing to his outspoken discussion on matters of sensual interests and his excessive preoccupation with beauty etc. he was continually criticized and attacked by literary circles. Wilde was an Irish poet and playwright. He began his writings in various ways although poems were most striking in this period. The last decade of the nineteenth century was a witness to his rise and success as a powerful playwright of London and America.

The initial appearance of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890 in the popular *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* was in the July issue. Although this debut was not far from controversy, still it was an opportunity not to be missed by any aspiring writer from an American literary periodical which was aiming at expanding their share in the larger market. This was a great chance for a talent like Oscar to get noticed among an extended readership and also good income for the writings. *Lippincott's* sales used to run in thousand back then when Oscar would begin his actual flourishing career. It must be noted at this point that J. M. Stoddart- one of the editors of Lippincott had come from Philadelphia to London to meet a few new writers like Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde himself. Each of them contributed their pieces, Oscar's piece being the *Picture of Dorian Gray*. This step was helpful in widening the scope of the magazine to reach out to more readers. Oscar's companionship with controversy and scandals had initiated with his publication of *Dorian Gray* as well as that of some volumes of poems.

As we have mentioned in the first unit, Oscar had earned fame and good money from his lectures, especially on topics related to art and aesthetics. He was rather a known name for people, but that was not much as a writer but as a speaker. No doubt he received some recognition owing to his effort at his write ups and reviews in periodicals and his collections of stories meant for children. His term as the editor of the women's magazine *Woman's World* was highly appreciated and his potential was noticed. What his poems, essays and lectures could not bring to him was brought by his collection of the children's stories. He was earnestly regarded as a writer of real worth. In the next couple of year Oscar got to taste some recognition for his essays, novella and a few other writings. This gradual eminence of Wilde prompted Stoddart to ask from him some story of more than 300000 words. What Oscar gave in writing was not sufficient or long enough to satisfy Stoddart. Hence, this time Oscar attempted to pen down a narrative the unusual narrative of which would go on to highlight the vanity and the attached vices of the high class society of the London of that time. This is how *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was born and published in 1890. The novel went on to become one of his most intelligent writings with the story of the handsome youth who allowed him to be spoilt to an extent that he could not come back from the life of shallow enjoyment. It is interesting to read Dorian's tale that if one goes by his looks and his outwardly appearance he hardly looks like capable of murdering someone, let alone his dear friend. The symbol of his immortal beauty and youth and the ageing of his portrait on his behalf is that of defying the destructions of time which is impossible. Shakespeare has rightly said in his famous Sonnet 65-

“How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,

Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

.....

Or what strong had can hold his swift foot back,

Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid? ”

But Dorian has gone so far in his ecstatic pleasures that the reality cannot be sensed by his hedonistic mind now. Only after the murder of

Basil does he suffer from incessant pangs and feels disoriented at times. And this gradually leads him to his final destruction.

The subject of love among men- the concept of homosexuality was a heated matter in those days and Oscar Wilde himself had to face disgrace and legal pursuance. Some critics like Carson wrote such crude reviews about him that it instigated the matter as a crime of confusing the artist with his subject matter. So much so that Wilde could not defend him in the court and faced imprisonment at last.

The novel had to face some difficult time then and now but for us modern readers it is an extremely intelligent work of a diligent artist. We definitely look for more upgraded interpretations of this uncommon story in our postmodern studies.

5.3 What happens in The Picture of Dorian Gray

The preface of the novel provides us a definite hint that Dorian, the protagonist, is going to be some sort of a personification of beauty and artistic perfection. The discussion that takes place between Basil Hallward and Henry Wotton on a particular portrait further suggests their preoccupation with the succinct notions of art and beauty. Not only theirs, but many of the young and wealthy youths of the late Victorian time.

What I always tell my students in the class is to read the text. Text means a poem, a novel, a play or an essay. We may appreciate and interpret a piece of writing in numerous ways but the text is the core and hence the pivotal point of any literary study. Hence, you must read the book. Reading the main text not only makes clear the writer's first hand ideas and passions expressed through the characters but also enables you to follow what study we make on the novel.

Now if you have gathered any idea of Wilde's writings start reading the novel and delve deep in the world of the talented writer. I hope you will enjoy this novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray opens in a splendid scene at the London studio of Basil Hallward- the artist who painted the portrait of Dorian Gray. He is very happy to have portrayed faithfully and lovingly the

portrait of a friend who is very dear to him and whom he adores for his intense physical beauty. Basil is presented as a secretive and slightly introvert individual, his silent nature and some gestures made him a laughing stock at Oxford.

Basil is shown as an independent artist but his obsession with Dorian suggests his dependence on his new subject whom he regards as his new muse and spirit of his art. Basil's attraction for Dorian appears to be hard to understand. It is professional but also seems to be personal when he is found in a romantic passion for his subject. At this point we can discern Oscar Wilde's love for Greek art and the love for perfection. But Basil's attempt to Dorian away from Lord Henry definitely points to other meanings. It shows how Basil wants to keep Dorian only to himself and not give away to anyone. "Don't spoil him", he insists.

Stop to consider

Basil's artistic maturity is vibrant in the portrait of Dorian Gray which he has painted so perfectly. The love of Greek art and the focus on perfection is discernible here, we are reminded of Oscar's excellence in Greek literature in his Student days.

Actually basil knew what kind of negative effect Henry would have on Dorian. And why not, we see in the next chapter how Henry really begins to tempt Dorian into damaging ways of life by telling him how his physical beauty will vanish in no time but the portrait will remain the same forever. This makes Dorian worried about his beauty and youth, and envious of his portrait which is going to have no ravages of time on it. Instigated by Lord Henry Dorian envisages that youth and beauty are everything and if gone, there is no point of living at all. He even pledges his soul in exchange of the aging process being thrust upon the portrait while he will bloom forever like a beautiful flower. Henry tries to come closer to him by showing his wish to own the picture, but Basil insists on Dorian's right over it.

The intelligent Henry Wotton with his commanding personality has already influenced Dorian with his impressive talks, the later gets more and more curious about his individuality and his intriguing views on life. Even when Dorian fears of getting into a "bad influence", Wotton seizes his interest by his oratory. He says, "There is no such thing as a good

influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral”. Herein Oscar Wilde echoes his own views through Henry’s words:

“The aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one’s self.”

It is a common fact that most children coming from a broken marriage or with a discord in parents grow up to become emotionally insecure and often morally vulnerable individuals. This has been proven by Dorian. His past is dug by Henry Wotton from his uncle- Lord Fermor- a rich and surly old man who delights by keeping private details of everyone. He lets us know that Dorian’s mother Margaret married a poor and low-level soldier and this displeased her father. The enraged father conspired and got Dorian’s father involved in a duel which led to his death. After this Dorian’s mother faced a lot of trouble with the child but she had a lot of money which keeps Dorian rich even today. After the information Lord Henry meets Dorian at a lunch party and again he dominates the conversation by celebrating beauty and youth as the source of happiness. He says, “I can sympathize with everything except suffering”. We know at this point that the relationship between Wotton and Dorian is strengthening too quickly and the later is almost hypnotized by his mentor.

Only after a few days later Dorian is seen in his own personality and free from Henry Wotton, although very much under the spell of the latter’s words and thoughts. Sibyl’s presence is mentioned by Dorian but it is practically superficial and vain. He loves her, but only for her acting skills. Henry does not forget to talk on the displeasure in married life; he wants to divert Dorian from any commitment as he is now a pristine ground for him to play on.

Stop to consider

Read the initial chapter of the novel as they introduce the main characters to us all at once. The tension which is going to pervade the rest of the book sets off right from here. Lord Henry is fascinated by Dorian and is ready to influence his young mind which is opposed by Basil. Basil’s own secret desire to have Dorian all by himself is not clear at this point though it becomes clear that he has some innermost reason of not exhibiting the beautiful portrait of Dorian Gray.

Sibyl is an eighteen year old enthusiastic girl who is hardly mature to see the real picture of Dorian's equally immature love for her. She idealizes her "Prince Charming" while her mother and brother are not so comfortable about her relationship with Dorian. In yet another level, James faces his mother about the truth of her marital status with his father and call him a scoundrel/. He simply hates the concept "gentleman" which is attached to both his dead father and to Dorian.

On the other hand Lord Henry informs Basil about Dorian's perspective marriage with Sibyl. Basil is not very happy to know this and he expresses his anxiety about Dorian's decision to marry so much below his social status. Lord Henry is least bothered about the outcome of any such marriage; he is interested in watching his fascinating subject gather more experiences. He is seen abstaining from making any judgment this time. He only says, "Every experience is of value, and, whatever one may say against marriage, it is certainly an experience. I hope that Dorian Gray will make this girl his life, passionately adore her for six months, and then Henry is so very poisonous that he wants to fill his life with something happening in lives, more so if he was the one to cause all of that. Dorian arrives and expresses his obsession with Sibyl; he also describes a performance by her and his fall for the character she played. Dorian speaks with regret against what Lord Henry dictates about the pursuit of sinful pleasure.

Stop to consider

At this juncture we discern a point of view of Aestheticism when Dorian says that Sibyl's life is not as selfish and cynical as Lord Henry's. Henry agrees that creating harmony with one's self is one of the clues to a happy life. Here we hear Dorian echoing the doctrine that art should be presented and enjoyed in such a way that the individual learns to regard his own life as a piece of artistic craft. After this all three of them leave for the theatre.

The following part is very crucial for the development of the plot. Sibyl performs disastrously on the stage and this disappoints everyone and most of the audiences leave. The worst hit by her dull acting was obviously Dorian Gray. On the other Sibyl is overjoyed at her bad acting because she feels that she has failed to enact the emotion of love only because she has now experienced the same emotion in real life, that is, her 'Prince Charming'. According to her, it cannot be that she will truly

love Dorian and at the same time feign it on the stage. She rather requests him to take her away to a new life with him.

But Sibyl is astonished to face the abrupt reaction of Dorian. He is so frustrated by her worse acting that he repudiates her saying:”You have killed my love.” This brings to light his shallow and inconsistent love for her which rests merely on her capability to perform on stage. In fact, it is not love at all, as he cannot even stand her now. Paying no heed to Sibyl’s plea to forgive her, Dorian reaches home and finds his portrait having changed a little, it looks cruel and ashamed. He feels guilty about his attitude towards Sibyl and decides to mend the repairs.

Next day when Dorian was still to awake Lord Henry brings the news of Sibyl’s suicide the previous night. Dorian feels devastated and thinks of remorse but right then Lord Henry manipulates him by saying that he was nowhere to be blamed in this incident; rather it can be taken as an artistic achievement. Dorian is numbed after getting convinced by his “best friend” Henry Wotton and after Henry is gone he decides to choose eternal youth, infinite passions, pleasure, subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins. The burden of his sins, his dirty deeds and experiences will be endured by the portrait. Dorian is so hooked up by Lord Henry that even though he begins to feel guilt pangs and starts reminiscing about his wrong ways, he is quicker still to consent to this witty manipulator whom he feels “obliged to” and who has understood him, as he says.

SAQ

Q1.What idea do you form of Basil’s character from his secret attitude towards Dorian and his portrait? (50 words)

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quality of acting then what is art after all? Besides, the way Dorian tries to return to Lord Henry's temptations defying all his humane feelings. The consequences of a life pursuing beauty and pleasure are uncovered. The philosophy which this tragic turning point undoubtedly points critically to is Oscar Wilde's outspoken aesthetic ways which he had to thwart after his imprisonment.

When Basil feels sorry for Sibyl, Dorian simply dismisses her memory and says- "What is past is past". Basil is awestruck to see Dorian's new incarnation and blames Lord Henry for this damaging impact. Dorian's speech too echoed the witty style of Henry while speaking of Sibyl's artistic elevation through death. Basil later says that painting can, as all forms of art, "conceal the artist far more completely than it ever reveals him". Dorian hides his portrait as it no longer bears the beauty which he does. Basil's ultimate confession of his obsession with Dorian is a promotion of homosexual love and nothing else. Wilde too was imprisoned for sodomy for his relationship with Lord A. Douglas. After Basil's departure Dorian gets his servants to help him to hide his portrait in a schoolroom which was unused for years. Covering the portrait safely expecting not to mar its beauty by his growing sins he locks the room and stays happy that the decay in his character and morality will now not be visible on the portrait any more. When he sits to read the Yellow book given by Henry, he is shocked to encounter a newspaper cutting of Sibyl's suicide and tries to read the book instead. The book is about a young Parsian who spent his life running after all sorts of passions and sins. Reading some part of the book Dorian's conscience seems to arouse and he rejects it as poisonous because it blurs the difference between good and evil.

Check Your Progress

1. Why was Sibyl happy even after her disastrous acting on stage?
2. Try to analyze the following thoughts-
 - i) Supremacy of art over life.
 - ii) The idea of love
 - iii) The Yellow Book
3. What does Dorian's hiding of his portrait signify?

It is more than clear by now that Lord Henry has been able to capture the mind of Dorian completely. His cold reaction towards Sibyl's death has proved as to what extent he has become the disciple of Henry in pursuing hedonistic and selfish principles of life. He converts death to the end of only a fictional character or of a painted item as if not of a human being. Thus we sense the narrowing of the margins of art and real life. Dorian's remaining beautiful and youthful while his picture bears the burden of age, experiences and sins sets us to see Dorian more as an artistic manifestation than a living human, or at least he has made himself to be so.

In this section Basil's emotion towards Dorian gets highlighted. He now reveals the true reason why he was not interested in exhibiting the portrait of Dorian- that his innermost true devotion would be revealed and hence would lose its value. This attraction, though homosexual, was artistic and intellectual as well.

For a moment it dawns on Dorian that he might have been saved by Basil's love from Lord Henry's destructive impact on him. Reflective, he gives in further to the yellow book which, we can say is another source of his moral and emotional decadence. Yet again we should rationally believe that it was Dorian who let himself loose to be taken over by the sinful book. And whenever his conscience arouses to prick him, he lets himself to be overpowered by Henry to continue the path of Hedonism.

Dorian continues to bury himself in the Yellow book and his character in grim darkness. He has become so frivolous that he tries to match different colours of yellow book to his varied tempers of sinful action. Even eighteen years of dirty pleasure-seeking cannot bring any trace of damage in his beauty and youth along with a fake look of innocence. Although he has been dwelling in darkness of his soul, he is far from its knowledge. The growing mysteriousness of his personality is not easy to understand at times. He momentarily reflects on the dirty sins he has committed, but is swift enough to settle down, take pride in and enjoy his life of pleasure and moral degradation.

Dorian seems whimsically searching for enlightenment in his life, the absence of which keeps him struggling between repentance and careless pride in a dirty life. His fear of losing his beauty gradually deepens and he seems disillusioned with himself. Now this weariness is not aloof from the real life of the people of that time. Even amid growing material

development and intellectual upgradation, human beings still remained unhappy and restless. At times the philosophy of Aestheticism appeared to be like a bridge to escape from the reality- as Dorian is doing-assisted by Lord Henry's thoughts. In fact, his appreciation of the gloomy part of a hedonistic life somewhere indicates a Gothic colour to the novel's plot- another feature of Victorian novel and Victorian life.

Stop to Consider

Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic values are evident in the entire novel on many levels. From Basil's secret longing for Dorian as his muse to his understanding of Dorian as the embodiment of beauty for beauty's sake we sense the notion of art for art's sake. Consider the following for self analysis:

- *Basil and his art

- *Henry's intriguing influence on Dorian

- *Dorian as a vulnerable and morally weak individual

A disastrous development takes place in the next section of the narrative. Before leaving for Paris, Basil meets Dorian and lets him know about the dirty accusations being heard in town about him. He entreats Dorian lovingly to say that these scandalous stories are wrong. Basil cannot believe people when they are repeatedly blaming him saying that so many people have spoilt their lives and reputation in Dorian's companionship. Disgusted at this, Dorian proudly takes Basil to see his portrait. Dorian devours the curtain and Basil almost faints to see the horrible gruesome state of the person in the picture. Dorian tells Basil to see his soul in the picture. Basil asks Dorian to stop enlarging the canvas of his sins and ask for forgiveness for letting his soul go. If he could shake off his soul then he would surely get it back after repentance now. It is never too late to repent. Dorian is so overwhelmed with guilt, shame and remorse that he stabs Basil with a knife resting nearby. At one level, the creation of the beautiful portrait was the contribution of Basil in Dorian's destruction. This time again Dorian diverts his crime as nothing but a regular event of a person's life. He has stooped so low morally that he doesn't feel the guilt of becoming the cause of two deaths. Or rather we may think that since Basil acted as a moral bridge between his conscience and his hedonistic ways, he weighed high the pleasures and

hence removed his friend for good. Or we may also understand it in this way that Dorian kills the only well wisher of his life and soul; and the murder of whom closes the door altogether for his redemption.

While reading this part of the narrative we remember the world of Doctor Faustus. But dear students, you must read every sentence of the novel here in order to get the real shudder in our views regarding the events and their severity. No summary or analysis by others can provide you with the actual feeling of horror faced by Dorian's soul at this point.

The day after the murder Dorian plans to destroy the corpse and the evidence and sends his servant for Mr. Campbell- a scientist who was his friend but not so friendly now. Till then Dorian tries to divert his mind and starts drawing, but n whatever he drew, he would see Basil's face. This technique is used by Oscar to let the readers know the beginning of an internal struggle in our protagonist.

Campbell comes but knowing the matter he refuses to help Dorian in destroying the corpse. But Dorian shows him a secret message which terrifies the scientist and he had to give in. Dorian collects the required things mentioned by Campbell and the corpse is destroyed successfully after some hours. Campbell leaves after the task expressing the hope never to see Dorian again.

Another doubt that might disturb the readers is the secret message shown to Campbell by Dorian in order to blackmail him. Neither do we get to know exactly what the sins of Dorian are. Oscar Wilde has played with our capacity of suspension because certain such details are not made available to us in the narrative. But it may very well be a deliberation on the part of Oscar. The secret about Campbell seems strange too. While we keep guessing about what kinds of sins were attributed to Dorian and what he might have done for his passions, we may brood over the concept of sin itself and what are the manifestations of sin.

SAQ

Q1. Do you think Dorian's murder of Basil is a reflection of his own mental suffering and frustration about his impending damnation? Or is it mere an impulsive act of the moment? (75 words)

Gradually Dorian's character starts revealing an abstract restlessness. He drinks a lot in the party without any food and behaves in a defensive manner about everything that he says or does. He seems disoriented and ill-tempered. His confusing attitude is quite a kind of reflection of his dissatisfied pleasure-seeking soul. It also goes on to suggest that the wrong ways of life, especially which are against the moral codes may seem attractive initially but cannot give us spiritual satisfaction in the long run. As long as our soul is dumped our peace of mind remains suspended too. Dorian has opportunity to enjoy, but he simply cannot enjoy now as he did earlier. Oscar Wilde symbolically reveals this kind of a reality of human existence at this point. Dorian leaves early and heads to home where he feels haunted about his own questionable secrets and now the murder of Basil. He then proceeds towards the river with his mentor's words in his mind- "To cure the soul by means of the soul". As Dorian is approaching towards his craving for redemption and the rejection of the same, he treads one step ahead in his pursuit of debauchery- he goes to consume drugs to forget his sins. Like Marlowe's Faustus in his last days, Dorian knows he cannot atone. He reaches a place of lost and sold souls- an appropriate space for him. He heads towards a gloomy passage with a staircase and reaches a very dark room only to find Adrian Singleton- whom Dorian avoids at first but later calls for a drink. Adrian is one of the men Dorian had corrupted- as Basil had questioned him about. He remembers Basil again.

At the bar a woman calls Dorian "prince charming hearing which a young sailor comes ahead and abruptly grabs Doran from the back. He is none other than Sibyl's brother James who had once heard from Sibyl the loving name of the gentleman who later destroyed her. But the dirty and selfish Dorian laughs and tells the man to see his face and decide if the culprit can remain a 20-year old man after eighteen years of such an incident. Obviously James takes it to be his mistake and sets Dorian free. He hardly knew about Dorian's deal with his soul to remain ever youthful.

Dorian's actual dirty secrets are slowly revealed through some turn of events. His past and his sins chase him and he find no place to hide but to plunge into drugs. But even there he seems to tremble with nervousness. His conscience cannot be old forever. His physical body has been cheated on but it cannot be the same with his ageing inner spirit which now seeks to break the cage which Dorian has manufactured.

The novel has not set towards an impressive narrative full of the struggle and torture within the character of Dorian Gray. As his word has changed, the readers' minds are glued to the grim terror created by Oscar Wilde for this moment in the narrative. The description of nature using literary devices, seem to carry the burden of the grotesque despair brought about by Dorian's sins. The utter sense of nothingness and discontent in Europe and England resulting from the lost values towards the ending decades of the nineteenth century can be reflected here. The hollowness of the excess of Aesthetic values pursued is also revealed here. Death, decay, desolation are dominant around his part of the novel which makes the readers ready for the worst to come soon.

Back home at Selby Royal Dorian finds another person to haunt him- this time it is Sibyl's brother James. He keeps flashing in Dorian's mind making him unable to concentrate on and enjoy with his guests. He attempts to be happy and fresh but fails to hide his exhaustion and subsequently falls unconscious. He hates being crowded, but again fears to be lonely. While alone he keeps brooding over the consequences of being bad or good, about his moral sickness and his fear of a dreaded end. He is sick and nervous, he fears even in his own house. Everything about his existence haunts him now. Meanwhile, a person is killed by someone just near his house. But he doesn't bother about this incident at all. He has become so selfish that he worries about only himself.

Stop to Consider

*The supporters of Aestheticism said that a work of art need not necessarily preach a moral lesson and art can exist for its own sake. Oscar Wilde, being a supporter of the aesthetic values, seems to digress from it by displaying a moral code in this novel. Do you agree?

*Lord Henry Wotton is an unforgettable element in this novel. He has caused most of the harm to Dorian's character. Had he not tainted the simple mind of the young man, the tragedy would not have been so terrible for Dorian, Basil and a few companions of Dorian. On the other hand, Dorian acts as too vulnerable and weak giving Henry the opportunity to swallow him completely. Try to reflect on this question.

The shooting of the ordinary man also brings to light the vanity of the class division of the Victorian society in which the death of someone cause less concern than the rejoicing in the killer's ability to shoot. Besides, Dorian doesn't care if the dead man's family is compensated or not, he only wants to know if the dead man is James. Now even when he confirms that it is James indeed, he feels delighted and relieved, but could not feel safe because the physical disappearance of the fear cannot spare him off of the spiritual turmoil. The physical world has

Oscar Wilde's aptitude and exceptional practice of the comic element in the behavior and conversation is demonstrated in chapters 17 through the characters of Basil and Dorian. Their shallow thoughts and vain manners are exposed through the witty dialogues- a feature of the comedy of manners the practice of which has lifted the reputation of Wilde as one of the finest artists among his peers. Although this chapter provides us with some comic relief, the shallow picture of their sophisticated yet complex society gets highlighted, especially in Henry's derogatory notions of England. The witty and shallow conversation of the people exposes the vanity of the upper middle class morality of the English people. Henry

Everything apart, now comes the realization to Dorian that he needs to repent, after all and try virtue. Henry laughs out at the idea and tries to restart his celebration of hedonism and wise philosophical worlds of pleasure. This shows the original paradox between the two. His misleading concepts cannot rebuild Dorian now as he has lived that philosophy and faced the ultimate disgrace. He is bowed down by the fawning weight of his own sins and cannot carry them on further. It is ironical that ever since their first meeting Henry had eloquently induced Dorian for a sinful living and heartless crimes, he himself has remained sin-free and hence he cannot just understand the mental turmoil Dorian is going through. He has not murdered anyone or contributed to anyone's suicide. He has not defied nature by trading his precious soul.

On the other hand Dorian wants to repent and abstains from ruining a simple country girl. But this invisible act of goodness cannot lead him to be atoned for his years of crimes and sins. When he goes to the portrait with the futile wish that the scorn and disgust on the portrait's face would be minimized by his latest act, obviously the portrait has come to be seen ever more wrinkled and scornful reflecting Dorian's summit of sins.

Devastated and aghast he seizes a knife and stabs the portrait on the heart but when the servants come up to see who has cried, they see an old man disfigured lying down with a knife plunged into his heart. They could not recognize Dorian until his rings were found on his fingers. The portrait remained evergreen and excessively beautiful. The supremacy and immortal nature of art is summed up in the conclusion of the novel. Dorian kept himself youthful and good looking but not forever; he transferred his sins, his shame and hostility to his portrait but could not continue with this deviation forever. A moment comes when he could not be saved by any repentance or self-realization. Hence he resorts to destroy the portrait- the ultimate evidence of his sins. The portrait, though, is the reflection of his own (sold) soul, Hence, the end of the portrait turns into the end of Dorian Gray himself!

SAQ

Q1. What kind of vanity of the Victorian society do you perceive in the narrative of Dorian Gray’s story? Is Wilde’s criticism of the same appropriate? (50 words)

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Q2. Describe Dorian’s suffering as portrayed towards the end of the novel? (75 words)

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Q3. Discuss briefly *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a comedy of manners. (50 words)

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Q4. Sketch the character of Lord Henry Wotton as the deciding factor of this novel. (50 words)

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5.4 Major Characters

Dorian Gray

As portrayed radiantly by Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray is the protagonist of the play. He is an unbelievably dashing and handsome young gentleman who can impress anyone at the first sight. The Focus of attraction of this novel is the portrait of this good looking youth which has been painted by his friend Basil Hallward. Things would have been totally different had Lord Henry Wotton not manipulated this young man. Right from the beginning we have perceived Gray as an extremely impressionable person. Wotton influences him so strongly to make him excessively worried about the transience of his good looks that he vows his own soul to leed the portrait age and grow old on his behalf. Henry Wotton keeps on ensuring him that the transitory nature of beauty betrays everyone and he won't be spared either. As a wealthy person he can have access to all kinds of pleasant things of the material world, so he should grab them.

We can see that Lord Henry fancies of fashioning the pristine mind of Dorian Gray into that of a ... pleasure seeking devil's. Dorian is too novice a youth and he gives in to the instigation of Henry. As he grows more and more complacent about his beauty, the apprehension of losing it makes him ready to do anything to avert the waning of his youthful appearance. He is by now fully convinced that since life is not so long, we should enjoy as much as we can. Hence, he begins to seek all sorts of pleasure at the cost of even his life and soul. It is strange that the poisonous effect of Henry makes him incapable of accepting the truth of life and the human body, he longs tom stay as bashful and youth as the portrait drawn by Basil Hallward.

The next step seen in Dorian is his adoption of the “Hedonism”. He gets determined to spend his life enjoying all the lovely things around him without caring for any moral restraint whatsoever. He turns so shallow that his love for Sibyl is seen as extremely vain and false leading Sibyl to take her own life. This incident shows the first sign of ageing in Dorian’s portrait leaving him unaffected by the entire experience. Only for a fleeting moment he feels guilty- merely to fall back on his old ways as Lord Henry dictates him. He then decides to see Sibyl’s death as an artistic achievement.

As Dorian’s ageing is taking place on his portrait, it seems growing old- perhaps not as much because of Dorian’s age as because of the severity of his sins. A noteworthy point here is Dorian’s innermost wish to purge his soul despite the absence of an active conscience. Gradually he starts to feel bad about himself. Although his pleasure seeking life is actively going on, he is pricked by something inside him. It appears; Dorian is, after all, a human being! The murder of Basil is the defining event which dismantles all the lessons taught by Lord Henry. He tries very hard but this time Dorian cannot keep himself away from the repentance of killing his dear friend. The turn of events make him miserable and fearful about his impending destruction. He is worried and apprehensive; he tries to be normal but fails to be so. And finally when he beholds the portrait and the horrible wrinkles and sinful scars on it, he stabs it only to stab himself to death. Thus proving that our soul is our real self which is eternal, the physical body is a mere medium to carry us through this material world never meant to be immortal.

Lord Henry Wotton

Off the record, Lord Henry Wotton can be called the anti-hero of this novel; as he is the character who has caused what Dorian Gray undergoes till his end. Henry could see the vulnerability and possessiveness of Dorian and he knew he could mould this youth in any shape and enjoy watching him getting spoilt up to the level of destruction. Henry enamours the youth with his cunning intellectual capabilities by means of his witty talks and impressive philosophy of life and art. He appears to be a label in himself. He influences Dorian so strongly that Dorian even goes on to mimic his erotic style and also inherits his inhuman sensibilities towards the people around him.

Henry moves about among the highly sophisticated groups of the society and extends his intellectual yet surly spell on people as vulnerable as

Dorian Gray. His oratory skill is his prime weapon to seduce people into his poisonous thoughts and views on leading a pleasurable life, although he keeps himself away from such dirty sins therein saving his soul from degradation. Basil stopped him in the very beginning from influencing Dorian who, he believes, “has a simple and a beautiful nature”. But Wotton wanted a marvellous person as his subject to play with, so when Dorian put himself as the delicious bait why should Henry withdraw from his malignant seduction. Although Henry perplexes others about the radical thoughts about art and life, these things prove absolutely naïve in the end of the novel leaving Henry himself confused of the implications of his witty theories.

Henry doesn't change or develop much in the narrative process of the novel, and he is seen basically as a stable and balanced not much affected by anything or anyone at all. He only becomes the reason behind the downfall of Dorian.

Basil Hallward

Basil is a talented painter whose drawing of Dorian Gray brings out his talent and also his adoration of his subject. His liking for Dorian is far beyond friendship, he says that he has put too much of himself in the portrait. He calls his love for himself as “idolatry” and keeps it a secret which Henry wants to dig out and Dorian gets to know only towards the end of the novel. Basil is somewhat a traditionally oriented artist who regarded his subjects as artistic investment. Dorian's beauty and youth have been unmistakably reflected in his portrait and he doesn't want to exhibit it in public, he fears his emotional attachment will be known to the world. As a true friend and admirer of Dorian Gray, he tries to dissuade him from harmful influences and several times he forbade Lord Henry from polluting the simple and immature mind of the young man. He proves clearly that Dorian is his favorite subject and he remains a genuine well wisher of Gray, rather the only well wisher in the entire narrative. He is so committed to Dorian and his safety that he tried to make him repent and save his soul from the ultimate degradation. He sacrifices his life to make room to save his subject from the clutches of damnation as Dorian murders him when he talks of redemption and forgiveness.

5.5 Minor Characters

Sibyl Vane

She is the eighteen-year old beautiful actress whom Dorian loves for her incredible acting skills. She fondly calls him ‘Prince Charming’ and impulsively adores him. She feels that after having experienced the real emotion of love for Dorian, she cannot feign the fake emotions on stage. Watching her disastrous acting Dorian scornfully rejects her which led her to commit suicide.

James Vane

He is Sibyl’s brother who is excessively protective of her. He is already demoralized about his father and his mother’s marital status with him. Added to this was Sibyl’s infatuation with another such gentleman. He vows to kill anyone who perpetrates any harm to his sister. After her suicide he searches for Dorian and finds him after eighteen years but Dorian’s deceitful youth and beauty misleads him.

Mrs. Vane

She is the mother of Sibyl and Vane and in possession of a secret past not fully disclosed by Oscar Wilde. She is not so happy about Sibyl’s craze for Dorian. As an experienced mother, she stresses on the practical side of the courtship with “Prince Charming” and tries to get more information about Dorian Grey and his fortune.

Lady Agatha

She is Lord Henry’s aunt from whom Henry heard Dorian’s name and about his beauty and youthful appearance. She was the host of a lunch party which Dorian Gray and Lord Henry attend and the latter extends his influence on the youth.

Allan Campbell

He is a scientist who is summoned by Dorian Gray to dispose of Basil Hallward’s dead body. They share some secret of the past which is not revealed clearly but Campbell is terrified by Dorian’s blackmail. After damaging Basil’s body Campbell leaves never to see Dorian again.

Lady Victoria Wotton

She is the wife of Lord Henry Wotton has nothing much in Henry's life and later divorces him. She is a pleasing character.

Lady Brandon

She introduces Basil Hallward to Dorian Gray at a party.

Margaret Devereux

She is Dorian's dead mother who went through a painful life before death as mentioned by Fermor.

Duchess of Monmouth- She flirts with Dorian. She is portrayed as being more attractive than her husband.

Sir Geoffrey Clouston- He is the brother of Duchess of Monmouth who is seen playing a crucial role in the killing of the person near Dorian's estate.

Mr. Hubbard- the frame maker whom Dorian calls for and then carries the portrait to the attic room with his help.

Mrs Leaf- she is Dorian's house keeper.

Adrian Singleton- One of those young men whom Dorian influenced and spoilt by Dorian. Dorian meets him later in the opium bar and tries to inform all.

Victor- First valet of Dorian

Francis- Dorian's valet after he let go of Victor.

Hansom Driver- Dorian moves to the opium den with him.

Hetty Merton- A beautiful but simple village girl who reminds Dorian of Sibyl. She is spared by him as an act of repentance.

Parker- Basil Hallward's butler.

Mr Isaacs- The manager and producer of Sibyl. He was a Jew. Sibyl owed him money taken in advance.

Policeman- He is called by the passersby. He rings Dorian's doorbell but is not responded. Just then he hears a crash and a cry from the attic room. This was the death of Dorian.

5.6. Summing Up

This unit was my attempt to open up for you all some facts about the origin of the novel, the circumstances around its final publication and Oscar Wilde's journey to success as a novelist. A great work of literature does not exist in vacuum but goes through numerous thoughts, issues and hard work of the writer. I have tried to discuss and analyse the story of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a comprehensive manner so that you can easily understand it with all the complexities. By complexities I do mean the novel has a few events of complex nature which make us think and then grasp the meanings and symbolic manifestations as well. I have discussed the three major characters and most of the minor characters who contribute to the making of this work of fiction. We shall discuss the plot and narrative in the next unit with all the technical details. I hope you will read the novel and understand it and extend the scope of reading fictional stories for your entire life.

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UNIT 3:

THEMES AND TECHNIQUES

Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 The themes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- 3.4 Symbols
- 3.5 Characterization
- 3.6 Point of View and Narrative structure
- 3.7 The Faust Legend and Morality in the Novel
- 3.8 Summing up
- 3.9 Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to encourage you to evaluate the novel in terms of its themes, to sort out the techniques employed by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and to analyse how these techniques go on to make the novel complete and effective.

3.2 Introduction

Whenever we pick up a novel to read we do happen to enquire ourselves what the novel is all about. Not always the subject matter or the plot of the specific novel is reported by a narrator. Often the story or the

proceedings of a novel are made known to us through the characters' speeches and activities. Knowledge about the author's age and contemporaries also help us to know a writer better. We may also study the different works of the author to learn about the topics of his present text. An author can be seen dealing with different types of themes and subjects in many of his writings, a few of them might be repeated. A writer has to express many diverse ideas and human passions which are possible to be seen among us. He needs to employ all kinds of techniques and unique styles to make everything interesting as well as believable to the readers.

SAQ

Q1.By what kind of elements is an author driven to choose a topic for his writing? (50 words)

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It does make difference when we read the first novel of a writer and when we are conversant with his/her previous works, if the writer is familiar to us we can have some sort of conjecture about not only his/her basic possible themes but also about a few techniques frequently used by the same. For example, after reading two or three of the tragedies of Shakespeare, we will naturally find it easier to follow his third tragedy.

A novel and its study cannot be complete only by its subject matter; the techniques employed in the progress of the story and the development of

the characters play a vital role in the entirety of the text. Now the concept of Technique is one of extended scope. It covers various issues right from characterization to the narrative system as well as the other figurative aspects used by the author to highlight some idea and also to please the readers.

The following sections will find the analysis of the themes of The Picture of Dorian Gray and the various techniques used by this unusual writer in this novel.

SAQ

Q1. What do you think Oscar Wilde deals with in his novel here?

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Q2. Would you like to amalgamate the themes of Wilde into a compact whole or do you think they are scattered type of ideas used as the themes?

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3.3 The Themes of The Picture of Dorian Gray

To identify the themes of a novel is not that much of an uphill task for any regular reader. This is especially true regarding the Victorian novelists who produced great novels all at the same time. But Oscar Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not the same. Although the novel is still pretty clear with its themes which are discernible at once.

Youth and Beauty

The foremost theme of the novel will very well be youth and beauty. Youth and beauty are the first principle of Aestheticism. And this is the philosophy for which Oscar Wilde himself lived, and it is that art which serves no other purpose than to offer beauty. The entire novel witnesses the reigning position of beauty. It is the means to revitalize the wearied senses as indicated by the effect that Basil's portrait has on the cynical Lord Henry. It is also a means of escaping the brutalities of the world. Dorian distances himself, not to mention his consciousness, from the horrors of his actions by devoting himself to the study of beautiful things- music, jewels, rare tapestries, etc. In a society that prizes beauty so highly; youth and physical attractiveness become valuable commodities. Lord Henry reminds Dorian of as much upon their first meeting, when he laments that Dorian will soon enough lose his most precious attributes. In chapter seventeen, the Duchess of Monmouth suggests to Lord Henry that he places too much value on these things; indeed, Dorian's eventual demise confirms her suspicions. For although beauty and youth remain of ultimate importance at the end of the novel- the portrait is, after all, returned to its original form- the novel suggests that the price one must pay for them is exceedingly high. Indeed, Dorian gives nothing less than his soul.

The purpose of Art

The Picture of Dorian Gray was published in a monthly magazine before getting the shape of a full fledged work of fiction and it was severely criticized as being immoral. Besides, his ideas explored in the text were looked down upon in an extremely derogatory manner. Hence, in the next year he added a preface to the book which contained many

epigrams. Through these epigrams he tried to tell us that art is not supposed to have any moral purpose whatsoever. Art can exist only to give us beauty and pleasure. He had to deal with a lot of criticism owing to his novel and his association with Aestheticism. In the vain Victorian society it was believed that art could be used as a tool for and social reform through moral enlightenment which was done by stalwarts like Dickens, Carlyle, etc. This was challenged by the supporters of the aesthetic movement by propounding that art should be freed from such burdens. These artists and writers despised the superficial morality of the bourgeois class and this aspect is clearly perceived in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where we meet the friend circle of Dorian whose talks and thoughts are shallow and vain.

If we believe that Oscar Wilde followed the ideas from the aesthetic movement, then we must see if his lone fiction from him really carries it or not. The novel shows us two significant works of art. First one is obviously the painting of Dorian, and the other one is the mysterious Yellow book which was handed by Lord Henry to Dorian Gray. These two pieces of art present the Victorian ways of thought- the painting behaving as the mirror to show Dorian his defying of the physical destruction of his body, something that is unnatural and going to be harmful in the long run. The Yellow book is a representation of the French excesses of human life. It is, again, like a leader who would lead Dorian to his sinful debaucheries in life further.

If we turn to the making of these two works of art- the painting and the Yellow book, we are unknown to the creation of the Yellow book; only its impact on Dorian's mind has been presented here to us. But we do know about the creation of the painting by Basil Hallward, his excessive affection for his artistic creation is confusing in the beginning but later in the novel he expresses his opinion that all art be "unconscious, ideal and remote". So his unwillingness to exhibit this painting in the beginning of the novel is the result of this belief in him that exhibition will betray his idolization of his subject. Or it may disrupt his affection towards his ideal subject- something which gave new meaning to his art. When Dorian is shown as following the path of debauchery and sins, it is not to be understood as the complete celebration of the aesthetic ideals. Rather it can be regarded as a caution that we must not insist on the conviction that art is necessarily going to reveal the artist or his thoughts or any moral lesson as such. Late in the novel Dorian realizes that if the imaginative impulse could bring harmony in the chaotic life of

human beings and also add meaning to our existence, then art will surely bring out some meaning as art will emerge of the same imagination. Although Oscar Wilde has fought hard and to an extent succeeded in making art free from the bondage of the superficial Victorian moral values, but his doctrine is equally questionable in the eyes of the society and this was further deepened when he had to face imprisonment.

Stop to Consider

1. When we discuss about the themes of a work of fiction, we also come across the idea of thematic unity, as the themes cannot exist in isolation from each other in the same novel and the same plot. So, what elements of thematic unity do you perceive in this novel, if any?
2. Were the themes of this novel relevant to the time and society in which it was written?

The Negative Results of Influence

Dorian Gray, the protagonist of this novel is terribly influenced by the Yellow book and the painting of himself. He was thrilled at the recognition of his beauty and youthful appearance. Basil's adoration of him and Lord Henry's poisonous impact on him led him to spend two decades of his life in an extremely sinful manner up to his demise. Henry knew the moment he saw Dorian that he would like to seduce the youth in much the same way as Basil was influenced by Dorian. When Basil forbids Henry not to spoil Dorian with his influence, Henry utters that there is something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence.

Dorian's falling under the influence of Henry is fatal which shows us that the novel censures the sacrifice of one's self to others. This is seen in the plot when Basil is killed by his idolatry towards Dorian and Dorian by his devotion to the immoral Henry. Therein is shown the idea that we should never give up our individuality. Our sacrifice of our existence to any person, any situation or any thing leads to our destruction always.

Check your progress

1. Comment on the theme of the purpose of art in the novel.
2. How are the principles of aestheticism revealed in the themes of the novel?
3. What does Wilde express about art in the novel, what art can do for us or to us?

Superficiality

The superficial attitude of the society of the Victorian people is very much evident in this novel. There is no doubt that a society that values beauty and bodily attractiveness above all is a society founded on the love of surfaces. Henry influences Dorian to believe that his physical beauty will be gone after some time and this will bring his disgrace and loss of value among all the people. This leads Dorian to sell his soul to keep his beauty and youth intact by transferring his decay to the portrait. They are unable to see the truth of human life- the ultimate truth that our bodies are transient and bound to die one day however we try to retain the same. Beautiful and ugly bodies decay in the same way. What matters most to Dorian, Henry and the police company is not whether a man is good at heart but rather whether he is good looking. As Dorian evolves into the realization of a type, the perfect blend of scholar and socialite, he experiences the freedom to abandon his morals without any heed. Indeed, even though Basil warns, society's elite question his name and reputation, Dorian is never ostracized. On the contrary, despite his 'mode of life', he remains at the heart of the London social scene because of the "innocence" and "purity of his face". As Lady Narborough notes to Dorian, there is little distinction between ethics and appearance. "You are meant to be good, you look so good."

3.4 Symbols

The painting

The painting of Dorian Gray drawn by Basil Hallward is, by far the most important symbol in the novel. As the centre point of the plot, the

portrait interacts with Dorian Gray throughout the narrative. When Dorian does something immoral the result is visible on the portrait-while Dorian's own face remains untainted and beautiful. The picture takes the Victorian ideal of morality. If art is useful by teaching some kind of a moral lesson, how perfect the piece of art must be. Since it is a parameter of ethical changes, Basil's final glimpse of his masterpiece occurs when his horrified reaction at the portrait leads Dorian to murder his dear friend.

Flowers

Flowers spread out throughout the novel. Dorian turns to flowers to relieve his soul after Henry awakens him to the power and brevity of beauty. Dorian sees moments both for appreciation and from terrible horror, such as when he is blackmailing Campbell into disposing of Basil's dead body. Flowers symbolize beauty and also how briefly it lasts. A fleeting beauty is a stark contrast to the inherent ugliness that is captured in Dorian's portrait.

Theatre

It, as a form of art, seems as form of escapism. Lord Henry advises that people should give in to temptation through indulgence and Dorian sees art as one means of escaping the ethical concern of his conscience.

It is the backdrop against which she artistically plays the character which seduces Dorian into loving her. But what she and Dorian fall in love. It is the setting in which Sibyl is no longer able to act destroyed his love forever. It is the place of Dorian's indulgence for Sibyl's performances excel but also. The theatre symbolizes the way all the main characters play their own personal dramas.

The Opium Dens

These opium dens are shown as being located in the remote and detached part of London. This distance of location also symbolizes the mental state of Dorian which is far from being healthy; he is really in a filthy state. He attempts to escape to that place at a time when he was restless and sick after the murder of Basil, his friend. Although he has a canister of opium at his house, he leaves for an outdoor place for accessing his intoxication in the darkness so he can feel safe.

James Vane

Sibyl's brother is more of a symbol of Dorian's shattered conscience. His character was added in the edition of 1891 publication. His later presentation at the opium den and later being murdered while chasing Dorian can be read as a deliberate attempt on Wilde's part to bring out the torture in Dorian's mind. His character has a spectral quality in the story.

SAQ

1.Explain why you think the symbols can be seen as the important elements in the novel. (50 marks)

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Q2.Which symbol can be seen as the strongest of all? How? (50 marks)

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3.5 Characterization

Characterization forms an integral part of any fictional work. In the preceding unit all the major and minor characters have been mentioned along with the story, you must have already linked the characters in their respective roles and contribution. How far the characters carry forward the narrative and the story is pretty clear to all of us.

Characterization is the manner of introducing, describing and developing characters by a writer. This presentation of the characters may be done directly by the author himself and also by the activities, thoughts and speech of the characters themselves. Characters make up the events of a story. When we take up a book for reading we get to know about the happenings through the speech, actions and thoughts of the characters. These elements about the living characters build up the narrative of the entire whole and make it a story which is rendered compact in these ways. The movements, reactions and their growth from all angles- these features become an integral part of any narrative.

Whenever we need to discuss the characterization style of other novelists, we take into consideration the other novels of the writer as well. This is not going to be the same in the case of Oscar Wilde. Since this is his only novel, we will have to take note of his writing style found in his other writings, especially his plays. His present

Wilde has written only one novel. So, it is not going to be easy to assess his 'type' of characters in fiction. Of course his characterization is evident also in his plays which have been very successful and popular among the audience and readers alike. In his plays he has tried to display the society of his time and the characters who occupy such a vain social order.....

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we see the characterization is focused mainly on Dorian, and Henry is made to act as a propeller to his character. The character of Dorian Gray is a round character as it is the focus of the no

Characters in a novel, a short story, a play or a work of fiction can be either round or flat. A round character is nuanced and well thought-out. They usually play an important role in the story. They are written specifically so audience or readers can pay attention to them for a specific reason. Flat characters, on the other hand, are more like the

arrangement of some attractive display in a window shop. They are two dimensional and lack nuances. Their purpose in a story is desultory.

A round character is usually deep and layered character of a story. They are interesting and attractive to the readers because they appear to be real people. Readers and audiences feel attached in the feelings, strengths, hopes and aspirations of these characters.

Round characters are full fledged characters that come into complexities with their life situations and other people in plausible manners. This generally results in the development of their characters. Now, round characters and dynamic characters should not be confused as being the same thing. A round character is complex but not prone to change while a dynamic character keeps changing throughout the story- a round character always evolves. Such characters always surprise us with different motions. Like a real person does, a round character cannot be described or presented with things.

SAQ

1.Comment briefly on the art of characterization of Oscar Wilde. (50 marks)

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Q2. What do you think is the role of characterization in fiction? (65 words)

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The character of Dorian Gary is a full fledged and specified character and our focus is on him completely. Henry can be regarded as one who assists in the realization and the fulfillment of the protagonist's character. Dorian and his characteristic flaws and his pleasure seeking for almost two decades are all that we get involved with. How his friend Hallward forbids him to trust and obey Henry Wotton as he is the most poisonous personality at that point of time

Henry is a powerful impact on Dorian. Often it seems that Henry rules the story by leading Dorian to wrong ways, but we must understand that Dorian is the protagonist and not Henry Wotton. Dorian, no doubt, is the central character and there is no doubt about it.

Dorian as the protagonist of the novel is consistently and strongly focused throughout the story. Wilde does not dislocate him on any instance in the narrative; neither does he depend much on any other person in the story. He occupies the space keeping us awed to see his lifted position in the book. The character of Dorian is not static; it grows and progresses, may not be for anything better.

If we look at the character of Lord Henry, he undoubtedly makes for an attractive character who is capable of creating tension and empathy or all of us. How delighted he is to have Dorian captive under his spell of extreme thoughts and his compelling talks. He is a fantastic creation by Wilde. Another noteworthy feature of his character is that he leads Dorian towards evil and sins, he becomes the cause of Dorian's fall and his destruction but he himself is untainted by all of these wrong or inhuman activities. From such angles, it seems that we should call Henry a round character too, as he is there vibrant and active like a sixteen year old youth. Often it seems that even Wilde is unable to hold him back from the way he swipes into the mind of Dorian and become his ultimate mentor and inspiration until he breathes his last. With such qualifications, Henry becomes an enticing presence in the novel.

American novelist William H. Gass has said that the great characters are the biggest marker of great literature. They have an endless interest and the reader's fascination never ends. Gass has mentioned: "great literature is great because its characters are great, and characters are great when they are memorable." In Aristotle's opinion, characters were mere servants of dramatic action. Gass, however, is in favour of characters that are alive. In a very interesting manner Gass is seen claiming that authors are gods since they can create whatever they want. Still,

characters should be “unique, entirely themselves, as if they had a self to be!

In Art of Fiction Henry James has to say something on character. He was criticized for focusing excessively on psychoanalysis at the cost of telling a story or for elaboration of characters. In his defence he said that the boundaries between these two are useless.

The character of basil Hallward is somewhat difficult to describe. He knows his friend the way he is and in spite of his immaturity and all his growing follies he is ready to tolerate him. He keeps on stopping Dorian from moving to the extreme limits of sinning. He wants goodness and peace to prevail amidst the victory of art.

There are many minor characters in the novel and each of them is distinct and crucial in their roles in the narrative. They are not so prominent in the plot but assist in the revelation of the central character. Wilde has taken care so that these characters do not exceed their space to intervene and eat up the moments of the main characters.

If we study further the features of characterization in fiction, we can also make a study of showing and telling of a character. In showing, the character is merely presented as speaking and behaving in some ways so that the readers can decide on the nature of the character. In telling, The author sort of intervenes to describe and evaluate the details of the character’s disposition- what the character thinks and feels, etc. Wilde has adequately presented to us the character of Dorian Gray as the protagonist with perfect showing and telling.

Stop to Consider

Discuss briefly the characterization of Basil Hallward as the originator of the plot tragedy through his art.

Describe are the different types of characters in fiction.

Discuss the functions of minor characters in a work of fiction.

3.6 Point of View and Narrative Structure

So, before beginning this section I wanted to ask you if you are conversant with the concept called point of view. Now we all know what is meant by point of view in general terms- it is the way our opinions are, or our ways of seeing and accepting things around us. What could be meant by the point of view of a novel, then? Who or in what way will we get into the novel, that is the question.

The story of a novel can be told by a character which is a part of the story, or from a perspective that observes and knows all the characters but not one of them.

It is the audience's perspective on the events of the narrative- be it the novelist or the selected point of view with strategy. The story teller asks even the details of the story- which perspective will be the most satisfying for his/her audience/readers.

There are three variations of point of view:

- a) In the third person narrative the audience watches the hero navigate the story's challenges. Use of pronouns such as 'he', 'she', or the general neutral is a feature of this type of narrative. The audience is kept outside the story looking in.
- b) In the second person narrative we become the hero of the story. It is rare in fiction and films because it limits the story teller's ability to build the character of the hero. When we can't see the hero, for example, you can't know what the person looks like. But second person narrative can be used because it can help make the action of the story feel immediate and relatable to the audience.
- c) The first person narration is the most natural point of view used in fiction and other narratives. It is a story told by the hero to the audience. In first person narrative, the audience is listening to the story. This point of view is fascinating, because we learn about the hero from the events of the story but also from how the hero chooses to tell that story. Again, we may or may not trust the narrator fully. When we encounter a first person story in a fiction or in real life, we should always ask ourselves why the person is

telling the story. The answer to that question can help us decide if we believe or doubt the narrator.

There can be many minute details of studying point of view of a novel; we shall not go so much into that kind of a detail at this point of our discussion. But if we will talk about the novel we are dealing with, here we definitely have a third person narrative in which a third person is narrating to us the events of the story who is not a part of the plot at all. He presents before us the characters in a narrative that is quite plausible and believable, for that matter. Whatever we get to learn about the proceeding of the plot is by the indirect speech employed by the narrator. The narrator himself is not a member from the story, he is an outsider who acts like an omniscient presence who knows everything about the story and the characters and their behavior.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the third person is clearly in use. The narrator is the omniscient presence who presents the characters, describes their behavior with their troubles, feelings and their growth as individuals. We get to read about each and every detail of the characters through the voice and eyes of the narrator. The narrator's description here in this novel is adequate for the readers to know and feel about the characters' thoughts and actions, especially that of the protagonist here. We have the narrating voice which reduces our painful effort to exert ourselves about the characters.

If we go on to discuss on the narrative structure of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we will notice that Oscar Wilde is known for having strong stories and never writing anything in a loose manner. There is never so much of a deviation in his structural progression, also noticeable in his plays and other stories. Although the story in the present novel spans nearly two decades, he is capable to unify every line of the speech and action in the story. We are so taken up by the happenings that we hardly are left to think about the lapse of such a long time. The introduction of the characters of Dorian, Hallward and Henry to the building up of the tension up to the summit and the fall of Dorian- everything keeps on the right space perfectly, Wilde leaves no looseness in anything.

Stop to Consider

1. What idea of point of view do you gather from your reading of this section?
2. Give an example of First person narrative in a fictional work.
3. Can a plot be forwarded without a proper technique?

In this section we shall discuss about the plot of the novel, the narrative structure. Plot is about the story itself, but it is not equivalent to a story. Plot can be, more frequently referred to the series of events which go on to form the story line of a novel or a film, etc. We can find a combination of succession and causality of those events. The present novel is regarded as a masterpiece not only because of the characters and the presentation of the same, but also because of the technical perfection Wilde has been able to employ in handling the narrative of the book.

Recently, many facts relating to plot and narrative structures have been updated in many ways. Thinkers like Levi Strauss and many other Structuralists have written at length about the features that a novelist adds to the story- the management of time sequence, the attractive and reliable presentation of the characters and the relation of the author to the story, if any. To break up the terminology called 'plot' we can get to a conclusion that plot means the systematic presentation of the characters, then the development of some events, next is the occurrence of some trouble, the characters' struggle to deal with the crises and the final climax etc. There must be proper beginning and end of a plot. Besides, it cannot stand detached from the characters and the events because those are what the ingredients of a strong plot are.

Shlomith Rimmon Kenan and David Lodge have formulated their valuable ideas on narrative structure and techniques. Kenan has used examples from different fictional works like James Joyce's masterpiece *A Portrait of the Artist* and Dickens' *Great Expectations* to discuss about narration and many other details. This kind of theoretical information helps the writer to take guidance in framing his narrative structure.

3.7 The Faust Legend and Morality in the novel

The story of Doctor Faustus will always be in the minds of students of English literature; it will keep mesmerizing us with the plentiful moments of suspense and thrill too! With only a few contrasting elements, Faustus and Dorian belong to the same genre of hero as sinners. Faustus shuns the company of people while Dorian is evil and dissolute so that people come to despise his company in the novel.

Narcissus was an extremely good looking youth in Greek mythology who was the son of the river God Cephissius and the nymph Liriope. One day he saw his image reflected in a fountain and became enamored of it, thinking that the image was that of the nymph of that fountain.

Faustus was a legendary German scholar of the early sixteenth century. His name was taken from the historian magician of the same name. Faustus sold his soul to the devil in exchange of knowledge, power, love and prolonged youth. This story of the magician inspired Marlowe to create this play called Doctor Faustus (1592) and other literary works by many other writers. Goethe and Lessing were few of them.

Faustus actually got tired of the study of sciences and hence he thinks of trying his hand at magic. He summons Mephistopheles and enters into a deed with him to sell his soul to the Devil for twenty four years. In exchange, he will get a life full of extreme knowledge, black magic power and anything else which he will wish. Mephistopheles will keep vigilance on him every moment and provide him whatever he wants. In the succeeding portion of the story we come across many incidents in which he travels a lot to distant places in moments and performs several extraordinary feats and meets many legends. In another noteworthy incident, he calls on Helen and Faustus addresses Helen in his famous lines: “was this the face that launched a thousand ships...” Now this surrendering of the soul was not easy either, especially as the period stipulated was coming near. The horrors of this sin leaves him devastated and he is unable to repent. The moment he would think of repentance the Devil would appear and attempt to take his soul away right away. Faustus’s anguish seems extremely pitiable and touching as portrayed by Marlowe. As his end approaches, he gets even more terrified of the damnation which lay in front of him. The Chorus brings to light the moral of the play, it says a person may wonder at unlawful things but should not practice the same more than heavenly power permits. The suffering of Faustus is similar to the suffering of Dorian

who too forgets his limits as a human being. The legend of Doctor Faustus and the story of Dorian Gray have a lot in common and both the stories are equally compact and close to our hearts.

Stop to Consider

1. Describe your images drawn from *Doctor Faustus* and your ideas associated with Marlowe's masterpiece.
2. What signs of morality does impress you the most in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?

In the Faust legend, the main character eventually confronts the loss of his soul but he is not able to seek redemption through confession or absolution. The Devil does not allow him to repent even if he wishes to do so. He starts to feel miserable and feels that he is now beneath pardon and also that there is no power superior to him who will save him strongly. Here again, Faustus can be still found to be committing the sin of pride because he regards himself to be such a unique case that even God seems incapable of helping him out. Traditionally, despair is symbolized by suicide. Here, Despair becomes a sin too because the sinner is not capable to ask for forgiveness at all.

In the closing chapters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's conduct and attitude are similar with the Faustus legend. The protagonist has matured from the naïve, vain young man whom we meet at Basil's studio. Now he has grown to a man who is abhorred in the beginning but is capable of attracting our sympathy by the end of the story. Actually we pity him, if not like him. Even then we see that he is unable to gain salvation because like Faustus he is not able to get rid of his pride and confessing and repenting.

Dorian cannot redeem his soul as he is someone who prioritizes himself. He easily dismisses the deaths of Basil and Alan Campbell, not to mention about Sibyl. In none of these cases Dorian perceives or accepts his own accountability. He decides that Basil's death was inevitable and that Campbell made his own choice. Even then he cannot escape the

torment of his inner self as he definitely has the realization that soul is a terrible reality. Dorian fails to understand that the only way of absolving moral responsibility is to pray for forgiveness. Hence, it is not surprising that he thinks that a man should pray for punishment for his sins.

Subsequently Dorian kills himself. Surprisingly, he stabs the portrait but he himself is found dead on the floor with the knife in his heart, finally wearing the face of the portrait. And that stabbing of the self brings body and soul, surface and depth, art and life all together at the end. And that is an important completion of this book.

Dorian's attempt to live a life in which his exterior surface is separate from his deep interior morality, his truth, his soul is unsustainable, and at the end its ugliness and death is clearly visible. So that is impossible for human beings to live in.

Thus, the end or fall of both Faustus and Dorian takes place in almost in similar terms. They commit sins; they go away from repentance, partly because of the pride in their characters.

SAQ

1. In *Doctor Faustus*, there is the Devil who keeps an eye on Faustus so he cannot repent or resort to good deeds. Who is the Devil to keep vigilance on Dorian? (60 marks)

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3. Comment on the climax of the novel. (40 marks)

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3.8 Summing up

In this last section we shall sum up what we have discussed in this unit the technical and thematic concerns of the book. While discussing such ideas and issues I had in my mind the motive to lead you to the complete understanding of the novel and assist you in the appreciation of the same. I hope that by now you have got an idea as to how to approach the text with its related matters like the details of structure and techniques. This novel being Oscar Wilde's one and only novel, we rather go forward neutrally without comparing his work to those of others. Even though this is a new attempt at fiction, Wilde has done a great job in all the areas of the book. If you all have gathered some confidence to read and go forward in your life, it will be fruitful for me to have written this unit.

3.9.Suggested Reading

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