

**Institute of Distance and Open Learning  
Gauhati University**

**MA in English  
Semester 3**

**Paper XI  
Fiction III - The Twentieth Century**

**Block 1  
Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness***



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April, 2011

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**Acknowledgement**

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University duly acknowledges the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi, for preparation of this material.

## **Block Introduction:**

In this second block of Paper VIII, we are going to read *Heart of Darkness*. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most enigmatic texts in modern fiction which has elicited multiple critical and often controversial responses from readers and critics. F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948) ranked Conrad 'among the very greatest novelists in the language or any language'. The novel is a brilliant fictional account of the rapacity and brutality which characterizes any 'Civilizing Mission'. The enduring reputation of *Heart of Darkness* lies in its symbolic connotations and this novel provides ample evidence of the brutal ways in which the supposed emissaries of European civilization engage in plundering and thereby distorting the unique and innate essence of the lands immersed in *darkness* in the name of progress. Combining the elements of fable, allegory, romance, adventure tale, this novel has been at the centre of critical debate since its publication as the text questions the validity of the received notions of progress on which imperialism thrives and establishes the all-pervasive mechanism of control. *Heart of Darkness* is replete with paradoxes, duplicities and a sense of profound skepticism characterizes this celebrated novel. Debunking the myth of racial and cultural superiority of the European civilization, the text bears testimony to the horrors of the civilizing enterprise. The novel is significant for various reasons and as readers you should be able to address the complexity and rich intensity of *Heart of Darkness*. The units in this block are also designed with this aim of addressing and accommodating the multiplicity of critical responses to Conrad's writing to help you find your own way of reading this text.

This block is divided into three units. Unit 1 deals with the background of the novel which aims to provide you a detailed reading of the life-history and the works of the author, Joseph Conrad. Attempt has also been made to situate *Heart of Darkness* in the specific literary and socio-historical context. Unit 2 concentrates specifically on the text prescribed for study and here, attempts have been made to enable you to gain an overview of the novel by discussing the story in detail so that you find it easier to understand the various significant issues like the arrogance and hypocrisy of Imperialistic venture, racial stereotyping, the 'philanthropic pretence' of European civilization etc. Unit 3 builds on the previous units and deals with the various

themes and techniques of the novel. We have kept a separate unit on the themes and techniques which will make you aware of the intricacies of the textual production of a novel and will also enable you to discern the common threads in *Heart of Darkness*. Attempt has been made here to be comprehensive enough to leave room for further observations from your reading as reducing the bewildering complexity of *Heart of Darkness* remains impossibility. We have added as much necessary information as you need to conceptualize your understanding of Conrad and the text prescribed but the limited space remains a constraint. So, we hope that the list of suggested readings will help you for further reading and you will add on to the ever-growing corpus of critical readings on Joseph Conrad.

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# Unit 1

## Background

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### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the first unit of Block II. The aim here is to provide you with a general introduction to Joseph Conrad and his fictional oeuvre. An attempt has also been made here to acquaint you with *Heart of Darkness*, the novel prescribed for study. After finishing the unit you will be able to

- *gain* a comprehensive knowledge of the novelist's personal and national identity
- *relate* the novel to Conrad's personal history
- *locate* the text in its proper context
- *identify* the nature of his literary preoccupations

### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad, a Polish-born English novelist, is one of the English writers of fiction. He was a significant forerunner of modernist literature and influenced many writers like Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, William S. Burroughs, John Maxwell Coetzee. The sense of living the life of an exile and a sense of betrayal haunt Conrad's fiction who was naturalized as a British citizen in 1886. Conrad was a victim of the oppressive

Russian rule in Poland as his upbringing shows. His novels and his essays on sea-life and various marine disasters, reflect his innate fascination for marine life. The mutual bonding amongst the sea-going sailors led to Conrad's tributes to the simple souls of seafarers like the archetypal Old Singleton of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. His stories of the sea are also filled with the reflections of his nearness with the sea.

In his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad (1961: 27-28) states that his goal as a writer was “to snatch in a moment of courage from remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life . . . The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its color, its form; and through its movement, its form and its color, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment.”

Almost all his works were written during the period of British imperialism and Conrad drew upon his experiences in the French and the British Merchant Navy. Conrad's texts therefore reflect various aspects of the rule of the empire and the outcome and also with the different layers of complexity of the human psyche in a unique prose style rich with ambiguity and multiplicity of viewpoints.

### **Modernism and the novel**

“In the course of the nineteenth century, the novel established itself as a genre of unparalleled variety, range and depth. . . By the turn of the century, . . it seemed that this sophisticated medium had no more territory left to develop, for it turned upon itself. Among some of its most important practitioners, the novel's degree of self-analytical presentation markedly increased; its obsessions with its own tactics of structure and design grew; it became markedly more 'poetic', in the sense that it became more concerned with precision of texture and form, more disturbed by the looseness of prose as popular written usage. ...

The Modernist phenomenon of what might be called 'narrative introversion' needs to be carefully distinguished from something familiar in the entire history of fiction and somewhat analogous, the mode of self-conscious narration. The novel has always conducted complicated transactions between its propensity toward realism, empirical detailing, the illusion of facticity, and elements of form and making involved in the realistic illusion.....

.....  
In his pursuit of his 'difficult' subject, then, Conrad deploys a considerable virtuosity of narration which draws our attention as readers. (p.398 John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury)

### **1.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH (1857-1924)**

Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, better known as Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) was born in Podolia which is now part of the Soviet Ukraine. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was an aristocrat without land, a poet and translator of English and French literature. Conrad's parents, Apollo Korzeniowski and Evelina Bobrowski, came of the Polish nobility and opposed the Tsarist domination of Poland. As a boy, young Joseph grew up reading Polish and French versions of English novels with his father who encouraged his son to read voraciously in French and Polish. Conrad's father introduced him to the works of Dickens, Fenimore Cooper, Marryat in Polish and French translation and thereby helped to shape Conrad's deeper aspirations. When Apollo Korzeniowski became embroiled in political activities, he was sent to exile with his family to Volgoda, northern Russia, in 1861. Conrad's mother died while the family was in exile. Continued ill-health and loneliness was a significant aspect of Conrad's childhood as he witnessed the death of his mother when he was seven and of his father at the age of eleven. Apollo Korzeniowski died of tuberculosis when he returned to Poland. Intense emotional despair was, therefore, part of Conrad's early life and he was privately tutored with occasional schooling which provided him with little opportunity to make new friends.

By 1869 Conrad's parents had died of tuberculosis, and he was sent to Switzerland to his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, whom Conrad later thought to be an important and continuing influence in his life. Tadeusz Bobrowski acted as a guide and mentor in Conrad's life and helped him to take all his major decisions. He attended schools in Krakow and his fascination for marine life and the life of a sailor led him to join the French merchant marine as an apprentice in the mid-1870s. Conrad's wish to go to sea and the desire to serve on the French vessel spared him service in the Russian army.

Marine life always fascinated the young Conrad and the sea forms the most important part of the setting in his works. Conrad grew up and chose to go to the sea as he felt it would provide him with the sense of openness, freedom he failed to enjoy in his childhood. The twenty years of his career as a sailor started from the French city of Marseilles. Conrad was excited at being able to mingle with a rich, variegated and cosmopolitan crowd where as he himself was to say, “the puppy opened his eyes”, and life began (*Letters*). In Marseilles Conrad was employed by the ship-owning firm of Delestang ‘a family having strong sympathies with the claimant to the Spanish throne, Don Carlos VII’. The five years in France were memorable, proving to be influential in his formative stage since they also brought disappointment and disillusion to the young man. Conrad made three voyages to the West Indies between 1875 and 1878. While making his first voyages to the West Indies in the *Mont Blanc* in 1875, and the *Sainte Antoine* in 1876, Conrad met the Corsican Dominic Cervoni, who became a model for central figures of romantic daring in his fiction. Conrad and Cervoni, were involved in a number of gun-running voyages to Spain, for the Carlists, which ended in disaster. These events were depicted impressionistically in Conrad’s reminiscences, *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906) and in *The Arrow of Gold* (1919).

### **Conrad and the Sea: “The Cruel Sea”**

“The love that is given to seas is profoundly different from the love men feel for every other works of their hands—the love they bear to their houses, for instance—because it is untainted by the pride of possession. The pride of skill, the pride of responsibility, the pride of endurance there may be, but otherwise it is a disinterested sentiment. No seaman ever cherished a ship, even if she belonged to him, merely because of the profit she put in his pocket. No one, I think, ever did; for a ship-owner, even of the best, has always been outside the pale of that sentiment embracing in a feeling of intimate, equal fellowship the ship and the man, backing each other against the implacable, if sometimes dissembled, hostility of their world of waters. The sea—this truth must be confessed—has no generosity. No display of manly qualities- courage, hardihood, endurance, faithfulness-has ever been known to touch its irresponsible consciousness of power. The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation” (Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, 1905, 136-137).

### 1.3.1 LIFE AT SEA

As pointed out, after several attempts to start a proper marine career in France, Conrad, along with three other men, acquired a small vessel and engaged in smuggling guns between France and Spain, between 1877 and 1888. However, through the betrayal of one of the crew, the vessel was ambushed and lost. Conrad attempted suicide out of frustration and desperation. His uncle's letters have shown that this was the truth behind an injury originally thought to have been received in a duel. (His uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski rushed to nurse the injured nephew and moralize on the matter of suicide. The attempt to suicide was a significant turning-point in Conrad's life as it changed the course of his life. His uncle also helped him out to clear his debts. After being wounded in a duel, or of a self-inflicted gunshot in the chest, Conrad continued his career at sea in the British merchant navy for 16 years. On June 18, 1878, Conrad arrived in England for the first time. Much has been written on his arrival in England as it influenced his future recognition as an English novelist. Having lost his reputation in France, Conrad tried to secure a job on board a British ship. In 1878, he began service on English ships. By 1880, he mastered the skills necessary for his job and the new language and passed his examination as second mate, and secured an officer's position in a ship to sail to Australia. Conrad rose through the ranks from common seaman to first mate, and by 1886 he obtained his master mariner's certificate from the Board of Trade, commanding his own ship. During his service with the British merchant navy, Conrad worked on a variety of ships: first with the *Mavis*, on a journey to Constantinople, and then on more than one wool clipper bound for Sydney. Particularly eventful voyages came in 1881, during his service with the *Palestine*, when Conrad had his first experience of the East and with the *Narcissus* in 1884, when he sailed from Bombay to Dunkirk. These were the experiences which underlay the novels *Youth* (1902) and *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) respectively. His later experiences as first mate on the *Vidar*, sailing through the Malay archipelago, and as a master of the *Otago* in 1888, was to show a wide influence on his fiction: notably the *Otago's* voyage from Bangkok to Singapore, which is directly discernible within *The Shadow Line* (1917). In the year 1886, he was naturalized as a British citizen and changed officially his name to Joseph Conrad. So Conrad's trilingual and tri-cultural identity, coupled with the sense of exile

and divided being, made him a marginal man thereby problematising the notions of 'home' and belonging. 'His triple fidelity to England, France and Poland' (M.C. Bradbrook) was a part of Conrad's creative and personal life. The constant confrontation with the forces of the sea influenced Conrad's deterministic view of the world, which he expressed in a letter in 1897: "What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well but soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife the tragedy begins."

### 1.3.2 THE SEA AND CONRAD'S FICTION

Quite inevitably, one can find direct correspondences between Conrad's biography and his fiction. In "Geography and Some Explorers", 1924, Conrad wrote:

"Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself their worthy, adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges and attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, . . . Once only did that enthusiasm (for geography) expose me to the derision of my schoolboy chums. One day, putting my finger on a spot of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there . . . about eighteen years afterwards, a wretched little stern wheel steamboat I commanded lay moored to the bank of an African river."

These lines from Conrad's biography bear remarkable resonances with the protagonist, Marlow's reminiscences about his childhood preoccupations, quite early in the novel, *Heart of Darkness*:

"Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and loose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that was particularly inviting on a map I would put my finger on it and say, when I grow up I will go there."

Conrad's experience as a seaman, his voyages and reading of adventure stories are instrumental in his career as a writer. In *A Personal Record* written in 1912, Conrad traced the significant parallels between the life of a seaman and his own endeavour to become a writer. Although he discouraged

the interpretation of the sea novels he wrote through evidence from his life, he was definitely proud of his training and experience as a sailor. For example, in *The Secret Sharer* (1909), the narrator speaks of the ‘great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land’. His first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) was about a derelict Dutchman Kaspar Almayer, who trades on the Jungle Rivers of Borneo and the events in his life. This novel was published with the help of Edward Garnett in 1896. *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) was the second novel by Conrad. This novel is inspired by Conrad’s experience as mate of a steamer, the *Vigar*. The period between *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is regarded as the major phase in Conrad’s writing life. Sometimes rated as Conrad’s best work of his early period, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* is the evocative and complex story of a storm off the Cape of Good Hope and of an enigmatic West Indian black sailor, James Wait. The novel is framed around a sea voyage from Bombay to London and the action is centered on the human community of *Narcissus*, the ship. Narrated by an anonymous narrator, Joseph Conrad’s preface to this novel is regarded as a manifesto of literary impressionism and of its chief aim: “it is, before all, to make you see”.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **Conrad on the Significance of Art**

“A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its ever aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts - whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common – sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism - but always to our credulity. And their words are heard with reverence, for their

concern is with weighty matters; with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies: with the attainment of our ambitions: with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims.....

Fiction—if it at all aspires to be art—appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and restless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions.”(Joseph Conrad, The ‘Preface’ to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897)

*Lord Jim* (published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* from October 1899 to November 1900) is narrated by Charlie Marlow. The novel narrates the fall and subsequent redemption of a young sailor. This novel concentrates on the life of Jim, the chief mate on the steamship Patna .Jim faces public disgrace as the official consequence of his action and moves through a variety of jobs ashore with Marlow’s help. The real redemption in Jim’s life comes his representation as a Tuan or Lord Jim in Patusan, a place devastated by the intrusion of Gentleman Brown and his followers. This novel was originally intended as a short story, but was then enlarged into a novel. It is partly based on true events: in 1880 a British captain and his crew abandoned the steamship *Jeddah*, carrying Muslim pilgrims, when the ship started to leak. Conrad sailed to many parts of the world, including Australia, various ports of the Indian Ocean, Borneo, the Malay states, South America, and the South Pacific Island.

**SAQ:**

Would you regard the ‘sea’ as significant metaphor or image in Conrad’s work or would you call it the link between his life and his work? (90 words)

.....  
.....  
.....

In 1890, his long cherished dream was fulfilled when he sailed up the Congo River in Africa. This voyage provided much material for his novel, *Heart of Darkness* as this novel was partly based on his four-month command of a Congo River steamboat. *Heart of Darkness* was written in 1899 and published in 1902, in *Youth: A Narrative with two Other Stories*. Conrad's knowledge of the atrocities inflicted by Congo "explorers" resulted in the character of Kurtz, the embodiment of the perversity European imperialism. The fable East-Indies was fascinating for Conrad who led an adventurous life; it became the setting of many of his stories. During his six-month sojourn in the Congo in 1890, Conrad was deeply appalled by the brutal and inhuman manner in which the Belgians exploited their African colony and its inhabitants. As the narrator in *Heart of Darkness* states euphemistically, "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have different complexions or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it much". This novel is Conrad's powerful critique of the process through which the Europeans have conquered and colonized Africa. Like the protagonist Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* experiencing a psychological journey through Congo, Conrad in his own journey on that river during his visit to central Africa in 1889, also gained the disturbing insight into the nature of evil and self-deception. His sense of exile and loneliness are visible in the novel as also in the short story, *Amy Foster* (1901).

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **The "Congo Diary"**

"Conrad's stay in the Congo (12 June-4 December 1890) is one of the most important periods of his life. Even if we question as excessive the claim of his first biographer, G. Jean-Aubry, that the journey to the Congo shaped Conrad's philosophical outlook, we must recognize the enormous physical and moral impact of these six months. Conrad signed in Brussels a contract to serve for three years as an officer on river steamboats belonging to the 'Societe Anonyme pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo'. He left Europe full of energy and thrilling expectations, with ideas about a "civilizing mission". He returned gravely ill, never to regain fully his good health, disillusioned, with memories to be later used in his most famous story, *Heart of Darkness*, and in another bitter denunciation of colonialism, "An Outpost of Progress."

From this period there survive a few letters and also a unique document, the so-called "Congo Diary." The manuscript consists of two notebooks. The first, untitled, is an actual diary, kept by Conrad during his trek from Matadi to Kinshasa between [28] June and 1 August. ....The diary proper has been used as a source of biographical information and, even more frequently, compared with "Heart of Darkness" for purposes of psychological and factual interpretation of the story." (Introduction to "The Congo Diary" and the "Up- river Book", Zdzislaw Najder)

### 1.3.3 A LIFE OF LITERARY WORK

Conrad's life at sea came to an end by 1894 and he decided to devote himself entirely to literature. At the age of thirty-six Conrad settled down in England. As we have pointed out the period between *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is considered, artistically, to be Conrad's most productive period. *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story* (1901), written in collaboration with Ford Madox Ford is an interesting novel drawing on science fiction. This novel traces the mental evolution of human society and the series of loss and gain as a result of the evolution. *The Inheritors* was first published in London by William Heinemann and is a work of repute for the exploration of themes of corruption and how the turmoils of the twentieth century influenced the aristocratic society of Britain. Although Conrad wrote it before the First World War; *The Inheritors* is prophetic in terms of the prediction of the transition of the society during war. Conrad's brilliant depiction of the clash between generations, torn apart by conflicts to preserve mutual values, interestingly traces the course of history. The aspiring writer- narrator also undergoes a sense of all-pervasive loss both at the personal and social levels. Conrad begun writing *Typhoon* in 1899 and the novel was serialized in "Pall Mall Magazine" from January to March 1902. Its first book publication was in New York by Putnam in 1902 and was published in Britain in *Typhoon and Other Stories* by Heinemann in 1903 [from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) ]. With this novel, Conrad once again drew on his favourite theme of marine disasters and the mysterious and vibrating life of the sea .The tale of the courage and fortitude of Captain Macwhirr who sails the Siamese steamer *Nan-Shan* into a typhoon and comes out

successfully is noteworthy. The novel follows the pattern of an adventure novel and is extraordinarily rich in its depiction of the trials and tribulations involved in the sea-faring life. Apart from the emotional estrangement and the lurking dangers in a sea-faring life, Captain Macwhirr's indomitable will in the face of the typhoon reminds the struggle of man against nature and his victory, therefore, relates to the human race. Conrad's collaboration with Ford Madox Ford is important in his career as a writer as the novels written in collaboration are rich in artistic merit. *Romance* is the second of their three collaborations and was published by George Bell and Sons in London and by McClure, Phillips in New York, in March 1904. Published in 1904, *Nostramo* is set in the fictitious South American republic of "Costaguana". Set in the coastal province of Sulaco, the wealthiest region of the South American republic of "Costaguana", this novel is renowned for Conrad's brilliant sketch of the turbulent political history and how it engulfs the inhabitants of the town where the San Tome silver mine is situated. The characters of Señor Gould and *Nostramo*, the eponymous anti-hero, the "incorruptible" soul dominate the narrative of this novel. The next novel *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* was published in 1907. "Revolutionary anarchists, senior police officers, the Home Secretary, and the mind of a half-idiot are a few of the ingredients of this 'simple tale' (as the novel is ironically sub-titled) set in contemporary London." This novel departs from the earlier tales of seafaring and is interesting as a political novel. Exploring issues of anarchism, espionage, and terrorism, *The Secret Agent* describes the life of Mr. Verloc who supplies information to the Russian agent Vladimir. Mr. Verloc leads a secret life as a spy and Conrad's success lies in the depiction of the anarchist or revolutionary groups which changed the course of the history of the twentieth century.

Conrad's interest in exiles and divided beings continue and *Under Western Eyes* published in (1911) is widely recognised as Conrad's response to the themes explored in Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. Conrad is renowned to have detested Dostoevsky and this novel is also one of his political novels like *The Secret Agent*. The story is set in St. Petersburg, Russia and Geneva, Switzerland, and is narrated by an elderly English teacher of languages. Conrad is here cynical about the historical failures of revolutionary movements and ideals. Concentrating on the life of Razumov and his exile, Conrad's novel depicts the irrationality

of life and the consequent suffering of the innocent and poor. Published in 1913, *Chance* changed the course of Conrad's life as it was his greatest commercial success. The publication of *Chance* helped to stabilise the author's financial status. The novel is narrated by Conrad's regular narrator, Charles Marlow but is characterised by a complex narrative structure with multiple narrators offering different interpretations by narrating the story at different points. Unlike Conrad's other novels depicting a hierarchical and strictly masculine world, *Chance* is different for its focus on a female character Flora de Barrall, the daughter of a convicted swindler named Smith de Barrall. Flora de Barrall is a victim of emotional isolation and the different narrators describe and attempt to interpret various episodes in her life. Flora de Barrall leads a sheltered life while her father is prosperous but after her father's financial ruin and imprisonment she tries to escape the consequent suffering by marrying Captain Anthony. Her trial is over when when her father is released from prison and the novel reaches its denouement. *Victory: An Island Tale* was published in 1915. Although considered as a minor work in comparison to Conrad's other novels, the reputation of *Victory* grew with ages. Conrad's reading of Schopenhauer influenced this novel, especially the portrayal of the central character, Axel Heyst and his ascetic upbringing and the renunciation of the world. The novel has been adapted to film more times than any other Conrad novel, especially outside the U.S. In *The Shadow Line: A Confession* published in 1917, Conrad again returns to the theme of life at sea and this short novel is rich for its dual narrative structure. The title of the novel alerts the reader to the retrospective nature of the narrative and is ironic in the depiction of the conflict between the unnamed protagonist representing 'youth' and the 'old' drive representing wisdom, experience and maturity. Begun in the 1890s, *The Rescue* is categorised as one of Conrad's later novels as it was published in 1920. Conrad set aside *The Rescue* to write *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. The novel is read as a conclusion to "The Lingard Trilogy", a group of novels based on Conrad's experience as mate on the steamer, *Vidar*.

*The Rover* written between 1921 and 1922 and first published in 1923, is the last complete novel by Joseph Conrad. Set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, Napoleon's rise to power and the French/English rivalry in the Mediterranean, the story of this novel takes place in the south of France.

**SAQ:**

1. Did Conrad’s preoccupation lie with colonialism and its explorations or with sea-faring and adventure?( 90 words)

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.....  
.....

2. Relate Conrad’s experience of Africa to his vision of evil. (100 words)

.....  
.....  
.....

Although Conrad was a prolific writer he struggled to establish himself as an author. His financial situation was not secure and ‘for nearly twenty years he lived in poverty’ according to M C. Bradbrook. In 1924, Conrad declined an offer of knighthood as he had earlier refused honorary degrees from five universities. As mentioned earlier, the publication of *Chance* in 1913 stabilized Conrad’s financial situation. H.G Wells’ encouraging reviews and recognition by John Galsworthy boosted Conrad and the three novels written in collaborations with Ford Madox Ford were also successful. With his wife and two sons, Borys and John, Conrad revisited Poland in 1914, an inauspicious moment. But having been adopted, as he said, by the genius of English language, Conrad’s life as an author was sedentary. On August 3, 1924 Conrad died of a cardiac attack at the age of sixty-six at his home near Canterbury and was buried in Canterbury.

**Conrad’s African Expedition**

“Conrad’s health was affected during all the rest of his life by his African expedition. He suffered from attacks of the gout which made his life an intermittent martyrdom. But, on the other hand, it is a not unlikely supposition that this journey to the Congo and its unfortunate consequences gave us the greatest writer... The illness which he brought back from the Congo, by limiting his physical activity and confining him to his room for several months, obliged him to withdraw into himself, to call up those memories with which his life, though he was only thirty-five, was already extraordinary full, and to try to estimate their value both from the human and the literary point of view ... It may be said that Africa killed Conrad the sailor and strengthened Conrad the novelist.”

(From *Sailor to Novelist*, G .Jean-Aubry).

## 1.4 PLACING THE WORK

Set in the Congo of 1890, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is considered to be the first modern novel by critics. Conrad's novel transcends the time of its publication for its marked difference from the conventional nineteenth century works of fiction. Written between the autumn of 1898 and February 1899 (while Conrad was working on *Lord Jim*), *Heart of Darkness* is interesting in its radical departure from nineteenth century fiction in terms of story, structure and theme. Conrad's text was path-breaking in many ways and it prepared the ground for the emergence of the experimentalist modernist novels. Although Conrad shared affinities with his contemporaries, *Heart of Darkness*, with the intense self-questioning of the characters and the self-reflexivity of the narrative is read more as a novel initiating the modern era. Unlike nineteenth century fiction, *Heart of Darkness* denies the possibility and validity of heroism in human society torn by conflicts. Witnessing the era of decolonization and scientific progress, this novel champions the sense of relativity and experimentation like modern novels. Conrad's narrative departs from the convention of the omniscient narrator and questions the stability of the social, political, intellectual and moral orders. So, the text has been extremely influential in modern literature. Conrad's vision of the grim and bleak world is sometimes visible later in the works of the Absurd dramatists like Beckett, Ionesco and others. Moreover his emphasis on death and isolation, failure of understanding between people introduce a sense of pessimism in his fiction which is reminiscent of the Victorian writers like Thomas Hardy.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **Conrad and Hardy**

“Such symbolically charged contrasts between the lonely individual in the foreground and the neutral or threatening vastness of the background may remind us of Thomas Hardy's work. Conrad is more cosmopolitan than Hardy, not only in locations and characterization, but also in thematic range: Conrad has a larger and more complex network of political, philosophical and psychological observations. Their pessimisms have different emphases: Hardy has a bitter sense of the ways in which destiny tortures the innocent and sensitive; Conrad has a more Augustan sense of the general vanity of human wishes. Yet there are clearly some common features in their pessimism which

point to causes extending beyond private experience to the general background. In both writers, there is a strong sense that the heavens, once thought to be benevolent to humans, are empty or even hostile. In both, there is a keen post-Darwinian sense that man and his struggles are part of a 'Nature, red in tooth and claw'. In both, there is a strong element of anti-rational primitivism: the feeling that 'Where ignorance is bliss/'Tis folly to be wise.' And, in both, we often hear the plangent tones of the disillusioned romantic." (P-46, Cedric Watts)

The serial version of *Heart of Darkness* appeared in the conservative *Blackwood's Magazine*, under the title '*The Heart of Darkness*' (title changed for book version) between February and April 1899. It was published in volume form as one of the three stories in the collection *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories* (1902). It was later published separately in 1942. According to Conrad the three stories in *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories* (1902) – *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *The End of the Tether* are representations of the three ages of man – youth, maturity and age. In the first sentence in his 'Author's Note' written for an edition of *Youth* published in 1917, Conrad states that apart from the contemporary developments, Conrad's own life helps to explain the powerful indictments of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* as he was also victimized in his childhood by Russian colonialist policies toward Poland. Once Conrad wrote, "I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, amongst imaginary things, happenings and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. Every novel contains an element of autobiography- and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only explain himself in his creations." (From Arthur Symons, *Notes on Joseph Conrad: With Some Unpublished Letters*)

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Explain the significance of the sea in Conrad's fiction in the light of his major themes.
2. Explore the contribution made by Conrad to the development of modern novel.
3. Discuss Conrad's attitude to colonialism and the role it plays in his major fiction.

## 1.5 SUMMING UP

After going through the preceding sections, you must have acquired a detailed knowledge of Conrad's literary preoccupations along with his personal and national identity. Attempts have also been made to familiarize you with his major works so that you can easily trace the connection between the novel prescribed and the author's other works. The detailed analysis of the context will help you see the major influences that shaped Conrad's works. Read as the first modern novelist, Conrad's place in the canon of modern literature invites serious critical attention and the previous sections will also help you assess Conrad's position as a writer of fiction. The following units will elaborate the issues raised in this unit in the specific context of *Heart of Darkness*.

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## Unit 2

### Introducing the Novel

#### Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 The Story in Brief
- 2.4 The Characters
- 2.5 Critical Reception
- 2.6 Summing up

#### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit of the block, an attempt was made to familiarize you with Conrad's literary preoccupations and the issues relevant to his development as an artist. However, in this unit, we will focus on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and try to discuss the novel in its totality. After going through this unit you will be able to

- *recapitulate* the story of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
- *situate* various characters in the context of the novel.
- *contextualize* the novel in the larger literary setting
- *identify* the range of critical approaches to this novel

#### 2.2 INTRODUCTION

*Heart of Darkness*, the novella written by Joseph Conrad is one of the most enigmatic texts in modern fiction. Widely acclaimed for thematic density and narrative complexity, Conrad's exploration of the rapacity and brutality inherent to the 'civilizing mission' of European colonization has generated multiple interpretations of the racial and cultural superiority of the European civilization. The symbolic potential of *Heart of Darkness* replete with the evidences of brutality and ruthless plunder bears testimony to the sense of horror characterizing the civilizing enterprise. Conrad uses the literary device

of story- within-a-story to tell the story of Charles Marlow's quest in the form of his expedition up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, a man known for his idealism. Through Marlow's expedition, Conrad debunks the philanthropic pretence of civilizing enterprise as his journey to the heart of darkness brings relates to the metaphor of deciphering and penetrating primitive ignorance often expressed in terms of 'darkness'. In the process of reaching to the core of 'darkness', binaries like light/darkness, self/other, civilized/primitive etc. get deconstructed. This unit basically concentrates on the text with the aim to give you an overview of Conrad's literary preoccupations in terms of *Heart of Darkness*. In this unit, our attempt is to address the complexity of Conrad's text by introducing the story line, major characters as well as the critical reception. A reading of this unit will help you understand the various themes and techniques discussed in the following unit.

### **2.3 THE STORY IN BRIEF**

The story of *Heart of Darkness* is narrated by an anonymous frame narrator, one of the five men sitting on board the cruising boat, *Nellie*. The description of the setting, the Thames estuary in the evening, fits into the existing pensive mood of the men on board. The opening paragraphs of the text center on describing the setting of the Thames estuary and the contrasting effects of light and darkness. The sense of estrangement is introduced in the beginning as the five men on board are cut off from the rest of the society. In this atmosphere, the first narrator feels the spirit of the past infiltrating into the present and his meditation on British conquerors and their remarkable achievements invites a different response from Marlow. The first passage of the novel is significant from the point of view of narrative technique as well as the theme of imperialism. It familiarizes us with the frame narrator's eulogy of the "knights-errant", who sailed down the Thames bearing "a spark from the sacred fire", together with "the seed of commonwealths the germs of empire".

**SAQ:**

How does the opening of the novel set in motion its overriding theme and move into the characteristic narrative technique that Conrad makes use of. (100 words)

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The other two passages in the beginning of the story are even more significant because they are spoken by Marlow, Conrad's core narrator. The anonymous narrator introduces his other companions—The Director of Companies, a lawyer, an accountant, and Marlow, a sailor who is a recurring character in Conrad. Marlow narrates the account of his quest in Africa in retrospect to the four companions aboard the *Nellie*. His feeling of alienation from this audience, for whom he must underline everything, is, therefore, clear from the beginning: Marlow's childhood fascination for the river Congo (unnamed in the text) materializes in his job as a captain of a steamboat with a Belgian trading company. Marlow's aunt helps him to get the job and his experience of the death-like atmosphere of the headquarters of the trading company in Brussels adds to his growing anxiety and uneasiness over the enterprise. The novel centers on Marlow, an introspective sailor, and his expedition up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, known for his idealism and great abilities.

As he travels to Africa, Marlow is fascinated by the enigmatic and overwhelming presence of the continent and the primeval forest but slowly the reality of imperial enterprise unfolds before his eyes when he encounters widespread cruelty and squalor in the Company's stations. His arrival at the Company's outer station is an important point in the narrative as here he is faced with the disturbing reality of physical and moral violence inherent in colonial venture. The devastated landscape with natives reduced to slavery stands in sharp contrast to the 'philanthropic' mission of imperialism. The natives are forced into the Company's service and ill-treatment and consequent death are common to them. The plight of the dying natives creates 'the gloomy circle of some inferno' and opens to doubt the authenticity of the European presence in Africa. The inefficiency of the

Company's servants coupled with the brutality has dehumanized the negroes and Marlow's initial vision of their innate vitality stands in contrast to their plight as slaves serving the Company. In contrast to the all-pervading chaos, darkness and despair, the Company's chief accountant's elegant attire and zeal for meticulous detail spells out the ambivalent attitude of the colonizers. The chief accountant is the first person to inform Marlow about Kurtz whom he is supposed to retrieve.

The Central Station is Marlow's next destination and here his enthusiasm meets with the disappointing news of the sinking of the steamer which now needs extensive repairs. The initial cold and cynical response of the manager at the Central Station is matched by the Brickmaker's false idealism. Marlow's disappointment increases with the suspicious delay of the rivets as without their help he is unable to reach the Inner station, the final destination. His interest in Kurtz grows during this period. The manager and his favourite, the brickmaker, consider Kurtz 'the emissary of pity, and science, and progress' as their rival to their position. Kurtz is rumored to be ill and alone and the manager deliberately delays repairing the ship. While sleeping on the deck of his steamer, Marlow catches snatches of a conversation between the ambitious Manager and his uncle over the fate of ailing Kurtz which confirms his thinking. The uncle arrives with the members of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, a group of 'faithless pilgrims' whose only aim is to extract riches from the continent. Marlow calls them 'pilgrims' because of their strange habit of carrying long, wooden staves wherever they go. After waiting for a long time, Marlow eventually repairs his ship, and he and the manager set out with a crew of cannibals and the 'pilgrims' on a long, and tiring voyage up the river.

En route to retrieve Kurtz, Marlow feels like penetrating the territory beyond human explanation, a place untrammelled by the demands of civilization as if he is 'traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world'. The wilderness personifies the mysterious and innate communication between the worlds of man and nature from time immemorial. The journey to the pre-historic past is metaphoric of Marlow's exploration of the inner self, seemingly hidden under the trappings of civilization. He also notices the sense of restraint the cannibals possess as they thrive solely on the hippo meat throughout the journey. At one point in their journey to the Inner Station, Marlow and his crew come across an abandoned hut with stacked firewood on the shore

together with a note saying that the wood is for them but that they should approach cautiously. As the boat approaches the vicinity of the Inner Station, Marlow is overwhelmed by the mysterious and unnatural ambience. The bush is frozen into an enchanted trance-like state which induces a sense of unknown fear. In the morning, the steamboat is surrounded by a dense fog which blocks visibility. When the fog clears, the steamboat is attacked by an unseen group of natives, who fire arrows from the safety of the forest. The African helmsman is killed in the attack and at last Marlow frightens the natives away by blowing the boat's steam whistle.

After the natives' retreat into the forest, Marlow and his companions finally arrive at the Inner Station, the ultimate end of the expedition. Throughout his symbolic journey into the heart of 'darkness', Marlow's impression of Kurtz and his philanthropic attitude undergo radical change. According to him, the whole European civilization is responsible for the darkness within and outside a figure like Kurtz who slowly falls from the initial state of graceful morality. Marlow arrives at the final destination expecting to find the ailing Kurtz dead, but the Russian trader, dressed like a harlequin, comes on board and informs them that Kurtz is still alive. The Russian with his strange combination of fear and admiration for Kurtz opines that Kurtz has enlarged his mind and world and his actions are beyond the moral judgments to which normal people are subject. The presence of Kurtz is a palpable reality within this territory as the natives with their unbound and thoughtless admiration have transformed him into all-powerful deity.

The unconditional submission of the natives helps Kurtz in raiding brutally the surrounding territory in search of ivory to fulfill the insatiable lust. The dualism in Kurtz's character becomes apparent when the Russian confides to Marlow that it is Kurtz who ordered the attack on their boat. Marlow's realization that the collection of ornamental carved balls adorning the fence posts around the station were dried human heads, adds to his ambivalent response to Kurtz. Slowly the story of Kurtz's charismatic presence and lack of moral restraint starts horrifying Marlow's conscience. Marlow is now confronted with the moral and ideological implications of 'darkness'. The amorality and savagery inherent in the rhetoric of imperialism becomes apparent in due course. Moreover, the harlequin bitterly describes how Kurtz had travelled hundreds of miles down the river with his ivory. Meanwhile the pilgrims carry the ailing Kurtz, reduced to a mere voice on a

stretcher, and a large group of native warriors pours out of the forest and surrounds them. Kurtz speaks to them, and the natives disappear into the woods. Marlow opines, “I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time”. Here, Marlow seems to oppose only wasteful and selfish imperialism, while justifying British imperialism on the grounds that it is “efficient” and conducted according to some unspecified “idea”. The manager brings Kurtz, who is quite ill, aboard the steamer. A beautiful native woman, apparently Kurtz’s mistress, appears on the shore and stares out at the ship. The Russian implies that she is somehow involved with Kurtz and has caused trouble before through her influence over him. The Russian reveals to Marlow, after swearing him to secrecy, that Kurtz had ordered the attack on the steamer to make them believe he was dead in order that they might turn back and leave him to his plans. The Russian then leaves by canoe, fearing the displeasure of the manager. Kurtz disappears in the night, and Marlow goes out in search of him, finding him crawling on all fours toward the native camp. Marlow stops him and convinces him to return to the ship. They set off down the river the next morning, but Kurtz’s health is failing fast.

Marlow listens to Kurtz talk while he pilots the ship; Kurtz entrusts Marlow with a packet of personal documents, including an eloquent pamphlet on civilizing the savages which ends with a scrawled message that says, “Exterminate all the brutes!” The steamer breaks down, and they have to stop for repairs. Kurtz dies, uttering his last words—“The horror! The horror!”—in the presence of the confused Marlow. Marlow falls ill soon after and barely survives. Eventually he returns to Europe and “experiences a partly deranged hostility to the masses of people in the streets, who seem ludicrous, arrogant and stupid in their failure to comprehend the abyss which is so near, the abyss of corruption or atavism into which Kurtz has fallen” (Cedric Watts). He goes to see Kurtz’s ‘Intended’ (his fiancée). She is still in mourning, even though it has been over a year since Kurtz’s death, and she praises him as a paragon of virtue and achievement. She asks what his last words were, but Marlow cannot bring himself to shatter her illusions with the truth. Instead, he tells her that Kurtz’s last word was her name.

**SAQ:**

Explain the enigma that surrounds the last words of Kurtz, “The horror! The horror!” in *Heart of Darkness*. (80 words)

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## 2.4 THE CHARACTERS

### *Kurtz*

Kurtz appears as a character in his own right but in the terms that are set by the title of the novel—the Heart of Darkness—Kurtz acquires a significance beyond his concretely human qualities. So we cannot judge the portrayal of Kurtz in terms of ‘human’ attributes—his mind, his behaviour and so on—but have to understand what symbolic meaning his name is made to evoke. Kurtz is significant as he represents the imperialist venture. Through Kurtz, Conrad ironically portrays the pernicious effects of colonialism, its influence on the colonial agents. Even a remarkable man like Kurtz cannot escape the trap he helps to create. He is the most fascinating character in the novel and the novel’s progress is also Marlow’s effort to reach him. He appears to be the aim and goal of Marlow’s voyage and Kurtz’s Russian disciple explains to Marlow his enigmatic power: “He came to them with thunder and lightening, you know—and they had never seen anything like it”. Although the perspective that frames Kurtz undergoes changes as the narrative progresses, the problem with Kurtz as identified by critics is not that the latter *went native*, but that he did not *go native* enough.

#### **Stop to Consider:**

In the Congo, Conrad had met a dying trader with the German name Klein, which means ‘small’. *Kurtz* is German for ‘short’, and Marlow emphasizes the ironic appropriateness of his name in its adaptation as a surname for a man who is a living lie: “‘Kurtz – that means ‘short’ in German- don’t it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death. He looked at least seven feet long.”

Kurtz, the demonic hero of this novel, is often read as the embodiment of the worst fears of the nineteenth-century Europeans. As Albert Guerard has rightly stated, the main theme of the novel is Victorian England’s fear of the fact of the isolation of the whites from their secure environment and its refinement and the consequent degeneration into abominable savagery. Once cut off from the trappings of civilized society, they become prey to unspeakable lust and moral dilemmas. The isolation from the civilized society in the Inner Station with occasional contact with other Europeans, adds to

Kurtz's descent into 'darkness' as Conrad points out how he starts losing the purpose and proper perspective of his mission.

**Stop to Consider:**

Conrad integrates the myth of Faustus in *Heart of Darkness*. Kurtz is a Faustian character. He is Charlie Marlow's answer to Christopher Marlowe's hero. Like his Renaissance predecessor, Kurtz is extraordinarily gifted. Marlow introduces us to Kurtz as "a remarkable man". He is said to have been the product of entire Europe: an allegorical figure for the European genius, and imperialism. Again, later, he becomes a "universal genius". He has the talents of a poet, musician, artist, explorer, rhetorician and would-be politician. But, most importantly, Kurtz is characterized by Faustus' tragic flaw –the lack of "restraint". Thus, despite his initial admiration for the other, Marlow finally acknowledged that Kurtz's "...soul was mad".

Like an archetypal imperialist, Kurtz does not hesitate to exploit the native Africans for his own perverse advantage. He is aware of their simplicity and gullible nature and these qualities help him to carry forward his mission aimed to loot the country. The "emissary of pity, and science, and progress", the representative of the moral and intellectual superiority of European civilization perverts the customs of the tribe by reducing them to ciphers; the Africans seem only the means to the ends. The Africans are important elements to turn colonialism into a profitable venture and Kurtz exploits their simplicity in the supply of ivory for his employers.

Frances Singh and Stephen A. Reid opine that Kurtz never assumes the positive virtues of the tribe. He remains a 'hollow man' to the core like the other characters in the novel representing the imperialist machinery. Considering himself as the apostle of civilization, Kurtz mesmerizes the natives so that they worship him. His possession of a gun, a rare instrument in the society of ignorant and childish natives makes him the object of reverence. So Kurtz mesmerizes these people with the lethal power of the gun and the natives believe that he is indeed the god of thunder and lightning. Once he has won their trust and respect, he simply uses them to pillage their neighbors for ivory. But ironically Kurtz becomes a victim of megalomania and begins to imagine himself as a deity who needs to be appeased with

human sacrifice. The horrifying spectacles of the dried human heads that are mounted on the stakes under his window confirm his descent into the world of 'darkness'. "The wilderness had patted" him and his hollowness defines the nature of his role in this novel. His monstrousness and cruelty lead him to the verge of ludicrousness and lunacy. In short, he represents the most extreme, the most "insidious" example of the general corruption, who succumbed to the "fascination of the abomination". Marlow rightly states that Kurtz's real transgression is that: "he had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land—I mean literally" (p.50). Kurtz can also be read as an agent of megalomania rather than being only a 'victim' of it.

### **Stop To Consider:**

#### **Conrad and Freudian Psychoanalysis**

Cedric Watts opines "there are some interesting similarities between Conrad's notions and Freud's. The presentation of Mr. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* may suggest the Freudian conflict-model of the self by indicating that his civilized qualities were 'sublimated' versions of repressed barbaric powers which, in the wilderness, can display their original lustful and murderous nature. Again, Marlow indicates that a conflict-model is appropriate to his own character: for, in spite of his civilized outlook, something within him responds sympathetically both to the charisma of the fallen Kurtz and to the throbbing of drums on the bank." (One commentator, Albert Guerard, carried this idea to implausible extremes by suggesting that Kurtz is really meant to be the 'id' of Marlow.)

Kurtz's final words "The horror! The horror!" also defines his character as for Marlow the 'horror' is the blackness of the other's soul, but it can also refer to what Kurtz had done to the natives and, later to himself. This utterance, replete with irony, is significant in terms of Kurtz's characterization. Only on this occasion Kurtz's voice loses its preternatural resonance and finally expresses the truth of his own deeds. In his dying whisper he identifies and condemns himself the most. Moreover Kurtz's final words can also be read as exemplifying the ultimate contradiction between the rhetoric and the reality of colonization. These words can also be read as a verdict on the essential decadence of humans and civilization. Conrad creates the atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty by giving these enigmatic words to Kurtz as the words add to the existing sense of confusion prevailing in the text.

Kurtz's dying words are as confusing as the speaker himself. Apparently, they seem to offer Marlow some consolation, who thinks Kurtz is "a remarkable man", because "He had something to say. He said it." However, just as Kurtz's final phrase remains unclear, so does the core narrator's impression of him. These words confirm the role of the speaker as the ironically privileged representative of words. This theme, with its parallel corollary themes of hollowness and the 'lie', provides an important unity in terms of the representation of Kurtz.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **Kurtz and Colonialism**

Hunt Hawkins explains that Kurtz provides a striking illustration of the fact that the particular 'idea' of the civilizing mission not only failed to restrain exploitation—but actually prompted it. Kurtz had gone to Africa as an apostle of civilization, a member of the "gang of virtue," but his morality disappeared when, his trade goods exhausted and he began to use a local tribe to raid the country for ivory. He adds that Conrad makes clear that Kurtz's immorality is not a contradiction of his morality but rather an extension of it. Thus, Marlow says of Kurtz's report, written while Kurtz was still an emissary of progress: "The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings'".

### ***Marlow***

The character of Marlow first appears in *Youth* and is often read as Conrad's alter ego. Marlow is the most complex character in the novel and we must recognize the difference between Conrad, the novelist and his core narrator. Critics have stated that Conrad, perhaps, opposed all imperial powers but Marlow is easily read as a "punctilious, well-meaning British conservative", who "sanctifies Britain's efficient imperialism". Although Marlow speaks sincerely in the critical passages on "efficiency" and the "idea", Conrad deliberately undercuts these values in the story. Consequently the readers are left to meditate on Marlow's failure to see. Even though he himself acknowledges that, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz", Marlow

fails to comprehend the fatal consequences and implications of the problem of colonization. He also fails to recognize the fact that England also shares the vices of the ancient Roman “conquerors”. We see Marlow’s colonialist bias at many points in the novel. For example, Marlow offers a biased and colonialist interpretation of the famous line, “Exterminate all the brutes!” He reads the word “brutes” as referring to the Africans, and interprets the fact that the sentence comes at the end of a document written to suggest a better way of approaching the less developed natives. We may approach the document from another angle by relating the colonizers with real ‘brutes’ whose removal is the only way to develop Africa. Kurtz, therefore, developed a historical foresight in the jungle rather than an “unlawful soul”. Marlow reflects an ambivalent attitude towards the people of Congo. He sympathizes with their plight when they die, but finds nothing of value in their culture of “unspeakable rites”, “satanic” litanies and “fiendish” rows. Marlow’s attitude to colonialism is, therefore, ambivalent and reflects that of Conrad’s.

Moreover, Marlow’s attitude is not entirely Conrad’s. So it may be said that showing the limitations in Marlow’s attitude, Conrad makes the point that those who fail to recognize the humanity of others are themselves dehumanized by their own vision. Critics like Hawkins feel that in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is essentially sympathetic to the Africans. He excuses Marlow’s referring to the Africans as “niggers” and “savages” as a usage of the language of his time. He stresses that, unlike the imperialists, the core narrator feels that, “they (Africans) wanted no excuse for being there”. Though Marlow does not view them as noble, he finds that in comparison with the fiendishness of Kurtz, their “pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist-obviously-in the sunshine”. He sees them as “prehistoric”, but he recognizes “their humanity—like yours”. Hawkins, therefore, argues that Marlow is sufficiently sensitive to the culture of the natives to realize that in Africa, drums might have “as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country”. Marlow’s ambivalent attitude is visible in his respects for the cannibals and their sense of restraint, a quality universally agreed to be the basis of moral behavior. Ian Watt’s comments that Marlow’s behaviour in this novel reflects a dual attitude—his awareness of the fragility of civilization, as well as his skeptical passivity when practically dealing with the issue of colonization.

**SAQ:**

Do you agree with Watt’s reading of Marlow as reflecting a dual attitude? Quote the passages that sustain your reading. (100+80words)

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How we understand and interpret Marlow as character and narrator is difficult and complex. Conrad’s own remark about Marlow that he is the “most discreet, understanding man” is significant as it reflects the latter’s superior comprehension and insight. When Marlow first sees the company’s chief accountant, he admires this “miracle” of civilization who can keep up his tidy appearance. But Marlow’s tone changes into a bitter one when he describes the accountant mechanically “making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions” while the sick agent lies on the bed and the Africans are left to die in the “grove of death.” Again, Marlow is appalled when the manager judges Kurtz’s plundering solely on the basis of its commercial viability. After the manager says the method is “unsound,” Marlow murmurs, “No method at all”. Perhaps, Conrad’s achievement, we could say, lies in his conception of Marlow itself, the duality of his attitude and his openness to more than one position.

Throughout his narrative, Marlow strives to point out that the unredeemable horror in the tale is the duplicity, cruelty, and venality of European officialdom. His notorious lie to Kurtz’s fiancée can be linked to his own principle that lying is a kind of dying. It also complicates the idea about how the core narrator in this novel too capitulates to a falsehood, like many of its European characters. Kurtz’s enigmatic last words “The horror! The horror” are subsumed in the last words Marlow quotes from himself. Marlow tells the ‘Intended’ that Kurtz died with her name on his lips and justifies his lying by explaining that to tell her the truth “would have been too dark—too dark altogether”. This concluding remark of the protagonist, therefore, undeniably confirms the inordinate and immanent motif of darkness in the novel.

In the novel, Marlow is twice compared with Buddha, towards the beginning and the conclusion of the novel. In the first part of the novel, he is introduced by the frame narrator and he describes his pose as that “...of a Buddha

preaching in European clothes...” Again, in the last paragraph of the novel, the frame narrator reappears to comment that “Marlow ceased and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time.”

This reference to Buddha with respect to Marlow can be read as both appropriate and inappropriate. It can be justified from the point of view that the core narrator’s narrative is a self-examining exercise. Further, as we learn that “Nobody moved for a time”, it can be assumed that perhaps Marlow could influence his audience, at least to some extent. Again, this reference to Buddha is unjustified as contrary to this Eastern idol of renunciation and illumination, Marlow could never be free from his inhibitions of the secular world—his racial prejudices towards the “black shapes”—therefore, he still awaits renunciation.

**SAQ:**

List the ‘hollow men’ depicted in the novel. How does Conrad contrast their hollowness and negativity with the inner emptiness of the Europeans? (50+100 words)

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***The Accountant***

The Accountant, like the manager and the brick-maker falls into the category of ‘conscienceless automata who carry death and exploitation abroad almost as a matter of mechanical habit’ (Cedric Watts). He is the first White man Marlow encounters when he reaches the Congo . The accountant, with his starched shirt and books kept in ‘apple-pie order’, offers an interesting contrast to the fate of the dying natives in the ‘grove of death’ . Although Marlow respects his efficiency in work, ironically, the mechanical efficiency and competence of the accountant coupled with his elegant, immaculate and sophisticated attire exemplify the heartless operation of the imperial machinery. His indifference to the natives who are left to die and his blindness to the suffering of his fellow mates illustrate his egoism and lack of sensitive understanding. He participates in the colonial enterprise and contributes to

the widespread dehumanizing mechanism of colonialism. The accountant's cynical indifference adds to Marlow's surprise as he is also the first person to tell Marlow of Kurtz. His appearance introduces a sense of repulsion in Marlow. He also shares the qualities of the 'hollow men' and Marlow considers him to be a mere vision as he is so elegantly dressed amidst the surrounding horrors and confusion. His insensitivity to the fecundity of the exotic jungle illustrates the sharp contrast between Europeans and the indigenous natives.

### *The Manager*

He, like the other characters in the text can be categorized as a 'hollow man' whose hypocrisy, amorality and cynicism are illustrative of the criminality of imperialism. The manager is spiritually and morally bankrupt and his hollowness is a consequence of his inner stagnation. His indulgence in the "habitual activity of mass murder" ironically questions the self-proclaimed notions of intellectual and technological supremacy of the colonizers. Marlow describes him as a part of his 'choice of nightmares' as the manager is a man with 'no genius... no learning and no intelligence'. His inner emptiness is visible in his denial of all human values which leads Marlow to comment that 'perhaps there was nothing within him'. He is an intriguer who conspires against Kurtz by delaying Marlow's voyage upstream meant to rescue Kurtz. His deliberate effort has led to the wreck of the steamer Marlow is to command to aid the ailing Kurtz and the significance of the wreck is visible to Marlow afterwards. The repair will take three months and the requisite time helps Marlow to read the mind of the shrewd and pretentious manager. The cunning and ruthless manager deliberately delays the repair by censoring the request for adequate rivets to repair the steamer as he awaits the nature to wipe away Kurtz, his greatest enemy to success. Conscious about his appearances and lacking sound judgment, he never objects to Kurtz's method of plundering the land for ivory and his cynicism stands as a sharp contrast to Kurtz's idealism. He thinks Kurtz to be his rival and even capable of killing the Russian for his own gain. The lack of vitality in the manager's appearance and his mechanical regularity contrast sharply with the vitality of the wilderness which provides almost an interlude amidst the all-pervasive deadliness.

***The Members of the El Dorado Exploring Expedition***

The El Dorado Exploring Expedition is a group of explorers with the manager’s uncle as their leader which arrives at the Central Station. All the explorers are corrupt to the bone and their arrival tears apart the veil of ‘philanthropic pretence’ as their only aim to visit the country is the desire to plunder and extract riches from the land. Marlow ironically calls them ‘faithless pilgrims’ as they lack the sense of responsibility and restraint and their behaviour is basically a parody of the inspiring missions aimed to civilize and enlighten the dark continent. They consider ivory as the only idol to worship and they serve the ‘flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly’. They are also the ‘hollow men’ who contribute to the moral and spiritual degeneration of the European race and it is their leader whose amorality is illustrative of their attitude of insanity. The reckless members of this group with long staves in their hands offer an ironic resemblance to the traditional pilgrims. Their leader, the shrewd manager’s uncle takes part in his intrigue as Marlow overhears their conversation one night. The manager’s uncle cunningly confirms that ‘Anything—anything can be done in this country’. This illustrates the widespread hollowness of the members. The hypocrisy and arrogance of the colonialist enterprise is apparent in his comment. They resemble the traditional pilgrims but ironically their motive and enterprise to ransack the riches are far removed from the religious missions. Their cynicism and moral blindness is visible in the activities they indulge in and Conrad relates them to the New World explorers whose aim was to find an ‘El Dorado’ in South America.

**SAQ:**  
Amplify the associations brought forth by the words “El Dorado”. (80 words)  
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***The Brick-Maker***

He is one among the pilgrims and an excellent example to illustrate their inner emptiness and uselessness. His uselessness is apparent when he escapes

his responsibility of making bricks and indulges in other activities like backbiting and intriguing. He too belongs to the category of “hollow men”. Apparently a vulgar character, his aim is to climb the ladder through intrigue and vulgar means. He can take recourse to any means to occupy the powerful position of the assistant manager. Ironically he never makes bricks but keeps on waiting for the necessary material to arrive. The brick-maker can also be read as a parody of Kurtz as he reproduces in a theatrical manner Kurtz’s grand rhetoric, the words of idealism. Ironically, he is unable to realize the intrinsic value of the ideas he tries to preach and practice. Marlow compares him to a ‘papier- mâché Mephistopheles’. Like Kurtz he has also looted the country as visible in his properties— the ‘silver- mounted dressing case’, and ‘a whole candle’ ‘an empty champagne bottle’. The African trophies in his hut make it clear that he has also ransacked the reservoir of African art.

### *The Harlequin*

The Russian, dressed like a harlequin, is an ambiguous character and resembles Marlow in many ways. He is efficient, hard working and shares the quality of retaining his innocence like Marlow. Marlow’s first impression of the altruistic and gullible admirer of Kurtz is formed when he finds the book entitled *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*. The book’s “singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work” impresses Marlow as he traces the similarity between the surrounding wilderness and the owner of the book. Both Marlow and the Russian share an unbounded admiration for Kurtz but the Russian fails to see through Kurtz’s grand rhetoric and he is blind to the implications of Kurtz’s idealism. He is naïve, biased and unable to distinguish between Kurtz’s image and the real man. His assertion ‘He made me see things-things’ spells out the fact that he is not matured enough to ‘see’ and judge. The harlequin describes himself as ‘a simple man’, like the natives. The presence of the harlequin seems to be shrouded in mystery and he seems ‘unreal’ to appear as a fully developed character. Basically, the harlequin is an odd figure, a caricature. In *Heart of Darkness*, he is presented as a lonely figure, a wanderer who mocks authoritarianism and tyranny.

**Stop to Consider:**

**Harlequin:** (**Arlecchino** in Italian or **Arlequin** in French) is the most popular of the zanni or comic servant characters from the commedia dell'arte which is of Italian origin. The name Harlequin derives from Old French Hellequin, leader of la maisnie Hellequin, often thought to be related to the Old English Herla. The notion that the Harlequin motif grew out of France is evidenced by Hellequin, a stock character in French passion plays. Hellequin, a black-faced emissary of the devil, is said to have roamed around the countryside with a group of demons chasing the damned souls of evil people to Hell.

The Harlequin character may have been based on or influenced by the Zanni archetype who, although a slow thinker, was acrobatic and nimble. Interpreted thus, Harlequin's distinctive motley costume may be a stylized variant of Zanni's plain white garb, designed to reflect the ad-hoc patching necessary to prevent the garment's degradation. (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlequin>)

**SAQ:**

Consider the characterization of the Russian harlequin and the Chief Accountant in *Heart of Darkness*. Compare their characters with the other Europeans. How do they reflect Kurtz's 'hollowness'? (50+50+60 words)

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***The Natives***

The novel concentrates on the inhuman treatment meted out to the natives by the Europeans who consider them to be nothing more than expendable slaves. In Conrad's text, the Europeans use the Africans as beasts of burden whose sole value is the physical work they can perform. Consequently, the European masters abandon the African labourers to die in 'the grove of death' when they are too frail to toil any more. It is said that Marlow's attitude of overwhelming admiration for the natives coupled with a sense of prejudice and fear of contamination reflects Conrad's attitude. This sense of duality is apparent in Marlow's mixed response to the natives. At first he is drawn towards their vitality and innate energy but sometimes the contemporary prejudices are present in his portrait of the natives. His use

of the word “nigger” is now considered to be offensive and derogatory as it has pejorative connotations. Marlow’s attitude to them is ambivalent he admires those who preserve their cultural unity and authenticity but is critical of those who are blind imitators of the western civilization. Marlow is vehemently critical of the detribalized natives lacking the sense of rootedness and unlike others he is sensible about assessing their mutual differences. He possesses the capacity to discriminate the Africans and praises the cannibals for their sense of restraint and calls them ‘friends’. Through Marlow’s opinion, we see a debunking of the myth of superiority of Western civilization and its status of living in perpetual grace. Africa and its inhabitants form a part of the West’s self-images but the effort to establish the distance by guarding the boundary is ironical.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **African Languages and Human Civilization**

Language is another aspect of human civilization that the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* are portrayed as lacking. What they speak is not recognizably human, and there is always an animal trait to their verbal communication. The novel refers to the language of the Africans as a form of babbling: “A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks”. Hence, whenever the African characters in the novel speak, their speech is described as “yelling, or babbling, or howling”. Robert Hampson points out that in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* “African languages are present only as sound. They appear as ‘a burst of yells’; ‘angry and warlike yells’; ‘tumultuous and mournful uproar’; ‘a tremulous and prolonged wail’; ‘complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords’. They are represented consistently as pre-verbal, pre-syntactic sound-as sound that is the direct expression of emotion, as sound that is pure sound (akin to music), as sound that is utterance without meaning: ‘they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language... all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance’.

(*Heart of Darkness* and “The Speech That Cannot Be Silenced”)

We may try to categorize the women characters in *Heart of Darkness* into European and native African subgroups. The three old women, Marlow’s aunt and Kurtz’s Intended will fall into the first category while Kurtz’s African mistress into the latter.

### The 'Intended' or Kurtz's Fiancé

Kurtz's fiancé appears as a radiant romantic idealist who preserves her faith in Kurtz's greatness and nobility and idolizes him. She is ignorant of the harsh realities of the world. She is basically a symbolic character and the absence of her name entails a sense of ambiguity in terms of her mysterious representation. The 'Intended' lives in a closed world and thrives on her 'idol worship'. It seems that her ignorance confirms the comment of the core narrator, "its queer how out of touch with truth women are!". Again, as Marlow rightly justified, "The darkness deepened" with the empty words of futile hope of Kurtz's fiancée.

<p><b>SAQ:</b> What kinds of associations are brought in through the term 'Intended'? (60words)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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Kurtz's native mistress, on the other hand, is exotic, wild and primitive. In keeping with European prejudices about Africa, the African consort is associated with the fecund jungle from which she emanates. In the novel, we find a vivid description of the native woman's character, ironically, signifying her radiant personality and sense of honour:

"And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed clothes, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witchmen, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress". This woman with her passionate involvement is

portrayed as a leader of her community and men obey her she also possesses the capacity of incapacitating the men. Evidently, she also symbolizes lust and wild fecundity which are overpowered by the rapacious European colonizers.

More descriptions follow,

“Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us . . . and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding. . . .”

The African woman is, therefore, presented as a foil to Kurtz’s ‘Intended’ as she seems to possess the power of facing the truth and enduring the pain of her failure in contrast to the false illusions of both Marlow’s aunt and Kurtz’s ‘Intended’. As Pelikan puts it, the function of the Intended and the native girl in this novel is to show a moral and cultural contrast. The African mistress is akin to a partner in Kurtz’s plunge into fleshly demonic rites and the Intended exemplifies the fidelity to which man must cling for eternal salvation. Because Kurtz could neither trust in nor be trusted by any other human being, he is forever lost to both women, lost to both the flesh and the spirit. Thus, the facile opposition of the native girl’s ‘flesh’ and the ‘Intended’s’ ‘spirit’ retain their significations also as binary opposites—as one of darkness and the other of light, respectively.

### ***Marlow’s Aunt***

She is perhaps the most influential person in Marlow’s life as it is her decision which paves the way for his realization of the reality of colonialism. Throughout the text Marlow treats her with ironic affection for her inability to see beyond the surface level lack of realistic vision. Although she arranges the job for him, her incapacity of conceptualization of his mission by reading the misguided and politically motivated news in the papers, she is not responsive to the profit motive of the company. She is unaware of the real, moral and physical dangers lurking in Marlow’s venture and her status testifies to his statement that women live in an unreal world of their own far removed from reality.

**Stop to Consider:**

“Feminists may rightly see misogynistic implications in this dichotomy, in which idealized beauty is made statuesque while passionate sexuality is associated with dangerously fecund nature. A crucially problematic detail occurs in *Heart of Darkness*, when the Intended stretches out her arms towards the Kurtz of memory, in a gesture which exactly duplicates that of Kurtz’s tribal consort. Does the duplication of gesture indicate a ‘common humanity’, or does it accentuate the remaining differences? Does it subvert the dichotomy or systematically reinforce it?”(Cedric Watts)

It can be stated that, in Conrad’s novels like *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*, the promise of the Ideal is offered to the male protagonists by female characters. However, the “moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment” associated with Kurtz’s fiancée in the sepulchral city is inherently noble and inspiring. Moreover the truth remains that Kurtz is too inherently savage to carry his conception of goodness beyond empty eloquence. It is the avaricious agents of civilization who actually hypocritically invoke such grand ideals.

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## 2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Exploring the complex of ideas ranging from the criminality embedded in the civilizing mission to racism, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is an enigmatic text which resists interpretative simplicity. The text has generated a bewildering variety of critical approaches and also provided creative stimulus to other artists. The novel first received mixed critical responses from the critics and the readers. Edward Garnett (1865-1937) who is credited with ‘discovering’ Conrad called the novel a ‘psychological masterpiece’. According to him the novel offers “an analysis of the white man’s morale when let loose from European restraint, and planted down in the tropics as an “emissary of light” armed to the teeth to make trade profits out of subject races.” Both E.M. Forster and F.R. Leavis addressed the complexity and obscurity of Conrad’s text. The various critical and creative responses to the text includes Andre Gide’s *Voyage to the Congo* (1929), Graham Greene’s *Journey Without Maps* (1936), Nadine Gordimer’s *The Congo River* (1961) and Hannah Arendt’s *Imperialism* (1951), *Heart of Darkness* has become one of the most widely read works written by

Conrad. It is therefore re-written by many writers. Such works include Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) by the Australian author Patrick White, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1976), David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991), Timothy Findley's *Head Hunter* (1993). T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925), Graham Greene's *A Burnt out Case* (1961), and V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) *In a Free State* (1971) are also influenced by and take inspiration from *Heart of Darkness*.

**Stop To Consider:**

The enigmatic line: "Mistah Kurtz — he dead" of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was used by T.S Eliot, the modernist poet, as the epigraph as well as the character and content of his famous modern poem *The Hollow Men* (1925). The hollowness that Kurtz shares with the colonizers is what led Eliot to use the servant's report as the section heading in his *Selected Poems*. The poet thereby presents Kurtz as a symbol for the faithless and inner emptiness of the modern world in general. Eliot's use of the term 'hollow men' came from other sources in William Morris, Rudyard Kipling and also the 'Gunpowder Plot' of 1605. It is perhaps fitting that Eliot's use of this short line in pidgin English should be used by him to set the pattern of reading his poems in the section, *The Hollow Men* (1925). This association built up between these two great modern texts has been the basis of all subsequent readings of Conrad's novels and also to provide the damning gloss on the whole world bequeathed by 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialist ambitions.

The psychological or psycho-analytical readings of Conrad's novel inspired by Freud and Carl Gustav Jung's theories offer a different approach to the text. Examples include the chapter entitled "Joseph Conrad's Uneasiness - and Ours" in Frederick Crews's *Out of My System: Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Methodology* (1975). A number of psychological or psycho-analytical readings such as Catharine Rising's *Darkness at Heart: Father and Sons in Conrad* (1990), Eugene Goodheart's *Desire and its Discontents* (1991) followed and contributed to stabilize Conrad's reputation. The feminist critics criticize Joseph Conrad for the exclusion of women from the masculine and hierarchical world depicted in his novels and especially for Marlow's lie to the Intended in *Heart of Darkness*. Commenting on the representation of women Nina Pelikan Straus (1987)

opines that the woman who identifies with Marlow actually ‘court[s] self-degradation’. Bette London (1989) comments on Joseph Conrad’s presentation of racial and gender ideology and writes that gender and race are ‘inter-locking systems’.

This text has also been controversial and provocative for its depiction of Africa and Africans. The ‘counter-discursive’ or ‘resistant’ readings of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* started with the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe’s diatribe in his famous and provocative article, “An Image of Africa” (1977). Highlighting the derogatory and negative portrayal of Africans in Conrad’s novel, Achebe condemns Joseph Conrad as ‘a bloody racist’ and opines that this novel ‘parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a selection of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question’. Chinua Achebe’s diatribe is important as a catalyst as this essay prepared the ground for sharp criticism on Joseph Conrad and his notion of imperialism. Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* also condemns Conrad’s depiction of the inhuman practice. Critic like Frances B. Singh, for instance, agrees with Achebe. The most famous adaptations of Conrad’s texts include—Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Sabotage* (1936), based on *The Secret Agent* (1907), Richard Brooks’s *Lord Jim* (1964), and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) based on *Heart of Darkness*. The novel also inspired John Powell’s composition for piano and orchestra *Rhapsodie Nègre* (1917).

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Show how the characterization of Kurtz relates to Conrad’s ambivalence towards imperialism in Africa.
2. To what extent does Kurtz attain a higher status in the novel as compared to the other characters? Support your answer with textual analysis.
3. Compare and contrast Marlow’s and Kurtz’s characters in the text.
4. Attempt to show the difference in the conception of Africa between that of the frame narrator’s and that of Marlow’s.

5. The Nigerian writer and critic, Achebe, critiqued Kurtz's African mistress as the "savage counterpart to the refined, European woman." Do you agree with this perspective on the female characters in Conrad's text? Explain your position.

## 2.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have tried to discuss the storyline of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* along with the important characters. A text like *Heart of Darkness* resists any interpretative simplicity into the conventional categories of story and character, yet an attempt is made here to acquaint you with the development of the story in terms Conrad's positioning of the characters in the novel. A careful reading will help you identify the underlying pattern of Conrad's characterization and will help you appreciate the novel in toto. Once you are able to relate the major characters to the development of the story after going through this unit, you will have a better understanding of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its enduring place in the academic cannon.

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## Unit 3

### Themes and Techniques

#### Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 The Title
- 3.4 Major Themes
- 3.5 Narrative Technique
- 3.6 Motifs and Symbols
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

#### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

In the previous units, you have gained familiarity with Joseph Conrad's oeuvre, his major preoccupations and the novel prescribed. Unit 3, the last unit in this block discusses the literary devices like major themes, narrative technique, title and the images and symbols which contribute to the enduring popularity of *Heart of Darkness*. In this unit we have tried to offer a detailed discussion of the novel by addressing the important issues elaborately so that you develop your own way of dealing with the complexity of the text. After going through the unit, you will be able to

- *describe* the importance of the title of the novel
- *identify* the major themes which are worked into a consistent pattern
- *find out* the narrative techniques employed
- *identify* the prominent images and symbols and relate them to the thematic plane of the novel
- *appreciate* the novel and its recurring structural parallels in totality.

#### 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been influential in various ways. You have already read about the various re-writings and adaptations of this

novel into novels, films etc in the earlier units. By now, you must have understood the fact that this modern classic, exploring multiple perspectives from which one can read the novel, eludes a simpler interpretation. The following sections are designed to help you read Conrad's text in terms of the themes and techniques used. A complete understanding of the significance of *Heart of Darkness* is possible only when the thematic and structural relations are addressed. The novel, drawing on the symbolic journey, the death and return of the protagonist Marlow from Africa, invites many similarities with the adventure tale, fable and traditional quest romance. Conrad deliberately left the text open-ended. The plot of the novel centers on the idea of the symbolic quest on the part of the characters to achieve moral awareness.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a classic in the canon of modern literature as the journey through the Congo, amidst the "great and invincible" wilderness, can also be read as a spiritual voyage of discovery of the self. The structure of this novel is based on symbolic and impressionistic actions as almost all the characters here have important symbolic roles and perform structural and symbolic functions to add to the inherent store of meanings. The mingling of two narrative voices of the frame and the core narrator further adds to the intensity of the miscellaneous and incomplete critical explanations that Conrad offers in this fiction. The various forms of "darkness" explored in the text along with the persistent image of mist or haze, from the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* suggest that meaning will only be tenuously visible in this fictional world.

#### CONGO

**Congo**, Kongo, Kongô, or similar may refer to:

*A river and one of two states in Africa*

- Congo Basin (Congo region)
  - Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville)
  - Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo-Kinshasa)
- Congo Free State (1885–1908)  
Belgian Congo (1908–1960)  
Republic of the Congo (Léopoldville) (1960–1964)  
Zaire (1971-1997)

The **Congo River** (also known as the **Zaire River**) is the largest river in Western Central Africa. Its overall length of 4,700 km (2,922 miles) makes it the second

longest in Africa (after the Nile). The river and its tributaries flow through the second largest rain forest area in the world, second only to the Amazon Rainforest in South America. The river also has the second-largest flow in the world, behind the Amazon; the second-largest drainage basin of any river, again trailing the Amazon; and is the deepest river in the world, at depths greater than 750 feet. Its drainage basin is slightly larger than that of the Mississippi. Because large sections of the river basin lie above and below the Equator, its flow is stable, as there is always at least one river experiencing a rainy season. The Congo gets its name from the ancient Kingdom of Kongo which inhabited the lands at the mouth of the river. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo, both countries lying along the river's banks, are named after it. Between 1971 and 1997 the government of then-Zaire called it the **Zaire River**.

The **Congo Basin** is the sedimentary basin that is the drainage of the Congo River of west equatorial Africa. The basin begins in the highlands of the East African Rift system with input from the Chambeshi River, the Uele and Ubangi Rivers in the upper reaches and the Lualaba River draining wetlands in the middle reaches.

The **Republic of the Congo** (French: *République du Congo*; Kongo: Repubilika ya Kongo; Lingala: *Republiki ya Kongó*), also known as **Congo-Brazzaville** or the **Congo**, is a country in Central Africa. It is bordered by Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Angolan exclave province of Cabinda, and the Gulf of Guinea. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (French: *République démocratique du Congo*) is a country located in Central Africa, with a small length of Atlantic coastline. It is the third largest country (by area) in Africa. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is, with a UN estimated population of 66,020,000, the nineteenth most populous nation in the world, and the fourth most populous nation in Africa, as well as the most populous country where French is an official language.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congo>. [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

### 3.3 THE TITLE

The novel *Heart of Darkness* refers to multiple forms of 'darkness' as the terms 'heart' and 'darkness' suggest in the text. The title is replete with ambiguity as questions are raised for and against Conrad's location of 'darkness' in a particular place. The title is illustrative of the ambiguities and authorial/narratorial ambivalence inherent in the text which debunks the myth of a stable and certain order. From February-April 1899, *Heart of Darkness* was serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* with the title '*The Heart of Darkness*'. Conrad later omitted the word "The" which was a part of the

original title when the novel was published in book form. The removal of “The” actually contributes to the enigmatic tale which follows. Conrad was himself ambivalent about the rejection of the definite article and thought:

“The title I am thinking of is ‘The Heart of Darkness’ but the narrative is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and our selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time though not topically treated. It is a story as much as my *Outpost of Progress* was but, so to speak, ‘takes in a little more – is a little wider – is less concentrated upon individuals.’” (*Letters*)

The use of the definite article ‘the’ would have contextualized and particularized the reference to darkness. But *Heart of Darkness* transcends the immediate context only to confirm the universal appeal in keeping with the central verve of the text itself. Conrad’s title explores various levels of meaning—geographical, psychological, spatial, and moral. On the surface level, it refers to the geographical location of the Belgian Congo and the skin colour of its inhabitants. On another level, it refers to the dehumanizing and evil practices of the colonizers in the Congo, the merciless and inhuman exploitation of the natives, and suggests that the real *darkness* lies not in Africa but in Europe. In this regard, Frances B. Singh rightly elaborates that its *heart* is not in the breasts of black Africans but in all whites who countenance and engage in colonialist enterprise. Seen at the surface level, the metaphor has a direct, factual, and straightforward application in the novel. But the cursory reading points out the ironic undertone as the apparently ‘black’ is really ‘white’ and vice versa. Thus, both the civilizations share mutual qualities of darkness and light. One of the major discoveries of Marlow as well as the readers at the end of his voyage is the untrustworthiness of contrary categories. Our awareness of the fact that light cannot be distinguished from darkness gradually leads us to the series of realizations which depart from and challenge conventional categories like that of the thin line of distinction between savage and the civilized.

**SAQ:**

For Indian students, the history of the title of the novel makes clear the function of the definite article (“the”). How does the removal of “the” transform the phrase from one with concrete denotations of geography

etc. into one with symbolic connotations? What does the 'heart' represent? Give reasons for your answer. (70 +50 words)

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Apart from the interpretations of the title based on the ethnography of the Congo and the consequence of Imperialism, the title is also important for the psychological meaning. Marlow introduces the story of his experiences in Africa through an analogy of the Roman colonizers of ancient Britain. He relates the psychological deprivation of the colonizers to the fact of being cut off from the norms of civilization. Consequently, he feels that they turned to the lawless jungle as an alternative to the civilization which is basically a vast reservoir of their untrammelled and unconscious desire. Marlow implies that his trip upriver into the geographical heart of dark Africa represents a similar experience. His voyage is a voyage into the innermost recess of human psyche, into the core of darkness, the utterly savage state of being that existed before civilization tamed the unconscious.

### 3.4 MAJOR THEMES

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a complex work which parades the spectacle of a world morally and spiritually atrophied. The spectacle of a civilization constantly wounded and uprooted by colonizing enterprise helps the reader to explore the issues surrounding colonialism from multiple angles. Marlow's journey from the Outer Station to the Central Station and finally up the river to the Inner Station to aid the ailing Kurtz is replete with his encounters with scenes of torture, cruelty, and slavery. The novel is read and criticized for the harsh picture of colonial enterprise as the real impetus behind Marlow's adventures was to lay bare the hypocrisy and immorality inherent in the rhetoric used to justify imperialism. The employees of the Company describe their work as mere "trade," and their treatment of native Africans is part of the benevolent project of "civilization" aiming the all-inclusive benefit. Ironically, the commercial interest never figures in the rhetoric of mutual progress and prosperity. Interestingly, Kurtz frankly tells

that he does not ‘trade’ but rather takes ivory by force. He never hides the fact that “suppression” and “extermination” are part of his own treatment of the natives and he rules through violence and intimidation. Kurtz, the ‘emissary of progresses’ is extremely successful in his venture but ironically his success threatens to expose the evil practices behind European activity in Africa and questions the validity of their presence.

*Heart of Darkness* portrays Africa as the land of savages lacking any worthwhile culture or civilization and awaiting the European intrusion as a means of sustenance. Africans lack everything that defines and characterizes civilization. For instance, the territory is depicted as a primordial jungle, where primeval chaos reigns, since the indigenous population has not established any form of social system or order. Again, in the novel we read the line “we were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet” which confirms the unexplored and chaotic nature of this portion of earth.

**SAQ:**

Conrad is far from interested in giving us a “well-made” story of inquiry and discovery. Show what the text presents of why Marlow has to meet Kurtz, what his function as a Company employee is. (50 words)

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Africans in this book are reduced to mere, lifeless, objects: Marlow refers to his helmsman as a piece of machinery, and Kurtz’s African mistress is at best a piece of statuary. It can be argued that *Heart of Darkness* participates in the oppression of natives which is much more sinister and much harder to remedy than the open abuses of Kurtz or the Company’s men. Africans lack the language, the society and basically the essence of the ‘human’ status. For Marlow, Africans therefore, operate as mere backdrop, a ‘human’ screen against which his philosophical, moral and existential struggles can easily be depicted. They provide Marlow with the alternative world which can be the reservoir of the unrecognized subconscious self of the Europeans. Their existence and exoticism enable his self-contemplation

and contribute to holding together his conception of himself. This kind of subtle dehumanization is harder to identify than colonial violence or open racism. While *Heart of Darkness* offers a powerful critique of the hypocritical operations of imperialism, it also presents a set of issues surrounding race that is ultimately more disturbing for sensitive minds.

Chinua Achebe, the famous Nigerian novelist condemns Joseph Conrad as a 'thoroughgoing racist' as his *Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as the antithesis of Europe, "the other world". Africa is symbolic of everything that Western civilization fears, it is a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. But it can be argued that the biased attitude to the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow. Moreover Conrad might be holding it up to irony and criticism rather than endorsing it.

Consequently, the dehumanization of Africa and Africans is the real issue in the novel. *Heart of Darkness* is not a great work of art to Chinua Achebe as the obvious racism depicted in the text is unacceptable. According to Achebe, Conrad's picture of the people of the Congo is incomplete and inadequate. He also points out the fact that Conrad condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but at the same time was strangely unaware of the racism on which *Heart of Darkness* focused. The nineteenth-century European prejudices about Africa influenced Conrad and the continent and its people are used merely as a background for this narrative, which is essentially Eurocentric. Marlow in the novel uses the rhetoric of religion to justify colonialism: "What redeems is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can . . . offer a sacrifice to . . ." His attitude reflects the issues explored in Conrad's essay, "The Weight of the Burden" (1906) where he also makes colonialism into a religion, calling it a "sacred fire". But critics defending Conrad argue that a matured understanding of the complexity of Conrad's style will help the readers to address the issues beyond racism as beyond the complex issue of race lies the crucial questions about the consequences of imperialism and empire-building.

The Journey, or voyage of the discovery of the true self, is one of the most important themes in the novel. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow often reiterates the fact that his voyage is basically a spiritual voyage of self-discovery. The

journey to aid Kurtz helps him to understand and appreciate himself and each point in the narrative is a turning point in his life. The Inner Station was his “farthest point of navigation” and “the culminating point of experience”. Marlow rightly explains that, “The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.” Therefore, the journey in the novel is a record of “remote kinship” with the wild and fecund Africa. The personal narrative of Marlow can be interpreted as the voyage within himself, the journey into the unconscious, and confrontation of an entity within the self.

**SAQ:**

‘Other-ing’ is an important concept where issues of racism and imperialistic exploitation are concerned. We must be clear as to what is meant by the ‘other’. Is Kurtz Marlow’s ‘other’? Are the African natives, Marlow’s ‘other’? (50+50words)

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**3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

*Heart of Darkness* does not simply record the unfolding of an action. As Michael Levenson in “The Value of Facts in the *Heart of Darkness*”, elaborates, the novel unfolds its own mode of understanding. By the time the text has reached its conclusion it has redrawn its boundaries, redescrbed its facts, and reevaluated its values. Thus, to sum up in Levenson’s words, Conrad’s act of writing was at the same time a discovery of his subject. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow’s impressionistic rendering of the story reveals a narrative consciousness different from the one found in Conrad’s earlier works. To some extent in *Youth*, but very clearly in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, Marlow’s subjectivity threatens to take over the narrative as he weighs, ponders, and attempts to understand his own thought as much as he attempts to understand Captain Beard, Kurtz, or Jim. Moreover, Conrad transposes the memory of his primary identity to the voice of Marlow, who matures from the naive youth to the knowledgeable speaker of *Heart of Darkness*. In the novel, the use of language cannot be described as

monolithic, it is basically dialogic and discursive in nature. The text is replete with instances of reverberations and reliance on memory plays an important part in the narrative. The readers also experience a transition from the mundane to the primacy of human speech.

**SAQ:**

Find out the sections from the text where Marlow's reliance on memory is made explicit. (80 words)

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*Heart of Darkness* is interesting as it is narrated by two narrators: the frame / primary narrator opens the text and introduces us to the core narrator, Marlow, who narrates the main story. The beginning and ending is narrated by the frame narrator and the use of the device of a story within a story is effective and relates Conrad to the modernist experimental novelists. Like the classic Modernist novels, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), *Heart of Darkness* also explores the disintegration and fragmentation of conscious control in the protagonist in a style which itself mirrors the disconnectedness of experience and the triumph of the random over the structured and unified. As Marlow comments: ". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. . . ." Even before Eliot formulated his theory of impersonality, Conrad had already tried to distance the narrator's voice from the personality of the author. Marlow's narrative is interspersed with the reactions of the primary narrator as well as Marlow's own observations on his past experiences. Both Marlow and the frame narrator share conspicuous similarities and differences. The frame narrator seems to represent a more comprehensive point of view as his role is to interpret the meaning of the tale and give it a universal significance. But, as Frances Singh explains, the meaning the frame narrator draws is quite similar to Marlow's. In the beginning, he is seen as the ardent upholder of English colonialism and calls the English "bearers of

a spark from the sacred fire.” But at the end he realizes that the Thames leads “into the heart of an immense darkness”, concluding that the English colonizers are as evil as any other. So the frame narrator, like Marlow, seems to be a critic of colonialism as in the end he shares Marlow’s view that inside every white man there resides a black and evil man, who has the potential, like Kurtz, to descend into darkness.

In *Heart of Darkness* the frame narrator introduces Marlow to the reader. When Marlow takes over and starts narrating, the anonymous frame narrator becomes one of the narratees. In the classic frame narrative, the frame narrator appears to be the most authoritative and knowledgeable but, in Conrad’s novel, though the frame narrator appears to be reliable, he is intellectually inferior to Marlow. This is evident in the beginning of the narrative, before the frame narrator introduces Marlow. He describes the Thames, and England’s past with undisguised adoration and offers a catalogue of the English sea heroes. But Marlow’s anti-imperial meditation begins in a different tone: “And this also...had been one of the dark places of the earth...” So, we can see the counter-discourses occurring within the framework of the same narrative. Conrad subverts the traditional generic demands and his method is dialogic as multiple voices jostle in the text and help the reader to arrive at meaning. Marlow’s remark exposes the limited insight of the frame narrator, and alerts the reader as to the complexities that they might encounter in the point of view presented.

**SAQ:**

At which points in the novel does the frame narrator intervene? How does the novelist alert the reader that the narrator has changed? (60+70 words)

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In the early pages of *Heart of Darkness*, the frame narrator explains that the meaning of Marlow’s tales is essentially complex: “...to him (Marlow) the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze...” The

secondary narrator's story uses symbolist and impressionist techniques to hint at meanings beyond the literal and traditional explanations. In the process of negating the myth of civilizing mission of the colonizers, the readers identify the latent irony in Conrad's narrative strategy. Conrad's technique allows the reader more than one perspective thus enabling different critical positions. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad also uses the narrative convention of the popular adventure stories. Moreover, he uses the elaborate pattern of voyages, weaving the reader back and forth in time and the various layers of voyages are subsumed into the narrative framework.

### 3.6 MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

While discussing the "final effect" of a work of art, Conrad maintained that "All the great creations of literature have been symbolic". As, he explained, "A work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character" ( Ian Watt, "Impressionism and Symbolism in *Heart of Darkness*"). As pointed out by Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* also shares the symbolic significance essential for the great works of art. The prominent images and symbols like light and darkness, the wilderness, mist, river here impart a structural and thematic continuity to the novel and the symbolist and impressionistic techniques employed by Conrad add to the levels of complexity leading the reader to multiple interpretations of the text.

*Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with the imagery of darkness and the river. Both these motifs play a significant role in Conrad's novel in terms of the setting, themes and the narrative technique. The motif of light and darkness operates metaphorically and existentially in the work. Conrad hints at the multiple forms and levels of 'darkness' which appears to be an integral motif throughout the novel. Significantly, the title hints at the centrality of this contrasting motif of light and darkness in the text. The contrasting effects of light and darkness refer simultaneously to the incapacity to see or visualize as well as the predictability of the human condition. It is apparently used as a stark visible contrast but has profound implications in the progress of the narrative. In the words of Ian Watt, "In the early part of the narrative, the main effect of Conrad's light and dark imagery was to break many of its

associated conventional antithesis in the domain of human values.” He also explains that Conrad’s novel helps us to see a world where the familiar and easy distinctions between black and white are complicated and sometimes reversed. Exploring the idea of horror implicit in the idea of ‘darkness’ and progress in ‘light’, Conrad reversed the common meanings of the recurring phrases—“to enlighten” and “to be in the dark”. Similarly, Watt cites the instance of white invaders in this text who are embodiments of blindness and cruelty. In fact, the entire novel seems to be lost and engulfed in darkness which can be traced back to Conrad’s main theme of the novel— the pernicious effects of imperialism.

Marlow recounts of his voyage up the river that “they penetrated deeper and deeper into the Heart of Darkness.” Thus, ‘darkness’ is further explored to suggest our failure to see, understand and recognize the presence of another human being. It also refers to the inner darkness which Kurtz discovers to be a part of his civilized and ‘enlightened’ self. *Heart of Darkness* is also about an inner voyage resembling the quest of the grail and here characters are also symbolic. Edward Said points out “the kinship between Marlow and Kurtz is sustained on a metaphysical level as kinship between darkness and light, between the impulse towards darkness sustained by Marlow until he sees Kurtz and the impulse towards light sustained by Kurtz in the deepest darkness.”

‘Darkness’ characterizes any civilized consciousness as Saul Bellow has said, “Well, maybe every guy has his own Africa”. In the beginning the light shining on the Thames estuary vividly contrasts with the all-pervading gloom in London. The image points out the existence of ‘darkness’ at the core of the civilization epitomizing progress. Even the painting by Kurtz “representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch” emphasizes ironically the failure to see or visualize as, in spite of having the torch, the woman cannot see.

In the concluding part of the novel, as Watt points out, there is a final variation on the values associated with whiteness and light. Kurtz’s fiancée is particularly associated with the motif of whiteness, “She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk... This fair hair, pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked at me.”

The fireplace at the 'Intended's place has "a cold and monumental whiteness"; her "fair hair" and "pale visage" seem "surrounded by an ashy halo". Although the 'Intended' is illuminated by "the inextinguishable light of belief and love," Marlow informs us that "with every word spoken the room was growing darker". Thus, she seems to be sick and pallid in comparison to Kurtz's "tragic" and "fierce" African mistress. So, the meaning of 'darkness' relates to the psychological, moral, spiritual realms and also to a larger metaphysical domain, where 'light' is replete with contradictory notions of 'darkness' and seems to be associated with unnaturalness, dehumanization, hypocrisy and delusion.

As pointed out, *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with the imagery of darkness and the river. The river is an important image and plays a significant role in terms of the setting, themes and the narrative technique of Conrad's work. The novel opens with a reference to the river Thames in the very second paragraph, "the Sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway". This river, quite contrary to that in Africa, is described as tranquil and restful. Although the novel begins and ends with the reference to the river Thames in London, the actual story of Conrad's novel concentrates on Marlow's journey to rescue Kurtz through the Congo—the very antithesis to the Thames. Interestingly both these rivers are repeatedly associated with images of darkness; but it is only the River Congo that particularly shares the primordial sense of being similar to the country, Africa. Like Africa smeared in eternal darkness and its inhabitant, the African river too, therefore, seems to be incomprehensible and mysterious to Marlow:

"The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy.... We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; ..." (37).

**Stop to Consider:**

"*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting peacefully at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks. But the actual story take will place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the

Thames. The river Congo is quite decidedly not a river Emeretus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension we are told that ‘going up to that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world.

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, and the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point .It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth’. It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative , the Congo , it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings”. (Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad *Heart of Darkness*”)

Marlow’s narrative begins and ends with the enveloping darkness thereby hinting at its presence in the ambience of the entire novel. The concluding line of the novel “the offing was barred by a black bank of clouds and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” shows the progression of the river serenely luminous at the beginning into an embodiment of darkness by the end of the novel. According to Ian Watt, the Manager’s reference to the “ebb” or flow of the tide enacts the endless circularity of meaningless human history in terms of the circular fictional setting. Thus, the river as part of the similar setting and evocative atmosphere, at the introduction and the conclusion of the text, helps the other audiences of Marlow in the *Nellie* as well as readers to search for the larger meaning of his tale.

**SAQ:**

Would you consider landscape to be important for enriching the theme of the novel? How does the landscape relate to ideas of exploitation, civilization, light and darkness in the novel? (80+90 words)

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Conrad's images of the sea and the river help us to address the sense of void that defines the text and are also rich with mythical overtone. The image of the river adds to the dark tonalities and brooding atmosphere of the novel. Moreover, it also highlights Conrad's prose style that seems to advance and recede in waves. The novelist's rhythms of thoughts are subtly expressed through the conflicting tides and ebbs of the Thames and the Congo. These images in the novel are also rich in mythical overtones.

The symbolic significance of wilderness and the African landscape enriches the themes explored. In the beginning, the fecund jungle and the innate vitality of the natives fascinate the reader as well as Marlow. The stark contrast between the empty formalism of the European scene and the dense and unpredictable wilderness of the African scene is established in the text repeatedly. This contrast hints at the distinction that lies at the core of the troubled relation between the races. In the Company which thrives on accumulation of ivory, Marlow is faced with the moral dilemma of negotiating opposites. The text is rich with examples of the materialist and absurdist aspect of the Company's venture. The empty assertion of the institutional formalism in the face of violently gruesome facts in Africa emerges as a sharp contrast in *Heart of Darkness*. The incongruity between the Company and the wilderness is a particular instance of that more general Conradian incongruity between value and fact, between the system of meanings that we devise and the world reluctant to accept them.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. How does Conrad create the atmosphere and mood of the novel? Attempt to trace the symbols and impressionist devices that contribute to the effects suggested by the title?
2. Expatriate upon the various senses that the title of the novel accommodates.
3. Assess the significance of the narrative technique in *Heart of Darkness* terms of the modern writer's experimentation with form and style.

### 3.7 SUMMING UP

In the last unit of this block we have tried to acquaint you with the various themes and techniques of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. As you know,

Conrad's techniques and themes, his passionate concern with the existential dilemma of man troubled with moral responsibility and the weakness of human nature, political violence, ambiguity and evasion etc have profoundly appealed to the modern sensibility. Conrad truly helped to create and sharpen the sensibility of the modern age and his writings dealing with the archetypal modernist themes of timeless struggle of man's self-deception and inner conflicts influenced writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. The previous units in this block will help you to trace the connection between the writer and his background and the third unit aims at providing you a comprehensive knowledge of Conrad's writing with special reference to *Heart of Darkness*. Moreover, the reading of the texts is the most essential part in gaining familiarity with any writer and we hope that the issues explored in this block will lead you to read and assess Conrad in a meaningful way.

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**Institute of Distance and Open Learning  
Gauhati University**

**MA in English  
Semester 3**

**Paper XI  
Fiction III - The Twentieth Century**

**Block 2  
Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway***



**Contents:**

**Block Introduction:**

**Unit 1 : Background**

**Unit 2 : The Novel**

**Unit 3 : Themes and Techniques**

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April, 2011

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**Acknowledgement**

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University duly acknowledges the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi, for preparation of this material.

## **Block Introduction:**

This is the second block of Paper XI which broadly deals with Modern Fiction. This block contains Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* which is considered to be a representative text of literary modernism. This novel, like the other novels prescribed for you in this paper, is significant for many reasons. We claim that after you finish reading these units you will be in a position to judge its significance yourself.

This block is divided into three units. Unit 1 deals with the background of the novel which means that you will be reading in detail about the life-history of the writer, Virginia Woolf, and about the works she produced. Attempts have also been made to place *Mrs Dalloway* in a specific literary and socio-historical scenario of the twentieth century of which Woolf was a part. Unit 2 goes directly into the novel we have chosen for discussion. Attempts have been made to enable you to comprehend the story of the novel in detail so that you find it easier to understand the various complex issues. Unit 3 specifically deals with the various themes and techniques of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* since our intention behind keeping a separate unit on the themes and techniques is to make you aware of the various innovations and experimentations applied by Woolf in her novels all of which is synonymous with literary modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century. We hope you will enjoy reading these units. If you feel that you need to know more about Virginia Woolf and *Mrs Dalloway*, then do refer to section 3.8 of Unit 3.

### **Contents Block 2:**

**Unit 1:** Background

**Unit 2:** The novel

**Unit 3:** Themes and techniques

# Unit 1

## Background

### Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Biographical Sketch
- 1.4 Placing the Work
- 1.5 Summing up

### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the first unit of block 2. In this unit you will be provided with information regarding one of Virginia Woolf's most powerful fictional attempts, *Mrs. Dalloway*. After you finish reading the unit you will be able to

- *draw up* the genealogy of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*
- *relate* the novel to Woolf's own personal history
- *discuss* Virginia Woolf as a literary modernist

### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

In the year 1922, Woolf brought out her third novel *Jacob's Room* in which she claimed "I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice." It was also a time when the Hogarth Press, run by both Mr. and Mrs. Woolf, published *The Wasteland* by T S Eliot, who persuaded her into believing that James Joyce's *Ulysses* had destroyed the whole of the nineteenth century in fiction, and showed the futility of all English styles. There are very few modern writers who are as creative or as productive as Virginia Woolf. Recognizing the considerable possibilities in the 'novels', she was trying hard to make use of the written records of her life, her feelings and the changes of her time. Gradually, Woolf came to realize that it was not her destiny to become a popular writer, as her interest laid not in

the strength, passion or the representation of anything spectacular and extraordinary, but in what she had called her 'queer individuality'. Eventually this spirit turned into one of her most important and powerful works of fictional modernity *Mrs. Dalloway*. Originally it began as a short story entitled *Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street*, completed in October 1922 and published in 1923 in the American magazine *The Dial*. However, she was also thinking of expanding it into a complete novel.

Her initial attempts were not what we read today in the novel. It was supposed to have six or seven chapters, dealing with London social life, making the Prime Minister an important character and finally converging on the party at the end. In a preface found in some early editions of the novel, she tried to explain that the central figure Clarissa Dalloway was to kill herself, or perhaps die at her party. However, this view was later changed but the preoccupation with death was to play a dominant role in the storyline, as she was trying to conceive of another new central character, the shell-shocked war victim Septimus Warren Smith, whose death was announced at the party and with which the novel also ended. Over the rest of 1922, Woolf continued to re-plan and re-arrange the book in which the storyline changed and a new technique of presentations through consciousness and awareness was adopted. However, in this attempt, the influence of Joyce's *Ulysses* was quite visible. Consequently, all the events, like Joyce's novel were to occur on one single day on which Clarissa held the evening party.

Woolf made it customary to maintain diaries since 1915 which continued up to her death in 1941. Actually, it was through her diaries, letters, and notebooks that she tried to explain her writing methods. Even the accounts she gives in her diaries about the composition of the novel provides a clear idea regarding the genealogy of the novel

### **1.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH (1882-1941)**

Virginia Woolf is known mostly for her central position in the Bloomsbury Group, her feminist undertakings, her troubled married life, her lesbian tendencies, her essays on various contemporary topics, her ancestry and her beauty, her place and function in the Hogarth Press, her radicalism in terms of narrative forms and finally her contribution to literary modernism at

the beginning of the twentieth century. It was to cope with her pain of loss caused by the death of her parents, her aunt, and many of her family friends at a young stage, that she sought recourse to writing at an early age.

It was through her father Leslie Stephen that Woolf had an entry into the world of literature. Her father was the editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography* and *The Cornhill Magazine*, and the author of *Hours in a Library*, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. He also wrote for *The Saturday Review*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Cornhill Magazine* as a true Victorian man of letters. His biographer Noel Annan wrote that he could surpass his contemporaries with his enormous range of readings and intellectual power. Her mother, Julia Stephen, was a stunningly beautiful woman and by the effect of her beauty she could turn to any thing such as tending to the sick, and perfecting the social order. From the sick she could derive the feeling of being needed. Within four years of the marriage of her parents they bore four children, Vanessa, Julian Thoby, Adrian, and Adeline Virginia.

Virginia was born on January 25, 1882 and spent happy times in her childhood as the four children lived and played in the nursery until the boys were grown up to go to school. The two sisters were left behind to the care of the parents and later several governesses. Virginia proved her inclination towards a culture of learning by showing an early interest in languages, history, and literature. Her home in Hyde Park Gate in the Kensington section of London was known for its upper-class taboos and gossips. But the children were fully aware of their neighbours and could share the same community feeling. But after the death of their parents they could not but leave that place.

From her childhood Virginia had a deep liking for her brother Thoby and sister Vanessa. But throughout her childhood she also vied with Vanessa for the affection of Thoby. Vanessa later in her *Notes on Virginia's Childhood* wrote about the ability of producing sarcasm in Virginia Woolf from an early age. Virginia was very conscious about people and relationships. The intensity of her relation with Vanessa lasted throughout their lives. Virginia had a habit of taking to understanding things verbally whether it was writing or speaking with her husband, her sister or any close friend.

The first combined literary effort of the Stephen brothers and sisters was their *The Hyde Park Gate News*, a small serial news paper written just to impress their parents. Virginia and Thoby presented most of the writings while Vanessa the illustrations. They covered daily events, made occasional announcements, caricatured so on and so forth. This paper also contained serial love stories which were of particular delight for Virginia. However, it was not their days spent at Hyde Park Gate but the summers they had spent at Talland House by the sea in Cornwall that Virginia later remembered most. Because Talland House was the place that became a place of family legends where the children could remember their parents most. The house also served as an early illustration of her attachment to the idea of a place to derive which she was struggling so hard.

However, the happiness of childhood met with an abrupt ending when her mother died on May 5, 1895. The fear of death was there to haunt Woolf throughout her whole life. But the peculiarity of her nature came out when her mother was lying dead and she was leaning towards her cheek to kiss her. Then she left, noting 'I feel nothing whatever.' But she was not all prepared to deal with the loss. After the demise of the mother, their half-sister Stella began to play the role of the mother by tending to the household, placating Stephen and caring for the children. But Stella too died after one year leaving Virginia motherless once again. Then it was the turn of Vanessa to play a role in the life of Virginia. But Vanessa was severely scolded by her father and Virginia found herself in an ambivalent position

In between 1899-1904, Virginia got a chance to read voraciously. During that time she read Macaulay, Pepys, Montaigne, Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Washington Irving, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt* and many more. In 1899, she took to book-binding and along with that lessons in Greek and Latin with Walter Pater's sister, Clara. Then, she developed a friendship with one Janet Case who provided so many topics to discuss. In addition to her friendship with Case, she also befriended several other women from Kensington one of whom, Kitty Lushington, provided the model for Clarissa Dalloway. She was a socialite who died an untimely death, believed to be a suicide.

Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father also passed away on February 22, 1904. He died of cancer. After his death the depressed and grief-stricken children

decided to move to Bloomsbury. Then Virginia exchanged several letters with her friends, Emma and Violet, whom she had met on her journey to Italy and Paris. The impression she gave of herself through those letters proved later to be of great help for her biographers. In those letters she was desperate and confused regarding her love for her father, as she was meant to live a tragic life surrounded by death. Actually, it was the beginning of what we can call mental ill-health or 'madness' in which she would try to kill herself. Once, Violet took Virginia to her house at Burnham Wood where she tried her first attempt at suicide by throwing herself out of the window. Although Virginia was not seriously hurt, her relatives were now clear regarding the madness in Virginia. Then she was sent to her aunt, Caroline Amelia, at Cambridge. She wrote to Violet that she was ready to begin writing again although the doctor advised her against that. Ultimately Vanessa called her back to their newly- built house at Gordon Square. During that time, Violet introduced her to Kathleen Lyttleton, the editor of the 'Women's Supplement' of the *Guardian*. Virginia began her work as a regular reviewer and writer of articles.

The new house at Gordon Square proved to be a freedom from family constraints and the old patriarchy under which they had lived. The Bloomsbury neighbourhood provided new scope to ponder over new materials and her diaries speak much of the details of lives she liked most to describe.

### **Bloomsbury Group**

It was the name given to a group of friends-writers, artists and intellectuals who began to meet in or about 1905 at the Bloomsbury house of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. Its members included Woolf herself, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, G. E. Moore, Desmond MacCarthy, David Garnett, and Lady Ottoline Morrell.

Although its members refused to be called a group in the formal sense, they were all united in a belief in the importance of the arts. Their philosophy could be best summarized by Moore who said that "one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge." They all were skeptical and tolerant, reacting against the artistic and social restraints of Victorian society. They exercised a considerable influence on the avant-garde generation of the early twentieth century. Accused by some of intellectual elitism, its reputation faltered in the 1940s and 1950s, but since 1960, there has been a critical revival of their achievements.

On Thursday evenings, these men gathered together and waited for the conversation to begin. Several topics were offered and discussed. It had a life-changing effect on Virginia. It was a place where Virginia could be more intelligent, more intellectual, investigative, and open. Some of the men were openly homosexual, and others seemed asexual without any marital attractiveness. Virginia described this understanding in her “Old Bloomsbury” in these words: “It seemed incredible that any of these men should want to marry us or we should want to marry them...” Though the situation was contrary to what Virginia wanted, and at first Virginia and Vanessa both were shy and quiet, they actively took part in the conversation about things they found intellectually exhilarating. Around 1905-07, Virginia was trying out for more intellectual opportunities. She regularly wrote and reviewed articles for a number of magazines, *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Academy*, *Speaker*, and so on. Then she got the job of an instructor of English composition in Morley College. But she was never a teacher in the making. Instead she began to gather some important distinction about class from her interactions with the working class which further found a place in her novels.

On November 20, 1906, Virginia’s brother Thoby died of typhoid. Thoby was her intellectual mentor after her father. The character of her brother comes alive as Jacob of *Jacob’s Room*. For several weeks after his passing away, Virginia kept him alive still further through letters to Violet Dickinson who was seriously ill. The death of her brother actually gave her the opportunity to recreate Thoby as a fictional character and through writing she could adjust to the shock of his death.

Since then Virginia led a more secluded life. In February, 1907, Clive and Vanessa got married which was simply another reminder of the fact that she was outside the circle of happiness. She then started to write *Reminiscences*, an account of her sister Vanessa, part memoir, part biography, part paean. In some ways, it was her other attempt to recreate her sister as a full-grown fictional character. At the same time she was working on her novel, *The Voyage Out*. By 1910, Bloomsbury could make its presence felt nationally. But this was also a time of illness for Virginia, which would run on through World War I. At the same time, Roger Fry was astonishing London audiences with the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Gallery and Woolf returned to work on her *The Voyage Out*.

### **Roger Fry and the Post-Impressionist Exhibition:**

Born in London, Roger Fry grew up in a wealthy Quaker family. He was educated at Clifton College and King's College, Cambridge, where he was also became a member of the Cambridge Apostles. Later, he went to Paris and then to Italy to study art. Eventually he became a specialist in landscape painting.

In 1906, Fry was appointed Curator of Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He got acquainted with the art of Paul Cézanne, and he shifted his scholarly interests away from the Italian Old Masters to the modern French art. In 1910, Fry organized the exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (a term which he coined) at the Grafton Galleries, London. Despite the derision with which the exhibition was met, Fry followed it up with the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in 1912. It was patronised by Lady Ottoline Morrell, with whom Fry had a romantic attachment. In 1913, he founded the Omega Workshops, a design workshop based in London's Fitzroy Square, whose members included Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant.

In January, 1912, Leonard Woolf proposed marriage to Virginia. Initially she neither refused nor accepted, but exchanged views through letters. Finally she got him as a partner who respected her both as a writer and as a person. Leonard was then working as a colonial civil servant at Ceylon but soon he was fed up with the colonial system. Their intimate friendship finally resulted in their marriage on August 12, 1912. Virginia's health started to deteriorate rapidly. Initially they also faced monetary troubles as Leonard did not have a stable job. He was temporarily working as a secretary for the Second post-Impressionist Exhibition with Roger Fry. But gradually Leonard strengthened his political career by working for the Women's Co-operative Guild, for the cause of British socialism, and for the Fabian Society, a socialist group responsible for the implementation of socialism in England.

### **Fabian Society**

The Fabian Society is a British socialist movement, whose purpose was to advance the principles of Social democracy through reforms, rather than revolutionary means. It is best known for its initial ground-breaking work beginning late in the nineteenth century and continuing up to World War I. The society laid many of the foundations of the Labour Party and subsequently affected the policies of states emerging from the decolonisation of the British Empire, especially India. Since its inception, the Fabian Society began attracting many prominent contemporary figures like George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells,

Annie Besant, Graham Wallas, Hubert Bland, Edith Nesbit, Sydney Olivier, Oliver Lodge, Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf, Ramsay MacDonald and Emmeline Pankhurst. Even Bertrand Russell later became a member. The two members John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White were delegates at the 1944 United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, commonly known as the Bretton Woods Conference. At the core of the Fabian Society were Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Together, they wrote numerous studies of industrial Britain, including alternative co-operative economics that applied to ownership of capital as well as land.

The society is still in existence today and forms a vanguard “think tank” of the centre-left New Labour movement in contemporary England.

Then Virginia made another attempt to commit suicide by taking more than 100 grains of veronal, used as sleeping tablets. Doctors called it neurasthenia, but fortunately she was once again saved. After recovery, Virginia again started reading and writing her diary. Then in 1915, the couple decided to buy Hogarth House and a printing press that was to play a crucial role in the times to come. But she became deranged again. Moreover, the revelation of the doctors that she would not be able to become a mother further triggered more illness in her. So, the only consolation left for her was the intellectual undertakings. Then the war, the Zeppeline attack on London, shattered most of their complacency as writers. The majority of the Bloomsbury intellectuals did not support the war for many reasons. But the same war became a part of Virginia’s aesthetic, as images of bombs and destruction began to appear in her writings. She could also understand the power she and Leonard could have with a press which could be used for wartime censorship and propaganda. On April 24, 1917, Virginia and Leonard’s dream of owning a press became a reality. As Leonard had believed, it could give her something else other than illness and writing to concentrate on.

### **Hogarth Press**

The Hogarth Press was founded in 1917 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. It was named after their house in Richmond, in whose dining-room the books were first printed. From being a hobby, it grew during the inter-war years to being a business, with the books being printed by commercial printers. In 1938, Woolf relinquished her interest in the business and it was then run as a partnership

by Leonard Woolf and John Lehmann until 1946, when it became an associate company of Chatto & Windus.

As well as publishing the works of the members of the Bloomsbury Group, the Hogarth Press was at the forefront of publishing works on Psychoanalysis and translations of foreign, especially Russian, works.

By 1921, depression again overpowered her. She once again began to think of suicide. She finished *Jacob's Room* by November. By 1922, she attempted another story, 'Mrs. Dalloway on Bond Street'.

But it received certain negative responses. Her illness progressed. She could use her fury and disillusionment with the doctor, to create the doctors of Septimus Warren Smith in her *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1922 also brought Virginia into contact with the most passionate romantic love of her life, Vita Sackville West, a novelist as well as the renowned lesbian. The year 1924 proved to be a major boon to the Hogarth Press as Leonard could successfully manage to get the publication rights of the first two volumes of Freud's *Collected Papers* to be published in English.

Then she tried to imitate her father and recreate him through her *To the Lighthouse*. For this she first went to Thomas Hardy as her father was the first to encourage him as a young writer. But the book reminded her of her parents and it left her tired and depressed. On May 1926, ultimately the book came out and brought the sisters closer. It was dedicated to Roger Fry for his support and encouragements in that undertaking. Then she tried to bring Vita back to life as a character in *Orlando*, who leaves through five hundred years and one sex change. Vita was both man and woman for Virginia and she finished the novel by March 1928. Following the success of the book Woolf was invited for lectures at Cambridge University. The papers that she delivered, *Women and Fiction*, later became *A Room of One's Own*, a famous feminist treatise. It was to address issues related to the position of a woman in a patriarchal society, her status in the family, her sexual life and so on.

Virginia was becoming a literary success. Her old friends were dying. Both Virginia and Leonard decided to go for a small vacation in Greece. When she returned to London, she was faced with the criticism of the contemporary critic, M. C. Bradbrook, who claimed that she usually used rhetorical paddling

to avoid saying things which were truly harsh. By late May, she again underwent depression which included fainting and headaches. Then, to soothe herself she turned to *The Years*. She began to write this novel in October 1932. She planned it as a novel-essay, altering forms by chapters. She was working steadily on the role of the women and their sexual lives in that book. By 1938, she finished her *Three Guineas*. It was the time for Hitler's invasion of Austria. And to avoid the mental disturbances caused by the war, she retreated into her work. She was worried about the reception of *Three Guineas*. In that book, she had denounced both the war and those who fought for the war. The atmosphere of the country was tense with the talk of war and the novel made an entry into literary circles at the right time. Virginia published *Roger Fry* in March, 1939, and started to work on her own autobiographical piece *Between the Acts*, following the advice of Vanessa.

The situation that followed was more grim. Writing, which was regarded as a major force in society became obsolete and lost much of its relevance. There was little time to think about fiction. Virginia was trying a common history-book but in vain. Everywhere there was the sound of fighting and explosions and there was no role to be played by the writers. Virginia again started to feel lost. She started to write again to make her presence felt. She made another suicidal attempt by drowning in the river Ouse, but escaped death. Finally on March 28, 1941, Virginia left a suicide note for Vanessa and Leonard, put on her fur coat, took her walking-stick, left towards the river, added stones to her pockets and drowned herself. Leonard found the suicide note and understood that his wife was no more, although the dead body could not be found until the next month, on April 18.

There are various views regarding her death. Some people suggest that Woolf's suicide resulted from an old madness which started to show its effect, and the terrified Woolf decided to commit suicide rather than suffer the same tortures of her former experience with mental illness. Some also opine that she failed to cope with contemporary war-ridden England with its terror of bombing as a part of World War II. Other still suggest that she was not willing to further burden her husband with her madness.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Name the major publications of Virginia Woolf.
2. List the major incidents that altered Virginia Woolf's life.
3. Do you think that the happenings at home triggered her mental ill-health?
4. Who were the people from whom Virginia got intellectual inspiration?
5. How do her letters to various friends help the readers in knowing her better?
6. How do you think the intellectual surrounding had a dominant effect on Virginia's upbringing as a writer?

**1.4 PLACING THE WORK**

A novel like *Mrs. Dalloway* played a vital role in British fictional modernism. In its different ways, the novel explores and asserts the relevance of certain very crucial and essential states of human sensitivity and intensity; and connects the two with a sense of modern Godless life constructed like a work of art with a reality hidden within it. However, Virginia Woolf's career, her sensibility as a writer and her attitude to modern fictions were greatly shaped by the World War I. Since she also happened to be a part of the Bloomsbury Group, the literary and intellectual community shaped her thinking mind to a great extent. Bloomsbury for her was not just an intellectual community, but also a social caste, an attitude to life and values, an intimacy amongst friends, marriages and much more.

*Mrs. Dalloway* as an example of modern fiction is 'modern' because of its sense of life, which can be experienced aesthetically and perhaps this was the dominant idea she was trying to express through her other novels also. This novel became well-known for its departure from earlier representations of reality and was never meant to be complete like the other realist novels. It can be placed in an age of changed relations and fractured connections.

In her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919), she says that modern novelists should not choose to create plots, comedy, tragedy or catastrophe in the traditional sense. Again, elsewhere in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), she had insisted that the modern novel was a novel of character and she very whimsically claimed that by 1910, human nature had changed.

**SAQ:**

Relate *Mrs. Dalloway* with 'Modernism'. (60 words)

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**1.5 SUMMING UP**

After going through the previous sections you have seen that to Virginia Woolf's credit goes the achievements of nine novels, several feminist essays, the critical books, and the biography of Roger Fry, several periodical articles, the diaries, and the letters, most of which were published posthumously. All of them seem central to her time, her intellectual world, and modern artistic ideas. A new questioning of realism, a new kind of experimentalism, and the rise of feminism have all contributed a lot to the understanding of the nature of her works and their significance at present. Although her sense of society, history and human condition was set within its chosen limits, she did not lack a sense of history and society. But she rebelled against the role that social and historical forces were made to play in creating the seeds of modern writings.

Woolf's novels are more domestic in nature and are enclosed in their own sense of aesthetic wholeness. But their significance also lie in their assumptions about literary modernism because the modernist belief was never founded on the assumption that reality had changed but on the attitudes and tools of perceiving reality. Moreover, the contemporary discoveries in psychology, philosophy, and painting supported much of what she was trying to prove.

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## Unit 2

### The Novel

#### Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 The Story in Brief
- 2.4 The Characters
- 2.5 Critical Reception
- 2.6 Summing up

#### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- *narrate* the story in brief (if there is a clear-cut story)
- *identify* the various characters and place them in the context of the novel
- *situate* the novel in a specific literary context of the early twentieth century
- *find out* the significance of the novel in its own time as well as in the later periods.

#### 2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit of the block, an attempt has been made to acquaint you with larger issues pertaining to Virginia Woolf's upbringing as a modernist writer and the establishment of what she has written in the context of the early twentieth century, both literary and socio-political. However, in this unit, we will lead you one step ahead in your endeavour to know Virginia Woolf as a writer. We will also try to discuss the novel in its totality. As you know Woolf, through her unique writing style could draw the attention of millions of readers. This is what is proved once again by her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In this unit, we will try to discuss the text in its totality. At the same time we will lead you one step ahead in your endeavour to know

Virginia Woolf as a writer. However, you will do well if you make a point of reading the 'text' of the novel.

### **2.3 THE STORY IN BRIEF**

Clarissa Dalloway decided to buy the flowers for the party that evening herself. Lucy had so much other work to do and the morning air was fresh and inviting which always reminded her of a morning when, at eighteen, Peter Walsh used to sit beside and comment on vegetables. He still wrote boring letters to Clarissa and would be returning from India someday.

Clarissa thought of the noise that fell over Westminster just before Big Ben rang. As the bell rang out, she looked at the people around her, living in the moment, and loving life. It was June and the Great War was over. Life sprang out all around her with a passion, dancing girls and ponies and shopkeepers in their windows. Clarissa was a part of it. Entering the park, she was met with a deeper silence. Hugh Whitbread, an old friend, walked towards her just to assure that he would attend the party even though his wife, Evelyn, was ill. The Whitbreads always came to London to see doctors. Though she adored him, Hugh had a way of making Clarissa feel underdressed. Richard, her husband, could not stand Hugh and Peter also had hated him.

Thinking of Peter again, she looked around her and felt that he would have been lovely to walk with, at this moment. She could not stop such thoughts and memories reminded her of Peter. Peter would not have cared for the sights of the morning. He cared more for people's characters and he often scolded her for her superficiality. She would be a perfect hostess. Clarissa found herself (through memory of course) arguing again with Peter about why she could not marry him. She knew she was right, he would not have given her any independence, but still it bothered her. Learning that he had married a flimsy Indian woman angered her greatly.

Clarissa knew not to define or label anyone because she felt at one with the world. Nor she was clever. She simply wanted to know people. Most of all, she loved living in the moment. Yet, she was not irked by the thought of death. Clarissa felt that pieces of herself existed wherever she had ever been. Musing among books, Clarissa could not find a suitable one to bring. She wanted Evelyn to look pleased when she walked in. She realized her

baseness, always wanting to do things that would make people like her instead of doing them for their own value, as Richard did. If she could live life all over again, she would look like Lady Bexborough. She disliked her own little beaked face and stick body. She felt invisible at times.

Bond Street fascinated her. Her daughter Elizabeth was not fascinated by any of the delicate gloves in the shops. Elizabeth was fascinated with Miss Kilman, a callous Communist who made one feel small because she was privately starving and depriving herself for the Russians. The hate that welled up inside of Clarissa scared her. She entered Mulberry's florist and was greeted by eager Miss Pym. Miss Pym was happy to help because Clarissa had been very kind. This year, however, she looked older. Clarissa was enraptured by the various smells and colors of the many flowers. She knew Miss Pym liked her and tried to surmount the hatred she had felt when suddenly a pistol shot was heard in the street.

The loud noise of a motorcar is heard. Passers-by claimed to have seen the distinguished face of the Prince or Queen in the window. The disturbance created by the car still remained even after it had passed away. The street came to a stop and Septimus Warren Smith, a man of thirty, mentally and emotionally devastated by his experience in World War I, imagined that he was the cause of the stop and anticipated horror. His wife, Lucrezia (Rezia) could not help but believe that others noticed his strangeness, as if he wanted to kill himself. He tried to please her, since she knew no one in England. Clarissa hoped that it was the Queen whose face people had seen. The car was delayed until the chauffeur spoke to a policeman, who allowed the car to pass. She imagined Hugh Whitbread at Buckingham Palace and her own upcoming party. The people on Bond Street took a few moments to return to daily life. The car continued through Piccadilly. Meanwhile, a crowd formed at Buckingham's gates. Suddenly, Emily Coates, a woman watching the events, noticed an airplane making letters out of smoke. Roaming across London's sky, the plane's trail mystified its observers.

**Stop to Consider:**

Look at the intricacies involved in the characters introduced so far. Also try to think of the little details of day-to-day life that are provided in this story and also try to find out their significance in the novel.

In Regent's Park, Rezia tried to show Septimus the letters since the doctor had suggested distracting him with things outside of himself. Septimus believed the letters were signaling to him. The beauty brought tears to his eyes. The voice of a nursemaid nearby vibrated in his ears and brought the trees gloriously to life for him. Rezia thought People had noticed him. She wished he were dead. She walked to the fountain with a view to distract herself. She could tell no one about his state and felt alone. He was not the same man she had married. The doctor said nothing about what was wrong with him. Septimus sat, hearing the sparrows sing in Greek and babbling aloud. When Rezia returned, he jumped up, moving them away from people and ignoring her. Maisie Johnson, a girl fresh from Edinburgh, asked the couple directions to the subway. Rezia replied abruptly, hoping Maisie would not notice Septimus' madness. Maisie was unnerved by both and would remember them for years. Mrs. Carrie Dempster, an older woman in the park, noticed Maisie and was reminded of her younger days. She imagined Maisie getting married, asserting that she, Carrie, would have done things differently if she had a second chance. Meanwhile, Mr. Bentley, a man sweeping around his tree in Greenwich, thought the airplane's effort represented the concentration of a man's soul. In front of St. Paul's Cathedral, a seedy looking man was awed by the thought of the members of society who were invited into its halls. The plane continued aimlessly, and letters pouring from its looping motion.

Clarissa returned home, wondering at what everyone was looking. Stepping into her house she felt as a nun returning to her daily habit. She breathed in happily while Lucy stood by, hesitant. Clarissa noticed a note that read that Lady Bruton had requested Richard's company for lunch. Clarissa felt annoyed. The lunch parties were supposed to be quite amusing. Clarissa felt alone. She withdrew upstairs to the solitary attic room that she had occupied ever since her illness. There, she liked to read Baron Marbot's Memoirs. The room was cool with a white sheet stretched tightly across the narrow bed. She wondered if she had failed Richard and thought back to her close connections with women, namely her old best friend, Sally Seton. She had known what men feel toward women with Sally.

**Stop to Consider:**

One noticeable thing in the story line of this novel is that Woolf did not divide it into chapters. This is common in other 'stream-of-consciousness' novels also. Stream-of-consciousness' novelists, deviating from the conventional norms of realism, sought to establish in their fictions what we can call 'psychological realism'. Hence, the story-line they were working on came under its effect and consequently, any division in terms of chapters and episodes was necessarily sought to be rejected.

She remembered Sally Saton and the way they had kissed one night. A moment later, Peter Walsh and Joseph, an old family friend, had intruded, perhaps purposely, since Peter was prone to jealousy. Clarissa was horrified at the intrusion. Clarissa remembered. Thinking of Peter, she wondered if he would think her older when he returned from India. Since her sickness, she had become pale. She thought her face pointed and her body shaped like a diamond. She thought herself to be a good woman even if Lady Bruton had not invited her. Clarissa found her loveliest green dress and took it downstairs to mend. The doorbell rang and she heard the voice of a man demanding to see her. Abruptly, her door opened and she turned to hide her dress, as if she were protecting her chastity.

Peter Walsh entered, taking her hands and kissing them. They both trembled. Peter noticed that she looked older. Clarissa observed that Peter was very much the same. He played with his pocketknife. Peter asked about her family and imagined that Clarissa had been mending her dresses and attending parties continuously during the time he had gone. Clarissa asked him if he remembered Bourton. But it reminded him of Clarissa's refusal to marry him. Clarissa too was caught in the wave of emotion. The memories brought Peter close to tears. He did not want to tell her about his new love Daisy because Clarissa would think him a failure. He felt that Clarissa had changed for the worse ever since marrying Richard.

Clarissa asked about his life. There was too much to tell her, but he mentioned that he was in love with a girl in India who was still married to a Major in the Indian Army. He had come to London to see about a divorce. Peter's life had been such a folly, thought Clarissa. Still, she was happy for him. Peter suddenly began to weep. Clarissa comforted him, kissing him, and stroking his hands before she retained control and sat back. She felt very much at

ease with Peter now and realized this gaiety would be hers always if she had married him. Clarissa joined Peter by the window. He seized her by the shoulders and asked if she were happy with Richard. Suddenly, Elizabeth entered. Clarissa said, "Here is my Elizabeth" Peter greeted her and rushed out of the door. Clarissa reminded him not to forget her party.

The bells of St. Margaret's echoed across London, and Peter associated St. Margaret's graceful entrance with Clarissa as the hostess. He imagined her coming into a room years ago and was swept up in the intimacy of the memory. As the bells died out, they reminded Peter that Clarissa's heart had been ill, and he imagined her falling to the floor, dying. He shook himself from this image and reminded himself that he was not old yet. He had never liked people like the Dalloways and Whitbreads. He had been a rebel, a pioneer, and civilization needed young men like him. Boys in uniform marched by Peter and alone in Trafalgar Square, he had not felt so young in years. A young woman passed who enchanted Peter. He transformed her into the woman he had always wanted and began following her through the streets. She seemed to speak silently to Peter, to his soul. He kept up with her until she slowed before a building and disappeared inside. He had had his fun.

He was still too early to meet the lawyer and so walked to Regent's Park to sit. The day was beautiful, and he felt a certain pride for the civility and accomplished air of London. His Anglo-Indian family had administered the affairs of India for years and, though he despised the empire and army, he still felt proud. Thoughts of his past continued to combat him, likely as a result of seeing Clarissa. He thought of a fight he had had with her father at Bourton. Peter looked for a secluded seat in the park but settled for one next to a nurse and sleeping baby. Peter again thought of Elizabeth, thinking that she was peculiar looking and probably did not get along with her mother. Smoking a cigar, he curled the smoke from his lips and decided to try to speak with Elizabeth alone that night. Then he fell into a deep sleep to dream of the gray nurse knitting beside Peter.

As Peter dreams, the narrator reveals the symbolic story of a solitary traveler. The visions that enter the mind of the solitary traveler allow Peter to conceive of him. The traveler sees a figure at the end of the path. She is a giant figure at the end of a great ride. The solitary traveler rides and reaches the mother-

like figure. Suddenly, Peter awoke and understood that he had been dreaming of a scene at Bourton years ago, when he had been deeply in love with Clarissa. They had been discussing the housemaid who had married the neighboring squire. Clarissa criticized the maid's impropriety. Sally mentioned that the maid had given birth before the marriage. Clarissa was abhorred, her manner prudish. The coldness she emanated chilled the whole room and, awkwardly, Clarissa left the table. Peter grew increasingly gloomy. At supper, he arrived late. He did not look at Clarissa at first but when he did, he noticed that she was speaking to a young man. It was Richard Dalloway and suddenly, Peter knew Richard would marry Clarissa. Peter could not hear of what Clarissa and Richard spoke but he noticed her maternal manner toward him. After dinner, they sat in the drawing room. Clarissa approached Peter to introduce him to Richard. Peter retorted that she was the perfect hostess. After that the young people decided to go boating in the moonlight and they left Peter standing in the drawing room. Clarissa ran back inside to find Peter. He was suddenly happy. They walked down to the docks talking and, when the boat reached an island, they sat on the grass together.

See the triangle in the relations among Peter, Clarissa and Richard, which is soured to leave each one disturbed throughout their whole life.

Peter felt awful on that hot sunny day. Still, when the nurse's little girl ran into a woman's leg, Peter laughed aloud. The leg belonged to Lucrezia Warren Smith, who had left Septimus to talk to himself and was wondering why she should suffer. Rezia realized that it was time to take Septimus to see Sir William Bradshaw, who might be able to help her. Septimus would probably be talking to himself, or to his friend Evans, who had died in the War. There were times when the couple was happy but then Septimus would mention killing himself, because, he explained, people were wicked. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. Holmes said that one was responsible for one's own health.

Peter Walsh saw the unhappy couple. London had never been so enchanting. Peter had always been able to change his mood rapidly. In the five years between 1918-1923, London had changed. Respectable

newspapers could write about bathrooms. Single women could put on make-up in public. Of all of Clarissa's old friends, he had always liked Sally best. She could see through the artificiality of the Whitbreads and Dalloways. The two had bonded over this dislike for artifice, and the fact that Clarissa's father liked neither one of them. And, now Peter would have to ask Hugh Whitbread or Dalloways for a job. Richard was not really so bad, Peter thought. Clarissa had probably fallen in love with him because of his ability to take charge. She thought Richard independent for not liking Shakespeare's sonnets.

Peter struggled to remind himself that he was no longer in love with her. Even Clarissa would also admit that she cared too much for societal rank. She cared about the dukes and duchesses. Her opinions, from marriage, had become subdued by Richard. Still, she was one of the largest skeptics Peter knew. She went through a phase of reading Huxley after seeing her sister, Sylvia, killed in an accident. It was Clarissa's nature, however, to enjoy. She needed people to bring out her sense of humor. She surely adored Elizabeth, who would think her and her friends, like Peter, boring and tiresome. Peter's passions remained strong but, being older, he could analyze them more objectively. He no longer really needed people anymore. Perhaps, he truly was in love with Daisy even though he scarcely had thought of her recently. Because Daisy loved him in return, he could relax. Jealousy had caused his rush of emotions at Clarissa's that morning. After all, his coming to London was to finalize his divorce.

Septimus was one of the first volunteers for the army in World War I. He went to protect Shakespeare and Isabel. Septimus gained strength and was promoted. He became friends with his officer, Evans, who died just before the war ended. Septimus was glad that he felt no grief over the death, until he realized that he had lost the ability to feel. In a panic, he married a young Italian girl, Lucrezia. Lucrezia likes his studiousness. The couple moved to London and Septimus returned to his post. He wondered if life lacked meaning. He read Shakespeare again and understood now that Shakespeare had despised love between man and woman. After five years of marriage, Lucrezia wanted to have a baby. Septimus, however, could not fathom bringing a child into the world. Rezia became increasingly unhappy. Septimus unhappily felt nothing when she wept. He wondered if he would go mad and, progressively, he did surrender to madness.

Dr. Holmes could not help. Septimus knew nothing was physically wrong with him. He felt nothing; he had married without love. The third time Holmes came to see him, Septimus refused him. Holmes pushed in anyway. Even though Septimus had talked of suicide, Holmes told him to shake off his depression. Septimus felt that Holmes, representative of human nature, was after him. He hated Holmes. Rezia could not understand this dislike. Without Rezia's support, Septimus felt deserted. He heard the world telling him to kill himself. One moment, he saw Evans, and cried out to him. Rezia entered his room, panicked, and called for Holmes. Upon seeing Holmes, Septimus screamed in horror. The doctor, annoyed, advised that they see Dr. Bradshaw.

The Warren Smiths went to visit Sir William Bradshaw. Rezia guessed his home because of the prestigious gray motorcar in front of the house. Bradshaw would often have to travel long distances to see rich country patients. Bradshaw earned his prestige through hard work. As Septimus walked in, Bradshaw knew immediately that Septimus had suffered a mental breakdown. He also recognized the great mistakes Dr. Holmes had made. In the short conversation Bradshaw had with Septimus, he learned that Septimus placed great importance on symbols. It did not detail the crimes to humanity that Septimus pictured he had committed. Bradshaw took Mrs. Smith to a room nearby and asked if Septimus had spoken of killing himself. Embarrassed, she replied that he had. Bradshaw reassured her that Septimus needed a long rest in a country house to regain a sense of proportion. Rezia doubted that Septimus would agree but Bradshaw responded that it was a case of the law. When they returned to Septimus, Rezia burst out that he was ill and needed to go to a home. Septimus asked if it was a home of Dr. Holmes. Though slightly annoyed, Bradshaw assured him that it was a home of his. Septimus equated Bradshaw with Holmes and with the evil of human nature. Septimus wondered if he confessed his crimes, would they let him go. But, he could not remember his crimes. As the couple left, Bradshaw told Rezia he would take care of everything. Rezia felt angry and deserted. Bradshaw had given them his three-quarters of an hour and he had prescribed 'proportion' to straighten out Septimus. Yet, as the narrator explains, there is another side to 'proportion', termed conversion. One had to wonder if Bradshaw did not like to impose his will on others weaker than he. Bradshaw showed his patients that he was in control, and they, often, broke down in his presence. He then remade them in his likeness.

An inherent satire on the characters of Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw can be seen underlying in this novel. The doctors talking of reviving a necessary 'proportion' in society actually failed in curing Septimus.

The Smiths traveled up Harley Street around the same time that Hugh Whitbread passed a nearby clock. The narrator jumps to Hugh. Hugh was the type to delve into matters superficially. Still, he had been an honorable member of high society for years. He was always impeccably dressed and maintained the best manners. On this day, as with every visit to Lady Bruton, he brought carnations for the luncheon. Lady Bruton preferred Richard Dalloway to Hugh. She had invited both to lunch to ask for their services. However, she thought it best to wait until they had eaten to approach the subject. Richard had a great respect for Lady Bruton, as she was the great granddaughter of a General. As they neared the serving of coffee, Lady Bruton abruptly asked about Clarissa. Clarissa doubted that the Lady liked her, and it may have been true. Lady Bruton cared more for politics than people and thought women caused their husbands to reject military posts. Suddenly, Lady Bruton mentioned that Peter Walsh was back in town. She was interested in seeing Richard's response. Richard thought that, when he returned home, he would tell Clarissa he loved her.

Richard and Hugh stood at a street corner, hoping to part but frozen in place. Finally, they decided to enter a shop. Richard had not cared about Canada and he did not care about the necklaces Hugh saw in the shop. He then remembered Clarissa and Peter and thought of buying Clarissa a gift. Soon, however, he was so disgusted by Hugh's pomposity that he wished to leave. He did want to buy Clarissa something, though. He bought Clarissa roses and rushed home to tell her that he loved her. He had not said it in years. Truly, he thought, it was a miracle that he had married her. Clarissa had said to him that she was right refusing Peter. She wanted support from him. He rushed through parks and past homeless women. He rushed by Buckingham Palace, full of prestige and tradition. Richard felt very happy, rushing home to profess his love.

Clarissa had purposely decided not to invite Ellie as she was a bore. She was also annoyed that Elizabeth was praying with Miss Kilman. The clock struck three and Richard walked in, holding flowers. He could not bring

himself to say he loved her, but she understood. Clarissa thanked him and filled him in on her list of annoyances. Richard told her about Hugh being at lunch and being an ass, and Clarissa mentioned Peter's visit. Richard held her hand. He then hurried off to some committee meeting, though he was not sure himself whether it was about the Armenians or Albanians. Before leaving, Richard told Clarissa to rest, as he always did, because a doctor once had suggested that she rest after lunch. Elizabeth and Miss Kilman were about to leave.

Desperate, Clarissa yelled after Elizabeth to remember her party, but Elizabeth did not hear. Clarissa hated how Miss Kilman wanted to convert everyone, and made others feel small. Clarissa simply wanted people to be themselves. Clarissa pondered love and religion, feeling that the combination had the power to destroy. She thought of Peter, who was filled with knowledge of the world, but who loved flimsy women. Big Ben struck three-thirty. Clarissa noticed the old woman whom she could view in the house adjacent through her window. It seemed to Clarissa that the ringing of the bell forced the lady to move away from her window. All was connected. One needed neither religion nor love to make the connections. Another clock, which always rang slightly after Big Ben, reminded Clarissa to prepare for her party.

As Elizabeth looked for her gloves in the market, Miss Kilman desperately hoped the girl would stay with her longer. But, Elizabeth wanted to go. Miss Kilman detained her by saying that she had not finished eating. She asked Elizabeth if she would go to her mother's party. Elizabeth responded that she would probably have to, though she did not like parties. Miss Kilman replied that she never went to parties because she was never invited. She continued talking, feeling sorry for herself and driving a small wedge between herself and Elizabeth. Elizabeth then paid her bill and left. Miss Kilman sat alone, despondent. She had lost her Elizabeth. Clarissa had won, after all. Elizabeth enjoyed the niceness of the day and decided to take a bus ride. Her life was changing. Already men were falling in love with her. She felt that the attention was silly. Elizabeth wished only to play in the country, with her father. She sat on the bus and enjoyed the fresh air. Meditating on Miss Kilman, she wondered if Miss Kilman's idea about the poor was correct. She paid another penny so that she could continue riding the bus onto the Strand, a working quarter of London. Miss Kilman had

said that all professions were open to women of Elizabeth's generation and so Elizabeth thought she might become a doctor, politician, or farmer. She was a lazy child, but the ride motivated her. The people in the Strand rushed about with such importance. Nearing St. Paul's cathedral, she knew it was getting late and she turned for home.

Septimus looked out his window and Rezia was tensed to see Septimus smile as he often did. Sometimes he would demand that she record his thoughts. Lately, he would suddenly cry out about truth and seeing his old friend, Evans. The doctors had said he should not get excited. He would speak of Holmes in terms of the evil of human nature. To Septimus, all this was true. This day, Rezia sat sewing a hat for Mrs. Peters, a woman she did not like but who had been nice to the Smiths. Septimus watched Rezia's form and found it perfect. Septimus fell asleep, slowly slipping from reality. When he awoke, Rezia had gone out. Rezia burst in, still happy. She felt that things had returned to normal. She thought back to when she had first met him, and how he had understood the things that she said. She asked if he liked the hat, but Septimus just sat, looking at her. He believed that he could feel her mind, but he also remembered that Bradshaw had said that he would need to separate himself. It bothered him that Bradshaw had seemed so demanding. Rezia told him it was because he had wanted to kill himself. He inquired where his writings were and she brought them to him. He wanted them burnt but she promised to keep them from the doctors. She also promised that the doctors would not separate her from him. Septimus imagined his wife triumphing over the doctors. Rezia heard the voice of Dr. Holmes and ran to stop him from seeing Septimus. Holmes pushed by her. Rezia, Septimus knew, was on his side. Holmes continued up the stairs toward Septimus. Septimus tried to think of ways to escape. The window was the only option he could fathom. He waited to the last minute, enjoying the sun, and then threw himself onto the fence below. Holmes ran in, shouting that Septimus was a coward. She thought of happy memories. Slowly, she realized that Septimus was dead. People outside carried the body away.

Peter appreciated the ambulance that sped past him as a sign of civility and communal empathy. His tendency to become emotionally attached to people and events had always been a flaw. He especially enjoyed the company of women. He thought back to a time when he and Clarissa rode on top of a

bus, and she came up with a transcendental theory for how she knew people simply by living in a society. Peter did notice that her theory worked for their relationship. The meetings they had experienced over the years were often painful while happening but later gave Peter food for thought when he least expected it. Memories of Clarissa would pop up anywhere. His memories of her were mostly at Bourton. He would always feel bitterly that Clarissa had refused him, though he knew that their marriage would have failed. He thought of Daisy and his ways of charming women. Daisy was only twenty-four and had two young children. He decided that he would attend Clarissa's party, in order to ask Richard what the English government was planning to do in India. Peter moved to the porch and watched the hot day dwindle into night. He enjoyed watching the young lovers dawdle. Finally, he left the hotel and slowly moved toward the Dalloway's home. The symmetry of London's squares and streets struck him as beautiful. It seemed as if everyone was dining out. Bustling, dressed up Londoners scattered to and fro. Reaching Clarissa's home, Peter breathed deeply to prepare himself for the challenge. Instinctively, his hand opened the knife blade in his pocket.

Lucy and the other servants ran around in final preparation for the party. They had heard that the Prime Minister was coming. Guests were already arriving and the ladies began to move upstairs. Lucy reported to the others how lovely Elizabeth looked. A few servants were hired for Clarissa's parties every year. As the guests entered, they were each announced and Clarissa would say to each, "How delightful to see you!" Peter felt that Clarissa was insincere and wished he had gone somewhere else for the evening. Clarissa noticed Peter and felt ashamed. His presence made her judge herself. She wondered why she threw parties and felt instantly that this party would fail. It angered Clarissa that Peter came to criticize. And, yet, she thought her parties did matter.

Richard was kind enough to say hello. A moment later, Peter greeted Richard and they walked off. Clarissa continued greeting all who entered. Sally Saton was passing through London and came to the party, uninvited. Clarissa was overjoyed to see her. She noticed that Sally looked older; Sally told her that she had five boys. The presence of the The Prime Minister was announced and Clarissa had to attend to him. Surprising to most, he was an ordinary looking man. He walked about with Clarissa, then Richard, acting

as a symbol of English society. Peter thought the English were snobs. Soon, Peter spotted Hugh Whitbread, another reminder of society. Lady Bruton met privately with the Prime Minister. Then, Clarissa continued to lead the Prime Minister around, making him feel at ease. Though intoxicated with the energy of her party, Clarissa retained a hollow feeling. As she grew older, parties were somewhat less fulfilling. On the other hand, hatred, brought about by a picture that triggered thoughts of Miss Kilman, managed to fulfill her. Clarissa caught sight of Sir Harry and greeted him with love. Clarissa wished she could dance for the young people, but there was no room. Spotting her aunt, Clarissa went to old Helena Parry. She had gotten along so well with Peter, so Clarissa brought Peter to her. Clarissa promised Peter that they would speak later. Sally noticed Peter with Miss Parry. Clarissa hoped they would wait until she had time. She remembered Sally's vigor from youth, her insatiable vivacity. Sally could not illuminate a room as she once had. Settling down to a normal marriage was not expected of her, Clarissa thought. Sally sat with Peter. Clarissa saw them as the link to her past.

The Bradshaws entered and Clarissa hurried to greet them. Clarissa and Richard had never liked the couple. They were so late because, as Sir William had received a call about a young man who had killed himself. Clarissa was appalled that the Bradshaws were bringing 'death' into the party. Distraught, Clarissa wandered into a little room but no one was there. The thought of death overwhelmed her. She could feel for the man, who had been Septimus. She thought of her past, Peter, and Sally, and she wondered if the man had been happy. Clarissa realized why she despised Sir Bradshaw; he made the life of his patients intolerable. The death seemed her disgrace, a fate into which she might have slipped if it had not been for Richard. He made her life happy, she thought. Clarissa looked out the window and noticed that the old woman across was looking back toward her. Clarissa felt revived by the knowledge that Septimus had thrown his life away. She returned to the party, to find Peter and Sally. Richard stood talking to the Bradshaws before they left. Elizabeth caught his eye and wandered over to him. Richard was amazed how grown up she looked. Sally could tell that Elizabeth and Richard shared a special bond. Almost everyone had left the party now. Sally rose to speak with Richard. Peter

waited a minute, soon overcome by great elation. He realized that he was happy because Clarissa had finally come.

So, the story ends like this. *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of the most complete, and ambiguous fictional representations of modern life. It is also Woolf's thorough experiment with the new technique of interior monologue. The novel plays subtly with the problem of identity which is both multiple and singular, both public and private, and more generally with human relationship. The meaning of the story lies in its complexity. But following recent ideas from Post-structuralism, we can say that the complexity actually gives birth to other possible ways of understanding the storyline in the text.

**Stop to Consider:**

French structuralist critic Roland Barthes makes a distinction between a "Readerly Text" and "Writerly Text" in his book *S/Z* (1970). The "Readerly" text is that we passively consume because it seems to offer us a real world of characters and events like we find in the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist novels. But a "Writerly" text is one which forces us to produce its meaning rather than consume it. A text like *Mrs. Dalloway* falls in the second category. One has to struggle hard to have a command over what is happening inside the text before feeling complacent about their own ability of interpreting the text.

**SAQ:**

1. Try to connect the various incidents and happenings and see how they help in the formation of the novel? (100 words)

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2. What idea do you get about the characters resented through the novel? (60 words)

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3. Why do you think that Modernist novels usually do not contain any clear-cut story? (50 words)

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## **2.4 THE CHARACTERS**

It is a debatable question if the characters in fiction usually emerge from a chronological account of events and the characters' reaction to those events or it is the duty of the novelists to provide description of the character just when they make an entry into the story. However, it has been unanimously accepted that both ways are adopted for presenting characters in fictions. Actually, the situation described in the fiction itself helps the characters to emerge. But as a result of the modernist pre-occupation with the nature of the states of consciousness, modern writers found it difficult to conform to the traditional methods. They realized that a psychologically accurate account of what a man/woman is at a given moment cannot be provided through these traditional methods. Subsequently, they became interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments but which are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature independent of any given time. The problem of character portrayal is central to stream-of-consciousness fiction. The great advantage and justification of it lies in its potentialities for representing characters more accurately and realistically.

### **Clarissa Dalloway**

The central character in the novel is perhaps Clarissa Dalloway herself. She cannot be regarded as a romantic heroine now at the age of 52; she has been ill and seriously weakened by influenza. She is at a loss throughout her life. But she is also the hostess of an upper middle class English life, herself being the wife of an Imperial Officer. However, the affairs of the husband do not interest her. But her social life does make sense as it gives meaning to her existence. Peter Walsh, who wanted to marry her thirty years ago, now reappears. In fact Clarissa rediscovers herself and her unifying wholeness while walking through London. Still her sense of wholeness is never complete as the evening party is interrupted by death. Throughout the book she is conscious of the confined spaces of her life. In her recollection of the past through her presence the moments of choosing between Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway come to the forefront. She sleeps alone in an attic room of her house which frequently remind her of some wholeness lost. Her relationship with Sally Saton with whom she had half fallen in love

also goes unfulfilled. Clarissa does not have any alternative and she is tied to the world of power and government; she simply remained to be the Mrs. Dalloway of Richard Dalloway.

To Peter she was a snob and to Richard she was childish. Yet, she loved her parties because she loved sharing in people's lives. Parties were her offering to the world, her gift. Clarissa was amazed by the very essence of life, moment to moment, the simple pleasures of seeing beauty.

### **Richard Dalloway**

Richard Dalloway is the husband of Clarissa. He is an important Conservative Member of the Parliament who is always busy with public affairs with little concern for the wife. Since the beginning of their married life, both of them are living a life of freedom and Clarissa never felt it necessary to ask her husband whether he was in a committee or conducting a meeting somewhere even if she had needed him beside her.

### **Peter Walsh**

Peter Walsh is another significant character. He happened to be a guy who loved Clarissa. We meet him on the day of the party and as the person for whom Mrs. Dalloway is saying that she would buy the flowers herself. It was by no means an accident that he had been in India for twenty years and has now arrived at London after a lapse of five years. His long absence has intensified his impressions on the people and more generally on London. For him now people look different, and unlike the pre-war London, there is a new sense of freedom and tolerance. He feels that now, just like in India, he could fall in love with every woman in London. He romantically starts finding "design, art everywhere". But the post war London also makes Peter aware of his failure as at the age of fifty three he has returned to London to look for a job. But although Peter Walsh was a failure he had a unique power of seeing through the shallowness and snobbery of the London upper class people. The varied career and a cosmopolitan background sum up his friends in London when revisiting them after a long gap. Peter Walsh in a way placed Clarissa within the London society, "she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world."

After meeting Clarissa in the morning, Peter goes to Regent's Park where he falls asleep on a bench. Waking up he remembers his unhappy days when he was hopelessly in love with Clarissa who callously rejected her.

### **Sir William Bradshaw**

Bradshaw is the doctor to whom Rezia brings Septimus for consulting the reasons of his eccentric and strange behaviour. Overconfident of his own vision of life, Bradshaw diagnoses Septimus as having lost the sense of 'proportion' and he advises "rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books; without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stones six comes out weighing twelve." What could be funnier than this for a doctor to deny the validity of the tormented experience and to impose his own will upon those who suffer. Woolf chose the character of Bradshaw from her own experience of the doctors who had treated her during the time of her mental breakdown. The idea was perhaps to satirise those doctors out of her own contempt and loathing. Bradshaw turned out to be a failure as Septimus rather than to surrender to Bradshaw "had thrown himself from a window".

### **Septimus**

Introduction of Septimus Warren Smith helped Woolf in creating a story of two worlds connected indirectly. Unlike Clarissa who extolled the contemporary public life of London, Septimus became the embodiment of another London wracked and devastated by the World War. Like many representative figures of the postwar generation Septimus belongs to what we can call the 'tragic generation' which the novel wants to explore. Being a figure of fragmented consciousness in a different way from Clarissa's, Septimus represents a world of violent forces and defeat.

#### **Being shell-shocked**

Shell-shock became a very pertinent issue in British Psychiatry during 1920s. According to a book on social history published during the World War II, shell-shock was described as 'a condition of alternate moods of apathy and high excitement, with very quick reaction to sudden happenings and emergencies but without any capacity for thinking. It also talks about the

brutal realities of the wars. During the war almost 80,000 cases of shell-shocked victims were reported by the medical officers. The early responses of the military doctors were extreme as it was suggested to them that in wartime if no actual physical injury could be detected then the soldier should be shot dead. The War office committee in 1922 was reluctant to the term Shell-shock as it suggested that the war was responsible for the nervous breakdown. The recommended treatment of shell-shock was coercion and more violence, a kind of bullying therapy of cure. 'shell-shock', for many physicians meant cowardice or disobedience. And it was actually because of Shell-shock that the Freudian analysis through neurosis and the unconscious gained popularity.

The disturbance of Septimus's consciousness is also linked with his sexuality as he represses his desire for his officer Evans and cannot even contemplate sex with his wife who constantly dreams of having children. It is quite ironical that Septimus who is presented as a coward fearing death, takes his own life. Although he never wanted to die, suicide was the only resort for defeating the world represented by the so-called psychiatrist William Bradshaw who always proclaimed that 'health is proportion'. The world which Septimus represents also demands his death. It is a masculine culture surrounding him in war memories, doctors, capitalists and politicians.

So suffering from the shell-shock, Septimus is obsessed with the thoughts of death and suicide. His Italian wife Rezia, following the doctor's advice, is constantly trying to make Septimus feel interested in the immediate surroundings and London with its Variety serves the purpose. Then Rezia draws Septimus's attention to the sky-writing by the plane and then they move to Regent's Park as Septimus thinks "they must get away from people."

### **Lucrezia**

Lucrezia is the Italian wife of Septimus Warren Smith. She is also referred to as Rezia in this novel. It is quite natural to Rezia to feel alienated in a strange city like London with a mentally disturbed husband. She begins comparing her Italy with the present London. Unlike in Italy where in the evening the streets are always crowded with people talking and merry-making, here in London, she is frequently confronted with the lonely and ordinary everyday life tortured and bullied by "this malignant torturer," her demented husband. She is hopelessly seen trying to come to live in this

awful city of London. We cannot but sympathise with her for the miseries she has undergone. She is left helpless once again by the death of her husband Septimus.

### **Sally Saton**

The usual image of Sally can be seen as someone sitting on the floor, smoking, saying she was descended from Marie Antoinette. She happened to be so utterly crude that Clarissa's family could not accept her and thought her untidy. Sally taught Clarissa about life, sex, men, and politics, things from which she was shielded at Bourton, her home before marriage. She had spent a considerable time with Clarissa before her marriage. Her feelings for Sally were protective and pure. Sally brought excitements into Clarissa's life. In several nights Sally dined with them. Sally went out with Clarissa for walking, stopped to pick a flower and kissed Clarissa on the lips. In another sense, Sally could make her forget the need for a man to a great extent. Sally Seton had unexpectedly married a rich man and lived in a big house. She makes her presence felt once again in the evening party of Clarissa.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth, the seventeen year old daughter of the Dalloways, has her own way of living her life. She spends much of the time with Miss Kilman. She likes freedom. Boarding a bus and taking a seat on top she was "delighted to be free". She enjoys going out to the remote parts of London and finds it surprising to see the city people preoccupied with trivial chattering, with thoughts of ships, business, law, administration and so on. She knows that her mother would not like her to walk by herself in strange parts of London, but then, at this moment, her mother seemed to Elizabeth "extremely immature, like a child, attached to dolls, to old slippers.". Elizabeth's adventure throughout London is regarded as a radical step towards her maturity and that gets reflected in the way she appears at the evening party making everyone mesmerized as even her father failed to recognize her changed appearance at first.

## **Miss Kilman**

Miss Kilman is presented as the tutor of Elizabeth. But she is not only her teacher but also her best companion and mentor. She takes Elizabeth for shopping, to the remote places of London as Elizabeth likes to roam about. Miss Kilman has also used her place to influence her emotionally and intellectually, playing on her idealism of youth, firing her with a self-abnegating passion for Christianity. This arouses much concern in Mrs. Dalloway as such an idea inbuilt in her has further alienated Elizabeth from the parents. Also found in her a kind of resentment of wealth and class comfort of a family like that of the Dalloways. Her religious enthusiasm serves as the vehicle for both expressing and containing her overwhelming sense of embittered self pity and resentment. Mrs. Dalloway is always repelled by Miss Kilman not because of her baleful influence on Elizabeth but also because of her attitude, her gait and her dress codes. She is gracious and self-effacing with a sense that the personal is always better than the doctrinal. Miss Kilman, for Clarissa is one who 'had taken her daughter from her'.

Miss Kilman despised Clarissa because, in her eyes, Clarissa was mean and superficial. She did not mind Mr. Dalloway; he had invited her to teach history to Elizabeth. Miss Kilman told herself that she pitied women like Mrs. Dalloway. Whenever she was filled with sinister thoughts, she thought of God. When Mrs. Dalloway came out with Elizabeth, Miss Kilman tried not to hate. She told herself there would be a religious victory in the end, and she would triumph.

### **Check Your Progress:**

1. Do you find any commonalities in the characters?
2. Do you consider them to be representative characters of the post war period?
3. What are the similarities in the characters of Clarissa and Septimus?
4. Why do you think that a character is so important in modernist novels?

**SAQ:**

1. How do you think that a ‘character’ is so important in modernist fiction? (50 words)

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2. Mrs. Dalloway is not ‘being’ but ‘becoming’. Comment from your reading of this section? (50 words)

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**2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION**

With the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the novels that followed, Woolf became the most representative woman writer of fictional modernism, claiming both praise and distrust from her contemporaries. She was a writer who could be compared with Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide or William Faulkner and their experimental attempts. As an answer to her critics, she noted in her diary “I substantize, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality-its cheapness,” Her contemporary friend E. M. Forster clearly summarizes her fictional attempts–“She is always stretching out from her enchanted tree and snatching bits from the flux of daily life as they float past, and out of these bits she builds novels.” By the time of the World War II, her works came to be recognized as a dominant strand in the modern movement. However, during 1940s and 1950s, the aftermath of the war demanded another chronicle of historical change and a tendency to return to social realism in contemporary novel writings sent Woolf’s reputation into the sideline. There was a reaction against the entire Bloomsbury Group. To them Woolf was not only the representative writer of what they had dismissively called the ‘experimental novels’ which were more concerned with private affairs of the elite class, but also of the dominance of a social caste in the British literary scenario and claimed the rights of aesthetic understanding to itself.

However, the most constructive feminist attack on Virginia Woolf came in the form of Elaine Showalter’s rejection of Woolf in her *Virginia Woolf and the Flight to Androgyny*. Showalter claims that Woolf’s concept of

androgyny in her *A Room of One's Own* was a 'myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.' She further claimed 'Woolf's wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience.' Replying to the charges brought by Showalter, Toril Moi seeks to rescue Woolf's status as a modernist writer by showing how Woolf succeeds in producing something which we can call a 'deconstructive' form of writing. Toril Moi writes that in her own textual practice "Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning. [For this you can read Toril Moi's essay "Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf", in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*.]

Later popular reception of Woolf resulted in the film version of *Mrs. Dalloway* made in 1997 by Dutch feminist film director Marleen Gorris. After that number of film versions of the novels of Woolf began to increase.

## 2.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have tried to discuss the story of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* although one cannot find any story in the conventional sense. Attempts are also made to peep inside the characters to know how they behave and react in the novel. If you notice carefully there are certain common traits in the characters which actually bind them together in a world of complexity. There seems to have a one-to-one relationship between the characters and the story in this novel, as it is on the basis of this understanding that the meaning of a text like *Mrs. Dalloway* sought to be explored. Once you become aware of this relationship by going through this unit, you will have a better understanding of *Mrs. Dalloway* as well as literary modernism during the first decades of its establishment.

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## Unit 3

### Themes and Techniques

#### Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 The Title
- 3.4 Major Themes
- 3.5 Narrative Technique
- 3.6 Images and Symbols
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

#### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

By now, you must have already been familiar with Virginia Woolf as a writer. However, in this unit we have tried to deal more specifically with the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and find out the reasons behind the popularity and significance of the novel. After going through the unit you will be able to

- *describe* the significance of the title of the novel
- *identify* the various possible themes
- *identify* the narrative techniques used by Virginia Woolf
- *identify* the images and symbols used by Woolf to justify her sense of modernism
- *know* Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* in totality

#### 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of *Mrs. Dalloway* will remain incomplete if we do not discuss its themes and techniques in details because the very significance of a novel like this lies in its experimentations in terms of themes and techniques. In *Mrs. Dalloway* there is an exploration of the characters' mind and a way of writing that draws attention to itself. Unlike the realistic novels resuming

to have read the world, the experimentations in *Mrs. Dalloway* instead draw attention to the ways in which the fiction tries to structure experience, for reality is always beyond the grasp of the text.

Moreover, *Mrs. Dalloway* is important also because of its influence on women and fiction. Virginia Woolf radically opts for women and fiction to posit a challenge against the boundaries and against the social systems that limits and defines women and men into feminine and masculine, emotional and rational role. Woolf's vision of such a kind of writing by women opened up the possibility of a series of changes that would not only see women capable of writing diverse fictions but also establish the possibility of re-reading women novelists from earlier centuries from a feminist perspective.

**Stop to Consider:**

Reread these two paragraphs in this section. Before preparing an answer to any question of *Mrs. Dalloway*, you may need to go back to what you have just read in this section.

### 3.3 THE TITLE

The significance of the title lies in its description of Clarissa Dalloway throughout a single day in her life in Post-War England through a stream-of-consciousness narrative technique. Created out of two short stories, 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street' and the unfinished 'The Prime Minister', the novel's story is of Clarissa's preparations for a party of which she is the hostess. With the interior perspective of the novel, the story travels back and forth in time, and in and out of the characters' minds, to construct a complete image of Clarissa's life and of the inter-war social structure.

The title of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* seems to me to be an apt one as it is commonly thought to be a response to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a text which also deals with the life story of a character on one single day and which is often hailed as one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century. Fundamentally, however, *Mrs. Dalloway* establishes new grounds for portraying the different and hidden aspects of the human experience.

### 3.4 MAJOR THEMES

*Mrs. Dalloway* is a book about the flow of consciousness and awareness, of the life of existence. Although the sense of consciousness is very strong in this book one must also consider it to be the result of a sense of solitude, an acute sense of loneliness, an existential sense of boredom and separation and a lack of communication. Woolf understood it clearly that a sense of crisis and extremity had been a part of great modern writings although she believed, like Clarissa Dalloway, in a metaphysical defiance: “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically, evaded them: closeness drew apart: rapture faded: one was alone. There was an embrace in death.”

#### **Stop to Consider:**

In her essay entitled *Modern Fiction* (1919) Woolf decried the ‘materialists’ for writing on ‘the unimportant things’ making the transitory appear everlasting and significant. Going against the mass of facts presented by the realists, Woolf said that the interests for modernist authors ‘lie very likely in the dark places of psychology’. She further added that “Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all side they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms.’

Woolf’s another key essay ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown’ (1924) read like this- ‘in or about December, 1910, human nature changed’. Woolf believed that the purpose of the novel was to represent character. She further added that with the coming of the new novelists there will be revolutionary change: “The literary convention of the time is so artificial...that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary society. Signs of this are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated, syntax disintegrated.”

Such an understanding was supposed to change her writings drastically.

In her *A Room of One’s Own* Virginia Woolf refers to her notion of ‘Androgyny’. Here she starts thinking if there are two sexes in the mind both male and female corresponding to the two sexes in the body, or if they are required to be united to derive complete satisfaction and happiness. Famous feminist critic Elaine Showalter further defined the idea of androgyny as ‘full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements. Woolf’s strategy however was to fuse them to make room

for a hybrid identity. *Mrs. Dalloway* offers an interesting analysis of the androgynous nature of Clarissa by presenting a number of sexual possibilities situated in the past. Clarissa repeatedly returns to her youth at Bourton and her choice of either Sally Seton, Peter Walsh or Richard Dalloway. Instances like these can be used to explore the possibilities of Clarissa of love with another woman (Sally), with a man (Peter Walsh) who is not 'manly' and a man who epitomizes masculinity (Richard) in society. Similarly, in Septimus' admiration of Evans can be seen as an erotic homosexual love resulting in the apparent sexual impotence with his wife Lucrezia. Woolf indirectly affirms that Clarissa has a 'manly' side just as Septimus has a 'womanly' side. Perhaps, such realities in the lives of the characters become much more important than considering Septimus as a coward.

Clarissa is both a conventional in her playing the role of a drawing room hostess and a misfit in the order, 'proportion' and classification of imperial patriarchy epitomized by the psychiatrists, Holmes and Bradshaw, who are out to colonize the tormented mind of Septimus, to cure him of the cowardice.

The 'spatial' character of modernist fiction is perhaps given the most detailed treatment in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The inclination of modernist literature towards spatial form means that the readers are supposed to apprehend the works spatially that means in a moment of time rather than in a sequence. It is said that Flaubert was among the first modernist writers to bring in the technique of simultaneity in his narratives. However, it was James Joyce's *Ulysses* that finally established the principle of spatial cross references and symbolic allusions. Looking at London in *Mrs. Dalloway* we can say that the city plays a major role in the setting of the novel. The Dalloways have a unique place in the London scene. Clarissa's promenade in the city has a profound meaning as a part of her fascination with the city, leading her to mystically communicate herself with the 'locale' - the space at a particular time in one morning. The following lines from the text makes everything clear

"For having lived in Westminster- how many years now? over twenty-one feels even in the, midst of the traffic, or walking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity: an indescribable pause: a suspense.. before Big Ben strikes...."

However, this social quality of Clarissa's character does not fully explain the other side of the story. There is another darker side of Clarissa, often exemplified by her sense of boredom and a feeling of futility and occasional thoughts of suicide. This side of Clarissa 's character come to the forefront at her party when Sir William Bradshaw informs of Septimus' suicide - the death of the non-conformist Septimus who failed to secure a place for himself in the vast multitudes of London and who ended his life by jumping out of his window of his Bloomsbury apartments. Preoccupied with the thoughts of Septimus she walks to the window, she too could feel an 'epiphany' on the futility of life.

"Clarissa felt somehow very like him-the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it: thrown it away. The clock was striking."

But she had to move back to the party as she could not but conform to the social conduct of which she was a part. Many critics even feel that Clarissa is Septimus' double. But she does not act like Septimus only because her social life does not allow her to become a non-conformist like Septimus.

### **Epiphany**

The term originally denotes the festival commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi. The feast is observed on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 'Twelfth Night', the Festival of the three kings.. More generally the term denotes the presence of God in the world. It was however, James Joyce who gave this word a particular literary meaning in his novel *Stephen Hero* which later became his most acclaimed novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* published in 1916. The specific paragraph in that book reads like this

"This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant—a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gestures in memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed it to be the responsibility of the writers to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. He told Cranly that the clock of the Ballast was capable of an epiphany."

An underlying theme of the novel is the oppression of patriarchy which leaves not only the women but also the men victimized. Both Clarissa and Septimus are linked by their marginal status in a highly patriarchal English society. Woolf has tried to bring in some affinities in terms of portraying their alienated minds. Although the thoughts of each are disjointed, they are actually associative. The only difference is that Clarissa has the ability to draw her fragments together which Septimus does not. While doing this, Woolf is actually referring to her own mental breakdown following the death of her parents, and provides her own definition of madness or trauma. In society, it is necessary for the individuals to answer for themselves and their action as responsible and stable identities. That is why perhaps, the social dimension, the party bringing different identities together, gains significance at the climax of the novel.

Following the contemporary feminist debates regarding the position and the status of a woman in a patriarchal society, Woolf has enabled Clarissa to understand herself for herself, and to distinguish what is herself from what is not in a chaotic conglomeration of sense-perceptions and images. Clarissa enters the patriarchal London world which for Woolf is a gendered male and assembles them into a concentrated single image. But most often she withdraws from the masculine world, and seeks support in her own 'attic room' - a room of one's own on which Woolf laid tremendous importance. In this attic room, Clarissa is resented as sexually innocent figure without any desire for Richard. However, the idea of an 'attic room' might also be read as an example of characters free from the male world and withdrawn into the female world.

Although Woolf did not consider patriarchy as the source of all evil or believe that evil was gender-related, it was that patriarchy in which one could find the source of injustice, suffering and oppression in society. Her own experience of life made her understand that it is the force of patriarchal authority, which she understood to be the root of social injustice and brutality as well as of individual or domestic unhappiness. Her aesthetic attempts as well as the content of her thought helped her to undermine patriarchal domination and subvert all forms of authoritarianism.

### **Virginia Woolf and Feminist Criticism:**

Elain Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) examines the range of British novelists since the Brontes from the viewpoint of a woman. She opines that there is no fixed or innate female sexuality or imagination or any profound differences between women's writing or men's, but a whole tradition of female writings has been neglected by male critics. The first of the tradition "The Feminine Phase" (1840-80) included writers like Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot who imitated and internalized the dominant male Aesthetic of showing women as gentle women. The main sphere of their work was their immediate domestic and social circle. The next phase "The Feminist Phase" (1880-1820) included writers like Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner who radically advocated for separatist Utopias and suffragette sisterhood. The third phase "The Female Phase" (1920 onwards) inheriting so much from the former phases developed the idea of specifically female writing and female experience. The third phase included writers like-Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson whose writings anticipated recent feminist theories. After Virginia Woolf, a new frankness about sexuality (adultery, lesbianism, etc.) made an entry into women's fiction. A new generation of university educated women like AS Byatt, Margaret Drabble, Christine Brooke-Rose was added to the list.

Virginia Woolf wrote a good deal about women's writing influencing much of modern feminist criticism. Although she never adopted a feminist stance, her continual examination of the problems women writers were facing helped her fellow writers and critics working for the empowerment of the women. She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles in their literary ambitions. She herself was well aware of the restricted education she received. By adopting the Bloomsbury sexual ethics of Androgyny, she withdrew from the struggle between male and female sexuality. Her repeated attacks of madness and eventual suicidal attempts suggest that the struggle to transcend sexuality actually failed. What she wanted to say in her *A Room of One's Own* is that she wanted her femininity to be unconscious so that she might 'escape' from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness. In another sense this book became an eloquent attack on the degraded position of women in society and literature.

The fact is that retrospect and anticipation constitute the very essence of consciousness at any specific time. In other words, the relation of consciousness to time is not the one of events to time, but are independent of any chronological sequence in a way that events are not. Moreover, the

quality of an experience of any new phenomenon is conditioned by a group of similar experiences scattered through past time, the association of which with the present experience is what makes the present experience what it is. Modern writers, to avoid the clumsiness of this method, were opting out for a more fluid technique which will enable the author to utilize constantly those ever present contacts with the past constituting the very stuff of consciousness. It was the result of such a realization that the stream-of-consciousness technique was introduced into fictions.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, if we are to judge it by its chronological time scheme, it becomes clear that it is a story of one day in the life of a middle-aged woman. But it is not exactly that. The story embraces much of Mrs. Dalloway's past as well as the present making it easier for us to look at the story as more than just a day's activity. Thus, the inclusion of so much of Clarissa's past life is made possible by the way in which her ever-changing state of mind is described. The time sequence is marked by the most common device as the striking of the clock. Fixing her character physically at a given point of time and space, Woolf is free to follow the character's 'Stream Of Consciousness' up and down the line of thought. The greatness of the novel can be explained more successfully by a metaphor that its significance lies in the tributaries explored rather than in the mainstream.

### **3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

In 1919, came out Virginia Woolf's essay 'Modern Fiction' in which Woolf appealed her contemporary writers for a more inward kind of action, a kind of novel which should not conform to the norms of old conventions and chronologies. However, to understand the works of Woolf, we must try to conceptualize the term "stream-of-consciousness" which was originally used by the psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), to describe the chaotic, ceaseless and multileveled flow that characterizes human mentality. Its manifestations in the world of fictions can be perceived by the presence of interior monologues which help in capturing the exact nature of the flow. She wrote in her essay-

"If a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no

love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged: but a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumcised spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible.”

This technique is made much more complex by Woolf’s peculiar handling of the notion of time. It is seen that throughout the novel she contrasts public time with private time. So, she may start to refer to a character’s thoughts when the clock strikes the hour, report those thoughts for several ages and then suddenly return to the characters’ awareness of the clock striking. In the external public time only a minute may have passed but in internal private time of the characters, it might have passed several minutes. Hence, Woolf’s technique distinguished between temporal duration in the mind and chronological common time in the world once again asserting the significance of the individual against the social.

### **Stream of Consciousness**

‘Stream of Consciousness’ was the phrase coined by William James , the psychologist brother of the reputed American novelist Henry James to refer to the characteristically continuous flow of thought and sensation in the human mind. Later, it was adopted by literary critics to refer to a peculiar kind of modern fiction which tried to imitate this very process. No one will deny the fact that the novel form is always notable for its interiorized rendering of experience.

The classic nineteenth century realist novels from Jane Austen to George Eliot, sought to present bits characters as social beings with a subtle and sensitive analysis of their moral and emotional inner lives. However, towards the turn of the century reality was increasingly sought to be located in the private, subjective consciousness of the individuals who were finding it difficult to communicate their experiences to others. Stream of Consciousness actually helps the readers by offering them an imaginative access to the inner lives of the other human beings, even if they are the characters of a fiction. SOC novels tend to inculcate sympathy for the characters whose inner selves are exposed to view.

There are two common techniques for representing consciousness in the form of fictions. One is interior monologue in which the grammatical subject is an ‘I’ and the addressees hear the characters verbalizing their thoughts as exactly as they appear.. The other method is free indirect style which of course started with Jane Austen but was made to flourish with scope and virtuosity by modern

novelists like Virginia Woolf. It renders thought as reported speech, usually in the third person, past tense as can be found in the expressions-“she wondered”, “she asked herself”, “she thought” and so on. Such expressions give the illusion of intimate access to a character’s mind, but without totally surrendering the authorial participation in the discourse.

“Stream of Consciousness” novels include the writings of the novelists like James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf herself. So far, four main techniques of Stream of Consciousness Techniques can be identified: Soliloquy, Omniscient narration of mental processes, and both Indirect and Direct interior monologue.

Her claim-“I substantiate, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality-its cheapness” clearly explains her distrust in materialism and more specifically fictional realism. And it was finally in the essay – *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, (1924) where she made the proclamation that reality is not a matter of fact but an aesthetic and metaphysical question. Such an understanding of realism made it possible for her to put some newness in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In October, 1923 she also noted, “ I took a year’s groping to discover what I call my tunneling process, by which I tell the past in installments, as I have need of it. . .” There is no denying the fact that Woolf’s method of narrating through consciousness owes much to her contemporary James Joyce. But she also differs from Joyce in presenting the flow of consciousness as the author’s own sense of aesthetic creation.

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges: Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning-fresh as if issued to children on a beach.”

This is how the novel begins. This makes it clear that although Mrs. Dalloway is about to go out, she is also thinking. But the style in which her thoughts are reported puts them and her at an ironic distance-“Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself”, the first sentence of the novel as well as that of the authorial narrator, does not clearly explain who Mrs. Dalloway is or why she needed to buy flowers. The sudden plunge of the readers into the middle of an ongoing city life typifies the presentation of the consciousness as a ‘stream’. The very next sentence “For Lucy had her work cut out for her”, moves the focus of the narrative into the character’s mind by adopting

a free indirect style, omitting the intrusive authorial voice. The ejaculations like, “What a lark! What a plunge!” look more like interior monologue, but they are not the character’s response to the Westminster morning; rather Clarissa is actually remembering, how at the age of eighteen she had remembered herself as a child. Or we can look at it in a different way. The image “fresh as if issued to children on a beach”, reminds her of how the metaphors of children larking in the sea would come to her mind as she ‘plunged’ into the fresh air of the summer morning at Burton where she is supposed to meet someone called Peter Walsh. Hence, the actual and the metaphorical, time present and time past both interact and interweave in the sentences each thought or memory insisting the next. But realistically enough, Clarissa cannot always trust her memory as she said, “‘Musing among the vegetables?’ - was that it? – ‘I prefer men to cauliflowers’ - was that it?’” (Source). This is what makes the style of the novel playful adding to its strength as a modernist novel.

Moreover, to examine how the human identity operates in this novel it is necessary to know Woolf’s unique process of constructing characters. In her diaries, while she was composing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf coined this process as ‘tunneling’ by which she would plough into the characters’ past to unravel their history. Consequently, her characters like Clarissa and Septimus are revealed as split personalities who are living both in the past as well as in the present. Their present thoughts and behaviour tell us who they are and also the reasons behind their becoming who they are.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. What is a Stream of Consciousness novel?
2. Describe the ‘Tunneling Process’ Woolf has used in the novel?
3. What ideas of narrative techniques do you find significant?

**SAQ:**

1. Comment on the narrative technique in the novel? (60 words)

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2. What according to you is the significance of what Woolf said in her essay “Modern Fiction”? (50 words)

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3. How does time function in the novel? (100 words)

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### 3.6 IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

It has been unanimously accepted by the critics that the city or the ‘locale’ bears a specific significance in modernist novels. Because the identity of the city is also related to the identity of the people inhabiting that city. On the basis of this fact, the city of London plays a very significant role. Clarissa Dalloway’s promenade through the London Streets on a specific June morning, in a way defines her social character. The various associations and reminiscences which we find during her walk determine her status as one of the English Upper class of the city of London, known for its industrial growth and cultural superiority. She is actually going to buy flowers in Bond Street which became the most expensive shopping center of London at that time.

London, just like a character, looms large in the novel. The novel is set in a great imperial city which survived after the war. It was Clarissa’s social London as well as the London which ‘swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith.’ London is a city with its legendary past and history. It is a city that both defeats and destroys. It is also a city of great parks, military parades, of royalty power and pride. “A splendid achievement on its own way, after all, London: the season: civilization,’ thinks Peter Walsh as he walks through it, following a girl who has caught his attention in the crowd. It is also a city of dull buildings and basement railings that swallows up people like Septimus Warren Smith. Although the two central characters Clarissa and Septimus never meet each other, the city, the streets, the ringing of the Big Ben connect them together.

In the story line of the novel the clock Big Ben is equally significant. Big Ben as a symbol of eternal time as well as an emblem of imperial power mark out the seventeen hours in which the story begins and ends. The clock in a way also links the characters in a common time. Woolf here presents instances of both exterior time and interior time - the exterior represented by the Big Ben and the interior by the consciousness of the characters as the present flows into the past. In this novel, the notion of time is superficially structured around the division of the clock. Here the intrusion of the public time, in the form of the Big Ben is used to connect the different characters. For example, The Big Ben breaks the novel into hours and sections. Consequently, the internal mental time of the characters, the timed duration of the memories and thoughts that are recalled to the mind's surface reality, is frequently interrupted by a common shared time. Yet, time connects the different characters by forming links across the spaces. As different characters and spaces can be connected by a common chronology which is public, external and shared. As, both Clarissa and Septimus hear the striking of the clock the narrative moves between them as seen in the line-“twelve o’ clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on the bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street.”

The aeroplane flying over the city reminds us of the recent World War as well as the modern technological growth. The car on the streets reassures the presence of the rich crowds, and the voices of authority. The world War in fact haunts the novel in different ways as Septimus imagines the world as a battle field. The other basic images and symbols include-the flowers, Peter’s pen-knife, the tolling of clocks, the ominous bedclothes in Clarissa’s attic room and so on. But underlying all these is the strong sense of a world changed by modernity itself.

**SAQ:**

What role does the city of London play in this novel?(50 words)

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### 3.7 SUMMING UP

In this last unit of this block, attempt has been made to acquaint you with the various themes and techniques of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, in order to have a better grasp of what this unit contains, you must first go through the previous units again so that you can connect some of the thematic analysis with the background of the novel, the life history of Virginia Woolf and various facets of modernism which shaped the novel. What I would like to suggest is that you should try to get hold of a copy the text and see the complexity inherent in it yourself. I am sure your attempt to read the novel will make the themes and techniques clearer to you.

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**Institute of Distance and Open Learning  
Gauhati University**

**MA in English  
Semester 3**

**Paper XI  
Fiction III – The Twentieth Century**

**Block 3  
D H Lawrence: *Sons and Lovers***



**Contents:**

**Block Introduction:**

**Unit 1 : Background**

**Unit 2 : Introducing the Novel**

**Unit 3 : Themes and Techniques**

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July, 2011

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**Acknowledgement**

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University duly acknowledges the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi, for preparation of this material.

## **Block Introduction:**

This is the third block of Paper 11. Here, we are going to read D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. *Sons and Lovers* shows aspects of Lawrence's modernism even though it varied in nature from the formal experimentation that novelists like Woolf and Joyce made. This novel, informed by a deep sense of alienation that partly has its roots in the transition from a working-class society to middle-class intelligentsia and the conflict consequent to clash of ideologies underlying the two classes, explores the themes of class, society, social mobility, impact of the industrial revolution, industrial landscape. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is also unique in terms of exploring the relationship between Paul and his mother as an Oedipal drama. The first part of *Sons and Lovers* builds up the Oedipal drama in which Mrs. Morel and Mr. Morel wage a battle for the psychological control of their children. The novel is divided into two parts. The first deals with the married life of the Morels through the birth of Paul to his growing up with his brothers and sister till the death of William, the eldest child in the family. The second part dominated by Paul explores his relationship with Miriam coming into conflict at first with his relationship with his mother and then with his growing relationship with Clara Dawes. The novel ends with the rejection of both Miriam and Clara and the death of Mrs. Morel that makes a "derelict" of Paul.

In the first unit of this block, I have tried to encapsulate the general structure of the block. In this unit, I have endeavoured to introduce you to some of the preoccupations in the field of fiction (and more particularly the novel) during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first unit provides you with background information of the novel and the novelist and of modernism as well. This will commence with a short biographical sketch of the author in the next section to be followed by an attempt to place *Sons and Lovers* more specifically with the context. It will also concentrate on some of the controversial aspects of Lawrence's writing.

The second and third units will take up the prescribed novel more specifically. A brief account of the story and the significant characters will form the bulk of the second unit. This will be accompanied by a look at some of the critical reception (both during the author's lifetime and after) of the novel. The third unit will look more closely at the novel and try to explore the

dominant themes, the structure and some of the control motifs in the novel. It will also take up issues of gender and class and other allied aspects with regard to the novel. As a result, before you start reading this material you should have an extension familiarity with the novel itself.

**Contents:**

**Unit 1 :** Background

**Unit 2 :** Introducing the Novel

**Unit 3 :** Themes and Techniques

# Unit 1

## Background

### Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Biographical Sketch
- 1.4 Placing the Work
- 1.5 Summing up

### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives in this unit will be to-

- *familiarise* you with the author and his life
- *locate* the author within his times, and
- *place* the present novel in the chronology of the author's literary and critical oeuvre

### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

The early twentieth century saw a greater self-consciousness in the field of the novel which emerged as “a critical concept that brought with it the pain of self-consciousness, doubt, and dissension” (Baldick: 155), evident in such works as Virginia Woolf's “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, “Modern Fiction”, Percy Lubbock's, *The Craft of the Novel*, H. G. Wells' “The Contemporary Novel”, D. H. Lawrence's “The Novel” and “Morality and the Novel”, Elizabeth Drew's *The Modern Novel*, E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, Edwin Muir's *The Structure of the Novel*, John Carruther's *Scheherazade; or the Future of the English Novel* and Ford Maddox Ford's *The English Novel*. The primary debate that took place during this period surrounding the novel was about its nature and its methods, and the question whether the novel could be raised to the level of an art like sculpture by the conscious perfection of its techniques, or did its true vitality lie in its undisciplined fluidities and hybridities, its omnivorous capacity to chew and

digest all manner of ideas and materials (Baldick: 156). In such an atmosphere of debate we find novelists themselves embarking on an exploration of the nature of the novel, notable among them being E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. In Woolf and Lawrence in particular, we find a preoccupation with the novel as an ‘art’ form that concerns itself with life, with something essential, but at the same time eschews the extreme realist notions that accompany it. While it is most vividly seen in the stream-of-consciousness technique, the novelistic practice of Lawrence, as we shall see in the succeeding units, also forms part of this newer tendency. The ‘life’ that Woolf says “escapes” in the works of the “Edwardian” novelists Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy (see “Modern Fiction” and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” by Woolf) is a more abstract spiritual or psychological quality that goes beyond the more realist notion of its being a sum of describable persons, events and objects (Baldick: 160). As a result, we can notice the significance given to experimentation in the modernist novel, whether overtly in the structure characterizations and larger or more subtly in the content or in the perspectives employed in it. We will examine Lawrence in this context in a greater detail in the fourth section (1.4) on this unit as well as in the third unit.

**Stop to consider:**

As students of literature you should be prepared to face questions like -What are the significant aspects of modernist fiction that you can think of? Is it in any way different from the manner it makes itself present in other modernist genres – poetry and drama, for instance? Is there any similarity?

As you have seen above, there is no fixed definition of the novel itself as a genre. Then, again, what is the “modernist” novel? You should not be overly confused here: literary definitions are often contradictory but you will find it useful to know at least a couple of famous definitions such as Henry James’s, for one. He called the novel “a baggy monster”.

**1.1 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

(Adapted from Gâmini Salgâdo’s *D.H. Lawrence* and Nicholas Marsh’s *D.H. Lawrence: The Novels*)

David Hubert Richards Lawrence was born on September 1, 1885, in the village of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. His father, Arthur Lawrence, was a miner, while his mother, Lydia, came from a middle-class background and had been a school-teacher before her marriage. Lawrence was youngest of three sons and the fourth child in a family of five. Lawrence was nearly two when the family moved from the course in Victoria Street to an end house on the Breach, and owned by the colliery. This house had the advantage of having a small strip of garden, but then cost more in rent.

**Stop to Consider:**

Read the opening paragraphs of *Sons and Lovers*. Do you find any similarity of the Morel house with this description given above? It is because Lawrence filled this novel with much autobiographical detail. The house on the Breach is, in fact, the house that is a part of the two back-to-back rows of miners' cottages in the Bottoms in the novel. As we go on, we will see many such locations, characters and events in the novel that closely parallel Lawrence's own life. However, I would like to introduce here a note of caution against taking these similarities too literally. After all, we have to be conscious that Lawrence was not writing an autobiography but a novel, that has its own world, its own characters and its own logic, so that it would be wrong to take the characters for real historical figures (such as Paul Morel as Lawrence himself) and treat them accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, Lawrence's parents came from different backgrounds. Arthur Lawrence's father lived in the mining village of Brinsley near Eastwood as a tailor who catered to the miners working in the colony. Lawrence's mother Lydia Beardsall's father, on the other hand, started work as a ship yard engineer after the lace making business at Nottingham (where he had previously worked) failed. He also performed duties as a preacher. The two families became mutually connected when one of Lydia Beardsall's aunts married Arthur Lawrence's uncle. It was in fact, in one of the parties thrown by this aunt that Lydia Beardsall first met Arthur Lawrence. She was fascinated by the earthy charm of Arthur, the handsome strong-bodied miner with flashing eyes and generous laugh and full black beard untouched by a razor. The love for singing and dancing and the extraordinary vitality along with the exotic quality of his rustic dialect captured the fancy of Lydia

Beardsall and they were married at Sneiton parish church in December 1875 (Salgado 10-11). A dramatic account of this is depicted in the first chapter of *Sons and Lovers* by Lawrence.

When Lawrence was six, the family moved to an even better house on Walker Street which, from its position at the top of the hilly ground overlooking the Breach, had a view of the countryside with its meadows and woods of Crich, Underwood and the Annesley Hills. In 1902, however, the Lawrences moved again to a semi-detached house in Lynn Croft Road. This succession of houses was not merely a physical remove but a social one as well, reflecting Lydia Lawrence's desire to evacuate her children from the constraints of an ordinary miner's home and a miner's life to a more intellectually and socially fulfilled middle-class life, and for this purpose, the chief weapon that she identified was education. Lawrence's eldest brother George (nine years older than him) subsequently became a textile engineer, while the second brother William Ernest (seven years older than David) became a clerk, when he was twelve, at a colliery in Derbyshire and then at Langlsey Mill, west of Eastwood. However, he did not abandon school altogether, enrolling at a night school to learn shorthand, type-writing and languages (French and German). As a result, he finally got a good place as a clerk at a Tandon shipping office. William Ernest was the one on whom Lydia Lawrence pinned almost all her hopes. However, his potential career came to an end when he died of erysipelas and pneumonia in London. When Lawrence wrote *Sons and Lovers* William Ernest became the model for Paul's elder brother William. Lawrence's sister, Emily, was three years older to him, while Ada was two years younger to him. Throughout his life, Lawrence remained closer to his sisters than to his brother, with Ada coming to visit him when he was abroad, and helping to come for him towards the end of his life.

Lawrence, or 'Bert' as he was called as a child, was weak and sickly from birth, but was, however, constantly impressed on by his mother that he had to follow on the steps of Ernest. Though not as athletic as his brother, Lawrence showed himself as no less, if more, promising, becoming the first student of his school – the Beauvale Board School, in which Ernest had also studied – to win a country scholarship to the Nottingham High School at the age of twelve. This was in spite of the regular bullying and teasing directed at him by other pupils due to Lawrence's dislike of sports and frailty and his delicate appearance. Lawrence studied in the High School at

Nottingham till he was sixteen, winning both a form prize and a prize for mathematics, but ultimately, coming fifteenth out of nineteen boys in his last year. However, this education entailed a severe financial crunch for the household of the Lawrences, resulting in strain on Lawrence himself, who had to leave home at seven to catch the train to school, returning home at seven in the evening. After he left school, Lawrence entered the professional world as a clerk at a Nottingham surgical goods firm, earning a salary of thirteen shillings a week. It was in the same year, 1901, that tragedy struck the Lawrence family with the death of Ernest at the age of twenty-three years.

Lydia Lawrence took the death of her son very hard and seemed to withdraw into herself from which she emerged only when David Herbert fell dangerously ill with pneumonia. From that point onwards, she seemed to clasp on to him with a love and ambition that Lawrence later expressed as being suffocating. After his illness, however, Lawrence did not return to the factory.

At about the same time, in 1901, another experience had come across Lawrence, an experience that was also to be recorded in *Sons and Lovers*. It was through his mother that Lawrence became acquainted with the Chambers family and more significantly, with their daughter Jessie Chambers, who was one of the three women who had deeply influenced his life. Jessie's father, Edmund Chambers had a dairy business in the Breach where the family lived for three years. After that they moved to Hags farm (Willey Farm in *Sons and Lovers*) Eastwood and Lawrence used to visit them at their farm with his mother, who had become a good friend of Mrs. Chambers. Lawrence's friendship with Jessie (the Miriam of *Sons and Lovers*) grew over the years, and he frequently visited Hags farm, talking with the family in the farmhouse, going for long walks with Jessie, and helping her brother and father with the farm work (Marsh 189). It was this farm that gave Lawrence his first direct experience of country life and physical activity and presented an escape from the tensions in his own family due to the different personalities of his parents as well and the economic problems at home, as well as the physical ugliness of Bestwood (Salgâdo 17). With Jessie Chambers, Lawrence shared a close friendship in which they read and discussed fiction, poetry, philosophy, history, autobiography and so on and which left an impact on Lawrence's subsequent life and career.

In the autumn of 1902, Lawrence took up a post as a pupil teacher at the British School in Eastwood though he did not enjoy this first experience of teaching (nor any subsequent experiences). Parallely, he also carried a course for pupil teacher at a school in Ilkeston. He remained in this post till 1906. In the meantime, in 1904, Lawrence passed the King's Scholarship examination with distinction and thereby qualified for a free admission at a teacher training college. Six months later, he also passed the London Matriculation examination in second division that enabled him to get admission to Nottingham University College, but due to financial constraints Lawrence had to extend his teaching at Eastwood, in order to collect some money for his expenses at the University. Furthermore, Jessie Chambers also sat for the king's scholarship examination, coached by Lawrence in Easter 1906.

From 1906 to 1908, Lawrence enrolled in the teachers' training course in the University College at Nottingham, earning his Teacher's Certificate at the end. During this time he had started working on *The White Peacock* and had produced many poems and short stories as well. One of them, "A Prelude" (sent under the name of Louise Burrows) had also won a prize in a competition held by the Nottinghamshire Guardian. At about this time, Lawrence's relationship with Jessie Chambers had also begun to deteriorate, not "due to disillusionment on either side but to the fact that Lawrence was at this time almost completely dominated by his mother, emotionally though not intellectually (Salgado 19). Lawrence gives his own version of this relationship in *Sons and Lovers* where the overly spiritual Miriam ultimately becomes suffocating in her love for Paul but shies away from any physical contact with him. Jessie Chambers presented in her memories another aspect of Lawrence, who had to create such a portrait of her under the influence of the fierce possessive love of Mrs. Lawrence, for her son.

Lawrence's friendship with Louise (Louie) Burrows subsequently developed rapidly and the latter become the model for Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow*, though here again could be seen Lawrence's imposition of his own feelings and experiences on Louie Burrows background, upbringing and appearance (Marsh 190).

It was during his stay in college that Lawrence became interested in philosophy. He read widely and the philosophers that he was most influenced by were Locke, John Stuart Mill, Darwin, William James and Schopenhauer.

Earlier he had already ceased to be a believer in Christianity, and now gradually gravitated towards a certain kind of paganism.

In October 1908 Lawrence joined the Davidson Road School in Croydon in South London as a teacher. He was innovative and effective as a teacher encouraging drama in the classroom and encouraging and training students to produce writing that he sent to boy's magazines. The money received for these publications was distributed among the contributors. In this he received the support of the Principal, as well as some of his colleagues, most notably, A.W. Mcleod, with whom Lawrence shared ideas on literature and philosophy. However, despite all this, Lawrence did not enjoy his stay at Croydon, especially because of the daily drudgery and the maintenance of discipline in the classroom. During this time, he was still in correspondence with Jessie Chambers, who sent some of his poems and short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums" to *The English Review* which published a series of his poems in 1909, and two more series in 1910. *The English Review* was then being edited by Ford Maddox Hueffer (later Ford) and it was he who was responsible for introducing Lawrence to the London literary society. As his romantic spiritual but unsatisfactory relationship with Jessie was waning, he was cultivating the friendship of Helen Corke, culminating in relationship of love and intimacy. However, between October 1910 and February 1912, Lawrence became engaged with Louise Burrows.

It was also during this period that Lydia Lawrence was diagnosed with cancer (in August 1910) and she died in the same year in December. *Sons and Lovers*, again, vividly recounts this period of her final illness, and it is also believed by many that the final scene of Paul and his sister apparently giving their mother an overdose in an act of carrying out euthanasia had an element of truth. This period seems to have been traumatic in Lawrence's life, and it is therefore understandable that the void left by her death must have been great. Lawrence was engaged in producing *The White Peacock* which was subsequently published in 1911. However, he managed to have a copy specially bound to present to his dying mother. She looked at the outside, then at the title page, then at her son who was at her bedside, and the book was put down. Lawrence's sister read out the inscription he had written for her. She never spoke of the book or looked at it again (Salgâdo 24).

**Stop to Consider:**

Lawrence wrote very little during 1911, but by this time he had written early versions of *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*. Helen Corke, who had become a prominent presence in his life during his stay at Croydon, figured in *The Trespasser*, as well as several short stories and the early 'Helen' poems of Lawrence. In 1911, Lawrence again fell seriously ill. His sister, Ada, came to London and nursed him back to health and they spent the period of his convalescence in Bournemouth at the beginning of 1912. One of the more positive points at this time during Lawrence's life is his acquaintance and later friendship with Edward Garnett, who was a member of a famous literary family as well as editor in the publicity house, Gerald Duckworth.

One of the most significant moments of Lawrence's life happened in April 1912, when he visited his former teacher Professor Ernest Weekley, who taught French at Nottingham University. There he met Professor Weekley's wife, Frieda Weekley, who was a member of the Von Richtofen family and was herself a baroness. She was also the cousin of the Baron Manfred von Richtofen, who was to play a considerable role during the First World War as a German fighter pilot. Frieda Weekley had three children when she met Lawrence, and bored with the mundane life of respectability, had several affairs, one of which was in 1907 with Otto Gross, the Viennese psychoanalyst and follower of Freud and Nietzsche. Moreover, her exposure to the ultra-modern permissive society in the continent had drawn her favour and sympathy towards the cause of sexual liberation and free sexual expression. The love affair between Frieda and Lawrence grew rapidly and they eloped on May 3, 1912, to the Continent, without a fixed plan but a desire to spend their time together away from friends and family in England. Lawrence subsequently (Salgado 30) wrote a letter to Professor Weekley declaring their mutual love, which was not very well-received. As Frieda later recounted, "He [Lawrence] had touched a new tenderness in me", on the other hand, Lawrence wrote to Garnett about Frieda: "She is ripping – she is the finest woman I've ever met. . . . Oh, but she is the woman of a lifetime" (Salgado 32). When they reached Frieda's hometown of Metz, they stayed at a hotel in separate rooms, the excuse being that her father's house was full of relatives. Lawrence did not have much money for their expenses and while Frieda Weekley was discussing their situation with her family, Lawrence was arrested as a British spy and only released after the intervention of the

Van Richtofen family. For a few weeks after that, Lawrence left for Waldbrol to visit his cousins while Frieda stayed at home with her family. They, however, spent the last week of May together in a Bavarian mountain village; on their honeymoon Frieda rented a flat in the village of Itching and they lived there a simple country life while Lawrence and Frieda found this life ecstatic. After this, the two stayed for some time in Munich, after which they went off to a walking town across the Alps to Italy, finally settling at Gargnano in Italy on the shores of Lake Garda. By this time Lawrence had abandoned his plan of obtaining a teaching post in Germany and decided to be a full-time writer. Their pastoral experiences in the mountains of Italy are incorporated into Lawrence's short novella *Love Among the Haystacks*, while Frieda Weekley became one of the models for Clara Dawes in *Sons and Lovers*. It was also during this time that Lawrence wrote the poems that appeared in *Look! We have come Though!* Later, *Sons and Lovers* was also completed and revised in 1912.

From 1912 onwards, the rest of Lawrence's life was spent with Frieda. Their relationship, however, was far from peaceful, with Lawrence being jealous, possessive and demanding with Frieda, and Frieda being involved in various love-affairs with other men. After the War ended, and in the 1920s, their quarrels took on a more violent and public aspect; problems also crept up in their sex life. This was compounded by Lawrence's futile longing for children and from the mid-1920s, his failing health which rendered him an invalid during the last stages of tuberculosis. In spite of all this, Lawrence and Frieda Lawrence Weekley could escape the constraints of their respective personalities and stay committed to each other (something of this is to be seen the Ursula-Birkin relationship in *Women in Love*) till Lawrence's death in March 1930. Frieda Lawrence Weekley, in her autobiography *Not I But the Wind*, published after Lawrence's death, records this commitment powerfully. Frieda says about their early life in Italy that "I didn't want people, I did not want anything, I only wanted to revel in this new world Lawrence had given me" (Salgado: 33). In Gargnano, they rented a flat and Frieda records that "Lawrence for the first time had a place of his own" (Salgado 34). Frieda settled down to her new experience of efficient housekeeping and cooking which Lawrence had managed till now, while he spent his time writing and painting. In this very creative phase, Lawrence had written the play *Fight for Barbara* based on their triangular

situation and started work on *A Lost Girl* (subsequently published in 1920). A collection of poems *Love Poems and Others* and *Sons and Lovers* also came out in this year (1913). Apart from this, Lawrence also started writing novel initially titled *The Sisters* that went on to become two of his major works – *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In April the Lawrences moved from Gargnano to San Gaudenzio and from there to Germany. The tension of the impending war was beginning to make itself felt and the Lawrences were now preparing to return to England. In the meantime, Lawrence kept up with the literary scenario in England as well as the cultural atmosphere in mainland Europe (exhaustively recorded in his countless reviews and articles on literature and the arts). He was also beginning to find and articulate his space in modern English fiction. In a letter to Edward Garnett he wrote “I know I can write bigger stuff than any man in England. And I have to write what I can write.....I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about, and that at present, is the relations between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today”. During his stay in Germany, Lawrence wrote some of the stories that later became part of the collection *The Prussian Office*, published in 1914. Lawrence and Frieda Weekley returned to England in June, 1913, staying for some time in London before the war years 1914-18. It was in the fashionable literary society that Lawrence became acquainted with Lady Ottoline Morrell (the model for Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love*), and the philosopher Bertrand Russell, along with a group of Cambridge intellectuals. While he found the latter disappointingly dull with their “dry approach and social ideals (Marsh 194), he tried, with Lady Ottoline Morrell and a few other friends, to found “a colony of liberated and like-minded people, who would find somewhere to live away from the polluted corruption of conventional society, an utopia” (Marsh 194) which he named “Rananim”. This idea, however, was given up later on account of its sheer idealism and unreality in the face of present-day circumstances. The Lawrences stayed at first at the Cearne with the Garnetts and later at Kingsgate on the Kentish coast. The couple met the critic John Middleton Murry and the New Zealand-born short-story writer Katherine Mansfield, who were also not married but living together like Lawrence and Frieda. The two couples shared an intense and stormy and ultimately unsuccessful relationship over the next few years. Some other important acquaintances during this period were Edward Marsh, editor of

*Georgian Poetry*, who published some of Lawrence's poems and with whom Lawrence had a long time debate over poetry and poetic meter; and Herbert and Cynthia Asquith (son and daughter-in-law of the Prime Minister). In August 1913, the Lawrences made a brief trip back to Germany, returning to England in June 1914 after when Professor Weekley finally agreed to a divorce. They were married on 13 July 1914, with John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield as witnesses. During his stay in London, Lawrence again came into conflict with Freudian psychoanalysis (he had already had some exposure to Freud's theories through Frieda Lawrence) through Dr. David Aldington and his wife, the poet Hilda Doolittle (more popularly known as H.D.), as well as the American Imagist poet, Amy Lowell. In January 1915, the Lawrences moved into a cottage lent by Viola Meynell (daughter of the Catholic poet Alice Meynell) at Greatham near Pulborough in Sussex. There he carried on with revisions of his novel (that had now become *The Rainbow*) which also seemed to reflect his interest, and in reaction to what he saw as the massive and monstrous inhumanity of the war, in the idea of a small community of chosen people living a simple but intense life of co-operation and communion" (Salgado: 41-42). It was also during the stay here that Lawrence came into contact with the Bloomsbury group particularly G.E. Moore and E.M. Forster, though he did not share any common cause with them, finding them instead, snobbish and artificial.

*The Rainbow* was published the same year in September but immediately after, met with hostile reviews that branded it as pornographic, so that within three weeks of publication, a thousand copies were seized by the Scotland Yard. At the trial, the novel was condemned and banned for obscenity, and this suppression proved to be a major setback, especially in economic terms, to the professional career of Lawrence as a writer.

In January 1916, the Lawrences moved to Cornwall, where, however, they were hounded as German spies. Moreover, Lawrence also had to undergo a medical examination to determine whether he was fit to be enlisted in the War, but was rejected due to his poor health and physique. Such experiences lent a personal note to the horror and disgust Lawrence felt on account of the War. This traumatic experience of the War was dramatized by Lawrence in the "Nightmare" chapter in *Kangaroo*. The Murrys joined the Lawrences in Cornwall during this time, though the stay was not very satisfying to any

of them. In spite of the souring of their relationship later, Murry stayed close to Lawrence till his death, and there is also a probability that he and Lawrence had a brief homosexual relationship. Years later, however, Murry also had an affair with Frieda without the knowledge of Lawrence. The figure of Rawdon Lilly in Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod* closely resembles Murry. In the same year, Lawrence began working on the other half of *The Sister* that was to become *Women in Love*, finishing it in September, though it was published only in 1920. In 1917-19 Lawrence began writing *Aaron's Road*, he also wrote essays on American literature (to be revised and enlarged as *Studies in Classic American Literature* in 1922) apart from a school text-book on European history he was commissioned to write finally published in 1921 as *Movements in European History* under the pseudonym Lawrence H. Davison) and another collection of poems titled *New Poems* (published in October 1918).

In 1919, Lawrence set off again (after recovering from his recurrent illness) for Italy, stopping at Florence, Rome and Capri and coming to Sicily in February and setting at Taormina, having rented the upper storey of an old farm house on a hill providing views of the Mediterranean Sea and the snow covered Etna. In his introduction to Magnus' *Memories*, Lawrence records it thus "Lovely, lovely Sicily, the dawn place, Europe's dawn, with Odysseus pushing his ship out of the shadows into the blue. Whatever had died for me, Sicily had not then died; dawn – lovely Sicily, and the Ionian Sea (Salgado 49). There were also a brief excursion to Sardinia, Germany, and the Austrian Alps. The works resulting from this period are *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (a collection of poems); *Sea and Sardinia*; *Aaron's Rod*; *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*; the first draft of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, a sequel to *Psychoanalysis* and the short fiction "The Captain's Doll". *The Lost Girl* and *Women in Love* had also been published in the meantime, but received bad reviews.

In the beginning of 1922, the Lawrences were invited by a wealthy American admirer, Mabel Dodge Sterne, to join a colony of artists at Taos in New Mexico. They accepted and traveled to America via Ceylon and Australia, arriving in September. They stayed there for three years with only an interval of a few months between 1923 and 1924 being spent in England. They also traveled extensively in Mexico but came back to Taos where they bought the Kiowa Ranch from Mabel Dodge Sterne (now Mabel Luhan, after

marriage to her American-Indian lover). During the excursion to Mexico, Lawrence suffered his first pulmonary hemorrhage that anticipated his later emaciation and death. In the third year at Taos the Lawrences stayed in their own ranch, leading a rough frontier life, an experience they longed to revive after they left the place. However, Lawrence never did return to the place due to various reasons. Lawrence wrote his *Kangaroo* during the early part of this period namely during his 3 month stay in Australia and also revised a novel *The Boy in the Bush* by the Australian woman writer M. L. Skinner. After recording his experiences and responses to Australia in these novels, he recorded his Mexican experiences in Quetzalcoatl (that later became *The Plumed Serpent*, published in 1926).

In September 1925 the Lawrence again went back to Europe, staying mostly in a villa near Florence, called the Villa Mirinda, for about two and a half years. It was here that Lawrence studied the Etruscan culture of the dead (Marsh 196) that finally came out as *Etruscan Places*. This stay was interspersed with travels to Switzerland, France, Germany and various parts of Italy. Also, in 1926, Frieda met and had an affair with Angelino Ravagli, who was to become her third husband after Lawrence's death. Lawrence made a couple of visits to England as well which became the basis for his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (written in three successive versions). In addition, during his last years he wrote the short story "The Escaped Cock" (later called "The Man who Died"); essays about the Tuscan countryside; the last collection of his stories, *The Women who Rode Away*; a volume of short poems *Pansies*; various essays like "Pornography and Obscenity", poems like "Bavarian Gentians" and "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*"; and finally *Apocalypse* (published posthumously). By this time, Lawrence's illness had significantly worsened and the Lawrences had to come to Switzerland and then to southern France where he was recommended complete rest in a sanatorium. Accordingly, Lawrence very reluctantly entered a sanatorium in Vence above Nice in France. However, his condition worsened and the doctor diagnosed pleurisy and Lawrence was moved to a villa in Vence itself after Lawrence expressed discomfort in the "institutional atmosphere" (Marsh 196) of the sanatorium. He was brought to the villa on 1 March 1930, but died in the evening between ten and eleven o'clock on the very next day (2 Marsh 1930). He was buried in Vence and a headstone with a phoenix design was placed at

his grave. Five years later his remains were exhumed and the ashes were taken to Taos where they were mixed with the cement used to make a small shrine in Lawrence's memory at Kiowa ranch (Salgâdo 62).

#### 1.4 PLACING THE NOVEL

*Sons and Lovers* shows aspects of Lawrence's modernism even though it varied in nature from the formal experimentation that novelists like Woolf and Joyce made. The novel had established its dominance as a literary form during the nineteenth century and closely stuck to realism in the first half. But the second half of the nineteenth century saw a revolution in ideas that confounded the rationalist tradition continuing from the Enlightenment. The mid- and late-nineteenth century novelists like Charles Dickens, Emile Zola, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Thomas Hardy had questioned some of the prevailing assumptions of technological, industrial and scientific progress and explored the impact of modernity on the ethical and moral structures in society. Accordingly, the form of the novel, as a mirror to society, also manifested this change in its very form and structure, which was erstwhile based on a realist and naturalist model. In the words of Marsh " [a] sequential prose narrative, centering on a structured plot, struggled to express a radically new, and much more unsettled, experience of life" (Marsh 207).

This manifested itself for example in the allegorical, symbolic and grotesque nature of Dickens's later novels and Hardy's visionary rather than naturalistic description of nature especially in the later works *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896). This was followed by the radical conclusions of the psychoanalytical theory of Freud and Marx's theories of socialism. The effect of Darwin's revolutionary theory of evolution and similar theories in geology by other scientists also remained powerful in the background. Thus, the break with the nineteenth century world was decisively made by the combined ideas of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Lawrence, who grew up in the backdrop of such a paradigm shift in the world of ideas, also naturally echoed it in the manner he approached novel-writing and the major preoccupations inherent in his novels.

With regard to the structure of the novel, newer and more experimental approaches of capturing live experiences and the unconscious mind's

responses to them and representing them though the form of the novel had yielded to the narratives of “Stream-of-consciousness”. It was tentative, fragmentary, non-linear and devoid of a conventional plot, it was thus an attempt to subvert the old conventional reality and its representation that found its way into novels such as James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Light House*. On the other hand, there were the other modernists like E.M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence who apparently remained within the conventional form of the novel in their works, but if we analyse their novels closely, we can see how the sequential narrative of events, characters and novels are distorted by holes within them in the shape of events “impossible to account for or describe, or of the intensity of the inner life of the characters and events that transcend their dependence on linearity and realist representation” (Marsh 208-9).

Lawrence himself wrote in essays and letters what he thought of the modern novel. I will append here certain extracts from some of these works. Please read them and see how they reflect the principles underlying Lawrence’s novels. The extracts, however, do not necessarily date before *Sons and Lovers*, so that you will also have to relate them to the novel retrospectively.

**Stop to Consider:**

*In a letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June, 1914, Lawrence wrote:*

You must not look in my novel for the old stable ego – of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it was, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond – but I say, Diamond, what! This is Carbon, and my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) You must not say my novel is shaky – it is not perfect, because I am not expert in what I want to do. But it is the real thing, say what you like. And I shall get my reception, if not now, then before long. Again, I say, don’t look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.

**The following are some extracts from “Art and Morality”(1925) where, through his non-conformist definition of morality, he puts art against the conventional morality of representation.**

Perhaps, from painting better than from any other art we can realize the subtlety of the distinction between what is dumbly felt to be moral, and what is felt to be immoral. The moral instinct in the man in the street. But instinct is largely habit. The moral instinct of the man in the street is largely an emotional defense of an old habit.

Yet what can there be in a Cezanne still-life to rouse the aggressive moral instinct of the man in the street? What ancient habit in man do these six apples and a water-pitcher succeed in hindering?

\* \* \* \* \*

Where, then, does the immorality come in? Because come in it does. Because of a very curious habit that civilized man has been forming down the whole course of civilization, and in which he is now hard-boiled. The slowly formed habit of seeing just as the photographic camera sees.

\* \* \* \* \*

This is the habit we have formed: of visualizing everything. Each man to himself is a picture. That is, he is a complete little objective reality, complete in himself, existing by himself, absolutely, in the middle of the picture. All the rest is just setting, background. To every man, to every woman, the universe is just a setting to the absolute little picture of himself, herself.

This has been the development of the conscious ego in man, through several thousands years; since Greece first broke the spell of “darkness”. Man has learnt to see himself. So now, he is what he sees. He makes himself in his own image.

\* \* \* \* \*

We, however, have learnt to see ourselves for what we are, as the sum sees us. The Kodak bears witness. We see as the All-Seeing Eye sees, with the universal vision. And we are what is seen : each man to himself an identity, an isolated absolute, corresponding with a universe of isolated absolutes. A picture! A Kodak snap, in a universal film of snaps.

We have achieved universal vision. Even God could not see *differently* from what we see :only more extensively like a telescope, or more intensively, like a microscope. But, the same vision. A vision of images which are real, and each limited to itself.

\* \* \* \* \*

The identifying of ourselves with the visual image of ourselves has become an instinct : the habit is already old. The picture of me, the we that is seen, is me

\* \* \* \* \*

The Cezanne still-life, however, is contrary to the All-Seeing Eye. Apples, to the eye of God, could not look like that, nor could a tablecloth, nor could a pitcher. So, it is wrong.

Because man, since he grew out of a personal God, has taken over to himself all the attributes of the Personal Godhead. It is the all-seeing human eye which is now the Eternal Eye.

\* \* \* \* \*

And this is the immorality in Cezanne: he begins to see more than the All-Seeing Eye of humanity can possibly see, Kodak-wise. If you can see in the apple a bellyache and a knock on the head, and paint these in the image, among the prettiness, then it is the death of the Kodak and the movies, and must be immoral.

\* \* \* \* \*

What art has to do, and we'll go on doing, is to reveal things in their different relationships. That is to say, you've got to see in the apple the bellyache. Sir Isaac's knock on the cranium, the vast, moist wall through which the insect bores to lay her eggs in the middle, and the untasted, unknown quality which Eve saw hanging on a tree. Add to this the glaucous glimpse that the mackerel gets as he comes to the surface, and Fantin-Lataur's apples are no more to you than enamelled rissoles.

The true artist does not substitute immorality for morality. On the contrary, he substitutes a finer for a grosser. And as soon as you see a finer morality, the grosser becomes relatively immoral.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let Cézanne's apples go rolling off the table for ever. They live by their own laws, in their own ambience, and not by the laws of the Kodak – or of man. They are casually related to man. But to those apples, man is by no means the absolute.

A new relationship between ourselves and the universe means a new morality. (Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 1936, pp. 521, 523-526)

**This notion of the artist's morality connects up with Lawrence's ideas about morality in the novel itself, which he expressed in "Morality and the Novel" (1925), parts of which are quoted below :**

And morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing *balance* between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness.

Now here we see the beauty and the great value of the novel. Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down, to get a stable equilibrium.

But the novel, no. The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance.

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb on the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.

The modern novel tends to become more and more immoral, as the novelist tends to press his thumb heavier and heavier in the pan; either on the side of love, pure love : or on the side of licentious “freedom”.

The novel is not, as a rule, immoral because the novelist has any dominant idea, or *purpose*. The immorality lies in the novelist’s helpless, unconscious predilection. Love is a great emotion. But if you set out to write a novel, and you yourself are in the throes of the great predilection for love, love as the supreme, the only emotion worth living for, then you will write an immoral novel.

\* \* \* \* \*

If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in. If the novelist *honours* the relationship in itself, it will be a great novel.

\* \* \* \* \*

The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary.

And the relation between man and woman will change for ever, and will for ever be the new central clue to human life. It is the *relation itself* which is the quick and the central clue to life, not the man, nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship, as a contingency.

\* \* \* \* \*

The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our live, as nothing else can; no didactic scripture, any how. If the novelist keep his thumb out of the pan.

(Lawrence: *Phoenix* (1936), pp. 528 – 9,

530, 531)

The other aspect I want to touch upon in this section is the place *Sons and Lovers* occupies in the ‘Bildungsroman’ tradition, and the debt it owes to the strain of psychological realism in English fiction.

Though the term ‘Bildungsroman’ became current in English only in 1910, the form itself was dominant in Victorian fiction with some famous novels like Dickens’ *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Thackeray’s

*Pendennis*, and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. By the fag-end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, through novelists like Henry James and Joseph Conrad, this tradition of subjective fiction underwent another revision, when these novelists put more emphasis on "the characters' " perceptions and interpretations of them in the perplexing mazes of 'consciousness' than on the events and action within the novel. This brand of psychological realism had in fact preceded the 'Bildungsroman' tradition, going back to the 1740s and Samuel Richardson (Baldick: 189). Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* also falls into both these categories (as does Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, though it is in the stream-of-consciousness mode), but also has to be seen as trying to break away from the strict confines of the term 'realism'. Psychological realism, in a larger sense, incorporates a subjectivity in the novel that opens up the inner world of the character's consciousness, so that external reality ceases to be centre-stage but instead, is mediated through the subjective self of the character herself or himself. This aspect is strongly evident in *Sons and Lovers*, especially the character of Paul whose subjectivity is the most dominant in the novel. Again, there is the subject of education (making way for the relevance of the Bildungsroman tag to the narrative) in as much as it is through education, (literally) and through the dynamics of Paul's relationships with his parents (his mother in particular) and his lovers that he struggles to emerge as an autonomous self. Here I am deliberately trying to make a reductive assessment of the novel in order to provoke you to further explorations and questions, so that, by the time we come to the third unit, you have already made a preliminary analysis of the novel.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Now that you have become acquainted with some of the preoccupations of Lawrence regarding the novel in the context of modern times, try to enumerate his major concerns and see how they are reflected in his fiction.
2. How is Lawrence different from the other modernists, say, Virginia Woolf, as far as modernist fiction is concerned? What is the place of *Sons and Lovers* in this context?

## 1.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, I gave you an introduction to Lawrence's life as well as a background both to Lawrence and to *Sons and Lovers*. With this information, we will now go on to the second unit which will make a preliminary discussion of what happens in the novel and the major events and characters in the narrative. As we go on to a preliminary reading of the novel, it will be useful to bring the information of the formative influences in Lawrence's life to bear upon the novel since it will throw some of the central themes in the novel into greater relief in the backdrop of the social and historical context of Lawrence.

\* \* \*

## Unit 2 Introducing the Novel

### Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 The story in brief
- 2.3 The Characters
- 2.4 Critical Reception
- 2.5 Summing up

### 2.1 OBJECTIVE

The objectives in this unit are to

- *familiarize* you with the major events and characters in the novel
- *help* you to summarize the critical positions regarding the novel

### 2.2 THE STORY IN BRIEF

*Sons and Lovers* is divided into two parts. The first deals with the married life of the Morels through the birth of Paul to his growing up with his brothers and sister till the death of William, the eldest child in the family in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 to 15 comprises the second part which is dominated by Paul. It explores his relationship with Miriam coming into conflict at first with his relationship with his mother and then with his growing relationship with Clara Dawes. The novel ends with the rejection of both Miriam and Clara and the death of Mrs. Morel that makes a “derelict” of Paul.

The novel opens with a hint of history in the description of the Bottoms, which connects the present to a primitive past. At the same time, it is an indictment of modernity and industrialization that robs the land and the mines of their organic presence and thereby dehumanizes the miners. This is important as it lays the ground for the subsequent division of Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel in terms of the body and the mind (a turning of roles that in itself is radical of Lawrence). It also lends the narrative a touch of realism that is specifically Hardy-esque in nature. Lawrence himself was quite influenced

by Hardy and wrote a long essay on him titled “The Study of Thomas Hardy”.

By the time the novel opens, Mrs. Morel already has had two children and she is expecting a third. As the chapter title says, it is the early married life of the Morels that is summarized here. Born out of an initial attraction for the vitality of the miner, the marriage for Mrs. Morel turns out to be disastrous as her middle-class respectability is constantly attacked by the coarseness of Mr. Morel, who drinks, keeps late hours, and generally acts as a boorish husband for most of the first part of the narrative. He is, quite early in the novel, relegated to the background with Mrs. Morel and the children, particularly William, coming to the foreground. In fact, the first chapter depicts a final break between Mr. & Mrs. Morel when the former cuts off the 2-year-old William’s curly, golden hair in order to make him look more like a boy. Also, significantly, it ends with a particularly violent quarrel between the husband and the wife in which a drunken Morel locks his wife out of the garden. Mrs. Morel experiences a strange, mysterious and rejuvenating communion with nature (the moon, the various white flowers) that gives her strength to withstand the stifling sensation within the confines of the house. The first chapter also lays down the framework of a struggle between Mrs. Morel and Mr. Morel for the control of their children’s minds that is played out, among other things, along class and gender distinctions/differences. It is succeeded by the birth of Paul, and as the author makes it clear in the chapter heading, another battle after which Morel is cast off by his wife (and children) to some extent in the third chapter. Mrs. Morel begins to turn to her eldest son for the fulfillment of her ambitions and aspirations, giving him the affection and ease he should have got from his father.

Paul is born in the second chapter which also witnesses his childhood both before and after he starts going to school, while throughout the rest of Part I, he takes second place to his elder brother. There is a significant incident in Chapter Two in which Mrs. Morel, who now feels guilty at not having wanted this child (all the more so because Paul is sickly and weak since birth), walks one afternoon into the country with him as a small baby and offers him up to the sun, signifying both rejection and possession. In this intense episode, she thereby connects to him in this supreme moment, in which all her grief, guilt and love for the child combine together. The second

important incident here is another quarrel between the Morels, in which, Morel (drunk again), throws a drawer at Mrs. Morel and injures her. The drops of blood from her wound fall on Paul's head (in the manner of the sacrament of Baptism) making a symbolic statement of the deep and irrevocable bond between Paul and his mother.

Mrs. Morel, as Paul begins to grow up, is very proud of him and helps him in his intellectual development. She also guides him later securing his first job. In the meantime, however, there has been the absolute break with Morel and William is "taken on" by Mrs. Morel to undertake the role of his father in terms of having a better education, getting a better job and joining thereby the higher rungs of social life. At the same time, the mother's emotional needs are also directed at the sons rather than at their father, and the strain begins to take its toll on William, who cannot find fulfillment with his girl friends because they cannot measure up to the idealized version of his mother in his mind. William subsequently goes away to London in order to work deeply upsetting Mrs. Morel and builds a relationship with a pretty but shallow girl whom he brings home to Bestwood. These visits are unsatisfactory and awkward for both William and Mrs. Morel. William later, is suddenly taken with pneumonia in London and dies. Mrs. Morel's grief at her eldest son's death is tremendous and for a while she withdraws into herself and neglects her other children. However, with William's death, after this period, she gradually begins to turn to Paul as the successor of William, who will now strive to fulfill her emotional needs as well as her social and economic aspirations.

Thus, Part One of *Sons and Lovers* serves an expository purpose to the unwinding of Part Two. At the same time it stands on its own as a searching expose of the miner's life at the turn of the century and the increasing dehumanization enforced by industrial progress. With the onset of modernity, the traditional way of the miner's life gave way to increasing exploitation of the workers by the factory and mine owners, which is reflected in the increasingly straitened situation of the Morel family. At the same time there is also the awareness that the only way out of the situation is a superior education and consequent entry into another, higher sphere of life. In this respect, it is Mrs. Morel's perspective that becomes dominant, though at times, we get a positive portrait of Mr. Morel when he is busy with his carpentering. Even Mrs. Morel seems to experience traces of her old

admiration for him, while for the children these are some of their happiest times in their life.

The second part of the novel concerns itself with Paul's growth into manhood, and in this process, his emotional and intellectual development as he strives to come out of his own. This has been anticipated in the first part in William's emergence from home. Lawrence explores the dynamics of the relationships between man and woman (here Mr. and Mrs. Morel) that takes the form of a battle over who will establish an influence over William. Indications are also given of some of the key aspects that will be developed in the longer second part, such as the fascination and horror of the mine where his father works, the disturbance of his parents quarrels, the jealousy he feels of his mother, his reactions to work (Butler 13).

Chapter Seven reintroduces Willey Farm and particularly, Miriam Leivers who is sixteen years. We had seen Mrs. Morel visiting the Leivers family with Paul in Chapter Six in Part I. Miriam is first seen as a gawky, shy fourteen year-old girl in a dirty apron who has "a rosy dark face, a bunch of short black curls, very fine and free, and dark eyes" (Chapter 6).

Even here, however, there is one aspect of her that is given much emphasis later – her intensity and her romantic nature, that makes her want to prove that she was a grand person like the 'Lady of the Lake' (Chapter 6). In Chapter 7, the narrator further says of Miriam: "Everything was a Walter Scott heroine being loved by man with helmets or with plumes in their caps. She herself was something of a princess turned into a swine-girl, in her own imagination. And she was afraid lest this boy, who, nevertheless, looked something like a Walter Scott hero, who could paint and speak French, and knew what algebra meant, and who went by train to Nottingham everyday, might consider her simply as the swine-girl, unable to perceive the princess beneath; so she held aloof" (Chapter 7).

Paul gradually becomes a favourite with the family and seems to find a motherly presence in Mrs. Leivers who expresses an enthusiasm for his painting that is lacking in Mrs. Morel. Paul and Miriam grew up together as childhood friends and Paul teaches her algebra and French. While Miriam adores Paul and looks up to him, Paul behaves patronizingly towards Miriam, becoming impatient and bad-tempered at what he thinks is the slowness of Miriam's intellect. Apart from studying, they spend the time

together in the fields among the flowers and visits to the chapel. Throughout this chapter, Miriam is shown as being intensely spiritual and withdrawn into herself and her own thoughts, while Paul is more open-natured. However, Mrs. Morel takes an aversion to Miriam from the moment she becomes aware of the growing bond of love between her and Paul. Most of the second part is cast as an exploration of the struggle between Mrs. Morel and Miniam over the control of Paul's soul. However, in the next unit we will discuss the problems inherent in such a position even though the narrator seems to endorse it. This part also takes a look at Paul's development as an artist.

In the meantime Paul has joined Jordan's factory and becomes, again, a favourite with the women workers. Two characters central to the narrative are introduced in the second part. In chapter eight, interestingly titled "Strife in Love", we find fault lines appearing in the love between Paul and Miriam. Earlier in Chapter Seven Paul had drawn a distinction between himself as "Norman" and Miriam as "Gothic". One of the reasons for the break is Paul's increasing attraction for Clara Dawes, who also works in Jordan's. As against Mrs. Morel and Miriam, Clara comes across as a more independent woman who is separated from her husband, and works for her living. She is, moreover, a rather striking woman blonde, with a sullen expression, and a defiant carriage. Moreover, she ignores Paul when he meets her first with Miriam. Due to all these reasons, Paul becomes interested in her, and his "masculine spirit rear[s] its head" (Chapter 8). Here the narrative subtly underlines the uncontrolled desire of Paul to establish his command over the defiant woman.

Interestingly, however, Mrs. Morel, who is wary of Miriam because the latter "wants to have the whole of Paul to herself and will leave none of him for her" (Butler: 13), accepts the Paul-Clara relationship because she does not seem to pose a similar threat. According to her, this is a more or less transitory relationship that is harmless because it is based primarily on physical, not spiritual, intimacy between the two. Even Paul begins to interpret his relationship with Miriam as excessively spiritual, even when Miriam offers her body up to Paul in an ultimate test for her love. On the other hand, the consummation of the Paul-Clara relationship is intensely satisfying for both but is marked by its short-lived quality. This is largely because Clara, "although physically luxuriant, has a passive, animal-like mental calmness.

She is a woman of a large, slow accepting, physical type which in Lawrence symbolizes the wisdom of the flesh rather at the expense of the spirit (Butler 13).

After the death of Mrs. Morel, the relationship between Paul and Clara also peters off, culminating in her return to her husband. There is another important incident towards the later part of the novel when Paul and Baxter Dawes fight with one another over Clara. Paul is ultimately the winner and he caps his physical triumph with a spiritual triumph by overcoming Clara's defiance and sending her back to her husband. This is seen as part of Paul's initiation into manhood and the narrative marks it by calling him by his surname, Morel, (a custom usually practiced in case of grown men and the manner in which they are addressed) from this point onwards. Mrs. Morel's death, also at this point, accelerates Paul's sense of alienation amidst his familiar environment. This is also symbolic in that it signifies the final breaking of his ties of childhood and adolescence and "he is an adult who can now leave the home in which he was born and brought up" (Butler 13).

Since, this is a story in brief, it is obviously and necessarily narrow in scope, and outlines only the basic structure of and the key points in the narrative. The narrative, however, is less concerned with conventional story and plot, concentrating more on the interiority of the characters and the narrative world as a whole. In this, *Sons and Lovers* exhibits a modernist preoccupation with the problem of realist representation that is produced by necessary distortions of subjective perspectives. Working towards this end, the work is primarily a study of emotion, not only with reference to the central character, Paul, but the other characters as well, so that in spite of the dominance of Paul's point of view, there is a possibility of the points of view of other characters undercutting his.

**Stop to Consider:**

**In an extract from a famous letter Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett in 1912, he summarises this novel like the following.**

A woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has had no satisfaction in her own life. She has had no passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up, she selects them as lovers – first the eldest, then the second. These sons

are urged into life by their reciprocal love of the mother – urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can't love, because the mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them...As soon as the young men come into contact with women there is a split. He gives his sex to a fribble and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him, because he doesn't know where he is. The next son gets a woman who fights for his soul – fights his mother. The son loves the mother – all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as object. The mother gradually proves the stronger, because of the tie of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother hands, and like his elder brother, go for passion. Then the split begins to tell again. But, almost unconsciously, the mother realizes what is the matter and begins to die. The son casts off his mistress, attends to his mother dying. He is left in the end, naked of everything, with the drift towards death. (Butler: 45)

**SAQ:**  
Look at the chapter titles closely. Do they give you an idea of how the narrative is structured or how the themes proceed? (30 + 60words)  
.....  
.....  
.....

**2.3 THE CHARACTERS**

**Mrs. Morel:**

Gertrude Coppard, before her marriage to Walter Morel. Mrs. Morel is a woman of small build with “clear, blue eyes and a “broad brow” and considerable, strength of personality that is greater than her husband’s. She aspires to move upward in society, and this is indicated by her intellectual interests such as reading newspapers and arranging discussion groups in the Women’s Co-operative Guild that she is a member of. Another significant pointer is her pride in, first William’s, and later Paul’s, refinement. Her strength of will makes her the centre of the Morel family, and her death in a way has a climactic impact on the narrative as well as on Paul.

**Mr. Morel:**

Walter Morel. He belongs to the working classes, working as a miner, well-satisfied with his position, life possessing an earthly and vital cheerfulness.

At the same time, he is poorly educated and has a quick temper due to which he has frequent problems at work with his superiors, though he is a good workman and popular among the miners. Initially he puts up a spirited defense of his masculine authority over his children, but ultimately he proves to be weaker to Mrs. Morel's mental strength.

**Paul Morel:**

The protagonist of the novel. There is a strong autobiographical streak in his character. The narrator begins before his birth, but by the second half, it becomes clear that the narrative centres round him.

**William Morel:**

The eldest son of the Morels, he remains to a great extent, an early version of Paul. Even though feeling an oppressive intrusion of his mother into his own life as he grows up, William is nevertheless on the way to professional success when he succumbs to his illness. His death at the end of Part Two paves the way for a deepening of the bond between Paul and his mother.

**Annie Morel:**

She is the second child of the Morels. She is given only secondary importance in the narrative, though the incident in Chapter 4 where she watches Paul "sacrificing her doll Arabella, is important in underlining her relationship with Paul, even as it exposes a disturbing streak of brutality in the latter. Since William is too much older to Paul to accept him as a companion, Paul as a child "belong[s] at first almost entirely to Annie". Annie is shown as "a tom-boy and a flybie-skybie, as her mother called her. But she was intensely fond of her second brother. So Paul was towed round at the heels of Annie, sharing her game" (Chapter 4). She waits upon Mrs. Western when the latter visits them with William subsequently after she becomes a trainee teacher and moves to Sheffield after she marries, and appears again towards the end during Mrs. Morel's illness. In fact Mr. Morel becomes ill during her visit to Annie.

**Arthur Morel:**

The youngest of the Morels. He is the one who most closely resembles Morel in his vitality, becoming consequently his father's favourite. Unlike the other members, he is rather distant from his family and ultimately joins the army where he is moderately successful.

**Miriam Leivers:**

The daughter of the Leivers family at Willey Farm, she is fourteen when we first see her in Chapter 6. She develops into a beautiful and sensitive young woman who is constantly held up for comparison by Paul with himself. Her shyness, intensity and religiosity is labelled by Paul as spiritual, and she is ultimately rejected by Paul on this ground even as he is goaded into making a final break by his mother. Thus she is defeated in her battle with Mrs. Morel and later also in her struggle with Clara Dawes for winning the love of Paul. In spite of her ultimate defeat, her role is significant as one of the central persons in Paul's life who help him in this quest of acquiring self-identity. She, however, is frequently criticised as moody, withdrawn and limiting, though she is constantly exploited by Paul as a threshing floor for his ideas.

**Clara Dawes:**

Miriam's rival in love. She appears first in Chapter 8 walking with Miriam, and exerts the power of her sexuality on Paul. She is part of the women's Movement and is independent and self-willed. Paul's affair with Clara (largely on physical terms) gradually begins to threaten his relationship with Miriam. Paul frequently visits Clara at her home in Nottingham and after a time, she rejoins her work at Jordan's. Their love-making unlike Paul's with Miriam, takes place outdoors, amid nature, not in the claustrophobic confines of the house, signifying the liberating and cathartic effect it has on both. Unlike Miriam, who has a small build and holds traditional and romantic views, Clara is large and physical and her views and opinions are progressive. The narrative, taking Paul's point of view, tends to posit Clara as the body as opposed to Miriam as the soul.

**Baxter Dawes:**

Clara's husband. He, like Morel, is a working-class man who is vulgar and coarse. Baxter Dawes and Clara seem to enact a marriage that closely follows the pattern of the Morel marriage, thereby creating of them some kind of surrogate father and mother figures in the narrative. Paul's fight with Baxter, thereby takes on an Oedipal angle similar to Paul's mental struggle against or hostility to Mr. Morel. Paul's restoring Clara to Dawes, therefore, also be seen as compensatory or a return to the symbolic in the act of restoring the wife to the husband or the mother back to the father, given that

the same does not happen in Paul's own family. Though Baxter Dawes is hostile to Paul because of the perceived intellectual superiority of the latter, both share a capacity for passion.

**Mrs. Leivers:**

Miriam's mother. Since she also does not belong to the mining society like Mrs. Morel, both become good friends. However, unlike Mrs. Morel who is shown in a continual struggle both inside and outside the home for the survival of her self-identity, Mrs. Leivers is resigned to her conventional roles as mother and wife, and retreats into a spirituality that is inherited by Miriam.

**Lily Western:**

The girl-friend of William. She lives in London but accompanies William on his visits to home. She is shown as extremely shallow, mindless and vain, who, again, can only provide a temporary and only physical fulfillment to William, and not a real relations with a real woman. This is because, as the narrative puts it, his soul is in the possession of his mother, so that he can never find any genuine fulfillment in any relationship with women.

**Mrs. Radford:**

The owner of and manager at Jordan's, largely drawn as a caricature, with his funny self-importance. "Lawrence's view of him has the quality of the working men's view of 'the boss' (Butler 58).

**Check Your Progress:**

1. To what extent does Lawrence make 'character' a surrogate for 'plot' in *Sons and Lovers*? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Discuss the women characters in Lawrence's novel as reflections of his 'Freudian' analysis of human motivation.
3. How would you receive the view that *Sons and Lovers* enacts the conflicts of the 'unconscious' with the 'conscious'? Give reasons for your answer.

**2.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION**

*Sons and Lovers* has been taken by many critics to be more an "apologia than a novel" (Salgado (Casebook) (1993): 11) due to the degree of the

author's involvement in the book, so that the initial criticism of the book was largely biographical in nature, concerned with the question of how truly and faithfully he had depicted real people and real events in the book. A significant commentary of Lawrence's portrait of Miriam, for example was provided by Jessie Chambers under the pseudonym 'ET' in *D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*. However, such criticism ultimately serves to take away the attention from the novel in itself to an examination of the private life of the author and the degree to which it is reflected in the novel.

Secondly, soon after the publication of *Sons and Lovers* another school of criticism, based largely on Freudian theories, emerged which perceived a strong dramatization of the Oedipus complex in the book. While contemporary psychoanalytic criticism of *Sons and Lovers* frequently made it too reductive in the process, later theorists have, however, provided a fresh and interesting perspective through its concern with the processes of repression and sublimation, and although peculiar working of the novel to its 'latent' meaning (Salgado:1993, 15). One example of such criticism is Simon Lesser's *Fiction and the Unconscious* (1957).

A great body of criticism regarding *Sons and Lover* has also studied Lawrence's evident interest in a response to what Salgado calls "the feel and tempo of life in the Midlands during the early years of this century, when the old agricultural England lived in an uneasy truce with the early phase of advancing industrialization" (Salgado 1993, 15). Furthermore, his depiction of working-class barriers also becomes typical of the concerns of Lawrence in his works. This is allied with the Bildungsroman tradition in which *Sons and Lovers* can be seen, with the particular dilemmas of an individual (as well as an artist) who happens to come from a provincial rather than a metropolitan background (Salgado 199, 15). In this process, this kind of criticism also tends to lay emphasis on some of the formal strategies or features of the narrative – imaging, structure, rhythm, language, and so on – as seen in the criticism of Dorothy Van Ghent and David Daiches. On the other hand, critics like Maurice Beebe try to see the novel as part of a larger historical tradition, while some like H. M. Daleskin (*The Forked Flame*) try to see in the novel a particular stage of a continuing theme (in Daleskin the male/female duality).

Since the late 1960s, however, there has been a tremendous shift in Lawrence criticism especially in the methodology of the critics. As Rick Rylance notes in the *New Casebook on Sons and Lovers*, earlier criticism “searched the novel for evidence of coherence, growth and moral wisdom. *Sons and Lovers* was assumed to have a cohesive stylish and formal organization and demonstrate a view of life from which something could be learnt. Today, these things are no longer looked for. Feminist and socialist critics, to take the most obvious example are more interested in the novel’s ideological limits and possibilities while, in the discussion of literary form, much recent criticism emphasizes, not the integrity of the text, but ambiguities, eddies of meaning and disturbing sub-texts (Rylance : 1). One example of such a shift is Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969), where she vehemently attacks patriarchy and closely examines the political aspects of sexuality, and the workings of power and violence in it as manifesting a “systematic condition of patriarchal culture (Rylance: 9). Lawrence, one of five male authors taken up by Millett, is attacked for representing and reinforcing male domination as an eternally valid truth or as a given, and masculinity as superior in the very order of nature. *Sons and Lovers*, for Millett, is a novel remarkable for its depiction of working-class life and its forceful delineation of the limited and almost non-existent opportunities for self-fulfillment in the life of women like Mrs. Morel and Mrs. Leivers. However, this originality of perspective is complicated here by what Millett sees as the complete identification of Lawrence with Paul. As a result, the novel becomes, for Millett, a compensatory enactment (through literature) of the loss of the mother encountered by the author himself as a resolution of the Oedipal condition. Consequently, the female characters in the narrative “exist in Paul’s orbit and to cater to his needs: Clara to awaken him sexually, Miriam to worship his talent in the role of disciple and Mrs. Morel to provide always that enormous and expansive support, that dynamic motivation which can inspire the son of a coal miner to rise above the circumstances of his birth and become a great artist” (Rylance:75).

Millett’s radical feminist position on Lawrence became a landmark in Lawrence criticism and paved the way for diverse feminist readings of his novel, though Millett herself was regarded as guilty of being too reductive in her equation of Lawrence with Paul, the protagonist of *Sons and Lovers*. A similarly radical position on the question of gender in Lawrence was

taken by Louis Martz in his essay “A Portrait of Miriam” that explored the narrative point-of-view in the novel in order to reveal the gaps in the depiction or “portrait” of Miriam. This essay resists the dominant interpretation of Miriam as insipid and excessively spiritual, arguing that this is only one perspective produced primarily by Paul’s point of view that dominates the narrative Martz closely reads Chapter 7-11 in order to question the supposed realism of the narrative. For Martz, as against the relative neutrality of the earlier and later parts of the narrative, its middle (comprising the above mentioned chapters) seems to self-consciously incorporate a forcefulness of commentary on Miriam that is resonant not of the point-of-view of a largely neutral third-person narrator but of the confusions and tensions arising in Paul’s consciousness itself. Thus, the narrator in these chapters, though still technically omniscient, becomes to a great extent, unreliable. Following Martz, critics like Diane S. Bonds, Graham Holderness and Tony Pinkney have questioned the validity of the novel’s association with realism, insisting more on the constructed and fictional nature of such an ostensible neutrality than the realistic mode. Nixon, Linda Ruth Williams and Hilary Simpson have also focused on Lawrence’s reaction to, response towards, and relationship with contemporary feminism, and its impact on his novels. In this process, they have examined the construction of particular subject-positions in those narratives, especially in relation to issues of gender as well as the politics involved in reading texts.

Another significant body of criticism regarding *Sons and Lovers* has been concerned with the manner in which Lawrence incorporates issues of social class and the life of the miners in Nottingham and allied areas. Critics like Graham Holderness, Tony Pinkney (both mentioned earlier in another context) and John Goode engage themselves with this aspect of Lawrence’s writing. As far as the present novel is concerned, they discuss the ramifications of the structure of a working-class family and how it necessarily creates a condition of emotional intimacy between the mother and children, while the father, because of the long hours of his job and his perceived role in providing the economic resources to his family, becomes a more or less alien presence. Attention is also given to the larger process of industrialization that entails such a structure of the working-class family, dehumanizes the landscape and imposes a mechanicality on the miner’s life-style. The conflicting perspectives on the novel’s realism is seen as resulting from the increasing

sense of alienation and isolation in the characters themselves, most particularly Paul, so that the novel itself begins to register a social and cultural transitory from a collective communal to a different and more individualistic social world. For John Goode, “*Sons and Lovers* has no stable generic shape and coggles between Bildungsroman, urban realism, courting pastoral and a more heavily symbolic kind of writing.” Goode relates this instability to the series of dislocations in social status and cultural expectation experienced by the Morel family. So, *Sons and Lovers* reflects Lawrence’s efforts to represent new kinds of class-experience and social process by adapting and challenging some of the realist conventions of novels written largely for middle-class readers (Rylance: 13). Thus the Oedipal condition in the novel, according to this perspective is not an exclusive matter of an individual psychology but rather the outcome of a collaboration of the social aspirations of the characters, especially within the Morel household, the changes in the family structure brought on by industrialization, and the transformation of an older community into a socially isolated individualism that bears the mark of early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity.

These are some of the significant areas for critical discussion of *Sons and Lovers* since it was first published till the present time. Much of contemporary criticism has capitalized on the radical processes evolved by theories such as post-structuralism, narratology and psychoanalysis, gender studies, cultural studies, and film studies, and so on, while earlier criticism of the novel had tended to place it in a largely autobiographical and moralist and ethical framework.

**SAQ:**

*Sons and Lovers* can be seen as a novel which is simultaneously ‘realistic’, ‘psychological’, and ‘symbolic’. How far does this typify the writing of the early twentieth century? (80 words)

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## 2.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, I have given a brief synopsis of the plot of *Sons and Lovers*, underlining the key phases and the role of the major characters. In the course of doing so, I have also tried to give a preliminary idea of some of the central themes and issues concerning the novel, which I will be elaborating in the next unit. It is desirable that you build up the character-sketches through your own reading of the novel and try to see how they are linked to networks and patterns of symbolic imagery throughout the narrative. In the penultimate section of this unit, I have not given a chronological account of the critical reception of the novel but have attempted to organize it under different sectors of contemporary criticism and theory. From this introduction, now proceed to a closer reading of *Sons and Lovers* in the next unit.

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## **Unit 3**

### **Themes and Techniques**

#### **Contents:**

- 3.1 Objectives**
- 3.2 Introduction**
- 3.3 The Title**
- 3.4 Major Themes**
  - 3.4.1 Class, Society and Social Mobility**
  - 3.4.2 Impact of the Industrial Revolution; and the Industrial Landscape**
  - 3.4.3 Gender and Patriarchy**
  - 3.4.4 Struggle for Individual Identity**
- 3.5 Narrative Technique**
- 3.6 Images and Symbols**
- 3.7 Summing up**
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings**

#### **3.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this unit is to

- *engage* you with a deeper analysis of *Sons and Lovers* in terms of its title, themes, techniques and its symbolism
- *help* you identify the subtle patterns within the writing
- *familiarise* you with Lawrence in totality

#### **3.2 INTRODUCTION**

So far you have only learnt of some of the more ‘obvious’ aspects of the novel. While studying a novel, however, you would surely raise many questions about why the author attempts certain deeper goals while describing or narrating, or how the author brings to the surface such embedded ‘intentions’ in the writing. As you have seen while reading the novel, Lawrence’s narration or description of Paul’s relationships often falls

into a larger pattern that we usually name, “theme”, or even, “structure”. In this unit, as per our normal practice in our material on the other novels prescribed for study, we shall go into such theme/s and structure, aspects that are not covered by the categories of ‘story’ or ‘plot’.

### 3.3 THE TITLE

In this section, we will discuss the title with particular reference to a theme that connects it with the entire narrative—the relationship between Paul and his mother as an Oedipal drama. As a result, I have deliberately excluded this theme from the next section that explores certain broad concerns in the novel. The initial title of the novel had been “Paul Morel” which was afterwards changed to *Sons and Lovers* when it was published in 1913. Lawrence had not come into contact with Freudian psychoanalysis when he started writing the novel. It was after his acquaintance and a growing relationship with Frieda Weekley that he became aware of Freud. By that time, he was working on the final stages of *Sons and Lovers*, so that the change in the title might have influenced by this knowledge.

#### **Stop to Consider:**

In numerous letters and non-fictional works, most notably *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, Lawrence took a hostile position towards psychoanalysis, terming it “pollyanalysis”. However, as can be seen in the novel, Lawrence had independently come to depict a structure that was to gain considerable influence (through Freud) as the ‘Oedipus complex’. Beginning with an examination of Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Rex*, Freud in “The Oedipus Complex” goes on to describe the Oedipus complex as the choice of the mother as love-object” of the child (Celly : 433).

The play is about the Greek mythical figure King Oedipus, whose destiny it was to slay his father and to wed his mother” (Celly: 443). Freud goes on to comment that it is “surprising” that the play does not elicit the audience’s revulsion, even though essentially it is an “immoral play, it sets aside the individual’s responsibility to social law, and displays divine forces ordering the crime and rendering powerless the moral instincts of the human being which would guard him against the crime” (Celly: 443-44). It is because the hearer or the audience reacts to the secret meaning and content of the myth itself. He reacts as though by self-analysis he had recognized the will of the gods and the oracle as glorified

disguise of his own unconscious; as though he remembered in himself the wish to do away with his father and in his place to wed his mother, and must abhor the thought” (Celly: 434). Thus, the Oedipus complex is characterized by the child’s (rather, infant’s) fantasizing about competing with the father sexually in order to obtain control over the body of the mother. The culmination of the Oedipus complex, however, is the child’s rejection of the castrated mother in favour of the phallic father and entry into the social world of the father. Due to the father’s taboo on incest with the mother, the child (which is male in Freud) withdraws his libidinal desire from his mother and effects a reconciliation with his father. Traces of the Oedipal complex, however, exist in the psyche of the individual even when he grows up into adulthood.

The first part of *Sons and Lovers* builds up the Oedipal drama in which Mrs. Morel and Mr. Morel wage a battle for the psychological control of their children. Due to Mr. Morel’s brutality against his wife, especially when he comes home drunk, the children gradually begin to side with their mother. We see this in Chapter Two when the narrator says “It was about this time Mrs. Morel was destroying her husband’s authority. Until now, she had felt too much alone to stand away from him. But William was growing up, and all his young soul was his mother’s. Annie too was against her father. Finally, there was this last baby. Mrs. Morel had hated him during the year before it was born” (Chapter 2).

Again, in Chapter 4, there is Paul’s silent rejection of his father when the latter comes up to his son who is ill with bronchitis. Morel’s presence seems to oppress Paul who is relieved when Morel finally goes out of the room. With his mother, however, Paul shares a special intimacy:

“Paul loved to sleep with mother. Sleep is still most perfect, in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so that it takes the body and soul completely in its healing. Paul lay against her and slept, and got better, whilst she, always a bad sleeper, fell later into a profound sleep that seemed to give her faith. (Chapter 4)

In Chapter 5, when Mr. Morel is in hospital recovering after an accident, Paul assumes the role of the head of the family, since, now that William is away working in London, he is the eldest son at home.

“I’m the man in the house now”, he used to say to his mother, with joy. They learned how perfectly peaceful the home could be. And they almost regretted – though some of them would have owned such callousness – that their father was soon coming back.” (Chapter 5)

Finally, in Chapter 8 in the Second Part of *Sons and Lovers*, there is an intimate moment between Paul and his mother which is violently interrupted by Walter Morel. After arguing over Miriam, Paul and his mother reach a mutual reconciliation and Paul strokes his mother’s hair while “his mouth [is] on her throat.” Mrs. Morel kisses him a long, fervent kiss”:

“My boy!” She said, in a voice trembling with passionate love. Without knowing, he gently stroked her face.

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His mother looked so strange, Paul kissed her, trembling.

“Ha – mother!” he said swiftly.

Morel came in, walking unevenly. His hat was over one corner of his eye. He balanced in the doorway.

“At your mischief again?” he said, venomously.

Mrs. Morel’s emotion turned into sudden hate of the drunkard who had come in thus upon her. (Chapter 8)

These are some instances in *Sons and Lovers* which show the eroticized relation between Mrs. Morel and her sons, particularly Paul, within the family. In the next section, we will see how the Oedipal drama in the novel is circumscribed by the social context, so that the title *Sons and Lovers* goes beyond its immediate referent of the ‘Oedipus complex’.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. How does the title, *Sons and Lovers*, adumbrate both autobiography and Freudian psychology in Lawrence’s novel? Support your answer with the examples given above from the novel.
2. Explore the idea that Paul Morel is a type of the “modern” protagonist whose experiences reveal Lawrence’s study of a modern conflict-ridden society.

### 3.4 MAJOR THEMES

In this section, we will concentrate on certain themes prominent in the novel. I will also be addressing certain other key themes within these broad sub-sections. However, given the limitations of space, this section is not intended to be exhaustive and therefore I would suggest that you explore the text further for the variety of themes and preoccupations in the novel while using this material as an introductory aid only.

#### 3.4.1 CLASS, SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

*Sons and Lovers* is informed by a deep sense of alienation that partly has its roots in the transition from a working-class society to middle-class intelligentsia and the conflict consequent to clash of ideologies underlying the two classes.

There is now a significant body of work addressing this particular aspect in Lawrence's fiction. Much of it is influenced by the pioneering work of Raymond Williams (such as in *Culture and Society* and *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*) which sees Lawrence as registering a transition from an older organic community to a more individualized and lonely social world. He also analyses how literary forms both respond to and are shaped by particular social and class experiences at different points in history. For Williams, as for later critics, Lawrence evolves a new language to depict this particular experience of transition and dislocation at the same time of reworking some of the nineteenth-century conventions in literature (chiefly, the tradition of realism in the Victorian novel). Williams's discussion of Lawrence will be taken up in the next sub-section where I will discuss Lawrence's response to the impact of the Industrial Revolution in his writings both fictional and non-fictional.

In Chapter One of *Sons and Lovers*, we are given a picture of the Bottoms, consisting of "six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block." This is followed by a more detailed description of the neat and decent front view of the houses countered by the ugly, dirty and "scrubby" back portion of the houses opening to the ash-pits. In this description we have a particularly stark account of the working class family and the particular nature of its lifestyle.

This description is, as you already know by now, based on the block of miner’s built by B.W. & Co. in the 1870s and 1880s. However, as Lawrence also makes clear, these houses were superior to other houses built for colliers at the time. Even by the early twentieth-century, however, (as A.R. and C.P. Griffin show in their exhaustive account of working-class life in the mining society in Nottinghamshire at the start of the twentieth century) most working-class houses did not have many essential amenities, like water-supply and regular waste disposal, resulting in epidemics of measles, diphtheria, diarrhea and whooping cough, while respiratory diseases (chiefly tuberculosis and bronchitis) were the largest killers in the mining country (Sagar, 1982 : 139). A.R. and C.P. Griffin further state that since few of the working-class houses had proper bathrooms or running hot water and “there were no pit head baths”, many miners would eat their meals without washing their hands after coming from work, and would only then wash themselves (“strip wash”) or take a bath in a galvanized bath or basin in front of the kitchen fire (Sagar (1982): 140). Unlike in middle-class houses, where the living room or parlour would be the central room where the family usually met after the day, the kitchen became the centre of the working-class houses. The kitchen thus took on the role of the dwelling-room or living-room, was at the back of the houses, facing onto that nasty alley of ash-pits (SL, Chapter 1). As Lawrence points out, since the two rows of houses had their backs to each other, the alley of ash-pits became the place where the children played and the miners and their wives socialized. It meant that the parlours at the front were largely uninhabited, to be used only on special days or on Sundays or when there were guests in the house.

**SAQ:**

Compare Lawrence’s descriptions of the Morel home in the novel. How does Mrs. Morel ‘civilize’ the house? (50 + 60 words)

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the house. Also, as A.R. and C.P. Griffin note, “central to the functioning of the living room/kitchen was the black-lead fireplace consisting of a central fire-grate with an oven on one side, and a boiler on the other. Here the family meals were prepared, and great pride was taken by each household in maintaining this unit” (Sagar 1982: 140 -41). Parallel to this is the role of the woman in the working-class family (especially the period to which Lawrence belongs) of a somewhat different nature than they are in the middle class. The miner’s wife was at the centre of the family both as an economic and a social unit, but her life, even when there was a maid, was one of drudgery. As a rule, she would not work herself, by the time she reached her forties, she would usually have her husband and at least one son working in the colliery, daughters in domestic service or in factories, offices or shops. Any younger children, if there were any, would be still at school. Her work would begin early in the morning, starting with seeing her husband and other working members of the family off to work.

All this, however, contributed to limit the horizons of the collier’s wife, and her complaints soon gave her a reputation for nagging. The inside and outside worlds were more starkly divided in the miner’s life – the miner had the fraternity and comradeship at the pit and after working hours, at the pub, while his wife’s world was mostly limited to the narrow confines of her house, from which she could only occasionally escape through socializing with the other women in the alley, an infrequent visit to a relative or going to the chapel.

As mentioned earlier, the woman also became the centre of the family as a social unit. This was largely because it was the woman who was usually to be found literally at home at all times, it was she who looked after the children and accompanied them in their leisure. The miner was usually away for most of the day in the pit and the evening in the pub. It was only during the weekends and on rare holidays that the miner could spend his leisure hours with his family. Some of the popular pastimes of the miners were the cultivation of gardens, rearing of pigs and poultry, family walks in the countryside, a trip to the nearest city and the wakes. As we see in *Sons and Lovers* the occasions when the children go out in the weekends in summer, searching for mushrooms and blackberries for their mother are some of the happiest moments of their life. Similarly, while Mr. Morel is seen by the children chiefly as a hindrance to the smooth functioning of the Morel family,

it is only during the times when he works and “is happy at work”, when he, on some evenings, “cobble[s] the boots, or mend[s] the kettle or his pit bottle”, or solders, puts patches on his pit trousers, or makes fuses with which to fire shots to blast the coal deep in the pit that –he is seen by them as an integral member of the family. What Lawrence underlines here is the fact that in the case of Mr. Morel, who embodies the ambiguous values of working class life in the novel, it is work rather than leisure activities that become central to his life. These are the times when the narrative shows him as his real self, and the children “unit[e] with him in the work, in the actual doing of something, when he is free of his temper and sullen resistance”.

While Mr. Morel has a working-class background, Mrs. Morel on the other hand, enters the working-class only through her marriage, and has essentially bourgeois sensibility. It is this that makes her different from the other women in the community. This is made evident in the first chapter itself when the narrator says that “having an end house she enjoyed a kind of aristocracy among the other women of the ‘between’ houses, because her rent was five shillings and sixpence instead of five shillings a week.” This is supplemented by the fact that she has only one neighbour and an extra strip of garden on the side of the house. Mrs. Morel shrinks from the first contact with the women at the Bottoms, and also from the “unsavoury” lifestyle they are forced to adopt. Again she does not like the wakes, and prefers solitude rather than gossiping with the stay-at-home mothers. She is pregnant with her third child, Paul, when we first see her, and she feels burdened with it: “The father was serving beer in a public house, swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him. This coming child was too much for her. If it were not for William and Annie, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness.”

**SAQ:**

What position does the narrator hold in relation to descriptions of the miners’ life-style? Give examples from the text. (60 words)

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In Chapter Three, we come across yet another indicator of the changes seen in the mining community during the early years of the twentieth century. Though the general structure of the working class (here the miner's) family remained more or less the same, many of the women in this community had begun to venture out of their homes and organize themselves into groups which would meet at regular intervals and where the women could share their experiences. In the case of Mrs. Morel it becomes one of the ways through which she keeps her connection with her middle-class origins. I am referring here to the Women's Guild that Mrs. Morel joins when her children are old enough to be left alone at home. The Women's Guild is attached to the Co-operative Wholesale Society and meet every Monday night, where they discuss various social issues and "the benefits to be derived from co-operation" (Chapter 3). Mrs. Morel presents papers at times, commanding the respect of her children, who are awed at the sight of "their mother, who was always busy about the house, sitting writing in her rapid fashion, thinking, referring to books, and writing again" (Chapter 3). The Guild, however, and its work towards consciousness raising, elicits the division and hostility of the colliers who think that their wives are getting too independent. Nevertheless, the Guild provides a space for the women of the mining community to come out from the confines of their domesticity and create a community in a more public domain.

Mr. Morel's vision of the family becomes central to the creation of Paul's sense of identity (Rylance: 127). In the first part of the novel, a picture of Mrs. Morel is carefully built up as the responsible one in the family, who the children look up to in wonder and admiration. We have already seen in Unit 2 how Morel shifts to the periphery of the family in the first half of the narrative. This is underlined in the use of language in the narrative: while Mrs. Morel speaks in Standard English, Walter Morel speaks mostly in dialect; the children are shown adopting the educated manner and language of their mother. This is extended to register differences in the personalities of the parents, so that the breakdown of their marriage can also be seen as occurring due to social rather than personal reasons. Scott Sanders sees these social differences being translated into ideological, moral and psychological terms in that "the wife is responsible, aware of obligations, bearing the reformer's burden: the husband is irresponsible, blind to obligations, the crude soil which she is to cultivate, he is sensuous, the body,

she is religious, the spirit “ (Rylance: 157) and she has a moral superiority over him. For example, in Chapter 1, Morel’s cutting off of William’s curls is one incident where this division becomes powerfully manifest since it brings into conflict two different notions of beauty and masculinity. For Mrs. Morel, William, who is one year old at this point, is “pretty” and “a joy to her, the training wisps of hair clustering around his head”, while Morel resents (what for him is) Mrs. Morel’s wanting to make a “wench” out of William. The subsequent quarrel between them takes place in two registers, one Mrs. Morel’s and the other Walter Morel’s, but it is indicative of the unbridgeable gulf of two different social classes and ideologies between them.

Mrs. Morel’s idea of manhood undergoes certain changes after she marries Walter Morel. Early in Chapter 1, in a flashback of Mrs. Morel’s ( as Gertrude Morel) life before her marriage, she accuses one of her earlier suitors, John Field, the son of a tradesman, of not being man enough to resist being drawn into the family business and rather become a clergyman instead. Her bourgeois perspective is seen firstly in her preferring the vocation of a clergyman (a more genteel profession) to being a businessman, who belongs to a lower rung of the social ladder, regardless of the his/her degree of professional success. Secondly, she regards “the individual as the unit of success or failure, without regard to the conditions which shape him, without regard to the collective social reality within which he dwells. . . .Mrs. Morel [holds] the individual responsible for his salvation or damnation” (Sanders in Rylance : 161). From this perspective, therefore, Morel, like John Field, fails by remaining to their respective communities, the miners and the tradesmen. In contrast, both William and Paul, taking on from the individualist ethics from their mother, feel alienated within their own community, and aspire to create their identities independent of it, and significantly direct their aspirations of success towards the centre, the town and the city, Nottingham and London. In this enterprise for individual autonomy, they are essentially alone, even at times from their mother. In fact, the failure of William in this enterprise is seen to be largely rooted in the overwhelming and stultifying power of Mrs. Morel over her son, while Paul is marginally successful in his enterprise but at the cost of rejecting and being rejected by the two women in his adult life –Miriam and Clara, - having to come to terms with the death of his mother.

**SAQ:**

To what extent does Lawrence endorse the individualism of his characters? Or does he uphold the sense of community? Give your views. (60 + 60 words)

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On some occasions, however, there are revisions made in the views of the central characters, chiefly Mrs. Morel and Paul, regarding the ideas discussed above. To take such an incident, in Chapter 8, we come across another of the family moments (that are so frequent in Part 1 but scarce in Part 2) comprising of Mr. Morel being in good spirits as he comes in and dries himself before the fire. The sight of his body elicits mixed responses in Paul and Mrs. Morel. Paul marvels at the incongruity between Morel's thick brown scarred hands with broken nails and the fine, smooth and clear skin of his body. His comment, however, that Morel must have had a good figure once, is met with a startled timidity by the latter, emphasizing the distance that has now been established between father and son. At the same time, the incongruity of Morel's body also seems to become a reminder of the coarseness of his manners combined with the narrator's assertion (in Chapter 1) that he did the right action by instinct. Mrs. Morel's enthusiastic reminiscence of Morel's physique in his youth, however, also makes him shy, scared and humble. The warm scene is interrupted by the entrance of Barker, a fellow-miner of Morel.

Barker is unlike most miners in sharing the domestic burden in his home, especially now when his wife is heavily pregnant and expecting a child very soon. He buys the week's groceries and meat on Friday evening and his considerateness towards his family elicits Mrs. Morel's comment that he is "ten times the man" Morel is. This is a reiteration of her realization after marriage that being a man did not necessarily guarantee freedom from responsibilities towards one's family. In case of Mr. Morel, this is glaringly absent as the mine and the pub become the embodiments of his world and

the family by contrast becomes a necessary bondage. On the other hand, Mrs. Morel tries to instill in her children a sense of responsibility not to the community but to the family and especially to themselves as individuals. This is also ambiguous in the sense that both William and Paul feel suffocated within this structure of the family versus the community, since both harbour elements that impede their (particularly Paul's) growth into independent and autonomous individuals. In their own ways, Walter Morel and his sons become the substantiation of John Field's comment early in the novel that being a man is not enough (Chapter 1).

**SAQ:**

How does the novel delineate the transitions within the familiar concepts of family, society and individual as being the subjects of social change? (50 words)

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Paul's relationship with his mother, seen as strongly Oedipal, is inscribed within the social context and changes in the structure of the family. We have already seen in the earlier unit how the bond between them is shown as intense and deep-rooted. Later they are also shown sleeping together, Mrs. Morel first asserts her possession of Paul as her Son and subsequently, struggles with Miriam in order to prevent her taking over Paul. A significant instance is in Chapter 8 ("Strife in Love") where Paul is torn between attraction and hatred when the desire and desirability of Miriam is laid bare to him. Miriam shows Paul her dairy is "mostly a love-letter", and Paul "would read it now; she [Miriam] felt as if her soul's history were going to be desecrated by him in his present mood. . . He was reading only the French, ignoring her soul that was there." This effect of indifference and subsequent hostility is heightened a few paragraphs later when Paul points out her mistakes:

“She bent forward, trying to see and to understand. Her free, fine curls tickled his face. He started as if they had been red hot, shuddering. He saw her peering forward at the page, her red lips parted piteously, the black hair springing in fine strands across her tawny ruddy cheek. He was coloured like a pomegranate for richness. His breaths came short as he watched her. Suddenly she looked at him. Her dark eyes were naked with their love, afraid, and yearning. His eyes too were dark, and they hurt her. They seemed to master her. She lost all her self control, was exposed in fear. And he knew, before he could kiss her, he must drive something out of himself. And a touch of hate for her crept back again into his heart.” (Chapter 8)

Notice the terms used for Miriam’s sensuousness and her sexual attractiveness and note how Paul feels threatened by this and abruptly breaks off the moments of intimacy by attending to the bread in the oven. The baking is important not only in itself but in the significance imbued in it by Mrs. Morel and consequently the Morel home, so that Miriam’s love for Paul and Paul’s attention to her are seen to be aligned against the domestic responsibilities of Paul and more particularly, his loyalty or allegiance to his mother. This is made clear by the subsequent altercation between Paul, Annie and Mrs. Morel where Annie accuses Paul of negligence towards their mother’s health and well being. Mrs. Morel puts the blame squarely on Miriam for the burnt bread, because Paul was too engrossed with her. This ultimately leads him to assert that he does not love Miriam even though he likes her: “What nonsense, mother – you know I don’t love her – I – I tell you I don’t love her – she doesn’t even walk with my arm, because I don’t want her to” (Chapter 8). This is followed by a complication of the triangular relationship between Mrs. Morel – Paul – Miriam commencing with Paul’s comparison between Miriam and his mother regarding his painting. Miriam appreciates and takes interest in his painting. On the other hand, Mrs. Morel does not seem to take much of an interest:

“But you don’t, mother, you know you don’t care whether a picture’s decorative or not – you don’t care what *manner* it is in.”

“How do you know. I don’t care – do you ever try me? Do you ever talk to me about these things, to try?”

\* \* \* \* \*

“You are old, mother, and we’re young.”

He only meant that the interests of her age, were not the interests of his. But he realized the moment he had spoken, that he had said the wrong thing.

“Yes I know it well – I am old! And therefore, I may stand aside, I have nothing more to do with you. You only want me to wait on you – the rest is for Miriam.”

He could not bear it. Instinctively, he realized that he was life to her. And after all she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

“No mother – I really *don’t* love her. I talk to her but I want to come home to you.”

He had taken off his collar and tie, and rose, bare-throated, to go to bed. As he stooped to kiss his mother, she threw her arms around his neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and cried, in a whimpering voice, so unlike her own the he writhed in agony.

“I can’t bear it. I could let another woman – but not her – she’d leave me no room, not a bit of room –“

And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly “(Chapter 8).

This entire incident is significant firstly because, in the earlier passage, Paul, like William earlier in the novel, embodies the implication of John Field’s frustrated protestation that being a man is not enough. He, unlike Mr. Morel, is not bound up by any community of men either in the miners or in the pub at the cost of the family but becomes an ideal member of the family, doing his share of the sundry domestic duties, as well as becoming successful socially. The occasion when Paul burns the bread therefore, as Scott Sanders comments in “Society and Ideology in Sons and Lovers”, signals the break between this notion of “being a man” that Mrs. Morel has brought her sons up in, and “the deep inner pressure towards individuation” (Rylance: 129) in Paul that ultimately pushes him beyond this mode of life Mrs. Morel represents. Miriam thus becomes one of the phases that Paul must enter (and ultimately outgrow like Clara later) in order to fulfill this “pressure towards individuation” which, ironically, he has imbibed from his mother. There is, of course, the further complication of Paul’s treatment of Miriam,

Clara, and Mrs. Morel (also the narrator’s treatment of these female characters), where Paul reverts to the same power structure inherent in gender issues, but that will form part of another section of this unit.

What needs to be underlined in this section is “the structure of social aspiration” (Rylance: 129) underlying the Oedipal relationship between Paul and his mother. This structure is dominated by the bourgeois sensibility of Mrs. Morel and the allied individualist strain in such an ideology as against the more communal ideology of Walter Morel and his mining community. Both, however, ultimately fail to become the norm, and the site for contestation between the two become the Morel family which, in the words of Sanders, “is neither an organic cultural unit because of the father’s inability to establish its unity, nor is it straightforward an agent of social mobility because Mrs. Morel cannot establish its unit, nor is it straightforward an agent of social mobility because Mrs. Morel cannot establish her own kind of relationship with Morel, author has to replace it first by her relationship with William and then with Paul” (Rylance 129).

**SAQ:**

How does the novel document social tensions? What kind of social aspirations are epitomized by the Morels? (50 + 60 words)

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In the case of Miriam, the narrator casts her as a reclusive figure subject to a duality between body and the spirit (an echo of Mrs. Morel to some extent) and tending more towards a spiritual ideal of love in a pastoral setting. This results in a sense of bondage in Paul to Miriam’s subjectivity that is only a repetition of his relationship with his mother, with both trying to cast him into their own idealized image of Paul. On the other hand, with Clara there is no such imposition and, as such, Paul’s relationship with her is more liberating since it facilitates a release from the cultural and ideological

constraints he experiences with his mother and Miriam. However, Paul has to transcend even this relationship to arrive at a tentative sense of selfhood and manhood, further accelerated/reinforced by a final struggle with Baxter Dawes, Clara's husband. This is because, in spite of the bourgeois roots of this strain of individualism, it ultimately takes an antisocial direction towards an absolute and isolated self. This, as Sanders says, is the "heart of the Lawrencean moral agony : for in the escape from the dualistic 'personality' which transforms its vitality into an energy within the social machine or tries to hold it apart in mystic evasion, the hero has to recognize more radically his own apartness" (Rylance: 132). However, this is not entirely attainable since it is through the family (and the community) that this sovereign individuality is challenged, the self-contained isolate individuality that becomes indicative of the 'old stable ego'. Paul's quest for his self therefore has to take into account this clash between unconscious desire and the social conventions which try to modify it.

### **3.4.2 IMPACT OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION; AND THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE**

While talking about the impact of the Industrial Revolution as it is addressed by Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*, I will dwell on the manifestations of industrialization on the landscape of rural England. In addition, I will use a later essay that Lawrence wrote towards the end of his life, looking back at how industrialization had changed the entire way of life of an earlier England.

In "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside" (1929) Lawrence gives a historical account of the change in the country landscape of Nottingham over the last century due to mining activities and the modernization of mining techniques :

"To me, as a child and a young man, it was still the old England of the forest and agricultural past; there were no motor cars, the mines were, in a sense, an accident in the landscape, and Robin Hood and his men were not very far away.

The string of coal-mines of B.W. & Co. had been opened some sixty years before I was born and Eastwood had come into being as a consequence. It must have been a tiny village at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a

small place of cottages and fragmentary rows of little four-roomed miner's dwellings, the homes of the old colliers of the eighteenth century, who worked in the bits of mines, foot-hill miners with an opening in the hillside into which the miners walked, or windlass miners, where the men were wound up one at a time, in a bucket, by a donkey. The windlass miners were still working when my father was a boy – and the shafts of some were still there, when I was a boy.

But somewhere about 1820 the company must have sunk the first big shaft – not very deep – and installed the first machinery of the real industrial colliery .....

\* \* \* \* \*

...Now Eastwood occupies a lovely position on a hilltop, with the steep slope towards Derbyshire and the long slope towards Nottingham. They put up a new church, which stands fine and commanding...what opportunities, what opportunities! These mining villages might have been like the lovely hill towns of Italy, shapely and fascinating. And what happened?

Most of the little rows of dwellings of the old-style miners were pulled down, and dull little shops began to rise along the Nottingham Road, while on the down slope of the north side the company erected what is still known as the New Buildings, or the Square. These New Buildings consist of two great hollow squares of dwelling planked down on the rough slope of the hill, little four-room houses with the “front” looking outward into the grim, blank street, and the “back”, with a tiny square brick yard, a low wall, and a w.c. and ash-pit, looking into the desert of the square, hard, uneven, jolting black earth tilling rather steeply down, with these little back yards all round, and openings at the corners. The squares were quite big, and people passing, children playing on the hard earth. And they were shut in like a barracks enclosure, very strange.

\* \* \* \* \*

So the place started...

In this queer jumble of the old England and the new, I came into consciousness. As I remember, little local speculators already began to straggle dwellings in rows, always in rows, across the field : nasty red-

brick, flat-faced dwellings with dark slate roofs. The bay window period only began when I was a child. But most of the country was untouched.

\* \* \* \* \*

So that the life was a curious cross between industrialism and the old agricultural England of Shakespeare and Milton and Fielding and George Eliot. The dialect was broad Dubyshine, and always “thee” and “thou”. The people lived almost entirely by instinct, men of my father’s age could not really read. And the pit did not mechanize men.

\* \* \* \* \*

The real tragedy of England as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lovely. The man-made England is so vile. I know that the ordinary collier, when I was a boy, had a peculiar sense of beauty, coming from his intuitive and instinctive consciousness, which was awakened down pit. And the fact that he met with just cold ugliness and new materialism when he came up into daylight, and particularly when he came to the Square or the Breach, and to his own table, killed something in him, and in a sense, spoiled him as a man. The woman almost invariably nagged about material things. She was taught to do it, she was encouraged to do it. It was a mother’s business to see that her sons got on, and it was the man’s business to provide the money. In my father’s generation, with the old mild England behind them, and the lack of education, the man was not beaten down. But in my generation, the boys I went to school with, colliers now, have all been beaten down, what with the din-din-dinning of Board Schools, books, cinemas, clergymen, the whole national and human consciousness hammering on the fact of material prosperity above all things.

\* \* \* \* \*

That silly little individualism of “the Englishman’s home is his castle” and “my own little home” is out of date. It would work almost up to 1800, when every Englishman was still a villager, and a cottager. But the industrial system has brought a great change. . . The English are town-birds through and through, today, as the inevitable result of their complete industrialization. Yet they don’t know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. They are all suburbase, pseudo-cottagy, and not one of them truly knows how to be truly urban. . .

And this is because we have frustrated that instinct of community which would make us unite in pride and dignity in the bigger gesture of the citizen, not the cottager... This is the side of the Englishman that has been thirsted and shockingly betrayed. England is a mean and petty scramble of paltry dwellings called "homes". I believe in their heart of hearts all Englishmen bother their little homes – but not the women. What we want is a bigger gesture, a greater scope, a certain splendour, a beauty, big beauty. The American does far better than we, in this. (Lawrence 1936: pp 133-135, 137, 139)

Even though this is a much later essay of Lawrence, there are distinct echoes of *Sons and Lovers* in it, especially the opening pages of the novel. Try to identify certain common elements in the two and interpret Lawrence's stand on industrialism. What line of argument does he pursue in the essay? Try to formulate it from the key passages I have quoted.

After this essay, I will now point out certain passages in *Sons and Lovers* where there are overt comments – both positive and negative – on industrialization and the mining life:

1. The first example is the opening paragraphs of the novel. I will not quote them here since I have already alluded to them earlier in the block. However, go through the passages carefully to see how Lawrence building up a perspicacious account of the impact of industrialism on the English countryside, and how this affects an entire way of life in the mining community.
2. The second passage is from Chapter 4 of the novel, titled "The Young Life of Paul": "While they were so poor, the children were delighted if they could do anything to help economically. Annie and Paul and Arthur went out early in the morning, in summer, looking for mushrooms, hunting through the wet grass, from which the larks were rising, for the white skinned, wonderful naked bodies crouched secretly in the green. And if they got half a pound, they felt exceedingly happy : there was the joy of finding something, the joy of accepting something straight from the hand of nature, and the joy of contributing to the family exchequer." (SL, Chapter 4)

Notice how the childhood enjoyment is qualified by the fact that the children are also contributing economically to the family, a characteristic

that approximates in a slightly different manner, the fact that the working-class family is an economic unit.

3. The third passage is a longish one that closely follows on the heels of the above passage in the same chapter (Chapter 4). This is an occasion on a Friday when Paul goes to “the Offices” after school to collect his father’s money. He feels alienated in the gathering of the miners and their employer, Mr. Braithwaite, calling them hateful and common as he recounts his experience to his mother. Contrasted to this outside world of the miners and their wives and children is the domestic world of the Morels. Friday night is “baking night and market night”, and as a rule, Paul stays at home and bakes. This is a radical revisioning of gender roles in the mining family, that is consciously emphasized by the narrator through Paul and the duties he has been allotted to by his mother, who shares a different and pro-bourgeois ideology. This is later to be echoed in Mrs. Morel’s admiration for Barker as a family man.

4. In Chapter 5 (“Paul Launches Into Life”), Paul, as he peruses the papers in the Co-Operative Reading Room for job advertisements, he happens to look “wistfully” out of the window. His reaction is as follows :

“Already he was a prisoner of industrialism. Large sunflowers stared over the old red wall of the garden opposite, looking in their jolly way down on the women who were hurrying with something for dinner. The valley was full of corn, brightening in sun. The collieries, among the fields, waved their small white plumes of steam. Far-off on the hills were the woods of Aldersley, dark and fascinating. Already his heart went down. He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley, was going now.”

5. In the early half of Chapter 6 (“Death in the Family”) when Mrs. Morel and Paul are on their way to Willey Farm, the home of the Leivers family, they see “little group in silhouette against the sky, a horse, a small truck, and a man”. While Mrs. Morel’s response alludes to the beauty of the entire scene and the landscape, for Paul, it is the line of trucks that becomes central to it. He compares the pit to a strange big creature that is alive, and the row of trucks to a string of beasts to be fed. The vitality of this string, and also its beauty, is because they’ve been handled with men’s hands, all of them. “Paul likes the feel of men

on things, while they are alive.” For him, the landscape and its elements become significant by being touched with the spontaneous vitality of “men” that itself is derived from an organic relation with nature. For Paul this life is embodied in the miners that marks a difference of perspective between him and his mother. This aspect will be taken up in another context in this unit. However, what is important here is Paul’s ambiguous relation with the mining life which is at once “common” dehumanized, and vital, alive.

6. This passage is towards the end of the same chapter, where Paul is sent to the colliery to bring his father back home and break the news of William’s death to him. The contrast between the bustling activity going on in the mines and the sudden blank forced on the Morel household with William’s death is part of a common tradition in English literature, as seen, for example, in Tennyson’s “Break, break, break”. However, the distinctive aspect of this particular occasion is the way the subordination of the human to the exigencies of the machine and industry is shown. Paul waits for his father; but while chair after chair comes up from the pit carrying coal, Mrs. Morel comes up only after a considerable amount of coal has been hauled up. Even on such an occasion as death, the human comes second to the machine, to the factory, what is still more significant is that the colliers surrender themselves to this structure.
7. In Part 2, Chapter 10 (“Clara”), there is again a comment on the expanding town. This time, the point of view is Clara’s, who says that it is “comforting to think the town goes no further. It is only a little sore upon the country yet. “Paul says that it is a little “scale”, but that it is “all right”. It is only a “temporary, . . . the crude clumsy make-shift we’ve practiced on, till we find out what the idea is. The town will come all right. . . But I don’t hate the town. It’s only a clumsy effort. We haven’t learned to live together yet.”
8. The last passage I will include here is again a conversation between Paul and Clara in Chapter 12 (“Passion”). Paul goes to Keston to meet Clara at the station, and from there, both come away towards the colliery. As they reach it, Clara comments, “What a pity there is a coal-pit here where it is so pretty”, pointing to the colliery that “stood quite still and black among the corn-fields, its immense heap of slag seen rising almost from the oats”. Paul again replies :

“Do you think so? ... You see I am so used to it, I should miss it... No, and I like the pits here and there. I like the rows of trucks, and the headstocks, and the steam in the daytime and the lights at night...”

Here again, as in the fifth passage, we have Paul’s reiteration of the vitality and life the pits seem to embody. This is, however, counteracted by Mrs. Morel and Clara’s revulsion against the ugliness of the individual landscape compared to the beauty of the English agricultural landscape.

**SAQ:**

Do you think Lawrence’s attempts here to provide a different perspective on modern, industrialised society? (70 words)

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In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams argues that Lawrence critiques the mechanical, disintegrated and artificial life and an accompanying effect on the condition of mind of the individuals that are generated through industrialism. It is not industry in itself but the consequences felt in society that become a preoccupation with Lawrence. The materialism of such a life, and the willing surrender to the depersonalization of the people to industrialism is something that exists not in the past but in the present! In this, Lawrence is in a unique position of being both inside and outside the industrial structure, explaining the ambiguity (seen, for example in passages 5, 7 and 8 above) of both Lawrence and Paul. However, for Lawrence, the liberation from this system is not a mass liberation but a very individual and personal liberation. This however, cannot be achieved merely through an ascent into the middle classes (see Mr. Braithwaite, for example, who is as much subject to the system as Mr. Morel), nor by getting a superior education (as imagined by Mrs. Morel), since these themselves are part of the materialistic goals established by the industrial system. The antithesis to this individuality comes, for Williams, through the idea of community as envisaged

by Lawrence. Lawrence “attacked the industrial society of England not because it offered community to the individual, but because it frustrated it. In this, again, he is wholly in line with the tradition. If in his own life he rejected the claims of society, it was not because he did not understand the importance of community but because, in industrial England, he could find none” (Williams: 204). This is because, the industrial community loses its ‘quick of life’, its spontaneous living through the routine of industrial work. The idea of community for Lawrence is what James Hillman, a Jungian psychologist, describes as a more “ecological”, a “psychic” field (Hillman, quoted in La Chapelle: 121), something that includes both the organic and the inorganic elements in one’s environment. This might be what Paul is pointing at in Passage 7 when he says “we haven’t learned to live together yet.”

This is initially reinforced by the working-class family which is the site for “close quick relationship,” where “there [are] no such devices of separation of children and parents as the sending away to school, or the handing-over to servants, or the relegation to the nursery or playroom.” In such a life, “the suffering and giving of comfort, the common want and the common remedy, the open row and the open making-up, are all part of a continuous life which, in good or bad, makes for a whole attachment.” It is this “continuous flow and recoil of sympathy”, Raymond Williams argues, that becomes in Lawrence’s writing. “the essential process of living” (William: 205). This comes out partly through the descriptions of the changing landscape and the responses that the narrator and the characters in the novel make regarding it.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Explain the point of view adopted by Lawrence in his descriptions of the industrialised countryside. How far, do you think, Paul’s ambivalence towards the mining-pits is a reflection of Lawrence’s own realism ?
2. How does the novel, *Sons and Lovers*, project the sense of community that offsets the dehumanization of industrialization?
3. Consider the characterization of Mr. Morel in terms of Lawrence’s own belief in the life-force of the ‘organic’ individual.

### 3.4.3 GENDER AND PATRIARCHY

As seen in the earlier sub-sections, Lawrence's idea of individuality is not as an isolated self, aloof from or ignoring the presence of the other. It is, rather, a recognition of otherness that enables the self to achieve a certain totality and fulfillment. This is made possible by the "struggle into love and the struggle with love" that exists in human relationships, chiefly the relationship between a man and a woman.

(Lawrence : "The Study of Thomas Hardy" quoted in Marsh : 67).

Each of Lawrence's novels and novellas explores the individual's quest for some kind of self-identity through one's search for a soulmate; this exploration is, however, not only spiritual but also physical. In this, however, Lawrence has been seen as controversial through his depiction of the gender relations in his works, both fictional and non-fictional. While, like Virginia Woolf, Lawrence maintains a difference between 'Male' or 'maleness' and 'man' and between 'female' and 'woman', he, however, associates the Male with "the Love, the spirit, and Mind, the consciousness" and the Female with "the Law, the Soul, the Feelings" (Lawrence, "The Study of Thomas Hardy" quoted in Marsh : 68). Though personality is created, in part, through the continual struggle between these two elements, nevertheless, in man, it is always the male struggling for dominance while in woman it is the female. The most authentic relationship between a man and a woman would transcend the conventions of society regarding love, family responsibilities, society, religion, and so on in order to attain an absolute individual self through the union with the other. In other words, the unity through the other in a male-female relationship in Lawrence is essential in order to fulfil to the utmost the female elements in the woman and the male elements in the man; they can find their individuality as woman and man only through this union. In the process the two will have to go beyond not only the contingencies of society and industrial life but their own instinct for competition and survival and a misleading ego that prevents the dissolution of self in the desire for the other in a relationship. However, the dominant perspective from which the problematics of the man-woman relationship is viewed in much of Lawrence's fiction is that of the man.

In particular, in the Second Part of the novel, the narrative voice subtly undercuts the conventional attitudes that Paul and Miriam, more than any

other character display in their attitudes towards gender roles. In this, they derive these attitudes in part from their respective mothers regarding marriage, family responsibility, and most of all, regarding sex. This can be seen clearly in Chapter Eleven, where Paul visits Miriam at her grandmother's house. Miriam has gone to look after her grandmother who had been ill. The entire instance is worked out in terms of the conventional gender roles in a marriage with the husband (Paul) carrying and Miriam cooking the chicken. Similarly, Paul takes an active role in their love-making while Miriam lies passive and submitting on the bed! At the same time, the narrative, through the focalization of Paul, dwells upon another aspect of their relationship—the mutual withdrawal into oneself that both feel, overwhelming their desire for one another :

“He might have married her. But his circumstances at home made it difficult, and moreover, he did not want to marry... He did not feel that he wanted marriage with Miriam. He wished he did. He would have given his head to have felt a joyous desire to marry her and to have her. Then why couldn't he bring it off? There was some obstacle... It lay in the physical bondage. He shrank from the physical contact... with her he felt bound up inside himself. He could not go out to her. Something, struggled in him, but he could not get to her, make love to her, kiss her? Why when she put her arm in his, timidly, as they walked, did he feel he would burst forth in brutality and recoil? He owed himself to her. He wanted to belong to her. Perhaps the the recoil and shrinking from her was love in its fierce modesty. He had no aversion for her. No, it was the opposite: it was a strong desire battling with a still stronger shyness and virginity. It seemed as if virginity were a positive force, which fought and won in both of them. And with her he felt it so hard to overcome.” (Chapter II, “The Test of Miriam.”)

It is on account of these reasons that Paul and Miriam do not feel liberated into a deeper sense of being after their physical relationship. In contrast, the relationship with Clara becomes more fulfilling at the beginning precisely because the two by this time are not bogged down by a debilitating self-consciousness, so that the moment of union becomes a baptism of life for both. However, the moment of liberation is overtaken by a return to the patriarchal structure with Clara returning to Baxter Dawes and Paul rejecting both Miriam and Clara (and Mrs. Morel as well) in favour of embarking on his quest alone.

Elsewhere, I have discussed one of the seminal critical positions on the question of gender in Lawrence, namely, that of Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*. Subsequently, there have been similar responses (one example being Judith Ruderman's *D. H. Lawrence and the Devouring Mother*) towards the depiction of women characters in Lawrence. In *Sons and Lovers*, the narrative is seen manipulating Mr. Morel, Miriam and Clara as instruments through which Paul attempts to arrive at self-identification and to become a man. As mentioned earlier, the quest for selfhood or self-identity in Lawrence's fiction is chiefly masculine, though there also provisions are made for a woman's sense of self as well. However, in this, the woman necessarily has to make herself a subordinate to the man and acknowledge him as a master. This is firstly seen in the division between the male fraternity in the pits in *Sons and Lovers* (and in the Nottingham essay) and the woman's world at home and in the Women's Guild. Women are reduced to nagging, and even the Guild is seen with derision by the miners. Even though the self can be realized only with a larger sense of community' this community exists outside the family, with the woman remaining peripheral to it. Secondly, the figure of Mrs. Morel, as the mother, is seen as trying to devour or consume the identity of her sons, thereby making it necessary that Paul move away from her. Miriam is also blamed for precisely this reason, that she wants all of him to herself; that she will not give Paul his own space. Again, Clara is rejected when she refuses to yield herself up completely to him. The following conversation takes place in Chapter 13, between Paul and Clara.

"Do you ever want to marry me? He asked curiously.

"Do you me?" she replied.

"Yes-yes-I should like us to have children", he answered slowly.

She sat with her head bent, fingering the sand.

"But you don't really want a divorce for Baxter do you?" he said. . .

"No", she said, very deliberately. "I don't think I do" . . .

"And you never really intended to belong to me?" he said.

"Yes I do belong to you", she answered.

"No", he said. "Because you don't want to be divorced"

\* \* \* \* \*

Again, Paul says to Clara:

I suppose you thought he [Baxter] was a lily of the valley, and so you put him in an appropriate pot, and tended him accordingly. You

made up your mind he was a lily of the valley, and it was no good his being a cow-parsnip, you wouldn't have it"...

"You imagined him something he wasn't. That's just what a woman is. She thinks she knows what's good for a man, and she's going to see he gets it; and no matter if she's starving, he may sit and whistle for what he needs, while she's got him, and is giving him what's good for him." (Chapter 13)

Then again,

"Love's a dog in the manger", he said.

"And which of us is the dog?" she asked.

"Oh well—you of course."

So there went on a battle between them. She knew she never fully had him; some part, big and vital in him, she had no hold over; nor did she ever try to get it, or even to realize what it was. And he knew in some way that she held herself still as Mrs. Dawes. She did not love Dawes, never had loved him. But she believed he loved her, at least depended on her. She felt a certain sanity about him that she never felt with Paul Morel. (Chapter, 13)

In these pieces of conversation and narratorial comments, the dominating voice is Paul's. In a way, in this particular instance, it is Paul being rejected along the same times that Miriam had been by Paul in Chapter 11. The 'sexual politics' that becomes apparent here is the fact that in the earlier instance Paul justifies his resolution not to marry Miriam by expressing his desire to be free from such objections. Even earlier, he had alleged that Miriam tried to reduce his being into only the spirit. In the above conversation with Clara, Paul, on the other hand, emphasizes on the largely physical aspect of their relationship, by pointing out that most of their meetings ended in coitus. Since in the conventional patriarchal system, it is the man who takes the prerogative, Paul here becomes hostile to Clara chiefly because he perceives himself being reduced to a state of dependence on Clara. This is made apparent in the reluctant admission of Paul that he would like to marry her and have children. Her refusal to divorce Baxter Dawes, however, is interpreted by Paul as a refusal to give himself up completely to him This antagonizes Paul against Clara since he cannot dictate the terms of their love, unlike in the case of Miriam where she is forced to

submit to Paul's will. The consequence is that Clara is termed "a dog in the manger" trying to mould Baxter into the ideal man/husband which he is essentially not. This comment ironically becomes applicable to the relationship between Paul's parents; in both cases, it is the woman who becomes responsible for stultifying the spontaneous vitality of life that the men (Walter Morel and Baxter Dawes) seem to possess. It is again in Paul's interests as a man in search for his self-identity that Miriam and Clara be seen as occupying the two poles in the mind/body duality.

The narrative of *Sons and Lovers* thus is preoccupied with or dominated, rather, by the frequent identification of the narratorial voice with the perspective and voice of Paul, the protagonist. This makes for the enactment of stereotypical gender roles in the relationships between the characters, chiefly those centering round the central characters. This also becomes responsible for the portrayal of the women characters in certain ways that result from the projection of a masculine fantasy and a masculine gaze on them. Most of the feminist readings of *Sons and Lovers* have explored these aspects of gender relations as seen in *Sons and Lovers*. At the same time, we also have to take into account the frequent ironic undercutting of Paul's point of view by the narrator as well as by the characters themselves, chiefly Clara and Miriam. For example, conclusion of Chapter 10, there is a significant questioning of Paul's interpretation of Miriam by Clara. When Paul says that Miriam wants "the soul out of [his] body" and that "he [doesn't] love her", Clara points out it is Paul who is afraid to develop his relationship with Miriam, The "soul communion" that Paul alleges Miriam wants is astutely pointed out to be his own imagination by Clara, who suggests that though Miriam "wants" him both emotionally and physically, it is Paul who shrinks from it.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Discuss the view that Lawrence combines social critique with Freudian analysis in *Sons and Lovers*.
2. Analyse the portrayal of Paul and Miriam in terms of Lawrence's study of gender roles.

### 3.4.4 STRUGGLE FOR INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Earlier, in the section on class and society in *Sons and Lovers* we have seen how Paul has to contend with two different ideologies (the working-class ideology of Walter Morel and the middle-class ideology of Gertrude Morel) as he grows up into adulthood. Several critics (Raymond Williams and John Goode, for example) have dwelt on the transitional nature of the family and the community in Lawrence's fiction, as in the present novel in this case. In order to arrive at a sense of self, John Goode contends that Paul must throw off the demands of the community. Thus, the struggle for individual identity that is dictated by the mother's ideology is necessarily a struggle which will alienate him from the social and even the familiar, since a "truly self-created being" must be ultimately built upon "a knowledge of the impersonality and separateness" (Rylance:131). The moral dilemma that the struggle for individuality entails in Lawrence is that "in the escape from the dualistic 'personality' which transforms its vitality into an energy within the social machine or tries to hold it apart in mystic evasion, the hero has to recognize more radically his own apartness" (Rylance 132). However, this journey towards self discovery again brings in the communal in which the journey itself has to be inscribed, since the individual in Lawrence is always embedded in the social. This accounts for the incompleteness of this journey in *Sons and Lovers* since Paul steps towards the town, a more modern manifestation of the social community than Paul's home in the minority locality of Bestwood. However, this apartness of the self ultimately has to generate a newer sense of community that goes beyond conventional notions of the social that feature in both Morel and Mrs. Morel's ideas on community. Morel would like his sons to enter the world of the miners while Mrs. Morel initiates them into her world of the church and the women's guild and wants them to 'get on' in life though a rise into the middle class. Both these, for Paul, ultimately become inadequate because of the refusal of both to take into account the necessity of the other. The fraternity of the miners is a community that bears the imprint of industrialization, and so, surrenders its vitality and spontaneous living to the machine dominated system. The bourgeois world, on the other hand, refuses to take into account on organic sense of community and is more ruinously individualistic. Both these perspectives thereby fail to recognize- at times even suppress -the deeper and more unconscious sense of life and living. It is this latter that Paul seems

to take cognizance of at certain points in the novel and which qualify the 'apartness' of Paul in his quest for self-identity.

**SAQ:**

In what way is the 'modern' novel concerned with issues of identity?  
Does *Sons and Lovers* problematize the issue ? (70 + 40 words)

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As Raymond Williams points out, the undercurrent of sympathy and the possibility of establishing close quick relationships are what characterises a working class family, where relations between parents and children are not mediated by external figures like those of a nurse or a governess (Williams: 205). The 'self' that emerges from this context is a 'self' that takes into account not only its own self-contained nature but also acknowledges alterity, the otherness of the other as equally self-contained. Thus this relationship is not underlined by a structure of dominance but by a structure of mutual and reciprocal recognition and acknowledgment. From this perspective, we can see Paul failing in each of his relationships with Mrs. Morel, Miriam and Clara. It is because in each relationship there is a struggle for dominance and power. Paul becomes triumphant in each case but is also, consequently, irrevocably destined to isolation and even alienation, since what he achieves is, in some senses, the overcoming (and possibly annihilation) of the other. There is only one exception which is an occasion of love-making between Clara and Paul in Chapter 13. Significantly, it takes place out of doors in the midst of nature. It is fulfilling and liberating precisely because it enables the dissolution of their self-contained subjectivities or egos and the emergence into a deeper and more expansive sense of being:

“It was for each of them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. If so great a magnificent power could

overwhelm them, identify them together with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass-blade its little height, and every tree and living thing, then why fret about themselves: they could let themselves be carried by life. And they felt a sort of peace each in the other: there was verification which they had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away. It was almost their belief in life.” (Chapter: 13)

However, such an experience is extremely short-lived, and both revert back to themselves. It is this elusive sense of quick, vital life that Lawrence’s protagonists are in search of and that defines the quest for self-identity in them. In this respect, it is useful to look into what the life implies.

Lawrence is seen as a dialectician (L.R. Williams: 12) in his positioning of key positive ideas like sex, life, blood-consciousness in opposition to “consciousness and cerebral states of being, knowledge or sex in the head” (L.R. Williams: 12-13). As a result, “[l]ife is not opposed to death proper, but to a kind of living death which is the result, for Lawrence, of degenerate modern consistence (LR Williams: 13). ‘Life’ in Lawrence, thus becomes a central philosophical principle that encompasses the natural organic and inorganic world, and that is constantly in peril in the face of an increasingly mechanized modern life. This notion of life is deeply embedded in the large sense of community. Dolores La Chapelle, in her book *D.H. Lawrence: Future Primitive* quotes the Jungian psychologist, James Hillman’s, redefinition of self and community. Rejecting the contribution that “soul-making” or self-discovery must be identified with introversion and the spiritual denial of the world of matter, objects, things, Hillman comments on the available definitions of the self that have their roots in Protestant and Oriental philosophy :

“Self is the interiorization of the invisible God beyond. The inner divine. . . . [but] it’s still a transcendent notion, with theological implications, if not roots. I would rather define self as the interiorization of community, I would be with myself when I’m with others. . . .and others would not include just other people, because community as I see it, is something more ecological. . . .a psychic field. And if I’m not in a psychic field with others – with people buildings, animals, trees – I am not.” (Lachapelle: 121)

**SAQ:**

Bring out the passages in the novel which make explicit Lawrence's allusions to his belief in the 'life'-principle. (90 words)

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This partly accounts for the primitivist element in Lawrence's thinking that privileges tribal and animistic perspectives concerned with the essence of life, of the spirit not only in human beings but in every element – organic or inorganic – in the world. Community in this sense is a larger cosmic bonding between beings and objects in the natural world. This effectively destabilizes the notion of the "old stable ego" since it is no longer central. The individual subject is split within herself in whom she becomes aware of unconscious passions and desires that impel her/him more conscious decisions. The former is something that is part of the interrelatedness of "man and his circumambient universe", as Lawrence terms it in "Morality and the Novel". The ideal subjectivity of the Lawrentian protagonist is dictated by this sense of life of which the crux is the experience of sexuality. It is through sex that the individual comes to connect with the spontaneous and vivid life. It is at the heart of the "blood-consciousness" that Lawrence envisages as life. By sex, however, Lawrence does not simply mean sexual acts (though they also constitute a part) but "all thought and behaviour charged with unconscious passion" (L.R. Williams: 16). It is "the disruptive spirit which destabilizes older notions of the mentally governed human subject, connecting Lawrence's work to wider concerns in modernist culture. Sex thus changes the sense that we are in conscious control of our individual domain, undermining the 'ideal' conscious self. Sex is the self's irrationalizing force. It is then sex which underpins the self's contrariness, which ensures her unknowing, which divides self within the self" (L.R. William: 16). Thus, while the characters in Lawrence's fiction strive to create a sense of their own identity, they are already divided within themselves, contending with their irrational desires and impulses, struggling to interpret them and to come to terms with them. This aspect surfaces most tellingly in the Paul-Miriam relationship where Paul struggles to get at the centre of his ambiguous (love-

hate) feelings for Miriam. Again, it is because Paul succeeds in yielding up his ego-ridden subjectivity in the love-making with Clara and thereby give in to his unconscious desire that he is more empowered and liberated in the latter instance of sex.

Thus, Lawrence's idea of individual identity discards (like those of the other modernists) a stable notion of self in favour of one that is torn by unconscious motivations beyond the reach of the conscious mind. What is significant for Lawrence in this case is that the decentering is inscribed within a larger notion of 'life' that makes it possible for the individual subject to arrive at a sense of self within greater organic and inorganic community that recognizes the presence of instinctive and unconscious existence in oneself. The struggle results because of the subject's being already located in modern, individualized society with its conventional social, moral and ethical codes. The individual is already conditioned into them but he can also feel the stirrings of spontaneous life and the novels become quest for the struggling into a deeper and more authentic sense of being in the world that is not stratified by the restraining norms of industrial society.

**SAQ:**

Explain Lawrence's redefinitions of 'sex' in terms of his concept of 'life' and 'community'. (90 words)

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**3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

The narrative technique adopted in *Sons and lovers* is that of the third-person point of view. That said, however, it becomes necessary to see how the omniscient or third-person point of view is problematized in the narrative through the focalization of the various characters. Furthermore, there are shifts even in the narrator's perspective, as Graham Holderness points out ["Language and Social Content in *Sons and Lovers*", from *D. H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction*, reprinted in Rick Rylance (ed.) *Sons and Lovers: New Casebooks*].

Holderness sees the opening of *Sons and Lovers* as an instance of the distinction between “detached” and the “direct” perspectives on the mining community. Starting from an “aerial” view while describing the location of the Bottom, the narrative perspective comes closer (even though the detached perspective of the superficial observer is continued) when the narrative concentrates upon the appearance of the houses themselves. Accompanying this detached description is the use of the impersonal “one”. But when the perspective moves still closer, from the parlour and the front gardens of the houses to the kitchen and the alley and then into Mrs. Morel’s house, the detachment of the narrative perspective is replaced by a direct inside view, expressed in “a language of real existence”. “The observer’s perspective is contrasted with the participant’s knowledge”. Lawrence, thereby, shows two kinds of “unpersonality” namely that which derives from superficial observation or ignorance and that which derives from the ability to see the life of a mining community with both inward knowledge and a wider perspective”. (Rylance: 136-137).

Other commentators like Louis L. Martz and Diane S. Bonds, have explored the ambiguity in the narratorial voice that destabilizes its authority. Martz, in “A Portrait of Miriam: A study in the Design of *Sons and Lovers*” (Rylance: 49-73) examines the infiltration of Paul’s point of view into the narrator’s ‘voice’ and its implications for the portrayal of Miriam in the narrative. Miriam becomes ambiguous because the action in the sections featuring Miriam conflicts with the narrative voice interpreting them. If you go back to section 3.4.1 in this unit, you will find a passage quoted from chapter 8 in the novel, featuring Miriam and Paul. Here again, we see the interpretation of the narrative voice. Miriam is sensuous and her love for Paul at this point is not only spiritual/emotional but physical also, but it is Paul who recoils and is subsequently filled with hatred for her. So we can see the impersonal narrative voice being supplanted with the focalization of Paul. In fact this occurs through much of Part 2 especially. However, Paul’s point of view also comes into conflict with Miriam’s and Clara’s when the narrative voice, on certain occasions, seems to align itself with the points of views of the latter two.

However, while Martz is of the opinion that the narrative voice stabilizes itself throughout the last four chapters, for Bonds on the other hand, the instability of the narrative voices continues throughout the novel. Thus, we see how Lawrence problematizes the third-person or ‘impersonal’ or

‘omniscient’ point of view in a number of ways that have become characteristic of his narrative technique.

**SAQ:**

Bring out the passages referred to above where the impersonal narrative ‘voice’ is brought into line with the individualised point of view of a character (Paul, or Miriam). (80 words)

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### 3.6 IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

In this section I will take you through an examination of some of the key images and symbols used by Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*. However, as with the section on themes, it will not be an exhaustive list but will concentrate more upon the most pervasive imagery and symbolism. After going through this section try to find out as many images and symbols in the text as you can and try to interpret them in the content of what you have read so far.

First of all, however, we need to make a distinction between an **image** and a **symbol**. I have used *A Glossary of Critical Terms* by M.H. Abrams and *Literary Terms and Criticism* (New Edition) by John Peck and Martin Coyle for this purpose.

Imagery, in literature, encompasses every concrete object, action and feeling in a poem and also the use of metaphors and similes (Peck and Coyle: 36). As a corollary, an image would be the individual object, action or feeling, or even a particular simile and megaphones. M.H. Abrams speaks of three distinct uses of the word “imaging”:-

1. “Imagery” (that is, “images” taken collectively) is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense-perception referred to in a poem or other works of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the vehicles (the secondary references) of its similes and metaphors.” (Abrams: 86).

For example, take the opening of chapter 7 in *Sons and Lovers* comprising a more detailed description of Miriam. The image in this section is not only literal and pertaining to farm life but also encompasses the imaginative and figurative in the images of heroes and heroines in Romantic Literature (“Ediths and Lucys and Rowenas, Brian de Bois Guilberts, Rob Roys and Guy Mannerings” or “a swine girl”).

2. “Imagery is used, more narrowly, to signify only descriptions of visible objects and scenes, especially if the description is vivid and particularized” (Abrams: 87). This can be seen, for example, in the opening of *Sons and Lovers* where the narrator gives a historical account of the establishment at the mining community in Bestwood.

3. Most commonly, “imagery signifies figurative language, especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes” (Abrams: 87). A particularly strong image used in *Sons and Lovers* pertains to Miriam’s attitude towards sex. In Chapter 11, as Miriam lies naked on the bed, she seems to give herself up in sacrifice to Paul: “Her big brown eyes were watching him, still and resigned and loving; she lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice: there was her body for him; but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back.” The imagery of sacrifices, made specific by the image of the “creature awaiting, immolation,” works to bring into relief Miriam’s fear and revulsion of the physical activity of sex underlining the very limited nature (for Paul) of her love that hinges only on the spiritual.

We can see through these instances the dynamic nature of images. A symbol, on the other, is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself (Abrams: 206). The difference between an image and a symbol is that the meaning or association of an image is stated in the work itself; on the other hand, the meaning and associations of a symbol are not explicitly stated in a work but have to be inferred by the reader (Peck and Coyle: 68). Thus, a symbol, unlike an image, embodies a meaning that has to be learned. Again, [S]ymbols are only used when a writer wants to express an apprehension of something which is not directly observable in the everyday world. The writer has to use a symbol because he or she can only convey this non-rational apprehension of something by using objects and words

from the familiar world” (Peck and Coyle: 69). For instance, Lawrence uses the moon and sun as symbols in much of his work, including *Sons and Lovers*.

The moon is a patent symbol not only in *Sons and Lovers* but in the other novels of Lawrence as well. The first occurrence of the moon is in chapter 1, where Mrs. Morel is locked out of the house by her drunken husband:-

“The moon was high and magnificent in the August night. Mrs. Morel, seared with passion, shivered to find herself out there in a great, white light, that fell cold on her, and gave a shock to her inflamed soul.”

The coldness of the moon contrasts sharply with Mrs. Morel’s “inflamed soul”, “seared” with passion, with the child (Paul) “boil [ing]” within her, with certain phrases and certain moments in the immediately proceeding quarrel “coming each time like a brand red hot” on her consciousness. The reaction to the coldness of the moon by the heat and warmth of Mrs. Morel’s thoughts happens, however, at an unconscious level. The central symbol of the moon is further supported by secondary metaphors, like the front garden, which is like “an immense gulf of white light” under the moon. The moonlight seems to fill up the landscape “almost blindingly”. Apart from the moon, this scene also makes use of flowers as symbols – the tall white lilies “reeling in the moonlight” (“the air was changed with their perfume, as with a presence”, so that Mrs. Morel “gasped slightly in fear”; when she bends down to look at the yellow pollen and takes in their scent, she feels “dizzy”); white phlox (whose “raw strong scent” invigorates her); and the white roses (which smell sweet and simple and whose “fresh scent and cool, soft leaves” remind her of “the morning-time and sunshine”).

The moon, with its coldness and blinding light, seems to stand for the “hardness of self-will” (Marsh: 153) that Mrs. Morel unconsciously feels when forced to confront the overbearing behavior of Mr. Morel and the burden of the coming child. The flowers, especially the lilies and phlox, indicate the strong sensual nature of the experience for Mrs. Morel, who has her face covered with the golden-yellow pollen (reminiscent of the golden rays of the sun) of the lilies and who is invigorated by the raw scent of the phlox. The use of lilies and phlox as sensual symbols thus enhance the

“metaphor of intimacy” between Mrs. Morel and the moon. As she comes out of this unconscious and irrational communion with the surrounding nature, however, the lilies and phlox give way to the sweet and simple scent of the white roses, suggesting her return back to the convention (white roses habitually symbolize purity, innocence, etc., in contrast to red roses which have, at times, been invested with sensual or erotic symbolism) of the family and daily routines. Thus, apart from the “hardness of self-will” (Marsh: 154) the moon also stands for an overthrowing of conventional relationships and gender-roles. Again, the night-time experience of Mrs. Morel brings her closer to a more vivid and spontaneous experience of life than her daytime pre-occupations with her family and her bourgeoisie sensibilities can ever bring her.

The moon symbolism is followed in the narrative further through Paul. Towards the end of Chapter 8, as Paul and Miriam walk in silence, from the seashore to a raised grass road on their way home, Paul suddenly stands as he sees the moon rising: “The whole of his blood seemed to burst into flame, and he could scarcely breathe. An enormous orange moon was staring at them from the rim of the sand hills. He stood still, looking at it.”

Again, in Chapter 11, when Paul decides to break off his relationship with Miriam, the moon reappears. This time, there are strong echoes of Mrs. Morel’s experience described in Chapter 1. In fact the scene starts with Paul sitting at home with his mother. As the perfume of the madonna lilies come with the house, he gets up and goes out. The beauty of the night makes him “want to shout”. “A half moon, dusty gold, was sinking behind the black sycamore at the end of the garden . . . a dim white fence of lilies went across the garden, and the air all around seemed to stir with scent, as if it were alive . . . The scent made him drunk . . . A corn-crake in the hay-close called insistently. The moon slid quite quickly downwards, growing more flushed . . . And then, like a shock, he caught another perfume, something raw and coarse. Hunting round, he found the purple iris, touched their fleshing throats, and their dark grasping hands. At any rate he had found something. They stood in the darkness. Their scent was brutal. The moon was melting down upon the crest of the hill. It was given, all was dank. The corncrake called still.” As Paul goes indoors, he breaks off a pink, and as he enters, he announces his decision to break off with Miriam. Here again, the expansiveness of the night scene becomes symbolic of the

expansiveness of deep, instinctive, ‘quick’ life, contrasted with the limiting influence of Miriam who “took all and gave nothing”, who gave “no living warmth”. Furthermore it also brings out the affinity between Mrs. Morel and Paul as both share an inwardness of self and struggle to maintain the self’s autonomy amidst the demands of conventional social life. Then again, the moon symbolizes, at times in Lawrence, an aspect of the ‘Female’, with its association with deep-seated and intuitive feelings that operate in the unconscious minds of individuals and therefore, are beyond the grasp of the consciousness itself. At the same time, however, Paul’s breaking off of a pink also seems to suggest the violence implicit in the breaking up of his relationship with Miriam.

Apart from the moon symbolism, the imagery of the mining landscape also presents a picture of an earlier organic community being supplanted by a more artificial and materialistic community set up by industrialism.

The nature imagery, in general, used throughout the novel serves to locate the sexual experiences of Paul (in particular) in a more natural and left-supporting environment which thereby has the potential to transcend the material aspects of industrial culture to arrive at a more authentic and fulfilling sense of being. As you read the novel attempt an inventory of the natural imagery used in the novel, taking into account the respective contexts for the images. Next, try to read what they stand for from the contexts they feature in and the responses of the characters to them.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Attempt to justify Lodge’s view, with reference to *Sons and Lovers*, that the language of modern fiction is involved with “introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie.” Support your answer with textual examples.
2. Examine to what extent *Sons and Lovers* displays the modernist preoccupation with ‘consciousness’ as its major theme.

### 3.7 SUMMING UP

In this section I will attempt to sum up the key preoccupations of this unit. In section 3.2, I discussed the significance of the title *Sons and Lovers* in

the light of the Freudian theory of the Oedipus Complex. I also mentioned in passing Lawrence's reaction to Freud and his theories.

In section 3.3, I dwelt upon four broad themes in addition to the theme of the Oedipus complex discussed in the previous section. The four themes are:-

- (i) Class, society and social Mobility
- (ii) The impact of the Industrial Revolution, and the Industrial Landscape
- (iii) Gender and Patriarchy and
- (iv) Struggle for Individual Identity

These four themes, however, also take into account certain other related themes, like the mother figure, human relationships and psycho-sexual identity.

In section 3.4, I discussed the narrative technique focusing chiefly on Lawrence's problematisation of the third-person point of view.

Lastly, in section 3.5, I discussed some of the images and symbols in *Sons and Lovers* while trying to elicit the differences between images and symbols. In the next section, I will give you a list of the names of books I have cited from as well as of books that you can use for a further study of the novel.

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