SEG - 2

Subsidiary Course in English

Modules 1 - 3

PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Bachelors Degree Programme, the opportunity to pursue Honours course in any subject introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Honours level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in 'invisible teaching'. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials, the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great deal of these efforts is still experimental–in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar

Vice-Chancellor

Second Reprint : October, 2013

Printed in accordance with the regulations and financial assistance of the Distance Education Council, Government of India.

SUBSIDIARY ENGLISH

[PASS COURSE]

PAPER - 2

Modules 1 - 3

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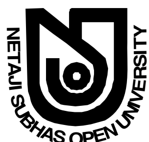

Netaji Subhas
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SEG - 2
Subsidiary Course
in English

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MODULE I – VICTORIAN NOVEL

UNIT 1 ❑ CHARLES DICKENS : A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Structure:

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Unit is to introduce the learner to the complexities of the Victorian era in brief, and to provide an overview of the factors that led to the Novel becoming the predominant literary genre of the period. A chronology of Dickens' works will be followed by a detailed analysis of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE VICTORIAN ERA AND THE NOVEL AS ITS DOMINANT FORM (with special reference to Charles Dickens)

It is a critical commonplace to say that the Victorian age, taken to coincide with Victoria's lengthy reign (1837-1901), was an age of paradox and contradictions. This is perhaps true of all times, but acquires greater relevance in periods of transition such as this one. One of the defining characteristics of this period is the spirit of self-questioning, and this can enable us to understand the Victorian era, in some ways, as part of the modern. This was a time when the British Empire expanded and reached its zenith, becoming economically, politically and culturally supreme. The advancement in science and technology added to the general air of confidence. New and bold inventions and discoveries, explorations and triumphs in the field of the sciences were accompanied by dramatic changes in society. The nineteenth century saw the rise and rapid spread of movements such as feminism, socialism and democracy. This period of seemingly unceasing progress was also a time ridden by doubt and uncertainties as a result of the challenges to religious faith and institutional Christianity. The Victorian period is therefore understood as a complex of multiple, often opposing pulls, and if there was anything in common shared by the various movements and thoughts, it was a sense of active engagement with society.

The keen sense of social responsibility and the rise in the importance of the middle class led to the emergence of the Victorian novel, arguably the most popular genre of its period. An ever-increasing class of readers who gained easy access to the works by leading writers, thanks to the lending libraries, the mode of serial publication and expansion of the publishing industry, sought and found both entertainment as well as moral consciousness in prose fiction. The ability to engage with their lived experience, with the vital issues and controversies of the period in a compellingly 'real' manner, was the reason for the stronghold of the novel over the imagination of the Victorian reader.

The popularity of Charles Dickens (1812-70), whose adult life roughly corresponds to the heyday of the Victorian period, can be compared to the pre-eminence of the novel itself in nineteenth century England. For a large body of readers he remains, as he was considered in his own time, synonymous with the Victorian novel. Very much a man of the times, he met the eventful course of the period he lived in head on. He took on the causes and problems of his society with his alert moral consciousness and a vibrant narrative powered by his trademark grotesque realism. Dickens began

his career by experimenting with exuberant and episodic sketches, much influenced by the picaresque tradition and the novel of sensibility which combined humour and sentiment in the presentation of eccentrics. Plot is secondary in such works, and the narratives move along with the character, as he encounters one new situation after another. Though satire and social commentary are not altogether absent in these early works, the major strengths of a work such as *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) are comedy and melodrama, qualities which, it is important to remember, are signature Dickensian qualities, to be found in equal measure in his later, mature works. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) rely on the early Dickensian strategy of combining brilliant caricature with an excess of sentiment, though here we already have the zealous social reformer at work, attacking individuals and institutions responsible for perpetrating injustice in this world. In the latter novel, he famously shows up the hypocrisy of institutionalised charity and *Nicholas Nickleby* exposes the sham of private schooling. The "Condition of England" question troubled and motivated not Dickens alone, but several other novelists of his time; but Dickens remains the most memorable writer of this fiction with his haunting and poignant portrayal of orphaned and homeless children at the mercy of an exploitative system and larger than life villainous adults. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), the theme of the suffering of the innocent is taken to its pathos-filled extreme in the scene of the death of the angelic little Nell. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44) presents an equally disillusioned picture of America, and is remembered for its memorable cast of hypocrites. By this time Dickens was the most acclaimed novelist in England and also enjoyed a wide following in the United States. A measure of his popularity can be gauged by the effect of his Christmas books - the 1843 masterpiece *A Christmas Carol* played a major role in reviving Christmas celebrations in Victorian England. The theme of youthful innocence versus hard-hearted worldliness is presented graphically in the tale of the ailing child Tiny Tim and the miser Scrooge who, in the end, undergoes a change of heart. In *David Copperfield* (1849-50), Dickens used material from his own life to once again portray that which he was a master of - the victimization of innocent children. In spite of the customary Dickensian sentimentality, this novel stands out for its detached, ironic presentation and a superb ability to capture the world from the child's point of view.

The novels which follow are said to mark a transition in terms of Dickens's style and perspective: he now begins to produce more focussed and more sombre works. Both *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) *and Bleak House* (1852-53) are intensely dark novels, characterized by a kind of thematic concentration not found in his earlier storytelling. The latter novel is remarkable for its complex plot and powerful use of symbolism. *Hard Times* (1854) is a critique of both industrial England and Utilitarianism, a philosophy that completely

sidelined the role of imagination. The work is a powerful allegory with the names of the characters evoking Dickens's revulsion at the hypocritical Gradgrinds and Bounderbys of his time, who were completely devoid of compassion. *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) critiques the bureaucracy and also contains a sustained polemic against the institution of debtors' prisons, a concern voiced repeatedly by Dickens in several of his novels. The final phase includes Dickens's masterpiece *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and the less celebrated but no less captivating work, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65). The first is, like *David Copperfield*, a *bildungsroman*, a novel tracing the growth and development of the central character, and also contains autobiographical elements, though not as overtly as in the earlier work. Apart from exploring the issue of class and other related kinds of social ills, this remarkable novel unfolds as a tale in search of identity and is a comment on the seclusion of the individual, on the ultimate unknowability of our future. The novel also provides us a masterful presentation of a young boy's perspective and shows Dickens's mastery of the plot. He also relies heavily on symbolism in these last novels. *Our Mutual Friend* therefore works at different levels of meaning and deals with the themes of death and rebirth, and the quest for identity. In his final and unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Dickens attempts to study the complex nature of human identity by using the device of split personality.

1.2 *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*: THE STORYLINE

The story is, as the title indicates, as much a tale of the two cities, London and Paris, as it is of the characters whose personal lives are caught up in the turmoil of the times. The period is the middle of the eighteenth century, from 1757 to 1793, covering the Seven Years War between England and France (1756-1763) to the middle of the French Revolution. The famous opening line **"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"** sets the mood, as the author goes on to ironically comment on the political and social unquiet in both countries, drawing attention to the gulf between the rich and the poor. The chapter ends on a note of grim prophecy, alerting us to the terrible shape of things to come. The action proper starts in the second chapter, with Jarvis Lorry's fearful night journey from London to Dover to meet Lucie Manette, a young French orphan raised in England. Mr. Lorry is the agent of Tellson's Bank of London of which Lucie's father was a client. He tells her that her father, Dr. Manette is not dead, but had been imprisoned, and is now released from the infamous Paris prison, Bastille. The scene shifts to the streets of Paris where the poverty-stricken masses ominously lap up spilled wine in a manner which prefigures

the spilling of blood on the same streets during the years of the Revolution. The Wine shop belongs to Monsieur Defarge, who once was a servant of the Manette family. It is he who now provides shelter to his former master. Lucie accompanies Mr. Lorry to France where she finds her father hidden away in this poor Paris locality, completely transformed by his long confinement. He obsessively makes shoes and is unable to communicate with anyone. He cannot recognize his daughter but Lucie resolves to take him back with her and to revive him with her love.

The second book begins five years later in London with a description of the claustrophobic confines of Tellson's Bank, which is located near the Temple Bar, a place infamous for the cruel system of punishment prevalent at that time. These miserable quarters of London recall the poor suburbs of Paris: there we met the Defarges, here we are re-introduced to Jerry Cruncher, the messenger in Book I. The relationship between Jerry Cruncher and his wife is very different from that between Monsieur and Madame Defarge - Cruncher rebukes his wife for praying and then throws his boots at her. Asked by the bank, he next goes to the court, where Charles Darnay is being tried for treason. The Manettes and Jarvis Lorry have been summoned as witnesses to identify Charles Darnay as the man they met on the return trip to England, and they do so, although their instinctive sympathy is for the noble and honest looking young man who is under trial. Darnay is a French émigré, and has been framed by the spies Barsad and Cly. He is ultimately saved when Sydney Carton points out the surprising likeness between Darnay and himself, and thus succeeds in dismissing the case. Working under the ambitious lawyer Stryver, Sydney Carton, the hero of the book, is an intriguing figure. He is immensely talented, but has cynically frittered away his chances and leads a dissolute life, looked down upon by respectable society. From the courtroom the scene shifts to the cosy domestic space of the Manette household, where the central characters of the novel reassemble. However, the peace and quiet of this happy London home is disturbed by the storm and the sound of "hundreds of people" rushing about, ready as if to violently enter their lives.

We are next transported to the streets of France, where the cruel Marquis St. Evrémonde carelessly runs over a child with his speeding carriage, and then without a thought tosses a coin as compensation to the father holding the dead child in his hands. In the meantime, Darnay has arrived in France - we find out that he is Evrmonde's nephew, and has changed his name, because he wishes to completely dissociate himself from the French aristocracy he was born into. He has now come to France to give up his inheritance. The following morning, the Marquis is found murdered, and a year later, Gaspard, the aggrieved father who lost his child, is found and executed for the murder. Darnay next returns to England and becomes engaged to Lucie. Sydney Carton, who too was devoted to Lucie, knows

his suit is futile and takes his leave of her, promising her that he will "embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you" (Book One, Chapter XIII).

Back in France, the ominous knitting of Madame Defarge alerts us to the impending danger posed to Darnay and the Manettes. Barsad, now operating as a spy for the French tells the Defarges that Lucie Mannette is about to marry Charles Evrémonde. At the wedding of his daughter, when Darnay reveals his real identity, Dr Manette again lapses into insanity. In France, the revolution breaks out in 1789, and among the leaders in the storming of the Bastille is Monsieur Defarges. The Evrémonde chateau is burnt down, and Gabelle, the loyal employee of the estate is taken prisoner. He manages to send a letter to England, and Darnay decides to return to France to help him. However, in revolutionary France, he himself is at once thrown into prison. The entire family - Dr Manette, Lucie, her young daughter and Miss Pross - come to Paris to help Darnay. Jarvis Lorry is already here, on official work. Darnay is at first freed through the testimony given by Dr Manette and Gabelle. The bloodthirsty and vengeful Defarge family succeeds in getting him arrested again, on the basis of the denunciation made by "one other". This mysterious 'other' turns out to be Dr Manette himself, who, during his confinement, had written a statement denouncing the Evrémonde family, "them and their descendants, to the last of their race" (Book Three, Chapter X). This document was retrieved by Monsieur Defarge at the time of the storming of the Bastille and retained as evidence against the clan towards whom he and his wife nurtured a long-held secret hatred. The story of their persecution at the hands of this aristocrat family is told in flashback - Dr Manette's letter recorded the way he was arrested following his visit to the Evrémonde chateau, where he was called to treat a young peasant girl who had been raped by Darnay's uncle. Her brother had been mortally wounded trying to save her, and the girl too soon died. The only surviving member of the family was a younger sister. Dr Manette was arrested when he attempted to expose the crime. Darnay is convicted and sentenced to death on the basis of this denunciation. Sydney Carton, in the meantime, has again made a surprise entry, and it is he who comes across two vital pieces of information: first that the spy Barsad is none other than Miss Pross's long lost brother Solomon, and the second more important revelation that Madame Defarge is the sole surviving sister of the family destroyed by the cruel Evrémonde brothers. He warns the English party of the threat to their lives and asks them to prepare for their flight to England. Carton manages to secure the help of Barsad since the latter cannot risk the exposure of his true identity in revolutionary France. He and Carton visit Darnay in his cell, where Carton drugs the prisoner, exchanges clothes with him and has Barsad carry him out of the prison. Thus Sydney Carton saves Darnay's life a second time, once again

making use of the strange similarity in their appearance. Lucie, her daughter and Mr Lorry manage to escape successfully along with the still unconscious Darnay and Dr Manette who has again relapsed into incoherence because of the shock of Darnay's sentencing. Meanwhile, Miss Pross holds back Madame Defarge as the latter tries to break in to look for Darnay's family. In the struggle between these two powerful women, both dedicated to their cause, Madame Defarge is accidentally killed, and Miss Pross goes deaf from the noise of the pistol fire. In the final scene of the novel, we see Sydney Carton going nobly to meet his death. The novel ends on a prophetic note, suggestive of not only the personal redemption of Sydney Carton, but of a larger scheme of justice and the restoration of peace and harmony.

1.3 The Plot

A Tale of Two Cities is one of the best examples of Dickens's mastery in plot construction - it is perfectly structured, employing a pattern of parallels and contrasts, thematic echoes, and alternating focusses. Dickens initially gave it the title *Recalled to Life*, which he later used for Book I. Resurrection is one of the central themes of the novel - perhaps the most important - yet the present title *A Tale of Two Cities* is successful in highlighting the similarities and differences between England and revolutionary France. Through this Dickens draws attention to the ideological issues at the heart of this historical novel. While Dickens unconditionally sympathizes with the suffering masses in France (and in England) and unequivocally condemns the heartless aristocracy, he cannot bring himself to support the excesses of the revolutionaries. Instead, he offers the ideal of the family and domestic bliss. In France, family ties are destroyed at multiple levels; in England, the broken family is brought together. The compact novel is divided into three books, with separate titles*:* *Recalled to Life*, *The Golden Thread* and *The Track of a Storm*. The short first book gives an introduction to the period, sets the tone and introduces the theme of resurrection, which is again powerfully evoked at the end of the novel. In the second book, the happier English scenes are offset by the violence in France. In Book Three, the main characters all find themselves inevitably sucked in by forces beyond their control, into the middle of the revolutionary conflict. Dickens makes brilliant use of the flashback method here, to reveal secrets which tumble out in a series, showing how the past can powerfully shape the present as well as the future. The only possible redemption is through personal sacrifice - Sydney's Carton's heroic intervention quite explicitly gives him with a Christ-like aura as he utters the final prophetic lines of the novel.

The plot of the novel operates on the principle of doubling - apart from the central pair

of doubles, Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay, there are others surrounding them, forming a ripple effect. Madame Defarge and Miss Pross stand out as the two formidable women, both equally committed and unrelenting. Again, Lucie's loving nature and brightness - both moral and physical, may be contrasted to the darkness represented by the bloodthirsty Madame Defarge. Madame Defarge also has her double in the Vengeance. The doubles operate not only as contrasts, but also draw our attention to hidden similarities, as in the case of Darnay and Carton.

1.4 IMPORTANT THEMES IN THE NOVEL

1.4.1 Resurrection, Rebirth, Renewal

Book One is titled *Recalled to Life*, and the action of the novel begins with a mission to bring back a man long thought dead. There is so much of an obsession with burial and with the idea of return from the dead that Dickens makes even the relatively less marginal character Jerry Cruncher literally a "resurrection man", stealing bodies from graves. Early in the novel, there is a long philosophical passage on the "inscrutable" dead, hiding their secrets in their chambers. Dr Manette is an exception - a revenant - who returns, yet is repeatedly tormented by his secret, something which leads to his inevitable collapse. Apart from Dr Manette, the other character who is given a new lease of life is Charles Darnay. Born Charles Evrémonde, he casts aside his hateful family identity and emigrates to England as Charles Darnay. This in itself is a rebirth of sorts for him - he has rejected his country, class, inheritance and lineage - to find a new identity in England where he can earn his living through his own efforts. However, in his case too, his past, his French identity, continues to pursue and persecute him and he finds himself tried for treason, being framed as a French spy. His deliverance comes through the intervention of his double, Sydney Carton, who appears, almost ghostlike, imperceptibly, to bring Darnay back from death's door. Sydney Carton repeatedly finds himself facing almost certain death, yet he is recalled to life miraculously each time. In France too, he is tried for treason and is at first acquitted when Dr Manette and Gabelle testify for him. However, he is rearrested almost at once, and this time it is Dr Manette's secret from the past that betrays him. The secret which has now come out into the open is no longer just a document, but the very embodiment of past, of the power of time and of destiny over the fates of men. Again, Sydney Carton resurfaces, just when required, and quickly sets in motion a plan to rescue Darnay from certain death. As he drugs Darnay in his cell, the latter undergoes a kind of death - he is unconscious till the end of the novel; he will wake up only after the carriage carrying him and his family

have crossed the French borders, and after the final scene in the book where his alter-ego goes to face his death, looking ahead at a new life. Charles Darnay's many resurrections are therefore magnified in the final redemption scene of Sidney Carton, who undergoes literal and symbolic transformation to shed his disreputable past and become not only the hero of the novel, but a Christ like martyr, sacrificing his life for his loved ones. His own resurrection is signalled in the promise of the yet to be born child of Lucie and Darnay who will bear his name.

1.4.2 Doubles and parallels

Doubles and parallels play an important part not only in plot construction, but also serve to draw attention to the thematic design of this novel. The title itself places the two cities side by side for comparison. The first chapter points out the differences and similarities between France and England. While the revolutionary anarchy of France is contrasted with the political stability of England, Dickens does not let the reader forget that in many ways the two societies are similar. In both countries, the gap between the rich and the poor is vast, and lawlessness thrives. If in France the powerful ruling classes can completely disregard the law and bend it to suit their will, literally getting away with murder, the English penal system is shown up to be bloodthirsty and corrupt.

The most notable instance of doubling is seen in the presentation of characters, especially in the case of the two major male protagonists, which may be understood in terms of the concept of the alter ego. Sydney Carton is, in many ways, the darker version of Charles Darnay. The novel underlines this by making the characters look alike - in spite of their many differences, there is also a common core that they share, which is not apparent at first. Both are committed to the ideal of sacrifice and altruism; however, it is Darnay who enjoys the rewards of his nobility in this world, as the final, noblest sacrifice is made by his less respectable counterpart, Sydney Carton. Significantly, however, Sydney Carton will live on - the yet to be born son of Darnay and Lucie will carry his name. Apart from these central pairs, there are other instances of doubling - in the case of the women characters, we have Madame Defarge and Miss Pross, who meet only at the end of the novel in a violent struggle, with the outcome that one again dies, while the other is permanently scarred. Lucie, who is instrumental in reviving her father, is the living image of her mother. She has the same golden locks that provide Dr Manette's only connection with his past and family in his long period of imprisonment.

1.4.3 Loyalty, Sacrifice versus Retribution

The characters in this novel are motivated either by the principles of loyalty and sacrifice

or by the desire for retribution, or both. Lucie is devoted to the father she finds after many years, and is intent on nursing him back to normalcy. Jarvis Lorry, the loyal employee of Tellson's Bank, is equally concerned about the well-being of the Manette family. The Manettes also have the good fortune to have in their service the somewhat grotesque but fiercely protective Miss Pross. Charles Darnay, the large-hearted aristocrat, is not only committed to his democratic ideals, but also to his former employee, Gabelle, the estate manager of the Evrémondes. He knows the dangers of returning to revolutionary France, yet feels compelled to go in order to save him. In France, we find the revolutionary group bound by its ties of loyalty and brotherhood. They have all suffered immensely and all have their personal tragedies, and therefore ready to sacrifice their lives in order to avenge the wrongs done to them. The character who embodies the concept of sacrifice is of course Sydney Carton, standing taller than the rest in the end, as he fulfils his promise to Lucie by willingly giving up his life to ensure her happiness. His supreme sacrifice elevates him and makes him appear a Christ like figure of redemption, whose dying words look forward with hope to a better future.

If sacrifice finally reigns supreme in the novel, its opposing force, retribution plays a powerful role in setting the action in motion. The Evrémonde brothers are not only unrepentant but vengeful: they throw the innocent Dr Manette into prison when he sympathises with the persecuted peasant family. The cycle of revenge continues with the murder of the Marquis by Gaspard, the execution of Gaspard for the murder, all leading up to the climactic event of the storming of the Bastille. The violence does not stop at this point, but the force of retribution continues to claim more lives. Gabelle is captured and, as Darnay arrives in France to save him; his past catches up with him. Dr Manette watches helplessly, unable to now protect his son-in-law, as he finds himself a prisoner a second time, arrested by the forces of history.

Therefore not only are the characters guided by altruistic and vengeful impulses in this novel, the continuous dynamics between the two forces shape the moral design of Dickens's work. In the end, Madame Defarge meets her end while confronting Miss Pross, and Sidney Carton's prophetic final vision sees "Barsad and Cly, Defarge, The Vengeance, jurymen, the judge, long ranks of the new oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument," the guillotine. Poetic justice, as Dickens promises through his protagonist, will be done soon.

1.4.4 Other major thematic motifs

Among the other chief themes in the novel are insanity, freedom and confinement. The madness of Dr Manette is paralleled by the frenzy of the mob; his incessant shoe-making

is comparable to Madame Defarge's ominous knitting. The Marquis considers the commoners crazy for mourning their children, they in turn think him insane because of his mindless cruelty. Liberty is one of the most important ideas in this novel set against the French Revolution, and many of the characters, particularly the most important, find themselves imprisoned at some point in the course of events.

The major symbols and images in the novel also constantly recur, forming an elaborate and intricate pattern of echoes: blood-red wine spilled on the streets of Paris stain the pavements, anticipating the blood soon to be flowing in the very same streets. The storm in Soho square has a similar function - it foreshadows the storming of the Bastille. The prison - in its many forms - repeatedly encloses the characters; apart from the Bastille, there are the other French prisons, and their English counterpart is to be found in the confines of Tellson's Bank, where young men are hidden away to grow old, unseen by the world.

1.5 THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dr Manette: The central character of Book one, this strange and haunting figure continues to be of vital importance in the subsequent drama involving the younger characters belonging to the next generation. Long thought to be dead, he makes a dramatic entry, as indicated in the title of Book One: *Recalled to Life*. In Dr Manette we have Dickens presenting a detailed study of insanity - how it is caused, the distinct marks of abnormalcy, the cure and subsequent relapses in periods of crisis. When we first meet Dr Manette, he has been released from prison, yet is in a state of confinement, locked away in a dark chamber, because the deranged man cannot tolerate light or company anymore. The secrecy surrounding him is necessary also because of the conditions leading to his arrest - he was thrown into prison because he was about to expose the crime of the Evrémonde brothers; after his release, he is looked after by his former servant, Defarge, who has sworn to take revenge against this cruel aristocratic family, who exhibits Dr Manette as an example of the extreme persecution suffered at the hands of the ruling class.

Locked away in the dark recesses of the infamous Bastille, known for robbing a man of his individuality and identity, Dr Manette not only loses his professional identity - from a physician he is reduced to the state of a shoemaker; he is also deprived of his name and self-consciousness, so much so that he becomes identified with a mere number, One hundred and five, North Tower. In order to keep himself

occupied in his state of terrible loneliness, he makes shoes endlessly. As he himself explains to Jarvis Lorry later, that "(by substituting) the ingenuity of the hands for the ingenuity of the mental torture" (Book Two, chapter XIX), this physical activity enabled him to forget his pain. Separated from his wife and infant daughter whose fate he had no way of knowing, falsely implicated and with no hope of getting justice, he would have truly disintegrated had it not been for his shoemaking. The first meeting between him and his daughter is a dramatic and poignant scene, in which the ghost of a man captures fragments of his past, bewildered to see the image of his long-lost wife stand in front of him. At first frightened, he later is softened by Lucie's gentle manner. Dr Manette's character changes with time and changed circumstance. In a way, his period of imprisonment can be interpreted as a period of timeless suspension, in which he is given to only one obsessive activity. Once out of prison, his process of recovery begins: under the gentle care of his daughter, he is restored to normalcy and to the flow of time. Yet, this recovery is not complete - he lapses back to his manic self every time he is reminded of the ghastly past. Darnay's revelation of his identity is one such, and again later when his letter is used against his son-in-law. Alexander Manette's character is complex and dynamic, yet like many of Dickens's characters, he is given a distinctive feature by which we identify him - his shoemaking.

Lucie Manette: The very image of the devoted daughter, she is, like the other Dickensian heroines, the picture of ideal Victorian womanhood: frail, child like, submissive, loving and loyal. Her physical appearance - a pair of blue eyes and golden locks - also are in keeping with the idea of perfect beauty. There is therefore an underlying assumption that outward appearance matches inner nature. Such an assumption is necessary in the case of Lucie because she is completely transparent and honest, incapable of any deception. Like the golden thread which sustains Dr Manette in his long years of imprisonment and after which the second book is named, she is ever supportive and compassionate.

Lucie Manette herself does not change, but she inspires people to change: she nurses her father back to life and light, and succeeds in bringing out the best in the dissolute lawyer Sydney Carton. In the case of her father, the change is effective but not complete; with Sydney Carton there is a radical change, so much so that in the end he becomes identified with Christ, the highest human ideal. Lucie's character in this respect is in sharp contrast with Madame Defarge, the malignant force of darkness, who incites and leads others to commit bloodthirsty acts. Lucie, the quintessential Dickensian heroine, stands for the cohesive force of domestic ideology: she is the magnet who draws to herself characters as diverse as Darnay, Carton as well as

Stryver.

Charles Darnay: Born Evrémonde, he relinquishes his title and estate because of his democratic principles and empathy with the peasants. He chooses to live in exile, in England, and earn his own living, rather than exploit the poor of his country. From the beginning therefore, he is cast in the heroic mould of self-sacrifice. Also the romantic hero of the novel, he secures the affections of Lucie easily - whereas his rival Sydney Carton, who is also his look-alike, does not stand a chance. However, when set against Sydney Carton, the character of Charles Darnay appears flat, since he is too perfect, and does not therefore undergo the kind of inner struggle and transformation that his less fortunate counterpart does.

In a way, their fortunes are similar - not only do they look alike; they both start out as peripheral figures. Sydney Carton has been orphaned at an early age, and leads a life of dissipation in spite of his talents. Darnay is in exile, away from his family and as misunderstood as Sydney Carton is. When we first meet him, he is the victim of a conspiracy, and is undergoing trial in an English court for being a spy. Again, in France, he is at the centre of another trial, this time accused of betraying his country. Each time, he survives, but through no effort of his own. He suffers passively, till his counterpart steps in to rescue him.

Although he is virtuous and therefore enjoys all the rewards - he is the one Lucie chooses, it is he who survives at the end of the novel - he is a less compelling figure than the other more fascinating character who takes charge of the action.

Sydney Carton: Dickens was inspired to write *A Tale of Two Cities* after acting in Wilkie Collins's play *The Frozen Deep*, which also presents a love triangle, similarly resolved when one man sacrifices his life for his rival. The sacrifice made by Sydney Carton is all the more remarkable because he is from the beginning presented as an anti-hero, unsocial and degenerate, someone who has wasted his life away and not therefore capable of any great act. Added to this is his dislike of Darnay, which he makes no effort to hide.

He projects himself on all occasions as the "man of no delicacy", yet we always suspect there is more to him than his outward posings. He is a man full of contradictions - definitely not what he appears to be. The more he stresses his difference from Darnay, the more we realise their affinities. And each time the romantic hero of the novel is in danger, it is Carton who comes up almost out of nowhere and succeeds in saving him. His altruism is directed not only towards Lucie and her loved ones, but towards all people in general. It is an innate quality, and like all truly generous

individuals, he deflects attention away from himself. Unlucky from the beginning, he yet always devoted himself to helping others. Orphaned at a young age, he passed his youth by doing the homework of his class mates. As a lawyer, he prefers to remain in the shadow of Stryver, using his talents to make the latter prosper. He is devoted to the ones he is close to - he almost looks up to Stryver as a father figure and worships Lucie as a goddess. His kind of adoration does not require any recompense. Therefore, though the Christ parallel in the end is startling, it is not inappropriate. Dickens prepares us for such an ending earlier, in Book Three, Chapter IX, when Sydney Carton says " I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord, he that believeth me, though he were dead, yet shall he live". These lines from the Bible are used by Sydney Carton to prepare himself before his final sacrifice; they also prepare us for the transformation he undergoes. As he travels to his death, looking heavenward, in his moment of glory he still has the time to comfort another, a young girl he did not know till then, who like him is fated to die by the dreaded guillotine.

The central figure of *A Tale of Two Cities* is an enigmatic figure: he is aloof, mysterious and lives on the edges of society. An outcaste and an orphan, it is he who rises to become the hero of the book. Orphans indeed occupy an important position in Dickens's works, and as Terry Eagleton suggests, being orphaned becomes a general condition in the world that Dickens depicts. In this novel too, there are several orphans: the heroine Lucie, loses her parents at a young age, and when she finally is united with her father, he is a man transformed, no longer in possession of his faculties. Charles Darnay also is an orphan of sorts - when we meet him, both his parents are dead, and very soon, he quarrels with his uncle, his guardian, and leaves his ancestral home forever. Almost immediately after Darnay's departure, the Marquis, his uncle, is also killed. Miss Pross and Madame Defarge also are lone figures - both have lost their families. Death, loss and orphaning therefore link the fates of these characters, and Sydney Carton is the most dramatic example of the working of these themes.

1.6 OTHER MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

Dickens's novels are populated with unforgettable eccentrics and comic characters. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a dark novel, dealing with a violent and bloody period, and therefore does not have too much room for humour. Yet, it has a handful of these truly Dickensian grotesques who are also among the most memorable: Jerry Cruncher the gravedigger, Miss Pross and The Vengeance.

Jerry Cruncher may literally be a marginal character, but time and again Dickens uses

this strange man with a telling name to draw attention to some of the central themes of the novel. His secret occupation, grave digging, parodies the way the dead are "recalled to life" in the main plot. A strange-looking man with his spiky hair, he is further marked out by his speech defect and his tendency to talk to himself. Dickens's interest in the quirky aspects of human nature makes him devote an entire chapter (Book Two, Chapter XIV, The Honest Tradesman) to him, giving us details of his family and his occupation.

The Vengeance, along with Madame Defarge and the other knitting women is part of a deadly group comparable to the three sisters of Greek mythology, the Fates, who determine the lives of mortals. La Vengeance is Therese Defarge's loyal lieutenant, and is no less bloodthirsty. However, Dickens makes her quite distinct from Madame Defarge. The latter, who is chief antagonist, is young, intense, brooding and nurses a long held grudge against a particular family. The Vengeance is the personification of the mindless retributive aspect of the French Revolution: she is an ordinary woman - a short, plump grocer's wife - transformed into the macabre and maniacal woman rushing through the streets, "uttering terrific shrieks, and flinging her arms about her head like all the forty Furies at once, was tearing from house to house, rousing the women." (Book Two, Chapter XXII). Madame Defarge is the cold, calculating strategist; the Vengeance represents the irrational force of destruction, dancing riotously and menacingly on the streets with the other peasant revolutionaries (the Carmagnole). Ironically, it is she who outlasts her friend and leader Madame Defarge.

The ghastly sisterhood of the French peasant women is paralleled by the no less strong bond that ties Miss Pross to Lucie, her "ladybird". A strange and ferocious woman, of grotesque appearance, with wild, red hair, she adds comic touch to the otherwise grim novel with her pronouncements on her fiercely-held allegiances. She loves Lucie, the monarchy and her country, and her first priority is the young French girl for whose sake she is willing to risk her life. In her readiness to sacrifice herself for Lucie she may be compared to Sydney Carton, but the reason behind her attachment to the Manette family adds a different social dimension to her character. Single, unattractive women like her had no other option but to find suitable employment in such families, and live their lives vicariously through their more beautiful and more fortunate counterparts.

The grotesques in Dickens's novels, as Terry Eagleton points out in his book , are not unrealistic, rather they point towards a different kind of social experience, deliberately presenting partial impressions in which physical features act as clues to inner nature.

1.7 *A TALE OF TWO CITIES* AS A HISTORICAL NOVEL

A historical novel is a sub-genre of the novel, and uses an earlier period in history as its setting. While by definition the historical novel form brings together reality and invention, it is important to note that it is after all, a work of fiction. Apart from the setting, some historical novels also feature actual historical personages. While the historical novel had a well-established pedigree owing to the popularity of Walter Scott's fiction, Dickens, considered to have taken over the mantle of his great predecessor, chose not to continue with this tradition. Instead, he turned towards a presentation and critique of his own times. He experimented with historical fiction in only two of his works, and that is one of the chief reasons why *A Tale of Two Cities* is often considered un-Dickensian. Yet, in terms of its themes and worldview, it is close to his other works. While the French Revolution setting is central to the plot of this novel, Dickens's primary interest here, as he himself pointed out, was to explore the potential of a drama involving love and sacrifice. The Revolution provides a suitable context of conflict in which the characters find themselves enmeshed, and it is they who, in turn, bring the revolution to life for the readers. As far as Dickens is concerned in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the evil aristocracy is embodied by the Marquis and his brother, the liberal, noble class by the hero Charles Darnay. The Defarges are shown to be the leading force behind the revolution. Dickens's real aim and success is in presenting the complex relationship between his characters, and in creating a gallery of colourful characters. These are the familiar characters of the Dickensian world, and in a way this novel, in spite of its historical setting, is as much concerned with his own time as are his other works. The celebrated opening line - "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" and the entire first chapter which presents a comparative study of the two societies, French and English, in the eighteenth century, can also be read as an oblique comment on nineteenth century England.

Dickens does of course attempt to capture the spirit of the past age and in this his chief inspiration is Carlyle's book *The French Revolution* (1837). While Dickens follows Carlyle's reading of history in suggesting that destruction leads to regeneration in society, he prioritises the role of man's essential goodness in bringing about such a change. In Carlyle's vision, human vice is predominant, and the stress therefore is on obedience rather than voluntary sacrifice. *A Tale of Two Cities* is an imaginative re-working of Carlyle's historical work, in which we find an expression of Dickens's views on the vital social issues of his time. The nineteenth century was a time which saw the birth and development of radical new movements and thought, such as Darwinism and Marxism, and the literature of the period reflect the

impact of these ideas. Dickens was a traditionalist, and although he was greatly moved by the plight of the poor and the exploited, he could not endorse rejection of authority. It is very often pointed out therefore that while at the beginning of the novel, the novelist sympathizes with the commoners and the peasants and depicts the extremes of their distress in vivid detail, in the latter part of the work, he shows the same group in a negative light, so much so that they are portrayed as mindless and bloodthirsty animals. They become the antagonists to the main characters who belong to a different, higher social order. The romantic hero of the novel comes from the nobility, but is shown to be truly noble in character, not depraved like the other members of his class. He may be an exception, but significantly, it is important for Dickens that the privileged role of the romantic hero, the ideal partner for Lucie, has to be allotted to someone of rank. Most significant is the nature of the solution provided by Dickens at the end of the novel. Sydney Carton's sacrifice does not only pave the way for the personal happiness of Lucie Manette and her family, but, on a grander scale, anticipates the end of the bloodshed. As Carton attains Christ like status, taking on the role of the scapegoat for the rest of sinful humanity, he looks forward to a time when justice is going to be done and order restored. Thus, Dickens's understanding of this violent period suggests that redemption is possible not through collective action, but through individual intervention.

A Tale of Two Cities is therefore a compelling story of individual sacrifice and the achievement of the ideal potential of humanity, set against the backdrop of a period of turmoil. This is not to suggest that Dickens's use of history is merely decorative - the past serves an important function in enabling the author to engage with the anxieties and uncertainties of the present. In short, Dickens's presentation of the French Revolution tells us more about his concerns and about the period that he belonged to, than the preceding era in which the novel is set.

1.8 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Answer Type

1. Explain the significance of the title of *A Tale of Two Cities*. How far is setting important in this novel?
2. How does Dickens present his protagonist in this novel? Who is the protagonist? Discuss the character of Sydney Carton as an anti-hero.
3. Comment on the ending of *A Tale of Two Cities*. How far is it expected? What

does it tell us about Dickens's moral vision?

4. How are women represented in *A Tale of Two Cities*? What ideal does Lucie Manette symbolise? How does Dickens represent dominating and independent women?
5. Write an essay on Dickens's handling of plot in *A Tale of Two Cities.*

Short Answer Type

1. Show how Dickens presents a complex study of madness in the character of Dr Manette.
2. Imprisonment is a recurring motif in Dickens's works. Show how *A Tale of Two Cities* presents imprisonment, both physical and mental.
3. What is the significance of the carmagnole? Show how Dickens presents a tableau in which the anarchic forces of the revolution are contrasted with the domestic emblem of harmony and peace.

Short Questions

1. Write a short note on the institution of the Tellson's Bank.
2. What is the spilled wine a symbol of? What does it presage?
3. What name does young Jerry give to his father's trade? What is the irony in the title "resurrection man"?
4. Comment on the reaction of the revolutionary mob to Sydney Carton's trials.
5. What is Sydney Carton's plan and whose help does he take in moving Darnay out of the prison?

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UNIT 2 ❑ THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

Structure

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2.1 OBJECTIVES

In passing from Charles Dickens to Thomas Hardy, the Victorian Age in general and the novel in particular takes in an immense range of developments in the socio- political, economic and philosophical spheres as also its cultural representations. The aim of this Unit will be to trace some of these outlines. The learner will also come across a thorough analysis of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

2.2 THE AGE OF TRANSITION

Thomas Hardy was not a typical Victorian, though born into the same century as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope. The beliefs which they shared was hard for Hardy to keep faith in, for his circumstances instilled in him a deep rooted belief in the role of Fate. The early Victorians were reared in a climate of the religious devoutness and the strong and naïve belief in Providence. This led to the literature of the period being motivated to translate this into the typical 'happy endings' of novels as a way of giving examples of the principles of poetic justice. Hardy, though brought up in a strongly Christian home, grew up to be an agnostic, or a doubter in the existence of God, owing to the intellectual and scientific climate generated by the theory of evolution. The debate over evolution and the breaking of the age old belief in the Christian scheme of God as the creator shook the very fabric of Victorian faith. The final nail was struck by the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, in 1859. Darwin said that vast numbers of species had existed at one time, several of them had died out and those which survived were ones that had best adapted to their environment. This came to be called the survival of the fittest. He also suggested that apes and men had evolved from a collateral ancestor, shaking thereby the very fabric of prudent Victorian Christianity that man was the 'roof and crown' creation of God. For if life evolved under its own laws, if it was not true that Adam and Eve and the animals had been created just as they were in the Garden of Eden, then there was no need for God. Darwin showed a world whose evolution was determined not by rationality, goodness or the intervention of a divine will but the struggle for survival in which victory went to the strong, not

necessarily to the good. The problem with Hardy was to retain faith in Christianity, of how could God be all-powerful and all-loving in the face of the overwhelming fact of human suffering. Darwin's book weakened the idea that love was the final law of the universe. This made Hardy and his generation feel that the world was frightening, unplanned and dangerous and this idea is conveyed in his novels through the intervention of fate, chance and coincidence which hound the characters, make their best plans go wrong and lead on to tragedy and waste of human potential.

Unlike the early Victorians, especially writers, whose consciousness was chiefly urban, Hardy was different in his preoccupation with the life of the countryside. He was also deeply influenced by John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* more than any other book of the period, the deep influence of which was felt again and again in his novels. Mill's treatise on the need for individual liberty and how the tyranny of society produces distorted human beings, deeply influenced Hardy and also induced in him the need to treat women as equals and in equal need of liberty.

2.3 THOMAS HARDY – VICTORIAN NOVELIST

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was a Victorian novelist, poet and writer whose work reflects the philosophical, spiritual and social milieu of the age distinctly. He was born when the young Queen Victoria had been on the throne only three years, and he died when the 1920s were drawing to a close. Hardy rose from lower-class rural obscurity to climb the ranks of society to become the foremost writer of the age. His funeral drew large crowds, the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, led the nation's mourning, and his ashes were laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, the ancient church ground in London where poets and politicians of repute were buried. Since Hardy's death, his reputation both as a novelist and as a major poet has grown; his short stories and his minor novels are being revalued, while developments in literary theory and criticism continue to reveal fresh aspects of a writer whose modernity continually surprises the current generation of readers and critics alike. Intensely private, evasive and ironic, Hardy has always proved a rather difficult subject for biographers. Much of Hardy's life, as he himself observed, is present in his novels, poems and short stories, and there is a complex strand of relationship between his life and his writings. These encompass, uniquely, his depiction of the topography of Dorset, where he was born and grew up, for his fictional land of Wessex, and his exploration of its society and history. In his writing Hardy engages with the thought, ideas and trends of his age: developments in science, new philosophies that sought to fill the vacuum left by the loss of religious

faith, the growth of a radical politics that gave expression to the struggle of the working class for social equality and democracy, the struggle for a better status for women, and the effects of the First World War. Another important aspect of Hardy's work is the literary market in which his work was published, especially since the majority of his novels and some of his short stories first appeared as serials in the popular magazines of the day. The Victorian writer's relationship with editors and publishers was difficult. This was perhaps more true for Hardy in particular, as he departed in thought and writing from established values, had to face the anger of the conservative and prudish Victorian publishers and reading public. Hardy was a great champion of individual liberty, full of empathy for the lot of women and in fact he created such powerful women in his novels that many critics and readers have opined that his male characters appear lifeless and unreal in contrast to his spirited heroines – Bathsheba (*Far From the Madding Crowd*), Tess (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*), Sue (*Jude the Obscure*) or Eustacia (*The Return of the Native*). This is perhaps the right note on which to begin the discussion on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which narrates the rise and fall of Michael Henchard, the sole male character who attains tragic grandeur in the entire output of Hardy's fiction otherwise distinctly dominated by strong women characters. "Happiness is an occasional episode in a general drama of pain". This is the conclusion drawn by one of Hardy's chief women characters, Elizabeth-Jane in his tragic novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This is also the concluding sentence of the novel. This sad realization is not something that we find in this novel only, but all of Hardy's so-called novels of character and environment reflect human tragedy after the grave and sombre manner of ancient tragedies. All the novels depict the despair and agony of man in eternal conflict with external as well as internal forces. His protagonists fight not only with circumstances but also with their own impulses and their own strong passions.

2.4 THE STORYLINE OF THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

Thomas Hardy completed the novel in 1885 and it began to be published in a serial manner from January 2, 1886, in the *Graphic* magazine. On May 10 of the same year, *The Mayor of Caste*rbridge was published in two volumes. Although the critics appreciated Hardy's realism and poetic style, most agreed that the novel was too improbable and too shocking – opinions that would only increase as Hardy continued to write novels. In the writing of the novel, he was preoccupied by the need to attain historical accuracy in his presentation of the market town of Casterbridge, now fully conceived for the first time in his literary canon as the centre of a tightly knit Wessex

community. He wanted to record a vanishing way of life. Set in the years of Hardy's childhood, the story draws on his memories of Dorchester, and also on his own researching in the files of the *Dorset County Chronicle* from January 1882 onwards. There he came across incidents such as a wife selling in Somerset, information about fluctuations in the corn trade in Dorset during the early years of the century, and an account of the short visit to Dorchester of Prince Albert in July 1849. Hardy explores the forces of historical change and their impact on a rural community in his treatment of the conflict between Henchard and his *protégé*, the young Scotsman, Donald Farfrae. The subtitle, 'The Story of a Man of Character', draws attention to the psychological complexity of Michael Henchard, a young unemployed hay-trusser, who gets drunk at a country fair and sells his wife to a sailor, and years later as mayor of Casterbridge suffers at the hands of a poetic justice. In the 1912 General Preface to the collected 'Wessex' edition of his work, Hardy divides his fictions into groups. He notes that 'the first group is called "Novels of Character and Environment". They include: *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Wessex Tales* (short stories), and *Life's Little Ironies* (short stories).

The Mayor of Casterbridge, one of Hardy's most renowned works, focuses almost entirely on the rise and fall of Michael Henchard. Since this novel was written in installments, it is easy to understand why so much suspense is used in the plot from chapter to chapter. The chapters are short with a lot of action packed into each of them.

2.4.1 Chapters I-V

The novel opens dramatically with the scene in which Henchard sells his wife and child to a sailor. Hardy believed that a novelist could not expect to hold the attention of his readers unless he told them something uncommon and unusual that was would immediately captivate their reading habit. The opening chapter of *The Mayor* is thus, perhaps one of the most compelling beginnings of his novels, second only to the famous description of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*. Strange though it may seem now, as it had seemed then to his London readers, it was not uncommon for poor, uneducated rustics to sell their wives and many even felt it was legal, as Susan (Henchard's wife) herself does. Henchard's resentment with Susan is not because he wants another wife but because she and the child are holding him back from getting on in life, or to earn a fortune. He grudgingly says: 'I haven't more than fifteen shillings in the world, and yet I am as good experienced man in my line. I'd

challenge England to beat me in the fodder business; and if I were a free man again I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't'.' (Chapter1). This introduces one of the central themes of the novel - ambition and its effects on human relationships. The family group presented at the beginning of the novel, trudging across a generalized and timeless landscape, represents the age-old story of marital discontent and economic vulnerability. Henchard's impulsive and unplanned decision to 'sell' his wife and rid himself of the 'tiring' responsibility of a family is the novel's crucial determining act. This choice is made believable, even understandable, by its context of physical exhaustion, alcohol, and the fair, where buying and selling is common and by the sinister practice of the woman selling her adulterated furmity, which was made from wheat boiled in spiced milk, laced with rum. Next morning on awaking from his drunken sleep, Henchard realizes the terrible nature of his action and searches everywhere for his wife and child. He fails to locate them despite a prolonged search for many months and in the end takes a strict oath of refraining from alcohol for twenty-one years, as the mark of self-punishment for the hateful deed. Next when we see Henchard, some twenty years later, he has achieved what he claimed he could in chapter one. He has been successful in the 'fodder business' – selling of oats and corn – and has now risen to the position of the Mayor of Casterbridge with gold chain and diamond studs signifying the money he has made. Twenty years lapse between this incident at Weydon-Priors fair and the time when Susan comes in search for Henchard, to discover that he has become the illustrious mayor of Casterbridge. The importance that Henchard attaches to a good name is evident from the way he has risen from being a nameless hay-trusser to mayor of a small agricultural town. He labours to safeguard the esteem that his high and respectable position has given him. When Susan, who has returned to Casterbridge with her daughter Elizabeth-Jane, in search for Henchard, sees him through the window of the 'chief hotel' where he is presiding at a public dinner, Henchard is a rich man with rich outfit, gold chain and diamonds on him. There is a marked contrast between those who have been invited and those uninvited and standing outside, amidst whom Susan is standing, as the rich fuss over their rich dinner the poor outsiders have to survive on bad bread which Henchard has sold them. The Mayor is hosting a banquet for the prominent citizens and they find a man struggling to convince and assure the people that despite a harvest that has been mismanaged and gone completely wrong, he is an honest person. As he is faced with an unhappy audience of grain merchants who have suffered financial losses and common citizens who are going hungry in the lack of good wheat, Henchard regrets that he does not have the power to turn a bad harvest of wheat into good; he lacks the power to undo the past. Somebody from the crowd asks him, '[b]ut what are you going to do to repay us for the past?' Thus he focuses on another central theme of the novel – the inability to

undo or rectify past mistakes. He relates grown wheat metaphorically to the mistake committed by him in his past, neither can be changed nor erased. He learns the lesson early in this episode of the bad harvest, but fails to internalize it. So the tensions which grow and magnify to destroy Henchard, eventually, exist right at the beginning.

2.4.2 Chapters VI-X

In the same crowd outside there is the young man Donald Farfrae, a Scottish, who having understood Henchard's difficult position sends him a written message revealing to him a method to disguise the flaw in the wheat and turn it edible. Henchard immediately warms to this man and goes to meet him at the humble Three Mariners, where Susan and Elizabeth-Jane have also put up for the night, and offers him to stay on as manager to him and appeals to Farfrae to abandon his initial plans of moving on to America to make a fortune. After initial refusals Farfrae accepts and stays on with Henchard. Henchard is actually a lonely man despite his wealth and position, and that is why he is so keen to get Farfrae to stay with him as he has no real friends in town. It is through taking Farfrae as assistant and then remarrying his wife Susan for the sake of Elizabeth-Jane that Henchard begins to bring about his own downfall at a very early stage in the novel. He makes an enemy of his manager Jopp by his whimsical hiring of Farfrae. Elizabeth-Jane comes to meet Henchard as Susan's messenger. Henchard sends her back with a small message asking Susan to meet him at the Ring, the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, and encloses five guineas as symbol of buying back Susan.

2.4.3 Chapters XI-XV

The meeting of the long separated couple happens in the backdrop of the solemn ruins where they regret the past and decide upon their reunion in a way so as to keep the world in the dark about the shameful events of the past. Despite his past, Hardy shows Henchard as having an integrity of character which makes him act honourably with everybody in his life. Henchard's impulsiveness and sudden bouts of affection are revealed in the way he shares the secrets of his life, about Susan and Lucetta without revealing their names, with Farfrae so easily. His impulsiveness is evident in the way which he makes a sudden enemy of Farfrae because of his jealousy; and of Jopp again whom he blames for his ignoring of the weather prophet. In the process he alienates those he most needs, including Elizabeth-Jane towards the end of the novel. However it is largely through his own fault that he antagonizes Farfrae, by his cruel treatment of Abel Whittle by asking him to come without breeches to work, though he is kind enough to have kept Whittle's mother supplied with coal all the previous winter. For

the moment the antagonism is kept under check though eventually it is Henchard's uncontrollable temper and aloofness drives Farfrae away from him and even as he is harsh with Farfrae he repents for what he has done.

2.4.4 Chapter XVI-XX

During this time Henchard's arrangement for the entertainment of the rural folk is a total failure while Farfrae's arrangements are a grand success, once again putting Henchard in a bad light with the folks while Farfrae's efforts are praised. This makes Henchard jealous of Farfrae and once again he shows a cold attitude and aloofness to him. This is what remains a problem with Henchard's nature - his impulsiveness and his need for constant affection, which he can return only in bouts and spurts. When Susan dies he feels extreme loneliness and a craving for affection from Elizabeth-Jane, who he thinks is his daughter. However when he discovers that she is the sailor Newson's illegitimate daughter with Susan, through her confessional letter to him which he opens after her death, he turns against her and starts finding fault with her, finally forcing her to leave his house. He does not learn to deal with people by considering their feelings, which Farfrae does and rises socially. Henchard loses his popularity gradually a Farfrae's social position is on the rise. Eventually it turns out that Henchard has offended his fellow members of the Corporation and hence will not be kept in the position of alderman any longer, and at the same time Farfrae, who is prospering in his independent grain-trade, is taken in the Council. Following at the footsteps of his gradual social downscaling come financial ruin and loss of prestige for Henchard who had entered into a competition and 'war of prices' with Farfrae in the grain trade. The war of the two rival corn merchants provides no scope for display of kindness in the atmosphere of ruthless and fierce competition. Farfrae does not wish to win over Henchard's customers but has to in order to survive. However Henchard's own recklessness and the unpredictable weather, with which he gambles, by consulting the weather prophet, ultimately ruin him. Based partly on real history of the uncertain harvests of the 1840s, before the repeal of the Corn Laws a bad harvest meant starvation for the poor and ruin for corn merchants, Hardy shows how Henchard realizes that predicting the nature of a harvest was similar to gambling. He suffers severe losses while the clever strategist Farfrae is able to devise a plan to combat the changeable weather and make huge profit. The man of humble background and no wealth, Farfrae, becomes the leading man of Casterbridge while the grand Michael Henchard is humbled. Hardy points out more than once that Henchard is

incapable of acting in his own best interests and at such a time when the best move would be to encourage Farfrae's interest in Elizabeth-Jane, he asks Farfrae to stop courting her. In the entire course of the novel Henchard shows the uncanny ability to miss opportunities to work for his own profit. When Farfrae sets up independent business and is on the way to becoming a popular and thriving tradesman, out of a feeling of envy Henchard writes to him asking him not to court Elizabeth-Jane anymore, the narrator makes a telling comment on Henchard's lack of tact: 'one would almost have supposed Henchard to have had policy to see that no better strategy could be arrived at with Farfrae than by encouraging him to become his son-in-law. But such a scheme for buying over a rival had nothing to recommend it to the Mayor's headstrong characteristics. With all domestic finesse of that kind he was hopelessly at variance. Loving a man or hating him, his diplomacy was as wrongheaded as a buffalo's . . .' (Chapter, 17). Thus, Henchard finds ways to bring about his own debasement and downfall. Just when Henchard has made up his mind and convinced Elizabeth-Jane of taking up his name, that he discovers through Susan's posthumous letter that she is Newson's daughter. His irritability and aloofness drive away Elizabeth-Jane to leave Henchard's house and find lodgings elsewhere. Henchard also writes to Farfrae to allow him to court Elizabeth-Jane anew if only the courtship is kept out of his home. It is stressed more than once in the narrative how similar in temperament Elizabeth and Farfrae are and neither of them are ever likely to be carried away by great passion. Elizabeth-Jane tries to subdue her love for him when she realizes they are one-sided and unmaidenly and Farfrae too has a mild liking for her, and having made good profit and social standing he feels the need to marry and thinks that Elizabeth-Jane, who is pleasing, thrifty and satisfactory, is an obvious choice. Driven out of her home, Elizabeth-Jane accidentally meets Lucetta who has come to Casterbridge and taken residence at High-Place Hall, with the motive of eventually marrying Henchard.

2.4.5 Chapter XXI-XXV

Though Lucetta has come to Casterbridge, changed her surname, taken lodgings at High-Place hall so that eventually she can get married to Henchard, she breaks her word to him and starts an affair with Farfrae. Farfrae too falls in love with the woman who has had a passionate affair with Henchard before the story begins. She is depicted as a femme fatale, a woman who attracts men with her charm and magnetism, with no depth apart from her fashionable exterior. During the entire course of the two men courting Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane watches like a silent onlooker and observer. Henchard and Lucetta have an argument, the former reminding her of her word to him and asking for marriage, while Lucetta, now drawn to Farfrae, tries to be aloof and put

off the haste in Henchard's plan, declaring in a soliloquy that she will no longer be bound by the pledge to Henchard and love Farfrae.

2.4.6 Chapter XXVI-XXX

Henchard eventually does get the hint that Lucetta's aloofness has to do with her affection for a rival. Henchard now hires Jopp as manager and under his influence visits the weather-prophet to forecast the harvest. Henchard makes a bad move by banking on bad weather under the prophet's words, buys stores of wheat and loses miserably when the weather turns pleasant. Farfrae however makes a huge profit by the favour of his luck and his sagacity. At this time the furmity-woman reappears in the story and under a series of circumstances comes to expose Henchard's past crime of selling his wife. Henchard confesses his crime and seals the fate of his already downward social course. Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane are saved from the attack of a bull by Henchard, and Lucetta is full of gratitude for Henchard for saving her life and is made to reveal her secret marriage to Farfrae. Henchard feels that there is some power beyond him which makes him lose his business, his social position, his house and his woman to the Scotsman.

2.4.7 Chapter XXXI-XL

At this time Henchard is seen standing on the remoter of the two bridges, which form the chief landmark of Casterbridge, the thoughts of suicide taking shape in his mind. However the affair between Lucetta, the new Mayor's wife, and Henchard, who is now almost a pauper, is exposed through the love letters of Lucetta falling into the hands of the lowly people of the town who are delighted at the opportunity of spreading public scandal about Lucetta, who is generally disliked because of her haughtiness. They arrange a skimmington ride, the rural tradition of a procession carrying the effigies resembling the parties to be ridiculed and exposed, on the day that Royalty visits Casterbridge, Henchard is publicly snubbed by Farfrae and Lucetta. This drives Henchard to assault Farfrae in the barn, but his innate sense of justice makes him fight with one hand to take no unfair advantage, as he is much more strongly built than Farfrae. Yet even he knows that he will never be able to kill Farfrae, reminded at the vital moment of their warm friendship at one time. There comes about a kind of change in Henchard who had till now thought of killing Farfrae, ruining Lucetta and rejecting Elizabeth-Jane as he undergoes a softening. However it is too late as now nobody seems to believe him and at his return the pregnant Lucetta has breathed her last, dying as a result of shock and fear at the public shame cause by the skimmington ride. Even Lucetta's fate shows that the deeds

of the past return to destroy the present.

2.4.8 Chapter XLI-XLV

The breach between Henchard and Farfrae is now beyond repair. With nobody to turn to for emotional support but Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard clutches at her affection with desperation. He even lies to her real father the sailor Newson, when he comes in search of her to Casterbridge, about her whereabouts to prevent him from reaching her. It is after this that in a fit of frustration that his lie will be discovered and he will lose the last person in his life that Henchard goes to drown himself in Ten Hatches Weir. He is saved by what seems to him a miracle, he sees his own effigy, from the skimmington ride, float across the waters and for the first time a sense that he is in the hands of some benevolent agency strike his mind and he returns from the dark depths of despair to which he had sunk. Though financially he thrives a little with the shop he has started, on realizing that Elizabeth-Jane will surely find out the truth about her real father Newson, Henchard leaves Casterbridge in his working clothes in which he came there twenty years ago as a poor hay-trusser, alone and friendless. He feels he is like an outcaste who cannot die before his time, but ironically he does die before his time. When he comes to the wedding of Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, he is made to feel unwanted and the coldness of the only human being whose affection could warm his broken heart rips him apart. At the end of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the ruined pauper Henchard, now homeless, penniless and friendless, moves across the solitary countryside with only Abel Whittle to trail behind him, lending an almost Shakespearean grandeur to the ending reminding us of the mad King Lear journeying across the heath with only the fool to keep him company. Cut to the heart by filial indifference, which is the final nail in the coffin of his gradual downfall and destruction, Henchard makes a Will desiring that no one remember his name after his death, that his name be wiped from the book of life, in this last will and testament. The request is startling as well as profoundly disturbing in its tragic intonations, especially when one remembers how important his name was for Henchard during his lifetime. After committing the shameful deed of selling his wife and child, Henchard wakes from his drunken stupor and wonders if he has divulged his name to anybody in the fair. This inability to let go of the past, of its mistakes and errors, becomes the key to Henchard's undoing. Henchard shows that at the time of his death he is a changed man who has realized that neither wealth, nor mayoralty, nor property is important for life, rather it is the bond between human beings which matters the most. Elizabeth-Jane, who has all along in the novel been depicted as the most compassionate individual, is shown

to be lacking in loving-kindness in comparison to an unlettered rustic Abel Whittle, and she is also taught an important lesson of life, to be less harsh and judgmental than she has been, in her attitude towards Henchard, towards those who are less unfortunate than her, though by no means less deserving.

2.5 THE PLOT

The terms story and plot as used in English Studies were introduced and defined by the novelist and critic E.M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Forster defines **story** as the chronological sequence of events and **plot** as the causal and logical structure which connects events. The plot usually comprises of features like **rising action**, **climax** and **falling action**. The plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* focuses almost entirely on the rise and fall of Michael Henchard. There are no digressions to divert the reader's attention from his story; even the sub-plots of the book include Henchard. It is fortunate that Henchard appears in almost every chapter to hold the book together, for the plot is lightly knit, only giving a vague impression of unity. The plot develops in a typical bell-shaped curve. The first chapter introduces the main characters and reveals how Henchard sold his wife and daughter. The plot then skips the period of twenty years, years in which Henchard rises to economic and social prosperity. Once Susan returns to Casterbridge after twenty years with her daughter Elizabeth-Jane, the rising action begins. The rising action involves the complication of the basic internal conflict through the introduction of secondary conflicts and various obstacles which frustrate the hero or the protagonist's attempt to reach his goal. Secondary conflict could be adversaries or rivals of lesser importance than the protagonist. Henchard meets with one challenge after another that will eventually doom him, as we see the troubles over the bad harvest and the arrival of Farfrae. His main concern, however, is to hide his past so that his good reputation and fortune in Casterbridge will not be lost. The **climax,** or the peak of the progression of action or turning point of the wheels of fortune for the protagonist, occurs in the courtroom scene when the 'furmity woman' exposes his past. From that point forward in the novel, the falling action shows a series of events that rapidly lead Henchard to losing everything, including his good name, his business, his home, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane. The **falling action** is exactly this reversal of fortunes after the climax, where the downfall of the protagonist occurs speedily and the plot rapidly moves towards resolution. The conclusion centers on Henchard's tragic death and will and Susan's ironic attempt to find him and ask forgiveness. The plot is further unified by a single main setting. The action, except for the first two chapters, takes place in Casterbridge. The characters are also woven tightly

together, with many overlapping relationships: Henchard has a relationship with the femme fatale Lucetta, who also has a relationship with Farfrae. At the time that Lucetta begins to have an affair with Farfrae, Elizabeth-Jane is seeing him. Lucetta is well aware of that fact, because Elizabeth-Jane stays with her at her house in High-Place Hall. Elizabeth-Jane, of course, is Henchard's stepdaughter, and Farfrae is his rival. The closeness of all the main characters helps to strengthen and unify the plot. Since this novel was written in installments, it is easy to understand why so much suspense is used in the plot from chapter to chapter. The chapters are short with a lot of action packed into each of them. Many of the chapters are likewise filled with dramatic scenes, especially the ones in the courtroom where the 'furmity woman' exposes Henchard's past, where Henchard is reading his letters aloud to Farfrae, where the skimmity-ride takes place, and where Henchard attempts at a reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane on her wedding day carrying with him the gift of a bull-finch which dies unattended out of starvation. Each of these scenes is filled with a sense of pathos to draw the tragic novel together. There are also repeated, detailed descriptions of the inhabitants, neighbourhoods, and architecture of Casterbridge, forming a motif throughout the novel. The reader is made to vividly see the Ring, the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, the two bridges, the courtroom, and Mixen Lane. Many critics feel that the descriptions interrupt the narrative, but they are essential in so far as they give a vivid presentation of the setting and keep the pace of the story from going out of control. Hardy uses an omniscient (all seeing) narrator, who gives his own comments on characters and situations, to control the movement of the plot. Although the main and subsidiary plots are realistically portrayed, Hardy uses a great deal of chance and coincidence in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, because to Hardy the manipulation of the plot could record the motions of Fate, which according to him was malicious (ill intentioned) and rendered the position of humanity dangerous and insecure in the universe. Susan's return after eighteen years, the reappearance of the furmity woman, and Newson's return are glaring examples of improbability. These coincidences woven in the plot emphasize Hardy's belief that man is not in control of his own destiny, but is ruled chiefly by Fate. The novel ends as it began, Henchard putting on his old working clothes, in which he came to Casterbridge, and leaving it all alone to die in poverty and grief.

2.6 IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE NOVEL

2.6.1 Chance and Coincidence

The plot of the novel is filled with instances of chance and coincidence which dominate

the lives of the characters. The use of chance, coincidence and accidents is a feature common to all Hardy novels and is the extension of his belief that man is not in control of his own destiny, but ruled chiefly by fate. Like the great tragedies of fifth-century Athens and Elizabethan England, Hardy's Novels of Character and Environment convey a strong sense of fatalism, a view that in life human actions have been predetermined, either by the very nature of things, or by God, or by Fate. Hardy dramatized his conception of destiny in human affairs as the Imminent Will in his poetry, especially in his poetic drama of the Napoleonic wars, *The Dynasts*. By his emphasis on chance and circumstance in the plots of his stories Hardy consistently suggests that human will is not free but chained. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Hardy seems to apply the concept of 'Fortune's False Wheel' to the rise and fall of Michael Henchard: starting as a poor hay-trusser with a drinking problem, he renounces alcohol and works his way up to become the town's leading corn merchant and mayor, only to undergo a startling series of reversals and end life as an outcast. Coincidences by themselves are neutral, it is how they affect the characters which matters to fiction. It is fate or chance which makes Susan return to Casterbridge after twenty years at the time when Henchard is already contemplating marriage with Lucetta, and turns the course of his destiny. Again the arrival of Donald Farfrae in Casterbridge, though apparently an inconspicuous affair, becomes a cruel joke of destiny for Henchard who steadily loses his money, social position, and his woman all to this Scotsman. There are numerous minor and major instances of chance and accidents in the plot. The entertainment organized by Henchard for the townspeople is ruined due to bad weather, whereas Farfrae's farsighted arrangements are successful. At the moment when Henchard has started planting affection for Elizabeth-Jane in his heart, Susan's letter reveals that she is actually Newson's daughter. When Henchard and Farfrae enter into a war of prices in the purchase of grains, Henchard suffers loss as the weather prophet's predictions regarding the weather prove wrong. The wheel of fortune turns fast for Henchard, assisted by chance and coincidence, to take him from the peak of prosperity on to a downward course. The chance appearance of the furmity-woman in Casterbridge, her trial for an act of nuisance at the church and her revelation of Henchard's great crime of selling his wife, push Henchard from his prosperity to social shame. Lucetta's passionate letters to him during their affair in the past get into the hands of Jopp and the townsfolk, who plan to defame Lucetta and publicly expose her through the skimmington ride. The chance return of the sailor Newson, in search for his daughter, to Casterbridge becomes one of the last nails in isolating Henchard from humanity completely. The turn of the wheel is complete as the grand figure of Henchard is reduced to a broken man, in his old work clothes, dying alone in the vast and limitless barren heath like Shakespeare's King Lear.

2.6.2 Tradition versus Change

As a novelist Hardy was deeply observant of the process of change in countryside Wessex around the mid and late nineteenth century. Another important social reality pictured in the novel is the depiction of agro-based economy of contemporary society. The economic downfall of Henchard is dependent upon the progress of agriculture throughout the novel. In the same way the influence of modernization in contemporary society is another important aspect of the depiction of social realism in the novel. During the first half of the 19th century English society was making the difficult transition from a pre-industrial Britain to 'modern' Victorian times. In agriculture, most of the transition took place around 1846 with the repeal of the Corn Laws. This allowed foreign grain to be imported into England for the first time. Consequently, the entire structure and methods of agriculture in Britain were greatly altered. Much of the action in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* takes place during the years surrounding 1846. These were the years in which traditionalists took their last stand before being defeated in the name of progress. The contrasts between Henchard, a man relying on the traditional way of life and Farfrae, a man struck by modern ideas, illustrate the inevitability that progress and modernization will overcome tradition. The conflict of tradition versus modernization is shown through Henchard and Farfrae's contrasting approaches to business, their contrasting attitudes toward modernization and their changing roles in Casterbridge society. Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae take very different approaches to book keeping and managing the employees of Henchard's business. Henchard is a man who has an old-fashioned attitude towards business. The novel enacts the progression of modern ideas and techniques and holds out that those trying to hold on and maintain the traditional ways, like Henchard, can only fall behind and be forgotten. Both Henchard and Farfrae are representatives of how modernization progresses over tradition and how the advancement of technology makes us lose the traditional skills we once treasured. Henchard builds his whole life on such values and methods only to be left behind when Farfrae and his modern methods are accepted in Casterbridge. Henchard is bad at figures, and toward the men who work for him he is both generous as well as harsh. He is unable to distinguish between business and personal affairs. Farfrae on the other hand bears the fruits of science and introduces new machines to the farmers. With him comes the introduction of the scientific sowing of seeds with the help of the seed-drill without wastage. He treats his men with progressive ideas, neither abusing them nor paying them as much as Henchard. The collision of the wagons of these two men is

the ultimate symbol in the novel of the collision between traditional values and the changes brought about by science. Just as England went through the change in agriculture due to industrialization, Thomas Hardy's Casterbridge society saw modernism progress over tradition; an inevitable change that will continue to happen until we run out of things to learn.

2.6.3 The Setting and Social Realism in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The Mayor of Casterbridge is set in the county of Wessex, a land that has relied on the beliefs of the farming folk for centuries. The action of the novel takes place mostly in the town of Casterbridge, a fictional town in the Hardy's fictional county of Wessex in England. His novels are referred to as "Wessex novels," for obvious reasons. Wessex is based loosely on the real-life county of Dorset, where Hardy grew up. The extinct kingdom, to which Hardy refers, of course, is that ancient kingdom of the West Saxons known as Wessex. The idea of Wessex plays an important artistic role in Hardy's works (particularly his later novels), assisting the presentation of themes of progress, primitivism, sexuality, religion, nature, and naturalism. Many of Hardy's greatest novels reflect the social realities of Dorset in the nineteenth century. It had its own culture, its own traditions, even its own language, in a sense. Some of his earliest memories were of corn-law agitations, mail-coaches, road wagons, candle-snuffing. He had also seen or heard of such customs as the skimmity ride, the maypole, the mummers who gave the play of St George and the Dragon at Christmas, the old-fashioned hiring for farm labourers, and the sale by husbands of wives. Because the farmers are more connected to the land, they follow a more primal religion, based on the changing of the seasons and the forces of Nature.

In a sense *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a historical and realistic novel. Realism is usually defined as an aesthetic mode which challenged the Classical demands of art to show life as it is. Realist art tends to substitute the elevated subject matter of tragedy in favour of the average, the commonplace the middle classes in their struggle for daily existence. Thus Henchard, a corn merchant and former mayor of Casterbridge, becomes the subject of tragedy. His struggles, ups and downs through the society of a small agricultural town is depicted with verisimilitude and elevated to the level of Classical tragedy. Hardy draws on memories of Dorchester when he was a youth, but he also places the story even earlier. It opens near the beginning of the nineteenth century, and most of the action takes place nearly twenty years later. Although the railway reached Dorchester in 1847, it has not yet reached Casterbridge; in the novel the Royal Personage arrives by coach (Prince Albert visited in 1849); and the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) is shown to be affecting a community dependent on agriculture. Hardy also evokes a longer historical perspective in the town's Roman origins and the square pattern of its streets, and the Ring where Henchard

meets his wife on her reappearance. Hardy's major concern is change. Looking back from the 1880s, he recreates a world that has been radically altered; the Three Mariners Inn has been pulled down, together with part of Mixen Lane, which has led to the extinction of a social underclass involved in petty crime and vice. The conflict between old and new is presented most vividly in the struggle between Henchard, whose brusque personal methods of dealing in corn and hay represent the old order, and the Scot Farfrae. His easy sentimentality about his native Scotland, which he is set on leaving, his replacement of personal business-dealings with a more formal system, his introduction of mechanisation, his disguising the impurities in the wheat, his rational shrewdness in buying and selling small volumes of corn as prices fluctuate, his estimation of Elizabeth-Jane's financial carefulness – all point to his function as an intrusive figure, who stands for the forces of modernity and change. The community of Casterbridge is central to this novel, and its base in the economic geography of the region is given with realistic detail. Its shops are full of agricultural implements, while its relationship with the enclosing agricultural landscape, and its dependence on the corn and hay harvests, is suggested by the progress of a butterfly along the High Street from one field to another, and the thistledown floating through the town in the autumn. Hardy's extraordinary capacity for detail enables the market place, the town's economic heart, to function symbolically. It is the hub of social activity, observed by Elizabeth-Jane and Lucetta from the upper window of High-Place Hall, but it is also where the hay wagons of the rivals Henchard and Farfrae collide at night. Casterbridge has a deceptive air of changelessness, but in fact is presented unsentimentally. Hardy emphasises the conservatism that arises from its geographical remoteness. Its values are brutally manifest in the traditional skimmity-ride that has disastrous consequences for Lucetta Le Sueur, leading to her death. Realistically, the impulse to publicly shame the town's hypocritical social superiors emanates from Peter's Finger, the public house that functions satirically as the 'church' for Mixen Lane, the 'dark' area of Casterbridge where social discontent ripens. Collectively the minor figures provide a subversive commentary on their betters. Their discussion outside the King's Arms, where Henchard is presiding over a dinner, and the description of the social sub-divisions of Mixen Lane, connected with its several various public houses, add a vital dimension of social realism to the novel.

2.6.4 Symbolism in the Novel

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts in literary texts. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is rich in such symbols which add depth and layers of meanings to the novel.

a) The Caged Goldfinch – In an act of repentance, Henchard visits Elizabeth-Jane on

her wedding day, carrying the gift of a caged goldfinch. He leaves the bird in a corner while he speaks to his stepdaughter and forgets about it when she coolly dismisses him. Days later, a maid discovers the starved bird, which prompts Elizabeth-Jane to search for Henchard, whom she finds dead in Abel Whittle's cottage. When Whittle reports that Henchard "didn't gain strength, for you see, ma'am, he couldn't eat," he unwittingly ties Henchard's fate to the bird's: both lived and died in a prison. The finch's prison was literal, while Henchard's was the inescapable prison of his personality and his past. Like the bird Henchard also starved, but of human affection. Hardy's love for animals and bird was immense and his poetry, novel and stories thus abound in compassionate descriptions of animals and birds, often as symbolic of the human condition. Another symbolic usage of the bird, in this novel, is in the wife-sale scene where a swallow enters the tent and hovers around and finally escapes, symbolic of Susan's escape from a marriage of imprisonment.

b) The Bull – The bull that chases down Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane (chapter, 29) stands as a symbol of the brute forces that threaten human life. Malignant, deadly, and bent on destruction, it seems to embody the unnamed forces that Henchard often laments of in life. The bull's rampage provides Henchard with an opportunity to display his strength and courage, thus making him more sympathetic in our eyes. The fight with the bull draws an important parallel between the untamed force and quick temper of the animal and Henchard, which he displays in his constant provoking of Farfrae to displays of manliness

c) The Collision of the Wagons – When a wagon owned by Henchard collides with a wagon owned by Farfrae on the street outside of High-Place Hall, the interaction bears more significance than a simple traffic accident. The violent collision dramatically symbolizes the tension in the relationship between the two men. It also symbolizes the clash between tradition, which Henchard embodies, and the new modern era, which Farfrae personifies.

d) The Two Bridges – There are two near the lower end of Casterbridge (chapter, 32). The two bridges, one of brick and the other of stone are imparted almost two distinct characters by Hardy's graphic description. The bridge of brick drew all the lowly people of the town, who were careless of their ill reputation, Jopp, Mother Cuxom, Abel Whittle had all stood there in their times of misery and distress. The remoter one of stone is haunted by the failures, bankrupts, and the unlucky people who had suffered at the hands of destiny. Thus Henchard comes to this later bridge at the time of his gradual social downfall. The two bridges stand on the face of the town of Casterbridge symbolic of the destinies of the men who haunt them.

2.6.5 The Novel as Tragedy

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a tragedy, in the tradition of the Greek tragedies and the Shakespearean plays *Othello* and *King Lear*. In the first edition of this novel, Hardy added the subtitle *The Life and Death of a Man of Character* expanding this in 1912, after revisions in the intervening years, to *The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character*. All the terms of the deliberately chosen title are important in suggesting this novel's strongly Aristotelian tragic form, which records the rise of Michael Henchard, a hay-trusser, to a position at the apex of the community of Casterbridge, after committing the sin of 'selling' his wife at Weydon Priors many years before, and the subsequent decline of his fortune based on economic misjudgment and the public revelation of his shameful deed of the past. The experience of the egotistical King Lear; his banishment of Cordelia, his deepening remorse, his longing for reconciliation with his family, his loss of his daughter, and his tragic death find parallels in the story of Michael Henchard. In Henchard, Hardy presents a Faustian figure, a 'vehement, gloomy being, who had quitted the ways of vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way' (Chapter, 17). He is a fascinating psychological study of a driven, tormented character, trapped by the mores of early Victorian society and by the politics of town life. Destroyed by guilt, Henchard's fundamental impulse is towards self-effacement. Perverse and stubborn, every action of Henchard works against his own best interests. He makes an enemy of his manager Jopp by his whimsical hiring of Farfrae; an enemy of Farfrae because of his jealousy; and of Jopp again whom he blames for his ignoring of the weather prophet. In the process he distances those he most needs, including Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard's crime in the opening chapter arouses the anger of the moral order in a way that the forces of retribution (Divine Justice) hound Henchard and ultimately punish him and reduce him to face the cruellest of deaths. Like all great tragic figures, Oedipus and Lear, Henchard is made to suffer and realize the forces of human affection and bonding he had denounced all his life. Henchard, the arrogant man, mayor and prosperous merchant, at the peak of his prosperity declares to the complaining crowds outside the banquet hall that the wheat cannot be turned wholesome. He is unconscious in the tragic intonations of his words 'I'll take it back with pleasure. But it can't be done'. He thus ironically outlines for himself the nature of his crime and punishment. This effectively means that not only is his crime irrevocable, it is also that the buried crime of selling his wife will return to haunt and destroy his life. Henchard suffers and is reduced to a tragic end because he attempts to revoke the actions of the past, not internalizing the lessons learnt through the episode of the bad wheat harvest. Michael Henchard is afforded moral stature

through his suffering, but also through the contrast Hardy makes between him and Donald Farfrae, the former emerges a far more superficial figure.

2.6.6 Characterization

(a) Henchard and Farfrae – The rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae is intensified by its inclusion of sexual, economic and political components. Henchard is forced to give up to his rival his former lover, his business, and his position as mayor. The relationship between Henchard and Farfrae echoes that of the Biblical story of Saul in the Book of Samuel. Henchard is alluded to at significant points as Saul, who loved the shepherd boy David, but who tried to kill him, just as Henchard seeks the life of Farfrae. Farfrae, the young Scot, serves as a foil for Henchard. Whereas will and intention determine the course of Henchard's life Farfrae is a man of intellect. He brings to Casterbridge a method for recovering damaged grain, a system for reorganizing and revolutionizing the Mayor's business, and a blend of curiosity and ambition that enable him to take interest in and advantage of the agricultural advancement of the day, such as the seed-sowing machine. He is the complete opposite of Henchard in his style, methods and business relations. Henchard's old world views on business and relations between master and retainers is evident from the way he treats Abel Whittle's act of coming late for work, by forcing him to come without his trousers and thereby becoming the object of shame and ridicule of fellow-workers. The difference in attitude between Henchard and Farfrae, is evident from the way in which Farfrae protests against the inhuman punishment and refuses to continue in his office as manager if Abel is not allowed to come back in his breeches. It shows not only his good sense, as Whittle may catch severe chill, but also the need of a healthy worker and capitalist relationship. (chapter, 25). These endear Farfrae in the hearts and lives of the citizenry of Casterbridge, just the way it had in Henchard's own a while ago. Henchard fears that by confessing his past secrets he has put himself under Farfrae's power, but he does not dismiss him from his service. His suspicions come in waves, alternating with bouts of affection, only to be turned off by the young man's new successes. The friendship between them turns sour only gradually, spoilt by Henchard's jealousy of Farfrae's popularity with the local farmers and the people of the town. Henchard's arrangement for the entertainment of the rural folk is a total failure while Farfrae's arrangements are a grand success, once again putting Henchard in a bad light with the folks while Farfrae's sagacity is praised. Although Henchard soon comes to view Farfrae as his opponent, the Scotsman's victories are won more in the name of

progress rather than personal gain or satisfaction. Farfrae's chief motive in taking over Casterbridge's grain trade is to make it more prosperous and prepare the village for the advancing agricultural economy of the late-nineteenth century. He does not indeed intend to dishonour Henchard, in fact even when Henchard is down and out, during the fight with Farfrae in the barn, the latter reminds himself of the fallen mayor's circumstances, taking pains to understand and excuse Henchard' behaviour. In his calm, measured thinking Farfrae is a model man of science, and Hardy depicts him with usual strengths and weaknesses of such people. He possesses an intellectual competence so unrivalled, that is passes for charisma, but throughout the novel, Farfrae remains emotionally distant. Although he wins the favour of the townspeople with his highly successful celebration, Farfrae fails to feel any emotion too deeply, whether it is happiness inspired by his carnival or sorrow at the death of his wife. In this respect as well he stands in bold contrast to Henchard, whose depth of feeling is so profound that it ultimately dooms him.

(b) Henchard – the Man of 'Character' – Henchard stands out in the entire range of Hardy's creations as a man of elemental character obsessed by guilt and bringing about his own downfall and destruction. Henchard is proud, commits a terrible crime at the spurring of momentary anger and spends all his life trying to atone for it with an ideal sense of honour. He is isolated and obsessed by guilt even at the peak of his prosperity shown by his remarriage with Susan, a woman he never loved. When Lucetta appears he acts honourably with her, though he wishes to avenge himself on Farfrae through her. When the furmity-woman reappears, after so many years, he publicly accepts his past crime and guilt. He is fair at all times, and fights Farfrae with one hand tied behind his back. Even when he is ruined and bankrupt he repays his debtors to the last farthing with his belongings. Thus, he seeks to undo his past through self-punishment. Loneliness and guilt make him hire Farfrae impulsively and confess his past indiscretions to him and later it is loneliness and guilt again which attaches him to Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard is a man of great force, something which he directs outwardly at times but more often against himself, inwardly. He is incapable of acting in his own interest, shown in his relations and dealings with Farfrae. Henchard at one point comes to wonder if there is an external agency which is shaping his doom and downfall, without realizing that the cause of his destruction originates from his own character. The novel emphasizes through its plot and action that character is fate. It has been suggested by critics that Henchard's struggle with his own guilt actually makes things go wrong with him, suggesting that the return of Newson and the Furmity-Woman were just symbolic reminders of his character and fate.

2.6.7 Henchard's Will and the Ending of the Novel

The speed of Henchard's accelerating decline and fall are terrible. All the significant figures of his past, each betrayal, return to haunt him – Susan, Elizabeth-Jane, Lucetta, Newson. Each step of his decline forces him to encounter his past. Each effort at reparation and reconciliation fails. He is reduced to his original trade, leaving Casterbridge in the same clothes and with the same implements that he had entered it, revisiting the scene of his first act of betrayal, and finally dying alone. However, as well as its powerful linear drive, the form of this novel also possesses the circularity implied by the symbolism of the Wheel of Fortune. The last two chapters are similar to the first two chapters in their dramatic impact. Henchard is on the way out of Casterbridge and the only dominant thought in his mind is that of Elizabeth-Jane. On the way out he encounters all the places and events of his past, as he revisits the spot of the Weydon-Priors fair and remembers his crime at the spot where the furmity tent had stood so many years ago. Haunted by the talk of Elizabeth's marriage with Farfrae, he resolves to go and meet her, for the first time since her discovery of his lie to her real father Newson. On his arrival the wedding merriment has already begun and he stands unnoticed, leaving a gift of a caged bullfinch in the garden, asking for Elizabeth's forgiveness. She however rejects him and Henchard does not utter one word in self-defence and goes out into the night. It is later that the discovery of the bird-cage with the bird starved to its death which makes the remorseful Elizabeth-Jane go out to seek Henchard as the symbolism between the bird and the emotionally starved Henchard become clear. The last chapter is set in the vast, limitless, open heath. Henchard returns to the humblest of dwellings, his hut in the heath, stripped to bare essentials the landscape becomes a moral landscape as much it is a natural one. It is in this endless stretch of barrenness that Elizabeth and Farfrae seek Henchard, but are greeted by the solitary figure of Abel Whittle. Comparison has often been made between Whittle's role and that of the fool in King Lear, the fool offering wisdom and Whittle offering the purest form of human gesture, doing to one's neighbour as one would have done to oneself. In contrast to Abel Whittle, now Elizabeth-Jane, who was all along the most compassionate and kind person in Casterbridge, appears to be sadly wanting. In Henchard's Will and final Testament we find the wish for annihilation in death, 'that no man remember me'; the desire not to be mourned by the object of his most tender feeling, Elizabeth-Jane; there is also the unshakeable belief in the personal rightness of the testimony, 'To this I put my name – Michael Henchard', just as twenty-five years ago he had taken his oath at the communion table, 'I, Michael Henchard, . . .'. Despite his tragic life Henchard has never lost his dignity and when

Elizabeth-Jane reads the Will she responds to it with the realization and knowledge that 'the man who wrote them meant what he said . . . (they) were not to be tampered with to give herself a mournful pleasure . . .' (Chapter, 45). The ending of the novel is low-keyed, marked by the somberness and austerity of tragedy, the grand figure of Henchard has been removed by death and the lesser ones whom he had overshadowed are left to restore order as best as they can. With the death of Henchard something deeply valuable, something which connected him with the land, the seasons, and the rural way of life seems to have perished with him.

2.6.8 Tragedy – of Character or Fate?

The Mayor of Casterbridge is set in the county of Wessex, a land that has relied on the beliefs of the farming folk for centuries. Because the farmers are more connected to the land, they follow a more primal religion, based on the changing of the seasons and the forces of nature. One of the forces of nature is cruel Fate, that "sinister intelligence bent upon punishing" which stops at nothing to keep things from being "as you wish it." This fate usually works through two channels: chance and irony. Chance often brings characters to places and situations – as Donald Farfrae and Lucetta are brought to Casterbridge – and irony works upon the people who are already there, making the best laid plans go wrong. Just as Michael convinces Elizabeth-Jane that she is his daughter, he finds the note from Susan that tells the truth. Nature also serves to assist Fate—the harvest weather is bad until Michael buys all the ruined grain at high prices and cannot sell it back. With the actions of a primal and unchanging world working against the powerless and ignorant human, life becomes a series of pains, punctuated only by flashes of happiness. Yet it is not completely the whims of fate that bring the characters to their downfall. When *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was first published in serial form, Hardy wrote, "It is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter." Fate may create the situations for the characters, but in the end their personalities determine how they will react to those situations. It is Henchard's character, his impulsiveness, his quick temper, his guilt for his past actions, his naivete to try to rectify those mistakes, which ultimately lead to his downfall. Michael gains a true confidante in Farfrae, but his quick temper only serves to push the young man away. Henchard creates an unequal and unnecessary competition between himself and Farfrae, which ultimately ruins him, taking away from him gradually everything – his business, wealth, mayoralty, reputation, his house, his woman and even his daughter. Likewise, Lucetta's reckless nature causes her to do dangerous things for love. The gossiping nature of the townspeople is responsible for the skimmity ride that kills Lucetta, and the gossip that ruins Henchard's career. Even Elizabeth-Jane's prudishness pushes Henchard away for

the first and last time. Character is just as responsible for the foibles of mankind as Fate.

2.6.9 The Role of the Women in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The Mayor of Casterbridge is Hardy's only novel where a male character, Michael Henchard, occupies the central focus in the novel. All his other novels revolve around powerful and substantial women characters. Though standing at the sidelines in this novel, the women nevertheless serve an important function in the novel. From the initial act of selling his wife and female child, Henchard, as Elaine Showalter suggests, "ells out or divorces his own 'feminine' self, his own need for passion, tenderness, and loyalty'. Henchard's misogyny prompts him and helps him to keep away from women and the return of Susan, Lucetta and the furmity-woman one by one eventually leads to his social ruin. However it is through his eventual attachment to and love for Elizabeth-Jane that Henchard, a pauper and a wreck of his early self, comes face to face with this side of his personality he has denied all his life. The women thus act more than just as real characters, as symbols which help in the 'unmanning' of Henchard.

(a) Henchard and Susan – The novel opens with the dramatic and incredible scene of the wife sale. Henchard's relationship with his wife Susan is without intimacy and love right from when we first see them together. It is under the influence of drink that he sells her to the sailor Newson for five guineas, setting into motion the wheels of retribution or justice which will eventually hound him and pull him down from the position of prosperity, for unwittingly Henchard has committed a crime against the moral order. However when Susan reappears in Henchard's life after twenty years he accepts her because he wishes to undo the past. Had he Married Lucetta he would have probably found contentment because he never loved Susan in the first place. Susan is like a ghost from the past which brings back Henchard face-to-face with his crime. Susan remains a shadowy figure in the novel who is simple enough to believe that she belongs to the sailor who has bought her and when she comes back after twenty years she believes that she is a widow and so can seek the help of Henchard to settle Elizabeth-Jane. Susan however does use duplicity against Henchard, for the sake of her daughter, by concealing the truth about Elizabeth-Jane's true parentage, thereby contributing towards his eventual downfall and tragedy. Despite her silence and docility in the novel Susan carries an integrity and dignified air which impresses the reader.

(b) Henchard and Lucetta - Just as Farfrae is the opposite of Henchard, so is Lucetta

to Elizabeth-Jane. Elizabeth-Jane is all nature and no art; Lucetta is all art and no nature. She is almost always artificial and superficial – she worries more about appearances than what is going on beneath the surface. According to Lucetta, you can change your personality and become a "totally different person" as easily as changing your dress. And she certainly is changeable: she is deeply in love with Henchard when she first meets him in Jersey, to the extent of compromising her reputation, but when she comes to Casterbridge, she wants to marry him only to save her reputation. When she meets Farfrae, Lucetta falls head-over-heels in love with him and forgets about her promise to Henchard. A big key to Lucetta's character is actually her name. Her original name is French ("Lucetta Le Sueur"), although she tries to disguise her French ancestry (and escape from scandal) by changing her last name to the more English-sounding "Templeman." She is as passionate and impulsive by nature as Henchard and reckless too. She is the femme fatale, or a woman who can easily lure men, who can win compassion even from Henchard, whom she has rejected for Farfrae, and draw from him the promise to return her letters to him. Unfortunately for her, her past is exposed through the skimmington ride, which ultimately claims her life. She like Henchard is made to realize that the past cannot be erased or undone, it returns to mar the present. Lucetta's life, her act of attempting to conceal her sinful past with Henchard, and later trying to reject it all and suffering retribution and death through exposure and scandal, actually precedes Henchard's serious moral drama.

(c) Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane – Elizabeth-Jane ends the novel after Henchard's death, married to Farfrae and having learnt the lesson of forgiveness and compassion. She emerges in the early part of the novel as a simple girl who insists on respectability and goes on to learn the important lesson of life called worldly wisdom. She is the sole motive which makes Henchard and Susan remarry and just when Elizabeth has learnt to accept Henchard as her father, Susan's letter of her parentage comes in and she is painfully rejected by him. She moves through the world of the novel watching silently and learning through the acts of others. Even when she is in love with Farfrae, she is able to suppress it because she feels that it is one-sided and unmaidenly. When it is revealed that Henchard delays her meeting with her real father Newson, she becomes unforgiving and rejects Henchard when he comes to seek forgiveness and reconciliation at her wedding. The end of the novel highlights that Elizabeth-Jane, who has all through the novel been the most compassionate of characters, fails before the human gesture of the unlettered Abel Whittle, who remains with Henchard in his final moments. Henchard's retention of the reader's sympathy in the final chapters is dependent upon his now unselfish love for Elizabeth-Jane. Her marriage with Farfrae, a man of limited virtues and qualities of thrift and prudence like herself, gives the novel a

sombre ending where the grand central character has departed leaving behind the lesser ones to learn the lessons and continue as best as they can. Elizabeth-Jane's quiet acceptance gives a sense of hopefulness despite the loss of grandeur by the death of Henchard.

(d) The Furmity Woman – The novel opens with the dramatic scene of the wife sale by Henchard, witnessed by the crowd in the Furmity tent. The role of the Furmity woman is significant in acting as a catalyst in Henchard's inhuman deed, as she performs the sinister practice of selling her adulterated furmity laced with rum which intoxicates the already resentful and exhausted Henchard. The woman becomes almost an agent of natural justice as she appears in this brief episode at the beginning and then again after more than twenty years when she commits an act of 'nuisance' on the walls of the church and is brought to the court for trial. She recognizes Henchard and questions his authority to punish her for her trivial crime while he had himself committed the terrible and unforgivable crime of selling his wife. She initiates the falling action of the plot, as the public exposure of his past leads to the gradual downfall of Henchard. The Furmity woman has sometimes been compared to the Classical Fates (Greek Mythology) that hound anyone who has committed an act of impiety against the moral order of the universe.

(e) An Overview of Women in Hardy's Novel – In summation it can be said that together the women characters act as an essential element in catalyzing the ruin and downfall of Henchard in different ways. Susan is a woman more sinned against than sinning, but we must not forget that she too uses a lie to secure the future of her daughter Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard is kept under the misconception, till after Susan's death, that Elizabeth-Jane is his own daughter. We are only left to conjecture if Henchard would have remarried Susan if he had known that his daughter, whom he had let go off twenty years ago, was dead. Things would have been different had Henchard married Lucetta who was suited to him temperamentally. Susan's return, like that of the furmity woman later, is an indicator of the impossibility to hide the deeds of the past. Lucetta, a passionate and impulsive woman, who is ready to rush into a compromising relationship with Henchard, writes passionate letters to him and comes to Casterbridge to marry him, not so much out of love as a means to secure her reputation and then falls in love with Farfrae and breaks her word with Henchard. In her relationship with the two men Lucetta becomes an important sign of the change of fortunes of the two, passing from the hands of Henchard to become Farfrae's wife. Elizabeth-Jane shares an important role in the fortunes of Henchard as it is with her quiet acceptance that the novel ends. Henchard rejects her from his life when he comes to know that she is Newson's daughter. The irony of fate is that just when Henchard is left

all alone by Susan's death and clings with his fallen fortunes onto Elizabeth, the return of her real father brings separation. Elizabeth does not forgive Henchard for keeping her father away from her through his lie. Her coldness and inability to reconcile with him make the broken-hearted Henchard die all alone on the barren heath. But it is through his renewed love and attachment for Elizabeth-Jane, towards the ending that Henchard becomes a changed man who realizes the value of human relationships, above ambition and fortune, which alone make life worthwhile.

2.6.10 Role of Rustics

Thomas Hardy' novels and fiction are located in his native Dorset. He was a countryman to the core and depicted rural life with love and sincerity. The rural society and the rustics feature as an integral part of his novels. In his famous essay *The Dorsetshire Labourer* he criticizes the Londoners' generalization of rustic mannerisms, dialects, habits and individuals as the despicable and undefined character of 'hodge'. Hardy gives his rustics due importance, function and individuality in his novels as much as that of a choric role in ancient tragedy. In The Mayor of Casterbridge they form a significant part of the story. It is the inhabitants of Mixen Lane who precipitate the skimmington-ride, which kills Lucetta eventually. The social transformation which Hardy depicts through the clash between Henchard and Farfrae is sharply reflected in the life of the rustics, through the gradual popularity of Farfrae among them, the success of his entertainment, through their initial resentment against Henchard's bad wheat and many more. They also perform their original choric role ascribed to them, notable in this context being Abel Whittle's recap of Henchard's final days on the lonesome heath. The rustics are viewed in a hard and realistic way and the events at Mixen Lane seem almost like a dark sub-plot.

2.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Answer Type (20 Marks)

1) Henchard's tragedy is a tragedy of character. Do you agree? Justify.
2) Analyse the role of the women characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in bringing about Henchard's downfall.
3) The conflict between Henchard and Farfrae is a clash between tradition and modernity. Discuss.
4) What role do chance and coincidence play in shaping the fate of the characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*?

5) Show how Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae survive in the Hardy-Universe while Henchard meets with tragedy.
6) Discuss how the past tells upon the present in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Medium Answer Type (12 Marks)

1) Comment on the Hardy's use of symbols in the novel.
2) Discuss the role played by the rustics in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
3) Compare and contrast Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane.
4) Critically comment on Hardy's depiction of nature in the novel.
5) Analyze the role of Elizabeth-Jane in the novel.

Short Answer Type (6 Marks)

1) Comment on the role of Abel Whittle.
2) Write a note on Susan Henchard.
3) Comment on Henchard' Will.

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MODULE 2 – SHORT STORIES

UNIT 1 ❑ INTRODUCING THE 'SHORT STORY'

Structure

1.1 Objectives
1.2 Why the Short Story
1.3 Evolution of the Short Story from a popular tale to a literary Genre
1.4 The Key Features of the Short Story
  1.4.1 Brevity and Unity of Impression
  1.4.2 Unity of Incidents
  1.4.3 Characterisation
  1.4.4 Point of View
  1.4.5 Structure
  1.4.6 Symbolism
1.5 Summing Up
1.6 Comprehension Exercises
1.7 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

In its present systematic written form the short story may be a relatively new entrant in the literary scene, but it has existed in diverse forms ever since the beginnings of human articulation. The aim of this Unit is to trace the origins and development of the short story as a literary genre and to understand some of the basic aspects that go on to make an interesting short story.

1.2 WHY THE SHORT STORY

Coming as this section does, after the detailed analyses of two very representative novels across the spectrum of Victorian Literature, it does run the general risk that

has often plagued the genre of the Short Story – that of being looked upon as 'the little sister of the novel'. It is true that most fiction writers have started their careers with the Short Story, for it is known to teach them the sense of unity that is so essential in producing a finished work over a limited time frame. It is also a fact that even established novelists turn back to short fiction when they need to replenish their literary acumen and writing skills. But the converse is also equally true and as Ailsa Cox shows, many great prose writers like Katherine Mansfield, Grace Paley and Raymond Carver have never written novels in the entire course of their literary careers. With more familiar names like O. Henry and the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, to take a very wide view of the genre of the short story, this list could be endless. Rather than going for names, it therefore seems more useful to make a brief survey of the rise, growth and trends of the Short Story as an independent genre.

The instinct for making stories is primitive and William Boyd, the acclaimed author and screenwriter of Scottish descent, who was also a judge at the inaugural National Short Story Award instituted by BBC Radio 4 at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2005, has a simple and interesting anecdote to illustrate what he calls a 'notional beginning' of the story telling impulse. "I have an image in my head of a band of Neanderthals (or similar group of humanoids) hunkered round the fire at the cave-mouth as the night is drawing in. One of them says spontaneously: You'll never believe what happened to me today. (As an immediate impulsive reaction to these words), gnawed bones are tossed aside, children are quietened and the tribe gives the storyteller its full attention." Truly, a gripping tale or a series of tales told in a captivating manner has this amazing capacity of drawing young and old alike, leaving aside all other activity. What Boyd says of the appeal a story has to the deep-seated human instinct and the natural tendency of curiosity is also brought out in the Oriental example of the *Arabian Nights* (originally *Hazar Afsan* in Persian, the English naming being dated to 1706 when the first English language edition rendered the title as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*). The main **frame story** concerns a Persian king and his new bride. He is shocked to discover that his brother's wife is unfaithful; discovering his own wife's infidelity has been even more shocking and annoying, so he has her executed. Out of bitterness and grief, the King, Shahyrar decides that all women are the same, so he begins to marry a succession of virgins only to execute each one the next morning, before she has a chance to dishonour him. Eventually the vizier, whose duty it is to provide them, cannot find any more virgins. Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, offers herself as the next bride and her father reluctantly agrees. On the night of their marriage, Scheherazade begins to tell the king a tale, but does not end it. The king is thus forced to postpone her execution in order to hear the conclusion. The next night,

as soon as she finishes the tale, she begins (and only begins) a new one, and the king, eager to hear the conclusion, postpones her execution once again. So it goes on for 1,001 nights. Thus, both the queen and the marriage are saved. Much more than ascertaining the substantive truth of this myth, it is important to understand the power to captivate that a short story can have.

Truly, insignificant anecdotes, fond remembrances, lengthy jokes or even pointed recollections are the points of origin of short stories. Anthropologists would say that one of the earliest roles of the shaman or sage was to tell stories that provided symbolic solutions to contradictions that could not be sorted out just like that. An almost similar process informs a child's craving for bedtime stories of fantastic creatures or conflicts – such narratives enable him to act out his inner confusions through imaginary events and then tuck off to sleep in the safety of his bed.

1.3 EVOLUTION OF THE SHORT STORY FROM A POPULAR TALE TO A LITERARY GENRE

In searching the origins of stories, classical history would take us back to the very beginnings of all civilizations – to Hesiod, who showed how the founding myths were invented to explain the existence of the world and how it was peopled by human beings. Myths, as Richard Kearney simply states, 'were stories people told themselves in order to explain themselves to themselves and to others'. Renaissance understandings of the European tradition would take us back to Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* where we find the idea of the framed narrative already formed. Similarly in Oriental history, we have the Persian queen Scheherazade's stories to King Shahryar, which also capture our attention, being in the similar form of framed tales. Besides, there are tales from the *Panchatantra*, the *Jataka* tales, *Aesop's Fables* and of course the *Bible* – that great storehouse of lore. But when we are looking at the Short Story as a genre, we are actually trying to locate a movement from the spoken word to the written in the course of its shaping up. The task of definitively ascertaining who wrote and published the first truly modern short story is however a difficult one. This is because the cultural history of the published short story is relatively recent; in fact it is only a few decades longer than that of cinematography. It had always existed in an informal oral tradition, but never found a real publishing forum until the rise of mass middle class literacy in the West in the 19th century. This in turn provided a market for magazines and periodicals which gave the short fiction autonomy of space. The ready reception of the new form proved that readers had for

long been in search of a medium that could express small but by no means insignificant aspects of their lives at the 'turn of a screw'; writers too discovered that they now had a powerful literary tool on their hands. As proof that the story telling and receiving ability had always been inherent in the human imagination, Boyd mentions the classic and timeless short stories that Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864), Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849) and Ivan Turgenev (1818 - 1883) were churning out in the early to mid-19th century. By the end of this era the form had been nearly perfected by the Russian master story teller Anton Chekhov (1860 – 1904).

Unlike other literary genres, it is not quite possible to outline an explicitly British history of the short story. This is because though Walter Scott's story 'The Two Drovers' published in *Chronicles of the Canongate* in 1827 has been widely accepted as the beginnings of the literary canon and it did inspire the likes of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, it was followed up more in other lands like France (Honore de Balzac, 1799 - 1850), Russia [Alexander Pushkin (1799 – 1837) and Turgenev] and of course America [Hawthorne and James Fenimore Cooper(1789 - 1851)]. In France the art of the short story was firmly established in 1829-31 with the magazine publication of a dozen contes by Prosper Merimee (1803 – 1870), Balzac and Theophile Gautier (1811 – 1872). Experimental works like the pastoral freshness of Alphonse Daudet (1840 -1897), the meticulous objectivity of Gustave Flaubert (1821 -1880) or the naturalism of Guy de Maupassant (1850 – 1893) however took some more time to mature. In Russia too, the beginnings of imaginative work in short prose fiction was done by Pushkin and then followed up by Nikolai Gogol (1809 – 1852) and Turgenev. In contrast with this, after the beginnings by Scott, the short story hardly had much following in Britain all along the mid-19th century when the novel was in its heyday. All the great story writers we have had around this time were non – British, like Flaubert and Maupassant, Herman Melville, Poe and Chekhov. In fact it was in reading Hawthorne that Poe came up with his famous definition of a short story as a narrative that "can be read at one sitting." Clearly Poe was focussing on the singularity of effect and that basically remains the hallmark of a gutsy short story. It was only with Robert Louis Stevenson in the 1880's that Britain took to writing short stories seriously and consistently. We come across a long list of writers like Herbert George Wells (1866 – 1946), Arnold Bennet (1867 – 1931), the America born Henry James (1843 – 1916) and Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936). The credits for making a cult of the short story must however go to Anton Chekhov who did away with manipulative plot structures, abandoned any judgemental stand on characters and sought neither climaxes nor neat narrative resolutions to his stories. A Chekhov short story would therefore just be out there in the middle,

standing out as a neat piece of realistic life. Most short writing in the 20th century has been Chekhovian, or inspired by Chekov. James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield or Raymond Carver - all owe their debt to him. From the end of the 20th century however, a tonal shift is again evident – if the pre-Chekhov models were 'event-plot' stories (to borrow the term from William Gerhardie) and the Chekhovian ones were ontological (presenting life in its bare essentials stripped of compulsions of plot or propriety); then the modernist short story is often baffling in its range. In it we find the use of techniques like the 'suppressed narrative' (where the meaning to be discovered lies beneath the apparently simple text), the poetic/ mythic (where the story comes close to lyric poetry and thus becomes difficult to understand) and the biographical (where stories tend to deal with factuality or even become non-fictional in intent). There could be endless such categories and this only goes on to prove that the short story is indeed a dynamic form.

1.4 THE KEY FEATURES OF THE SHORT STORY

It seems relevant to go back for a while to Edgar Allan Poe's definition of the short story as a narrative that 'can be read at one sitting.' Evidently, he was highlighting the element of singularity of effect and he further went on to say that the impact of a good short story was like that of a painting upon the mind of the viewer – 'a sense of the fullest satisfaction.' It will be seen that this is not an attempt to theorise upon what goes into the making of a short story, for as R.K Narayan (1906 – 2001) the creator of the delightful Malgudi tales once said – '…all theories of writing are bogus' for story tellers develop their own intuitive methods. Thus short stories often tend to break generic boundaries, so that the categories enumerated in the previous section on the development of the short story often become fluid. For instance, a technically adventurous piece like Stephen King's (born 1947) 'That Feeling, You Can Only Say What it is in French' merges all classifications between experimental and mainstream writing. On the other hand, early 20th-century writers like Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941) make supreme use of the 'moment' of revelation in their stories. Again the concerns of expatriate writers across space and time, like the Canadian born Mavis Gallant (born 1922), the Indo-Trinidadian British writer V.S Naipaul (born 1932) and even almost a generation later, the Bengali-American author Jhumpa Lahiri (born 1967) repeatedly cut across national borders and point to universal concerns. There can thus be no unanimous point of view to enumerate the major components of a short story. At best certain qualities (which are themselves fraught with controversies) may be chosen, depending on our common experience of

reading stories. This catalogue is by no means any finality on the genre, and it would be appreciated if readers could come up with more features.

1.4.1 Brevity and Unity of Impression

The issues of brevity and unity of impression are inseparably linked since Poe's definition of the short story came along, even though subsequent developments have revealed the absence of any finality in his pronouncements. On brevity, Poe said that the length of a tale should be such as can be perused at one sitting. But then we must understand that some can sit for longer at a stretch than others, so it becomes a fluid definition wherein the lower limit could just be a few sentences but it is impossible to circumscribe any upper limit. Henry James mentions the 'hard and fast rule' among contemporary magazines of keeping inside the range of six and eight thousand words, but then again such rules vary from time to time and magazine to magazine. Somerset Maugham (1874 – 1965) notes in the Preface to his Complete Short Stories that while the smallest item there comes to about 1600 words in all, the longest comes to about 20,000. In the Collected Stories (published in 1965) of Frank Sargeson (1903 – 1982), one of New Zealand's foremost short story writers, the range varies between 500 and 32,000! There can thus be no one acceptable answer to the vital question – 'How long is short'.

In the context of Tragedy, Aristotle says it must have a certain magnitude (he does not specify how long) that will be enough to contain all the movements that are integrally connected to the plot. One guesses that the same principle should be applicable to the short story as well. Going back to Poe, he says 'In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.' There are of course exceptions to this blanket rule of formal unity stemming out of deliberate care – the tensile balance between humour and pathos in Chekhov's stories or the dream elements in the German story teller Franz Kafka (1883 – 1924) for instance. A story like Gogol's 'The Overcoat' has so many different shades to it. Again there are stories like 'The Ballad of the Sad Café' by the American writer Carson McCullers (1917 – 1967) where the unified impact is in fact achieved by the interplay of several modes. The last has even been made into a film by Merchant Ivory Productions.

With the short story increasingly embracing manifold complexities of life within the ambits of its subject, there could thus be no end to such diversity. It therefore stands to reason that it is not length or unified content that one needs to primarily focus upon; rather a single unified and culminating effect (that is not necessarily linear) is what we are stressing upon. It would indeed be childish to strictly outline a specified word count or put in a choice of subjects from which the writer has to take his pick.

1.4.2 Unity of Incidents

Given the relative contexts of brevity and unity of action, it is seen that in short stories the element of concentration is generally achieved by confining the action to a single or at most a few related incidents. Such other incidents are not digressive in nature; their purpose is to contribute to the single illuminating moment. In this the short story resembles a lyric poem which deals with a single emotion. Interest is concentrated upon a single incident which, however trivial it might appear, is significant to or has significance for the concerned character and thereby for the reader. In our subsequent discussion of the syllabised texts, we shall see how even the most unassuming incidents become instrumental in showing up the 'truth' of each story.

1.4.3 Characterisation

A short story frequently draws out one or two individuals who are seen as separate or distinct from their fellow-men in some way or the other. Being short in its expanse, it is neither possible nor necessary to have too many characters in a brief space. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* edited by Sylvan Barnet et all (London, 1964) notes that 'most frequently a short story writer of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries focuses on a single character in a single episode, and rather than tracing his development, reveals him at a particular moment.' This is mostly the moment when the character undergoes some decisive change in attitude or understanding, as when Olga in Chekhov's 'The Grasshopper' recognises her husband's true worth and her great need of him at the moment of his death. Thus characters are basically revealed, not brought out by explicit descriptions or value based pronouncements. Not only incidents, often inward actions like a person's thoughts, dreams, attitude, the special manner and rhythm of his speech – all become important in the revelation of character. Additionally, the perspective or consciousness from which a story is told also shapes the presentation of the character.

1.4.4 Point of View

At the simplest level 'Point of view' refers to the relationships between the story teller, the story itself and the reader. It is the point of observation from which the story is being told; as also who is doing the act of telling. Is the story coming down directly to the reader as a happening, or is it getting filtered through another mind or personality – these are observations that establish the point of view from which a particular story is written and presented. There are several such ways that a writer may adopt in taking us through his story, the choice depending on the ends he/she has in mind. Some of these are:

- The Omniscient Observer
- The Direct Observer
- The First Person Narration
- The Second Person Narration
- The Third Person Intimate
- **Activity for the learner –**

  Define and elucidate the exact nature of each of these narrative strategies with suitable examples of each.

1.4.5 Structure

As with much else, there is no norm of structure for a short story as well. It may be told as a progressive movement of episodes chronologically arranged or as fragmentary, seemingly disconnected episodes. In this, it is more a representation of human life as it is lived – capturing small details and capturing them with as much of the unpredictability that pervades our daily life. Sometimes the writer may use the 'epiphanic' structure perfected by Joyce, at others the entire structure might be based on hints and suggestions as in Mansfield or even an unbroken flow of perceptions as in the 'stream of consciousness' mode. The flexibility of structure in a big way lends to the dynamic nature of the short story as a genre.

- **Activity for the learner –**

  Before going on to the detailed study of the short stories, see for yourselves what 'epiphany' and 'stream of consciousness' mean. Then try to relate these terms to the texts that are prescribed in your syllabus.

1.4.6 Symbolism

Symbolism is a patent technique that artists across all forms resort to in order to make a subtle expression of their thoughts and ideas. A symbol is a sign that carries a meaning that may either be fixed (as the dove for peace) or variable, depending on the usage (like the fly in Mansfield's short story). The use of symbols is common in short stories to throw additional light upon a character, scene or event. In the hands of master story tellers, a symbol itself may become the focal point of a text. A symbol is not necessarily an external object; it could be a dream, a recurrent thought or even an event that could define the story in a big way. Many of O.Henry's stories like 'The Last leaf' or 'The Gift of the Magi' make very pertinent use of symbols to connect nature or myths with the human scenario.

- **Activity for the learner**

Read the two stories by O. Henry and make brief write-ups on how he uses the symbols to invest his tales with multiple layers of significance.

1.5 SUMMING UP

You have by now understood the genesis of the short story and some of the main elements that go into the making of stories. Suffice it to say that a short story is a very handy literary genre that presents a microcosmic view of the real dynamics of human life. In the course of reading one, the reader unknowingly becomes a collaborator with the author, often re-living one's own life experiences and feeling intensely with the character(s). In this sense, we have to agree with Frank O'Connor (The Lonely Voice) when he says of the short story that it is 'romantic, individualistic and intransigent.'

1.6 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Write a note on the diversity inherent in the development of the short story as a genre.
2. Why is a short story called 'short'? Assess the features of a short story with reference to any story that you have read and liked.
3. What featuress would you suggest that a budding writer of short stories should keep in mind to create a successful short story?

1.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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2. Reid, Ian, *The Short Story*, Methuen, 1977.
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4. Boyd, William, *A Short History of the Short Story*, The Quarter, Summer 2006, accessed on the Internet on 30th November 2011.
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UNIT 2 ❑ ARABY: JAMES JOYCE

Structure

2.1 Objectives

2.2 A Brief introduction to James Joyce

2.3 *Dubliners* – An Insight

2.4 *Araby*

2.5 Analysis

2.5.1 The Setting

2.5.2 In love…

2.5.3 The moment cometh!

2.5.4 The waiting commences.

2.5.5 The Destination…Is it???

2.6 Key Issues in 'Araby'

2.7 Comprehension Exercises

2.8 References

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This Unit focuses on how James Joyce's formative years have been an important influence in the making of his fictional art. The significance of *Dubliners* as a collection of short stories has also been briefly reckoned, before making a detailed study of 'Araby'.

2.2 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO JAMES JOYCE

It must be mentioned at the outset that the purpose of this introduction is only to trace the growth of James Joyce, the short story writer and the novelist. So a proper purview of the entire corpus of the writings of Joyce, one of the prominent figures of Irish (English) literature is not within the scope of this discussion. Born on 2nd February 1882, James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was the eldest surviving child of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane Murray Joyce. For his schooling he was sent to Clongowes Wood College and later to Belvedere College, Dublin where Joyce became both famous and infamous! His fame

was as the most gifted pupil while his notoriety arose from the definite signs of irreligiosity that he showed. He was a good student and a good linguist too, having already studied Latin, French and Italian. But he was always at Jesuit institutions and that brought Joyce repeatedly at odds with the authorities.

Such controversies continued brewing as Joyce began to mature - his open advocacy of art over morality or the praise of the new realistic drama of Henrik Ibsen the Norwegian dramatist, drew much flak from the Irish Catholic clergy. He in turn detested their slavish mentality. Though he was deeply influenced by Irish nationalistic tendencies and the literary revival, somewhere Joyce could not accept the 'quaint' provincialism that was grasping Ireland; he felt his land needed to be more continental in approach to greater issues about the Empire that had begun to emerge. His work is generally pervaded by a passionate love for Ireland, as profound as the love of his life Nora Barnacle and in particular we find an unfailing love for his 'dear dirty Dublin'.

Paris, where the young Joyce first went to study medical science in 1902 has been a major influence in the course of his literary career. It was here that he came across Edouard Dujardin's novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (The Bays are Sere) written in 1888, which helped him derive his singular idea of the **interior monologue**. After a brief spell back in Dublin, Joyce was again in Paris in 1903. By now he had given up all attempts to study medicine and devoted himself to writing poems and **epiphanies** in the course of shaping his own aesthetics on his journey to becoming a literary artist. It was in 1904 on the suggestion of George Russel that Joyce started writing some simple short stories for the magazine *Irish Homestead* and that marked the beginnings of work on the stories for *Dubliners*. Though most of his adult life was spent abroad, Joyce's fictional universe does not extend beyond Dublin, and is populated largely by characters that closely resemble family members, enemies and friends at home. As he clarified after the publication of his masterpiece *Ulysses* in 1922, "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." (1)

Joyce's first published work was *Chamber Music* (1907), a book of lyrical verse written in his student days and suffused with the graceful melody of early 19th c poetry. This was followed by *Dubliners* (1914), a collection of 15 short stories set in the Dublin where he grew up. These stories are penetrating analyses of the stagnation and paralysis of Dublin society seen from different facades, coupled with the sensitivities

of the adolescent growing up young boy and recounted in narration from a **vantage point**. Prof. Samir Kumar Mukhopadhyay (2) in his elaborate analysis notes that Joyce experienced great difficulty in getting the stories published, but after publication they earned him critical admiration from major literary figures like Ezra Pound. *Exiles*, Joyce's only attempt at drama (though not well acclaimed then) was staged at Munich in 1918 and later performed in London in 1926. It is interesting to note that the play was revived and directed by none other than Harold Pinter in 1970, almost 30 years after the death of James Joyce.

Ulysses (which has been referred to earlier) was partly serialised in an American magazine *Little Review* which however stopped doing so in 1920 after being prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Vice. In fact just about 13 chapters had been published in serial form when the U.S Customs Court ruled it to be 'obscene' in 1921. Joyce's use of curse words and such radical techniques as the 'stream of consciousness' brought out inner truths that were perhaps too much of a realistic presentation for civil society to bear and live up to! Partly because of this controversy, Joyce found it difficult to get a publisher to accept the book, but it was first published in France in 1922 by Sylvia Beach from her well-known Rive Gauche bookshop, *Shakespeare and Company*. An English edition published the same year by Joyce's patron, Harriet Shaw Weaver, ran into further difficulties with the United States authorities, and 500 copies that were shipped to the States were seized and possibly destroyed. But censorship apart, the year 1922 was a remarkable one in the history of literary modernism, what with the appearance of both *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*. In *Ulysses*, Joyce employs **stream of consciousness**, parody, jokes, and virtually every other established literary technique to present his characters. The action of the novel, which takes place in a single day, 16 June 1904, sets the characters and incidents of the *Odyssey* of Homer in modern Dublin and represents Odysseus (Ulysses), Penelope and Telemachus in the characters of Leopold Bloom, his wife Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, parodically contrasted with their lofty models. The book explores various areas of Dublin life, dwelling on its squalor and monotony. Nevertheless, the book is also an affectionately detailed study of the city, and Joyce claimed that if Dublin were to be destroyed in some catastrophe it could be rebuilt, brick by brick, using his work as a model! (3)

Earlier in 1904 Joyce had written an essay *A Portrait of the Artist* which was a recollection of the spiritual development of an unidentified but seemingly autobiographical hero. This had shaped into a novel called *Stephen Hero*, which was however then abandoned by the young writer. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

(1916) is almost a rewrite of this abandoned novel, the original manuscript of which Joyce is said to have attempted to burn in a fit of rage during an argument with his soul mate and later his wife Nora Barnacle, though it was finally rescued by his sister. *Portrait* is presumably a heavily autobiographical, coming-of-age novel depicting the childhood and adolescence of the protagonist Stephen Dedalus and his gradual growth into artistic self-consciousness. Some hints of the techniques Joyce frequently employed in later works, such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and references to a character's psychic reality rather than to his external surroundings, are evident throughout this novel. This text has even been made into a film directed by Joseph Strick. Stephen Hero was subsequently published posthumously in 1944.

Joyce's last great work was *Finnegans Wake*, extracts of which appeared as *Work in Progress* in the magazine *Transition* and was finally published in 1939. While *Ulysses* was a day view of life, this book presented a night view of man's life and was acceptably written in a difficult style. But along with *Ulysses*, it is part of the canon of literature that definitely brought about a revolution in form, structure and linguistic frame of the novel in modernist literature.

- **Activity for the learner**

  Make a catalogue of new terms you have come across in the course of reading this Introduction to James Joyce and elucidate them with help from a Glossary/ Dictionary of Literary Terms.

2.3 DUBLINERS : AN INSIGHT

Dubliners is a collection of 15 short stories by James Joyce, first published in 1914. They were meant to be a **naturalistic** depiction of Irish middle class life in and around Dublin in the early years of the 20th century. The implications of the term 'naturalistic' would best be understood in Joyce's own words on his collection that he wrote to the publisher of the book:

"My intention was to write a moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis."

He clarifies that the stories are grouped under four different aspects – childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life; and goes on to add:

I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, and still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard. I cannot do any more than this. I

cannot alter what I have written. I cannot write without offending people. (4)

This is ample testimony to the fact that with *Dubliners*, Joyce was all set to pit the short story into an altogether new dimension; it was to become a virtual power house with a narrative intensity that has hardly even been surpassed. Naturally, he had a tough time getting a publisher for his work as his 'nicely polished looking glass' with 'the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal' (5) was too harsh a reality to accept. The stories were set at a time when Irish nationalism was at its peak, and a search for a national identity and purpose was raging. Thus Ireland stood at the crossroads of history and culture – the struggle for Independence from Great Britain, the rise and fall of the nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell (1846 – 91), the mass risings in favour of Irish language and culture were all important happenings. Subsequently there were several socio-religious splits and it is these social forces that repeatedly find way by whatever means in Joyce's writing. Against a very happening backdrop of events, Joyce situates his characters and traces their growth at different stages of life.

When after much persuasion, *Dubliners* did find a publisher in Grant Richards in 1914, it was discovered that the presentation of the spiritual 'paralysis' of the nasty city was laced with Chekhovian realism, blended with the naturalistic tradition of Emile Zola, Flaubert and Maupassant. But beyond all this, the skilful use of musical effects to add vividness to the reality was Joyce's own device and this, according to Prof. Samir Kumar Mukhopadhyay, is one of the aspects of literary modernism. As we shall see in our reading of *Araby*, he is a master at presenting realities – ghastly and intensely emotional, alike – in a detached, impersonal and objective manner.

As has been mentioned earlier, *Dubliners* contains fifteen portraits of life in the Irish capital; from where Joyce, the man, had never perhaps moved away psychologically, though all the stories were written overseas. With all their filth and squalor, the streets of Dublin are a persistent image, almost a motif that threads through all the 15 tales. The perfect focus could best be understood in Harry Levin's words: he calls them 'fifteen case histories'. (5) The author focuses on middle or lower middle class society – his characters are children and adults such as truant schoolboys, salesmen, timid and depressed housemaids, office clerks, music teachers, students, shop girls, swindlers, and out-of-luck businessmen most of them faced with disasters of sorts. In most of the stories, he uses a detached but highly perceptive narrative voice that displays these lives to the reader in precise detail. Rather than present intricate dramas with complex plots, these stories sketch daily situations in which not much seems to happen—a boy visits a bazaar, a woman buys sweets for holiday festivities, a man reunites with an old friend over a few drinks. Though these events may

not appear as something very momentous, the characters are faced with intensely personal and often tragic revelations which are certainly important or defining moments in their lives. Joyce called such moments ‘epiphanic’, meaning that particular point of time when a character experiences self-understanding or illumination. The stories in *Dubliners* peer into the homes, hearts, and minds of people whose lives connect and get woven up through the shared space and spirit of Dublin. A character from one story will mention the name of a character in another story, and stories often share common settings. Such minute connections create a sense of shared experience and evoke a map of Dublin life that Joyce would keep returning to in later works. This ‘map’ of Dublin is ever present in his choice of subsistence level life as the backdrop of the stories; this enables a poignant revelation of the drabness of living conditions so that squalor, sin, degeneration, defeat and despair become the common stay of all the stories. A student with some awareness of the development of literature on the continent will realise that Joyce’s Dublin is in many ways like Dante’s Florence which is full of envy and iniquity – a near parallel to what Joyce calls ‘paralysis’ in his collection. But then, there is of course in *Dubliners* a note of universality, for readers of a different place and time can of course identify themselves with Joyce’s characters in different phases of their lives. With superb economy of language and a perfect understanding of his created world, James Joyce, in *Dubliners*, gives us a pen picture of life that transcends space and time in its assertion of relevance.

2.4 *ARABY*

North Richmond Street, being blind[1], was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers’ School set the boys free. An unihabited house of two stories stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste[2] room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot,* by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memories of Vidocq*[3]. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes, under one of which I found the late tenant’s rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners.

When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses. Where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits[4], to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in his tea, we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed, and I stood by the railings lookings at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye, and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickend my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a come-all-you[5] about O'Donovan Rossa[6], or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers runing upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken

panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: O love! O love! many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*[7]. I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazar, she said; she would love to go.

—And why can't you? I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent[8]. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps, and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head owards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

—It's well for you, she said.

—If I go, I said, I will bring you something.

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllabus of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go the bazar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped it was not some Freemason affair[9]. I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

— Yes, boy, I know.

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high, cold, empty, gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs. Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old, garrulous woman, a pawn-broker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs. Mercer stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

—I am afraid you may put off your bazar for this night of Our Lord[10].

At nine o' clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hall door. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hall–stand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go the bazar. He had forgotten.

—The people are in bed and after their first sleep now, he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

—Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is.

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. He asked me where I was going and , when I had told him a second time, he asked me did I know *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*[11]. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onwards among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazar. I remained alone in the bare carriage.

In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girded at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words Café Chantant[12] were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come, I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

—O, I never said such a thing!

—O, but you did!

—O, but I didn't!

—Didn,t she say that?

—Yes. I heard her.

—O, there's a . . . fib!

Observing me, the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

—No, thank you.

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interests in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

NOTES

1. North Richmond Street, being blind: Joyce and his famly moved to 17 North Richmond Street, Dublin, in 1894 to a house corresponding exactly to the one described here. Earlier, Joyce had attended the near-by Christian Brothers' School, a school run by a Catholic religious comunity. North Richmond Street is a cul-de-sac: hence 'blind'.
2. waste : spare (this sense of 'waste' is rare in English usage).
3. *The Devout Communicant :* a Catholic manual. The Memoirs of Vidocq: Francois Eugene Vidocq (1775-1859) had a remarkable career in the oddly assorted rules of soldier, thief, chief of the French detective force and private detective.
4. ashpits: where the refuse of the household would be thrown.
5. *come-all-you :* street-ballad, so called because these were its opening words.
6. O'Donovan Rossa : the popular name of the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist Jeremiah Donovan.
7. *Araby :* the name given to a 'Grand Oriental Fete' held in Dublin, 14 to 19 May 1894. a bazaar is very different, in English usage, from the oriental market so called : it is a special event at which goods are sold for the benefit of charities and sideshows are provided for amusement.
8. retreat... her convent : a period at her Catholic Convent school devoted entirely to religious observance.
9. Freemason affair : the Freemasons are an old-established secret society, with branches (or 'lodges') throughout the world : his aunt's doubts are due to the Freemasons' reputation for anti-Catholicism.
10. this night of Our Lord : it is hard to establish exactly when this was; it was proably the Eve of Easter Sunday.
11. *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed :* a sentimental poem by the nineteenth-century minor poetess, Caroline Norton.
12. Cafe Chantant : 'singing cafe' : a kind of cafe where musical entertainment was provided, in its heyday of popularity in the first decade of this century.

2.5 ANALYSIS

There is little to paraphrase in a story like this, for the experience of reading and

understanding is essentially personal. In fact Ezra Pound seems closest to the truth when he points to its multi-dimensional texture and says that it is 'a vivid waiting.' So it makes sense to cast short glances at the significant movements of this short story.

2.5.1 The Setting

The story is set in a 'blind' lane – North Richmond Street that is quiet for most of the day, apart from the time when the Christian Brothers' School would give over. The phrasal verb 'set the boys free' is ironic as also interesting, because that immediately equates school with a prison in the sense that it inhibits the free flow of the young mind. The other details that specifically interest the boy narrator are equally noteworthy – the uninhabited house of two storeys at the end of the alley and the 'brown imperturbable faces' of the other houses. The boy mightily intuits (understanding that arises out of sensitivity) that these houses are inhabited by sombre looking people who implicitly have no understanding of the world of the child, for they live 'disciplined lives'. In the opening paragraph of extremely economic naturalistic details, the multiple images of deathly quietness are offset against the single expression of liveliness - the imagined cries of exultation of the boys when the school would give over for the day. That "Araby" (written between September and December 1905) in specific and *Dubliners* in general is a recollection from a vantage point by the grown up Joyce is amply clear from the vividness of perceptions. The interplay of colour shades, the strong olfactory (related to the sense of smell) images of musty air, the liking for the quaint (curled, damp yellow pages of the books left over by the priest who was long dead) and the Adam syndrome (the boy loitering in the wild garden with the central apple tree behind the house) are all objects that must have been part of his psychic (of the mind) growing up. Unknowingly he must have assimilated it all and now the mature writer gets beneath the skin of his boyhood days as he lets the narrator take over. The 'wild garden' and the 'straggling bushes' surrounding the apple tree thus virtually recreate an Eden from where the modern Adam begins his quest for a lost world of innocence and love. Joyce's picturisation of adolescence is romantic to say the least and all romanticism has about it a degree of universalising. So the setting of "Araby" is not just spatial, it is intensely psychological too.

The naturalistic details of the setting are also closely related with the activities of the band of boys and the hectic mental activity of the narrator as part of the group. The sombre looking houses in the winter dusk contrast with 'the colour of ever-changing violet' in the sky and the 'feeble lanterns' (hazy street lights) in the street. Similarly, the pervasive silence of the place is animated with the shouts of the boys at play, trying to prolong their fun hours

as much as possible and never at all minding the smelly and dingy nature of the place. In fact they are so used to it that the narrator almost takes it in his stride. The two human figures apart from the boys themselves mentioned in this episode are that of the narrator's uncle who remains to him a sinister emblem of authority, and Mangan's sister who is clearly the centre of all his dreams. The one he hides and escapes from, to the other he is drawn with magnetic charm and he revels in his make-believe world of adolescent fantasy – "She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door." The setting of the story is therefore a mix of movements, for by the time we have read it we are almost initiated into the myriad moods of the boy narrator.

2.5.2 In love…

The shifts that Joyce introduces in the narrative framework are subtle but very effective. Almost unconsciously the collective 'we' has changed to the intensely subjective 'I' as the boy launches on his private viewing of Mangan's sister; he is at once identified as being alone in the crowd! The other significant shift is in the time frame – from the fading lights of dusk to bright mornings as he recounts – "Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. […] When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped." It is not the simple Wordsworthian leaping of the heart at 'beholding' a rainbow, for the feeling of love though unexpressed, becomes a virtual hymn for the boy. It sustains him amidst the tedium of his life 'in places the most hostile to romance'; exalting him to a transcendental world of absolute innocence. That this trance is almost spiritual in nature is repeatedly insisted – her name is like a 'summons' to all his foolish blood (the text is in the past tense because his foolishness, like all else, is a later/mature realisation); he perceives himself as straining to bear his 'chalice' to safety among marauders (here, it implies people are out to rob him of his sensitive feelings). To readers Mangan's sister is kept a nameless but vibrant presence, but to the besotted boy she has her 'name' which moves him into an indescribable sensation of love bordering on worship: "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom." This confused adoration of adolescent love defies or requires no logic, no physical co-relative in the sense of an equivalent, expects no returns in real terms; in its lyrical fervour it approximates the condition of music. So even though he has never spoken to her, yet his body in sync with his mind becomes the 'harp' while on wings of fancy her words and gestures are like fingers animating the wires.

The spiritual dimensions of such love are supplemented by deeply sensuous desires, but

once again that is in the realm of a make-believe world constructed by the boy in the same abandoned back-drawing room that has been referred to in the setting. But now the musty air fosters the environment for a passionate 'communion' (act of sharing) with his beloved on a dark rainy evening. Through a broken pane on the window of this abandoned room, needles of water play up on the sodden beds and by a thin thread of imagination we realise that the boy is playing out his private erotic fantasies about his love. He is now thankful for the 'feeble lanterns' for they shield him from any kind of public view and almost in delirium (excited frenzy)he trembles and presses the palms of his hands murmuring passionately 'O love! O love!'. Language has hardly ever been so evocatively used as in the spontaneous and intensely passionate erotic-spiritual communion of this adolescent priest of love.

2.5.3 The moment cometh!

From never having spoken beyond a few casual words with her, to when she asks him if he would be going to Araby, the boy is too enamoured to answer. Her words become mystic orders of the goddess to the devotee and the very word 'Araby' comes to denote an icon of his devotion. So he promises to get back something for her from the fair at Araby and this is more than a love-vow, it is the promise of bringing offerings. He almost begins to imagine it to be a magical place lifted out of the pages of some Oriental romance and therefore obviously different from the paralytic markets of Dublin that he has to frequent with his aunt. As they converse, Joyce constructs a vision that inspires both sensuality and sanctity in the dreamer. Structurally the high point of the story is reached, and in the next phase the boy slips into a bout of 'destructive instinct' which in Freudian terms means the desire to destroy anything that comes as an obstacle to the fulfilment of an ardent desire.

2.5.4 The waiting commences

Ezra Pound's description of "Araby" as a tale of 'vivid waiting' finds manifold significance in this section of the story. Just as a pilgrimage is fraught with unknown hazards, so also the day of the boy's intended visit to the fair begins on a bad note. His uncle, being in a sullen mood, does not give him the money to go to Araby before leaving for work; in waiting for the much needed money the boy gets late for the day and misses out his morning meeting with the girl of his dreams. His uncle is late in returning and he has to endure the gossip of the talkative Mrs Mercer. Even as he tries to luxuriate in fantasies of his beloved at her doorsteps, he realizes that time is slowly but steadily slipping out of his hands. Significantly, we notice that the earlier self-contained and self-constructed world of romantic love is no longer there; rather the callous adult world has begun to infringe upon the

autonomy of the boy's emotional plane. Money as means of exchange now becomes a necessary pre-requisite for the fulfilment of his love interest, though it is still some time before the boy will come to a realisation of this paradox. By the time his uncle returns, tipsy and indifferent, gives him the money and the boy journeys to his exotic destination, it is well past nine and he has almost lost his grip on 'the purpose of (his) journey'.

2.5.5 The Destination…Is it???

When the boy finally comes to stand before the building that 'display(s) the magical name', it is almost ten minutes to ten. But his entry into the supposedly magical land soon becomes a disillusionment of sorts. Contrary to being the dreamland of his imagination, Araby is almost covered in darkness and among the handful of stalls that are still open; he finds scenes of crass commerce or heartless flirtation. This is definitely not the shrine he wanted to arrive at after his long wait. But since he has built up the mental image of Araby as the palpable icon of an alternative reality, nor can he dismantle it as easily into the marketplace of real life. On the contrary, the fervid votary of love himself gets transformed as he is forced to acknowledge the self-deception he has unleashed on himself for so long. For a while he still tries to keep up the show but that is more to save him the blushes of getting caught by the outside world. So he pretends to be a curious onlooker at the stall, but can carry on no longer. As he lets the two pennies fall against the sixpence into some obsolete corner of his pocket, the moment is ripe for the epiphany:

"Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger."

2.6 KEY ISSUES IN ARABY

➢ Title of the Story

The title of a short story is expected to pin point at the central situation that the text unravels. As such "Araby" is a culmination of several strands of thought. It is, to begin with, a 'Grand Oriental Fete' held in Dublin from 14th to 19th May 1894. Michael Thorpe informs us that in English usage a bazaar would be something very different from what we understand by the term; it would signify a special event where goods are sold for the benefit of charities and sideshows are provided for amusement. So it would be quite a thing to look forward to, more so for the young people we find in this story. Mangan's sister being a young girl, presumably tied to a life of domesticity where going out to school would perhaps be her only 'excursion' out of

doors naturally has a great attraction for the fete where girlie things would be available aplenty. The boy narrator understands nothing of this, it just becomes for him a place where he hopes to find a palpable correlative to the depth of his feelings for the girl – perhaps a token of his love that he could bring back for his goddess. So from a mass commercial enterprise in the eyes of the common man, Araby becomes transmuted to a land of pilgrim's dreams. These dreams are predestined to be shattered and so it happens. It is interesting how Joyce introduces an element of a second climax in the story in the epiphany the boy has in the nearly closed down hall. At once this connects the second part of the story to the first, the different states of consciousness explored in the story merge into a continuum and the title becomes a wonderful mirror to the mental upheaval that the boy is faced with.

➤ Psychological elements

Joyce's exploration of the adolescent mind from a vantage point makes "Araby" a great mix of memory and imagination. On the one hand there are vivid recollections of childhood incidents and on the other, these remembrances are laced with a mature artist's understanding of the sights, symbols and colours of life. The aim of the analysis in the preceding section has been to capture, among other things, the psychological growth of the boy. It is also interesting how through his eyes, Joyce has also made a very subtle study of the people who willy nilly fill his life – the girl of his dreams, the band of boys, the aunt who somewhat understands his pains but cannot do much and of course the adult world that is very indifferent and largely unconcerned about the sensitivities of the mind of the growing up. Above all, the concluding section of the story is a superb psychological study of the protagonist and it leaves us somewhat baffled and hunting for final answers. Is psychological growth all about the conscious elimination of fancy? Does the darkness from which he seeks relief in the opening section get reinforced with a peculiar permanence at the end? Can he at all take the epiphany as a journey to consciousness or are the 'anguish' and 'anger' a momentary response that will once again fade when he sees the girl amidst his own drab surroundings? Will he or won't he still seek his private heaven in her? The answers might vary but there is no denying that hardly has any writer so poignantly captured the essence of the mind of an adolescent in the growing up years.

➤ Symbolism

The use of symbols is central to the edifice of Joyce's story. We could identify three major symbols in course of the narrative, apart from several others that are scattered. The first and the most obvious is the play of light and darkness. The story both begins and ends in darkness, at both these junctures the boy narrator is enmeshed in the fathomless pits of life, of which he can make no meaning. As dusk engulfs the setting at the beginning,

the lives of the boys is visualised in terms of lengthening shadows, dark muddy lanes, dark dripping gardens and dark odorous stables. In contrast to this pervasive darkness, there is a ray of light that illuminates the figure of Mangan's sister in a sensuous way, just as the boy's mornings, bright and sunny, are spent in stealing glances at her. She is mostly mute but remains an eloquent presence of his creation. Again it is a 'dark rainy evening when the boy's emotions surge up and he indulges in a psycho-sexual act. When he reaches Araby it is already half plunged in darkness and the silence is that of a 'church after service'. In the over-arching darkness of his individual psyche, the flirtatious and hollow conversation of the shop girl and the young men act as an ironic counterpoint against the hallowed image of 'his' girl in the mind of the boy. Thus the gathering darkness of evening, paradoxically a passage to self- discovery, climaxes in the darkness of full realization. Or an illumination even!

The second major symbol is that of the boy's journey to Araby. He undertakes it in the spirit of a questing medieval knight in search of a coefficient of his notion of ideal beauty. In the process he dissociates himself from all natural activities that befit his age and position and faces hindrances one too many in the course of his journey. The innocence and impressive nature of the boy raises our pathos for we foresee what he does not. As apprehended, this sufferance of an isolated pilgrimage leads him to the nearly dark hall where his dreams are shattered. The journey thus becomes a powerful symbol of hope turned into despair and the resultant painful process of growing up that must be faced by all in life. In effect therefore, the journey symbol has universal connotations and readers may identify their own individual loss of paradise with that of the impressionable young boy. The metaphor of 'waiting' that Pound identified as a major aspect of the story could also be fitted into this symbol of the journey.

The Biblical/religious references that have been identified in course of the discussion on the text form another important symbolic pattern in the story. The garden behind the house, the Adam figure of the boy, the concept of the chalice, the priest's books and the goddess-devotee-prayer triad of relationships between the boy and Mangan's sister – all add up to the religious symbolism that constitutes a major rubric of the story. It also lifts the tale above the dreary intercourse of life and gives a touch of spiritual quest to the boy's narrative.

Besides these, there are several other scattered symbolic usages that have been discussed in the detailed analysis of the text.

2.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Answer Type

1. On what grounds would you call 'Araby' a modern short story?
2. How does Joyce use the setting as a fitting background in 'Araby'?
3. Trace the psychological growth of the boy in 'Araby'.
4. What is an epiphany? What impact does the epiphany create in Joyce's short story?
5. Make a comparative study of Dublin market and Araby as you find these depicted in the story.
6. Justify how the title of Joyce's story relates to the element of a 'vivid waiting'.

Medium Length Answer Type

1. What aspects of the dead priest's room attract the boy and why?
2. Attempt a vivid description of North Richmond Street by dusk.
3. Trace the sensuous elements in the boy's stolen glimpses of Mangan's sister. How does it attain spiritual overtones with time?

Short Answer Type

1. Comment on Joyce's use of symbols with reference to any two major examples.
2. Give a brief description of the train journey to Araby.
3. Bring out the difference in the boy's mental state before and after he has spoken to Mangan's sister.
4. Write notes on:

   Mangan's sister, The old priest, The boy's uncle, Mrs Mercer, The shop girl at Araby.

2.8 REFERENCES

1. (Ellman , p. 505, citing Power, From an Old Waterford House (London, n.d.), p. 63- 64.).
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UNIT 3 ❒ KATHERINE MANSFIELD: THE FLY

Structure

3.1 Objectives

3.2 The Life of Katherine Mansfield

3.2 The Making of Katherine Mansfield and her Art

3.3 On "The Fly"

3.4 *The Fly*

3.5 Analysis

  3.5.1 The Setting

  3.5.2 The Characters

  3.5.3 The Action

3.6 Key Issues

3.7 Comprehension Exercises

3.8 References

3.1 OBJECTIVES

A close reading of 'The Fly' is the obvious aim of this Unit. But prior to that, the development of Katherine Mansfield as a literary artist has also been dwelt upon at adequate length. This is because it is felt that the diverse cultural conditions that she was exposed to, had a major role to play in her growth as a powerful exponent of the short story form.

3.2 THE LIFE OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

As mentioned in the introductory section on the short story, Katherine Mansfield is one of those rare writers who concentrated only on this genre and took it to such heights that almost a century after her death; she still remains a literary phenomena to reckon with. Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp was born in 'an ordinary, middle class, colonial home' (1) in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1888. She was an adventurous and ambitious schoolgirl who began to try out her writing skills as early as 1898-99 for the *High School Reporter*, the school magazine at Wellington Girls' High School.

At the young age of fifteen she was sent to Queen's College School, London and was there for four years. Though she did return to her homeland after that, she was always at odds with the country of her birth and ever eager to distance herself from New Zealand. There was in her a dislike for the poverty and illiteracy of the indigenous Maori population and a discontent at the lack of opportunities for pursuing a career of her choice – as a cellist or as a person of literature. In course of a stormy personal life, she stayed in places as diverse as Germany, France and even Switzerland; apart from London of course, which was more than home to her. Her closeness with Middleton Murry, the leading critic and editor, around 1912 in London was a great turning point in Mansfield's literary career. They married in 1918 and as Michael Thorpe says, with him 'she found as much happiness as was possible for her'. She died of tuberculosis in January 1923, aged only 35.

3.2 THE MAKING OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND HER ART

Given that a writer who worked exquisitely on the short story mode still remains relevant so as to be syllabised, it would make interesting study to have some insight into the development of her literary acumen. We have already spoken of and perhaps even wondered at the rather unusual distance she maintained from her homeland. Like Joyce, for whom distance from his native Dublin was never a hindrance in making his beloved city the backdrop of most of his work, Mansfield too, perhaps unknowingly, drew much creative sustenance from this distancing from her geo-cultural environment. Her letters to her friend Ida Baker written around 1922 are proof of how she felt 'little bits' of herself still sticking out of her past. Naturally, the role of memory is immense in the work of Mansfield, and this is seen in stories like "At the Bay" and "Prelude". With Murry she collaborated in editing the literary periodical *Rhythm* and also its successor *The Blue Review*. The loss of her brother Leslie in the First World War (1914-1918) was a devastating experience for Mansfield and it actually drove her to recreate memories of home that she had shared with him. She called it a 'sacred debt' she paid to her country, not only because she and her brother were born there but because in her thoughts she ranged with him over all the remembered places. So the stories of this phase, that are considered among the richest literature ever set in New Zealand, are inspired not by nationalist thought but essentially driven by personal emotions. Many of these are found in her second volume, *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) (her first volume of sketches was titled *In a German Pension*, published in 1911). However, the later volumes – *The Garden Party* (1922) and *The Dove's Nest*

(1923) reflect London and the European world of Mansfield's mature years.

In order to get a feel of a short story like *The Fly*, we need to understand the nuances of Mansfield's fictional art. While being greatly influenced by Chekov as a short story writer, she also felt the need for a new structure and form of expression that would adequately express the changed conditions of life in a post-war world. In fact, as early as 1910, a visit to the first ever post-**Impressionist** visual arts exhibition in London brought in her an awareness that the reality of life no longer lay in the blind belief in a static, unchanging objective reality. She began to be increasingly convinced that human experience was to be found not just in externalities but they could as well be interiorised ones. As Bates (2) correctly points, she 'saw the possibilities of telling (a) story by what was left out as much as by what was left in, or alternately describing one set of events and consequences while really indicating another'. Secondly, she resorted to techniques like mental **soliloquy** that became fluttery, gossipy and almost breathless with questions and answers. Besides, Mansfield was also apt in creating an intense atmosphere through clear observation and suggestive detailing. She could be said to practise what came to be known as the **'stream of consciousness'** technique that was perfected by Virginia Woolf in her novels. Most often in a Mansfield story we thus find no hectic action, no high drama; rather there is a moving presentation of the lives of ordinary, lonely and pathetic people. The author seems so well versed in placing a sensitive finger on the pulse of the lives she describes – she grasps the very essence of their existence at the exact moment as it were.

- **Activity for the learner –**

  Make a short write-up on the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique to bring out how it is essentially a modernist approach in art. Substantiate with examples from literature how it becomes a representation of psychological realities of life. As a hint, you will find a basic definition in the section on the Essays.

3.3 ON "THE FLY"

The first thing that strikes readers is the insignificance of the object that is focussed upon in the title. But this apparent feeling of a puny creature is deceptive, as is the inordinately short length of the story. "The Fly" has in fact been described as one of the fifteen finest short stories ever written. Whether it is or not may be debatable, but Thorpe puts it very intelligently when he says, 'it must surely be the shortest of good short stories'. It was included in the collection *The Dove's Nest* and was completed,

according to Mansfield's own records, by 20 February 1922. The story was written while she lived in the Victoria Palace Hotel in Paris, the same place where she had witnessed heavy bombing by the Germans in 1918. This historical detail somewhat lends credence to the fact that the particular incident of the death of Mansfield's brother Leslie Heron Beauchamp in the war and the general perception of angst could have found creative expression in "The Fly". This should not however lead the reader to expect a story of the battle in progress, far from it, the story as Anthony Alpers (3) says, is the author's 'profound symbolic treatment of post-war sadism and grief and loss'. Thus the story is an intense probe into human reactions to individual losses and beyond, of course in the aftermath of the war. It is now proper that the learner first goes through the story and then formulates responses to it.

3.4 *THE FLY*

'Y'are very snug in here,' piped old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great, green-leather armchair by his friend the boss's desk as a baby peers of its pram. His talk was over; it was time for him to be off. But he did not want to go. Since he had retired, since his... stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the houses every day of the week except Tuesday. On Tuesday he was dressed and brushed and allowed to cut back to the City[1] for the day. Though what he did there the wife and girls couldn't imagine. Made a nuisance of himself to the friends, they supposed . . . Well, perhaps so. All the same, we cling to our last pleasures as the tree clings to its last leaves. So there sat old Woodifield, smoking a cigar and staring almost greedily at the boss, who rolled in his office chair, stout, rosy, five years older than he, and still going strong, still at the helm. It did one good to see him.

Wistfully, admiringly, the old voice added, 'It's snug in here, upon my word!'

'Yes, it's comfortable enough,' agreed the boss, and he flipped the Financial Times with a paper-knife. As a matter of fact he was proud of his room; he liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it in full view of that frail old figure in the mufflcr.

'I've had it done up lately,' he explained, as he had explained for the past-how many? – weeks. 'New carpet,' and he pointed to the bright red carpet with a pattern of large white rings. 'New furniture', and he nodded towards the massive bookcase and the table with legs like twisted treacle. 'Electric heating!' He waved almost exultantly towards the five transparent, pearly sausages glowing so softly in the titled copper pan.

But he did not draw old Woodifield's attention to the photograph over the table of a grave-looking boy in uniform[2] standing in one of those spectral photographers' parks with photographers' storm-clouds behind him. It was not new. It had been there for

over six years.

'There was something I wanted to tell you,' said old Woodifield, and his eyes grew dim remembering. 'Now what was it? I had it in my mind when I started out this morning.' His hands began to tremble, and patches of red showed above his beard.

Poor old chap, he's on his last pins, thought the boss. And feeling kindly, he winked at the old man, and said jokingly, 'I tell you what. I've got a little drop of something here that'll do you good before you go out into the cold again. It's beautiful stuff. It wouldn't hurt a child.' He took a key off his watch-chain, unlocked a cupboard below his desk, and drew forth a dark, squat bottle. 'That's the medicine,' said he. 'And the man from whom I got it told me on the strict Q.T.[3] it came from the cellars at Windsor Castle.'[4]

Old Woodifield's mouth fell open at the sight. He couldn't have looked more surprised if the boss had produced a rabbit.

'It's whisky, ain't it? He piped feebly.

The boss turned the bottle and lovingly showed him the lable. Whisky it was.

'D'you know,' said he, peering up at the boss wonderingly, 'they won't let me touch it at home.' And he looked as though he was going to cry.

'Ah, that's where we know a bit more than the ladies', cried the boss, swooping across for two tumblers that stood on the table with the water-bottle, and pouring a generous finger into each. 'Drink it down. It'll do you good. And don't put any water with it . It's sacrilege to tamper with stuff like this. Ah!' He tossed off his, pulled out his handkerchief, hastily wiped his moustaches, and cocked an eye at old Woodifield, who was rolling his in his chaps.

The old man swallowed, was silent a moment, and then said faintly, 'It's nutty!'

But it warmed him; it crept into his chill old brain—he remembered.

'That was it,' he said, having himself out of his chair. 'I thought you'd like to know. The girls were in Belgium last week having a look at poor Reggies's grave, and they happened to come across your boy's. They're quite near each other, it seems.'

Old Woodifield paused, but the boss made no reply. Only a quiver in his eyelids showed that he heard.

'The girls were delighted with the way the place is kept,' piped the old voice. 'Beautifully looked after. Couldn't be better if they were at home. You've not been across, have yer?'

'No, no!' For various reasons the boss had not been across.

'There's miles of it,' quavered old woodifield, 'and it's all as neat as a garden. Flowers growing on all the graves. Nice broad paths.' It was plain from his voice how much he liked a nice broad path.

The pause came again. Then the old man brightened wonderfully.

'D'you know what the hotel made the girls pay for a pot of jam? He piped. 'Ten francs! Robbery, I call it. It was a little pot, so Gertrude says, no bigger than a half-crown. And she hadn't taken more than a spoonful when they charged her ten francs. Gertrude brought the pot away with her to teach 'em a lesson. Quite right, too; it's trading on our feelings. They think because we're over there having a look round we're ready to pay anything. That's what it is.' And he turned towards the door.

'Quite right, quite right!' cried the boss, though what was quite right he hadn't the least idea. He came round by his desk, followed the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out. Woodifield was gone.

For a long moment the boss stayed, staring at nothing, while the grey-haired office messenger, watching him, dodged in and out of his cubby-hole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run. Then: 'I'll see nobody for half an hour, Macey,' said the boss. 'Understand? Nobody at all.'

'Very good sir.'

The door shut, the firm heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet, the fat body plumped down in the spring chair, and leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep . . .

It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave. It was exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him. For it was strange. Although over six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, umblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever. 'My son!' groaned the boss. But not tears came yet. In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him. Time, he had declared then, he had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, Might live their loss down, but not he. How was it possible?

His boy was an only son. Ever since his birth the boss had worked at building up this business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning. How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years without the promise for ever before him of the boy's stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off?

And that promise had been so near being fulfilled. The boy had been in the office learning the ropes for a year before the war. Every morning they had started off together; they had come back by the same train. And what congratulations he had received as the boy's father! No wonder; he had taken to it marvelously. As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack[5] of them down to old Macey couldn't make

enough of the boy. And he wasn't in the least spoilt. No he was just his bright natural self, with the right word for everybody, with that boyish look and his habit of saying, 'Simply splendid!'

But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. The day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you. . . .' And he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins.

Six years ago, six years . . . how quickly time passed! It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands from his face: he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. But it wasn't a favourite photograph of his, the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern-looking. The boy had never looked like that.

At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into his board inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again. Help! Help! Said those struggling legs. But the sides of the inkpot were wet and slippery; it fell back again and began to swim. The boss took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it on to a piece of blotting-paper. For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then the front legs waved, took hold, and pulling its small, sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. Over and under, over and under, went a leg along a wing as the stone goes over and under the scythe. Then there was a pause, while the fly, seeming to stand on the tips of its toes, tried to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and, sitting down, it began, like a minute cat, to clean its face. Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over; it had escaped; it was ready for life again.

But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting-paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came great heavy blot. What would it make of that? What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as if painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning.

He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of. . .But the fly had again finished its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about is this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, You artful little b…' And he actually had the brilliant

notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen deep into the ink-pot.

It was. The last bolt fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the draggled fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

'Come on,' said the boss. 'Look sharp!'And he stirred it with his pen-in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste-paper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey.

'Bring me some fresh blotting-paper,' he said sternly, 'and look sharp about it.' And while the old dog padded away he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was . . . He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.

NOTES

1 The City: 'The City' is a familiar term for the 'business' area of London where many of the leading banks, insurance companies, stockbrokers etc. are concentrated (largely grouped in the area near the Bank of England).

2 Grave-looking boy in uniform: the boss's son, like Katherine Mansfield's brother, was killed in the 1914-18 war.

3 Q.T.: quiet (sl); 'on the strict Q.T.'—'in the strictest confidence', not to be repeated to anyone.

4 Windsor Castle: one of the principal residences of the English Royal Family.

5 Man jack: 'every man jack'—'every one of them'; Jack is a familiar form of John and is sometimes used to refer loosely to any ordinary man, whose specific name is not important to the speaker.

3.5 ANALYSIS

3.5.1 The Setting

In a striking contrast to the dull setting of "Araby", the action of "The Fly" is set in the well-furnished and decorated office chamber of the Boss. The Boss makes it a point to mention that he has had the room redecorated very recently, talking specifically of the carpet, the furniture, the electric heating and even draws his listener's attention to the 'pearly sausages' glowing in the copper pan. There is a copy

of the *Financial Times* that he flips through with a paper-knife. But significantly, he does not draw the attention of his audience to the photograph of his son that is placed on the table. It is not new; we are told it has been there for over six years now. Is it because it is something different from the rest of the décor that he does not talk of it in the same breath? Or is it that the photograph is symbolic of a common memory that the two men share – a common loss, the implications of which go without mentioning? These are vital questions, the answers to which we have to discover in course of reading the story. And there can be no universally acceptable answer to this, for "The Fly" is very much an **open-ended** story and each reader is left to formulate his own responses to it. The aim of this analysis will therefore be to open up possible channels for appreciating the story.

3.5.2 The Characters

There are three characters present in the story – Mr Woodifield, the Boss and his grey-haired office messenger Macey. There are several non-present characters as well – Woodifield's wife, his daughters and the sons of the two men, both dead in the war. We come to the second set later.

Woodifield is presented by Mansfield largely through the eyes of the Boss. The common experience that the two share is that both are bereaved fathers, having lost their sons in the war. But their long standing reactions to this loss are strikingly different. We are told that Woodifield has suffered a stroke and has been forced to take a pre-mature retirement from his position in this office. He now leads a mostly domesticated life and keeps coming back to the office every now and then, much to the displeasure of his family, in search of pleasures he has had to give up somewhat suddenly. Clearly the Boss shows a condescending attitude towards him. The image of him that is given is that of a grown up baby, clearly a misfit in this plushly done up office and the Boss seems to derive some apparent pleasure in contrasting himself with his ex-employee. Note the words like 'piped', 'peered', the 'green-leather armchair' in which he seems to sink, and the only too obvious point of similarity – 'as a baby peers out of its pram'.

In contrast, the boss seems quite in control of the situation for a major part of the story, at least as long as he is in the company of Woodifield. He patronises Woodifield when the latter cannot remember what he wanted to say, offers him whisky to get energised and even shows his acute consciousness of the material things of life by displaying the label. But once Woodifield has spoken of the graves in Belgium, the boss seems to be making a retreat. The 'quiver' in his eyelids is the only pointer to the fact that he is hearing what is being said. After all that Woodifield garrulously babbles out, the boss only says a cribbed 'No, no!' and this is supplemented by the narrator's cryptic comment – 'For various reasons the

boss had not been across.' He hardly listens to what Woodifield says next, waits for him to depart and then closes himself out of the public world for 'half an hour'. He then plunges into recollections of his dead son – the way he had been bringing up the son, the moment of the crisis and then his own way of coming to terms with it in the years that have followed. The fly episode which follows next will be taken up for detailed discussion in the following sections, but for the moment it suffices to say that there is a radical evolution in the characterisation of the boss in Mansfield's story. He is one person in public view – very much the boss; and a completely different entity in privacy. The unravelling of the private chambers of the boss' mind is indeed the high point of "The Fly". In this story we must therefore also keep in mind that the use of names for characters is also an interesting study – the boss remaining un-named is a pretty good strategy that the author employs to hint at the fact that often in life, there are differences between what 'appears' and what 'is'. This could be a preliminary hint in understanding the complexity that underlies the character of the boss.

The role of Macey is purely functional – he knows his boss in and out, and has seen him undergo all the suffering on the death of his son from very close quarters. For it was Macey who had handed him the telegram six years back, and though Mansfield does not explicitly say so, yet we realise that he has some idea of what the boss could do in moments of such intense psychic suffering.

The non-present characters play an important role in the story. Woodifield's wife and daughters are not favourably disposed to the idea of his outings to the city; they feel he would be making a nuisance of himself to his friends. More than that, it is the visit of his daughters to the graveyard at Belgium that becomes the occasion for the story. A garrulous old man that he is, Woodifield had actually forgotten that he had come to tell the boss of this visit of his daughters and that they had also seen the grave of the boss' son. Their delight at how well maintained the place was, or their concern over being charged a wee bit too much for the pot of jam – all suggest that Woodifield's family members have perhaps accepted the death of their son/brother as a fact beyond reversal and moved on in life. Of course, much of this narration is provided by Woodifield himself and could lead us to believe that he has perhaps assimilated the sorrow within himself with his stroke and his incessant speaking about it.

The two dead boys, though non-present, are perhaps the pivotal characters in the story. Woodifield's son has a name, Reggie; but like the boss, his son is also un-named. While nothing much is told about Reggie, Mansfield, through the boss' recollection, gives a fairly elaborate picture of his own son. He was bright, well

mannered, exuberant and a quick learner at work. But now it is all a thing of the past as he lies cold and dead, or perhaps reduced to a heap of bones at the mass cemetery in Belgium.

3.5.3 The action …

A drink offered by the boss on the sly revives Woodifield's sagging spirits and he narrates the visit of his daughters to the cemetery in Belgium where both their sons, who fell to their death in the war, are buried. The two graves are quite near to each other. To Woodifield's question, the boss says rather peremptorily (with a sense of decisive finality) that he has never been to the grave, but that does not deter the talkative old man from waxing eloquent (to go on and on) on how wonderfully the place is maintained. He also talks about how they charge extra for trivial things like a pot of jam before he finally leaves the room. Two things are notable here. At the beginning of the story, Woodifield is in discomfort and the boss is in command of the situation – sympathising and patronising him. But as the whisky warms up Woodifield, he begins and continues to speak on things that are not necessarily related. He is never really in control of the situation but somehow manages to resurrect (here, to pull up again) himself from what he looks like at the beginning of the story. In contrast, the boss who has been so flamboyant (elaborate/colourful behaviour) early on, gradually seems to be withdrawing into a shell, so much so that he actually loses track of whatever Woodifield says before departing – "'Quite right, quite right!' cried the boss, though what was quite right he hadn't the least idea."

Left all alone, the boss shuts himself off from the outside world, goes over to his desk with 'firm heavy steps', lets his bodyweight sink on the spring chair and covers his face with his hands. Mansfield piquantly (provocative/suggestive) says: 'He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep …'. From here begins the second movement of the story which is actually also the beginning of complexities. Unlike Woodifield who is a private individual, the boss has always had to move in life with multiple concerns related to his business, the security of his employees and so on. So if Woodifield has taken the shock of the death of his son by succumbing to a stroke, taking voluntary retirement and now through occasional visits to the city, it has been a personal/private response to grief. It is unfair to conclude that he loved his son more and so all this happened to him; contrarily the boss is a money-minded person who has relegated the memory of his dead son to some remote corner of his mind and concentrated again on his enterprise. We must realize that for both these men, as with

all human beings, any event happy or sad, brings out certain responses, the expressed intensity of which definitely lessens with time. So in the early years when the boss would say that he could never live down the sorrow of his son's death, it was a genuinely felt utterance at that point of time. After all, like many parents who expect to find in their children's' lives a vicarious fulfilment of their own dreams, he too had been rearing his boy as his successor in business and from this point of view both father and son are perhaps universal figures, hence one possible reason why they are not given proper names. In the intervening six years he had wept his heart out in private whenever he felt heavy with the memory of his son. So, as opposed to the talkativeness of Woodifield, the boss' is a silent muted response to bereavement (generally grief caused by the death of a near one) – and both are absolutely valid and acceptable as individual reactions, they cannot be compared. But all grief does get internalised after a period of time, the span of which again will vary from person to person. This is not to say that the grief or the suffering is lived down, it is just that external manifestation no longer perhaps occurs. Mansfield has captured the boss at one such sensitive moment of his life. So long he was used to crying out, being relieved and putting on the mantle (here, something that covers) of the 'boss' and readily taking the world. So he wants, intends and arranges to weep. But however much he groans, tears refuse to come out and he is tyrannised at the thought that he has overcome the grief of the death of his 'only son'. The author almost reads into the mind of the character as he questions himself – 'How was it possible?' It is at this point of time that the boss notices the fly fallen into his inkpot and trying desperately to extricate (to make oneself free) itself and his attention gets diverted momentarily.

The 'fly episode' is the third movement of the story and definitely the most complicated. Apparently it might seem a digression (act of straying from the main action) and in fact it is so for a few moments as the boss finds respite from the angst (a feeling of fear/ insecurity). Or so he thinks, for the memory of the son and the need for weeping are temporarily suspended from his conscious mind. On a sudden impulse the boss picks up the fly from the ink-pot and places it on the blotting paper to dry itself. As the poor creature dries itself with meticulous care, the boss, with a desire to test its tenacity for survival, sprinkles not one, not two but three drops of ink after the fly has dried itself each time. It is a strange psychological-physical war between two unevenly matched forces – the boss acting Fate on the fly and the puny creature representing through its incessant (continuous) attempts the various crises and onslaughts that the boss himself has had to encounter in his daily life. Sub-consciously the boss sees his own fight in the resistance offered by the fly. The drops of ink are the constant reminders of his son that are inflicted on him and that which comes in the garb of sympathy or accidental references, like Woodifield has just

done. Thus his own attempts to conquer grief and present a brave façade (artificial effect) are typified by the fly's efforts to save its life. For this reason he encourages the fly by saying: 'That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of …'. Inadvertently (without knowing) he wants to see his own positive attitude in the fly's resolve and spirit and thinks that such fortitude (mental strength) will give the fly – as it has supposedly given him, everlasting strength to challenge and defeat fate. Therefore he emerges as the destiny of the fly and kills it. But with its death the boss realizes that after all, human endurance has its limits, beyond which it gets maimed (very seriously injured). There is thus a striking similarity between the dessication (drying up) of his feelings of grief to external manifestation and the fly being divested of dear life.

Alternately, the fly might also symbolise the boss' son, the thread to this thought being the words – 'You artful little b…' said tenderly by the boss himself. As the fly waves its teeny weeny front legs, perhaps the boss has reminiscences of his child as a kid babbling the first mutterings of life! The idea here is that just as the fly was under the complete control of the boss and yet pushed aside the domination as sham and died; so too the boss once controlled the life of his son but had to leave him nevertheless.

Thus there could be an infinite number of interpretations of the fly episode; each would be valid if supported by an authentic reading of the text. If we take the drops of ink falling on the fly as the continuous encounters with life that blur the boss' memory/grief for his son, then the final moment comes with the stopping of the fly's stirrings. He feels he is divested of all traits of grief and hence tears do not come out. So on the one hand the tete-a-tete (private conversation between two persons) with Woodifield has welled up the boss' latent grief, on the other he cannot get purged (to get rid of) of his emotional upsurge through tears. Hence the boss is frightened and he just can't remember what it was that he was thinking. There is a kind of mental black-out and he is tormented by the wild drift of his own mind.

3.6 KEY ISSUES IN "THE FLY"

➢ Title

Usually the title of a story is a pointer to the central situation of the narrative. So when Mansfield chooses an apparently un-'organic' (in the sense of integrally related) episode as the title, it is clear that she is seeing the implications of the story at a symbolic level. As the text is structured, the fly episode comes in the form of a climax that takes the boss off the hook and brings out the deeper meanings of the story in retrospective (here,

starting from the present and going to the past) effect. No discussion on the story can thus be complete without referring to this episode. It is, to use T.S Eliot's term, an 'objective correlative' that brings out the complex emotional turmoil of the boss. (The manifold implications of the fly episode have already been discussed in analysing the text. Learners are encouraged to formulate their individual responses as well, after going through the text very minutely). Not only the boss' character, the episode also helps to place the perspectives of the other characters and certain general observations on life in clearer understanding. It goes to the author's credit that she can weave out such multiple significations from a seemingly trivial incident.

➤ Related Issues

Significance of the fly episode

As a story without any rigid meanings/ A story with multiple layers of meaning

➤ Symbolism

It is commonly held that in "The Fly", Mansfield converts the personal trauma of her brother's death in World War I and her father's artificial grief over it into an art form of the highest quality. The translation of personal experience into art follows the Chekhovian method of hints, suggestions and symbolism. Symbols are used in this story mainly to indicate one set of situations while stating something else. For instance the plush décor of the boss' office is not so much about the furnishing as it is to indicate that the flow of time has stopped for him. The showing off to Woodifield is thus as much revenge as self-defence. In contrast the presentation of Woodifield as childlike proves a misnomer as the same helpless person soon proves to be the agent of nemesis (fate) for the boss. The whiskey with which the boss steadies Woodifield is an interesting symbol. It shows the boss' total control over his former employee as the former forces the latter to go against his doctor's prescription and his family's instructions. Thus the consumption of the whiskey by Woodifield symbolises the boss' successful attempt at making him a psychic slave.

The grave and the graveyard as mentioned by Woodifield are symbols of both his latent desire for everything around and for everything straight. Clearly the picturesque surroundings have attracted all his attention, removing his son from his focal point. A gap of six years is indeed enough for memory to turn painless in representation, yet stay alive in the mind.

The photograph of the boss' son standing on his table is a very important symbol. In it the boy looks 'grave', though the boss feels his son 'never looked like that'. Besides, the photograph faces away from the boss and he has to get up to have a look at it. This

strange way of keeping the image of his beloved son raises several questions. The 'grave' look is perhaps an accusation that haunts the father who has tried to rob the boy of his naturalness by trying to determine his life for him. It is perhaps this denial of choice that drove him to enlist for the army, for it was not compulsory service in WW 1. Thus the photograph taken during enlistment shows a grave look! This look further disturbs the boss by being a constant reminder that he has in a way killed his son by creating such circumstances that he went on to join the war. This conjecture (supposition) is vindicated by the fact that the dead body of the fly is referred to as corpse (human dead body) and not carcass (animal dead body). In the fly episode which naturally follows in this symbolic study (and has been discussed earlier), the boss not only sees his son in the dead fly; he also sees himself as the virtual murderer. Thus these two symbols – the photograph and the fly, are of great importance in bringing about the self-realization of the boss.

The final picture of an important man sitting helplessly, unable to remember a thing and passing his handkerchief inside his collar to mark his discomfiture is a symbolic role reversal – from the position of 'still going strong, still at the helm' to a pitiful figure much like Woodifield whom he despised and even sympathised with.

3.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Answer Type

1. Bring out the elements of modernity in "The Fly".
2. How would you relate the 'Fly' episode to the general drift of the story?
3. Justify the idea that in "The Fly", Mansfield works by suggestion and not explicit statement.

Medium Answer Type

1. Describe the interior décor of the Boss' chamber.
2. Attempt a description of the cemetery in Belgium as narrated by Woodifield's daughters.
3. Give an account of the 'encounter' between the Boss and the fly.
4. How did the Boss react on hearing the news of his son's death? Show how his reactions underwent change with time.

Short Answer Type

1. What did Woodifield do on most Tuesdays?
2. How according to the Boss did his son look in the framed photograph?
3. Write in brief about the demeanour of Macey.

4. What does the Boss do at the end of the story?
5. What is ‘stream of consciousness’ technique?

3.8 REFERENCES

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MODULE 3 - ESSAYS

UNIT 1 ❒ INTRODUCING THE ESSAY

Structure

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Defining the 'Essay'

1.3 A Brief History of the Essay as a Literary Genre

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The 'Essay' as a literary form has existed since classical times and has undergone several evolutionary processes in subsequent times, being largely influenced by and in turn influencing contemporary cultural and artistic representations. The aim of this Unit is to take note of some of these trends.

1.2 DEFINING THE 'ESSAY'

Before we begin with the discussion of any of the essays in our syllabus, let us first understand what an essay is. It is quite a tricky task to define an essay, for it has different forms and manners, and follows almost no rules or regulations of composition. Keeping in mind the general trend, we may say as Edmund Gosse says that an essay is 'A composition of moderate length... which deals in an easy way... with the external conditions of a subject, and, in strictness, with that subject only as it affects the writer.' Hence, the essay is subjective for it reflects the writer's personal opinion regarding a particular issue. It is also not a treatise or dissertation, because it is meant for the general reader and lacks any systematic or complete exposition on the subject matter. It is also not a narrative. The essayist may use anecdotes to make his point. He may create characters to illustrate his opinions. But his chief interest is not that of story-telling. He is rather the social philosopher, the critic, the commentator.

We may divide the essay into two types: the formal and the informal. The formal essay is a knowledgeable and scholarly analysis on a given subject, which is meant for the informed reader. Examples would include serious articles published in journals or magazines addressed to a thoughtful audience. The informal or familiar or personal essay addresses the reader in an intimate tone. It deals with everyday things rather

than with public affairs or specialised topics and is written in a relaxed, self-revelatory, and sometime seven in a whimsical manner. However, it is always better to bear in mind that no literary work can be kept in any such water-tight compartments as it is suggested here by dividing the essay into two sub-genres. There can be many examples where the essay would deal with a serious topic in an easy style or with a not-so-serious topic in a formal fashion.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ESSAY AS A LITERARY GENRE

The origins of essay writing may be traced in the writings of Greek philosophers like Theophrastus and Plutarch and their Roman counterparts like Cicero and Seneca. The term essay was first used by the French writer Montaigne in his collection called *Essais* in 1580. The title means 'attempts' and it indicated Montaigne's personal opinion regarding subjects like 'Of Illness' or 'Of Sleeping'. In England, essay writing came to exist with Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Most of his essays are short discussions such as 'Of Truth', 'Of Adversity', 'Of Studies', and so on. Bacon insisted on the importance of what is known as 'scientific method', that is, the belief that knowledge could be enlarged by observation of the world, by the collecting and recording of facts, and by the induction from them of general laws. Bacon was more of a philosopher who in his works stated the belief on which the whole scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was based. His essays are dictatorial and moral in tone. His style also is epigrammatic, i.e., short sentences filled with serious thoughts. It lacks the friendly prose style which the later essayists successfully adopted. We shall notice when we read Benson's essay that he hardly mentions Bacon, for his style is entirely different from the modern essayists. However, we cannot undermine Bacon's importance in the development of a more scientific approach to life that marked the beginning of modernisation of England towards the end of the seventeenth century.

The major change in the style of essay-writing took place with the advent of the periodicals in the eighteenth century. These publications issued at regular intervals included social and moral commentary, literary and dramatic criticism, as well as short literary works. They also saw the advent of serialized stories, which Charles Dickens, among others, would later perfect. However, the most important outgrowth of the eighteenth-century periodical was the topical, or periodical, essay. Although novelist Daniel Defoe made some contributions to its evolution with his *Review of the Affairs of France* (1704-13), Addison and Steele are credited with bringing the periodical

essay to maturity. This rise of the periodical was also associated with another social development, the growth of the coffee-houses. The passion for coffee drinking increased during this time and the coffee-houses became the places where people met and exchanged ideas and it is here where the most famous periodicals of the period *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were born. *The Tatler*, which first appeared in 1709, was produced by Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) and his friend Joseph Addison (1672-1719). It contained essays and articles on all sorts of subjects, many of them pretended to be written by an imaginary character known as Isaac Bickerstaff and his equally imaginary sister, Jenny Distaff. In 1711 *The Tatler* was replaced by a new paper called *The Spectator*. This magazine ran for the next one and a half years. It was published every weekday, and still chiefly written by Addison and Steele, though there were now other contributors like Pope. The greatest achievement of Addison and Steele was the creation of a group of characters, whose personal interaction made the subject of the periodicals. These characters were typical representatives of their respective social classes, for instance, Sir Andrew Freeport was a rich businessman, Will Honeycomb was a sophisticated and fashionable young man about town, and Captain Sentry was a military man. The most famous of all, Sir Roger de Coverley was an old-fashioned country gentleman. These character-sketches became extremely popular and the style of essay writing continued to influence generations of writers to come.

The next important writer in the history of essay-writing is Charles Lamb. As we shall be reading Lamb later, it would suffice now to know that he popularised the intimate conversational style of writing. Lamb was Romantic in temperament, talking about old memories, common trivial things that make our otherwise mundane lives beautiful. Lamb's contemporary William Hazlitt (1778-1830), however, had a different take on life. His life was also fraught with sorrow, poverty and tragedy like that of Lamb, but instead of accepting them quietly and cheerfully, as Lamb did, he voiced an angry protest. His essay 'On the Pleasure of Hating' is a good example of this. Here he described how the ideals of his youth were destroyed by the hard experiences of life:

> As to my old opinions, I am heartily sick of them. I have reason, for they have deceived me sadly....Instead of patriot and friends of freedom, I see nothing but the tyrant and slave....I see folly join with knavery, and together make up public spirit and public opinions.

For the next group of writers, consisting of Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) and Matthew Arnold (1822-88), the essay was a means of serious intellectual discourse. Both these writers are well known for their scholarship. Macaulay wrote

about the lives of great men like Milton and English generals and politicians. He himself was a successful statesman. Arnold was an educationist. He criticised the materialism of upper and middle classes, calling it 'philistinism' and believed that culture was the only means of development in man. The genre of essay writing continued to portray its strain of seriousness and scholasticism in the works of later modern writers like Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) who spoke about feminist issues, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) who wrote extensively on topics related to literature, politics and religion, George Orwell (1903-50) who criticized the contemporary European practice of colonization and imperialism, and so on.

This is a rather brief and sketchy discussion on the history of essay-writing in England. One common thread that emerges in all these writers is that the essay, no matter what its content is, is something which is personal, intellectual and candid. The author might or might not want to impart education, but he must always be honest with his reader in expressing what he believes to be true.

UNIT 2 ❐ A. C BENSON: THE ART OF THE ESSAYIST

Structure

2.1 Objectives
2.2 Introduction to Arthur Christopher Benson
2.3 *The Art of the Essayist*
2.4 General Analysis
 2.4.1 The charm of personality
 2.4.2 The Essayist and the Poet
 2.4.3 The Aim of the Essayist
2.5 Summing up
2.6 Ready References
2.7 Comprehension Exercises

2.1 OBJECTIVES

With his thorough and methodical learning, Arthur Christopher Benson remains one of the seminal non-fictional writers of the English language. The aim of this Unit will be to closely study the essay 'The Art of the Esayist', which holds a very pragmatic approach to the art.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

Arthur Christopher Benson (1862-1925) was one of the most popular essayists of his time, publishing over seventy volumes of essays before his death. Educated at King's College in Cambridge he began his career as the schoolmaster at Eton and eventually became the President of Magdalene College in 1915. Apart from being an acclaimed essayist, he was also a poet, critic and historian. He influenced a great many people through his writing, teaching and administration of several schools as well as through his literary connections. He knew Queen Victoria personally and was royally commissioned to produce a number of works, including the lyrics to one of Britain's most beloved patriotic songs, *Land of Hope and Glory*. Benson's popularity declined rapidly after his death, largely due to shifts in literary fashion,

yet his body of work stands as a collection of thoughtful observations on what it means to be human and how literature can enhance the quality of life.

2.3 *THE ART OF THE ESSAYIST*

There is a pleasant story of an itinerant sign-painter who in going his rounds came to a village inn upon whose signboard he had his eye for some months and had watched with increasing hope and delight its rapid progress to blurred and faded dimness. To his horror he found a brand-new varnished sign. He surveyed it with disgust, and said to the innkeeper, who stood nervously by hoping for a professional compliment, ('This looks as if someone had been doing it himself.')

That sentence holds within it the key to the whole personal mystery of essay writing. An essay is a thing which someone does himself; and the point of the essay is not the subject, for any subject will suffice, but the charm of personality. It must concern itself with something 'jolly', as the schoolboy says, something smelt, heard, seen, perceived, invented, thought, but the essential thing is that the writer shall have formed his own mind; and the charm of the essay depends upon the charm of the mind that has conceived and recorded the impression. It will be seen, then, that the essay need not concern itself with anything definite; it need not have an intellectual or a philosophical or a religious or a humorous motif; but equally none of these subjects are ruled out. The only thing necessary is that the thing or the thought should be vividly apprehended, enjoyed, felt to be beautiful, and expressed with a certain gusto. It need conform to no particular rules. All literature answers to something in life, some habitual form of human expression. The stage imitates life, calling in the services of the eye and the ear; there is the narrative of the teller of tales or the minstrel; the song, the letter, the talk—all forms of human expression and communication have their antitypes in literature. (The essay is the reverie, the frame of mind in which a man says, in the words of the old song, 'Says I to myself, says I'

It is generally supposed that Montaigne is the first writer who wrote what may technically be called essays. His pieces are partly autobiographical, partly speculative, and to a great extent ethical. But the roots of his writing lie far back in literary history. He owed a great part of his inspiration to Cicero, who treated of abstract topics in a conversational way with a romantic back-ground; and this he owed to Plato, whose dialogues undoubtedly contain the germ of both the novel and the essay. Plato is in truth far more the forerunner of the novelist than of the

philosopher. He made a background of life, he peopled his scenes with bright boys and amiable elders-oh that all scenes were so peopled! – and he discussed ethical and speculative problems of life and character with a vital rather than with a philosophical interest. Plato's dialogues would be essays but for the fact that they have a dramatic colouring, while the essence of the essay is soliloquy. But in the writings of Cicero, such as the *De Senectute,* the dramatic interest is but slight, and the whole thing approaches far more nearly to the essay than to the novel. Probably Cicero supplied to his readers the function both of the essayist and the preacher, and fed the needs of so-called thoughtful readers by dallying, in a fashion which it is hardly unjust to call twaddling, with familiar ethical problems of conduct and character. The charm of Montaigne is the charm of personality-frankness, gusto, acute observation, lively acquaintance with men and manners. He is ashamed of recording nothing that interested him; and a certain discreet shamelessness must always be the characteristic of the essayist, for the essence of his art is to say what has pleased him without too prudently considering whether it is worthy of the attention of the well-informed mind.

I doubt if the English temperament is wholly favourable to the development of the essayist. In the first place, an Anglo-Saxon likes doing things better than thinking about them; and in his memories, he is apt to recall how a thing was done rather than why it was done. In the next place, we are naturally rather prudent and secretive; we say that is just what the essayist must do. We have a horror of giving ourselves away, and we like to keep ourselves to ourselves. 'The Englishman's home is his castle', says another proverb. But the essayist must not have a castle, or if he does, both the grounds and the living-rooms must be open to the inspection of the public.

Lord Brougham, who revelled in advertisement, used to allow his house to be seen by visitors, and the butler had orders that if a party of people came to see the house, Lord Brougham was to be informed of the fact. He used to hurry to the library and take up a book, in order that the tourists might nudge each other and say in whispers, 'There is the Lord Chancellor'. That is the right frame of mind for the essayist. He may enjoy privacy, but he is no less delighted that people should see him enjoying it.

The essay has taken very various forms in England. Sir Thomas Browne, in such books as *Religio Medici* and *Urn-Burial*, wrote essays of an elaborate rhetorical style, the long fine sentences winding themselves out in delicate weft-like trails of smoke on a still air, hanging in translucent veils. Addison, in the *Spectator,*

treated with delicate humour of life and its problems, and created what was practically a new form in the essay of emotional sentiment evoked by solemn scenes and fine associations. Charles lamb treated romantically the homeliest stuff of life, and showed how the simplest and commonest experiences were rich in emotion and humour. The beauty and dignity of common life were his theme. De Quincey wrote what may be called impassioned autobiography, and brought to his task a magical control of long-drawn and musical cadences. And then we come to such a writer as Pater, who used the essay for the expression of exquisite artistic sensation. These are only a few instances of the way in which the essay has been used in English literature. But the essence is throughout the same; it is personal sensation, personal impression, evoked by something strange or beautiful or curious or interesting or amusing. It has thus a good deal in common with the art of the lyrical poet and the writer of sonnets, but it has all the freedom of prose, its more extended range, its use of less strictly poetical effects, such as humour in particular. Humour is alien to poetical effect because poetry demands a certain sacredness and solemnity of mood. The poet is emotional in a reverential way; he is thrilled, he loves, he worships, he sorrows; but it is all essentially grave, because he wishes to recognize the sublime and uplifted elements of life; he wishes to free himself from all discordant, absurd, fantastic, undignified contrasts, as he would extrude laughter and chatter and comfortable ease from some stately act of ceremonial worship. It is quite true that the essayist has a full right to such a mood if he chooses, and such essays as Pater's are all conceived in a sort of rapture of holiness, in a region from which all that is common and homely is carefully fenced out. But the essayist may have a larger range, and the strength of a writer like Charles Lamb is that he condescends to use the very commonest materials, and transfigures the simplest experiences with a fairy-like delicacy and a romantic glow. A poet who has far more in common with the range of the essayist is Robert Browning, and there are many of his poems, though not perhaps his best, where his frank amassing of grotesque detail, his desire to include rather than exclude the homelier sorts of emotion, his robust and not very humorous humour, make him an impressionist rather than a lyrist. As literature develops, the distinction between poetry and prose will no doubt become harder to maintain. Coleridge said in a very fruitful maxim: 'The opposite of poetry is not prose but science; the opposite of prose is not poetry but verse.' That is to say, poetry has as its object the kindling of emotion, and science is its opposite, because science is the dispassionate statement of fact; but prose can equally be used as a vehicle for the kindling of emotion, and therefore may be

in its essence poetical: but when it is a technical description of a certain kind of structure its opposite is verse—that is to say, language arranged in metrical and rhythmical form. We shall probably come to think that the essayist is more of poet than the writer of epics, and that the divisions of literature will tend to be on the one hand the art of clear and logical statement, and on the other the art of emotional and imaginative expression.

We must remember in all this that the nomenclature of literature, the attempt to classify the forms of literary expression, is a confusing and a bewildering thing unless it is used merely for convenience. It is the merest pedantry to say that literature must conform to established usages and types. The essence of it is that it is large force flowing in any channel that it can, and the classification of art is a mere classification of channels. What lies behind all art is the principle of wonder and of arrested attention. It need not be only the sense of beauty; it may be sense of fitness, of strangeness, of completeness, of effective effort. The amazement of the savage at the sight of a civilized town is not the sense of beauty, it is the sense of force, of mysterious resources, of incredible products, of things unintelligibly and even magically made; and then, too, there is the instinct for perceiving all that is grotesque, absurd, amusing and jocose, which one sees exhibited in children at the sight of the parrot's crafty and solemn eye and his exaggerated imitation of human speech, at the unusual dress and demeanour of the clown, at the grotesque simulation by the gnarled and contorted tree of something human or reptile. And then, too, there is the strange property in human beings which makes disaster amusing, if its effects are not prejudicial to oneself; that sense which makes the waiter on the pantomime stage, who falls headlong with a tray of crockery, an object to provoke the loudest and most spontaneous mirth of which the ordinary human being is capable. The moralist who would be sympathetically shocked at the rueful abrasions of the waiter, or mournful over the waste of human skill and endeavour involved in the breakage, would be felt by all human beings to have something priggish in his composition and to be too good, as they say, to live.

It is with these rudimentary and inexplicable emotions that the essayist may concern himself, even though the poet be forbidden to do so; and the appeal of the essayist to the world at large will depend upon the extent to which he experiences some common emotion, sees it in all its bearings, catches the salient features of the scene, and records it in vivid and impressive speech.

The essayist is therefore to a certain bound to be a spectator of life; he must

be like the man in Browning's fine poem, 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' who walked about, took note of everything, looked at the new house building, poked his stick into the mortar.

> He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
> The man who slices lemons into drink,
> The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
> That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
> He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
> And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
> And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
> He took such cognizance of men and things,
> If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;
> If any cursed a woman, he took note;
> Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,
> And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
> He seemed to know you and expect as much.

That is the essayist's material; he may choose the scene, he may select the sort of life he is interested in, whether it is the street or the countryside or the sea-beach or the picture-gallery; but once there, wherever he may be, he must devote himself to seeing and realizing and getting it all by heart. The writer must not be too much interested in the action and conduct of life. If he is a politician, or a soldier, or an emperor, or a plough-boy or a thief, and is absorbed in what he is doing, with a vital anxiety to make profit or position or influence out of it; if he hates his opponents and rewards his friends; if he condemns despises disapproves, he at once forfeits sympathy and largeness of view. He must believe with all his might in the interest of what he enjoys, to the extent at all events of believing it worth recording and representing, but he must not believe too solemnly or urgently in the importance and necessity of any one sort of business or occupation. The eminent banker, the social reformer, the forensic pleader, the fanatic, the crank, the puritan – these are not the stuff out of which the essayist is made; he may have ethical preferences, but he must not indulge in moral indignation; he must be essentially tolerant, and he must discern quality rather than solidity. He must be concerned with the pageant of life, as it weaves itself with a moving tapestry of scenes and figures rather than with the aims and purposes of life. He must, in fact, be preoccupied with things as they appear, rather than with their significance or their ethical example.

I have little doubt in my own mind that the charm of the familiar essayist depends upon his power of giving the sense of a good-humoured, gracious and reasonable personality and establishing a sort of pleasant friendship with his reader. One does not go to an essayist with a desire for information, or with an expectation of finding a clear statement of a complicated subject; that is not the mood in which one takes up a volume of essays. What one rather expects to find is a companionable treatment of that vast mass of little problems and floating ideas which are aroused and evoked by our passage through the world, our daily employment, our leisure hours, our amusements and diversions, and above all by our relations with other people-all the unexpected, inconsistent, various simple stuff of life; the essayist ought to be able to import a certain beauty and order into it, to delineate, let us say, the vague emotions aroused in solitude or in company by the sight of scenery, the aspect of towns, the impressions of art and books, the interplay of human qualities and characteristics, the half-formed hopes and desires and fears and joys that form so large a part of our daily thoughts. The essayist ought to be able to indicate a case or a problem that is apt to occur in ordinary life and suggest the theory of it, to guess what it is that makes our moods resolute or fitful, why we act consistently or inconsistently, what it is that repels or attracts us in our dealings with other people, what our private fancies are. The good essayist is the man who makes a reader say: 'Well, I have often thought all those things, but I never discerned before any connexion between them, nor got so far as to put them into words.' And thus the essayist must have a great and far-reaching curiosity; he must be interested rather than displeased by the differences of human beings and by their varied theories. He must recognize the fact that most people's convictions are not the result of reason, but a mass of associations, traditions, things half-understood, phrases, examples, loyalties, whims. He must care more about the inconsistency of humanity than about its dignity; and he must study more what people actually do think about than what they ought to think about. He must not be ashamed of human weaknesses or shocked by them, and still less disgusted by them; but at the same time he must keep in mind the flashes of fine idealism, the passionate visions, the irresponsible humours, the salient peculiarities, that shoot like sunrays through the dull cloudiness of so many human minds and make one realize that humanity is at once above itself and in itself, and that we are greater than we know; for the interest of the world to the ardent student of it is that we most of us seem to have got hold of something that is bigger than we quite know how to deal with; some thing remote and far off, which we have seen in a distant vision, which we cannot

always remember or keep clear in our minds. The supreme fact of human nature is its duality, its tendency to pull different ways, the tug-of-war between Devil and Baker which lies inside our restless brains. And the confessed aim of the essayist is to make people interested in life and in themselves and in the part they can take in life; and he does that best if he convinces men and women that life is a fine sort of a game, in which they can take a hand; and that every existence, however confined or restricted, is full of outlets and living channels, and that the interest and joy of it is not confined to the politician or the millionaire, but is pretty fairly distributed, so long as one has time to attend to it, and is not preoccupied in some concrete aim or vulgar ambition.

Because the great secret which the true essayist whispers in our ears is that the worth of experience is not measured by what is called success, but rather resides in a fullness of life: that success tends rather to obscure and to diminish experience, and that we may miss the point of life by being too important, and that the end of it all is the degree in which we give rather than receive.

The poet perhaps is the man who sees the greatness of life best, because he lives most in its beauty and fineness. But my point is that the essayist is really a lesser kind of poet, working in simpler and humbler materials, more in the glow of life perhaps than in the glory of it, and not finding anything common or unclean.

The essayist is the opposite of the romancer, because his one and continuous aim is to keep the homely materials in view; to face actual conditions, not to fly from them. We think meanly of life if we believe that it has no sublime moments; but we think sentimentally of it if we believe that it has nothing but sublime moments. The essayist wants to hold the balance; and if he is apt to neglect the sublimities of life, it is because he is apt to think that they can take care of themselves; and that if there is the joy of adventure, the thrill of the start in the fresh air of the morning, the rapture of ardent companionship, the gladness of the arrival, yet there must be long spaces in between, when the pilgrim jogs steadily along, and seems to come no nearer to the spire on the horizon or the shining embanked cloudland of the West. He has nothing then but his own thoughts to help him, unless he is alert to see what is happening in hedgerow and copse, and the work of the essayist is to make something rich and strange of those seemingly monotonous spaces, those lengths of level road.

Is, then, the Essay in literature a thing which simply stands outside classification, like Argon among the elements, of which the only thing which can be predicated is that it is there? Or like Justice in Plato's *Republic* a thing which the talkers set

out to define, and which ends by being the one thing left in a state when the definable qualities are taken away? No, it is not that. It is rather like what is called an organ prelude, a little piece with a theme, not very strict perhaps in form, but which can be fancifully treated, modulated from, and coloured at will It is a little criticism of life at some one point clearly enough defined.

We may follow any mood, we may look at life in fifty different ways – the only thing we must not do is to despise or deride, out of ignorance or prejudice, the influences which affect others; because the essence of all experience is that we should perceive something which we do not begin by knowing, and learn that life has a fullness and a richness in all sorts of diverse ways which we do not at first even dream of suspecting.

The essayist, then, is in his particular fashion an interpreter of life, a critic of life. He does not see life as the historian, or as the philosopher, or as the poet, or as the novelist, and yet he has a touch of all these. He is not concerned with discovering a theory of it all, or fitting the various parts of it into each other. He works rather on what is called the analytic method, observing, recording; interpreting, just as things strike him, and letting his fancy play over their beauty and significance; the end of it all being this: that he is deeply concerned with the charm and quality of things, and desires to put it all in the clearest and gentlest light, so that at least he may make others love life a little better, and prepare them for its infinite variety and alike for its joyful and mournful surprises.

TEXTUAL NOTES

gusto: a term of literary criticism first popularized by Hazlitt. It suggests that personal enjoyment or taste which is the fruit of long-sustained acquaintance with the best in literature.

Montaigne: a Frenchman (1533-92). His Essais have been translated into several European Languages.

Cicero: a celebrated Roman Lawyer and man of letters. He is best known for his rhetorical prose. His manner was widely imitated in the Middle Ages. He lived from 106 B.C.to 43B.C.

Plato: one of the greatest and the most original of the Greek philosophers.

De Senectute: one of Cicero's famous 'Essays'.

Lord Brougham (pronounce Broom), (1778-1868) : he professed an almost incredible variety of subjects. A contemporary remarked of him once, 'There goes Solon, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Archimedes, Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Chesterfield, and a great many more in one post-chaise.'

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-82) : a famous prose writer of the century. His mind was a curious blend of the scientific and the mystical. His style is characterised by whimsical turns of thought, expressed often in the most magnificent musical prose.

Pater : Walter Pater (1839-94) : Prose writer and art critic; he is known for his delicate touch and fineness of style.

Robert Browning (1812-89): one of the major English poets. He was possessed of great gifts both as a poet and dramatic artist. He is sometimes censured for the obscurity and harshness of some of his work, but his powerful individual genius atones for such apparent defects.

Coleridge (1772-1834): a great poet and the greatest nineteenth century literary critic. His influence on Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement was profound.

the principle of wonder: Watts-Dunton, a critic of the last century, described the Romantic Revival of the nineteenth century as the 'Renaissance of Wonder'.

pantomime: a dramatic performance in which the actors use only, or chiefly, 'dumb show'.

priggish: narrow and self-centred. This word is very difficult of definition. A prig is one who is easily satisfied with his own mental or spiritual attainments. He always makes an obvious or unexpressed comparison of himself with others, always to his own advantage and glorification.

'He stood and watched . . ': the description which Benson applies to an essayist was written of a poet. 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' begins:

I only knew one poet in my life:

And this, or something like it, was his way.

Winch: the crank or handle for turning an axle.

the tug-of-war between Devil and Baker: 'pull devil, pull baker' is a proverbial expression in English.

the joy of adventure, ... : mark the metaphor that follows.

Argon: much more about this colourless, odourless gas is known than the essayist implies. It is, for instance, used to fill electric lamps.

2.4 GENERAL ANALYSIS

The **'Art of the Essayist'** reflects Benson's erudition and close knowledge of the style and writings of the masters of essay writing. This essay was published in 1922. Here Benson theorizes on the style that an essayist may adopt to write a good essay.

Hence the subject matter is serious and literary, and the style, in keeping with the content, is quaint and elegant. Here the readers may encounter a problem as the essay at the outset appears to be unyieldingly long and the language somewhat removed from that which we find in common usage yet a closer examination would reveal that Benson follows a logical and orderly style. He makes a statement and then validates it with a set of examples. In this context we must also remember that this essay would have been classified as an article for its scholarship and seriousness of subject-matter. Yet Benson's personal touch and subjective approach make the serious literary discussion as interesting as it can get. . He makes several points in the essay. To make our reading smoother we shall divide the essay into the following thematic sections:

2.4.1 The charm of personality

The first and the most important point on which this essay or Benson's theory is based is presented at the very beginning of the essay. It is the 'charm of the personality'. Benson begins in an indirect way—with an anecdote (an anecdote is a short and amusing account of something that has happened). He narrates the story of a travelling sign-painter who was going on his usual round through the villages. He had his eye on a particular sign which was getting blurred. But one day he finds that the sign was already re-painted. When the keeper asked for his opinion on the new sign, he replied in a disgusted tone that it looked like as if 'someone had been doing it himself.'

The keywords in this phrase are: 'doing it himself'. Perhaps the painter meant that the sign was poorly done but what appeals to Benson in this statement is that it emphasizes the charm of personality, that is, the artist had followed no set of rules. It is rather done in a very personal, offhand or relaxed manner, which is uninhibited by any custom or practice. Similarly, the essayist must think about the subject, approve of it, and then express it with his or her own inimitable style. The essay is not about the subject but rather about the essayist and his opinion on the subject. For that matter any subject would suffice; what is required is the personal touch. Benson further suggests that every art form imitates certain aspects or activities of human life. For instance, the drama imitates human interaction, poetry communicates human emotions. In this sense the essay resembles a reverie (a reverie is a state of imagining or thinking about pleasant things, as if one is dreaming). Benson gives the examples of three important classical essayists: Plato, Cicero and Montaigne to explain the concept of the charm of personality. He traces the beginnings of essay writing in Cicero, for Plato is—according to him—more a forerunner of a novelist. He finds Montaigne's style of writing the most suitable for essay writing. To quote him: 'The charm of Montaigne is the charm of personality—frankness, gusto, acute observation, lively

acquaintance with men and manners.' This also provides a definition of the phrase 'charm of personality'. The essayist should not be ashamed of recording anything that interests him, or leave out anything because it is trivial. This 'discreet shamelessness' is his greatest virtue and the fact is attested by Montaigne's writings. In this context, we also find another anecdote of Lord Brougham (pronounced BROOM) in the following section. It is told that this aristocrat wanted people, visiting his house, to see him deeply engrossed in a book in his study. He did not enjoy his privacy rather he enjoyed the fact that he could make a show of his privacy. Such is the open-mindedness of the essayist. They like to share their private thoughts and beliefs with others not for the sake of making a moral statement but just for the sake of enjoyment. Benson sadly comments that the case of Lord Brougham is an exceptional one, for usually an Englishman's home is a fortress. They are a bit too reserved to be good essayists. They do not wear their heart on their sleeves. They are also more inclined to act than to think. Such a temperament does not make a successful essayist. Elsewhere Benson has reflected that this practice of giving privilege to action over contemplation or highlighting achievement over intellectual and emotional development limits the scope of effective education also. As an educationist he had strong opinions against this trend of society.

2.4.2 The essayist and the poet

We now move on to the next section where the essay is studied as a literary genre and compared with the other types of composition. Since the essay is personal or subjective interpretation of a theme it can be compared with a lyric. Both record 'the personal sensation, personal impression, evoked by something strange or beautiful or curious or interesting or amusing.' We may wonder how something written in prose can be compared with something written in verse. To solve this puzzle Benson refers to the statement made by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*: 'The opposite of poetry is not prose but science; the opposite of prose is not poetry but verse.' Thus poetry is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions, science is a dispassionate statement of fact; whereas verse is a metrical form and prose a free composition. As literature progresses the distinction between poetry and prose gets blurred. Both may record the emotions. If we read Lamb's essays we would find them as 'poetic' as any poem. On the other hand Browning's portrayal of a poet in his poem 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' is strangely similar to the portrayal of the essayist made by Benson in this essay.

However, there is a major difference in the temperament of the essayist and that of the poet. The poet cannot use humour. He expresses the different shades of human emotions

with a certain solemnity of mood, what Benson describes as a 'ceremonial worship'. He immediately qualifies this statement by citing the example of Lamb and Pater who have adopted this mood of transcendence, but this is a matter of choice for a few essayists. It is not mandatory for them to maintain this seriousness of attitude. The essayist has the freedom to choose from a wide range of subjects and treat them in any way suitable for his style while the poet must free himself from all 'discordant, absurd, fantastic, undignified contrasts' that may evoke 'laughter and chatter'. (However, as modern readers we know that a poet might use all these absurdities, contrasts, laughter etc, as the modernists or postmodernist poets have done, but Benson had no chance of knowing about these later developments in literature. His discussion is thus limited to the Classical, Romantic and Victorian writers.)

2.4.3 The Aim of the essayist

So far we have read about Benson's opinion on the personality of the essayist and his choice of subject. Now we shall discuss his take on the aims and objectives of an essayist. This is the most reflective section of the essay.

Like any other artist the principal aim of the essayist is to arouse our sense of wonder. The word 'wonder' is not used in an aesthetic or metaphysical sense that a Romantic poet like Wordsworth would have preferred—a sense of amazement at a spectacle of beauty that would result in a sense of calm and bliss. Here the word wonder connotes a certain zest for life. Benson uses several such instances where this sense of wonder is created: the savage looking at a civilized town; children listening to the parrot mimicking human language; the dress of a clown; a twisted tree that resembles a human shape; and the pantomime stage where the actor falls headlong with a tray full of crockery. In all these examples the amazement is not caused by something grand or magnificent but at things trivial and mundane, things that happen every day around us. The good essayist would be able to capture these moments and probe into the essential beauty of human life.

It therefore follows that the essayist is not a moralist. He is not going to suggest what is good or bad. He is a spectator of life—looking at things as they appear without theorizing on their ethical or moral significations . He is a friend to the reader, he confides in them, but never condemns or disapproves of them. Benson clarifies why an essayist should not be a moralist: firstly, we do not go to an essayist for suggestions for moral dilemmas. Secondly, everyman is a bundle of contradictions, he is torn between good and evil, and the essayist must be able to appreciate that fact. He must realize that a common man does not make any judgement out of some logical or reasonable understanding of

things. He is whimsical and erratic and mostly acts out of ignorance or lack of proper understanding of his customs, or traditions. The essayist must not be ashamed of revealing this human weakness. Rather, he may focus on the fact that in spite of all these inequities man sometime rises above his expected level of mediocrity and reflects his uniqueness. Such moments of glory furnish the essayist with his topics.

Hence, the temperament of the essayist is not serious. Anybody deeply attached to any particular set of beliefs, like a banker or a reformer or a puritan can never be a good essayist. Because, the moment they despise their fellow human beings for lack of intellect, or on grounds of perpetrating social injustice, they lose the 'largeness of view' of human life that is so essential for an essayist. Once again the essayist is not a romancer (a romancer is someone, who tries to evade reality by finding a refuge in a world of make-belief). He does not escape from the real because it is harsh or ugly. He dwells in the mundane and trivial creating a balance between the expectation and fulfilment in human life and prepares us to face life in all its joyful and mournful surprises.

Benson finally clinches the argument by comparing the essay with the inert gas Argon. Just as the gas could not be classified with other physical elements, similarly the essay can also not be grouped with any other genre. It is set apart for its style: it follows no rule, adopts no fixed format. It is also like an organ prelude, a little piece with a theme, which cannot be restricted to any format, which depends on the composer's imagination. So is the essayist. He speaks about the commonest things of life. We read him and wonder 'Well, I have often thought all these things, but I never discerned before any connection between them, nor got so far as to put them into words.' It is his charm that makes the slightest of details reveal the greatest of all secrets—the secret of life.

2.5 SUMMING UP

Now that we have finished reading the essay, let us note a few interesting points regarding his style. However, the list is not exhaustive, you may add to it.

- Benson's standpoint is Romantic. He sees the essay as an expression of personal sentiments and observations. The mind of the essayist is of paramount interest to him. He is not looking for social or moral truths.
- Benson does not believe in the didacticism of literature, i.e., art must reveal some essential truth. He is an aesthete, who loves beauty for its own sake. This is why he clarifies that the essay has got no moral function. However, that must not mean that he supports immorality, but it is only that literature

must not be used for the sole purpose of teaching or preaching, it should also be viewed as a medium of entertainment.

- Benson is also a humanist. For him man is the measure of all things. The tolerance that the essayist must have towards human inequities comes from the fact that he believes more in the essential goodness of man than in the social customs and traditions. A word on the role of the Renaissance in fostering this Humanism??
- The topic that Benson has chosen is definitely a serious one. He alleviates or tones down the severity in two ways, firstly, through the analogies and examples (note how he describes the essayist as a pilgrim who in the course of a long and monotonous journey enlivens his mind by looking at strange things happening on the side of the road, or how he compares the essay with an organ prelude, or Justice in Pope's Republic and the Argon gas) Secondly, through his sense of humour He narrates interesting anecdotes and makes witty comments.
- Benson's language is a bit different from what we usually read in modern times. He follows the style of the old masters, preferring long sentences, polysyllabic words (i.e., words with more than on syllable; a syllable is the unit of pronunciation usually having one vowel sound often with a consonant or consonants before and after it; eg: in-fer-no, wa-ter, pro-so-dy, and so on) and ornate expressions. This style of writing is no longer in vogue. Yet, we cannot deny Benson's charm of personality. He maintains a friendly tone, as if he is speaking to his readers.

2.6 READY REFERENCES

In the course of the essay Benson has referred to many writers. Here we shall read about them and try to understand why Benson refers to them in the essay.

Plato (428-347 B.C.E.): The great Greek philosopher. He was the pupil of Socrates. Throughout the later period of his life he was occupied with the composition of the *Dialogues*. The dialogues embody his philosophical thoughts which are influenced by Socrates' teachings and the philosophy of Pythagoras. The central concept is the existence of a world of ideas, divine types or forms of material objects. These ideas are real and permanent, while individual material things are their ephemeral and imperfect imitations. Of this ideal world the form of good is the brightest and highest form of perfection.

The Dialogues derive their name from the fact that they are written as dialogues between Socrates and his disciples. The principal dialogues are: 'Phaedo', 'Sophist', 'Republic', 'Symposium', etc.

Benson believes that Plato's style is dramatic while the essay is a soliloquy in its essence, therefore, he does not consider Plato as the forerunner of essayists.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 B.C.E.): Sometimes referred to in English Literature as Tully. After studying law and philosophy he became a pleader and was also an important political figure of his time. His works consist of writings on the art of rhetoric (of which 'De Oratore' is the chief); on political philosophy ('De Legibus' and 'De Republica'); on moral philosophy ('De Senectute', 'De Amicitia'); and on theology ('De Natura Deorum'). His letters to his friend Atticus are also well-known.

In 'De Senectute' or 'On Old Age' was written by Cicero in 44 BC on the subject of aging and death. It has remained popular because of its profound subject matter as well as its clear and beautiful language. The essay is composed as a dialogue taking place between the esteemed Cato the Elder (a well-known Roman statesman of ancient times) and Scipio Africanus (politician of ancient Rome) and Gaius Laelius Sapiens (Roman statesman).

Benson finds him a bit didactic. His style is that of a novelist giving more importance to the background, creating an ambience to discuss his topic.

Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de (1533-92): French writer and author of the famous *Essais*, which was first translated into English in the year 1603 by Florio. Later many other translations were made. The essays reveal the author as a man of insatiable intellectual curiosity, kind and sagacious, condemning pedantry and lying, but tolerant of an easy morality. The general conclusion of the essays is the recognition of the fallibility of the human reason and the relativity of human science.

Benson prefers him and points him to be the initiator of this genre.

Pater, Walter Horatio (1839-94): Essayist and critic. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury and Queen's College, Oxford. In the 1960s and 70s he began publishing articles on literature, philosophy and the fine arts in the upcoming journals of the time, but it was his *Studies in the History of Renaissance* (1873) that secured his reputation. His other important publications include *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), *Appreciations with an Essay on Style* (1889), etc. In his works Pater emphasized on the appreciation of beauty in this ephemeral world. This realization of the brevity of human life adds a melancholy note to his writings. He is also well known for his stylized prose and remains a salient figure in the Aesthetic

Movement of 1880s that stirred the Victorian belief in utilitarianism and morality of art, and created the credo of art for art's sake.

Browne, Sir Thomas (1605-82): Scientific and religious writer. He studies medicine at Montpellier, Padua and Leyden and qualified as a doctor. He was knighted by King Charles II. Browne was the author of several prose tracts which are characterized by his intelligence and liveliness of expression. His well-known work is Religio Medici (an examination of his religious beliefs) that was published in 1642. It was followed by other important works like Vulgar Errors (1646), Urn Burial (1658), Certain Miscellany Tracts (1684), Christian Morals (1716), etc. His mind was a curious blend of the scientific and the mystical.

Addison, Joseph (1672-1719): Well-known English essayist. He was educated at Charterhouse (where he met Richard Steele, his lifelong friend) and Magdalen College, Oxford. He was a diplomat and Whig supporter and his career rose and fell with the political changes of the time. After losing his office as the Chief Secretary to Lord Wharton in Ireland due to the fall of the Whig government, he returned to England in 1710. In the same year his friend Steele commenced *The Tatler*, to which Addison soon became a frequent contributor. From 1711 to 1712 Addison contributed to *The Spectator*, the most popular English periodical. He was the animating spirit of the magazine, and wrote exquisite essays and criticisms. He also left an unfinished work on *The Evidences of the Christian Religion.*

But the most delightful and original of all his productions, is that series of character sketches in *The Spectator* of which Sir Roger de Coverly is the chief one. Sir Roger is an English squire of Queen Anne's reign. He exemplifies the values of an old country gentleman, and was portrayed as lovable but somewhat ridiculous ('rather beloved than esteemed'). He is a conservative, yet his Tory politics is harmless and a bit silly. This characterization reflects the vividness of Addison's imagination, his gay and cheerful spirit of humour, the keen, shrewd observation. He added a sense of delicacy to English sentiment, and modesty to English wit with his dignified composition.

De Quincey, Thomas (1785-1859): He was educated at Manchester Grammar School and later at Worcester College, Oxford, but took no degree. He was one of the early members of the staff of 'Blackwood's Magazine', for which he wrote the 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater' and 'On Murder as One of the Fine Arts'. He wrote a great deal of essays on various topics, translated a German novel. Mention

should also be made of his 'Autobiographical Sketches', his articles on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and others. He wrote an ornate prose, marked by splendid imagery and humour.

Browning, Robert (1812-89): a well-known poet of the Victorian era. He was privately educated. He popularized a genre of poetry, known as dramatic monologue, in which the entire poem is presented as a monologue uttered by a speaker to a listener/auditor, whose reaction is noted by the speaker himself. His works include *Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, *Ring and the Book*, *Men and Women*, etc.

In the essay Benson has mentioned his poem 'How It Strikes a Contemporary'. It is a long poem of some 115 odd lines. It presents a portrait of the poet made by gossiping public of his day. It is humorously coloured by the alien point of view of the speaker, who suspects without understanding either the greatness of the poet's spiritual personality or his mission. He also fails to understand the nature of his life, which is withdrawn from that of the commonality, and yet the poet is full of sympathy for the common man.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834): a great poet and critic of the nineteenth century. Together with Wordsworth he heralded the beginnings of the Romantic movement in English literature. Their *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, is seen as the first definitive publication of this movement. The book contained two famous poems by Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'. Coleridge's Romanticism was quite different from Wordsworth's. He created a supernatural world of fantasy in his poems and believed in the 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of the reader that would enable him/her to enter this imaginary world and see into the 'life of things'. He wrote ballads, the finest of them is 'Christabel', though it was never finished. Apart from poetry Coleridge did valuable work in literary criticism, maintaining that the true end of poetry is to give pleasure through the medium of beauty. His *Biographia Literaria* contained discussion of philosophy by Kant and Schelling, and the criticism of Wordsworth's poetry.

2.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Questions

1. What are the essential qualities of a successful essayist as illustrated in 'The Art of the Essayist'?
2. Critically examine Benson's view that 'the point of the essay is not the subject, for any

subject would suffice, but the charm of the personality'.

Semi-Long Questions

1. Why does Benson call the essayist a 'lesser kind of a poet' in 'The Art of the Essayist'?
2. How does Benson explain that the essayist is both a critic and spectator of life in his essay 'The Art of the Essayist'?
3. What are the aims of a successful essayist?

Short Questions

1. Who is Montaigne? What are the charms of his essays?
2. What is the basic difference between prose and poetry?
3. Why does Benson say that the English temperament is not wholly favourable for becoming a good essayist?
4. Why does Benson narrate the anecdote of Lord Brougham?

UNIT 3 ❒ CHARLES LAMB: 'DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE'

Structure

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introduction to Charles Lamb

3.3 Essays of Elia

3.4 Lamb as a Romantic

3.5 ***Dream Children: A Reverie***

3.6 The Analysis of the Text

3.7 Characteristics of Lamb's style

3.8 Ready References

3.9 Comprehension Exercises

3.1 OBJECTIVES

Charles Lamb, the foremost among the essayists of the Romantic period, gave an all new personal touch to the Essay. This Unit aims at a study of some of the characteristic features of Lamb's non-fictional art. The essay 'Dream Children: A Reverie' has been taken up for detailed study.

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO CHARLES LAMB

We have read in Benson that as literature develops the distinction between poetry and prose becomes hard to maintain. Echoing Coleridge's argument Benson has held that there is as such no difference between the two genres except in their form and structure of composition. The English writer for whom this dictum holds the greatest truth is perhaps Charles Lamb. In fact Benson also had Lamb's essays in his mind when he made this comment for it is in his essays we find the same flight of imagination, abundance of imagery and sweetness of language that make the prose akin to poetry.

'Charles Lamb, born in the Inner Temple, 10th February, 1775; educated at Christ's Hospital; afterwards a clerk in the Accountant's Office, East India House; pensioned

off from that service, 1825, after thirty-three years' service; is now a gentleman at large; can remember few specialities in life worth nothing, except that he once caught a swallow flying' This is how Lamb summarised his life in the 'Autobiography' that was published in a London magazine almost as an obituary four months after he died. He also made a list of his works in 'Autobiography': a tale in prose *Rosamund Gray;* a dramatic sketch named *John Woodvil*; a 'Farewell to Tobacco' with sundry other poems, a light prose matter 'pompously christened his works, though in fact they were his recreations; *Essays of Elia* (which fetched him recognition); *Specimens of English Dramatic Writers who lived about the Time of Shakespeare*.

Significance of the 'Autobiography' lies not in what it says, for it says almost nothing about the influence that Lamb had on the development of the genre of essay writing in English literature; but rather in what it hides. It hides the pathetic tale of his life, the thousand slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune that failed to take away his sense of humour, his goodness and honesty. It is, however, characteristic of Lamb's writing, for though he shares the intimate details of his life with his readers, he twists and turns and simulates reality in such a way that it becomes hard to separate it from fantasy that colours a Romantic mind.

To grow as an informed reader and to understand Lamb better we need to know a few grim details of his life. He was the seventh and youngest child of his parents and it was only his brother James (born 1763) and sister Mary (born 1764) who survived childhood. Poverty forced him to leave his studies in 1789 and find employment first at South Sea House and later at East India Company. During this time he spent his holidays at Blakesware, in Hertfordshire, where his maternal grandmother Mrs Field worked as a housekeeper to the Plumer family. During one such visit he came to know Ann Simmons, with whom he fell in love but the relationship never matured. Ann Simmons is represented as Alice Winterton in his Essays and as Anna in his poems. Both his grandmother and Ann features in the essay that we are about to read. In 1796 he suffered the first attack of madness and many biographers think that it is because of this illness that the courtship came to an end.

His personal life continued to worsen. His parents were ill and his brother James lived separately in a comfortable lifestyle. His sister Mary was the one who took care of his parents and perhaps the hardship of such a life coupled with the hereditary weakness resulted in mental derangement. On 22 September 1796 in one such violent fit of insanity she killed her mother, wounded her father. This terrible shock strengthened Charles Lamb but his sister continued to suffer attacks of madness throughout her life. In spite of that Lamb took the responsibility of his sister formally (he appealed to the court) and his brother who wanted her to remain in the asylum left the whole cost

of her support to Charles. Uncomplaining, Charles devoted his life to his sister's care but never uttered anything against his brother in his portrayal of him in his essays.

This extended biographical note would convey to us Lamb's genial temper and his good humour. Even after he had been confined for madness he wrote to Coleridge, his closest and life-long friend: 'I am got somewhat rational now and don't bite anyone'. He referred to him and his sister as 'shorn Lambs'. His essays are marked by the same tolerance and patience, his humour is essentially self-reflexive, he seldom moralises and never disapproves of human weakness—marks of a great essayist, if you remember what Benson said.

3.3 ESSAYS OF ELIA

Lamb did not begin his literary career as an essayist. He began as a poet, contributing to volumes published by Coleridge, tried his hand at the drama and the novel. At the age of forty-five he found his true vocation—that of essay writing. The first of the essays made their appearance in London Magazine in August 1820 under the pen-name Elia. In his 'Autobiography' he wrote: 'He is also the true Elia, whose essays are extant in a little volume, published a year or two since, and rather better known from that name without a meaning than from anything he has done, or can hope to do, in his own name.' Many critics believe that Elia is anagrammatic of 'a lie'. (An anagram is a word or phrase formed by changing the order of the letters in another word or phrase. For example, 'triangle' is the anagram of 'integral'). Lamb, however, says that he borrowed the Italian name from one of his old acquaintances who worked with him thirty years before at South-Sea House. 'I went the other day' writes Lamb in June 1821, '(not having seen him for a year) to laugh over with him at my usurpation of his name, and found him, alas! no more than a name, for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it. So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think, and 'tis all he has left me'.

The essays continued to appear in the London magazine till December 1822. When a collected form was published in 1823 it had twenty-five essays. The content of the essays is chiefly personal bordering on the autobiographical. Many critics later ruefully commented that had Lamb started writing the essay at an earlier age, English literature would have been more enriched. But we must remember that as a writer he had to reach that level of ripeness when he could look back at his personal experience in a humorous and detached way and all the preceding years of hopes and disappointment were but a period of growth and preparation for this final artistic culmination.

3.4 LAMB AS A ROMANTIC

Lamb has been classified as a Romantic though there is an essential difference between the type of Romanticism practised by Wordsworth and Coleridge and that expressed by Lamb in his essays. Lamb is a man of the city. He was born and brought-up in London, and unlike Wordsworth who sought in natural surrounding the source of his poetic inspiration Lamb preferred the streets of London. In a letter to his friend he wrote:

Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent, Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses...authors in the street with spectacles...lamp lit at night, pastrycooks' and silversmiths' shops...noises of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchmen at night...these are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many-sins.

Now we may question on what premises we call Lamb a Romantic who was decidedly a 'scorner of the fields'? We have long associated the Romantic Movement with the 'return to nature'. However, we must remember nature does not simply mean the mountains and vales, it also implies what is natural in man. It was a movement that questioned and challenged the preponderance of the intellect over the emotions that characterized literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century England. Romantics emphasised the quality of imagination, emotion and feelings. Truth was not what was found by the mere allocation and study of facts accumulated by careful scientific experiments, but truth was what the imagination seized to be true. From this perspective Lamb is definitely a Romantic.

3.4 *DREAM CHILDREN: A REVERIE*

CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders when *they* were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or granddame whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene-so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country- of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled

it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining country; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if someone were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing room . Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'that would be foolish indeed'. And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted- the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said 'those innocents would do her no harm'; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she- and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grandchildren, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Caesars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out

hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then— and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew-trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir-apples, which were good for nothing but to look—at or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings –I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such-like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grandchildren, yet in an especial manner, she might be said to love their uncle, John L—, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain; and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is between life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all daylong, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed

his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarreled sometimes) rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up, and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n ; and , as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of representment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: 'We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name' –and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side –but John L. (or James Elia) was gone for ever.

NOTES

my little ones: the children of his fancy, of course. Lamb never married; he devoted all his life to the service of his sister, who suffered from occasional lapses into insanity.

the Abbey: i.e. Westminster Abbey, where the tombs of so many of England's famous men are to be found.

tawdry: the etymology of this word is interesting; it is derived from Saint Audrey, and originally implied any trinket or the like bought at a fair held in honour of the saint.

busy-idle: a compound like this is known in rhetoric as an oxymoron.

such a distance there is betwixt life and death: a thought quite in keeping with the sad wistful tone of the easy.

Lethe: the river of oblivion in hell.

Mark the beautiful close of this essay; it is like the gradual merging of the colours

of a sunset into the darkness of might.

3.6 THE ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

We shall come back to this discussion again, but first let us take a look at the basic facts of the essay 'Dream Children; A Reverie'. The essay was published in the London Magazine in January, 1822. Lamb's elder brother John was then lately dead. The 'broad, burly jovial' John Lamb, lived his prosperous life on his own, avoiding social relation with his brother and sister. But as we have already noted Charles Lamb was quite fond of his brother. He mourned his death and in a letter written during this time he complained to his friend Wordsworth that his brother's death had made him aware of a certain 'deadness to everything'. He also became keenly aware of his solitude and loneliness. With John dead, he was left with but one near relation and Mary was also away from home in the periods of insanity. The bleakness of the present scenario made him wonder what could have been had he married and had children. This pathetic longing for companionship is hidden under the warmth of the imaginary parlour where on a winter afternoon, the children Alice and John crept to their father to listen to the story of their grandmother and uncle. The chatter of the dream children keeps us busy and it is only at the end that we realize that the author was sitting on his 'bachelor' arm chair and day-dreaming.

The entire essay in a single paragraph resembles the unhindered flow of thoughts, feelings and emotions. In a way Lamb, in form, becomes a fore-runner of the 'stream of consciousness' (see notes below) writers.. However, we may divide it into three parts to make our reading easier. The first part talks about the great grandmother Mrs Field who worked as the housekeeper for the Plumers in Blakesware. Lamb disguises the locality of the house, probably because Walter Plumer, for many years M.P. for Hertfordshire was still living. Norfolk also gave Lamb the opportunity to refer to the ballad of 'The Children in the Wood; or the Norfolk Gentleman's Last Will and Testament'. The ballad narrates the story of the two children who were murdered in the woods by two ruffians at the consent of their uncle. The last lines of the ballad refer to the robin redbreasts, and reads as following:

> No burial of this pretty pair
> Of any man receives,
> Till Robin redbreast piously

Did cover them with leaves.

The reference to ballad (see notes) creates an enchanted atmosphere of the woods. The old story of cruelty and pathos marks the mellowed beginning of a reminiscence that slyly voices the unfulfilled wishes of the author. We now have a long section on Mrs Field who was a good-natured, religious and god-fearing lady who loved her grandchildren, and was respected by everyone near her.

The memory of the grandmother brings forth the other happy memories associated with her, that is, Lamb's visit to Blakesware during his holidays. The description of his childhood experiences in her house constitutes the second part of the essay. This portion also projects the Romantic Lamb at his best. He almost takes us by hand and leads us from the garden to the palatial house, through its rooms, and again to the garden, orangery (a glass-roofed conservatory, artificially heated, in which oranges are grown), and the fish-pond. We have earlier discussed that Lamb is not a worshipper of nature in the way Wordsworth was. He was rather the man of the city. Here in the description of nature we would not find any worship of nature, nature would also not teach us the lessons of life, give us solace and strengthin times of need. Nature here is presented as it influenced a boy. What is conveyed to us is his sensitivity, his love for beauty. He finds no animal delight in eating the fruits, but enjoys basking in the orangery and feels a sense of ripening with the limes and oranges. This reference to the orangery may also remind us of Keats' 'Ode to Autumn', where in the 'season of mist and mellow fruitfulness' the poet watches the fruits growing to their fullness. He also looks at the busts of twelve Caesars (from Julius Caesar to Domitian) which were kept in the garden and felt either the stones turning to life or he changing into marble. This vision of oneness with the objects is a characteristic feature of the romantic, imaginative mind, and is known as empathy.

Among all the children Grandmother Field was most fond of John Lamb. As we move into the third section of the essay, we find a description of John and his closeness with Charles in their boyhood days. He was of a different temperament, preferring active life to the 'busy-idle' diversions that kept the young Charles so occupied. He rode and went with the hunters, he was brave and handsome and to the lame-footed stuttering Charles', he was nothing short of a hero. He narrates how he used to carry him on his back. Lamb mourns his death and feels that he has been impatient with him in his hours of pain. We know from the biographical note that this is hardly true. But we are not after the facts or truth for we are reading a dream, a wish-fulfilment not a mere narrative of his life. It is his life as he wanted it, not as he lived it. And thus we find the reference to the children's mother, Alice Winterton, Ann Simmons of real life. The reference to Alice makes him look at his dream-

daughter Alice who is made in her mother's image; so much so that he feels he can see their dead mother in her. Then suddenly the vision of the children grows dim and he remembers that the children of Alice calls Bartram father for Ann Simmons married one Mr Bartram, a pawnbroker of Leicester Square, London. The children are still waiting at the banks of Lethe, for it is the river of forgetfulness at whose side the souls wait for next incarnation. Another parallel of this classical allusion can also be found in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> Souls destined to inhabit
>
> A second body, sit by Lethe's stream,
>
> Quaff opiate draughts of long oblivion.

As he wakes up he finds his sister Mary (Bridget of the essay) still sitting beside him but John (James Elia) was gone forever.

The reverie is punctuated by the voice of the children. As they listen to their father's story they comment, laugh, feel afraid, find interest, twitch their feet, weep when they listen to the sad death of their uncle. They also utter the final words that bring Lamb back to the normal world. These children are fragments of dream, but Lamb's extreme sensitivity portrays them as living beings, and he shows a keen understanding of the childs' mind. For instance, when he narrates how he used to love more the atmosphere of the garden as a child, John, his dream-son keeps the bunch of grapes back in the platter, trying to show how he finds the story more fascinating than the grapes. These small humorous touches enliven the sad reality of the background. Along with Charles Lamb we also forget the present world of experience and travel to the world of make-belief.

3.7 CHARACTERISTICS OF LAMB'S STYLE

There are certain essential features of Lamb's composition. Let us make a note of it:

- We have already discussed that Lamb is a Romantic with a difference. He describes nature with a sensitivity that is akin to that of Keats. But he never tries to draw moral lessons from it. Nature is not worshipped but rather enjoyed for the sake of beauty.

- There is a tremendous consciousness of death that pervades the entire essay. The description begins with the death of the two children as narrated in the ballad, and continues with the description of Grandmother Field's funeral, brother John's death, Alice's death. These references to death do not intend to make us aware of the transience of human life, but rather the inevitability of death adds to the charm of life giving us a scope to languish in sorrow.

● There is a thin line of demarcation between the fantastic and the real. Fantasy is so realistically portrayed that we begin to believe it as real when the dream breaks into the sad reality of life. Lamb also alters the facts to suit his purpose. For instance, he changes the location of his grandmother's house from Blakesware to Norfolk. Sometimes these changes also hide the grim truth. He imagines a loving and doting elder brother which he never had in John. He describes him with 'superhuman sweetness' endowing him with qualities he never had. Similarly, he conceals the identity of Alice in his real life by changing her name. Perhaps, though Lamb shared his dreams, openly regretted his loneliness, he did not want the public with uncertain sympathies to pry too near to destroy his privacy or comment on others close to his heart. Thus the memories are thinly disguised, slightly distorted, garbed in fantasy. The essay remains an essay with autobiographical elements; but if we try to find the facts of the writer's life we shall be deceived.

● Another speciality of Lamb's prose is the artful blending of humour and pathos. We must remember that humour and fun are not the same. Fun involves a laughter which is more caustic, usually directed at someone, and harbours a kind of insensitivity towards that person or his habit. We are struck by the difference between what is expected of him and what he does. For example, the antics that a clown performs on stage, strike us as 'funny' because a 'normal' human being does not act in that manner. A waiter tripping over something with a handful of crockery tickles us for we expect him to be portly and efficient. But notice, in both the cases we are not touched by the individual's plight (a poor man being forced to behave abnormally to make people laugh or the great waste of the fine china or the possibility of the man being hurt), otherwise we would be too much of a moralist and such grave concern can never raise laughter. Fun is also associated with a jovial mood, a physical enjoyment; for instance, we say that we went for a picnic and 'we had fun'. Now picnic is not a serious or sensitive affair, so fun in the sense of a light mood goes well with it.

Humour evokes a very different kind of laughter. It is tolerant, usually directed at the very person who is narrating the incident or story, it is thus something more delicate. It would not make you burst into a peal of laughter; rather it would make you smile. It is more akin to pathos. We may say that they are the two sides of the same coin. In both humour and pathos the most distinguishing feature is the narrator's sensitiveness. If he can tolerate his grief and break into a smile, we have humour, otherwise it turns into pathos. That is why it is widely believed among the students of literature that *King Lear* a celebrated tragedy of Shakespeare had every predilection to change into a comedy had the playwright not decided otherwise.

Now to turn to Lamb once again, his humour is of rare order. It must be enjoyed in silence. He does not make us laugh as P. G. Wodehouse or Jerome K. Jerome does; rather, his humour nestles with such an intensity of grief that even tears cannot comprehend. It is quite complex. One must be extremely perceptive to understand its delicate shades. It is far from fun and closer to pathos. Let us see what J. Lewis May, Lamb's biographer and critic says regarding this:

With Lamb, the humour often resides not in the theme narrated, but in something interjected, an aside, an apparent innocent addition, analogous, not to a wink...but to the faintest flicker of an eyelid, something that might easily be missed if our attention were not on the alert....

Take for instance how in the essay, Alice reacts when she learns that her grandmother was a great dancer or John tries to look brave when he listens about the infants. The narrative itself is not humorous; it is a description of the past—not bitter memories but sweet remembrances. The humour is introduced by the little descriptions of the children's reaction to the story. Pause, think deeply, the children do not exist! We may be reminded of the film *Limelight*. In one scene, Charles Chaplin acts as a joker and performs his antics. We roll in laughter. The very next moment, the camera pans and we find that there is no audience in the hall, and we realize the hard fact that as a joker the character has been an utter failure. We laugh and cry at the same instant. Such is Lamb's humour. It does not satirize, it does not provoke malice. It is simple feeling of being delighted at life's little ironies.

- Last but not the least, we should categorically state, that Lamb is not a moralist. He has no aim to instruct. His themes are homely as Lewis May says that his essays are like 'the chambers in a house of dreams, furnished and adorned with all the relics of the gracious past—old portraits, old books, old prints, old china...'. He does neither scorn nor support anyone for their moral infirmities. He is a detached observer of life. However, we cannot say that he believes in the theory of 'art for art's sake', chiefly because though Lamb does not deliberately instruct, yet his humble philosophy of acceptance and tolerance is evident in all his writings. In spite of the commonality of his theme, his goodness is almost infectious, so much so that it brings out the best in us.

You may also refer to a few more essays by Lamb which are collected in his *Essays of Elia*: 'My Relations' (here he talks about his brother), 'Mackery End, in Hertfordshire' (this is about his sister), 'The Superannuated Man'.

3.8 READY REFERENCES

Romanticism: We have come across the terms like Romantics and Romanticism in the course of our reading. It would not be entirely out of place to look at the term and understand its manifold implications. Romanticism was a movement in arts and literature that began towards the early half of the 19th century. The precursors who set the trend were philosophers like Rousseau, Schiller, Goethe, poets like Gray, Cowper, novelists like Scott, to mention a few. Though the beginnings of Romanticism can be traced in these writers, the movement officially began in literature with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge. It was a holistic movement, affecting every genre of art, for instance, Lamb wrote essays, Turner and Constable painted pictures, Wagner composed music—all of which can be termed Romantic. Now every art has its own language of expression and as the medium changes, so does the nature of the work. Hence, no two artists are the same. Even the five English poets who are grouped together as Romantics, namely, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats are very different from one another. In spite of their individually distinctive features, they share some common features. Firstly, the movement rose as a form of protest against the philosophical rationalism of the 18th century literature. The earlier writers believed that there is a clear distinction between the real and the unreal, fact and fiction, natural and unnatural. They suggested that we should follow the path of reason and logic and arrive at the conclusion of any argument. The Romantics contested this theory. They put stress on emotion, spontaneity, and imagination. Truth was what the poet believed in. Poetry was 'the spontaneous flow of powerful feelings.' They legitimized the individual imagination as a critical authority and believed that knowledge is gained through intuition rather than deduction.

Romantics believed in the natural goodness of humans which is hindered by the urban life of civilization. They almost worshipped nature as the source of constant inspiration. To Wordsworth, nature was a friend, a philosopher and guide. It teaches man the essential lessons of humanity. That is why their movement is pitted against the rampant industrialization of the European society and is commonly referred to as 'a return to nature'.

Since the Romantics emphasized on feelings and emotions rather than logic and reason, they did not believe in the distinction between the prose and poetry. They thought that both genres could be inspired by the poet's/writer's imagination—poetry

can be 'prosaic' or the prose 'poetic', it all depends on how it is written. They preferred a simple language (poet is a man speaking to men, as Wordsworth said) humble theme, both of which are ennobled by the 'sublime' thought.

As their imagination was fuelled by the French Revolution, the Romantics also believed in the individual's freedom. They highlighted the common man, the social outcast and showed how, by the virtue of his imagination, the common man can rise above the snares of mediocrity.

Ballad: A ballad is a song, which is transmitted orally, and it tells a story. In other words, it is the narrative species of the folk songs. Their roots can be traced in the Middle Ages, though they were still collected or written and sung by many modern renowned singers like Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie to name a few. The literary ballad is influenced by the traditional ballad form and it imitates its narrative design, simple language and spirit. The ballad-writing became quite a fashion during the period of Romantic Revival for they could voice the simplicity and sentimentality of the common people. The name of Wordsworth and Coleridge's first publication *Lyrical Ballads* is suggestive. Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' Wordsworth's Lucy poems are all examples of fine literary ballads.

Stream of Consciousness: the phrase was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* in1890 to describe the unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts and feelings at the back of the mind. The term has been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction, particularly those written since 1920s. These fictions represent the character's mental process along with the conscious or semi-conscious thoughts, expectations, feelings, memories, without the author's intervention. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* are examples of this form.

3.9 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Questions

1. What are the typical features of Lamb's essay that make it a Romantic essay?
2. Write a note on the autobiographical elements in Lamb's 'Dream Children'.

Semi-Long Questions

1. Bring out Lamb's humour and pathos in 'Dream Children'.
2. 'Dream Children' gives us pictures of two kinds of childhood running concurrently—one belonging to the past, one to the present. Discuss.

3. Explain the appropriateness of the tilte of ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’.

Short Questions

1. Why did Lamb’s dream children call Bartram father?
2. Where did the author’s grandmother live? What happened to her according to Lamb?
3. How does Lamb portray the character if his brother in his essay ‘Dream Children’?