

GAUHATI UNIVERSITY  
Centre for Distance and Online Education

ENG-3036

M.A. Third Semester

(Under CBCS)

ENGLISH

Paper: ENG 3036  
WORLD FICTION



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# **BLOCK-I**

**Unit 1: Introduction to World Fiction**

**Unit 2: Major Figures in World Fiction**

**Unit 3: Post Modern Fiction**

**UNIT-1**  
**INTRODUCTION TO WORLD FICTION**

**Unit Structure:**

- 1.1 Objectives**
- 1.2 Introduction**
- 1.3 Cultural Identity and Representation**
- 1.4 Themes and Motifs in World Fiction**
- 1.5 Literary Techniques and Narrative Structures**
- 1.6 Selected Literary Works**
- 1.7 Reception and Interpretation**
- 1.8. Summing Up**
- 1.9. Discussing a Question**
- 1.10. References and Suggested Readings**

**1.1 Objectives**

The goal of this unit, "Introduction to World Fiction" is to give you a comprehensive understanding of the various literary traditions from around the globe. Here, we will explore how world fiction has evolved and how it has been able to reflect various cultural, historical and sociopolitical issues. In the following sections, we will focus on the major aspects of world fiction, which will include key authors and their influential works, along with the themes and styles that define different literary traditions. We will also examine the various critical and theoretical frameworks which are essential for analyzing world fiction.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- *Identify* and differentiate major works with the major authors from various world literary traditions, from novels to short stories and other forms of fiction.
- *Understand* how historical events and cultural traditions, along with sociopolitical developments have influenced the themes and styles of world fiction.
- *Apply* the various critical approaches from comparative literature to postcolonial theory, in order to analyse world literary texts.
- *Appreciate* the contributions of significant authors from various regions while gaining insights into their works within the contexts in which they wrote.
- *Evaluate* the importance of considering different critical ideas when analyzing and interpreting world fiction.

Ultimately, this unit aims to equip you with required knowledge and the ability for in-depth analysis to appreciate world fiction while understanding its diverse traditions and its significance.

## **1.2 Introduction**

World fiction is a term that encapsulates the vast and intricate varieties of literary narratives spanning across diverse cultures, and historical epochs. It serves as a gateway to understanding the multifaceted nature of human experiences and imaginations. It is important to understand the essence, evolution and significance of world fiction as a cornerstone of global literary exchanges. Often referred to as global or international fiction, this genre transcends geographical boundaries and linguistic barriers to encompass a broad spectrum of narratives originating from various corners of the globe. At its core, world fiction consists of narratives which explore

universal themes and human experiences, and it also illuminates the unique cultural and socio-political contexts from which they emerge. These narratives may be written in different languages, drawing from diverse literary traditions and storytelling techniques, but they seem to share a common thread of engaging with the complexities of the human condition on a global scale.

The scope of world fiction is expansive, as it includes a rich diversity of genres, styles and themes. From timeless classics to contemporary masterpieces, this broad term encompasses a wide range of literary forms, including novels, short stories, poems and plays. It spans historical periods and geographical regions. It also offers readers a window into the cultural landscapes and social realities of societies around the world. Whether set in bustling metropolises or remote rural villages, it invites readers to embark on a journey of exploration and discovery, which helps people to transcend their own cultural and linguistic limitations, engaging with narratives that resonate with the shared condition of humankind.

The evolution of world fiction can be traced back to ancient oral traditions and epic narratives that have been passed down through generations. They serve as important repositories of collective wisdom and imaginative storytelling. From the epics of Homer and the Sanskrit scriptures of ancient India to the medieval romances of Europe and the oral traditions of indigenous peoples, an integral part of human culture has been storytelling since time immemorial. However, it was not until the advent of modernity and the age of exploration that world fiction began to take shape in its contemporary form. The rise of colonialism, imperialism and globalization facilitated the exchange of a plethora of ideas, languages and literary traditions across continents, giving rise to a rich collection of cross-cultural encounters and creative exchanges.

As writers from diverse cultural backgrounds began to interact and influence each other's work, world fiction seemed to emerge as a dynamic and hybridized genre. World fiction serves a multitude of purposes which range from entertainment and escapism to education and enlightenment. Through the power of storytelling, world fiction has the capacity to transport readers to distant lands and introduce them to unfamiliar cultures, all the while broadening their horizons by offering new perspectives on familiar themes and issues. Moreover, world fiction has the potential to foster empathy, understanding and a sense of solidarity across various divides, bridging the gap between different communities. Furthermore, world fiction plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage by documenting historical events and giving voice to marginalized communities whose stories have been overlooked or silenced by dominant narratives. World fiction contributes to the enrichment and diversification of the global literary canon, challenging established norms and expanding the boundaries of literary expression while listening to unheard voices.

### **1.3 Cultural Identity and Representation**

As we have understood till now, world fiction serves as a multifaceted mirror reflecting the cultural identities and lived experiences of diverse communities across the globe. Within its vast expanse, we see themes of cultural authenticity, diversity, resonant indigenous voices, marginalized communities, and postcolonial perspectives while offering profound insights into the complexities of human existence and societal dynamics. One of the defining features of world fiction is its celebration of cultural authenticity and diversity. Through the vivid portrayal of customs, traditions, languages, and belief systems, authors weave intricate ideas that capture the essence of different societies. Whether exploring the



bustling streets of Tokyo in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* or delving into the mystical realism of Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, readers seem to be transported to worlds rich in cultural nuances and authenticity. The authenticity of these narratives lies not merely in their portrayal of surface-level customs but also in their ability to delve into the intricacies of human emotions, interpersonal relationships and various societal norms which help to offer readers a deeper understanding of cultural identities.

It serves as a platform for amplifying indigenous voices and showcasing the experiences of marginalized communities that have often been overlooked or silenced in mainstream discourses. Authors like Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, provide a poignant portrayal of African societies grappling with the impact of colonialism which sheds light on the resilience and struggles of indigenous peoples when pitted against external forces. Similarly, the works of Indigenous authors such as Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich offer powerful narratives that challenge dominant narratives and reclaim agency over their cultural heritage. World fiction not only enriches literary discourse but also fosters empathy and solidarity across diverse communities. The legacy of colonialism continues to reverberate through the pages of world fiction which provides a lens through which authors interrogate some important aspects like power dynamics and historical injustices along with the quest for decolonization. Writers from former colonies, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Arundhati Roy, offer intriguing critiques of colonial legacies and their enduring impact on the current day society. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, for instance, portrays the Nigerian Civil War through the eyes of characters grappling with questions of identity and nationhood, while reconciling it with the legacy of British colonial

rule. These types of resilience and cultural resurgence show how world fiction becomes a site of decolonizing praxis, which challenges hegemonic narratives and envisioning alternative futures rooted in justice and equality.

Here are some milestones in the development of World Fiction-

1. The creation of foundational texts such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, set early precedents for narrative fiction.
2. The publication of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1605, which is often considered the first modern novel, revolutionized narrative form and character development.
3. The rise of influential literary movements with authors like Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy and Charles Dickens, expanded the thematic and stylistic boundaries of fiction.
4. The early 20th century's literary experimentation was seen done by figures like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and later the postmodern innovations of authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Haruki Murakami, which helped reshape narrative techniques and storytelling approaches forever.

**SAQ**

1. How did World Fiction first emerge? (30 words)

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2. Write about some of the key developments in World Fiction. (60 words)

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## **1.4 Themes and Motifs**

World fiction serves as a mirror reflecting the myriad facets of human existence, which show us deep insights into universal themes and motifs that transcend geographical boundaries and cultural contexts. Within the vast variety of world literature, several recurring themes emerge, each offering profound insights into the human condition. This section shall explore four prominent themes: Love and Relationships, Identity and Belonging, Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchies, and Nature and the Environment.

### **Love and Relationships**

Love, in its various forms and manifestations, occupies a central place in world fiction. Whether romantic, familial, or platonic, the exploration of human relationships forms the bedrock of the various literary works across different cultures and eras. From the passionate romances of Shakespearean tragedies to the subtle nuances of Japanese haiku, love serves as a powerful medium through which authors explore multifaceted themes like desire, intimacy, sacrifice, and betrayal. In world fiction, this often transcends conventional boundaries while challenging societal norms and expectations. It may manifest as forbidden love in the face of cultural taboos, as seen in the tragic romance between Romeo and Juliet, or as a form of enduring love amidst socio-political turmoil, as depicted in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Moreover, the complexities of familial relationships, such as those between parents and children or siblings, offer a vast area for exploration by addressing themes of duty, loyalty and forgiveness.

### **Identity and Belonging**

The quest for identity and belonging lies at the heart of many world fiction narratives, seeming to resonate with readers across diverse cultural backgrounds. Be it grappling with issues of race, ethnicity

or gender, characters in world literature often navigate the complexities of self-discovery and societal acceptance. In works such as James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, characters confront the nuances of their identities in the face of societal expectations and historical legacies. Themes of displacement, assimilation, and cultural hybridity emerge as characters straddle multiple worlds. They seek to reconcile their individual identities with broader collective narratives. Moreover, the notion of belonging extends beyond geographical or cultural boundaries. It may include emotional and spiritual dimensions as well. Characters may be seen to find a sense of belonging in communities of shared experience, in nature, or even within themselves through acts of self-realization and acceptance.

### **Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchies**

World fiction often serves as a critique of power dynamics and social hierarchies. It sheds light on systems of oppression, injustice and inequality. By exploring the feudal structures of medieval Europe or the caste system of colonial India, authors are seen to interrogate the ways in which power shapes individual lives and societal structures. One of the effective examples of this is seen in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where the allegorical portrayal of animals overthrowing their human oppressors exposes the corrupting influence of power and the perpetuation of tyranny. Similarly, we can see that in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the collision of traditional Igbo culture with colonialism lays bare the devastating consequences of imperial domination and cultural erasure. By focussing on the power dynamics, world fiction confronts various issues of marginalization, and resistance, urging readers to question prevailing power structures and envision alternative futures grounded in justice and equality.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Discuss the historical emergence of World Fiction.
2. Explore the impact of cultural influences, such as mythology, religion and tradition, on World Fiction. Provide examples of how these elements are integrated into literary works.
3. Examine the role of World Fiction in the overall arena of World Literature. Discuss the significance of diversity within World Fiction.
4. Consider the complex interplay between themes and motifs in World Fiction. How does the infusion of these ideas enrich narratives and contribute to a deeper understanding of different methods of literary expression?

### **1.5 Literary Techniques and Narrative Structures**

World Fiction encompasses a vast array of techniques and structures that authors seem to employ to convey their stories and messages effectively. These techniques and structures often reflect the cultural, historical and social contexts from which they emerge. In this section, we will explore three significant literary techniques: Magical Realism, Oral Tradition, and Metafiction.

#### **Magical Realism and Surrealism:**

Magical Realism, a term largely popularised by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, refers to a narrative technique that blends elements of the fantastical with the ordinary, creating an integration of the magical into the fabric of everyday life. This genre often challenges conventional perceptions of reality by imbuing mundane settings and events with supernatural or surreal elements. Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exemplifies one

of the major uses of Magical Realism in world fiction. Set in the fictional town of Macondo, the novel chronicles the lives of the Buendía family across multiple generations. Márquez intertwines elements of myth, legend and fantasy with the historical and political backdrop of Latin America which blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination. Here, we can see how through Magical Realism Márquez lucidly explores themes of solitude, and the cyclical nature of time, inviting readers to contemplate upon the enigmatic forces that shape human existence.

Surrealism, on the other hand, emerged as an artistic and literary movement in the early 20th century which is characterized by its emphasis on irrationality, dreamlike imagery and subconscious exploration in a psychological sense. Writers such as Franz Kafka and Julio Cortázar often employed surrealistic elements to depict the absurdity and alienation of modern life. Their works challenge conventional narrative structures while inviting readers to delve into the depths of the human psyche, confronting the complexities of existence along with the elusive nature of truth.

### **Oral Tradition and Storytelling:**

Oral Tradition serves as the foundation of many world cultures, preserving history and beliefs through the spoken word. These traditions are passed down from generation to generation, where oral narratives play a vital role in shaping collective identity and transmitting cultural heritage. In literature, authors are often seen to draw upon oral traditions to infuse their works with authenticity and rhythm. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a good example of the incorporation of oral tradition into world fiction. Set in pre-colonial Nigeria, the novel portrays the Igbo culture through the eyes of its protagonist, Okonkwo. Achebe effectively integrates proverbs, folktales and communal rituals into the narrative, which captures the essence of Igbo oral storytelling practices. Through the

art of storytelling, Achebe celebrates the richness of African culture while challenging Eurocentric notions of civilization and progress.

### **Metafiction and Intertextuality:**

Metafiction refers to a literary technique that self-consciously draws attention to its own status as a work of fiction, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Metafictional narratives often explore the nature of storytelling, authorship, and reader-text relationships, inviting readers to reflect on the construction of narrative meaning. Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* demonstrates the use of metafiction in world fiction, where the novel follows the journey of Toru Watanabe as he navigates love, loss and identity in 1960s Japan. Murakami incorporates elements of metafiction by employing first-person narration, intertextual references to other literary works along with self-reflexive commentary on the act of writing itself. Through these techniques, we can see how Murakami blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. He invites readers to question the nature of memory, perception and storytelling.

### **1.6 Selected Texts**

This section will analyze five significant novels from diverse cultural backgrounds. Each novel will offer unique insights into human experiences, societal dynamics and the power of storytelling. These novels will not only highlight the richness of their respective cultural heritages but also the resonance of their universal themes. This shall demonstrate the global relevance of world fiction.

1. **Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:** Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian Nobel laureate, crafted a masterpiece that transcended geographical boundaries and cultural barriers. *One Hundred Years of*

*Solitude* can be called the magnum opus of magical realism, blending historical events with fantastical elements to chronicle the Buendía family's multi-generational saga in the fictional town of Macondo. Márquez's intricate narrative weaves together themes of love and power apart from showing the cyclical nature of history. He invites readers into a mesmerizing realm where reality and myth converge.

At its core, this novel is a reflection on the nature of time and history. Márquez employs a non-linear narrative structure to move back and forth in time to underscore the cyclical patterns in the lives of the Buendía family. This structure mirrors the repetitive nature of history itself, which suggests that despite the passage of time, human experiences and mistakes are often repeated. The use of magical realism further allows Márquez to infuse the mundane with the extraordinary, which creates a world where the supernatural is an accepted part of reality. This blending of the real and the magical, challenges readers to rethink their perceptions, even of reality and fiction.

The novel also delves deeply into themes of solitude and isolation which is seen as the Buendía family's repeated failures to connect meaningfully with each other and the outside world. They reflect broader existential concerns about human loneliness and the quest for meaning. The character Colonel Aureliano Buendía, who fights numerous wars but yet remains emotionally detached, seems to epitomize the tragic isolation that pervades the novel. Márquez's rich, lyrical prose and his ability to evoke the sensory details of life in Macondo to further enhance the immersive experience of reading this novel.

2. **Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*:** A seminal work in African literature, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* offers a poignant portrayal of pre-colonial Nigeria and the impact



of colonialism on traditional Igbo society. The tragic story of Okonkwo, a proud warrior grappling with changing cultural norms and external forces demonstrates how Achebe confronts themes of cultural clash, identity and the resilience of the human spirit. With its vivid imagery and incisive critique of imperialism, this novel continues to resonate with readers worldwide as a powerful testament to the complexities of colonial legacies.

Achebe's narrative seems to be deeply rooted in the customs, beliefs and the daily life of Igbo people. It provides a rich, authentic portrayal of African culture before the arrival of European colonizers. The novel challenges the stereotypical depictions of African societies prevalent in Western literature while presenting a nuanced and respectful account of Igbo life. Okonkwo, the protagonist, embodies the struggle to maintain cultural integrity in the face of disruptive change. His personal downfall is shown to be triggered by his inability to adapt to the new colonial reality, which symbolizes the broader disintegration of traditional Igbo society under colonial rule.

This novel also addresses the themes of masculinity and identity, where Okonkwo's rigid adherence to traditional notions of masculinity and his fear of being perceived as weak lead to his tragic end. Achebe uses Okonkwo's story to explore the destructive consequences of inflexible cultural norms and the importance of adaptability and resilience in the face of change. The novel's title is derived from W.B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," which evokes the sense of chaos and fragmentation brought about by colonialism. It further reflects the profound impact of historical forces on individual lives and societies.

3. **Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*:** Haruki Murakami, Japan's preeminent contemporary writer, is well known for

his enigmatic narratives and existential themes. *Norwegian Wood* stands out as a poignant exploration of love, loss and the search for meaning in a tumultuous world. It is set against the backdrop of 1960s Tokyo, and follows Toru Watanabe's introspective journey as he navigates relationships and the haunting memory of his friend's suicide. Murakami's lyrical prose and introspective storytelling evoke a sense of melancholy and nostalgia which seems to resonate with readers across cultural divides.

*Norwegian Wood* is often seen as a departure from Murakami's more surreal works while still retaining his signature style of blending the ordinary with the profound. The novel is steeped in themes of existentialism and the quest for authenticity in a rapidly changing world. Toru's relationships with the enigmatic Naoko and the vivacious Midori show us different aspects of love and connection, each reflecting his internal struggles and desires. Naoko's fragile mental state and ultimate suicide highlight the pervasive sense of loss and the difficulty of finding solace in a world marked by impermanence.

Murakami's use of music, particularly the titular Beatles song, as a recurring motif, enhances the novel's nostalgic and melancholic atmosphere in which the music serves as a bridge between the past and the present, evoking memories and emotions that shape Toru's identity and experiences. Murakami captures the universal longing for connection and understanding, making *Norwegian Wood* a profound exploration of the human condition.

#### 4. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a prominent voice in contemporary African literature who brings to life the tumultuous history of Nigeria through the eyes of three compelling characters against the backdrop of the Biafran

War. *Half of a Yellow Sun* delves into themes of love, politics and identity amidst the chaos of conflict, which shows us a nuanced portrayal of human resilience and the complexities of nationhood. Adichie is known for her vivid prose and empathetic storytelling, which she effectively uses to illuminate the personal and collective struggles of ordinary people caught in the throes of war and upheaval.

Adichie uses multiple perspectives to tell the story, shifting between Ugwu, a young houseboy; Olanna, a university professor; and Richard, a British expatriate and journalist. This narrative technique provides a multifaceted view of the war, which captures the diverse experiences and viewpoints of those affected by the conflict. The characters' intertwined lives reveal the profound impact of war on personal relationships and individual identities. Thus, it focuses on the resilience and adaptability required to survive in such turbulent times.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* also tackles the theme of national identity. It explores what it means to belong to a nation in the midst of civil war. The novel's title is derived from the symbol of the short-lived Republic of Biafra, reflecting the hope and eventual despair of the Biafran people. Adichie's portrayal of the war's brutality and the resulting humanitarian crisis challenges readers to consider the human cost of political conflicts. It also deals with the enduring legacies of colonialism and division.

5. **Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*:** Isabel Allende, the renowned Chilean-American author, enchants readers with her richly textured narratives and magical realism. *The House of the Spirits* is a sweeping family saga that traverses generations while blending elements of history, politics and mysticism, all against the backdrop of Chile's tumultuous political landscape. Through the lens of the Trueba family,

Allende explores themes of power and the interconnectedness of the past and the present. Its vivid characters and evocative prose invites readers to embark on a journey of discovery and self-reflection.

Allende's use of magical realism serves to heighten the emotional and symbolic resonance of the novel which creates a world where the extraordinary is seamlessly woven into the fabric of everyday life. The supernatural elements seem to be evident, such as Clara's clairvoyance and the presence of spirits which reflect the characters' inner lives along with the cultural beliefs of their society. This blending of the mystical and the real allows Allende to explore the deeper truths and connections that underlie the surface of these historical events.

The novel also examines the dynamics of power and oppression, both within the family and in the broader political context. Esteban Trueba's authoritarian rule over his family and his involvement in the political turmoil of the times mirror the broader societal struggles between authoritarianism and democracy and the portrayal of the intergenerational impact of trauma and resistance highlights the enduring power of memory.

These five novels, each from a different cultural background, offer profound insights into the human condition and the power of storytelling. They highlight the ways in which world fiction can illuminate the complexities of identity, history, and society, bridging cultural divides and fostering a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. Through their unique narrative styles and thematic explorations, these works seem to exemplify the richness and diversity of world literature which invites readers to engage with the multifaceted realities of life across different cultures and historical contexts.

**Stop to Consider**

**"The Tale of Genji"** by **Murasaki Shikibu** is often considered the world's first novel, written in 11th-century Japan.

**"Don Quixote"** by **Miguel de Cervantes** was published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615, and is regarded as a cornerstone of modern Western literature.

**Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude"** is a seminal work of magical realism, blending the fantastical with the everyday.

**"Things Fall Apart"** by **Chinua Achebe** is a landmark in African literature, depicting the impact of colonialism on Igbo society.

**Haruki Murakami's novels** often blend surrealism with pop culture references, creating unique narrative worlds.

**Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"** is famous for its opening line, where Gregor Samsa wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant insect.

**"War and Peace"** by **Leo Tolstoy** is known for its extensive cast of characters and detailed depiction of Russian society during the Napoleonic Wars.

**"One Thousand and One Nights"** is a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales compiled during the Islamic Golden Age, featuring stories like Aladdin and Sinbad the Sailor.

**SAQ**

1. What are the dominant writers in World Fiction and why are they so prominent in this type of writing? (60 words)

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.....  
.....

2. What role does Allende play in World Fiction? (60 words)

.....

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**Stop to Consider**

Here are some important terms used in World Fiction-

**Narrative Voice:** The perspective from which a story is told, influencing the reader's understanding and connection to the plot and characters.

**Magical Realism:** A literary style that incorporates fantastical elements into otherwise realistic settings, blending reality and fantasy seamlessly.

**Stream of Consciousness:** A narrative technique that portrays the continuous flow of a character's thoughts, feelings, and memories.

**Bildungsroman:** A coming-of-age story that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood.

**Postcolonialism:** A critical framework examining the effects of colonization on cultures and societies, often exploring themes of identity, power and resistance.

**Intertextuality:** The relationship between texts, where one text references or draws on themes, symbols or structures from another text.

**Metafiction:** Fiction that self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction, often blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction.

**Epistolary Novel:** A novel written in the form of letters, diary entries, or other documents, providing intimate insights into the characters' thoughts and experiences.

**Allegory:** A narrative in which characters, events and settings represent abstract concepts which convey a deeper moral, political or philosophical meaning.

**Gothic Fiction:** A genre characterized by dark and mysterious settings along with elements of horror and romance, often exploring themes of fear, decay, and the supernatural.

**SAQ**

1. What is the importance of Murakami in the World fiction? (60 words)

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2. Mention the major texts and writers of World fiction. (30 words)

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**1.7. Reception and Interpretation**

World fiction is not merely a static entity but a dynamic discourse that evolves through its reception and interpretation by readers and critics alike which is why this section delves into various aspects of how world fiction is received, interpreted, and critiqued within different cultural and academic contexts.

**Reader Response Theory:** Reader Response Theory posits that the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself but is constructed by the readers through their interaction with the text. In the context of world fiction, this theory highlights the subjectivity of interpretation and the role of readers' personal experiences, along with their cultural backgrounds, and socio-political contexts that shape their understanding of the text. Readers from diverse cultural backgrounds may interpret the same text in vastly different ways, leading to multiple layers of meaning and nuanced understandings of the narrative. For example, a reader from a postcolonial society might interpret a colonial-era novel differently than a reader from the colonizing culture, emphasizing themes of resistance and cultural identity.

**Cross-cultural Reception and Interpretation:** One of the most fascinating aspects of world fiction is its ability to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, with an ability to elicit varied responses from readers across the globe. Cross-cultural reception and interpretation involve the examination of how a work of fiction is received and understood in cultures other than its own. This process often involves translation and adaptation of cultural differences. For example, the translation of a Japanese novel into English may necessitate cultural annotations and footnotes to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps for Western readers, just like adaptations of literary works for film or stage may undergo significant changes to make them more accessible or relatable to audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural reception highlights the fluidity and adaptability of world fiction, as it travels across borders and engages with a diverse audience.

**Literary Criticism and Academic Discourse:** Literary criticism plays a crucial role in the scholarly examination and analysis of world fiction. Scholars are known to employ various critical lenses,



such as feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, structuralism and deconstruction, which are used to interrogate the themes, motifs and socio-political implications of literary texts. Academic discourse surrounding world fiction seems to encompass a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to cultural authenticity, narrative techniques, historical context or authorial intent. Through close reading, comparative analysis and various theoretical frameworks, literary critics contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding world fiction, uncovering hidden meanings and subverting dominant narratives while shedding light on marginalized voices. Moreover, academic conferences, journals and research publications serve as platforms for the exchange of ideas and scholarly insights into the ever-expanding realm of world fiction.

**SAQ**

1. What are some of the major developments in World fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? (60 words)

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2. Briefly analyse the role of globalisation in various types of World Fiction? (60 words)

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### Check Your Progress

1. How do the dominant themes in Asian literature reflect the unique experiences and perspectives of the writers? Provide examples to support your answer.
2. Explore the role of culture in World literature. How do writers like Murakami and Marquez incorporate unique elements into their works? Provide specific examples from their writings.
3. Discuss the impact of technology and globalization on the contemporary developments in World Fiction. How have digital platforms and online communities transformed the way literature is created, shared and consumed in this area?
4. Analyze the emergence of new voices and genres within World Fiction in the 21st century. How do writers engage with various literary techniques and narrative structures?

Here are some Critical opinions on World Fiction-

**Postcolonial Critique (Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak):** Emphasizes how world fiction reflects and challenges the power dynamics and cultural impacts of colonialism looking closely at voices from formerly colonized societies.

**Feminist Perspective (Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar):** Analyzes how world fiction represents gender roles, identities and the experiences of women, often advocating greater recognition of female authors and characters.

**Comparative Literature Approach (René Wellek, Claudio Guillén):** Examines the similarities and differences between literary works from different cultures along with an identification of universal themes and unique cultural expressions.

**Marxist Interpretation (Georg Lukács, Fredric Jameson):** Investigates how world fiction depicts class struggles and social inequalities. It is often known to critique the capitalist structures depicted in literary narratives.

## 1. 8 Summing Up

In this lesson on "Introduction to World Fiction," we have traversed the rich and varied landscape of global literary traditions, and focussed on the intricate nuances of cultural identity, thematic exploration, narrative innovation, significant literary works, as well as the diverse interpretations these works invite.

**We have seen how Cultural Identity and Representation** emerge as fundamental aspects of world fiction, as literature serves as a mirror reflecting the myriad ways in which different societies perceive themselves and others. Authors from diverse backgrounds often use fiction to assert their cultural identities and challenge stereotypes while providing nuanced portrayals of their communities. This representation is crucial not only for affirming the existence and value of diverse cultures but also for fostering empathy and understanding among global readers. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels offer profound insights into Nigerian culture and identity which seems to directly challenge Western-centric perspectives.

We have seen how the **Themes and Motifs in World Fiction** highlight universal human experiences such as love, loss, struggle and the quest for meaning. However, the manifestation of these themes is deeply influenced by cultural contexts, resulting in a rich variety of stories that, while exploring common motifs, offer unique perspectives. Themes like postcolonialism, migration and identity are crucial, as they reflect the historical and sociopolitical realities faced by different cultures. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's magical realism, for example, can be seen to intertwine the fantastical with the mundane to explore complex social and political issues in Latin America.

**Literary Techniques and Narrative Structures** were also examined by us as tools through which these stories are crafted and conveyed. The diversity in narrative forms, from the stream-of-consciousness technique used by James Joyce to the fragmented postmodern narratives of Haruki Murakami, showcase the inventive spirit of world fiction. These techniques not only enhance storytelling aspects, but also invite readers to engage with the text in more profound and interactive ways. We have seen how they often challenge conventional notions of time, space, and reality.

By examining **Selected Literary Works**, we have seen how individual texts exemplify the broader trends and themes of world fiction in works like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *The God of Small Things*. They are not merely representative of their respective cultures but also offer a microcosm of world literature's broader concerns. It is important to know that these works are milestones that have shaped the literary canon and continue to influence writers and readers globally.

Finally, we see how the **Reception and Interpretation** of world fiction underscores its dynamic and evolving nature. We have noted how the critical interpretations of these texts are as diverse as the texts themselves, often shaped by cultural, political and academic compulsions. The reception of world fiction often involves a dialogue between the local and the global which reveals how literature can transcend boundaries while still being deeply rooted in specific cultural milieus.

Thus, we now know how world fiction serves as a powerful medium for exploring and understanding the vast array of human experiences across cultures through its diverse themes, innovative techniques, and rich representations of cultural identity. The ongoing critical engagement with these works ensures that they remain relevant

while continually offering new insights into the complexities of our globalized world.

### **1.9 Discussing a Question:**

Here is a solved question for your perusal:

**Q.** Discuss the significance of world literature in fostering cross-cultural understanding and global awareness. Provide examples from specific authors and texts to support your arguments.

**Answer:** World literature plays a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and global awareness by transcending national and linguistic boundaries to offer readers insights into diverse cultural experiences and perspectives. Through the exploration of cultural identity, thematic diversity, innovative narrative techniques and the varied reception of literary works, it can be seen how world literature facilitates a deeper appreciation of the complexities and interconnectedness of human societies.

One of the most significant contributions of world literature is its ability to reflect and assert cultural identities. Authors from various cultural backgrounds are known to use fiction to highlight their unique traditions, histories, and social realities. They challenge dominant narratives and stereotypes. For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* provides a nuanced portrayal of pre-colonial African society and the impacts of European colonialism, especially through the character of Okonkwo. Achebe explores themes of identity, tradition and change that offer readers a perspective that contrasts sharply with Western depictions of Africa. Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* delves into the complexities of caste, class and family dynamics in India, providing an intriguing narrative that enhances readers' understanding of Indian society.

World literature also encompasses a wide range of themes that resonate across cultures while also reflecting specific local concerns. Common themes are abundant, such as love, power, conflict and existential quest, but they are given unique treatments depending on the cultural context. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for instance, employs magical realism to address the tumultuous history of Latin America which blends fantastical elements with historical events to comment on political oppression and cultural resilience. Furthermore, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* explores themes of redemption, loyalty and the immigrant experience which provides a window into Afghan culture and the impacts of geopolitical conflicts. The innovative use of narrative techniques in world literature further enriches the reading experience and challenges readers to engage with texts on multiple levels. James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique in *Ulysses* revolutionized the narrative form, providing a deep psychological insight into his characters' inner lives. Haruki Murakami's postmodern narratives, such as *Kafka on the Shore*, similarly blur the lines between reality and fantasy, which prompts readers to question the nature of reality and identity. These narrative innovations not only enhance storytelling but also reflect the diverse ways in which different cultures understand and depict reality uniquely.

It is also interesting to know that the reception of world literature varies across cultures, highlighting the dynamic interaction between local and global literary traditions. Works of world literature are seen to often call for different interpretations based on the cultural and historical contexts of their readers. We can see that in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, there is an interesting blend of intricate storytelling and postcolonial critique, but it has also been known to face controversy and censorship in some regions due to its

portrayal of political and religious themes. This varied reception underscores the importance of considering multiple perspectives in literary analysis and the crucial role of literature in challenging and shaping cultural norms.

In conclusion, it can be said that world literature is instrumental in fostering cross-cultural understanding and global awareness by providing diverse cultural representations, along with thematic explorations and innovative narrative techniques. By engaging with world literature, readers can gain a deeper appreciation of the complexities of human societies and the interconnectedness of global experiences, especially by reading up on authors like Chinua Achebe, Arundhati Roy, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Khaled Hosseini, James Joyce and Haruki Murakami. They demonstrate the power of literature to transcend boundaries and offer insights into the universal and particular aspects of human life through critical engagement with these ideas. Readers can cultivate empathy, challenge their own perspectives, and contribute to a more inclusive and interconnected world with their help.

### **1.10 References and Suggested Readings**

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## UNIT-2

### MAJOR FIGURES IN WORLD FICTION

#### Unit Structure:

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Introduction

#### 2.3 Major Figures in Early Fiction

#### 2.4 Major Figures in 19th Century Fiction

#### 2.5 Major Figures in Modern and Postmodern Fiction

#### 2.6 Contemporary Major Figures in World Fiction

#### 2.7 Summing Up

#### 2.8 Discussing a Question

#### 2.9 References and Suggested Readings

#### 2.1 Objectives

The purpose of this course, "Major Figures in World Fiction," is to provide you with a grasp of the significant authors who have influenced various literary traditions worldwide. It aims to give you an insight into how these key people influenced the growth of fiction and how their works are able to reflect different cultural, historical and sociopolitical situations. In the following parts, we will aim to look at notable authors, their influential works, and the themes and styles that distinguish their contributions to global literature. We will also look at critical and theoretical frameworks needed to analyze the impact of these authors, so that you can gain an understanding of ideas like comparative literature, postcolonialism and transnational studies.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

*Identify* and distinguish the various notable authors from various literary traditions, including their major works and contributions.

*Understand* how different historical and sociopolitical developments shaped these authors' themes and writing styles.

*Apply* a variety of critical ideas, like comparative literature and postcolonial theory, so that you can analyze the works of significant world fiction authors.

*Analyse* the contributions of the significant authors from various locations and be able to learn about the situations in which they wrote.

*Evaluate* the significance of historical and cultural aspects of the aforementioned major figures across time and space.

Ultimately, this unit is aimed at equipping you with the tools to appreciate and critically analyze world fiction while understanding its different traditions and significance in different contexts.

## **2.2 Introduction**

World fiction comprises a vast and diverse array of literary works which were produced across cultures and languages. Unlike national or regional literatures that often reflect localized traditions and concerns, world fiction seems to transcend geographic and cultural boundaries which provide a broad canvas, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human experience. This genre is not merely a collection of disparate narratives but a cohesive line of thought that offers insights into universal themes and issues through culturally specific lenses. The importance of world fiction lies in its ability to foster cross-cultural understanding and challenge readers to see beyond their own lived experiences.

The selection of major figures in world fiction for this lesson is guided by several criteria. Firstly, the chosen authors must have made a substantial impact on the literary landscape, either by

pioneering new narrative forms or by significantly influencing subsequent writers and literary movements. Secondly, their works should offer rich insights into the social and historical contexts from which they emerge, which shall involve a deeper understanding of diverse human experiences. Thirdly, the authors must have achieved a level of recognition and acclaim that reflects their importance within the global literary canon, through critical reception, scholarly attention, or widespread readership. Finally, the selection aims to represent a broad geographical and cultural spectrum in order to ensure that the diversity inherent in world fiction is adequately reflected.

Here are some interesting facts about major figures in World Fiction-

1. **Chinua Achebe:** Though widely known for *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's debut novel was rejected by several publishers before becoming a classic of African literature.
2. **Gabriel Garcia Marquez:** Marquez's journalistic career heavily influenced his narrative style and he was almost a lawyer before fully committing to writing.
3. **Haruki Murakami:** Before becoming a celebrated author, Murakami owned a jazz bar in Tokyo, which significantly influenced the major themes and settings in his novels.
4. **Toni Morrison:** Before gaining fame as a novelist, Morrison worked as an editor at Random House, where she played an important role in promoting African American literature.

## 2.3 Major Figures in Early Fiction

### Miguel de Cervantes (Spain)

#### Overview of Cervantes' Life and Works

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, born in 1547 in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, is often hailed as one of the greatest writers in the Spanish language. Cervantes led a turbulent life, doing military service, and experiencing captivity and financial struggles, and enjoying a

prolific literary career. After serving in the Battle of Lepanto where he sustained severe injuries, he was captured by Barbary pirates and spent five years in captivity in Algiers. Despite these challenges, Cervantes' indomitable spirit and creativity flourished, culminating in the publication of his magnum opus, *Don Quixote*.

### **Analysis of *Don Quixote* and Its Significance in World Literature**

*Don Quixote*, published in two parts (1605 and 1615), is widely regarded as the first modern novel. This chronicles the adventures of Alonso Quixano, a nobleman who, inspired by chivalric romances, renames himself Don Quixote and sets out on a quest to revive knighthood and is accompanied by his loyal squire, Sancho Panza. The novel's significance lies in its innovative narrative structure and unique sense of character development. Cervantes employs a metafictional approach where he presents the story as a historical account, basing it off of various sources. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are complex, multidimensional characters whose evolving relationship and contrasting worldviews provide profound insights into human nature. It also addresses themes of idealism versus pragmatism, the influence of literature on reality along with the struggle for personal integrity in a changing world.

### **Cervantes' Impact on the Development of the Novel as a Literary Form**

Cervantes' contributions to the development of the novel are monumental as his use of a multi-layered narrative, realistic character portrayals and satirical elements laid the groundwork for subsequent novelists. It can be seen that *Don Quixote* transcended the episodic nature of earlier prose works and was able to offer a cohesive and sophisticated narrative structure that delves deeply into the psychology of its characters. His influence extends beyond the

boundaries of Spanish literature. His pioneering techniques and thematic explorations have inspired writers worldwide, from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and beyond. Cervantes set a precedent for future novelists, which established the novel as a dominant literary form capable of addressing complex social and philosophical issues.

## **Murasaki Shikibu (Japan)**

### **Overview of Shikibu's Life and Works**

Murasaki Shikibu, born in the late 10th century (c. 973) into the Fujiwara clan in Japan, is celebrated as one of the greatest writers of Japanese literature and the author of *The Tale of Genji* (Genji Monogatari). Shikibu's life was closely intertwined with the Heian court, where she served as a lady-in-waiting. Her intimate knowledge of court life and politics, combined with her literary talent, allowed her to create a work of extraordinary depth and sophistication. *The Tale of Genji* was written in the early 11th century, and is considered the world's first psychological novel. It remains a cornerstone of classical Japanese literature. The narrative follows the life and loves of Hikaru Genji, a nobleman, while touching upon themes of impermanence, love, and the irreducible complexity of human emotions.

### **Analysis of *The Tale of Genji* and Its Significance**

*The Tale of Genji* is a monumental work comprising 54 chapters and an intricate web of characters and relationships. Shikibu's narrative delves into the inner lives of her characters with unparalleled subtlety while portraying the intricate dynamics of Heian court society. The novel's focus on personal emotions and psychological depth marks a significant departure from earlier literary works as they often emphasized heroic exploits and moral didacticism. On the other hand, Shikibu's prose is renowned for its poetic elegance and

sensitivity to the fleeting nature of beauty and life which is largely seen as a reflection of the Buddhist concept of impermanence. *The Tale of Genji* offers a vivid depiction of Heian-era aesthetics and values which highlights the sophisticated cultural milieu of the time. The novel's significance extends beyond its literary merits as it provides invaluable insights into the life of the Heian period. Its themes of love, jealousy and the quest for fulfillment resonate universally which makes it a timeless classic that continues to captivate readers.

### **Shikibu's Influence on Japanese and World Literature**

Murasaki Shikibu's influence on Japanese literature is also quite profound. *The Tale of Genji* set a high standard for narrative fiction which influenced subsequent generations of writers and became a central text in the Japanese literary canon. Its exploration of psychological complexity and human relationships truly paved the way for later literary developments in Japan, which included the rise of the modern novel in the Meiji period. This is why Shikibu's work also holds a significant place in world literature and this is why it has been translated into numerous languages, allowing global audiences to appreciate its artistic and cultural richness. Its impact can be seen in the works of modern writers and scholars who seem to draw inspiration from its narrative techniques and thematic depth even today.

#### **SAQ**

1. What is the basic importance of World Fiction? (30 words)

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2. Write about some of the key names in World Fiction and their main contributions. (60 words)

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### Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the impact of Miguel de Cervantes' turbulent life on his literary works, particularly "Don Quixote." How do his personal experiences reflect in the themes and characters of the novel?
2. Analyze the significance of "Don Quixote" in world literature, focusing on its innovative narrative structure and character development.
3. What elements of Heian-era culture and aesthetics does Shikibu portray in her narrative?
4. Compare and contrast the contributions of Miguel de Cervantes and Murasaki Shikibu to the development of the novel as a literary form.

## 2.4 Major Figures in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Fiction

### Leo Tolstoy (Russia)

#### Overview of Tolstoy's Life and Works

Leo Tolstoy was born in 1828 into an aristocratic Russian family and is widely regarded as one of the greatest novelists in the history of literature. His works are known for their profound insights into the human condition with detailed depictions of Russian society. We know that Tolstoy's life was marked by a series of personal and spiritual crises, which influenced his writing and philosophical outlook. He is best known for his epic novels *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877), which not only reflect his literary genius

but also his evolving views on topics like religion, politics and morality.

### **Analysis of Key Works**

*War and Peace* is an extensive narrative that intertwines the lives of several aristocratic families against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars. The novel is celebrated for its intricate plot, rife with rich character development and philosophical depth. His meticulous research and vivid descriptions bring to life the historical events and cultural milieu of the early 19th-century Russia. The novel explores themes such as fate, free will and the search for meaning in a chaotic world with Tolstoy's signature touch. *Anna Karenina*, on the other hand, delves into the complexities of Russian high society through the tragic love affair of its titular character, Anna, and her lover, Count Vronsky. The novel contrasts Anna's passionate, ultimately destructive love with the more stable, albeit less thrilling, marriage of Levin and Kitty which marks a dual narrative. It is clear how Tolstoy examines the constraints of societal norms and the pursuit of personal happiness along with the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in their private and public lives.

### **Tolstoy's Contributions to Narrative Technique and Thematic Depth**

Tolstoy's contributions to narrative technique are manifold. He employed a realist style which was characterized by psychological depth and a focus on everyday life. His use of free indirect speech allowed readers to intimately experience the thoughts and emotions of his characters by blurring the lines between narrator and character perspective. This technique enhanced the emotional resonance and authenticity of his storytelling. Thematically, we see that Tolstoy's works address the existential struggles of individuals and the broader social and political issues of his time. His exploration of



themes such as the futility of war, the hypocrisies of high society and the search for spiritual fulfillment show how his deep philosophical inquiries and moral convictions add to the value of the work.

## **Jane Austen (England)**

### **Overview of Austen's Life and Works**

Jane Austen, born in 1775, was an English novelist whose works have gained immense popularity and critical acclaim for their keen social observations and biting wit. She was living in a quiet rural environment, and her life was relatively uneventful compared to the dramatic events she depicted in her novels. Despite the limited scope of her personal experiences, her keen insight into human nature and the social dynamics of her time has made her one of the most beloved authors in English literature. Her major works include *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1815).

### **Analysis of Key Works**

*Pride and Prejudice* is perhaps Austen's most famous novel which chronicles the romantic misadventures of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. The novel is renowned for its sharp critique of the British class system and the institution of marriage. Through Elizabeth's wit and independence, Austen is also seen to challenge contemporary gender norms and celebrate the virtues of intelligence and integrity. *Emma* centers on the eponymous character, Emma Woodhouse, who is a wealthy young woman who prides herself on her matchmaking skills which is often misplaced. The novel seems to explore themes of social status and personal growth along with the complexities of romantic relationships. Emma's journey from misguided self-assurance to self-awareness and humility illustrates how Austen's nuanced understanding of the world around her

helped her in her portrayal of character development and social dynamics.

### **Austen's Influence on the Novel and Themes of Social Critique**

Austen's use of irony allows her to critique societal norms subtly yet effectively. Her focus on the domestic sphere and the lives of women provides a counter-narrative to the male-dominated literary canon of her time. She was instrumental in highlighting the importance of women's perspectives and experiences. Thematically, Austen's works are known to have critiqued the social and economic pressures that dictated personal relationships and individual choices. Her exploration of marriage and gender remains relevant today, offering timeless insights into the human condition and societal structures.

## **Charles Dickens (England)**

### **Overview of Dickens' Life and Works**

Charles Dickens, born in 1812, was one of the most influential and prolific writers of the 19th century. His early life was marked by hardship, including his father's imprisonment for debt, which profoundly influenced his later works. Perhaps that is why Dickens' novels often depict the struggles of the poor and the injustices of the social system. He had a deep social consciousness and commitment to reform with his major works including *Great Expectations* (1861) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

### **Analysis of Key Works**

*Great Expectations* follows the life of Pip, an orphan who rises from humble beginnings to wealth and status, only to realize the emptiness of his ambitions. The novel explores themes of social mobility, identity and personal growth with vivid characters, such as

the tragic Miss Havisham and the convict Magwitch. They also add depth and complexity to the narrative. Set during the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities* deals with the idea of contrast between the cities of London and Paris which depicts the turmoil and upheaval of the era. The novel explores themes of sacrifice, resurrection and the redemptive power of love with a depiction of the revolutionary fervor and corresponding brutality. It highlights his concern with justice and the human cost of social change.

### **Dickens' Impact on Social Realism and the Portrayal of Urban Life**

Dickens is celebrated for his pioneering role in social realism, a literary movement that sought to depict everyday life and social issues with authenticity and compassion. His detailed descriptions of urban life, particularly in London, capture the squalor complexity, and vibrancy of the city. Through his use of serialized publication, Dickens reached a broad audience, which raised awareness about social injustices and the necessity of reform. His narrative style is characterized by memorable characters, intricate plots and a blend of humor and pathos. It has left a lasting impact on the novel as a literary form.

## **2.5 Major Figures in Modern and Postmodern Fiction**

### **James Joyce (Ireland)**

#### **Overview of Joyce's Life and Works**

James Joyce was born in Dublin in 1882, and is a towering figure in modernist literature. His innovative narrative techniques and complex, layered prose have left an indelible mark on the literary world. Joyce's early life in Ireland was marked by a strong Catholic upbringing and a turbulent family background, which profoundly influenced his work. After leaving Ireland in 1904, Joyce lived in

various European cities, including Trieste, Zurich and Paris, where he wrote most of his major works. His notable works include *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

### **Analysis of *Ulysses* and Its Revolutionary Narrative Techniques**

*Ulysses* is arguably Joyce's magnum opus and a cornerstone of modernist literature. The novel parallels the structure of Homer's *Odyssey*, chronicling a single day on June 16, 1904, in the life of Leopold Bloom in Dublin. Joyce's use of stream-of-consciousness, interior monologue and intricate allusions creates a richly textured narrative that immerses the reader deeply into the inner lives of its characters. The stream-of-consciousness technique in particular, allows readers to experience the protagonists' thoughts in real-time, which captures the complexities and nuances of human consciousness. Joyce also employs a vast array of styles and linguistic experiments, ranging from parodies and pastiches to symbolic and mythological references, which challenge conventional narrative forms and invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels.

### **Joyce's Influence on Modernist Literature**

Joyce's work has had a profound influence on modernist literature and beyond. His experimental narrative techniques have inspired countless writers to explore new ways of telling stories and representing consciousness. It can be seen how authors like Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Samuel Beckett drew on Joyce's innovations to develop their own distinctive styles. Furthermore, Joyce's thematic explorations of the fragmentation of modern life resonate deeply with the concerns of the 20th century and continue to influence contemporary literature.

## **Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia)**

### **Overview of Marquez's Life and Works**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, born in Aracataca, Colombia, in 1927, is a central figure in Latin American literature and also a Nobel laureate. Marquez's early life in a small town infused with local folklore and political tension significantly shaped his narrative style which is seen even in his journalism career and political views. They also influenced his literary work, which often addresses social and political issues in Latin America. Marquez's major works include *Leaf Storm* (1955), *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985).

### **Analysis of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the Magic Realism Genre**

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is Marquez's most celebrated novel, and it is a seminal work of the magic realism genre. The novel traces the rise and fall of the Buendía family in the fictional town of Macondo. It blends realistic narrative with fantastical elements. Marquez's seamless integration of the extraordinary into everyday life creates a unique narrative atmosphere that reflects the complexities and contradictions of Latin American reality. Magic realism, as employed by Marquez, seems to challenge the boundaries between reality and fantasy, allowing for a richer, more nuanced exploration of themes. The novel's cyclical structure and its use of symbolic and allegorical elements offer a profound commentary on the nature of history and human experience.

### **Marquez's Impact on Latin American Literature and Global Fiction**

Marquez's work has had a transformative impact on Latin American literature, helping to propel the Latin American Boom of the 1960s

and 1970s. His use of magic realism has influenced writers across the globe, including Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison and Isabel Allende. Marquez's ability to blend political and social commentary with lyrical and imaginative storytelling has made his work a touchstone for writers seeking to explore the interplay between the real and the fantastical.

## **Franz Kafka (Austria-Hungary)**

### **Overview of Kafka's Life and Works**

Franz Kafka, born in Prague in 1883, is one of the most influential figures in modernist fiction. Kafka's life, marked by his struggles with illness, alienation, and a complex relationship with his father, deeply influenced his writing. Although he published only a few works during his lifetime, including short stories like "The Metamorphosis" (1915) and novels like *The Trial* (1925, published posthumously), Kafka's work gained significant recognition after his death, largely thanks to his friend and biographer Max Brod.

### **Analysis of Key Works like "The Metamorphosis" and *The Trial***

In "The Metamorphosis," Kafka tells the story of Gregor Samsa, who inexplicably transforms into a giant insect. This surreal narrative explores themes of alienation, identity and the absurdity of human existence. Gregor's metamorphosis and subsequent ostracization by his family serve as a powerful metaphor for the dehumanizing effects of modern society and the individual's struggle to find meaning and acceptance. "The Trial" follows Josef K., who is arrested and prosecuted by an opaque, inaccessible authority without ever being informed of his crime. The novel's exploration of bureaucratic oppression and the existential angst reflects Kafka's profound concerns with the absurdities of modern

life and the individual's powerlessness within larger societal structures.

### **Kafka's Influence on Existentialism and Modernist Fiction**

Kafka's work has had a lasting impact on existentialist and modernist literature. His exploration of themes such as existential dread, the absurdity of life and the oppressive nature of societal institutions resonates with the existentialist philosophy of thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Kafka's distinctive narrative style, characterized by its precise, detached prose and its blend of the mundane and the surreal, has influenced a wide range of writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, Haruki Murakami and Philip Roth. Kafka's legacy endures as his works continue to offer profound insights into the human condition and various complexities of modern existence.

#### **Stop to Consider**

- Toni Morrison: Morrison was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.
- Haruki Murakami: Murakami began writing fiction while running a jazz bar in Tokyo.
- Franz Kafka: Kafka requested that his unpublished manuscripts be destroyed upon his death, a wish his friend Max Brod famously ignored.
- Virginia Woolf: Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* explores a single day in the life of its protagonist, similar to Joyce's *Ulysses*.
- Chinua Achebe: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most widely read books in African literature and has been translated into more than 50 languages.
- Marcel Proust: Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is often cited as the longest novel ever written, with around 4,000 pages.
- Jorge Luis Borges: Borges was nearly blind by his late fifties, but he continued to write influential works of fiction and essays.
- Isabel Allende: Allende's debut novel, *The House of the Spirits*, began as a letter to her dying grandfather.

**SAQ**

1. Write a few lines on the impact of Marquez in World Fiction. (60 words)

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.....  
.....

2. What role does Kafka play in World Fiction? (60 words)

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.....  
.....

**Stop to Consider**

Here are some important terms used in World Fiction-

**Narrative Voice:** The perspective from which a story is told which influences the reader's understanding and connection to the plot and characters.

**Magical Realism:** A literary style that incorporates fantastical elements into otherwise realistic settings, blending reality and fantasy seamlessly.

**Stream of Consciousness:** A narrative technique that portrays the continuous flow of a character's thoughts and memories.

**Bildungsroman:** A coming-of-age story that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood.

**Postcolonialism:** A critical framework examining the effects of colonization on cultures and societies, often dealing with themes of identity, power, and resistance.

**Intertextuality:** The relationship between texts, where one text references or draws on themes, symbols or structures from another text.



**Metafiction:** Fiction that self-consciously addresses its own devices, often blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction.

**Epistolary Novel:** A novel written in the form of letters, diary entries or other documents, which provides intimate insights into the characters' thoughts and experiences.

**Allegory:** A narrative in which characters, events and settings represent abstract concepts which convey deeper moral, political or philosophical meanings.

**Gothic Fiction:** A genre characterized by dark, mysterious settings and elements of horror and romance, often exploring themes of decay and the supernatural.

### SAQ

1. What is the importance of Kafka in World fiction? (60 words)

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.....  
.....

2. Mention the major texts and writers of World fiction. (30 words)

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.....

## 2.6 Contemporary Major Figures in World Fiction

### Haruki Murakami (Japan)

#### Overview of Murakami's Life and Works

Haruki Murakami, born in Kyoto in 1949, is one of Japan's most renowned contemporary authors with a unique style that blends surrealism, magical realism and themes of alienation along with existential inquiry. Murakami's literature is heavily influenced by

Western culture, particularly American literature and music, which he integrates seamlessly with Japanese traditions. His novels often feature ordinary protagonists who find themselves drawn into extraordinary and fantastical situations in his signature style.

### **Analysis of Key Works**

***Norwegian Wood* (1987):** This novel is a poignant coming-of-age story set in the 1960s, a period of political unrest in Japan. The protagonist, Toru Watanabe, reflects on his college years and his relationships with two very different women, Naoko and Midori. The novel explores themes of love, loss and mental illness, showing a deeply personal journey against the backdrop of a changing society. This novel catapulted Murakami to fame as it resonated with readers for its emotional depth and lyrical prose.

***Kafka on the Shore* (2002):** This novel intertwines the stories of a 15-year-old runaway named Kafka Tamura and an elderly man named Nakata, who has the ability to talk to cats. Blending elements of magical realism, surrealism and metaphysical speculation, Murakami explored complex themes such as fate, consciousness and the unique search for identity. The novel's non-linear narrative and enigmatic symbolism seem to have garnered both critical acclaim and widespread readership.

### **Murakami's Influence on Contemporary Fiction**

Haruki Murakami has significantly impacted contemporary fiction by blending genres and cultural references while also creating a literary style that is both globally resonant and uniquely his own. His works challenge traditional narrative structures and often incorporate elements of the surreal. Murakami's influence extends beyond literature into popular culture, with his novels being adapted into films, plays and even operas. His ability to bridge Eastern and

Western literary traditions has greatly helped to expand the global reach and appeal of Japanese literature.

## **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria)**

### **Overview of Adichie's Life and Works**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1977 and is a leading voice in contemporary African literature. Adichie's writing is deeply rooted in her Nigerian heritage and often addresses themes of identity, post-colonialism and feminism. She studied in the United States, where she earned degrees from Eastern Connecticut State University and Johns Hopkins University, which is known to have significantly influenced her literary perspective.

### **Analysis of Key Works**

***Half of a Yellow Sun (2006)***: Set during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), this novel provides a multi-perspective narrative that follows the lives of three characters: Ugwu, a young houseboy; Olanna, a middle-class woman; and Richard, a British expatriate. Adichie weaves their personal stories into the broader historical context while exploring the impact of war on individuals and society. The novel's vivid storytelling and nuanced portrayal of Nigerian culture and history have earned it numerous accolades, most notably the Orange Prize for Fiction.

***Americanah (2013)***: This novel chronicles the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who emigrates to the United States for college, and her subsequent return to Nigeria. It addresses themes of race, identity and cultural displacement. It offers a critical perspective on the immigrant experience and the complexities of navigating different cultural landscapes. The novel's insightful commentary on race relations in America and the global Black

experience has made it a seminal work in the area of contemporary fiction.

### **Adichie's Impact on Contemporary African Literature and Global Discussions on Identity**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has significantly influenced contemporary African literature by bringing Nigerian and broader African experiences to a global audience. Her works challenge stereotypes and offer a rich, authentic portrayal of African life and history. Adichie is also a prominent feminist voice, especially with her TED Talk "We Should All Be Feminists" and subsequent essays sparking international discussions on gender equality. Adichie has become a crucial figure in contemporary literature and a powerful advocate for social change.

### **Margaret Atwood (Canada)**

#### **Overview of Atwood's Life and Works**

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1939. She is a prolific writer whose career spans over six decades. She is known for her versatility across genres, including fiction, poetry and critical essays. Atwood's work often explores themes of gender, and environmental degradation, using speculative and dystopian elements to critique contemporary society. Her contributions to literature have earned her numerous awards, including the Booker Prize and the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

#### **Analysis of Key Works**

***The Handmaid's Tale (1985)***: Set in the dystopian society of Gilead, this novel explores themes of totalitarianism, gender oppression and resistance. The story is narrated by Offred, a woman forced into reproductive servitude. Atwood's chilling vision of a

future where women's rights are severely restricted serves as a powerful commentary on contemporary issues of gender and political control. *The Handmaid's Tale* has become a cultural touchstone, and inspired adaptations into a successful television series and a graphic novel.

***Oryx and Crake* (2003):** This speculative fiction novel is the first in the "MaddAddam" trilogy, exploring themes of genetic engineering, ecological collapse and the ethics of scientific experimentation. The narrative follows Snowman, who believes he may be the last human alive, as he reflects on his past and the events that led to the dystopian present. Atwood's intricate world-building and exploration of the consequences of human hubris and technological advancement offer a profound critique of contemporary society.

### **Atwood's Influence on Dystopian Fiction and Feminist Literature**

Margaret Atwood's works often serve as cautionary tales, warning against the dangers of authoritarianism, environmental neglect and unchecked scientific progress. Atwood's exploration of gender dynamics and power structures has made her a pivotal figure in feminist literature, inspiring both critical discourse and activism while her ability to blend speculative fiction with pressing social issues has earned her a global readership while cementing her status as a major figure in contemporary world fiction.

#### **SAQ**

1. What are some of the major ideas dealt with by Atwood in her works? (60 words)

.....

.....

.....

2. Briefly analyse the role of Adichie in World Fiction? (60 words)

.....

.....

.....

### Check Your Progress

1. How does Haruki Murakami integrate Western influences into his works, and what impact does this have on his portrayal of Japanese culture and themes of alienation and existential inquiry?
2. In what ways does Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* address themes of identity and cultural displacement?
3. Analyze the role of dystopian elements in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*.
4. Compare and contrast the narrative techniques used by Haruki Murakami, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Margaret Atwood in their respective works.

Here are some Critical opinions on Major Figures of World Fiction-

Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Harold Bloom commended Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a masterpiece of magical realism. He noted its ability to weave the fantastical with the mundane, creating a richly textured representation of Latin American history and identity.

Haruki Murakami: Jay Rubin, a prominent translator and scholar, emphasized Murakami's unique fusion of Western and Japanese literary traditions and described his work as a bridge that connects diverse cultural landscapes and explores universal themes of alienation and identity.

Toni Morrison: Critic and academic, Barbara Christian, acclaimed Morrison's novels for their deep exploration of African American history and identity, noting how her intricate narratives and multifaceted characters offer a powerful critique of systemic racism and social injustice.

Virginia Woolf: Hermione Lee praised Woolf for her pioneering stream-of-consciousness technique and exploration of the inner lives of her characters. She believed it redefined the narrative form and deepened the psychological complexity of modern fiction.

## 2.7 Summing Up

The study of world fiction involves exploring the diverse literary traditions that have shaped global literature. In this lesson, we have examined major figures in world fiction, which highlighted their contributions to the evolution of narrative forms and themes. By understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which these authors wrote, we have further gained insights into the universal and particular aspects of human experience that their works reflect. We have studied how World fiction has evolved through distinct historical phases, each marked by significant cultural and intellectual shifts. From the oral traditions of ancient civilizations to the written texts of the classical and medieval periods, early fiction laid the groundwork for narrative structures and themes. The advent of the printing press in the 15th century revolutionized the dissemination of literature, setting the stage for the flourishing of fiction in the modern era.

We have addressed how figures like Homer and his epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, provided archetypal stories of heroism and adventure. In the medieval period, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The*

*Canterbury Tales* offered a rich variety of stories reflecting the complexity of human nature and social dynamics which established narrative techniques and thematic explorations that would be revisited and reinterpreted by later writers. The 19th century was a golden age for the novel, characterized by the rise of realism and the exploration of social and psychological themes. Authors like Leo Tolstoy, with *War and Peace* and Charles Dickens, with *Great Expectations* are seen to have delved into the intricacies of human relationships and societal issues. We then went on to study how the 20th century introduced modernism and postmodernism, movements that challenged traditional narrative structures and thematic conventions. James Joyce's *Ulysses* exemplified the stream-of-consciousness technique, while Franz Kafka's works depicted the absurdity and alienation of modern life. We have seen how even in contemporary literature, figures such as Haruki Murakami, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Margaret Atwood have gained global prominence with Murakami's blending of surrealism and Japanese culture and Adichie's exploration of post-colonial identity and feminism, along with Atwood's dystopian visions and critiques of power dynamics which exemplify the diverse thematic concerns and narrative techniques in today's fiction.

Finally, we have understood how their works remain pivotal in analysing the evolution and ongoing relevance of fiction in capturing the complexities of life.

## **2.8 Discussing a Question:**

Here is a solved question for your perusal:

**Q.** Discuss the contributions of major figures in world fiction from different historical periods, including early fiction, 19th-century fiction, modern and postmodern fiction, and contemporary fiction.



Analyze how these authors have influenced the development of literary themes and narrative techniques, and examine their impact on global literature.

**Answer:** The evolution of world fiction is marked by the contributions of major literary figures across different historical periods. Each era has seen the emergence of writers who have significantly influenced literary themes and narrative techniques which have shaped the trajectory of global literature.

In the realm of early fiction, foundational texts from figures like Homer and Geoffrey Chaucer laid the groundwork for future narrative forms. Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, are cornerstones of Western literature which are known for their intricate plot structures and exploration of themes like the human condition. These works set a precedent for epic storytelling, combining poetic form with rich, multifaceted narratives that delve into the complexities of human experience. It can be seen how Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* introduced a novel approach to storytelling through its use of a frame narrative and diverse character perspectives. This work is notable for its vivid characterizations and its insightful social commentary. It reflects the cultural and social milieu of medieval England and these early figures not only established foundational narrative techniques but also underscored the role of fiction in reflecting and critiquing society.

The 19th century further witnessed a transformative period for the novel, marked by the rise of realism and an intensified focus on social and psychological themes. Writers like Leo Tolstoy and Charles Dickens are emblematic of this era. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a monumental work that interweaves personal narratives with historical events. It is a profound exploration of human nature and society. His detailed character studies and philosophical

musings on life, death and destiny set a high standard for literary realism. Charles Dickens, on the other hand, is renowned for his vivid depictions of Victorian England and his critical engagement with social issues such as poverty, child labour and class disparity in novels like *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities* combine gripping narratives with incisive social critique. This made Dickens a pivotal figure in the development of the social novel.

The 20th century introduced modernism and postmodernism, which seemed to revolutionize narrative techniques and thematic exploration. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is a quintessential modernist text that employs stream-of-consciousness narration and intricate allusions to classical literature which pushes the boundaries of narrative form and linguistic experimentation. Joyce's work is a testament to the modernist preoccupation with exploring the depths of human consciousness and the fragmentation of reality. Postmodern authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino further expanded the possibilities of fiction through their innovative approaches to storytelling. Borges' works, such as *Ficciones* are characterized by their metafictional elements and philosophical inquiries which challenge conventional notions of authorship and narrative. Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* exemplifies postmodern playfulness with its recursive, self-referential structure, which invites readers to question the nature of fiction and reality. These modern and postmodern figures have profoundly influenced contemporary literature by challenging traditional narrative forms and encouraging experimental approaches to storytelling.

Similar ideas can also be seen in contemporary fiction, with authors like Haruki Murakami, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Margaret Atwood, who have garnered international acclaim for their unique narrative voices and thematic concerns. Murakami's blending of surrealism and Japanese culture, as seen in works like *Kafka on the*

*Shore*, offers readers a distinctive blend of the fantastical and the mundane and explores themes of alienation and existential inquiry. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, including *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, provide nuanced explorations of post-colonial identity and feminism. Margaret Atwood's dystopian fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale* has become emblematic of feminist literature and speculative fiction. Her exploration of gender oppression and environmental degradation resonates deeply with contemporary societal concerns. It demonstrates the enduring relevance of fiction in critiquing and reflecting reality.

In conclusion, the contributions of major figures in world fiction across different historical periods have been instrumental in shaping the development of literary themes and narrative techniques. It can be seen from the epic tales of Homer to the innovative structures of Borges and the socio-political critiques of Adichie, that these authors have not only reflected the concerns of their times but also expanded the horizons of fiction, influencing generations of people worldwide. Their works underscore the power of fiction to explore the human condition, challenge societal norms.

## **2.9 References and Suggested Readings**

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## UNIT-3

### POSTMODERN FICTION

#### Unit Structure:

#### 3.1. Objectives

#### 3.2. Introduction

#### 3.3. Key Features of Postmodernism

#### 3.4. Introduction to Postmodern Fiction

#### 3.5. Some Major Postmodern Fictions

#### 3.6. Summing Up

#### 3.7. References and Suggested Readings

#### 3.8. Model Questions

#### 3.1. Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- *Understand* the basic theory of Postmodernism
- *Analyze* postmodern literary works
- *Know* about postmodern fiction
- *Learn* about the major postmodern writers

#### 3.2. Introduction

Postmodernism is a complex, multifaceted school of thought that emerged in the mid-twentieth century that challenged the traditional notions of art, culture, and literature. Its origin can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century when various literary and art movements like Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism were in vogue. Along with these movements, the 1940s-50s witnessed the rise of Existentialism and Absurdism, led by prominent thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Postmodernism looked forward

to newer experimentations as it attempted a unique blend of different styles, genres, and disciplines to create new, hybrid forms of expression. The postmodern thinkers celebrate pluralism and diversity of perspectives, experiences, and voices, postulating a more inclusive and heterogeneous understanding of the world. It challenges the idea of objectivity while contemplating the role of language, power, and context in shaping our apprehension of reality. Postmodernism explores hyper-reality, which often blurs the line between reality and representation in which simulations becomes more significant than the reality itself. The postmodern school of thought renounces centralized, authoritative perspective. It mostly emphasizes on the fragmented, provisional nature of knowledge, identity, and reality as it challenges the grand narratives and the dominant stories of reason and universal truth that moulds our understanding of the world.

### **3.3. Key Features of Postmodernism**

Let us discuss some of the main features of postmodernism:

- Experimentation and hybridity

The postmodern school of thought frequently privileged a blend of styles, genres, and disciplines to create new hybrid forms of expression. This experimental outlook changed as well as challenged the traditional notions of art, culture, and literature. The postmodern literary works often abandon traditional linear narratives and emphasized more on fragmented, non-linear structures. It attempted a blending of different genres such as science fiction, women literature, magic realism, historical fiction, fantasy and myth, and various other elements to create hybrid forms. The postmodernist focus on the provisional nature of knowledge, identity, and reality rejects the centralized and

authoritative perspectives while embracing diversity, complexity and multiplicity. Postmodernism celebrates the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and voices, promoting an inclusive, heterogeneous understanding of the world. One of the most significant works of postmodern fiction is Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel combines and blends elements of science fiction, feminism, dystopian futuristic reality, alongside numerous biblical references, thus challenging genre conventions. Another widely acclaimed work includes Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which combines multiple elements of historical fiction, postcolonial literature, and magic realism. The novel celebrates the diversity of immigrant experiences, challenging dominant British narratives. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is structured with blended elements of historical fiction, science fiction, and paranoia. The novel features a fragmented form with multiple, non-linear storylines, characters, and events, thus challenging the idea of a single, coherent narrative.

- Challenging grand narratives

Also known as meta-narratives, grand narratives are overarching ideologies that explain and justify the world as well as our position in it. Postmodernism challenges these ideologies and argues that these narratives are socially constructed, exclusionary, and oppressive. It questions the dominant ideas around progress, reason, universal truth, etc. that shape our understanding of the world. The grand narratives hold certain preconceived notions— for instance, progress is the idea of a linear march towards improvement and growth from the past. It believes reason to be a rational thought which can eventually lead to universal truth, while universal truth itself is the notion that a single, objective truth is applicable in all contexts.

Postmodernism questions the validity and universality of grand narratives, arguing that they are social constructs, often created and promoted by dominant groups to maintain power relations or justify the dominant ideologies as well as to maintain the status quo. Postmodernist thinkers like Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, challenged various notions of the grand narratives. Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book, *The Postmodern Condition* (published in 1979) challenges the grand narrative of progress, arguing that it is a social construct meant to ignore the experiences of marginalized groups. Foucault in one of his most widely-acclaimed books, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (published in 1969) challenges the grand narrative of reason. Derrida's theory of deconstruction challenges the grand narrative of universal truth. Deconstruction, in simple terms, is a critical methodology that challenges the traditional notions of meaning and interpretations, introduced in Derrida's book, *Of Grammatology* (published in 1967). He challenges the idea of objective truth, arguing that meaning is always subjective and depends upon the context, both spatial and temporal. The feminist and postcolonial critiques of the late twentieth century challenge the grand narrative of patriarchy and imperialism. By challenging the grand narratives, postmodernism widens the scope of alternate perspectives, thus promoting critical thinking while encouraging a more nuanced understanding of the world.

- Hyperreality and simulation

Hyperreality refers to a state or situation where the representation of reality or simulation takes precedence over the actual reality. It basically is a liminal space between reality and representation where the distinction between the two is blurred or erased. On the other hand, simulation refers to the process of creating a representation of reality. It can be of diverse forms



such as image, model, linguistic or artistic representation, media, etc. Though simulations are unreal representations or a copy of reality, it need not necessarily be deceptive or manipulative but rather meant to promote a more engaging and convenient experience. For instance, the Disney theme park and all the Disney characters like Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck are representations or simulations of reality which creates a hyperreal experience which is more engaging and fascinating than reality. The concept of hyperreality and simulation gained popularity in the works of Jean Baudrillard. He argues that the contemporary society has become characterized by hyperreality and simulation which have extensively led to the replacement of the actual reality. According to Baudrillard, this has led to a severed connection with reality and a growing fascination for the simulations, thus altering our perception of the real world. The philosophical implication of Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and simulation challenges the traditional notions of reality, truth, and knowledge. He critiques modernity's emphasis on reason, progress, and objective truth.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Jean Baudrillard's** theory of hyperreality and simulation remains a significant and influential work in contemporary thought which offered valuable and thought-provoking insights into the nature of reality, representation, and simulation in postmodern society. Baudrillard's theory has influenced various fields in the academia and beyond, such as cultural studies, media theory, philosophy, sociology, etc. He argues that contemporary society is characterized by simulations or copies of the actual reality, thus creating a hyperreal world. Baudrillard identifies four levels of simulations:

**1. First-order simulation** refers to the direct copy of reality; for instance, a photograph.

**2. Second-order simulation** is a copy of the copy of the actual reality, like a portrait or a painting of a photograph.

**3. Third-order simulation** is an imagined representation of a reality that does not actually exist yet, like a fantasy or a futuristic dystopian movie.

**4. Fourth-order simulation** is what masks the absence of reality; for example, a hyperreal theme park like Disneyland.

Hyperreality and simulation are central concepts that mold the postmodernist school of thought which describes the way simulated images or representations of reality overshadow the actual reality of the world. Baudrillard's theory highlights the implications of this phenomenon on our understanding of the world as well as our place in it.

- Intertextuality and Pastiche

Postmodernism highlights the interconnectedness of texts, ideas, and cultural artifacts. Many postmodernist thinkers argue that meaning is not fixed but is always generated through interrelationships between texts. Intertextuality refers to the practice of referencing, quoting, or alluding to other texts within a new text. Intertextuality challenges the idea of originality and authorial ownership as it highlights the interconnectedness of various texts. Pastiche is one specific type of intertextuality which is known for imitating or mimicking the style of another text or author. It often involves a playful, ironic and humorous reworking of existing texts, genres, and styles to create a new work. However, pastiche does not intend to mock or critique any

author or text but rather tends to be celebratory or invoke nostalgia for a bygone age. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is one of the most popular postmodern epics which refers to multifarious elements for a vast array of texts, from mythology to historical events. Intertextuality forms a key factor for postmodern thinking as it challenges the traditional genre boundaries for creating art and literature. The interconnectedness of different texts across genres, style, time, and space, acknowledges and celebrates the cultural and literary heritage that shapes our understanding of the world.

- Metafiction and Self-reflexivity

Metafiction, in simple terms, refers to a kind of fiction that self-consciously addresses the nature of fiction itself. It comments on its own fictionality, often acknowledging its own artificiality and constructedness. Metafictional works try to subvert genre conventions, thus challenging genre boundaries and expectations. Postmodern literature, through metafiction often self-consciously addresses its own status as a construct as it acknowledges the provisional nature of knowledge and representation. One of the most influential postmodernist thinkers, Michel Foucault in his seminal text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, examines the power dynamics involved in knowledge production, acknowledging the provisional nature of his own research work. The self-reflexivity of postmodernist literature attempts to break the fourth wall as characters or the narrative itself often addresses the readers or considers their role in interpreting the work. For instance, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is a self-reflexive postmodern metafiction which addresses its own construction as well as challenges the readers' role in understanding and interpreting it. Metafiction questions the notion of objective truth and encourages readers to

actively engage with the text and comprehend its meaning themselves. The metafictional works in postmodern literature works on self-reflexivity which reveals the complex, constructed nature of reality and challenge readers to actively engage with the text.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why do you think postmodernism advocate experimentation in creation of literary work? Explain with example.
2. What do you understand by grand narratives? Why do you think postmodernism challenges the grand narratives?
3. What is hyperreality?
4. Explain with example, your understanding of simulation. How does it influence postmodern literature?
5. Why do you think intertextuality is a key factor in postmodernism?
6. What is pastiche?
7. What do you understand by metafiction?
8. What do you understand by self-reflexivity in postmodern literature?

### **3.4 Introduction to Postmodern Fiction**

Postmodern fiction is a literary genre that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, often characterized by fragmented narratives and unconventional narrative structure, humorous and playful use of language, and a self-reflexive style of composition, to explore complex themes and ideas. It often thematises political and historical issues, as it challenges the grand narratives and questions the dominant ideologies and cultural norms. Notable postmodernist authors include Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, David Foster Wallace,

Italo Calvino, Jeanette Winterson, among others. The postmodern literary works often explored recurrent themes associated with fluid and performative identities, challenging dominant historical narratives, impact of technological intervention on human experiences, effects of globalization from a cultural perspective, etc. Postmodern fiction challenges readers to think critically about the nature of the different elements of reality, reason, progress, culture, identity, and truth.

One of the most prominent precursors to postmodernism is Dadaism, an early twentieth century European avant-garde art movement which emerged as a response to the chaos and catastrophe of World War I. Postmodern literature was extensively influenced by Dadaism, especially in the creation of collage using elements from various illustrations and events from popular novels. Another prominent art movement was Surrealism, an artistic and literary movement that emerged in the 1920s. It was initiated by French writer Andre Breton and it speculated the subconscious and the realm of dreams, fantasies, and the irrational. Surrealist artists took recourse to techniques like free association, and spontaneity to delve into the unconscious. The movement questioned the nature of reality and the rational world as it celebrated the absurd and the illogical, unconventional world. Surrealism draws upon the Dadaist rejection of reality and embracing the irrational. Postmodernism represents a continuation to modernism's exploration of subjectivity, breaking from the external reality to examine the inner state of consciousness. It draws from the prime literary styles of modernist literature such as the stream of consciousness technique in many popular narratives by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Postmodernist literature derives inspiration from a modernist style of composition in the use of fragmented narratives and character construction. Another significant element present in many

modernist texts that was followed by postmodernist writers is the playful use of language, often employing humor and irony to subvert conventions and challenge certain norms. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Woolf's *Orlando* serves as precursors to postmodernist texts like David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* which dwells on playful language and irony to subvert the story-telling convention and questions readers' expectations.

Some of the earliest postmodern narratives were written during the 1950s which includes William Gaddis's *The Recognitions* (1955), Vladimir Nobakov's *Lolita* (1955), and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959). Postmodernism gained prominence in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the 1960s and 1970s with the publication of some of the best-known literary works like Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), among others. Several key works of postmodern literature also came in the 1980s like Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) and Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1985 -86).

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. Name two major art movements that influenced postmodern literature.
2. Who was the founder of Surrealism?
3. Name any two earlier postmodern narratives.
4. Do you think postmodernism is an extended form of modernist literature? Discuss.

### 3.5. Some Major Postmodern Fictions

We have already discussed above some of the most significant novelists and their works. Let us study some of them in details-

- *Naked Lunch* (1959)

The novel, *Naked Lunch*, was written by William S. Burroughs in 1959. The narrative is structured as a series of non-chronological events in the life of the protagonist, William Lee, an opioid addict who travels to the city of Interzone to work for the organization, Islam Inc. Burroughs was inspired to write the novel while staying in the Tangier International Zone where he witnessed surging tension between European powers and the Moroccan Nationalist movement. This political tension is reflected in his fictional setting of Interzone. The protagonist's opioid addiction also relates with Burroughs struggle with opioid addiction which forms the bulk of the novel. In order to avoid arrest, Lee embarks on an escape journey to New York, through Philadelphia and Mexico, into the fictional state of Freeland. He flees from Freeland following a riot into the strange city of Interzone where he witnesses bizarre events that involves pornographic indulgences, anomalous orgies and strange medical experiments. Lee consumes yage, a hallucinogenic drug, which leads to a spiritual epiphany involving the concepts of time and space and human experiences. Lee's journey involves three fictional locations, each with its own peculiar system of administration. The first place is known as Annexia with its own bureaucratic system that often involves arbitrary punishment. The second place is Freeland, controlled by a sadistic doctor, Benway. The third and the final place where Lee ends up in is known as Interzone,

which commercially deals in all kinds of drugs and deviant sexual activities which is deemed normal and commonplace. The novel speculates the developing modern society of the 1950s as it reflects on the emerging counter cultures and offers an intriguing picture of the contemporary society.

- *Catch-22* (1961)

*Catch-22* is a satirical novel by American writer, Joseph Heller, published in 1961. The novel chronicles the desperate attempts of the protagonist, Captain John Yossarian, to survive the war which he convinces himself to be a personal attack from the military personnels. Yossarian is an American bombardier stationed on the Mediterranean island during World War II. The catch which the title of the novel signifies involves a peculiar Army Air Force regulation which asserts the sanity of a man is based on his willingness or desire to involve in the deadly combats of the war. The regulation establishes that a man is sane if he formally requests to be relieved from his assigned missions whereas an insane person willingly continues to fight the deadly battles. The irony sparks from the fact that those who want to withdraw from their missions are deemed to be perfectly stable and hence are worthy to continue with their mission, thus making themselves ineligible to be relieved. Yossarian was deeply traumatized by his war experiences and harbours a strong desire to keep himself alive. On discovering the Army Air Force regulation, Yossarian tries every way to claim himself insane, only to find out that his attempts to prove himself insane have actually proved him completely sane, thus making him perfectly eligible to participate in the war. The narrative is molded by a loosely-knit series of events and anecdotes that reflects on Yossarian's experience as a soldier. He is constantly tormented



by his memory of Snowden, a fellow soldier who died in his arms during a combat. To avoid a similar fate, Yossarian continually pretends to be sick and stays admitted in the hospital to avoid fighting in the war. The novel, *Catch-22*, speculates on the conventional notions of bravery and heroism associated with war from a broader perspective, in a psychological, sociological, as well as economic context. It deviates from the popular glorifying war narratives and shifts to showcase a wild, grotesque, and bizarre picture of war realities that differs tremendously from the war chroniclers of the past. Such chroniclers glorified the victors and erased the defeated from the pages of history the way they vanished in the war. Heller published a sequel of the novel in 1994, entitled *Closing Time*, discussing the later lives of some of the characters from this novel.

- *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969)

*Slaughterhouse Five* is a semi-autobiographical science-fiction by Kurt Vonnegut, published in 1969. The novel revolves around Billy Pilgrim, an American soldier. The novel can be seen as a bildungsroman narrative as it chronicles his early life, his war experiences as a soldier in World War II, as well as his life after the war. Billy is psychologically traumatized by his war experiences. He was captured by the German army and later survives the Allied firebombing of Dresden, resonating with Vonnegut's personal experience as a prisoner of war. Billy constantly moves back and forth in time as the novel progresses in a fragmented, non-linear pattern. He travels to a fictional planet, Tralfamadore, where he indulges with a former pornographic movie star as a lover, suggesting schizophrenic elements in the novel. The novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*, portrays

the horror of the catastrophic Dresden bombing through Billy's trauma as a war prisoner from the events he witnessed in Dresden. Finally, Billy confronts his trauma as he accepts the Tralfamadorian doctrine that believed in the non-existence of freewill. Towards the end of the novel, Vonnegut concludes that life is meaningless, similar to a nonsensical limerick that does not truly end but wanders in a repetitive cycle of events, just like the novel begins as well as ends with a bird's song which is not understandable and thus appears meaningless like life itself.

- *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)

Often considered as Thomas Pynchon's greatest literary work, *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a satirical novel published in 1973. The narrative is set in the backdrop of World War II and continues into the post-war period as it weaves a complex web of conspiracy, paranoia, and power and combined with historical events and technological advancements. The novel reflects on the anxieties of the War with multiple storylines, creating a hyperreal world. The narrative structure follows a fragmented, non-linear pattern and highlights intersection of several timelines, blurring the line between history and fiction. The characters in the novel are complex, ambiguous, and multi-faceted whose perspectives often overlap and contradict one another. The novel revolves around Tchitcherine and Slothrop, two contrasting characters whose commitments, ideals, and actions are significant in shaping the novel. Tchitcherine is a Russian Intelligence officer, a complex, conflicted but loyal and responsible character. Slothrop is an American Lieutenant, associated with the development of the V-2 rocket. His paranoia and conspiracy theories embody the decline of American innocence and represent a fragmented, disjointed postmodern

identity. Other significant characters include Pirate Prentice, a British Intelligence officer; Katje Borgesius, a Dutch double agent who worked both for the Germans and the allies; Captain Blicero, German rocket scientist; and Gottfried, a young German soldier, among others. The novel focuses on the development of the V-2 rocket and its relation to a mysterious substance, Imipolex G. The novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, won the National Book Award for fiction in 1974. It was also recognized as one of the "All-Time 100 Greatest Novels" by *Time Magazine*. The novel appears challenging to many readers but also provides a thought-provoking exploration of history, technology, paranoia, and unsettling human experiences.

- *White Noise* (1985)

The novel, *White Noise*, by Don DeLillo was published in 1985. The novel narrates the life of Jack Gladney, a professor at the College-on-the-Hill who was popularly recognized for his pioneering work in the field of Hitler studies. Set in the town of Blacksmith, the novel explores the excesses of consumer culture and its impact on human life and relationships. The narrative follows a fragmented, non-linear pattern that reflects the disjointed nature of postmodern experiences. The protagonist, Jack Gladly, has been married five times and has fathered a number of children. He embodies the contradictions of postmodern identity as he struggles with consumer culture, materialism, and media saturation. The narrative reflects on the pervasive influence of media on our perceptions and understanding of reality. The first part of the novel, entitled "Waves and Radiation", is basically an introduction of the characters and major themes that forms the bulk of the book. It narrates the contemporary family life and forms a critique of the

modern American society. The characters in the book are obsessed with consumer culture, media and the celebrity culture and often struggle to distinguish between reality and simulation. The second part of the novel, “The Air-borne Toxic Event”, narrates a mysterious chemical spill which releases a black toxic, mephitic cloud of gases over Jack’s locality, calling for an evacuation. Jack got exposed to a toxin called Nyodene Derivative released from the air spill that compelled him to grapple with his mortality. An organization, called SIMUVAC (also known as “simulated evacuation”), indicating the growing obsession for simulations over reality, is introduced in this part of the novel. The third part of the book is entitled “Dylarama”, where Jack discovers his wife Babette’s infidelity. She was having an illicit affair with a man named Mr. Grey in order to access a drug known as Dylar, which is supposed to be a treatment for death. The novel meditates on the human anxiety surrounding mortality and its obsession with chemical cures like Dylar to prevent it, turning a blind eye to death’s inevitability. *White Noise* is a seminal work of postmodern literature that confronts the contradictions of modern American culture through the exploration of contemporary social issues like consumerism and media saturation. The novel won the National Book Award in 1985.

**SAQ**

1. Why do you think much of postmodern literature has a non-linear and fragmented literary style? Explain with reference to postmodernist texts.

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2. Name the semi-autobiographical novel by Kurt Vonnegut. How do you think the narrative resonates with the author's personal life?

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3. Discuss any two postmodernist novels written at the backdrop of World War II.

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### 3.6 Summing Up

Postmodernism is a literary movement that emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The literary works were known for its disjointed structure, non-linear narrative, and multiple storylines. Postmodern fiction highlights the interconnectedness of texts, cultures, and historical events. The postmodern narratives experimented with language, style, and narrative conventions and often questioned the grand narratives, challenged authority and objective truth. Postmodernism has influenced various literary movements, including poststructuralism, postcolonialism, contemporary literary fiction, and others. Postmodern fiction has expanded the possibility of literary expression, challenging readers and writers to reevaluate the nature of reality, identity, and popular narratives.

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### 3.8 Model Questions

- How does postmodern fiction explore the concepts of reality, hyperreality and simulation, particularly in a media-saturated society?
- Comment on the use of unconventional narrative structures by postmodern authors, and how this engages readers in active interpretation.

- How does the use of fragmentation and non-linearity in postmodern fiction represent the complexities of modern life?

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## **BLOCK-II**

**Unit 1: Natsume Soseki: *Botchan* (Introduction)**

**Unit 2: Natsume Soseki: *Botchan* (Reading the Novel)**

**Unit 3: Natsume Soseki: *Botchan* (Themes and Techniques)**

**Unit 4: Selma Lagerlof: *The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgersson* (Introduction)**

**Unit 5: Selma Lagerlof: *The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgersson* (Reading the Novel)**

**Unit 6: Selma Lagerlof: *The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgersson* (Themes and Techniques)**



## UNIT-1

### NATSUME SOSEKI: *BOTCHAN* (INTRODUCTION)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 1.1 Objectives

#### 1.2 Introduction

#### 1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch

#### 1.4 Natsume Soseki's Works

#### 1.5 A Historical Background

#### 1.6 Summing Up

#### 1.7 Model Questions

#### 1.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- Outline the life and works of Natsume Soseki.
- Understand the cultural and historical context behind Soseki's writing.
- Discuss the historical background of Japan during Soseki's era.

#### 1.2 Introduction

Natsume Soseki, one of Japan's most celebrated modern fiction writers, was born in Tokyo in 1867. He is among the rare and influential figures in Japanese literature who popularized modern fiction within the country. Soseki's characters often embody intellectual depth, navigating life's struggles with a tone that is **both light-hearted and comic**, reflecting his unique narrative style. In this unit, we will delve into the **rich details of Soseki's life and works, exploring his enduring influence on Japanese literature.**

We will also examine how **translations have played a crucial role** in disseminating his works to a global audience, allowing readers from diverse cultures to appreciate his unique storytelling. Furthermore, we will discuss the key considerations when reading Soseki's translated texts, addressing how **cultural nuances and stylistic elements** impact the reader's understanding and interpretation.

Soseki remains widely read and celebrated for his **distinctively creative and comical narrative style**, a quality that resonates across generations. This unit will introduce students to Soseki's life and works, with **key insights and themes highlighted** across different sections to enhance understanding and engagement with his literature.

### **1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch**

Natsume Soseki, one of Japan's most celebrated modern writers, was born as Natsume Kinnosuke in Edo (present-day Tokyo), Japan, in 1867. From his earliest days, Soseki experienced a profound sense of displacement, having been separated from his biological parents and placed with adoptive parents until he was nine years old. However, when his adoptive parents divorced, he was sent back to his original family. Born to a powerful and well-established family, Soseki was, nonetheless, plagued by insecurity. His father treated him harshly, possibly due to societal pressure stemming from Soseki's late birth—his mother was almost forty years old and his father was around fifty-three. In a society where childbirth at a later age was seen as unconventional, Soseki's birth may have been viewed as a source of shame, contributing to his father's austere treatment. This sense of insecurity deepened after his mother's death when he was fourteen. Highlighting his early estrangement, Soseki

often referred to his parents as “grandfather” and “grandmother” due to the limited connection he had with them in his formative years.

Soseki grew up during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), a period marked by significant social changes that transformed Japan from a feudal society into a modern industrialized nation. The spirit of the age can be epitomized by Yukichi Fukuzawa's 1885 essay, “Datsu-A Ron” (“Goodbye Asia”), which argued that Japan should align with Western societies, leaving behind the traditional, conservative ways of neighboring countries like China and Korea. This radical cultural shift inspired many Japanese youths to adopt Western studies, and Soseki was no exception. Although he was initially drawn to Chinese classics, the societal expectations of the time led him to study English—a necessary choice for anyone hoping to attend college in that era.

In 1884, Soseki entered college, where he initially considered a career in architecture. Discouraged by his brother from pursuing literature, he was eventually persuaded by a friend to view a literary career as honorable. This shift in perspective led him to choose English literature as his field of study. Edwin McClellan notes in this regard that:

“It is not clear whether he meant eventually to become a novelist or a literary scholar. Probably he himself did not know. It must have been difficult for a young Japanese of that period to know what sort of career would suit him best. In a time when a great part of the educated population of Japan was engaged in indiscriminate and aimless imitation of everything Western, it is not surprising that the young Soseki should have been so vague about his future” (5).

By the time he graduated in 1893, Soseki had demonstrated remarkable proficiency in English, both as a reader and writer, surpassing the average level of his peers. In 1891, he undertook a

pioneering translation of *Hojo-Ki*, a 12th-century Japanese classic, into English. As Gouranga Charan Pradhan observes, this work “marks one of the earliest efforts to translate Japanese literary works into Western languages; it is also among the initial foreign-language translation attempts of a Japanese work by a Japanese person” (69). After completing his studies, Soseki took a teaching position at Tokyo Normal College, though he was ambivalent about the profession. He later stated, “it was suggested to me that I should teach. I had no desire to teach, or not to teach” (qtd. in McClellan 7).

In April 1895, Soseki made the surprising decision to leave Tokyo and take up a teaching position in Matsuyama, a provincial area in Shikoku. Raised in Tokyo, he was accustomed to an urban lifestyle, making this move unusual. McClellan notes, “perhaps there was some spiritual significance in the self-inflicted exile, then, for that very year he visited a Zen temple in Kamakura” (8). His experiences as a teacher in Matsuyama later inspired his novel *Botchan*. Although the novel revolves around a teacher in a Matsuyama high school, Soseki clarified that it was not autobiographical. During his time in Matsuyama, he met Nakane Kyoko, whom he later married. In 1896, he took a position at the Fifth National College in Kumamoto, where he found peers with similar backgrounds, further influencing his social standing. Kyoko and Soseki welcomed a daughter during their time in Kumamoto.

In September 1900, Soseki sailed to England on a government scholarship to study English for two years. Although initially reluctant to go, he accepted the scholarship, which was more of a mandate than an offer. His time in England was marked by hardship; his stipend was insufficient, leading him to live in isolation and endure severe financial constraints. This period of loneliness and overwork had a lasting impact on Soseki. McClellan

describes that “two years of loneliness and overwork left a permanent mark on Soseki; and he returned to Japan an irritable man, prone to sudden outbursts of temper and more eccentric than ever” (12). Despite the challenges, his time abroad helped him solidify his literary vision. Soseki resolved to ground his writing in Japanese culture, rejecting the pressure to adopt Western styles.

Upon returning to Japan in 1903, Soseki resumed teaching, first at First National College and later at the Imperial University, where he taught English literature. His return to Japan marked the beginning of his prolific career. By joining the *Asahi* newspaper, he gained a platform to publish his novels, ultimately establishing his legacy as a leading figure in Japanese literature. By 1907, he effectively retired from academia to join the *Asahi* newspaper, agreeing to publish his novels there. At this point, he was already a celebrated author with several significant works, including *I Am a Cat* (1905), *Kairo-Ko* (1905), *Botchan* (1906), *Kusamakura* (1906), and *Nowaki* (1907). Soseki’s decision to write full-time marked the beginning of an incredibly productive period, establishing him as a central figure in modern Japanese literature.

Soseki passed away on December 9, 1916, in Tokyo.

### Check Your Progress

□ How did Natsume Soseki’s early experiences of displacement and family dynamics influence his sense of identity, and how might these experiences have shaped his later literary themes? (80 words)

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□ Describe the impact of the Meiji Era's cultural and social changes on Soseki's educational and career choices, particularly his decision to study English literature over Chinese classics.(100 words)

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#### 1.4 Natsume Soseki's Works

Natsume Soseki's first novel, *I Am a Cat*, appeared in the literary journal *Hototogisu*, with its first episode published in January 1905. Initially, Soseki intended it to be a standalone episode, but due to its popularity, he was encouraged to expand it, resulting in a serialized novel. This work brought Soseki fame and recognition, establishing him as an important figure in Japanese literature. Although *I Am a Cat* is categorized as a novel, it can be seen as a collection of episodic narratives, presented in a satirical manner. The story is narrated by an observant cat owned by Mr. Kushami (Mr. Sneaze), who provides commentary on the lives of the people in the neighborhood. Each episode unfolds around Mr. Kushami's house, offering a humorous and often critical view of society. By the novel's conclusion, the cat drowns itself and dies, a darkly humorous ending that reflects Soseki's satirical style. Through the cat's voice, Soseki critiques contemporary social norms and behaviors, using wit and irony to explore the complexity of human nature.

Another of Soseki's important novels is *Botchan* (or *Little Master*), written in 1906. This novel is characterized by a first-person narrative with vigorous, colloquial language that particularly reflects

the dialect of Tokyo. The story is distinguished by its candid, straightforward language, and, in contrast to Soseki's other works, *Botchan* lacks a deeper, more serious tone, instead favoring a humorous approach. As McClellan observes:

"Soseki was here trying to develop a style which was free from ornateness, and in his quest for naturalness and simplicity, he chose the familiar device of making the hero, a not very intelligent though well-bred young man, tell the tale" (19).

The novel draws from Soseki's personal experiences as a teacher at a high school in Matsuyama on Shikoku Island, although Soseki claimed it was not autobiographical. The protagonist, Botchan, reflects the culture shock and frustrations Soseki himself may have felt teaching in a provincial area. *Botchan* remains one of the most translated and widely read of Soseki's works, and it will be discussed in greater detail in the next unit. This work has come to symbolize the clash between rural and urban values, as well as the humorous yet poignant struggle of an outsider trying to adapt to a new environment.

Soseki's next novel, *Kusamakura* (translated as *The Three-Cornered World* or *The Grass Pillow*), was also written in 1906. It is markedly different from his earlier works, reflecting Soseki's experimental phase in writing. In this novel, a painter from Tokyo retreats to a remote mountain village, seeking isolation to focus on his art without emotional interference. *Kusamakura* is not so much a narrative of events as it is a meditation on aesthetics and the value of detachment from emotional turmoil. The protagonist meets Miss Nami, a woman who cares for her ailing father and is rumored by villagers to be mad. Her mysterious character, and the painter's growing fascination with her, juxtapose the themes of emotional distance and artistic observation. She reminds the painter of the painting of Ophelia by John Millais, creating a surreal, almost

dreamlike connection between art and life. The novel's lyrical style reflects Soseki's aim to create a purely aesthetic experience for readers, urging them to appreciate the beauty of form and expression.

With *Nowaki* (or *Autumn Wind*, 1907), Soseki's work took on a more serious tone, marking the beginning of his later, more introspective period. This novel explores themes of economic hardship, social hierarchy, and personal integrity within the context of a rapidly modernizing Japan. The story revolves around three men: Shirai, Takayanagi, and Nakano. Shirai, a university-educated man, leaves his teaching position out of a disdain for the wealthy and those in power. Now working as an editorial writer for a poorly paying magazine, he deeply resents the influence of wealth on society, believing that Japan's affluent class has eroded the spiritual ideals of society. Takayanagi, who is also educated but impoverished, harbors bitterness toward the rich, while Nakano, a wealthy friend, provides a contrast to Shirai's and Takayanagi's struggles. In a climactic moment, Takayanagi learns he has tuberculosis, and doctors advise him to seek a warmer climate. Nakano offers him a hundred yen, which Takayanagi accepts on the condition that Nakano will read the novel he plans to write. Later, Takayanagi uses the money to pay off a debt owed by Shirai. The novel closes with Takayanagi departing with a manuscript written by Shirai—a work no publisher is willing to print. Through this poignant exchange of a mere hundred yen, Soseki portrays the interconnected struggles of these three men, united by their economic hardship and strained ideals in a society marked by materialism.

In subsequent years, Soseki's novels grew increasingly sophisticated, reflecting his maturity as a writer. His later works, including *Sanshiro* (1908), *And Then* (1909), *The Gate* (1910), and



*The Wayfarer* (1912), address the dilemmas faced by Japan's emerging middle class. These novels delve into themes of economic struggles, personal desire versus social duty, and the psychological strain brought about by rapid industrialization and Western influence. In *Sanshiro*, for example, the young protagonist from a provincial area confronts the challenges of urban life in Tokyo, symbolizing Japan's own tensions between tradition and modernity. Similarly, *And Then* and *The Gate* explore the intricate conflicts between individual aspirations and familial obligations, reflecting the psychological depth and nuanced perspectives that define Soseki's later work.

Throughout his career, Soseki continued to publish widely, earning recognition for his explorations of the human condition within Japan's rapidly changing society. In addition to his novels, Soseki produced short stories, essays, and poetry, contributing significantly to the development of modern Japanese literature. His work often combines humor with profound philosophical insights, allowing readers to reflect on Japan's cultural evolution while also engaging with universal human themes. His prolific output and the universal relevance of his themes cemented Soseki's place as a leading figure in Japanese literature.

Soseki's unique ability to bridge traditional Japanese values with the influences of Western thought remains a defining aspect of his work. His writings continue to be celebrated both in Japan and internationally, resonating with readers due to their examination of identity, belonging, and the challenges of a society in flux. Soseki passed away on December 9, 1916, in Tokyo, but his legacy endures, inspiring new generations of readers and writers.

**Stop to Consider**

Here is the list of Soseki's works in chronological order:

*Wagahaiwa Neko de Aru (I Am a Cat)* – 1905

*Kairo-Ko (The Tower of London)* – 1905

*Botchan (Little Master)* – 1906

*Kusamakura (The Three-Cornered World or The Grass Pillow)* – 1906

*Nowaki (Autumn Wind)* – 1907

*Sanshiro (Sanshiro)* – 1908

*Sorekara (And Then)* – 1909

*Mon (The Gate)* – 1910

*Kojin (The Wayfarer)* – 1912

**Check Your Progress**

How does Natsume Soseki's *I Am a Cat* reflect his use of satire to critique Japanese society? (80 words)

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In what ways does *Kusamakura* exemplify Soseki's experimental approach to literature, and how does the novel's focus on aesthetics distinguish it from his other works? (100 words)

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- Give a brief account of Natsume Soseki’s works (100 words)
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**1.5 A Historical Background**

As we have already mentioned, Natsume Soseki was born during a pivotal period in Japanese history. He came into the world during the last phase of the Tokugawa shogunate, a military government that ruled Japan for over two hundred years, coming to an end with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Meiji Restoration marked the reestablishment of imperial rule in Japan, bringing about profound political and cultural changes. Under the shogunate, Japanese society was organized with a strict social hierarchy and adherence to tradition. The samurai class, also known as bushi, was at the top of this social order. However, while certain samurai clans enjoyed privilege, others experienced marginalization. During this period, Japan adhered to the *Sakoku* policy, a strict isolationist stance intended to shield the nation from foreign influences, particularly from Western colonial powers. Marvin Marcus explains that “Tokugawa society was subject to an official moral code that stressed duty and obedience, and its leaders instituted a relatively strict regime of edicts, regulations, and widespread censorship in order to ensure social order” (37). This led to a stable society in which the domestic economy flourished. Cities like Edo (modern Tokyo) and Osaka expanded, and urban culture evolved with new forms of entertainment. Lavishly decorated restaurants, *kabuki* theaters, and *geisha* houses offered residents a place to spend leisure time and money, contributing to a vibrant social scene.

Born in 1867, Soseki lived through a period of rapid societal transformation in Japan. Growing up in an era marked by change, he was exposed to the deeply rooted traditional values of Tokugawa society, even as these were being steadily challenged by forces of modernization. Throughout his lifetime, he witnessed swift developments that propelled Japanese society toward modernity. He also experienced firsthand the tension between traditional values and the influence of Western culture, a conflict that would play a central role in his writing. One significant historical event that impacted Japanese society was the arrival of the Perry Expedition in 1853. Led by Commodore Matthew Perry, this American expedition aimed to establish trade relations between Japan and Western powers. The expedition sought to survey, explore, and open diplomatic channels with the Japanese shogunate, eventually succeeding in opening Japanese ports to American trade. The implications of Perry's arrival were enormous, as it forced Japan to acknowledge the technological and military advancements of the West, exposing its own vulnerabilities and need for reform. This event set the stage for the end of the shogunate fifteen years later, leading to the restoration of imperial power.

The Meiji Era was dedicated to transforming Japan into a modern nation, with particular emphasis on advancing education, infrastructure, media, and technology. There was a concerted effort to bring Western knowledge and expertise into Japan, and the government sent students abroad to learn from advanced Western countries. This decision reflects Japan's determination to reinvent itself as a strong, modern nation. Tokyo, the former shogunal capital, was given special status and developed as the epicenter of Japan's cultural and intellectual life, symbolizing the spirit of progress. Some of the significant societal changes included the emergence of a new middle class, the growth of urban culture, and

increased demands for women to play more active roles in society. In the process, traditional roles were being questioned, and a new generation of thinkers and leaders emerged, bringing with them modern ideals that at times clashed with established customs. However, rapid modernization also led to economic disparity and a sense of cultural dislocation, often resulting in identity crises among the populace.

Although Japan had shifted towards Western ideas of development and progress, a conservative undercurrent persisted. Many of the Meiji oligarchs, who were former samurai from the shogunate, sought to preserve Japanese culture and tradition. These leaders recognized the need for Western-style advancements while fearing the erosion of Japanese values. To balance Westernization, they promoted the Emperor's role as a divine and supreme leader, a symbolic assertion of Japan's intention to safeguard its heritage. This conservative faction propagated the concept of *kokutai*, a unique national identity rooted in loyalty to the Emperor, fostering a sense of Japanese unity and collective identity that reflected the nation's authoritarian past. These measures aimed to counterbalance the overwhelming influence of Western models, ensuring that Japan's core cultural values remained intact.

The ideological fusion of this era—between Western influence and traditional Japanese values—shaped the intellectual environment of the time. The Meiji leaders' strategies to mold Japan into a “modern” nation created a society in which traditional beliefs and Western innovations existed in a state of constant negotiation. This led to a dynamic yet conflicted cultural atmosphere, influencing a generation of Japanese thinkers, writers, and artists. This complex backdrop had a profound impact on writers and thinkers of Soseki's generation. His works reflect the psychological and social complexities of a society caught between the forces of tradition and

modernity. Soseki's novel *Botchan*, for instance, critiques the rigid bureaucratic structures of the Meiji period, exposing the flaws within Japan's evolving social hierarchy.

The importance of Natsume Soseki's works goes beyond Japanese literature; they hold a significant place in world literature as well. His novels explore the unique psychological turmoil of individuals facing the dissonance between Japan's traditional values and the influence of modernization. Through his insightful examination of human struggles, Soseki's literature continues to resonate with readers, offering a window into the transformative—and often turbulent—period of Japan's history. His works will be explored in greater detail in subsequent units, but it is already clear that Soseki's influence is a vital part of both Japanese and global literary traditions.

**Check Your Progress**

How did the Meiji Restoration change Japanese society, and why was the role of the Emperor emphasized during this period? (80 words)

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What impact did the arrival of Commodore Perry's expedition have on Japan's decision to modernize, and how did this influence Soseki's generation? (80 words)

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## 1.6 Summing Up:

In this unit, we explored the life, works, and historical context of Natsume Soseki, one of Japan's most influential modern writers. Beginning with his biography, we learned about Soseki's challenging early years, his education during Japan's Meiji Era—a period of rapid modernization—also shaped his literary perspective, and his engagement with both Japanese traditions and Western influences.

We have learned how his novels reflect the complex social and cultural transitions of his time. His early work, *I Am a Cat*, uses satire to critique society, while novels like *Botchan* draw from his personal experiences, exposing bureaucratic and social hierarchies. Soseki's later works address themes of modernization, personal struggle, and the clash between traditional values and Westernization, demonstrating his experimental narrative style and deep cultural insight.

Finally, the historical background provided context to Soseki's literary vision. Born during the final years of the Tokugawa shogunate and witnessing the Meiji Restoration, Soseki experienced first-hand the shift from Japan's feudal, isolationist policies to its modernization efforts. The Meiji government's focus on Westernization created tensions in Japanese society, as people grappled with balancing their heritage and adapting to new ideals. This duality shaped Soseki's themes and character portrayals, as he examined the psychological impact of cultural dislocation and identity crisis.

## 1.7 References and Suggested Readings:

- Nathan, John. *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*. Columbia University Press, 2019.

- Ridgeway, William N.. *A Critical Study of the Novels of Natsume Soseki, 1867-1916*. Edwin Mellen Press, 2004.
- Soseki, Natsume. *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*. Bourdaghs, Michael et al, eds. Columbia University Press, 2010.

### **1.8 Model Questions**

- What were the key events in Soseki's early life that influenced his writing?
- In what ways do Soseki's works reflect the tension between tradition and modernity in Japan?



## UNIT-2

### NATSUME SOSEKI: *BOTCHAN* (READING THE NOVEL)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Introduction

#### 2.3 Summary and Analysis of the Text

#### 2.4 Analysis of Important Characters

#### 2.5 Summing Up

#### 2.6 References and Suggested Reading

#### 2.7 Model Questions

#### 2.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Gain an overview of the text through comprehensive interpretation.
- Explore and engage with the central ideas in Natsume Soseki's writing.
- Understand the text through a basic summary, aiding overall comprehension.
- Critically analyze the important characters and their roles within the narrative.

#### 2.2 Introduction

In this unit, the students will get an overview of the novel. The chapter-wise summary and analysis of the text are provided to help them comprehend the content. Each chapter in the novel plays an important role, and the students will benefit from the summaries, as this unit emphasizes the most significant events in the narrative. The

chapter-wise summaries are also intended to view the novel's linear development, which students will find beneficial for their interpretation.

The unit includes a brief character analysis of the key figures in the novel. Each character plays a crucial part, and through their analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of the narrative. This understanding of the characters' roles will aid in comprehending the conflicts and the motivations behind them. Students will also learn how the characters and their agendas drive the plot of the novel.

### **2.3 Summary and Analysis of the Text**

The title of the novel can be perceived as eponymous of the main character because *Botchan*, as a term, can be used as a name or to describe multiple characteristics of a person. Often, it is used fondly to describe a young person who is inexperienced or naive. However, it can also carry a negative connotation, describing someone as irresponsible or spoiled. The novel is told in the first-person narrative from the perspective of the principal character.

The first chapter introduces the main character and his experiences while growing up. He is the younger son of his parents, and his older brother is their favorite. The narrator tells the readers that he was a reckless boy in his childhood. He shares experiences where his notorious behavior stood out. These incidents include jumping out of a second-floor window, cutting his own finger to prove a point, trying to catch an older boy in the yard, and clogging a paddy field's water pipe with the help of friends. All these acts are narrated to emphasize the narrator's recklessness.

The first-person narrator is always somewhat unreliable. When the narrative is under the control of a character, readers must be

cautious about how much to rely on their perspective. The narrator appears as a lonely person who, based on his own statements, feels he is not loved by his parents as much as his brother. He states, “My old man never showed any fondness for me, and my mother always favored my older brother... My mother would tell me I was so rough that she worried about what would become of me. Well, it’s true that I never have amounted to much” (Soseki Chapter 1). The narrator even views himself as an inferior person who does not consider himself a big achiever or a goal-oriented person. In fact, he doubts Kiyō, an elderly woman who works at his home, even though she has high hopes for him.

It is Kiyō who fondly calls him Botchan. His mother passes away when he is away from home, which upsets him. Kiyō takes care of him, motivating him when he feels disinherited, as he believes his father and brother dislike him. Six years after his mother’s death, his father also passes away. Later, his brother graduates from business school and joins a company in Kyushu. His brother decides to sell their property, and the narrator moves into a boarding house. Kiyō decides to live with her nephew. Before moving to Kyushu, his brother gives the narrator six hundred yen. The narrator then takes a course at the Institute of Physical Sciences, studying there for three years. After graduation, he receives a job offer to teach at a middle school in Shikoku. Before departing for Shikoku, he meets Kiyō at her nephew’s place. She helps him pack and accompanies him to the train station. He observes her small figure standing at the station as his train departs.

In the second chapter, the narrator disembarks from the ship and assesses the ambiance of the place. To him, it appears to be no more than a fishing town in Tokyo. The middle school is a few miles from the port, so he takes a train to the nearest station. Upon arrival at the school, classes have already ended. Instead of waiting for the

principal, he decides to stay at an inn and visit the school the next day. He is unimpressed with the room he is offered at the inn. After his meal, he quickly falls asleep despite the noisy surroundings. He dreams of Kiyoo during his short sleep.

The next day, he visits the school and meets the principal. He also meets the other teachers, assigning them humorous nicknames based on his first impressions. Back at the inn, he is shown to a better room, which he attributes to a five-yen tip he gave the maid earlier. He writes a letter to Kiyoo, describing his arrival and his meetings with the other teachers. The senior math teacher, whom the narrator has nicknamed Porcupine, visits him at the hotel. Porcupine suggests a better place for the narrator to stay. When they visit it, the narrator likes it and moves there. He also learns that Porcupine is the most popular teacher in the school.

In this chapter, it is evident that even though the narrator is far from Kiyoo, he maintains a close emotional bond with her. His experiences are often viewed through the lens of past events tied to his memories of Kiyoo. The emotional attachment he shares with Kiyoo is stronger than what he had with his parents.

In the next chapter, the narrator begins his teaching role at the school. He feels uncomfortable standing before a class for the first time. The loud ‘sir’ from the students “gave me a sort of creepy-crawly feeling in the soles of my feet” (Soseki Chapter 3). One day, a student asks for help with a question he cannot immediately solve, leading to embarrassment when he overhears the student gossiping about it.

Additionally, the narrator is annoyed by his nosy landlord, who persistently tries to sell him antiques that do not interest him. Outside school, his students seem to monitor his every move. One day, he visits a place called Tokyo Buckwheat Noodles and orders

four bowls of tempura noodles. This incident becomes fodder for gossip, and in the next class, he finds "MISTER TEMPURA" written in large letters on the blackboard (Soseki Chapter 3). Despite his efforts to resist the students' antics, their taunts intensify. On another occasion, he visits a dumpling shop near a red-light district and finds another mocking note on the blackboard. This constant surveillance by his students makes him realize that in such a small town, every action he takes is noticed. The narrator states that:

It seemed as if the whole student body was intent on keeping me under surveillance like a pack of detectives. It was downright depressing. No matter what they said about me it wasn't going to make me stop doing what I wanted to do, but when I wondered what had made me come to such a petty, narrow-minded kind of place I felt completely disgusted.  
(Soseki Chapter 3)

In the fourth chapter, we see that the narrator, a teacher, is assigned night duty at the school. He is surprised and simultaneously feels jealous of the fact that the principal (nicknamed Badger) and the assistant principal (nicknamed Redshirt) are exempt from night duties because they are directly appointed by the Prime Minister. The narrator visits the hot spring, and while returning in the evening, he encounters the principal and Porcupine. Their conversation reveals the narrator's irritation about the duty he has been given. At the school, he is disturbed by the students at night. He finds grasshoppers in his bed, which crawl on his leg while he is sleeping. When he questions the students about this prank, they deny any involvement. Later, they make noises above his room in the dormitory, making it impossible for him to sleep. In the darkness of the night, he falls and injures himself while trying to catch the students. He eventually catches two students, but they too deny their involvement. In the morning, the principal comes to the school after

the custodian reports the commotion. The principal suggests that the narrator take the day off since he hasn't slept. In this chapter, we see the hierarchy of administrative power being revealed to the readers. The narrator is jealous of the principal and assistant principal because he feels they are well-paid and have fewer responsibilities. He perceives himself as inferior.

In the next chapter, the narrator goes fishing with the assistant principal and Yoshikawa, the art teacher, nicknamed Hanger. Along with the boatman, they venture near an uninhabited island called Green Island. The island consists only of boulders and pine trees. Through their conversation, we learn that Redshirt is a man with an interest in arts and literature. He and Hanger get along well, but the narrator feels uneasy around them. They share information in hushed tones, seemingly ignoring the narrator's presence. During their exchanges, it becomes clear that Redshirt and Hanger consider the narrator vulnerable and credulous due to his youth. They believe his honesty will only bring trouble and that he must learn to navigate a world where even close acquaintances can be deceitful. On this fishing trip, the narrator realizes how much he misses Kiyo, who respects him for his honesty. The chapter ends with their return to the island. In this chapter, we learn that the narrator's pure-hearted and honest perspective makes him appear naive—a kid, or in Japanese terms, a *botchan*.

In the next chapter, the narrator struggles to decide whether to trust the hints Redshirt has dropped about Porcupine. Redshirt has already warned him against getting involved in hostilities. After much internal conflict, the narrator decides to return the money Porcupine had paid for a shaved ice the other day. The relationship between Porcupine and the narrator becomes strained. Meanwhile, the narrator's landlords ask Porcupine to inform him that he must vacate their house. At the same time, Badger arranges a meeting to

address the misconduct of the students in the dormitory the previous night. In the meeting, Redshirt and his associate, Hanger, advocate for leniency towards the students, suggesting that such incidents reflect a failure on the school's part, indirectly blaming the teacher. Porcupine, however, supports the narrator, insisting that the students must apologize to the teacher. He also points out that the narrator's visit to the hot spring during his duty hours should not be overlooked. This chapter sheds light on the office politics and hierarchical dynamics within the school system.

In chapter seven, Botchan moves out of Ikagin's house and boards with the Hagino family. He feels a sense of pride in staying with the Haginos, who belong to the samurai class. Later, he is surprised to learn that Hanger has moved into his old landlord's place as soon as he vacated it. Botchan fondly remembers Kiyoko whenever he feels let down by others. Meanwhile, he develops a close relationship with the old landlady, who provides insights into the real identity of the woman referred to as Madonna by Redshirt and others. The old lady, a gossip, is well-informed about her neighborhood. Botchan realizes that he is in a small town where everyone knows everyone's business.

The old lady tells him that Mr. Koga, whom Botchan nicknames Pale Squash, is in love with Madonna, and they are engaged. However, after Mr. Koga's father passed away, the family's financial situation worsened, leading Madonna's family to postpone the marriage. Redshirt then tries to win Madonna over. Botchan feels sorry for Pale Squash, whom he finds gentlemanly. Later, at the hot spring, Botchan spots Redshirt and Madonna walking together along a narrow road by the Nozeri River embankment.

In the next chapter, Botchan is perplexed about whether Porcupine is trustworthy. However, he is certain about Redshirt's deceptive nature. After a minor dispute over Botchan's behavior when

returning money to Porcupine, the two fall out. Botchan claims he tried to reconcile, but Porcupine seems uninterested. Again, as readers, we must remember the narrator's first-person perspective, which may be unreliable. Meanwhile, Redshirt invites Botchan to his home, where he informs him of a potential raise since Mr. Koga is being transferred to a school in Nobeoka. Redshirt promises to recommend Botchan for promotion if he continues performing well.

Later, Botchan learns from the landlady that Mr. Koga's transfer to Nobeoka occurred under odd circumstances. Mr. Koga had requested a pay raise, but since the school could not accommodate it, the principal applied for a position in Nobeoka on his behalf, where the salary was five yen higher. Botchan finds this arrangement suspicious and dissatisfying. He quickly decides to refuse the salary raise and informs Redshirt of his decision. This chapter highlights Botchan's impulsive nature. It seems the author emphasizes how Botchan, the narrator, embodies the characteristics of a naive, young *botchan*.

Chapter nine begins with Porcupine apologizing to Botchan for believing the landlord's accusations and misjudging him without evidence. Porcupine acknowledges that Botchan's former landlord is "a shady character who goes around selling fake paintings stamped with phony seals" (Soseki Chapter 9). The two men share their life stories and reconcile, even joking about stereotypes associated with their hometowns. When Botchan mentions he is an *Edokko* (Tokyo native), Porcupine responds, "Ah, an Edokko. No wonder you hate to give in" (Soseki Chapter 9). Botchan, in turn, remarks that Porcupine's stubbornness is unsurprising since he hails from Aizu.

The school arranges a farewell party for Mr. Koga at the Kashin-tei restaurant. The principal and Redshirt deliver farewell speeches, emphasizing the school's loss with Mr. Koga's departure.



Porcupine, in his speech, wishes Mr. Koga well and hopes he will find a suitable match and settle down in Nobeoka. Once a few geisha arrive, the principal and Redshirt leave the party. Botchan notices a young girl greeting Redshirt, while Mr. Koga appears lonely. As Botchan and Mr. Koga prepare to leave, a drunken Yoshikawa tries to stop them, but Botchan knocks him on the head. Yoshikawa confronts them, but Botchan and Mr. Koga depart, leaving Porcupine to deal with Yoshikawa. This chapter highlights the cultural and lifestyle differences between Botchan's Tokyo upbringing and the rural Matsuyama setting. Botchan even criticizes the restaurant's food, remarking:

“My fellow guests on both sides, apparently undeterred, were busy devouring everything as if this was some kind of splendid feast. I guess they had never had a chance to try the kind of fresh fish we enjoy in Tokyo” (Soseki Chapter 9).

This comment underscores how Botchan distances himself from the locals, asserting his superiority through culinary preferences.

In the next chapter, we see that there is an atmosphere of celebration over Japan's victory in the war. There is no direct reference to the details of the war in the novel. A ceremony takes place at the parade ground, where students and teachers alike march in a procession. Each teacher participates in the march, and “according to the plan, the physical education teacher would organize them into neat ranks and files, arranged by classes, with one or two teachers marching along as supervisors in the gaps between one class and the next” (Botchan Chapter 10). During the procession, a fight breaks out between the students of the middle school and those from the normal school. Once the fight is resolved, the ceremony at the field proceeds, with notable figures such as the brigade commander and the Governor delivering congratulatory messages.

After Botchan returns from the ceremony, he attempts to write a letter to Kiyō but finds himself unable to frame anything meaningful to say to her. He is soon surprised by Porcupine, who arrives with some beef to celebrate Victory Day together. Later, they head out to witness a unique dance performed by the dancers of Kōchi. This dance is particularly remarkable and perilous, as the dancers swing swords in rhythm. Botchan describes that:

Each sword was swinging freely within its own space, but that space was limited to a column about eighteen inches square, and it had to be wielded in the exact same direction at the exact same speed as the swords in front and behind and to the right and left. This was a revelation – ordinary dances like the Salt Gatherers and the Gateway Door simply couldn't compare. It takes tremendous skill, I was told; learning the technique of synchronizing your movements like that was no easy thing. (*Botchan* Chapter 10)

During the event, a brawl breaks out again between the students. Botchan and Porcupine get involved to separate them. However, they are injured in the process, and later, when the culprits flee the scene, they report the incident to the police.

In the last chapter, the news of the fight is published in the local newspaper. *The Shikoku News* accuses Botchan and Mr. Hotta of inciting the incident. At school, the two are sympathized with by the other teachers. Redshirt states that he apologizes to both of them, explaining that it was his brother who had invited them to the event in the first place. He also claims that he, along with the principal, requested the newspaper to withdraw the article. However, Mr. Hotta suspects that Redshirt is behind the entire scheme.

When the principal forces Mr. Hotta to resign, Botchan and Mr. Hotta plan their revenge. Later, they catch Redshirt and Hanger-on

coming out of a hotel named Kado-ya, where two geisha girls had been seen entering before them. Porcupine confronts Redshirt and injures him, while Botchan pelts Hanger-on with raw eggs, completely soaking him in egg yolk.

Next, we see Botchan resigning from his post and traveling to Tokyo with Porcupine. In Tokyo, he lives in a rented house with Kiyō. After his return, he secures a job as an engineer. The novel ends with the information that Kiyō passes away in February and is buried in Yōgen Temple in Kobinata, which is also Botchan's family's temple.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Comment on the relationship of Botchan with the other teachers. Describe how the conflicts in their relations drive the plot of the novel. (200 words)
2. How does the narrator's relationship with Kiyō differ from his relationship with his parents, and how does this shape his character throughout the novel? (150 words)

## **2.4 Analysis of Important Characters**

The narrator, Botchan, is the main character of the novel. As is seen above, he is an arrogant man who is impulsive and very easily offended. As the name suggests, he is an immature young man with qualities of being outspoken. In many occasions he evokes his identity as a Tokyo man and also seems to be proud of his heredity. When he is disturbed by the students during his night duty at the school dormitory, he repeats in his mind his superiority compared to the students. The narrator states that:

Whatever faults I may have, my ancestors were retainers of the Shōgun, a line of warriors going back to the Emperor

Seiwa and descended from the great Minamoto no Mitsunaka. I'm not made of the same stuff as those peasants were, of that you can be sure. (*Botchan* Chapter 4)

From the very beginning we see that he accepts the teaching offer in a middle school in a very secluded region of Japan. His frank nature often puts him in a difficult condition with the manipulative and sly colleagues of his school. As he spends sometime in the school amidst such petty politics, Botchan understands the difficult and deceiving nature of human behaviour. He is put into difficult situations by his scheming seniors but as he understands the dishonesty of the people, he starts to appreciate honest and fair behaviour. Although the novel presents him as an impulsive young man, in the last chapter we see him taking a stand in his life. He rents a house where he lives with Kiyō and responsibly takes a job as an engineer.

The character of Kiyō plays an important part in the novel. She is a mature helper in Botchan's house from his childhood who is totally devoted in taking care of him. She plays an important role in Botchan's life. It is also considered that even after the flaw in his character, like his headstrong and impulsive nature, the readers seem to love him. It is not baseless to say that Kiyō's character has humanized the character of Botchan in the novel. Doi Takeo writes in this regard that:

We like him just the same, and I wonder if this is not because Soseki succeeds in having us look at him through Kiyō's eyes. It may very well be that he is her creation and that she exerts an immeasurable influence on his personality. As a matter of fact, leaving Tokyo makes Botchan realize how irreplaceable she is. We can imagine that she has played a major role in shaping his personality. (10)

She takes responsibility of Botchan from his early age and she plays an important role in shaping his morals. She has a presence in the novel that readers can relate whenever Botchan is considering things. For Botchan, Kiyo is the epitome of goodness and virtue. He always compares and contrasts the teachers and other characters that he meets in Matsuyama.

Other important characters in the novel include the Porcupine, the Redshirt, Pale Squash, Hanger-on and Botchan's students. The Porcupine, or Mr Hotta, is Botchan's senior in the school in the mathematics subject. He helps with Botchan's lodgings when he first arrives in Shikoku. The relationship between the two, however, is damaged by the implied accusations made by the Redshirt. But eventually, the Porcupine's moral uprightness and good judgement sets him apart from his deceitful colleagues. Botchan and he eventually become good partners. The Redshirt and Hanger-on are presented as partners in dishonest acts. They try to manipulate situations and always present themselves as the upholders of ethical values. Redshirt has questionable virtue because even though he strives to win Madonna, he still pays visits to a young geisha. Hanger-on is an associate of the Redshirt in his schemes. Pale Squash is a very simple personality who is engaged to Madonna. After his father's demise, Pale Squash's family faces financial decline and this leads to a halt in their marriage. It is suggested that his transfer to Nobeoka has something to do with the Redshirt's interest in Madonna. Botchan's students also play an important role in the novel. These young students harass Botchan and they make fun of his private life. He is monitored by the students wherever he goes. They do not succumb to his disciplinary measures and their behaviour disturbs Botchan deeply.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. How does Botchan's impulsive and headstrong nature influence his interactions with his colleagues and students? (80 words)
2. In what ways does Kiyō shape Botchan's personality and moral outlook throughout the novel? (150 words)
3. Discuss the role of Porcupine, Redshirt, and Hanger-on in highlighting the themes of honesty and deceit in the novel. (150 words)

### **2.5 Summing Up:**

In this unit, we have understood how the plot of the novel is driven by the conflicts among the characters. The chapter-wise summary and analysis of the novel have helped students grasp key events and character developments. The summary has provided crucial details that will help students focus on the important parts of the novel. Additionally, the analysis of important characters, such as Botchan, Kiyō, Porcupine, Redshirt, and others, has given students an empathetic understanding of their motivations and perspectives.

We have also explored how Botchan's impulsive and outspoken nature often places him at odds with his colleagues and students, highlighting the theme of honesty versus deceit. The role of Kiyō, as a guiding and stabilizing force in Botchan's life, has been emphasized, showing how her unwavering support helps shape his moral compass. The unit further delves into the dynamics of office politics at the school and the interplay of power and manipulation among the staff, particularly between Redshirt and Hanger-on, contrasting with the upright Porcupine. These aspects enrich the

reader's understanding of the socio-cultural context and human relationships portrayed in the novel.

## **2.6 References and Suggested Readings**

Sōseki, Natsume. *Botchan*. Translated by J. Cohn. Penguin Books, 2012. E-book.

Takeo, Doi. *The Psychological World of Natsume Soseki*. Translated by Soseki no Shiiteki Sekai. Harvard University Press, 1976.

## **2.7 Model Questions**

- Comment on the importance of the novel's title with respect to the narrator.
- Describe the context of the novel's setting in Japan.

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## UNIT-3

### NATSUME SOSEKI: *BOTCHAN* (THEMES AND TECHNIQUES)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 3.1 Objective

#### 3.2 Introduction

#### 3.3 Note on Translation of *Botchan*

#### 3.4 Narrative Techniques in *Botchan*

#### 3.5 Important Themes in the Novel

#### 3.6 Summing Up

#### 3.7 References and Suggested Reading

#### 3.8 Model Questions

#### 3.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to-

- Reflect on the complexities of English translation.
- Understand the features and nuances of the original Japanese text.
- Understand different themes that are involved in the text.
- Evaluate the narrative techniques used by Soseki.

#### 3.2 Introduction

In this unit, students will explore the various aspects of writing involved in the novel. They will benefit from explanations that critically examine its technical elements. The unit will address the challenges inherent in translating a text, while also introducing students to the narrative techniques employed by Soseki. It will delve into Soseki's use of the first-person narrative, satire, symbols, and other narrative features and see how these add depth to the



story. Additionally, the key themes that play a significant role in the novel will be analyzed. The unit will highlight important ideas such as societal change, authority, and the conflict between tradition and modernity, among other critical aspects. By the end of this unit, students will be able to understand the text from multiple perspectives.

### **3.3 Note on Translation of *Botchan***

It is widely acknowledged that the foundation of any attempt at translation involves the interpretation of the text, i.e., the original work. The translator then strives to reproduce the closest possible elements of the original text in another language. Before this process, however, there is an exchange of thoughts between writers and readers. Writers choose to express their thoughts in language, using words that will have the maximum impact on their readers. Readers, in turn, interpret the text based on their own knowledge and experiences. In essence, this process involves deciphering the writer's mind through their language and ideas.

In the case of translated texts, the translator stands between the reader and the author. The translator is also a reader who interprets the text in its original form and then acts as a writer, conveying the ideas of the original work into another language as accurately as possible. This makes translation a complex and challenging task.

Natsume Soseki's novel *Botchan* is a significant Japanese literary work of the modern era, widely read by audiences around the world. Major translations of the work into English have been undertaken by four translators: Umeji Sasaki, Alan Turney, Joel Cohn, and Yasotaro Mori. Of these, the translations by the first three are currently available. The challenges of translating a text, as noted earlier, become particularly evident with a work like *Botchan*. In

translating such a text, considerations must include the colloquial language of Tokyo, Soseki's distinctive narrative style, his deliberate word choices to capture the nuances of wordplay, and the unique aspects of Japanese culture.

Since this study focuses on Joel Cohn's translation as the primary text, we will examine his use of language. In the text, the narrator is referred to as *Botchan*, a term with multiple connotations. Cohn's primary concern is to convey these nuances to the readers. In his translation, it is evident that when Kiyō, the landlady, uses the term, it carries a sense of respect and affection. Conversely, when used by the teachers in Matsuyama, the word takes on a negative and condescending tone. Consider, for example, the following comment by Botchan while returning from the fishing trip with his colleagues:

Now that I thought about it, though, I realized that most people actually encourage you to turn bad. They seem to think that if you don't, you'll never get anywhere in the world. And then on those rare occasions when they encounter somebody who's honest and pure-hearted, they look down on him and say he's nothing but a kid, a Botchan.

(*Botchan* Chapter 5)

As suggested in the above quote, Cohn successfully highlights the negative overtone that the word *botchan* carries in this context. In another instance, Cohn retains the word *namoshi* to preserve the Japanese flavor in the translation. There is a stark contrast between the slow-speaking Matsuyama dialect, reflected in the brief conversations between Botchan and his students, and Botchan's quick, rough Tokyo dialect. Cohn keeps the phrase *namoshi* at the end of each sentence where it appears, maintaining its authenticity.

Regarding the English translation of the novel, Tokunaga Mitsuhiro notes that "a particularly difficult issue in translating *Botchan* is

appropriately conveying the characters' sense of amusement present in the original Japanese" (viii).

*Botchan* contains various features of Japanese language and culture in its original form, which are inherently understood by native Japanese readers or those familiar with the nuances of the language. To fully grasp the different layers of meaning in these features, the translator plays a crucial role. They can include explanatory notes or footnotes to clarify important concepts that are not directly translatable. However, in the English translations, such footnotes are often absent. As a result, significant cultural and linguistic concepts, naturally accessible to Japanese readers, remain implicit and unspoken in the translated text. This limits English readers to a more superficial understanding of the novel, depriving them of its deeper comprehensibility.

In the following passage, for example, Botchan comments on the speech delivered by Hanger-on and states that:

These were fine-sounding remarks, but with no meaning, full of fancy Chinese-style phrases that I could barely make head or tail of. The only part I could make out clearly was the business about endorsing without reservation. (*Botchan* Chapter 6)

In the passage, it is clearly stated that Botchan does not comprehend the statement made by Hanger-on who uses many Chinese phrases that reflect his ability and mastery over the rhetorics of Chinese language. The Japanese readers are familiar with this statement but the English readers have no knowledge of what Botchan is referring to. As Tokunaga suggests that:

In order to fully grasp this passage, readers must be aware that knowledge of classical Chinese is a mark of sophistication in Japan... Knowledge of the Japanese writing

system-which includes Chinese characters and two Japanese syllabaries-is also required to interpret, some passages in *Botchan*. (x)

Thus, the subtleties and challenges of translation must be considered when reading a translated text. One such challenge involves the translation of names. In J. Cohn's translation, as in those of other English translators, the characters' nicknames are directly translated from the original work. Botchan's habit of naming his colleagues based on their features and personalities is one of the novel's most delightful elements. Let us compare these nicknames with their Japanese counterparts.

The Principal is nicknamed *the Badger* in the English text, corresponding to *Tanuki* in Japanese. The two terms are similar, as the tanuki, a raccoon-like animal, is often translated as *badger*. Cohn notes that "in Japanese folklore it is known as a wily creature with the ability to deceive or bewitch humans" (Introduction).

Next is the Assistant Principal, whom Botchan dubs *Redshirt* because of his fondness for the color red, which he wears habitually, believing it to be beneficial for health. Redshirt's associate, Yoshikawa, is nicknamed *Nodaiko* in Japanese. According to Cohn, the term "referred to flunkey-like entertainers who attached themselves to parties of pleasure seekers and provided a range of mood-enhancing services, including flattery, jesting, and cajolery, as the merrymakers wended their way from teahouse to restaurant to Kabuki playhouse to brothel" (Introduction). Cohn translates this as *Hanger-on*, which, while not a direct equivalent, captures the superficial and sycophantic nature of the character.

The English teacher, Mr. Koga, and Botchan's fellow mathematics teacher, Mr. Hotta, are called *Uranari Hyōtan* and *Yamaarashi* in Japanese, respectively. In English, these are rendered as *Pale*

*Squash and the Porcupine*, reflecting Botchan's first impressions of their appearances.

Translating a classic novel like *Botchan* requires the translator to consider numerous factors. They must capture the nuances of the Japanese language, which play a vital role in the deeper understanding of the text. The novel is a highly regarded work of modern Japanese fiction, celebrated for its humorous narrative style, witty remarks, and subtle social commentary.

### **3.4 Narrative Techniques in *Botchan***

In the novel, Soseki uses various narrative techniques. His use of colloquial language, first person narrative style in the form of stream of consciousness technique, satire, various symbols and many other narrative features are proof that Natsume Soseki has a good command over his narrative. Although the novel is one of his earliest efforts in writing, these narrative features, however, show a maturing writer who will later develop into one of the most prolific modern writers of Japan. The narrator in the novel *Botchan* is the eponymous character Botchan. The first-person narrative offers a very narrow viewpoint to the readers. We are subjected to the personal and very partial account of the experiences of the narrator. As the narrator is emotionally involved in the experience, this puts into question the authenticity and impartiality of the narrative. Botchan as a character is very impulsive and thinks of others according to his own understanding of the circumstances. Botchan as a narrator creates a sense of urgency in the readers and it is the biases and prejudices of this narrator that shape and drive the narrative forward. His naivety risks the authenticity of the circumstances, yet Soseki's narrative style has convinced us, the readers, to love and trust the character. Commenting on the narrative, J. Cohn writes that

The voice in which Botchan tells his story is striking, not quite like anything seen in Japanese fiction before, and not often matched since: sometimes choppy but always vivid, direct, and outspoken; basically colloquial but frequently enriched by literary expressions at strategic points. The reader has the sense of being in direct touch with an engaging, refreshingly candid character who may do some boasting but never talks down to us. The contrast between his forthrightness and the devious, pompous tones of many of the other characters makes him all the more appealing.

(Introduction)

The use of stream of consciousness technique in the novel provides the readers with the fresh and unfiltered thoughts of the protagonist narrator. The narrative is woven around the thoughts and emotions of Botchan in such a way that the readers are allowed to view the action in the novel through his judgmental eyes. The narrative flows in a very unbound way that imitates human thought. Just like the chain of thoughts that are stretched in the human consciousness, the descriptions in the novel also progresses in the same unchained manner. Each of the events in the novel are followed by the critical thought of the protagonist. For example, during his stay in Yamashiro-ya hotel in Shikoku, he is disapproving of the maid's behaviour there and thinks of tipping her a five-yen to maintain his status as not some cheap person. When the maid arrives, the narrative proceeds in the following way:

The same girl from last night brought in my breakfast. As she served it, she kept breaking into an obnoxious smirk. Outrageous! What did she think she was gawking at, some kind of stage show? Even a face like mine was a lot more impressive sight than hers was, that much was for sure. I had been intending to wait until after she was through serving to

hand over my tip, but I was feeling so angry I just took out a five-yen bill right then and there and told her to take it to the office. (*Botchan* Chapter 2)

We can clearly observe in the above passage that the narrative has a spontaneous free flow that often narrows the gap between thoughts and actions. This technique separates Soseki's narrative style from the traditional writing style and challenges the readers to engage with the text at a profound level. Often the narrative is fragmented as the narrator jumps from one thought to another reflecting how the narrative mirrors the human thought that is illogical in its structure.

Soseki also uses satire in the text. He uses satire as a tool to reveal the unyielding social standards of the Japanese society. We have already suggested that during Soseki's lifetime, Japan went through many political, social and economic changes. These changes have left their impact on the society and the novel often subtly relates to them. Soseki satirizes the strict hierarchical order of Japanese society that has been being replaced by the modern urban order. Soseki in a humorous way satirizes the mindset of clan-based order that does not hold value in the Meiji-era Japan. For example, we can see that Botchan always thinks of himself as a superior personality as his family and ancestors are from a top samurai clan. He states during his clash with the dormitory students that

If people were to hear that I allowed this pack of snot-nosed brats to make a fool out of me while I was on duty and simply slunk back to my room because I couldn't handle them, I would never live it down. Whatever faults I may have, my ancestors were retainers of the Shogun, a line of warriors going back to the Emperor Seiwa and descended from the great Minamoto no Mitsunaka. I'm not made of the same stuff as those peasants were, of that you can be sure. (*Botchan* Chapter 4).

Soseki also satirizes the education system of Japan of that period. He criticises the petty politics, hypocrisies, rewarding favouritism and trifling rivalries present in the school administration under the guise of professionalism. For example, the Assistant Principal nicknamed the Redshirt is actually a manipulative character who uses his resources to damage the reputation of others. He is, however, a hypocrite himself because he is involved in illicit affairs with a geisha but maintains a morally refined and cultured character from the outside.

The symbolism in the text is also prominent. It is already mentioned how the assigning of nicknames to the teachers work according to their dispositions and nature. Also interesting to note is the fact that the narrator is not directly named or we know him only by the term Kiyoo fondly calls him, Botchan. Hence, the term itself becomes symbolic because it can be interpreted both as endearing as well as disdainful. There is also a playful comparison between Tokyo and Matsuyama. While the school and people of Matsuyama represent a pull towards traditional ways of Japanese culture, Tokyo symbolises a more progressive society where modernity has arrived. The students can notice this difference while reading the text as Botchan often points out his difference as a Tokyo born and raised person. All these rich features of Soseki's narrative make the novel an interesting read.

#### **Stop to Consider**

Stream of consciousness is a term that describes the literary technique in which a character's thoughts are captured as a continuous flow in the text. It often involves the process of internal monologue where the thoughts of the character are directly addressed to the readers. This technique uses fragmented narratives and non-linear progress of the narrative. The readers understand the



inner thoughts of the narrator, his deepest desires and motivations as he speaks his mind. In this aspect, M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham describe that:

“stream of consciousness” is the name applied specifically to a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character’s mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations. (345)

### **3.5 Important Themes in the Novel**

*Botchan* is one of the earliest ventures of Soseki in the field of fiction. It was his third novel. Although the novel is short, it has many important themes that are addressed by the writer. One of the most important themes that runs throughout the novel is the underlying tensions between the forces of tradition and modernity. The novel is set in the Meiji period of Japan and, as already mentioned in earlier units, it was a time when Japan saw the opportunity to push modernisation in the country. This modernisation was obviously secured by the Western adoption of values and education. Thus, in the novel, we see that Soseki explores the dichotomy of modernity and traditionalism in Japan through the experiences of Botchan. It is apparent in the novel that Botchan’s character involves values of both traditionality and modernity. He respects the ideals of honesty and loyalty that fits well into his identity as an Edokko and a descendent of Samurai clan, his more traditional side; on the other hand, one can clearly see that dressing sense and values are more urban and Western. For example, on the banquet for Mr Kigo’s (Pale Squash) farewell ceremony, almost everyone was dressed in the traditional Kimono

dress, while the narrator Botchan was wearing a Western suit. However, it is also important to note that Botchan is also proud of his identity as a Samurai and often looks down upon the Matsuyama people, especially the students whom he calls “peasants” in anger. Thus, caught between the two forces, the frustration of Botchan during his time in Matsuyama reflects the overall struggle of the society to balance modern lifestyle and traditional values.

Another theme that Soseki explores is the social class mindset and the hierarchy that is still present in the society. The first major example of class consciousness in the novel is the relation between Kiyoko and Botchan. It is a relation based on the master and servant attitude. Although Kiyoko is fond of Botchan as she respects him and loves him, her choice to call him “Botchan” signifies that the meaning of the term is closer to “little master” in English. This suggests that the relationship between the two is still of servant and master. In this regard, Cohn states that the term “may be used to express a measure of respect mixed with fondness for and intimacy with its subject, as Kiyoko does” (Introduction). Along with the theme of hierarchy we can also see the problem with authority lingering all over the narrative. Botchan finds himself in the space of school where he directly involves himself in the power structures being played out in the faculty as well as in the school class among the students. While he tries to occupy a space among the teachers, he realises that the Principal and the Assistant Principal hold the maximum power in the administrative hierarchy. Along with this he also has to prove his authority to the students who often overlook him and do not take him seriously. The school can be seen as a microcosm of a society where a very few hold the maximum power and they are often guilty of the abuse of power.

Natsume Soseki also explores the theme of friendship and self-discovery. Botchan’s struggle to adapt to the school is an example of

his journey to finding his own voice. One can clearly see that he is confused between the Redshirt and the Porcupine in choosing who he should trust. Trust and loyalty are the major values in Botchan's life. Among the self-serving relationships that his colleagues maintain, Botchan longs for the true and honest relationship that he has with Kiyō. For instance, when he goes to fishing with Redshirt and Hanger-on, he feels lonely as his colleagues are not genuine and only interested in their own politics. He states that:

As I gazed at the sky I was thinking about Kiyō. I was thinking how nice it would be if I had some money and I could bring her here to enjoy this pretty place. No matter how splendid the scenery was, it was no fun being here with the likes of the Hanger. Kiyō might be a wrinkled old woman, but I wouldn't feel embarrassed to take her anywhere. (*Botchan* Chapter 5)

So, in the novel, the relationship between Botchan and Kiyō is contrasted against Botchan's relationship with his colleagues in school. Kiyō represents moral integrity and purity of love which most of his colleagues, especially the Redshirt, lack. It is seen that Botchan, in the later part of the novel, starts to trust the Porcupine in whom he sees the qualities that he can trust. So, the novel explores various themes that corresponds to a changing society and inspects the complexities of human behaviour. By exploring the above-mentioned themes, Soseki provides some important insights of his era where changing and adapting to the new reality was going on at a fast pace.

### **3.6 Summing Up**

This unit has thoroughly examined the key aspects of Natsume Soseki's *Botchan*. Through this study, students have gained

an understanding of how the novel's English translations compare to the original Japanese text. The unit explored how effectively the English translations convey the nuanced meanings of the original work. Particular emphasis was placed on the translator's role in capturing the right connotations, ensuring that the cultural and linguistic subtleties of the Japanese text are preserved.

Additionally, the unit analyzed the narrative techniques employed by Soseki, focusing on his decision to use Botchan as the narrator. It explored the use of *stream of consciousness*, symbolism, and satire, which collectively enhance the novel's literary quality. These elements provide insight into Botchan's inner world while offering a critique of societal norms.

The unit also discussed significant themes such as the tension between tradition and modernity, the impact of social hierarchy, and the dynamics of friendship and authority. These themes reflect the broader socio-cultural transitions of the Meiji period and highlight the complexities of human relationships in a rapidly changing society.

Furthermore, the unit emphasized the importance of Botchan's moral integrity and his struggle to navigate his environment, underscoring how these contribute to the novel's universal appeal. It also introduced the concept of cultural context in literature, encouraging students to consider how cultural values and historical settings shape narrative techniques and character development.

By engaging with these aspects, the unit helps students develop critical thinking skills while reading the text. It encourages them to identify and analyze other key factors, such as the interplay of humor and seriousness, the role of setting in shaping character perspectives, and the significance of minor characters in advancing

the narrative. These insights are crucial for an in-depth understanding of the text.

### 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

Abrams, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Cengage, 2009.

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### 3.8 Model Questions

- What is the dichotomy between Western and traditional Japanese belief in the novel’s Meiji-era setting?
- Discuss the narrative style used by Soseki in the novel.

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## UNIT-4

### SELMA LAGERLOF: *THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURE OF NILS HOLGERSSON* (INTRODUCTION)

#### Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Biography of Selma Lagerlof
  - 4.3.1 Personal life of Selma Lagerlof
  - 4.3.2 Selma Lagerlof's Works
- 4.4 About the text *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*:
  - 4.4.1 Background of *The Adventures of Nils Holgersson*:
  - 4.4.2 Lagerlof and Swedish Literature
- 4.5 Summing Up
- 4.6 References and Suggested Readings
- 4.7 Model Questions
  - 4.8 Answers to SAQ

#### 4.1 Objectives

This unit will focus on Selma Lagerlof's personal life and works with a special reference to her novel, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nil Holgersson*. A detailed account of the background of the text will also be provided in this unit. Thus, by the end of this unit, the reader will be able:

- to provide an introduction of the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nil Holgersson* and the ideas explored in the novel.

- to provide an overview of children's literature through Lagerlof's novel, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*.
- to recognize the connection of the text with the social backdrop.

## **4.2 Introduction**

Selma Lagerlof is a Swedish writer who became the first woman writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1909. She is known for her realistic portrayal of people's circumstances, ideas and social lives. She is also known for her works on Children's Literature. Like many leading Swedish writers of her time, Selma Lagerlof featured folktales, legends and stories from her homeland Sweden.

## **4.3 Biography of Selma Lagerlof**

Selma Lagerlof is a Swedish author who published her first novel *Gosta Berling's Saga* at the age of 33. She was also an active teacher throughout her professional life and in 1914 became the first female admitted to the Swedish Academy. She is not only the first Swedish author to win the Nobel Prize in Literature but also the first woman to win the same in 1909. Additionally, she was the first woman to be granted a membership in the Swedish Academy in 1914.

### **4.3.1 Personal life of Selma Lagerlof**

Selma Lagerlof was born in 1858 in Ostra Emterwik, Varmland, Sweden. She was the fifth child to Erik Gustaf Lagerlof, a lieutenant in the Royal Varmland Regiment and Louise Lagerlof, whose father was a wealthy merchant and a mine owner. She was brought up on

the small family estate Marbacka owned by her paternal grandmother Elisabet Maria Wennervik who had inherited it from her mother until it was sold in 1884, which had a serious impact on her life. She was born with a hip injury, which was caused by a detachment in the hip joint. However, at the age of three and a half, a sickness left her lame in both legs, although she later recovered. She was a quiet, serious child with a deep love of reading. She had a happy childhood as she describes her early years in this “little homestead, with low buildings overshadowed by giant trees” in *The Story of a Story* (1902) and *Memories of My Childhood* (1934). After reading Thomas Mayne Reid’s *Osceola* at the age of seven, she decided that she would be a writer when she grew up. This is what she said, “For me acquaintance with this Indian story had a decisive effect on my whole life. It awoke in me a deep, powerful desire to produce something as fine. Thanks to this book, I knew as a child that later I should above all love to write novels.”

#### **Stops to Consider**

The Swedish Academy comprises a prestigious group of eighteen authors and scholars. In 1904, the academy had awarded her its great gold medal, and she was the first woman to be granted a membership in the Swedish Academy in 1914.

Selma Lagerlof received her early education at home since the Folkskola compulsory education system was not fully developed yet. At school, Selma Lagerlof read many of the nineteenth century’s important writers such as Henry Spencer, Theodore Parker and Charles Darwin. Her readings influenced her to question the faith of her childhood in traditional Christian dogmatic beliefs. Rather, she developed a faith in the goodness and morality of God.



Later, she entered the Women's Higher Teacher Training College in Stockholm from where she graduated three years later, in 1885. Before her tenth birthday, Selma introduced herself to Walter Scott's novels while staying at Stockholm. She had been writing poetry ever since she was a child, but she did not publish anything until 1890, when a Swedish weekly gave her the first prize in a literary competition and published excerpts from the book *Gosta Berlings Saga* which was to be her first, best, and most popular work. She started writing plays for a puppet theater named *Dockteaterspel* while her younger sister enthusiastically made the puppets. She wrote poetry but was never seriously encouraged to write until the age of twenty-two, when she met the writer Anna Fryxell, champion of female education and daughter of the well-known prelate and historian Anders Fryxell. Anna Fryxell met Lagerlof at a wedding where young Lagerlof was called upon to read some celebratory verses that she had composed. Upon hearing the verses, Fryxell encouraged Lagerlof to leave home and get some training as a teacher. Because of her father's objections, Lagerlof had to battle his wishes and incur a loan in order to finance four years of study in Stockholm with the ultimate aim of becoming self-sufficient. She spent a year of preparatory study at Stockholm beginning in the autumn of 1881 and then received training for three years, from 1882 to 1885, at Stockholm's Women's Higher Teacher Training College, a prestigious institution for gifted young women during her time. The college was a stimulating environment for the aspiring author. While studying in Stockholm, Lagerlof wrote perhaps to entertain her fellow students. She wrote the narrative poem "Madame de Castro" at this time, the action of which takes place in a circus tent and at a grand ball. In "Madame de Castro," a circus artist and her young daughter are both social inferiors and unacceptable in the ballroom where they, nevertheless, perform. The Women's Higher Teacher Training College provided a wide-ranging

liberal education for women. She got introduced to widely acclaimed writers like Ernest Renan, Charles Darwin, Henry Spencer, and Theodore Parker and admired the Swedish poet and thinker Viktor Rydberg. She was not only engaged in avid reading but she also actively participated in the cultural life of the city. On 8 March, Lagerlof had a cerebral hemorrhage, and she died on 16 March 1940. She was laid to rest in the family grave in Ostra Amtervik.

**SAQ**

1. When and where was Selma Lagerlof born?

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2. What was the name of the estate where Lagerlof grew up?

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3. What influence did Reid's *Osceola* have on Lagerlof?

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4. Give a brief account of the personal life of Selma Lagerlof.

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### 4.3.2 Selma Lagerlof's Works

Although Lagerlof started writing quite early in her life, she gained a momentum as a writer only after publishing a few excerpts from her widely acclaimed book *Gosta Berlings Saga*. *Gösta Berlings Saga* was published in 1891, but went unnoticed until its Danish translation received wide critical acclaim and paved the way for the book's lasting success in Sweden and in other parts of the world. She won a prize that enabled her to leave her teaching career and focus on writing. Thereafter, she completed the novel, with its themes of beauty versus duty and joy versus good. The novel was published the next year, to disappointing reviews by the major critics. But its reception in Denmark encouraged her to continue with her writing. By 1895, she gave up her teaching to devote herself to her writing. Despite the strong desire to write, Lagerlof struggled to find material and a language of her own. Her inspiration came suddenly one day while she was walking down Malmskillnad Street in Stockholm. She relates this experience in *En saga om en saga och andrasagor*; translated as *The Girl from the Marsh Croft*. With the help of the money from the publication of *Gösta Berling's Saga* and a scholarship and grant, she made two journeys, which were largely instrumental in providing material for her next novel. With her close friend Sophie Elkan, she traveled to Italy, and also to Palestine and other parts of the East.

#### Stop to Consider

Selma Lagerlof had been writing poetry ever since she was a child, but she did not publish anything until 1890, when a Swedish weekly gave her the first prize in a literary competition and published excerpts from the book *Gosta Berlings Saga* which was to be her first, best, and most popular work. She has sent a few of the chapters

she had finished of *Gosta Berlings saga* to the magazine *Idun*, which resulted in her winning their literary competition.

In Italy, a legend of a Christ Child figure that had been replaced with a false version inspired Lagerlof's novel *Antikristsmirakler*, translated as *The Miracles of the Antichrist*. The novel is set in Sicily and explores the interplay between Christian and socialist moral systems. In 1900, she visited the American Colony in Jerusalem which became the inspiration for Lagerlöf's book by that name. The royal family and the Swedish Academy gave her substantial financial support to encourage her writing passion. *Jerusalem* was also acclaimed by critics, who began comparing her to Homer and Shakespeare, so that she became a popular figure both in Sweden and abroad. In 1902, Lagerlof was asked by the National Teachers' Association to write a geography book for children intended as a primer for elementary schools. She wrote *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* translated as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* which became one of the most charming children's books in any language. She secured her reputation as a children's-book author with *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. It is a novel about a boy from the southernmost part of Sweden, who is shrunk to the size of a thumb and who travels on the back of a goose across the country. Lagerlof has interfused historical and geographical facts about the provinces of Sweden within the tale of the adventures undertaken by the boy until he manages to return home and is restored to his normal size. The novel is one of Lagerlof's most well-known books, and it has been translated into more than 30 languages. In 1912, Lagerlof wrote another novel *Körkarlen*, translated as *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness!* derived from the superstition of Breton folklore that whoever dies on the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve must drive Death's

cart, collecting the souls of all who pass away during the following year. Lagerlof mingles realistic slum interiors with hallucinatory descriptions of the state of mind of the new coachman, David Holm, a tubercular drunkard who has tormented his wife and children.

The World War I had a deep impact on her as she was deeply disturbed, and for some years she barely wrote. In her mid-twenties, she published the historical trilogy: *Lowenskoldska Ringen* (1925), *Charlotte Lowenskold* (1927), and *Anna Svard* (1928). She also published several volumes of reminiscences, told in the third person narrative, under the title *Marbacka* (1922-32) which includes the story of how Selma, three and a half years old, mysteriously lost the use of her legs, probably because of the terror of once waking alone in an attic room, and having been carried everywhere. Two years later, her father arranged for the whole family to visit the west-coast town of Stromstad in the hope of improving her health. They were invited onboard a ship whose captain had returned from the Far East with, reputedly, a bird of paradise. Selma privately determined to ask the bird to cure her. Once the dinghy carrying the family had reached the ship, she was the first person to be carried up a rope ladder and placed on the deck. Onboard she asked a cabin boy where the bird of paradise was, and she followed him down the stairs into the captain's cabin and climbed onto the table on which the beautiful stuffed bird stood. There was a commotion on deck when Selma was missed, and it was not until the family found her and asked how she got to the captain's cabin that she realized that she had actually walked. Lagerlöf's works are full of miraculous and unaccountable events, including examples of overcoming psychosomatic and mental illnesses. After her astounding cure she was left with a faulty and painful hip causing a lifelong limp.

**SAQ**

1. Write a note on Selma Lagerlof's first novel?

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2. Give an account of Selma Lagerlof's novel *Antikristsmirakler*.

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3. Who is the hero of the novel *Gosta Berlings Saga*?

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4. What is her book *Marbacka* about?

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**4.4 About the text *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*:**

*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* Holgerssons, originally written in Swedish as *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* is a novel by the Swedish writer Selma Lagerlof. It was originally published in two books in Swedish, one in 1906 and the other in 1907, and was later published in English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* in 1907 and *The Further Adventures of Nils* in 1911. However, the two parts are later usually published together, in English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. Lagerlof's gift of story-telling is highlighted through this book that explores the

supernatural and is rooted in the folktales and legends of her homeland. Lagerlof has brilliantly weaved fact and fiction in this book, crafting out an interesting fable on the adventures of a mischievous young boy named Nils. The plot of the book recounts the adventures of this young boy of fourteen, who turns into a tiny human being as he travels around the countryside on the back of a goose. The novel explores a wide variety of ideas through the depiction of nature, geography, folklore, animal life, and so on.

#### **4.4.1 Background of *The Adventures of Nils Holgersson*:**

*The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgersson* is a children's classic in Swedish literature, written in 1906. After receiving wide acclamation from the critics of Sweden with the publication of *Jerusalem*, Selma took up a request made by the director of the National Teachers' Association to write a popular geography book for elementary school children in order to introduce Swedish history and geography to them. Lagerlof had long served in that college as a teacher of geography and history. When she was in the process of writing the book, she had a clear intention in her mind. She wished to educate Swedish children to love their motherland. From a pedagogical point of view, she believed that only when children understand the geography and culture of their country and become familiar with the history of the motherland can they truly love and respect that country. Therefore, she decided to create a fictional narrative which would be actually published as a variation of standard textbooks. In 1902, Lagerlof was asked by National Teachers' Association to write a geography book intended as a primer textbook for elementary children. She wrote *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*, first published in 1906 and translated as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, became one of the most charming children's books in any language. She secured

her reputation as a children's-book author with *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. The plot of the novel narrates the adventures of a mischievous young boy who shrinks into a tiny human being and travels around the world to understand the speech of birds and animals. He was a boy of fourteen, naughty, tall and lanky and flaxen-haired, who hates his studies and likes sleeping and eating all the time. Although Lagerlof had been commissioned to write a geography textbook for schools, she struggled to come up with a structure for it. The school authorities who commissioned the book wanted a collection of folktales and legends from different provinces of Sweden to reflect Swedish geography and culture. However, Lagerlof had a different idea altogether. She had the aspiration to build a story around Swedish folklore and legends of the various provinces. She wanted the book with a single storyline with a unifying idea that would excite and appeal to the children. Much of the stories in the book were based on the story of her hometown. Her prolonged struggle trying to find a way to create a storyline is evident in the forty-ninth chapter of *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*. Here she writes that when she returned to her childhood home, the estate of Marbacka in search of motivation, only then, she did come up with the idea of a young boy on the back of a goose. The idea itself is based on a goose she had known at Marbacka. The conception of this tale of adventure in the novel was inspired by an incident that happened when she was walking in the garden in Marbacka. She was startled by the cry for “help” by a young boy who was struggling to resist an owl that had attacked him. This scene created an impression on the author, which she fictionalized through Nils tale of adventures. When Nils bullies chickens, cats and dogs, the animals try to hit back.



### **Stop to Consider**

Much of the stories in the book were based on the story of her hometown. Her prolonged struggle for trying to find a way to create a storyline is evident as she writes in the forty-ninth chapter of *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* that when she returned to her childhood home, the estate of Marbacka in search of motivation, only then, did she come up with the idea of a young boy on the back of a goose. The idea itself is based on a goose she had known at Marbacka.

Thereafter, Lagerlof began an intensive study of the geography and history of Sweden. Much of the materials was sent to her by teachers and schoolchildren from different parts of the country. Lagerlof compiled a variety of resources such as facts about the natural environment, cultural and historical notes, tales and legends, and stories of people who had performed great deeds. She had also travelled around Sweden for more than three years to compile the resources of her book. In order to execute her vision of the book, Selma travelled through Sweden from north to south, meticulously collected detailed information on various animals and plants in the country and observed the living habits and behavior of birds. She also compiled the traditional stories such as the folktales and legends which greatly enriched the authenticity of her work. In the summer of 1904, Lagerlof and Elkan also made a special journey to Norrland, the northernmost of the three main regions of Sweden, in order to get an impression of the geography of the region. However, this trip was difficult for Lagerlof as she was immensely loyal to her friend, who was then working on *Konungen*. Yet Lagerlof needed peace and tranquility to write what she had promised which was then provided by Olander. Since they met in 1902, Olander had become an essential part of Lagerlof's life, but she felt left out

during Lagerlof's month-long journeys with and visits to Elkan, and she wrote about of moving from Falun to Stockholm.

Upon the release of her book *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* in 1906 and 1907, the general public and many literary critics welcomed it with enthusiasm. In early 1907, her paternal aunt, Lovisa, whom she loved dearly, died in the home she shared with Lagerlof in Falun. She was laid to rest in the family plot in OstraAmtervik because of which Lagerlof had to return to Varmland. There she found Marbacka on a dilapidated state and was up for sale. Elkan had planned a trip for them to Budapest, Vienna, Trieste, Montenegro, and Dinant in Belgium, although Lagerlof's thoughts were too occupied with the second volume of *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*, due out in December 1907. On her return home, encouraged by a fifty-thousand-copy school edition of the first volume, Lagerlof bought back Marbacka and finished the second volume of *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*, published five years later in 1907.

**SAQ**

1. Who commissioned Lagerlof to write the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

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10. What was Lagerlof's idea of writing the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

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11. What motivated Lagerlof to write the story of Nils?

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#### 4.4.2 Lagerlof and Swedish Literature

Selma Lagerlof's contribution to Sweden and Swedish literature is immense. Most of her works represents the folk tales, legends, and stories from her home district in Varmland County, Sweden. She wrote her novels and short stories in the Swedish language. Even *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is a Swedish book where she used her imagination to intertwine fact and fiction. The interfusion of fantasy with reality by wandering from the human world to the world of animals and plants makes the entire work deeply appealing to the readers. The novel stimulates the imagination of the children by allowing them to experience a pseudo-realistic world and at the same time educates them on human values. Most of her works provide realistic depictions of people, their circumstances, ideas, and the general life of Sweden. Like many leading Swedish intellectuals of her time, Selma Lagerlof was also an advocate of Swedish spelling reform. The book also has a very helpful guide to pronouncing Swedish names. When *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* was first published, this book was also one of the first to adopt the new spelling mandated by a government resolution in Sweden on April 7, 1906.

Selma Lagerlof wrote this book to familiarize the school children with the folktales and legends from different provinces of Sweden. It was intended as a textbook for the Swedish elementary school. The plot and the language are relatively simple and suitable for

young children to understand in the grades in elementary schools. These children who have already gained a modicum of the knowledge of worldly affairs allows them to have a deeper insight into the novel. The Swedish Academy commissioned Lagerlof to write only a popular geography book. However, Lagerlof wanted to make the book more interesting and appealing to the children by interspersing the narrative with a large variety of fairy tales, legends and folk tales from different parts of Sweden in order to teach children practical knowledge in an entertaining way. Her way of narrating the stories in a straightforward way, through a single plotline, is what makes it worth reading for the students. Thus, the story of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* provides a good representation of the relationship between man and nature through the description of the journey undertaken by the young boy, Nils Holgersson.

#### **4.5 Summing Up**

In this unit, the readers can learn about the author Selma Lagerlofas a Swedish author. Besides, what inspired Selma Lagerlof to write the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is also provided to facilitate the understanding of the same. A brief overview of Lagerlof and her contribution to Sweden and Swedish literature through this book is reflected in this unit.

#### **4.6 References and Suggested Readings**

Lagerlof, Selma. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*. DoubleDay Page & Company. New York. 1910

Lagerroth, Erland. "THE NARRATIVE ART OF SELMA LAGERLÖF: TWO PROBLEMS." *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 33,

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<https://childrensliteratureblogsite.wordpress.com/2018/06/08/the-wonderful-adventures-of-nils/>

#### **4.7 Model Questions**

Q.1. Give an account of the personal life and works of Selma Lagerlof.

Q.2. How did Selma Lagerlof reflect her homeland in her works?

Q.3. Give an account of the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* and the purpose of its writing.

Q.4. What is the background of the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

Q.5. Write a note on Lagerlof’s contribution to Sweden and Swedish literature.

#### **4.8 Answers to SAQ:**

**Answer to Q 1.** Selma Lagerlof was born in 1858 in Ostra Emterwik, Varmland, Sweden. She was the fifth child to Erik Gustaf

Lagerlof, a lieutenant in the Royal Varmland Regiment and Louise Lagerlof, whose father was a wealthy merchant and a mine owner.

**Answer to Q 2.** She grew up on the small family estate Marbacka, owned by her paternal grandmother Elisabet Maria Wennervik, who had inherited it from her mother, until it was sold in 1884, which had a serious impact on her life.

**Answer to Q 3.** After reading Thomas Mayne Reid's *Osceola* at the age of seven, she decided that she would be a writer when she grew up. Selma said, "For me acquaintance with this Indian story had a decisive effect on my whole life. It awoke in me a deep, powerful desire to produce something as fine. Thanks to this book, I knew as a child that later I should above all love to write novels."

**Answer to Q 4.** Selma Lagerlof was born in 1858 in Ostra Emterwik, Varmland, Sweden. She was the fifth child to Erik Gustaf Lagerlof, a lieutenant in the Royal Varmland Regiment and Louise Lagerlof, whose father was a wealthy merchant and a mine owner. She was brought up on the small family estate Marbacka, owned by her paternal grandmother Elisabet Maria Wennervik, who had inherited it from her mother, until it was sold in 1884, which had a serious impact on her life. She was born with a hip injury, which was caused by detachment in the hip joint. However, at the age of three and a half, a sickness left her lame in both legs, which she later recovered. She was a quiet, serious child with a deep love of reading. She has had a happy childhood as she describes her early years in this "little homestead, with low buildings overshadowed by giant trees" in *The Story of a Story* (1902) and *Memories of My Childhood* (1934).

**Answer to Q 5.** *Gösta Berlings Saga* was her first novel, published in 1891, but went unnoticed until its Danish translation received wide critical acclaim and paved the way for the book's lasting success in Sweden and in other parts of the world. She won a prize that enabled her to leave her teaching career and focus on writing.

Thereafter, she completed the novel, with its themes of beauty versus duty and joy versus good. The novel was published the next year, to disappointing reviews by the major critics.

**Answer to Q 6.** In Italy, a legend of a Christ Child figure that had been replaced with a false version inspired Lagerlof's novel *Antikristsmirakler*, translated as *The Miracles of the Antichrist*. The novel is set in Sicily and explores the interplay between Christian and socialist moral systems. In 1900, she visited the American Colony in Jerusalem which became the inspiration for Lagerlöf's book by that name. The royal family and the Swedish Academy gave her substantial financial support to encourage her writing passion.

**Answer to Q 7.** The hero, Gösta Berling, a defrocked pastor, is handsome, passionate, and an unregenerate romantic who spreads light and joy but also chaos and destruction. He is saved from death in a snowdrift by a commanding woman, the so-called Majorskan (Major's wife), no longer young but with traces of past beauty. She is an owner of seven mines and the most powerful woman in Värmland. Gösta is invited to join a band of penniless but eternally carefree, party-loving "cavaliers," mostly aging former army men who live as her guests in a wing of Ekeby manor. The Major's wife has a past to atone for, however, and while she sets out on foot on a penitential pilgrimage, the cavaliers become masters of Ekeby for the space of a year, having signed a Mephistophelian pact to do nothing useful or gainful during that time. The conflict played out is between everything attractive and irresponsible on the one hand, and seriousness and useful work on the other. The inevitability of falling in love with beauty and the sacrifices demanded by real love constitute a variation of the theme. Lagerlöf had been nourished on Romantic poetry and the myths and stories of bygone adventures; she was also socially committed. Hence, her cavaliers are depicted as lovable men but also destructive because of their neglect of the

iron foundry, on which Ekeby and all its employees and neighbors financially depend, a lesson reinforced by Nature when a raging flood threatens to sweep away the neglected foundry. The central problem of the novel is how can a man be both joyful and good? Is it possible to reconcile a love of romance and gaiety with social concerns.

**Answer to Q 8.** *Marbacka*, a book with several volumes of reminiscences, told in the third person narrative, includes the story of how Selma, three and a half years old, mysteriously lost the use of her legs, probably because of the terror of once waking alone in an attic room, and had to be carried everywhere. Two years later, her father arranged for the whole family to visit the west-coast town of Stromstad in the hope of improving her health. They were invited onboard a ship whose captain had returned from the Far East with, reputedly, a bird of paradise. Selma privately determined to ask the bird to cure her. Once the dinghy carrying the family had reached the ship, she was the first person to be carried up a rope ladder and placed on the deck. Onboard she asked a cabin boy where the bird of paradise was, and she followed him down the stairs into the captain's cabin and climbed onto the table on which the beautiful stuffed bird stood. There was a commotion on deck when Selma was missed, and it was not until the family found her and asked how she got to the captain's cabin that she realized she had actually walked. Lagerlöf's works are full of miraculous and unaccountable events, including examples of overcoming psychosomatic and mental illnesses. After her astounding cure she was left with a faulty and painful hip causing a lifelong limp.

**Answer to Q 9.** *The Wonderful Adventure of Nils Holgersson* was commissioned by the National Teachers' Association. Selma took up a request made by the director of the National Teachers' Association to write a popular geography book for elementary school children in order to introduce Swedish history and geography to



them. Lagerlof had long served in that college as a teacher of geography and history.

**Answer to Q 10.** When she was in the process of writing the book, she had a clear intention in her mind. She wished to educate Swedish children to love their motherland. From a pedagogical point of view, she believed that only when children will understand the geography and culture of their country and become familiar with the history of the motherland can they truly love and respect their own country. Therefore, she decided to create a fictional narrative which would be actually published as a variation of standard textbooks.

**Answer to Q 11.** Much of the stories in the book were based on the story of her hometown. Her prolonged struggle in trying to find a way to create a storyline is evident as she wrote in the forty-ninth chapter of *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* that when she returned to her childhood home, the estate of Marbacka in search of motivation, only then did she come up with the idea of a young boy on the back of a goose. The idea itself is based on a goose she had known at Marbacka. The conception of this tale of adventure in the novel was inspired by an incident that happened when she was walking in the garden in Marbacka. She was startled by the cry for “help” of a young boy who was struggling to resist a owl that had attacked him. This scene created an impression on the author, which she crafted through Nils tale of adventures. When Nils bullies chickens, cats and dogs and the animals try to hit back.

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## UNIT-5

### SELMA LAGERLOF: *THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF NILS HOLGERSSON* (READING THE NOVEL)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 5.1 Objectives

#### 5.2 Introduction

#### 5.3 Reading the Text

#### 5.4 Critical Analysis of the text

#### 5.5 Characters

#### 5.6 Summing Up

#### 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

#### 5.8 Model Questions

#### 5.9 Answers to SAQ

#### 5.1 Objectives

This unit will focus on the understanding of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* by providing a reading of the text and also a critical analysis of the same. Through this unit, the readers will be able to:

- grasp the gist of the text and understand the plot.
- understand the journey undertaken by the central character of the novel.
- understand the important characters after reading the text.

#### 5.2 Introduction

*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is a classic children's book by the Swedish author Selma Lagerlof. The first volume was

originally published as a book in 1906 in Swedish. It is a two-volume story written for Swedish school children to make them aware of the geography of the country. It was a commissioned work by Lagerlof as the National Teachers Association had requested her in 1902 to write a geography textbook for the elementary schools in Sweden. The book tells the story of a young adventurer, Nils Holgersson, a boy of fourteen. Through Nils's adventure, Lagerlof features a wide variety of folklores and legends of the different provinces of Sweden.

### **5.3 Reading the Text**

Selma Lagerlof's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is the tale of an adventure of a boy who flew by riding on top of a goose over Sweden after shrinking in size and turning into an elf. The novel features the journey of transformation of the central character, Nils Holgersson, from a naughty selfish boy to a sympathetic hero who undergoes a deep understanding of the world of nature and natural objects. In his journey with a flock of geese, Nils learns about the culture of different places and changes to a better person. The book begins with Nils as a young boy who hates his studies and who finds it difficult to read books. He is insensitive to birds and animals who are kept in their farm and often plays tricks on the animals. He teases the animals and always ends up being bitten by them. He is cruel to the animals in the farm and is a lazy, stubborn, inconsiderate, good-for-nothing boy who has driven his parents to despair. Nils, also known as Thumbietot or Tummetot, after turning into an elf undergoes a journey to a wide variety of places. "Once there was a boy. He was—let us say—something like fourteen years old; long and loose-jointed and towheaded. He wasn't good for much, that boy. His chief delight was to eat and sleep; and after that—he liked best to make mischief." (Lagerlof 3)

Nils is the only child of his parents. On a particular Sunday morning, Nils's parents go to the church leaving Nils behind at home and ask him to memorize chapters from the Bible. An elf appears in front of Nils on the farm. According to Swedish folk beliefs, elves were supposed to bring good luck to Swedish farms. Being a nasty and disobedient boy, Nils plays a dirty trick on the elf that lives on the farm. Nils captures the elf in a net. The elf, helpless, proposes to Nils that if Nils frees him, he will give him a huge gold coin. Nils rejects the offer and the elf retaliates by turning Nils into the size of an elf. He magically transformed into an imp and is made to live with animals. Being shrunken, Nils is able to talk with animals, who are thrilled to see the boy reduced to their size. The animals are angry and hungry for revenge for Nils's past mischiefs. Meanwhile, wild geese are flying over the farm as it was the season of their migrations. The white goose of the farm whose name was Marten tries to join the flock of wild geese. In an attempt to restore before his family returns, Nils holds on to Marten's neck as he successfully climbs on Marten's top and takes off, joining the flock of the wild birds. Marten decides to fly with the wild geese to travel to the north as he has been longing to see Lapland for a long time. Thus, this is the point where Nils's wonderful adventures begin from where he rides the goose to all over the country.

**SAQ**

1. Who is the central character of the novel?

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2. Why does Nils transform into an elf?

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3. Who is Marten?

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4. What happens to Nils when he was left all alone in the farm?

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The wild geese were not happy to find the boy and a domestic goose among them. Eventually, they accept them and take them on an adventurous trip across all the historical provinces of Sweden. Travelling on the top of Marten with the flock of wild geese, Nils comes across different geographical stretches, people, cultures, and values. He is able to connect with a variety of birds and animals such as a stork, an eagle, a raven and a moose. At times, when the flock of wild geese lands on earth for food and rest, Nils acquires an opportunity to interact and get along with the culture of different geographical locations and learn the values from different people. Initially, Nils was enjoying his travelling and wasn't much bothered by his transformation from a human to a tiny elf. He hardly misses his past life of being a farm boy. However, as Nils meets new

people and learns about both nature and culture well, he gradually transforms into a considerate boy. He begins to learn to put others ahead of himself. At first, Nils wins the respect and trust of the goose Marten and then of other creatures as well. He learned compassion, loyalty, kindness, courage, and self-sacrifice from his adventures in different places. He interacts with animals and realizes how cruel he had been to the animals on his farm. He promises to reform his older self and aspires to become a better person.

**SAQ**

5. What was Nils's reaction when he transforms into an elf?

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6. What made Nils reform his older self before his adventures?

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The adventures undertaken by Nils along with the flock of wild geese and the various situations that he encounters make him a man. As the geese fly up the east coast of Sweden, Nils comes across a variety of people, land and creatures. In his elf form, he comes to the aid of animals in distress, which is in complete contrast to his past self at home. He experiences a vision of a beautiful, lost city. He gets himself a wily enemy by defying Smirre Fox. He encounters different situations such as death, danger, a storm at sea, an army of

rats, a congress of the animals, and abduction by crows. He also hears the tales of giants throwing rocks into the middle of the sea to scare the salmon upstream. He also hears the tale of how an island was formed from the fossilized carcass of a giant butterfly. He saves the lives of a flock of sheep, a duck, and a human child, and even plays a role in saving a wild bird refuge. Amidst all these encounters and interactions, Nils develops a conscience, a heart, and a longing to prove himself worthy of his parents' love. While projecting the geography and culture of Sweden, Lagerlof also aims to inculcate moral values, thus influencing child psychology while teaching them about geography.

There is a story that runs parallelly to the story of Nils. The peasant girl Aza and her little brother Mats tend geese. They are friends of Nils, often guarding the geese together. Suddenly their mother and all brothers and sisters die. It seems to many that this is the curse of one gypsy. The father of Aza and Mats, out of need, leaves his children and becomes a miner in Malmberg, in northern Sweden. One day, Aza and Mats find out that their mother and brothers and sisters did not die at all from a gypsy curse, but as a result of tuberculosis. They go to their father to tell him about it. During the journey, they learn what tuberculosis is and how to fight it. Aza and Mats soon arrive in Malmberg, where Mats dies in an accident. Having buried her brother, Aza meets her father: now they are together again. Nils returns with the wild geese from Lapland in autumn. Before continuing on his way across the Baltic Sea to Pomerania, the gander Martin drops Niels off in the yard of his parents, who are worried about the loss of their son. They catch the gander and want to kill him, but Nils does not allow them to do this, because they have become true friends. At this point, he turns back into a human. In another incident, his guilt of not saving the city in return for a coin makes him cry, and there he learns a lesson of

compassion. When he becomes nice for a week, the Gnome offers him to return to humanhood, which he denies first. When he returns to his family, he is not the same annoying, cruel child anymore.

#### **5.4 Critical Analysis of the text**

Selma Lagerlof has written this book for school children to teach the geography and culture of Sweden. She has intertwined fiction to fact and history in order to impart geographical lessons in a fictional way. The setting of the book is twentieth century in Sweden and the book has been written in the context of introducing the geography of Sweden to the children. The book includes a wide range of folk tales and legends, cultures and geographical landscapes of Sweden. The novel recounts the story of a young boy named Nils Holgersson who was naughty and cruel to the animals. He used to tease and torture the animals kept on the farm of his house. He confines the birds in the cages, grabs his family cat by its tail and abuses other animals living on the farm like the goose, Marten. He finds amusement by inflicting pain on these animals. One day, as his parents were out to Church, he was all alone in the farm. He notices a tiny elf, Tomette, a mythical creature, in his garden. He captures it with a net and tortures him. The tiny creature pleads Nils to set him free, in return promising to grant him some gold coins. However, Nils refuses and the Tomette curses him. He transforms Nils into a tiny being by shrinking him in size.

The novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is an adventure story that finds its place in both Children's literature and twentieth century Realist fiction. The book has been narrated by a third person narrator, who is anonymous to the readers. The tone of the novel is essentially didactic as it moves from being amusing to becoming more pensive and moralistic in nature. Nils also has a



moral journey as well as an educational one. He reforms himself to a better human being as he has to make amends for his previous deeds. The novel has been translated to some 60 languages and was included among Le Monde's 100 Books of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is also believed that the novel had earned Selma Lagerlöf the Nobel Prize in Literature 1909. The novel was later adopted as an animated series by the Japanese cartoon under the same name.

**SAQ**

7. What is the setting of the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

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8. What is the tone of the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

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**5.5 Characters**

Following are the important characters in Lagerlof's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*:

Nils Holgersson: Nils Holgersson also known as Thumbietot or Tummetott, is the central character of the book. He is a bad tempered, lazy, naughty boy living on a farm in Västra Vemmenhög, Scania on the southern tip of Sweden. He loves eating

and sleeping all the time. He is a fourteen years old, inconsiderate, good-for-nothing boy who has driven his parents to despair by his cruel deeds. He hates his studies and finds it difficult to read books. He often plays tricks on the animals that are kept in their farm. One day, when his parents had left him alone at home to learn chapters from the Bible, he is out playing in the farm and discovers an elf in the farm and traps it with a net. The elf, frustrated, shrinks Nils down to the size of an elf. Nils's subsequent wonderful adventures take place across the length and breadth of Sweden which he traverses on the back of a goose.

**Marten:** Marten is the goose in the farm in the house of Nils. It is a domesticated goose who lives with other animals in the farm owned by his father. However, Marten wishes to wander to Lapland along with the wild flock of geese that fly over the farm. Nils boards on his back as Marten joins the flock of wild geese.

**Akka:** Akka is one of the leaders of the flock of wild geese who leads the way to migration. She is old, gray and very sensible. She has gained much experience in the way of the animal world throughout the years. Nils had a deep conversation with Akka after gaining the ability to talk with and understand animals ever since he has shrunk into a tiny being. Akka is important to the story as she counsels Nils in understanding the ways of the animal world.

**Gusta:** Gusta is another goose who often seems grumpy but is strong, and Lasse's friend. But when Lasse marries his crush Suiirii, Gusta starts to tease him. He is the only goose who does not marry.

**Mr. Smirre:** Mr. Smirre, the fox is the antagonist to Nils's story. He serves as a predatory being as his predatory instinct forces him to attack the geese at various points of the book. His presence puts both Nils and the geese in danger along the way. Smirre follows the wild geese all the way to Lapland.

Osa: Osa, the Goose-Girl is a girl who tends to geese along with her little brother Mats. Nils knew them both back home, but never had much interest in them or cared for them before his adventure. Upon being reformed as a better human being, his attitude towards them drastically changes after returning home from his adventures.

**SAQ**

9. Who is Mr Smirre?

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10. Who is Akka?

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11. Who is Osa?

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**5.6 Summing Up**

In this unit, a detailed understanding of Lagerlof's book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is attempted. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is a book which helps the readers to understand the geography and culture of Sweden through

the folktales fabricated by the adventures of the central character Nils.

### 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

Lagerlof, Selma. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*. DoubleDay Page & Company. New York. 1910

Lagerroth, Erland. “THE NARRATIVE ART OF SELMA LAGERLÖF: TWO PROBLEMS.” *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1961, pp. 10–17. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40916317>. Accessed 30 June 2024.

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### 5.8 Model Questions

Q.1. What is the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* about?

Q.2. How does Nils transform himself in the course of his adventures in the novel?

Q.3. Give a critical analysis of the text *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*.

Q.4. Write a note on the important characters in Lagerlof's novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

Q.5. Discuss *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* as a moralistic novel.

Q.6. Justify the title of the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*.

### 5.9 Answers to SAQ

**Answer to Q 1.** The novel features the journey of transformation of the central character, Nils Holgersson, from a naughty selfish boy to a sympathetic hero who undergoes a deep understanding of the world of nature and natural objects. In his journey with the flock of geese, Nils learns about the culture of different places and changes to a better person.

**Answer to Q 2.** Nils is the only child of his parents. On a particular Sunday morning, Nils' parents go to the church leaving Nils behind at home and asking him to memorize chapters from the Bible. An elf appears in front of Nils on the farm. According to Swedish folk beliefs, elves were supposed to bring good luck to Swedish farms. Being a nasty and disobedient boy, Nils plays a dirty trick on the elf that lives on the farm. Nils captures the elf in a net. The elf, helpless, proposes to Nils that if Nils frees him, the elf will give him a huge gold coin. Nils rejects the offer and the elf retaliates by turning Nils into the size of an elf.

**Answer to Q 3.** Marten is the goose in the farm in the house of Nils. It is a domesticated goose who lives with other animals in the farm owned by Nils's father. However, Marten wishes to go to Lapland along with the wild flock of geese that fly over the farm. Nils boards on his back as Marten joins the flock of wild geese.

**Answer to Q 4.** Nils is the only child of his parents. On a particular Sunday morning, Nils' parents go to the church leaving Nils behind at home and asking him to memorize chapters from the Bible. An elf appears in front of Nils on the farm. According to Swedish folk beliefs, elves were supposed to bring good luck to Swedish farms. Being a nasty and disobedient boy, Nils plays a dirty trick on the elf that lives on the farm. Nils captures the elf in a net. The elf, helpless, proposes to Nils that if Nils frees him, the elf will give him a huge gold coin. Nils rejects the offer and the elf retaliates by turning Nils into the size of an elf.

**Answer to Q 5.** Initially, Nils was enjoying his travelling and wasn't much bothered by his transformation from a human to a tiny elf. He hardly misses his past life of being a farm boy.

**Answer to Q 6.** Travelling on the top of Marten with the flock of wild geese, Nils comes across different geography, its people, cultures, and values. He is able to connect with a variety of birds and animals such as a stork, an eagle, a raven and a moose. At times, when the flock of wild geese lands on earth for food and rest, Nils acquires an opportunity to interact and get along with the culture of different geographical locations and learn the values from different people. Initially, Nils was enjoying his travelling and wasn't much bothered by his transformation from a human to a tiny elf. He hardly misses his past life of being a farm boy.

**Answer to Q7.** The setting of the book is twentieth century in Sweden and the book has been written in the context of introducing

the geography of Sweden to the children. The book includes a wide range of folk tales and legends, cultures and geographical landscapes of Sweden.

**Answer to Q 8.** The tone of the novel is essentially didactic as it moves from being amusing to being more pensive and moralistic in nature. Nils also has a moral journey as well as an educational one.

**Answer to Q 9.** Mr. Smirre, the fox is the antagonist to Nils's story. He serves as a predatory being as his predatory instinct forces him to attack the geese at various points of the book. His presence puts both Nils and the geese in danger along the way. Smirre follows the wild geese all the way to Lapland.

**Answer to Q. 10.** Akka is one of the leaders of the flock of wild geese who leads the way to migration. She is old, gray and very sensible. She has gained much experience in the way of the animal world throughout the years. Nils had deep conversation with Akka after gaining the ability to talk with and understand animals ever since he has shrunk into a tiny being. Akka is important to the story as she counsels Nils in understanding the ways of the animal world.

**Answer to Q 11.** Osa, the Goose-Girl is a girl who tends to geese along with her little brother Mats. Nils knew them both back home, but never had much interest in them or cared for them before his adventure. Upon being reformed as a better human being, his attitude towards them drastically changes after returning home from his adventures.

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## UNIT-6

### SELMA LAGERLOF: *THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF NILS HOLGERSSON* (THEMES AND TECHNIQUES)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 6.1 Introduction

#### 6.2 Objectives

#### 6.3 Thematic concerns:

#### 6.4 Narrative Techniques:

#### 6.5 Summing Up

#### 6.6 References and Suggested Readings

#### 6.7 Model Questions

#### 6.8 Answers to SAQ

#### 6.1 Introduction

*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is written by Selma Lagerlof in 1906. It is a children's classic book that features a wide variety of folktales and legends across various geographical locations in Sweden. Lagerlof was commissioned to write a geography textbook comprising of various folklores of her nation. However, Lagerlof had a broader idea in her mind regarding the book. She intertwined fact and fiction to create a unifying story by crafting the character of Nils Holgersson. The novel displays the transformation of the central character, a boy of fourteen, from being extremely notorious and insensitive to a compassionate human being. The novel deals with a variety of themes that are connected to the adventures undertaken by Nils.



## 6.2 Objectives

This unit will focus on the understanding of the text *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* by considering the themes and techniques used by Lagerlof. Through this unit, the readers will be able to:

- read the text in the light of the issues presented in the text.
- understand the thematic concerns of the text.
- understand the imageries and techniques used by Lagerlof in the text.

## 6.3 Thematic concerns:

The book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* deals with a vision of nature and human values. The book was commissioned by the National Teachers' Association to teach the geography of the country to elementary level children. However, Lagerlof had much more of a vision than simply creating a geography book. She spent three years doing extensive research and travelled across Sweden to be able to write the book. She has created a fusion of reality, myth and legend and fiction into the plot of the adventures of Nils Holgersson. The novel explores a wide variety of ideas through the depiction of nature, geography, folklore, animal life, and so on. Following are the two important thematic concerns of the novel:

### **Men and Nature:**

*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* provides a good representation of the relationship between man and nature through the description of the journey undertaken by the young boy, Nils Holgersson. The novel features the journey of transformation of Nils from a naughty selfish boy to a sympathetic hero who undergoes a deep understanding of the world of nature and natural objects. Nils meets

new people and after confronting both nature and culture, he gradually transforms into a considerate boy. There are images of forests, cities and various other places through which Nils flies with the flock of geese. Whenever the geese halts for rest and food, Nils gets the chance to associate with different people from the region. His view of the human world changes and he thinks that the earth is transformed because he looks at it like a bird from the top. He says, “everything appeared so strange and spook like heavens were no longer blue, but encased him like a globe of green glass. The sea was milk white, the boy thought it was as if the earth had been transformed, and he was come to another world.”

#### **Stop to Consider**

The book was commissioned by the National Teachers’ Association to teach the geography of the country to the children of elementary level. However, Lagerlof had much more of a vision than simply creating a geography book. She spent three years of extensive research and travelled across Sweden to be able to write the book. She has created a fusion of reality, myth and legend and fiction into the unifying plot of the adventures of Nils Holgersson.

Through Nils’s journey, there is a mapping of the various animals populating various geographical locations. Nils’s visit and association with them represents the relationship between men and the world of nature. Though the animals speak because Nils can understand them in his magical state, they are not endowed with human qualities to fit the fantasy. Even as they speak, their behavior remains firmly rooted to nature which consolidates the authenticity of animal behaviour. In the beginning of the book, Nils represents all the people who inflict violence upon animals and torture them.

He is cruel to the animals in the farm and is a lazy, stubborn, inconsiderate, good-for-nothing boy who has driven his parents to despair. Nils, also known as Thumbietot or Tummetot after turning into an elf undergoes a journey to a wide variety of places. Being a nasty and disobedient boy, Nils plays a dirty trick on the elf that lives on the farm. Nils captures the elf in a net. The elf, helpless, proposes to Nils that if Nils frees him, the elf will give him a huge gold coin. Nils rejects the offer and the elf retaliates by turning Nils into a boy the size of an elf. He is magically transformed into an imp and is made to live with animals. It was during an attempt to halt the flight of a goose that Nils initiates his journey towards humanity. The author has tried to teach children about the value of kindness through the book along with imparting the geographical lessons. The character of the wild goose, Akka represents the bridge between the world of men and the world of animals. Much of the information about the lives of animals were derived through Nils interaction with Akka. She also saves Nils from the attacks of Smirre fox and from other menacing happenings. The novel also aims to impart human values to the reader, which include compassion, sympathy, empathy, kindness, courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice and optimism. Through the animal imageries, Lagerlof encompasses human values.

#### **Stop to Consider**

Nils was also known as Thumbietot or Tummetot, and after turning into an elf undergoes a journey to a wide variety of places. Being a nasty and disobedient boy, Nils plays a dirty trick on the elf that lives on the farm.

#### **Folktales and Legends:**

The book tells the story of a young adventurer, Nils Holgersson, a boy of fourteen. Through his adventures, Lagerlof features a wide

variety of folklores and legends of the different provinces of Sweden. The school authorities who commissioned the book wanted a collection of folktales and legends from different provinces of Sweden to highlight Swedish geography and culture. However, Lagerlof had a different idea altogether. She had the aspiration to build a story around Swedish folklore and legends of the various provinces. During the course of his journey, the tiny hero maps the geography of Sweden and some of the landmarks and buildings of the nation. There are images of Nils coming across a raven, an eagle, a mythological creature Tomette, a cat, and a moose. The image of the Tomette or the elf is a representation of Swedish culture, as according to Swedish folk beliefs, elves were supposed to bring good luck to Swedish farms. “To be sure, the boy had heard stories about elves, but he had never dreamed that they were such tiny creatures. He was no taller than a hand's breadth— this one, who sat on the edge of the chest. He had an old, wrinkled and beardless face, and was dressed in a black frock coat, knee-breeches and a broad-brimmed black hat. He was very trim and smart, with his white laces about the throat and wrist-bands, his buckled shoes, and the bows on his garters. He had taken from the chest an embroidered piece, and sat and looked at the old-fashioned handiwork with such an air of veneration, that he did not observe the boy had awakened.” (Lagerlof 10) The book also includes various subplots concerning people and animals whose lives are touched in one way or another by Nils and the wild geese. For example, one story centers on a provincial man who feels lonely and alienated in the capital Stockholm, is befriended by a nice old gentleman who tells him (and the reader) about the city's history - and only later finds that it was none other than the King of Sweden, walking incognito in the park.

**SAQ**

Q.1. How much time of research did Lagerlof do to write the novel?

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Q.2. How is the relationship between men and nature is reflected in the novel?

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Q.3. What is the role of folktales and legends in the novel?

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**6.4 Narrative Techniques**

The novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is an adventure story that finds its place both in Children’s literature and twentieth century Realist fiction. The book has been narrated by a third person narrator, who is anonymous to the readers. The tone of the novel is essentially didactic as it moves from being amusing to being more pensive and moralistic in nature. Selma Lagerlof has written this book for school children to teach the geography and culture of Sweden. She has intertwined fiction with fact and history in order to impart geographical lessons in a fictional way. The setting of the book is twentieth century Sweden and the book has

been written in the context of introducing the geography of Sweden to children. The book evokes a wide range of folk tales and legends, cultures, and geographical landscapes of Sweden. The novel recounts the story of a young boy named Nils Holgersson who was naughty and cruel to the animals. He used to tease and torture the animals kept on the farm of his house. He confines the birds in the cages, grabs his family cat by its tail and abuses other animals living on the farm like the goose, Marten. He finds amusement by inflicting pain on these animals. One day, as his parents were out to Church, he was all alone in the farm. He notices a tiny elf, Tomette, in his garden. He captures it with a net and tortures him. The tiny creature pleads to Nils to set him free and in return, promises that he will grant him some gold coins. However, Nils refuses and the Tomette curses him. He transforms Nils into a tiny being by shrinking him in size.

The narrative of the novel is directed toward teaching lessons in Swedish geography and at the same time aims to craft an appealing read for the students. Nils lacks compassion, sympathy, kindness and is insensitive towards animals despite the fact that these traits are associated to being a human. Ironically, it is after living a life of an animal that he gets acquainted with these human traits. Nils learns the most important lessons of his life by spending the life of an animal among other animals. During his life as a human, he was devoid of everything which he gained after embarking on a journey with a flock of geese. He got to know about various aspects of Sweden's culture and its values. The novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is an adventure story that finds its place in Children's literature and twentieth century Realist fiction alike. The novel has been translated into some 60 languages and was included among Le Monde's 100 Books of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is also believed that the novel had earned Selma Lagerlöf the Nobel

Prize in Literature 1909. The novel was later adopted as an animated series by the Japanese cartoon under the same name.

**SAQ**

Q. 4. What is the narrative technique used in the novel?

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**6.5 Summing Up**

In this unit, a detailed understanding of thematic concerns and narrative techniques of the book *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is attempted. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson* is a book which helps the readers to stimulate their imagination and at the same time can give insights into Swedish geography and culture.

**6.6 References and Suggested Readings**

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<https://childrensliteratureblogsite.wordpress.com/2018/06/08/the-wonderful-adventures-of-nils/>

[https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Nils\\_Holgersson%27s\\_Journey\\_Across\\_Sweden](https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Nils_Holgersson%27s_Journey_Across_Sweden)

### **6.7 Model Questions**

Q.1. How is the theme of men and nature reflected in the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

Q.2. How is the theme of folktale and legends reflected in the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

Q.3. Write a note on the narrative technique of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*.

Q.4. What are the thematic concerns of Lagerlof's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

Q.5. How is geography explored by Lagerlof in the novel *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*?

### **6.8 Answers to SAQ**

**Answer to Q 1.** Lagerlof has spent three years of extensive research and travelled across Sweden to be able to write the book. She has created a fusion of reality, myth and legend and fiction into the plot of the adventures of Nils Holgersson.

**Answer to Q 2.** *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* provides a good representation of the relationship between man and nature through the description of the journey undertaken by the young boy, Nils Holgersson. The novel features the journey of transformation of Nils from a naughty selfish boy to a sympathetic hero who achieves a deep understanding of the world of nature and natural objects. Nils



meets new people and appreciating both nature and culture gradually transforms into a considerate boy. Through Nils's journey, there is an identification of the various animals populating the different geographical locations of Sweden. Nils's visit and association with them represents the relationship between men and the world of nature.

**Answer to Q 4.** The book tells the story of a young adventurer, Nils Holgersson, a boy of fourteen. Through Nils' adventure, Lagerlof features a wide variety of folklores and legends of the different provinces of Sweden. The school authorities who commissioned the book wanted a collection of folktales and legends from different provinces of Sweden to reflect Swedish geography and culture.

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## **BLOCK-III**

**Unit 1: Jorge Luis Borges: (Introduction)**

**Unit 2: Jorge Luis Borges: “*The Circular Ruins*”, “*The Aleph*”**

**Unit 3: Salman Rushdie: *Shame* (Introduction)**

**Unit 4: Salman Rushdie: *Shame* (Reading the Novel)**

**Unit 5: Salman Rushdie: *Shame* (Themes and Techniques)**

## **UNIT-1**

### **JORGE LUIS BORGES: INTRODUCTION**

#### **Unit Structure:**

#### **1.1 Objectives**

#### **1.2 Introduction**

#### **1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch**

#### **1.4 Borges's Literary Works**

#### **1.5 Borges as a Short Story Writer**

#### **1.6 Borges and Philosophy**

#### **1.7 Summing Up**

#### **1.8 Reference and Suggested Reading**

#### **1.9 Model Questions**

#### **1.1 Objectives:**

In this unit, the learner will be able to-

- Learn about Borges's life.
- Appreciate the literary works of Borges.
- Evaluate Borges as a short story writer.
- Identify the basic traits of Borges's story.

#### **1.2 Introduction**

Jorge Luis Borges is a very unusual writer, and a very difficult one at that. You must have been familiarised yourself with a variety of short story writers in the world—O Henry, Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, R.L. Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Premchand, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and so many others—but this Argentinian writer will, I am sure, make for a hugely different reading experience. Borges has not written plenty of stories compared to his

long life, but the stories that carry his name also bear the stamp of typically Borgesian quality.

### **1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch:**

Jorge Luis Borges, born on August 24, 1899, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was a pivotal figure in 20th-century literature, renowned for his innovative writings blending metaphysical themes, detective fiction, and philosophical inquiry. Raised in a family steeped in culture and literature, Borges developed an early passion for reading, immersing himself in both English and Spanish literature despite facing challenges with severe myopia.

After completing his secondary education at Colegio Nacional, Borges traveled extensively with his family, spending formative years in Europe, particularly in Switzerland and Spain. In 1914, when World War I erupted, the family moved to Europe, settling initially in Geneva, Switzerland. There, Borges enrolled at the College Calvin, where he studied French and Latin. Despite being afflicted with a congenital eye disorder that led to severe myopia, Borges continued to explore the world through literature. He read Arthur Rimbaud, Mallarme, Emile Zola, Gustave, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant. War was being fought all over Europe, but the war seemed a distant reality to him: reading consumed most of his time (Bloom 12). Reading Heinrich Heine inspired him to learn German which he taught himself. He began to delve into German expressionist poetry, expanding his literary influences beyond the English and Spanish canons to include Whitman, Schopenhauer, and Chinese literature. His love of books and his exposure to literature was a shaping force of his sensibility and thought.

### Stop to Consider

As a child Borges immersed himself in the world of books. His father's library was largely studded with works of English writers. He read Huckleberry Finn and A Thousand Night and A Night, both of which had profoundly influenced him. He read H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, H.W. Longfellow, the Brothers Grimm, R.L. Stevenson, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, P.B. Shelley, John Keats, A.C. Swinburne. Among the Spanish writers, he read Jose Hernandez, Cervantes, books about *gauchos* and outlaws (Bloom 10)

After the war, the Borges family traveled extensively, living in Spain for a time, first in Palma on the Balearic Islands and later in Seville. In Spain, Borges was exposed to the literary movement known as Ultraism and came in touch with Rafael Cansinos-Assens. The Ultraists upheld pacifism, anarchy and freethinking, and focused on purity of metaphor and rhythm. Borges wrote many poems and essays under the influence of Ultraism, but he destroyed them all before he left Europe.

Returning to Buenos Aires in 1921, did not look for any job, because he had chosen to be a writer, a choice encouraged by his parents too. Borges became involved in avant-garde literary circles, experimenting with new forms of publication, pasting on prominent city walls pages from *Prisma*, a magazine he helped found. His career as a writer and intellectual blossomed during his tenure as assistant librarian at the Miguel Cane Municipal Library, a role he held until 1946. During this period, he collaborated with Silvina Ocampo and Adolfo Bioy Casares on editing the influential "Antología de la literatura fantástica" (Anthology of Fantastic Literature) in the 1940s. In 1942, he achieved critical acclaim with

"El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" (The Garden of Forking Paths), a collection of short stories that showcased his mastery of metaphysical fiction.

Borges's outspoken criticism of fascist regimes and his involvement in political activities led to personal and professional challenges, including a brief demotion to "Inspector of Poultry" at the library under the Peron regime. His lectures were closely monitored, and his family faced repressions such as the arrest of his mother and sister in 1948. It is pertinent to mention here that Borges was devoted to his mother for much of his life. He lived with her till her death at the age of ninety-nine.

In the subsequent decades, Borges continued to produce significant works, including "*Otrasinguisiones*" (Other Inquisitions) in 1952, which further cemented his reputation as a leading intellectual figure. Following the fall of the Peron government, Borges was appointed Director of the National Library, where he played a pivotal role in promoting Argentine literature and culture.

Internationally, Borges gained widespread recognition in the 1960s with translations of his works into English, beginning with "*Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*." He received numerous accolades, including honorary doctorates from Columbia University and Harvard University. In 1980, he was awarded the prestigious Cervantes Prize, followed by the *Legion of Honour* from France in 1983.

Jorge Luis Borges passed away on June 14, 1986.

#### **1.4 Borges's Literary Works**

Borges was a poet, prose writer, short story writer, and above all an artist and relentless experimenter. Since the 1920s, he began writing

prose strongly influenced by Kafka and German expressionism (Borges in the World 2). Since then, he carried out experiments in narrative, starting with retellings of already existing literature and texts from diverse sources. These were collected in his *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935) (*A Universal History of Infamy*). He fashioned a new kind of short story as review and obituary (see “The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim” and “Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote,” for example). Varied kinds of writing and their fictive avatars constitute a recurrent thematic element in his fiction. “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is a tale about imaginary encyclopedia articles, while “The Garden of Forking Paths” negotiates the genre of detective thriller. *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*The Garden of Forking Paths*) was published in 1941 and was expanded as *Ficciones* in 1944. In 1949, *El Aleph* (*The Aleph and Other Stories*) was published. These anthologies of stories, in translation, attracted the attention of readers across the globe. In *Ficciones*, as in *Other Inquisitions*, Borges blurs the boundary between short story and essay. “Pierre Menard” is a perfect example of this generic crossover. Borges wrote literary/critical essays, apart from fiction, such as “The Postulations of Reality” and “Narrative Art and Magic,” to expound his own notions of reality, causality, and ideas about literature. It is important to note that Borges's idea of literature paved a theoretical ground for the philosophy of postmodernism. *Discusión* (1932, 1957) and *Otras inquisiciones* (1952) are among his most notable collections of essays. Borges's books of poems include *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925), *Elogio de la sombra* (1969), and *El oro de los tigres* (1972) (prose and poems). The poems were incorporated in the collected works, *Obras Completas*, in 1974. *Los conjurados* (*The Conspirators*), published in 1985, was his final collection of prose and poems. Borges produced a huge corpus of texts, more than 2,700, over a time frame spanning most of the twentieth century. Understanding

Borges as a writer must consider him also as a voracious reader. Called by Susan Sontag the greatest of readers (Borges in the World 3), Borges left innumerable imprints of his wide reading in the texture of his work. References and allusions to hundreds and thousands of texts—folktales, classics, travel literature, and so on—as well as intriguing references to historical figures, philosophers, places, and ideas from mathematics, physics, and music, make Borges an area of inexhaustible study and research. Even most of his fictional characters belong to philosophers and theologians whom he read. For instance, Ireneo Funes, the protagonist in the story “Funes, The Memorious”: the first name refers to a Christian theologian, and the last name refers to an Argentine religious and political figure (Balderstone, xiv). One of the most remarkable bookish writers of the twentieth century, Borges refers to Schopenhauer, Cervantes, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Homer, Goethe, Dante, Rosas, De Quincey, Chesterton, Hernández, and Góngora. Along with Stevenson and Kipling, he refers to Morris, Wells, Shaw, Wilde, Rossetti, and so on. Shakespeare is one he mentioned most, with references to *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter’s Tale*, etc. There are also numerous implicit references that encourage readers to undertake varied explorations of meanings.

Given below is a list of some of the major works by Borges in chronological order.

- *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Fervor of Buenos Aires; 1923) - Poems
- *Luna de enfrente* (Moon Across the Way; 1925) - Poems
- *Inquisiciones* (Inquisitions; 1925) - Essays
- *El idioma de los argentinos* (The Language of the Argentines; 1928) - Essays
- *Cuaderno San Martín* (San Martín Notebook; 1929) - Poems



- *Evaristo Carriego* (1930) - Biography
- *Discusión* (Discussion; 1932) - Essays
- *Historia de la eternidad* (History of Eternity; 1936) - Essays
- *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (The Garden of Forking Paths; 1941) - Short Stories
- *Poemas* (1922-1943) [Poems (1922-1943); 1943] - Poems
- *Ficciones* (1935-1944) (Fictions; 1944) - Short Stories
- *El Aleph* (The Aleph; 1949) - Short Stories
- *La muerte y la brújula* (Death and the Compass; 1951) - Short Stories
- *Otras inquisiciones* (1937-1952) (Other Inquisitions; 1952) - Essays
- *El hacedor* (The Maker; 1960) - Poems
- *Antología personal* (Personal Anthology; 1961) - Essays, Poems, Prose
- *Obrapoética* (1923-1964) (Poetic Work; 1964) - Poetry
- *Para las seis cuerdas* (For the Six Strings; 1965) - Lyrics
- *Nueva antología personal* (New Personal Anthology; 1968) - Essays, Poems, Prose
- *Elogio de la sombra* (In Praise of Shadow; 1969) - Poems and Prose
- *El otro, el mismo* (The Other One, The Same One; 1969) - Poems
- *El informe de Brodie* (Brodie's Report; 1970) - Short Stories
- *El Congreso* (The Congress; 1971) - Story
- *El oro de los tigres* (The Gold of the Tigers; 1972) - Poems and Prose
- *Prólogos con un prólogo de prólogos* (Prologues with a Prologue of Prologues; 1975) - A Collection of Prologues
- *El libro de arena* (The Book of Sand; 1975) - Short Stories
- *La rosa profunda* (The Unending Rose; 1975) - Poems

- *Libro de sueños* (Book of Dreams; 1976) - A Collection of Dreams
- *La moneda de hierro* (The Coin of Iron; 1976) - Poems and Prose
- *Adrogué* (1977) - Poems
- *Obrapoética* (1923-1976) (Poetic Works; 1978) - Poetry
- *La cifra* (The Cipher; 1981) - Poems and Prose
- *Nueveensayosdantescos* (Nine Essays on Dante; 1982)- Essays
- *Veinticinco de agosto, 1983 y otros cuentos* (August 25, 1983, and Other Stories; 1983) - Short Stories
- *Atlas* (Atlas; 1984) - Collection of Short Prose Pieces (Source: Yates Donald A. *Jorges Luis Borges: life, Work, and Criticism.*)

### **1.5 Borges as a Short Story Writer:**

Borges's fictional world is both intriguing and complex. His fiction does not embrace realism, if by "realism" we mean the authentic portrayal of external and internal reality. While there is an aura of realism in Borges's work, thanks to his calculated use of authenticating devices, accuracy, adequacy, and a stable sense of truth never constitute the framework of his fiction, unlike the classic realist novels of the Victorian period. Social and psychological realism are not thematic focuses for Borges; instead, he delves into themes of time and space, memory and dream, identity, truth, and reality.

In *The Aleph*, for example, Borges explores the concept of a special, universal totality, famously summarizing it as, "What eternity is to time, the Aleph is to space." *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* grapples with the problem of identity. Although identity might not be a novel

theme in literature, Borges's negotiation with it is unique, intriguing, and powerful enough to destabilize conventional notions. *The Circular Ruins* presents a man dreaming another man, interweaving the subject and object of the dream into an endless labyrinth of intersubjective dreaming, compelling readers to reconsider the initial idea of the narrative. In *Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote*, a twentieth-century novelist rewrites Cervantes's *Don Quixote* identically, rendering the themes of identity and difference with ironic and dramatic nuance. *The Immortals* addresses immortality, evoking the appalling horror that immortality might entail. *The Library of Babel* describes an immense labyrinthine architecture housing all possible books, a spatial metaphor for the universe itself.

Reading Borges's stories does not give readers the certainty of a conclusive ending, nor does it allow them the freedom to choose among possible interpretations. While readers can enter the world of the story, they rarely emerge unscathed by its lingering effects. The imaginative content and thought in Borges's tales resist any ready conclusions. Consider *The Garden of Forking Paths*, for instance. This story begins with a war report, then shifts into a first-person narrative from Dr. Yu Tsan, drawing readers into a suspenseful, multi-layered reality of wartime. The narrative digresses into a description of a labyrinth and a novel by Ts'ui Pên, linking back to the main plot of pursuing and confronting an enemy in intellectually provocative ways. What begins as a simple tale of investigation transforms into a bewildering narrative where identities are chameleon-like, and possibilities are bizarre.

Borges's first short stories in *A Universal History of Iniquity* were re-tellings of existing tales, but the stories in *The Garden of Forking Paths* marked a significant development with a distinct Borgesian aura. Borges's best stories, products of the early 1940s, exhibit this unique style. *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* revolves around texts and

objects (articles, encyclopedias, mysterious artifacts), uncovering a metaphysical conspiracy to overthrow accepted realities, with sinister political implications. *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* exemplifies how Borges develops the short story form by blending various genres. Presented as a book review of a fictional novel with a lost first edition, it even includes a summary of that novel. *Pierre Menard* similarly critiques the notion of authorship and originality in literature, portraying an ironic interplay between fact and fiction. Dr. Pierre Menard, a historical figure, is fictionalized, conveying insights into writing, representation, and originality.

The relation between fiction and reality is a constant preoccupation for Borges. In stories like *The Circular Ruins* and *Tlön*, historical events and conspiracies mirror theatrical performances where fiction and reality blur. For Borges, reality is not an ordered universe but a bizarre matrix of coincidences and contingencies. While existentialist literature often finds freedom and ethical depth in this chaos, Borges's vision of a non-ordered, contingent universe hints at terrifying political consequences. *The Lottery of Babylon*, set during the tense period of World War II, explores totalitarianism through a lottery-driven society where increasing punitive measures paradoxically boost the lottery's popularity. In *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Borges toys with alternative notions of time, bringing together historical and narrative timelines. As Tsun confronts Albert, he realizes that in some dimensions, they are eternal enemies. This story requires readers to consider its many layers—historical, philosophical, and textual—to fully appreciate Borges's achievement in short fiction.

Before turning to short stories, Borges experimented with infusing fictional elements into his essays in the 1930s. Many of his remarkable stories mimic reports, reviews, or expository prose. He experimented with re-telling legends, parables, and accounts of

dreams and fantasies. His early work, *Streetcorner Man*, was written in a journalistic style. Borges was deeply influenced by his predecessors in short fiction, with Kafka as a favorite. Detective fiction also had an impact on him, with Edgar Allan Poe and Chatterton among his inspirations. Non-Western texts like *A Thousand and One Nights* and *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, as well as Asian and Arabic cultural motifs, enriched his fiction. Labyrinths, swords, coins, mirrors, moons, chessboards, masks, maps, towers, and books are some of the symbols he draws from these sources.

### **Stop to Consider**

#### **Borges and Realism**

Borges expresses a distaste for traditional realism. However, if we recall Bertolt Brecht's famous dictum—"Realism does not mean showing real things, but showing how things really are"—Borges could be considered profoundly realistic. Rather than presenting "real things" or creating an illusion of reality by downplaying technique, Borges embraces artifices with self-conscious intent. Notably, the title of one of his anthologies is *Fictions*.

Borges worked closely with Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo, with whom he discussed short stories extensively, championing the form against the grain of realism. The stories in *A Universal History of Infamy*, which explore the city's low life and villainy, are rooted in fact but show the imagination of a mature artist. While these stories are often seen as precursors to his later, more powerful tales, they have also garnered sporadic critical attention. Paul de Man, for instance, appreciates the stylized aspects of these stories in his essay *A Modern Master*, noting Borges's

distinctive style. *Streetcorner Man* remains a notable exception among his early work.

The publication history of Borges's works reflects a genre shift. *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* was initially published as an essay in *A History of Eternity* (1936) but was later reclassified as fiction in *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941) and *Ficciones* (1944). The titles *Ficciones* and *El Aleph* capture two key traits of Borges's short stories: *Ficciones* underscores the fictive nature of his tales, while *El Aleph* suggests the elusive nature of totality and the inherent limitations of human knowledge.

**Stop to Consider**

**Labyrinth:**

Borges's fiction often reveals a fascination with puzzling constructions known as labyrinths. Labyrinths appear in various forms—both as physical and metaphysical realities—across many of his stories. Borges explores myths and folklore depicting diverse labyrinthine structures. These labyrinths are not confined to buildings; they extend to cities, terrains, waterways, and also represent concepts like time, destiny, eternity, space, religion, and philosophy.

**Check Your Progress**

- How does Borges differ from classic realist novelists of the Victorian period in his approach to themes like truth and reality? (100 words)

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- .....
- In Borges's story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, what role does the concept of time play in relation to the story's plot and characters? (100 words)
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### 1.6 Borges and Philosophy

Borges is one of the most philosophical of writers. He was not a philosopher nor did he profess a distinctive philosophical doctrine, but he was an avid reader of philosophy. He read both guides to philosophy, such as Lewis's *Biographical History of Philosophy*, Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, as well as texts by philosophers themselves, such as Heraclitus, Zeno, Plato, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hume, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche. He was almost obsessed with such foundational philosophical ideas as time, identity, space, human understanding, language, reality, death, causality, chance, and determinism.

He does not explicitly subscribe himself to any solid philosophical system, as I have mentioned, nor did he perceive philosophy as a necessary means of arriving at truth about reality. His philosophical speculations are often playful, fluid, and they reveal his aesthetic attitude to philosophy itself. This is something extraordinary. You are not exploring some unquestionable philosophical truth but undertake, through philosophy, a thought-experiment to perceive a pattern. The perception of such a pattern itself is the end or goal of

philosophical action. Nevertheless, certain tendencies of Borgesian thought can be discovered in his fiction. For one thing, he is averse to materialism or its many versions, including dialectical materialism, and he was keenly aware of the disastrous political consequences of materialism in contemporary history. There might be arguments and counter-arguments around his persistent dismissal of materialism and endorsement of idealism, but this is a key Borgesian position regarding philosophy. In the story titled *Averroes*, which is about the medieval Arab philosopher Averroes, he realizes that the philosopher is just a product of his mind. *The Circular Ruins* features a protagonist who realizes that he is just a figment of someone else's imagination. The notion of an objective reality is questioned time and again in Borges's tales, as in *The Wait* and *The South*.

This basic philosophical predilection for idealism underpins his rejection of realism as a style of writing and paves the way for fantasy. Further, the centrality of the self and marginalization of the other that is basic to Cartesian epistemology is refuted in Borges's writing. The notion of the "self," grounded on the continuity of identity, can be refuted if reality exists only insofar as it is perceived. Perception can shift from moment to moment, and hence the self is also not a stable identity. In this philosophical framework, psychology as an objective study of the human mind holds no water. This accounts for Borges's distaste for psychological realism.

It would be wrong to assume that Borgesian idealism is a mere exercise of thought-experiment, a luxury of airy speculation. To Borges, the ideal is the real, similar to the feminist principle of "the personal is political." Look at *The Aleph*. An ideal notion of the totality of a spatial universe is examined here. What eternity is in the context of time, the Aleph is in the context of space. But this



immense panorama of spatial totality is located in the space of a dark cellar, impinging on the mind of the characters.

Borges's philosophical thinking is subversive: the categories of reality and fiction are subverted. Dream is a substantial, even inescapable reality, while the universe, which is a giant machine in Newtonian physics, is a grand illusion. In interviews with Osvaldo Ferrari, Borges speaks about Hindu philosophy, whose ideas of the universe as a cosmic illusion and of cycles influenced him (*Conversations* 36-37).

Now, if the self is a series of perceptions, negation of a stable, unchanging self proves itself. This has manifold implications for the world of his narrative. The dreamer in *The Circular Ruins*, assured of his reality in contrast to the phantasmagoric existence of the youth he is dreaming into existence, is assailed at last by the force of self-doubt. In *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Dr. Tsun is exposed to the possibility of a friend becoming an enemy. The stories share common characters, while in some, the names of characters are missing. Even some characters figure "only insofar as they are doubles or rivals of somebody else" (*The Cambridge Companion* 9).

Borges's philosophical speculations about time are interestingly complex: they confound a reader accustomed to the notion of linear time. Look at the story *The Secret Miracle*. Here, a Jewish playwright is arrested by the Gestapo during World War II. The night before his execution, he prays to God for one more year to complete his unfinished play. The next day, at the moment of execution, time stops miraculously for an instant. But within this instant, he mentally completes his play within the strangely subjective time of one year, and finally, objective time resumes when he is executed. This parallel existence of subjective and objective time is also reflected in Borges's idea of literature. There can be various kinds of discordance between story time and text-

time in a narrative, which involves the reader. The reader can learn about events happening across years in a couple of minutes of actual reading. In *Forking Paths*, we are faced with a labyrinth of time, where an infinite series of divergent, convergent, and parallel times create an intricate maze of bizarre possibilities.

Borges's philosophical narratives essentially refute conventional notions of identity, truth, and reality rather than uphold any irrefutable vision of reality. It is this negative verve that informs *Death and the Compass*, where a detective's erroneous premise leads to an ironic point of discovery, as the investigator is detected by the criminal, who offers him an alternative interpretation of the whole course of events. In *Funes, His Memory*, the protagonist accumulates facts and impressions but, because he cannot categorize them, renders himself incapable of thought. Borges does not offer solutions to such philosophical paradoxes. What underlies these speculations, then, is, as I have already mentioned, a perception of beauty in the contours of thought itself.

#### Self-Assessment Questions

- How does Borges's philosophical stance on idealism influence his rejection of realism as a literary style? (in 80 words)

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- In what way does Borges's story *The Secret Miracle* illustrate his exploration of subjective and objective time?

(in 60 words)

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### 1.7 Summing Up

This, then, is the world of Borges. What we have discussed can be better understood in light of a close reading of his fictional work. We have delved into the life of Borges and explored his literary contributions. As I have hinted, Borges is a very unusual writer—interestingly complex and, at times, baffling to the reader. In a sense, Borges creates a wonderland in which the reader wanders, finding her inherited notions of reality, truth, and identity subverted. To delve into the world of Borges is not to arrive at moments of positivist truth but rather to find ample space for interrogating the real and the true.

We have discussed the major preoccupations and forms in his short stories. Particularly, his departure from literary realism is an essential point to ponder. You will also benefit from reading the stories mentioned in this unit, in addition to those in your curriculum. Borges’s philosophical lineage spans heterogeneous traditions, from Jewish mysticism, Buddhism, and Indian philosophy to Western thinkers such as Berkeley and Schopenhauer, inviting further inquiry.

Moreover, Borges’s fascination with metaphysical concepts like time, identity, and infinity adds another layer to his work, transforming his stories into philosophical explorations rather than straightforward narratives. His use of the labyrinth as a recurring symbol underscores the complexity and sometimes the futility of human knowledge. Additionally, Borges’s fiction often challenges

readers to question the stability of their own perceptions, subtly leading them into a realm where subjectivity is paramount.

With these points in mind, we are now prepared to engage deeply with *The Circular Ruins* and *The Aleph*, two of Borges's most philosophically rich tales. Through these stories, you will witness Borges's skillful blending of literary form and philosophical inquiry, and perhaps encounter a reflection of the questions that linger at the heart of human existence.

### 1.8 References and Suggested Readings

- Balderston, Daniel. *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges*. Duke University Press Books, 1993.
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### 1.9 Model Questions

1. How does Borges explore metaphysical and philosophical themes in his texts?

2. What role did Borges play in the development of Latin American literature, and how has his work influenced global literary traditions?
3. How did Borges's upbringing in a multilingual environment and his extensive travels influence his literary work?

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## UNIT-2

### JORGE LUIS BORGES: “THE CIRCULAR RUINS”, “THE ALEPH”

#### Unit Structure:

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Introduction

#### 2.3 What Happens in ‘The Circular Ruins’

#### 2.4 Characters in ‘The Circular Ruins’

#### 2.5 Critical Analysis of ‘The Circular Ruins’

#### 2.6 What Happens in ‘The Aleph’

#### 2.7 Critical Analysis of ‘The Aleph’

#### 2.8 Summing Up

#### 2.9 References and Suggested Reading

#### 2.10 Model Questions

#### 2.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *Grasp* the basic storyline of the texts under discussion
- *Critically appreciate* the short stories
- *Write* about the themes depicted in the short stories.

#### 2.2 Introduction

Reading Borges is a unique experience. His style is often plain and seemingly commonplace, delivering details in an offhanded manner but subtly urging readers to revisit these details for deeper meaning. Borges’s own comments about his stories rarely provide exhaustive clues to their interpretation. While writing ‘*The Circular Ruins*’, Borges noted that he felt as if he were continually in a dream state,

except when working on the story itself. He also remarked that Lewis Carroll's line, quoted at the beginning, "may have been the story's seed." Yet rather than seeking the story's origin, one must explore its wider philosophical implications. Drawing on the Jewish folklore of the Golem, Borges incorporates themes of creation and autonomy, aligning them with Kabbalistic symbolism, where language itself carries a mystical essence.

First published in *Sur* in 1940, '*The Circular Ruins*' is filled with motifs of purification rituals, totem animals, ruined temples, and sacred fire—elements suggestive of ancient rituals of renewal and creation.

Similarly, '*The Aleph*', another of Borges's celebrated works, intertwines the mystical with the metaphysical. The Aleph, a mysterious point in space, symbolizes the universe's infinite complexity within a singularity. Borges's narrative explores the limits of human perception and blends metaphysical wonder with philosophical inquiry. The story probes the themes of infinity, representation, and the struggle to convey the ineffable through language. As in '*The Circular Ruins*', Borges invites readers into a labyrinth of ideas, where the everyday intertwines with the cosmic, and where meaning is elusive, layered, and symbolic.

### **2.3 What Happens in '*The Circular Ruins*'**

It is a fantastic narrative about a 'dreamer,' a man referred to as a 'stranger' who arrives in a desolate landscape surrounded by jungles and ruined temples. The unnamed man (the protagonist of this story) travels from a village upstream in the South, rowing a boat and enduring injuries and pain. As he arrives at a circular enclosure, home to the ruins of what was once a temple, he notices another temple further downstream. He takes upon himself the task of

sleeping in order to 'dream a man' through an act of free will. He aims to conceive the man in his dream and deliver him in reality (almost akin to biological reproduction).

First, he dreams of a host of students within the phantasmagoric locale of the ruined temple (while the dreamer's actual locale is also the ruined temple). He lectures them on subjects such as anatomy, cosmology, and magic. The students, though taciturn, seem to be perceptive, as they learn that education will enable one of them to be inserted into reality. Later, the dreamer realizes that the students only passively accept his teachings and may lack individuality, making them unworthy of his project. Therefore, he dismisses the entire class, retaining a taciturn pupil for instruction. The youth, now under the sole guidance of his teacher, improves rapidly. While all this happens in nightly dreams, one day the man loses his dream and begins to be tormented by insomnia. After much physical exhaustion deliberately imposed by the dreamer, he regains access to the dream of the students in brief moments, though their faces contort during these dream moments.

Realizing the enormity of his undertaking, the dreamer resorts to a new mode of sleeping—more unconscious and less reliant on conscious effort. The result is immediate, as he "almost immediately dreams of a beating heart." Gradually, night after night, through recurrent dreams, he perceives the heart with increased clarity. Thus, over time, he dreams of each of the young man's organs, down to his skeleton. Finally, the entire person is conceived through these repeated acts of dreaming. However, the youth remains asleep and inert, akin to the lifeless Adam believed to have been created by the demiurges in Gnostic tradition. This makes the dreamer desperate, and he begs at the feet of the idol of beasts at the circular ruins for a solution. The statue transfigures, in the stranger's dream, into a queer composite figure of many animals, revealing itself as



Fire, and declares that the circular temple has the power to infuse life into phantasms. The mysterious phantasmagoric figure instructs the man to guide the youth in the rites and send him to the other temple downstream.

For two years, the man instructs the youth in the cult of Fire and perfects the figure, but he feels pained by the thought of their imminent separation. During this time, the youth becomes accustomed to reality, undertaking actual tasks like climbing a mountain. The time arrives for the youth to be born into reality, and the man sends him to the other temple as instructed by the temple idol. Yet, the man is determined to keep the youth completely unaware of his unreality. After completing this task, the man is troubled by boredom—a weariness of the sameness of his days. He loses the zeal to dream, as his ‘life’s goal’ has been fulfilled.

Two rowers wake him after some time and inform him that a magical man in the other temple can walk on fire without being burned. The man remembers that only Fire knows that the youth is a phantasm. A fear of the youth's imminent self-consciousness grips him. The thought of the youth awakening to the reality of his phantasmagoric existence is unsettling, as it is a genuine concern akin to that of every parent for their children.

Then the landscape undergoes transformation: clouds hover above a mountain, smoke trails into the night, and the circular ruins catch fire. Finally, the dreamer, walking through the tatters of fire, realizes that he is immune to fire and that he himself is a phantasm alive in someone else's dream.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. What, do you think, is the climactic moment in the story? (50 words)
2. Present the basic storyline of ‘The Circular Ruins’. (100 words)

## **2.4 Characters in ‘The Circular Ruins’**

**The Dreamer:** The story’s protagonist is a ‘dreamer’, referred to as ‘a gray man,’ who arrives at the ruins of a circular temple in a forest. He knows little of what happened to him before, and although perhaps somewhat frightened, he does not assimilate with the local people around the place, but he accepts their offer of food. His sacred vocation is to ‘dream a man’ into existence. He starts dreaming consciously, meticulously, and systematically. Alongside, he imparts some learning to people happily. Thankful to those who offer him food, the dreamer experiences a variety of feelings—bitterness, despair, happiness, sadness—and most crucially, feels the pang of separation from his son created through the dream. To ensure that the young man—product of his imagination, now a reality—never senses his unreality, the dreamer erases his memory. (We can re-connect this fact with the loss of memory the dreamer suffers, as mentioned in the beginning.) After separation from the youth, loneliness grips the dreamer, pushing him to the verge of boredom. Hearing from people about a man unharmed by fire, he is horrified by the realization that the flames have not burned him either, suggesting that he too is merely a creation of someone else’s imagination.

### **The Dreamer’s Son**

A youth who proclaims his embryonic existence in the dreamer’s imagination, starting with a heartbeat. In a year, he evolves into a fully fleshed man, ready to be ‘born’ into the real world. Once he comes into palpable existence, he performs tasks as instructed by his father and seeks to prove he is ready for independent existence. Before being sent to another temple, as I have already mentioned, his memory is erased so that he does not gain an inkling of his phantasmagoric/phantastic reality.

**Fire:**

That Borges incorporates elements from the fable is testified by the fire, which acquires almost anthropomorphic traits in the story and carries out roles as a character, like other human (phantastic) figures. We see the charred statue of a colt or lion on top of the ruined temple. Unable to conceive anything in a dream, the dreamer prays to the statue. Fire assures him that he will bring the youth to life in dreams. Fire also instructs him later to send the youth to a distant ruined temple. Thus, fire plays a crucial role in the patterning of the action. Finally, reports of the youth walking unaffected on the blazing fire reach the dreamer, while he also realizes that he too is not burned by fire.

**Check Your Progress**

1. From whose point of view is the story narrated—the Dreamer's, his Son's or the Fire's? (50 words)

**2.5 Critical Analysis of 'The Circular Ruins'**

Truth, reality, identity, eternity, the infinite—such are persistent themes of Borges's fiction. Many of his stories, veering away from the exploration of psychological and socio-political realism, are exercises in both the amazing and bizarre realm of thought and imagination. But they are not simply philosophical or intellectual puzzles; through them, Borges articulates his perception of reality and truth. Borges is not a philosopher, nor does he belong to any given philosophical system, but his stories often carry or dramatize a certain philosophical perception or the limits of a specific philosophical principle. '*The Circular Ruins*', however, must be primarily seen as a short story before its (philosophical) ideas are teased out. Echoing the title, the form of this story is itself circular,

compelling the reader, after the story's end, to go back to its beginning. The resonance of many elements in the text would catch an attentive reader's eye upon revisiting the narrative. The dreamer's blood-spilling struggle to arrive at the circular ruins is seen as a dreamed man's mission willed by an antecedent (and absent) dreamer. It is only upon a retrospective rereading that we are positioned to explain certain mysteries, such as the prompt healing of the dreamer's wound: the dreamer himself is a phantasm inserted into reality by the antecedent dreamer, and hence, our accustomed sense of everyday reality won't work. But this hermeneutic circularity of *'The Circular Ruins'* is an effect of an apparently linear narrative that starts with a man's arrival at a mysterious, desolate spot, unfolds through episodes of dreaming (or creating) a young man in what may be called a 'willed act,' and ends in the penultimate realization of the dreamer's realization of himself as a creation of somebody else's dream. At the center of the text is the Dreamer, his willed act of dreaming, the development of his unique emotional life through the dialectic with the dreamed 'other,' and the pangs of an almost predetermined separation from this 'other'. In the latter part of the story, comparatively less space is devoted to how the dreamed youth is made to carry out arduous tasks. The story is basically narrated omnisciently, but with a persistent focus on the dreamer, foregrounding his perspective. The dreamed man is marginalized. The persistent focus is on the 'charred temple' within the desolate circular enclosure; the dreamer, variously addressed as the stranger, the dreamer, or the magician, arrives from the distant south; the dreamed man finally leaves for another circular ruin further north. These terrains in the North or South are not narrativized nor described with any details but are simply mentioned or suggested. However, this center-margin dichotomy is resolved, and beyond this emerges an amazing equation of the dreamer and the dreamed: the dreamer realizes his own phantasmagoric, unreal

status, while the reader can infer another feverish act of dreaming continuing in the circular ruins downstream. The dreamed man must have dreamed another man before walking on fire to realize his fictive character. It is not difficult to see that behind the dreamer is another dreamer, forming an endless labyrinth of dreams. The final moment of realization kindles the reader's imagination to envision the infinite regress—an endless series of antecedent dreams and the dreamers' realization of their own unreality.

The philosophical implications are intriguingly problematic. If I am someone's dream, I am trapped and feel humiliated. I have no free will. See the paradox: the man's painstaking journey through difficult terrains to the circular ruins as a suitable place for dreaming confers on him an identity and individuality; his act of dreaming is a manifestation of free will. However, we learn from the living statue of the temple that sending off someone to another circular ruin is willed by the sender. In that case, every manifestation of individuality is a necessary outcome of predestination. And the penultimate sense of one's lack of individuality and reality dismisses the hitherto persisting sense of individuality as a mere myth.

You may ask yourself: Are these just thought-experiments, or do they resonate with the way we live and think in life? To read Borges is not to arrive at moments of truth through glimpses of the real but to interrogate the very concept of the real and question the validity of all presumptions that make the real a stable locus of truth. Look, for instance, at the notion of dream and wakefulness depicted in the story. Complications and confusions arise because our perception of dream and reality is dichotomous. The insubstantiality of the dream state is a commonplace notion. But it also connotes mental states where identities are blurred, perceptions confounded, and the sense of the self becomes elusive. Further, the dream carries a sense of not

being affected by reality, like the dreamer(s) who are not burned by the fire. Does it not also suggest the indifference or lack of mindfulness that characterizes our dull, humdrum everyday life? From this extended sense, any moment of our waking state can be seen as part of a dream.

On the other hand, the story is not simply about dreaming but a conscious, willed act of dreaming, illustrating the idea of free will, as I have mentioned several times before. The final discovery of the creator being created in a dream confounds this notion of free will. Now, ask yourself: Are we, as human beings, free? Are we not a product of antecedent factors, whether history, discourse, language, ideology, culture, or technology?

You may thus 'read' 'The Circular Ruins' as a story about the creative process. Look at the dreamer's persistent preoccupation, torment, and frustration. Unlike a mechanical act of making, the creative act involves uncertainties, profound moments of distraction, and the gradual development of things around a central idea, such as the dreamer's unexpected and sudden dream of a 'beating heart.' Of course, the final aim of the artist is to give autonomy to his or her work, to make it speak for itself. The pangs of separation from the product of one's imagination stem from a lack of control over the work's meaning and interpretation. You may even connect this with Roland Barthes's proclamation of the 'death of the author.' Secondly, after feverish, almost religious meditation on the work developing in the creative space of the mind, when one discovers that the author is himself created by some antecedent force, it might suggest the author's self-realization of the limits of his/her created work. There are instances in literature of writers preventing the publication of their own work. Franz Kafka is a case in point.

### **Stop to Consider**

Borges writes two sonnets immediately after 'The Circular Ruins'. The first is named "Chess", illustrating the idea of free will. In the intense battle played out on the chessboard, it becomes a ritual of war with erstwhile players consumed by time making way for new ones. In the third quatrain this game suggests a socio-political war waged in the east but assumes a global proportion. In the second sonnet Kings and Bishops poised in intense moment of war do not know that their destiny is shaped by players. But the players are also plaything in the hands of more overarching forces of instincts such as caprice where days and nights are compared to black and white squares of a different level of chess board. It is God who moves the players, but there are even forces beyond God.

## **2.6 What Happens in 'The Aleph'**

Extracting the plot from a modern/postmodern fictional text often presents challenges. In Borges, exclusive focus on the tale and blindness to techniques, symbolism, tones, allusions, etc., may lead us astray. Nevertheless, Borges's short fiction has a tale to relate. 'What happens in the story,' then, will enable us to get to the core of the text—its ideas and thematic concerns. So, here is the 'tale':

'On the burning February morning,' a woman named Beatriz Viterbo passes away. The narrator (named 'Borges', as we will learn) is her suitor and is saddened by the indifference of the world around to this event of her death. He starts visiting Beatriz's family on her birthdays every year, ostensibly to commemorate the day. Gradually, he wins the confidence of her cousin Carlos Argentino Daneri, an 'authoritarian,' yet 'unimpressive' fellow, a visible contrast to Beatriz. Daneri craves fame and glorifies his own vision of becoming a towering figure in poetry. His vision of a modern

man is one of an individual with an infinite capacity for experience without actual travel, facilitated by a host of modern technologies. Daneri is working, he intimates to Borges, on a poem titled '*The Earth*' for many years. The poem is an ambitious work seeking to describe the globe in an accurate way. Reading a few fragments from the poem in progress to Borges, Daneri also presents a eulogy of what he has written. Borges finds the poem tiresome, and its self-aggrandizing appreciation vacuous. He finds even Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, a description of England, less boring than Daneri's. Nevertheless, Daneri's poetic project continues, covering territories of the world, including 'Queensland' and Australia, with the passing of years, all in monotonous hexameter.

One day, Daneri calls Borges for a get-together at a salon bar set up by his landlords, Zunino and Zungri. At the bar, he reads a few fragments of the poem, ostentatiously praising his own choice of words. Having dismissed the practice of prefacing a literary work, Daneri contradicts himself by asking Borges to help him by calling one Alvero to write a preface for his to-be-published poem. Borges explicitly agrees to talk to Alvero at the Writers' Club but inwardly decides not to say a word to Alvero in this regard.

Phone calls from Daneri keep coming to Borges, with tiresome requests to help him fulfill his poetic mission. One day, over the telephone, Daneri informs Borges that his landlords are planning to demolish his house on Garay Street. Daneri is enraged at this move and plans to employ his lawyer, Doctor Zunini, if the landlords persist in their plan. He reveals that he needs his house to complete his poem because down in the cellar is the Aleph. The mention of the Aleph turns Daneri more truthful and sincere than he normally is. From his childhood, he found the old-fashioned globe in the cellar and later learned that this sphere is the Aleph where all the world is, not merely an atlas of the world. The Aleph is a space



where all places of the world coexist. He has realized that because of the Aleph, he will be able to write the envisioned poem. Borges turns curious to see the mysterious Aleph for himself. He travels to Daneri's and, in the cellar, discovers pictures of Beatriz 'in gaudy colors'. Becoming emotional, he articulates his feelings for the lady in front of her image there. As instructed by Daneri, Borges enters the chamber, which is a dark room cluttered with empty bottles and canvas sacks, even infested by rodents. As asked, he counts nineteen steps up the stairs to find the so-called Aleph, amid fear, panic, and claustrophobia, sensing madness in the self-proclaimed poet.

Now Borges dwells on the problem of recounting his experience of the Aleph. To find a metaphor for describing the object, he thinks, is to resort to fiction. But the description of the endless series of things discovered in the Aleph would be infinitesimal. Moreover, while he experiences everything in the Aleph simultaneously, his description will only be sequential because of the inevitable condition of language.

The Aleph that he sees is a brilliant spherical ball of barely 2 inches in diameter. In it, he sees multitudes of things, and he (the narrator) gives a list of places and spectacles in their bewildering heterogeneity—images and scenes that are clearly defined, where he includes an obscene letter Beatriz wrote to Daneri. Towards the end of his description, Borges the narrator loses his mental agility, goes to the verge of babbling, and 'felt dizzy and wept'. The effect of the mysterious ocular experience centered around the Aleph overwhelms him. Daneri appears on the stairs and asks whether it is not 'one hell of an observatory.' Borges's reply confirms that it is. But he refuses to share with Daneri what the Aleph is like and steps out of the house. For a few days, Borges remains utterly disturbed by the experience and by the fear that nothing in the world would

ever amaze him. However, after spending a few sleepless nights, he returns to normalcy by forgetting things.

After six months, a book publisher releases a selection from Daneri's poem, and it wins second prize for Literature. We learn that Borges congratulates him despite himself, while the poet relishes his pride and glory. Borges turns envious again.

Finally, Borges the narrator, in a direct communication with the reader, returns to the topic of the Aleph. He explores the various symbolic meanings of the Aleph and dwells on similar concepts found in various traditions—the Kabbalah, the Hebraic, and so on—hinting at the possibility that the Aleph of Garay Street may be false. He refers to a manuscript of Burton's where a crystal reflecting the whole world is mentioned, and where Burton mentions other similar concepts.

In the final monologue, the narrator even doubts whether he really saw the Aleph because he now forgets it. He discovers, in a somewhat sad realization, that he is subject to oblivion and that the memory of his beloved Beatriz gradually fades from his mind.

### **Check Your Progress**

Briefly present the storyline of 'The Aleph'. (100 words)

## **2.7 Critical Analysis of 'The Aleph'**

In his essay "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal," Borges dwells on philosophers across various time periods who explicate the notion of the eternal sphere. Xenophanes, as he mentions, describes the idea of God as spherical. Plato endorses the idea of a sphere in which all points of its surface are equidistant from its center. The notion of God being the sphere with its center everywhere and circumference

nowhere resonates well with the medieval mind. God is in each one of His creatures, but none limits Him. Giordano Bruno says that the center of the universe is everywhere and the circumference nowhere. After the Renaissance, man feels lost in space and time because both are infinite. It exudes the idea of the degeneration of all beings as a consequence of Adam's sin. Absolute space, for Pascal, as Borges says, becomes an abyss, and he abhorred the universe. But he cannot return to God; he feels the inexorable weight of the physical world and articulates Nature as an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Here Borges's proposition is that universal history is the history of 'a handful of metaphors', such as that of the sphere. (Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Edited by Donald A. Yates, James E. Irby, New Directions, 1964.)

The central idea in '*The Aleph*' is that of infinity. Associated with it is a focus on human language and representation. What embodies these ideas is a story of two persons, Borges and Daneri, while Beatriz looms in the background. In this story of the discovery of the Aleph and its eventual destruction, a variety of feelings create tension—love, hate, jealousy, pride, self-aggrandizement, fear, a sense of loss, and so on. The Aleph—the key object of discovery narrated in the story—is a tiny sphere located in the dark cellar of the deceased Beatriz's house. Its present custodian, Beatriz's cousin named Carlos Argentino Daneri, is a poet who undertakes the writing of a poem titled *The Earth* that would describe all spaces of the world in minute detail. The Aleph is the source of his inspiration, as it allows one to glimpse all possible spaces of the universe at all possible points in space. In other words, the Aleph allows Daneri a totalizing vision of space and time. The skeptical narrator (named 'Borges') does not believe in the idea, as he is also

deeply skeptical of Daneri's impossible poetic project. The self-boasting poet reads quite a few parts of the poem to him, and the lack of poetic quality and presence, combined with the grandiose diction, explains the boredom of these tiring sessions of poetic audition. However, the presence of the Aleph would allow us to believe in the impossible poetic project as a logical possibility: if all spaces and times, or rather, infinite space-times, can be viewed from all possible angles so that nothing in this universe remains unseen, the writing of a huge topographical poem about the earth is a possibility. Reference to Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* would enhance this possibility. The narrator's common sense fails to grasp the reality of the Aleph, which is why he asks: "But isn't the cellar very dark?" (11) and it is only natural that he offers to see this miracle himself at Daneri's residence. And we learn that eventually the narrator, too, experiences the Aleph. (Let me, at this moment, ask you—how is this unreal event inserted into the world of the story, which operates in a realistic framework?) The narrator's ineffable experience of the Aleph is a glimpse of all moments and spaces in the universe in a dizzying and momentous instant of time. But immediately afterward, he feels dejected by the fact that he cannot represent this experience in language. While the experience of infinity involves an idea (however impossible) of simultaneous perception, this simultaneity cannot be rendered in language as such because of the consecutive linearity of language. What Borges offers by way of representing the felt experience of the Aleph is a juxtaposition of disparate things:

"I saw the teeming sea; I saw daybreak and nightfall; I saw the multitudes of America; I saw a silvery cobweb in the center of a black pyramid; I saw a splintered labyrinth (it was London); ...I saw in a backyard of Solar Street the same tiles that thirty years before I'd seen in the entrance of a house in Fray Bentos..." (13)

What Borges has seen here is only an infinitesimally small portion of the totality of his vision. Still, these disparate images reveal access to all dimensions of time, from a God-like vision of the universe to a microscopic view of ‘each letter on each page’. The proliferation of images reveals numerous truths, including the secret sexual relationship between Beatriz and her cousin, and even startles the reader with such extra-diegetic references— “I saw your face.” The story now allows the reader to revisit and reassess the narrator’s view of Daneri’s poem about the earth. The narrator’s refutation of Daneri’s poetic project is quite rational in the first place, but after the peculiar experience of the Aleph, the narrator himself faces a similar problem. What he offers is a representation of the Aleph, and what Daneri progressively succeeds in writing is a poem about the topography of the earth, with the poem expanding territorially. In Daneri’s case, the narrator’s criticism rests largely on the former’s extravagant poetic language and overall banality of the text. But what is crucial is also to see that what is the Aleph’s property—to encapsulate an unimaginable and inexorable diversity into a small sphere—is also a property exhibited by Daneri’s poem, or any poem for that matter. Daneri himself boasts of his power as a poet to compress a huge time period into small lines and allusions. The vision of totality is actualized in a mystical and momentous instant in the dark cellar infested by rodents. The totality he enumerates is an inchoate assemblage of disparate things that are not logically linked. Therefore, this articulated vision of the infinite veers toward the surreal. The madness the narrator discovers in Daneri’s project is now a destabilized condition of the narrator himself, consequent to this ineffable experience. The author has not detailed the consequences, but the hints are suggestive: first, all people that day down the street look familiar to the narrator. But this familiarity does not give him a sense of fraternity; rather, he is now deeply apprehensive of the loss of surprise and wonder from his life. In

other words, once you have access to infinity in the way Borges describes it, life will lose its real charm. The advent of oblivion is, therefore, a blessing to him: “Happily, after a few sleepless nights, I was visited once more by oblivion.” (15)

Oblivion is a key word here, which is linked to another theme of this story: memory and the passing of time. The story starts with a painful experience of forgetfulness: Beatriz dies, but the ‘wide and careless universe’ moves on. It signals an endless cycle of forgetfulness in which human lives are caught. Borges’s struggle, therefore, is against this pall of oblivion and in favor of the preservation of the memory of his love interest. He watches the photographs of Beatriz and bemoans the pangs of loss. But this fixation with Beatriz gradually gives way to a familiarity with her cousin Daneri, with whom he gets along amid compulsion and jealousy. The photographs reveal that Beatriz was married and divorced. The discovery of the Aleph reveals, among other heterogeneous things, erotic letters by Beatriz to her cousin, which militate against the idealized view he has of Beatriz. To keep the vow that the universe may change, but not he, Borges attends her home on every birthday after her death. But what surpasses his obsession with her is the extraordinary experience of the Aleph in the cellar. It is, for him, an ineffable, uncanny experience for which he remains mentally unsettled for quite a few days. Throughout the story, we see changing images of Beatriz—her initial defiant yet elegant impression, later tainted with dust in the photograph, finally reduced to an image of her rotten corpse. The pristine impression of the beginning darkens after the discovery of the erotic letter and her illicit relationship with her cousin, which may well be the projection of the narrator’s jealousy. The experience of time itself is narrativized in this story through a few hints. Take the telephone, for instance. Daneri’s intermittent telephone calls exasperate the

narrator, who is jealous of him on the grounds of his access to Beatriz, his prospective poetic fame, and his reluctance to be an instrument for his adversary's poetic fame. "Gradually the phone came to lose its terror." Gradually eroding impressions suggest that things are getting out of our grasp—the passing of time and, with it, the erosion of memory. What comes as something of a climax towards the end of the story is the experience of the ineffable Aleph itself slipping out of mind. The next discovery is more tragic, if not climactic—Beatriz herself is slipping out of his memory.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. How does 'The Aleph' touch upon the theme of creation and creativity?
2. Comment on the text's representation of the idea of 'free will'.

## **2.8 Summing Up**

The unit studies Borges's stories 'The Circular Ruins' and 'The Aleph', focusing on themes of infinity, representation, creation, and the instability of reality. Both stories are built around the central symbol of a sphere—an ancient metaphor linked to philosophical ideas of totality, explored by thinkers like Xenophanes, Plato, and Pascal, as well as Borges himself in his essay "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal."

In 'The Circular Ruins', Borges narrates the journey of a man who, through conscious and systematic dreaming, attempts to create a human being. As the story unfolds, the dreamer's creation comes to life, and yet the dreamer ultimately realizes his own existence as a creation in another's dream. This recursive narrative structure emphasizes the themes of infinite regress and the boundaries of free

will, revealing the paradox of reality: one's perception of autonomy might be an illusion shaped by prior forces. The story's circular form complements its thematic concerns, encouraging readers to revisit the narrative and recognize the layered nature of reality.

'The Aleph', centered around the titular symbol—a tiny sphere encompassing all points in the universe—further explores the limits of perception and representation. The Aleph grants Daneri, a self-aggrandizing poet, a total vision of the universe, enabling him to write a poem describing the world in exhaustive detail. Borges, the narrator, is skeptical until he experiences the Aleph himself, confronting the impossibility of conveying the simultaneous and infinite in language. The story's exploration of the interplay between infinity and oblivion mirrors the struggle of memory and representation.

## 2.9 References and Suggested Readings

- Bell-Villada, Gene H. *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*. University of Texas Press, 2000.
- Williamson, Edwin. *Borges: A Life*. Viking Press, 2004.
- Williamson, Edwin. *The Cambridge Companion to Jorge Luis Borges*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *The Aleph and Other Stories*. Penguin USA, 2004.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths*. Penguin Classics, 2000.

## 2.10 Model Questions

1. In the discussed works by Borges, what are the central themes and innovations?



2. What recurring symbols are present in Borges's work, and what might they symbolize?
3. How does Borges blur the line between dream and reality in "The Circular Ruins", and what implications does this have for our understanding of creation and existence?
4. In what ways does the narrator's experience with the Aleph challenge conventional perceptions of reality and the limitations of human senses?

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## UNIT 3

### SALMAN RUSHDIE: *SHAME* (INTRODUCTION)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 3.1 Objectives

#### 3.2 Introduction

#### 3.3 Biographical Sketch

#### 3.4 Placing Rushdie's *Shame* in the Literary Scenario of the Period

#### 3.5 Situating *Shame* among Rushdie's Other Works

#### 3.6 Summing Up

#### 3.7 References/ Suggested Reading

#### 3.8 Model Questions

#### 3.1 Objectives

Through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand Rushdie as a writer.
- place the novel in the literary context of the time.
- place the novel among Rushdie's other novels.
- understand the novel as a postmodern novel.

#### 3.2 Introduction

In this introduction I would like you to contextualize Salman Rushdie in the traditions of Indian writing in English. So, let us quickly look at the ways the English language was sought to be legitimized in India by the British and how that legitimization ultimately resulted in the proliferation of literature written in English in the coming days. The noted Indian critic, Gauri Viswanathan, in her book *Masks of Conquest*, clearly points out the

fact that under the educational reforms laid out by British officers like Charles Grant and Thomas Babington Macaulay was lying hidden a tendency to secure political power. Seen in the context of postcolonial writings of India whose English education came as a foreigner's tool for cultural domination, Salman Rushdie's readiness to accept English as a sub-continental language invites attention and debate. However, the English language began to create more problems in the contemporary neocolonial situation. Today English still remains as the lingua franca of power and a means to access to all resources in today's world of cultural transactions. Then what remains to be 'Indian' in Rushdie if he chooses to write in an alien language by abandoning the vernacular? It is in this context that I would ask you to read Indian English novels as well as the novels of Salman Rushdie. In this context, another noted Indian critic, Bishnupriya Ghosh, says that English in India is not a language disconnected from Indian realities, but has itself become a vernacular, subject to significant variations as a result of differential class and regional uses. And Rushdie's 'localised or regionalized urban (Bombayite) use of English can be shown as an useful example of that. So, against the common view that Rushdie 'translates most of the Eastern cultural signs for his Western audience', Ghosh insists that local references and the situatedness of language based in contextual, historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge of the country, engage Rushdie with the milieu for whom he speaks.

### **3.3 Biographical Sketch**

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1947 almost two months before India gained Independence from the British. His father's name was Anis Ahmad Rushdie who was a barrister turned businessman, and his mother Negin (nee Butt)

Rushdie was a teacher from Aligarh, in North India. His schooling continued both in Bombay and at Rugby in England and then he studied history at King's College, Cambridge, where he also joined the 'Cambridge Footlights Theatre company'. After his graduation, his family moved to Pakistan in 1964 and Salman worked temporarily for television before returning to England. His first novel, *Grimus*, was published in 1975. *Midnight's Children* was his second novel and it was published in 1981 and won him the Booker Prize for fiction. Rushdie's third novel, *Shame* (1983), which many critics saw as an allegory of the political situation in Pakistan, won the 'Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger' and was again short-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction. The publication of his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in 1988, led to accusations of blasphemy against Islam and demonstrations by Islamist groups in India and Pakistan. The orthodox Iranian leadership issued a *fatwa* against Rushdie on 14 February 1989 and he was forced into hiding under the protection of the British government. It won the 'Whitbread Novel Award' in 1988.

Salman Rushdie however, continued to write and publish books, including a children's book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), that won the 'Writers' Guild Award' (Best Children's Book), and which he adapted for the stage with Tim Supple and David Tushingham. It was first staged at the Royal National Theatre, London. This was followed by a book of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (1991); and *East, West* (1994), a book of short stories; and a novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) relating to the history of the wealthy Zogoiby family. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, is published in 1999, and through this novel, Rushdie re-works the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in the context of modern popular music. His novel *Fury*, set in New York at the beginning of the third millennium, was published in 2001. He

is also the author of a travel narrative, *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), an account of a visit to Nicaragua in 1986.

Salman Rushdie is presently working as Honorary Professor in the Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was also made Distinguished Fellow in Literature at the University of East- Anglia in 1995. He was awarded the ‘Austrian State Prize for European Literature’ in 1993 and the ‘Aristeion Literary Prize’ in 1996, and has received eight honorary doctorates. He was elected to the Board of American PEN in 2002. The subjects in his book, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002* (2002), range from popular culture and football to twentieth-century literature and politics. Salman Rushdie is also co-author (along with Tim Supple and Simon Reade) of the stage adaptation of *Midnight’s Children*, premiered by the ‘Royal Shakespeare Company’ in 2002. *Shalimar the Clown*, was published in 2005. It was short listed for the 2005 ‘Whitbread Novel Award’. Salman Rushdie became a “Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire” (KBE) in 2007. His latest novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, was published in 2008. This novel is based on the history of India during the reign of the great Mughal emperor, Akbar.

If we peep inside Rushdie’s personal life we find that on the eve of partition Rushdie’s parents Anis Ahmad Rushdie and Negin Rushdie decided to leave Anis’s home in Delhi and move to the south-western part of Bombay. They did not feel like being a part of the journey to Pakistan being made by many other Muslims in 1947 because they, like Ahmad Sinai in *Midnight’s Children*, felt ‘more like Indians than Muslims’. Anis Rushdie felt that their stay in Delhi during the partition disturbances would not be free from troubles and Bombay, with its multiplicity of faith and cultures, seemed like guaranteeing safety to Muslims who chose to remain in India after

the separation. Rushdie enjoyed a privileged childhood with an education in the elite Cathedral and John Cannon School—a period transmuted into fiction in the middle sections of *Midnight's Children*. He and his school friends went to see 'Bollywood' movies, read comic books and pulp-fiction and bought records from 'Rhythm House' record-store in Bombay-later a model for the 'Rhyme Center' in his rock-'n'-roll novel *The Ground Beneath her Feet*. However, Rushdie's family had begun to suffer anti-Muslim prejudices. As Rushdie recalls, there were questions about his family's loyalty to India: as Muslims they had not left. There were court cases. The Government took over his father's properties, as being evacuee properties. In *Midnight's Children*, this incident is translated into fiction where the freezing of Ahmad Sinai's 'assets' results in his testicles turning into 'little cubes of ice' (75). Then, Rushdie's family had to move to Pakistan which is again fictionalized in *Midnight's Children*. The later visits made to Pakistan form the basis of his third novel *Shame*. Pakistan, as it appears in both *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*, is a bleak and unforgiving force in contrast to the wonderfully various and endlessly re-created India.

### **3.4 Placing Rushdie's *Shame* in Literary Scenario of the Period**

It is an acceptable generalization that postmodern literature is the product of the immediate period after the devastating World War II. The postmodern literature marks its distinctiveness by using ingenious literary techniques that are hitherto not fashioned in literature. Among various literary genres, the postmodern fiction bears the most remarkable inventiveness in the art of storytelling. Postmodernism is not a movement but a phenomenon that is pervasive in the fictional reality of its literary products. Some of the features of postmodern fiction include the ambiguous and

unreliable character of the narrator, variety in the number of places and characters, the constant acknowledgement of the fictionality of the narrative (often by the narrator herself), twisted plots, distortion of history and reality, multiple endings and even dead ends. One of the major distinctive features of postmodern fiction is the quality of the narrative to distort the monolithic understanding of historical discourse. Postmodern fiction subverts the ideal with the use of metafictional narrative techniques. This disruption of singularity of discourse is highly used by the postmodern authors especially by the lobby of postcolonial fiction writers. The case of Salman Rushdie's fictional world is also same as we will discuss later. As the world of fiction give in to the sweeping force of avant-garde techniques of the modernist writers, the narratives slowly parted ways with whatever was left of the nineteenth-century realism. Narrative techniques of the postmodern writers changed the way how reality was perceived and the fictional reality became a space of bizarre experimentation. The narrators became imposing presence often interrupting the temporal and spatial integrity of the text. The fragmentation of the narrative became a common distinguishing feature that conflicted with the traditional algorithm of plot development. As it has been already hinted, the postmodern fiction is strictly in denial with the idea of grand narratives. The postmodernists understand that the current age is the age of information and hence it is the most distrusting thing in the world. As the information is manipulative, those in power will always create a space for their own benefits with their worldview as the dominant narrative. In this regard, we can look at the example of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in which he exposed the Western imperial narrative of representation of Oriental societies. He deconstructed the totalitarian narrative on Orient imposed by the Western imperialists who is rooted in a different social order. In this regard, Christopher Butler writes that "the imperialist saw himself

as the representative of a rational, ordered, peaceful and law-abiding framework, and defined the Orient as the opposite of it . . . ., and had the confidence that his representation of ‘them’- his narrative of ‘Orientalism’ – would prevail” (15-16).As already mentioned, the use of metafiction in the postmodern narrative technique is plenty. Its uses blur the lines between fiction and reality. Also, it constantly reminds the readers of the made-up nature of the story. In a way, it’s a voice within the fictional narrative that is recurrent and superimposes itself to hint at the fictionality of the narrative.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Metafiction:** It is a literary method where the narrative is self-conscious of its fictionality. This often leads to blurring of lines between fiction and reality. The narrative, often through the narrator, appeals to the readers for the attention in the process of storytelling itself. In a way, it is breaking the fourth wall to address directly the readers. This is achieved through multiple ways, such as author’s direct engagement of addressing the text, the nature of the narrative that understands its own construction or through the characters that recognize themselves of being in a story. Metafiction defuncts the conventional methods of representing fiction.

In such a landscape of literary scenes arrives the critically acclaimed author Salman Rushdie. Rushdie’s *Shame* is a significant text that is rooted in the postcolonial ambit. It offers a vital and creative exploration of history, colonialism and different facets of identities. The novel dictates a satirical take of the author on the postcolonial prospects of Pakistan after its separation from India. Rushdie’s narrative technique is unique and his representations are vividly creative. Postcolonial literature is based on the response to the



legacies imposed by the colonial and imperialist powers. Various authors from the former colonies started to challenge the commanding narratives proliferated by the Western thinkers and writers after independence. This quickly becomes a movement like phenomenon where these writers seek to provide voices to the marginalised, restructure the discourse of the colonial powers and also explore the convergences and divergences of power, identity and distorted history.

One of the key ideas related to postcolonial literature is hybridity. The writers of the postcolonial period are often seen exploring the mixed identity resultant of multicultural influences. This is the result of migration and colonisation experienced by the world under the western powers. Postcolonial literature also deals with the perpetual trauma of colonial rule on nation and its subjects. This trauma can be psychological, social as well as political. Postcolonial literature also deals with the problem of locating identity. The colonisation has violated the individual identities. The aftermath of colonisation left the people undecided between the traditional values and Western cultural influence. There are also instances where one can see the postcolonial writer using language as a tool to resist and redefine the representation of the subjects independent of colonialism. The writers have tried to reimagine the colonial experiences from the perspective of the subjects and infuse it in the dominant literary traditions of the west as a tool of subversion. The postcolonial writing represents such literary tradition of complex writing. Salman Rushdie's *Shame* is also part of this tradition. Using the narrative technique of magical realism, Rushdie reimagines the fictional reality of a formerly colonised place. The place is claimed to be the fictional representation of Pakistan. It represents the intertwined relationships of a family and its history with the epoch of a nation grappled in important tragic events.

**Check Your Progress**

On the basis of your reading of the above context, formulate your idea about the probable themes or ideas of Rushdie's *Shame*. (60 words)

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**3.5 Situating *Shame* Among Rushdie's Other Works**

The works of Salman Rushdie are renowned for their distinctive features like innovative language, humour, unapologetic satire, creative themes and magical realism. His third novel *Shame*, published in 1983, reflect similarities with his other works that preceded and succeeded it. It would not be wrong to mention here that he had already engaged and perfected the technique of storytelling in the magical realist way in *The Midnight's Children* (1981). It tells the story of Salim Sinai whose birth was coincided at the exact time of the birth of independent India. This mysterious moment of his birth gives him the power to communicate telepathically with all the children that were born in the exact same hour. So, for Rushdie, the introduction of history and its intrusion into personal space serves a creative possibility. As it is already suggested above that in the postmodern fiction, especially in the postcolonial literature, history plays a great role. His third novel *Shame*, just like the most of his novels, deals with the problem of identity, non-singularity of history and various ways of storytelling. Rushdie employs the narrative to merge both the fantastic and real. This he continues in *Shame*, just like in *The Midnight's Children*, to address the political turmoil. In the same manner, most of the fictional works from his oeuvre, especially novels, deal with the

distortion of identity, tangible effects of migration and the tug of war between the forces of tradition and changes of modernity. Rushdie's work *The Satanic Verses* (1988) has been the most controversial work as he explored themes of blasphemy and religious fundamentalism. This hurt the sentiments of many people and erupted as a controversy of serious concern as it led to the issuing of fatwa against Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Although Rushdie's works contain creatively terse satire on religious fundamentalism, in *Shame*, he is more bent towards revealing the absurdity of political situation through harsh critique. A narrator who is self-aware and bears a close relation with the author is something that Rushdie continues to explore in his later works as well. As already mentioned, the metafictional narrative that questions the boundaries of history and fiction is a recurring theme that baffles the readers of Rushdie's works. So, in general, Rushdie's *Shame* is a work that can be marked as an important work and it paves the way for his mature works where he is most controversial. The readers would be introduced more closely to the novel in the next two units.

**Check Your Progress**

Q. Write a note on Salman Rushdie's *Shame* as a postmodern novel. (60 words)

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### 3.6 Summing Up

In this unit, you must have seen that my discussion of Rushdie is basically drawn from his position amongst the Indian writers writing in English. My main intention here is to prepare for you the ground to understand and discuss Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, often considered as an excellent example of the post-modern Indian English novel. I feel that understanding the various contexts of Indian English literature is almost a precondition for all of us to read Rushdie. Once you have finished reading this unit, I am sure that you can proceed with the next two units.

### 3.7 References/ Suggested Reading

- Booker, Keith M.. *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*. Twayne Publishers, 1999.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Penguin Books, 1992.

### 3.8 Model Questions

- Discuss key events in Rushdie's early life that influenced his literary career.
- In what ways does Rushdie represent the tensions between tradition and modernity in post-colonial societies through his work?

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**UNIT 4**  
**SALMAN RUSHDIE: *SHAME***  
**(READING THE NOVEL)**

**Unit Structure:**

**4.1 Objectives**

**4.2 Introduction**

**4.3 Summary and Analysis of the Text**

**4.4 Summing Up**

**4.5 References and Suggested Reading**

**4.6 Model Questions**

**4.1 Objectives:**

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Understand the plot and key events of *Shame*,
- Identify significant developments and character progressions throughout the novel.
- Explore the development of central characters, particularly Sufiya Zinobia, Omar Khayyam Shakil, and Iskander Harappa, through psychological and symbolic perspectives.
- Prepare for further study of Rushdie's works, engaging with socio-political commentary, thematic exploration, and postcolonial perspectives presented in the novel.

**4.2 Introduction:**

Salman Rushdie is a contemporary English writer of Indian origin, renowned for his witty expressions and creative engagement with the history and politics of the Indian subcontinent. His works often center on the Partition of India, blending historical facts with

innovative narrative techniques that capture the peculiarities of the nation-states. His unapologetic humor, marked by sharp satire, critiques fanaticism, particularly pseudo-nationalism. Rushdie employs magical realism, particularly in *Shame*, a modern fiction critiquing military dictatorship and oppressive power in Pakistan. Despite the author's assertion that the novel is not a representation of Pakistan, the undeniable parallels suggest otherwise. Rushdie's narrator clarifies:

"The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality." (*Shame* 29)

This overlap of real and fictional realms allows Rushdie to craft a modern fairy tale where facts and fiction blend absurdly. This unit will explore and analyze significant events from the novel, providing readers with insights to aid their understanding.

### **4.3 Summary and Analysis of the Text**

The novel is divided into five parts, the first of which is titled "Escapes from the Mother Country." In the opening chapter, we are introduced to the family of Omar Khayyam Shakil, who resides in a town called "Q." The narrator insists that it is not Quetta. The town resembles a dumbbell, with two orbs: one encompassing the old town and bazaar, and the other containing the Cantt, where the colonizers, the Angrez, lived. Interestingly, Old Mr. Shakil's (Omar Khayyam Shakil's grandfather) house is positioned equidistant from both orbs.

Old Mr. Shakil has three daughters—Chunni, Munnee, and Bunny. From his window, Old Mr. Shakil could observe the Hotel Flashman, where many Angrez officers and ladies gathered for

dancing and revelry. He kept his daughters confined indoors, and the narrator notes that they invented their own language for communication. Their fantasies and desires were bizarre, according to the narrator. The identity of the narrator remains undisclosed, and he frequently expresses uncertainty about the reliability of his account. Many of the facts presented are portrayed as rumors that the narrator has encountered, which he “cannot prove or disprove the foul story ...” (*Shame* 13). In these circumstances, the three sisters form an unbreakable bond, described as a “secret compact to remain triune” (*Shame* 13).

The narrator frequently interjects himself into the story and hints at future events within the fictional present, even admitting that “it seems that the future cannot be restrained, and insists on seeping back into the past” (*Shame* 24). This creates a highly flexible narrative, where glimpses of significant future events are provided, but the full story remains fragmented, only partially revealed to the reader. This approach is typical of postcolonial narratives employing the magical realism style.

### **Stop to Consider**

The narrative of magic realism blends real, everyday occurrences with magical or supernatural events, presenting them in an ordinary manner. The extraordinary is seamlessly integrated into the story, treated as a natural phenomenon within the fictional reality. Maggie Ann Bowers explains:

“The variety of magical occurrences in magic(al) realist writing includes ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents, and strange atmospheres, but does not include the magic found in a magic show. Conjuring ‘magic’ involves tricks that create the illusion of the extraordinary, whereas in magic(al) realism, it is assumed that something extraordinary truly has occurred.” (Bowers, 19)

The narrator states that, according to rumors, Omar Khayyam Shakil (the hero of the story) was conceived on the day of the party hosted by the three sisters, just days after their father's demise—a shameful act. Omar Khayyam Shakil's birth is a symbol of shame. The sisters, however, did not feel dishonored and gave birth to their son under mysterious circumstances. It was mysterious because all three acted as one person; their bodies swelled in unison, sharing the same symptoms simultaneously. The narrator, however, dismisses these rumors, describing them as “twin phantom pregnancies accompanied the real one; while the simultaneity of their behaviour suggests the operation of some form of communal mind” (*Shame* 20).

From birth, Omar Khayyam Shakil was raised in the most unorthodox ways and constantly felt on the edge of things. He was “afflicted, from his earliest days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside down. And by something worse: the fear that he was living on the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment” (*Shame* 21). He developed nightmares of falling into nothingness from the edge and chose not to sleep at night, earning the nickname “Little bat” from his mothers. He believed that paradise was beneath his feet and that earthquakes signified the presence of angels.

The character of Omar Khayyam Shakil is far from a conventional hero. While the narrator refers to him as “our hero,” there is a subtle deconstruction of the archetypal hero, who is typically macho, flawless, and capable of overcoming any odds. In contrast, Omar is “dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?” (*Shame* 25). He is, as suggested by the narrative, a peripheral-hero.



**Hero and Antihero:** Hero, in general, is the protagonist of the story and main character in the plot around which the interest of the readers/audience centers. Antihero or Anti-hero, as the term suggests, is someone who is surprisingly not compatible with the characteristics of a hero. According to Abrams and Harpham, “instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, clownish or dishonest” (14).

In the second chapter, titled “A Necklace of Shoes,” the narrator introduces the history of Pakistan alongside the story. He clarifies that the country in the narrative is not Pakistan, though it runs parallel to the facts of reality. The cities have the same names, and the representation of military vigilance resembles that of Pakistan. In essence, the narrator recounts the story of his friend, the peripheral-hero, Omar Khayyam Shakil, as the latter is unwilling to narrate his own story in quatrains. There is a conversation in the text where the narrator is accused of being a trespasser and an outsider, telling the story from an imposing persona that is neither involved nor a participant in the events. This concept of ‘otherness’ and ‘hybridity’ is a recurring theme in postcolonial fiction. The narrator’s history mirrors the author's own. For example, he states:

"I tell myself this will be a novel of leavetaking, my last words on the East from which, many years ago, I began to come loose. I do not always believe myself when I say this. It is a part of the world to which, whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands." (*Shame* 28)

In this chapter, readers see Omar Khayyam Shakil growing up in Nishapur, the name given by the daughters to Old Mr. Shakil’s house. He spends twelve years under the care of his three mothers,

realizing over time that their presence restricts his freedom. He has access to almost everything except liberty. Exploring the house, he uncovers labyrinthine passages and hidden spaces. The caretaker Hashmat Bibi and other servants laugh at his tales of the house's vastness. One day, he finds his grandfather's study, discovering the book collection of Colonel Arthur Greenfield. In this dark-paneled room, he learns classical Persian, Arabic, French, German, and Latin. He also finds his grandfather's real bookcase, filled with volumes on hypnosis, including Sanskrit mantras, Persian Magi lore, *Kalevala*, and works by Franz Mesmer, along with do-it-yourself hypnosis manuals (*Shame* 33-34).

Omar practices hypnosis on Hashmat Bibi, resulting in tragic consequences. Servants accuse his hypnotic experiments of causing her death, prompting his mothers to forbid further acts of mesmerism. He also discovers a telescope in the house, through which he spies on the world. During one of these voyeuristic ventures, he first sees Sarah Zoroaster. On his twelfth birthday, he demands two things: to be allowed outside and to know his father's identity. His mothers grant only the first wish, allowing him to attend school. This decision disrupts the unity of the three mothers, causing them to separate and struggle with their individual identities, transforming them into hybrid beings. Omar's venture into the outside world exposes him to ridicule, as Maulana Dawood shames him, while Farida Balloch and her brother Bilal wait to confront him. Farida blames her husband's death on the Shakil sisters. When Bilal attempts to garland Omar with shoes, it accidentally lands on Maulana Dawood, embarrassing him. Omar is rescued by the schoolmaster, Mr. Eduardo Rodrigues, who introduces him to Farah.

In the third chapter, "Melting Ice," we witness Omar's development from a child to a young boy. He is bullied at school but remains

indifferent, which eventually makes him invisible to his peers. As he gains more freedom, he becomes a voyeur, uncovering the town's secrets (*Shame* 45). He observes the postman Ibadalla's affairs with both the widow Balloch and Zeenat Kabuli. After learning about the party where he was conceived, Omar begins to scrutinize Angrez sahibs, seeking resemblances. His mothers, curious about the town's gossip, ask him questions, which the narrator terms "voyeurism-by-proxy" (*Shame* 46). The chapter also details Mr. Eduardo Rodrigues's background, including his arrival at Cantonment School and rumors surrounding his relationship with Farah's mother, Mrs. Zoroaster. Eduardo tutors both Omar and Farah privately, persuading Omar to pursue a medical career, which Omar accepts out of respect for Eduardo as a father figure.

When Farah invites Omar to visit her father's workplace, he witnesses the frontier he had often seen through his telescope, further intensifying his fear of edges. During this visit, he confesses his love to Farah, who dismisses him. Omar realizes that Farah loves only herself. Later, Eduardo forcefully marries the pregnant Farah and leaves the town with her. At eighteen, Omar informs his mothers of his intention to attend medical college in Karachi, having won a scholarship. Before his departure, he learns from Chand Nawab, the ice vendor, that Farah has returned to town to care for her deranged father. Two years later, Omar receives a letter from his mothers announcing the birth of his brother, Babar.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. How does the relationship between Omar Khayyam Shakil and his three mothers influence his upbringing and sense of identity? Discuss specific examples from his childhood in Nishapur.
2. In what ways does the narrator of *Shame* reflect themes of 'otherness' and 'hybridity' in his storytelling? How does this affect the portrayal of the fictional country in relation to Pakistan?

“Behind the Screen” is the fourth chapter of the novel, included in the second part titled “The Duellists.” The narrator provides a brief overview of Sufiya Zinobia’s family, particularly how her parents, Raza Hyder and Bilquis Kemal, came together. Bilquis’s father, Mahmud Kemal, owned a cinema hall named Empire Talkies. From a young age, Bilquis was treated as a princess by her father, a role she embodied fully, earning the nickname Khansi-ki-Rani from her admirers and street-urchins. These events occurred during the pre-Partition disturbances. As described by the narrator:

“This was the time immediately before the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without. (Al-Lah’s new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist.)” (*Shame* 61)

During the violent conflict between two religious groups—one that worshipped one god and the other described by the narrator as worshippers of stone gods—Mahmud’s cinema hall was destroyed in a blast, with Mahmud perishing along with his Empire. Bilquis witnessed the explosion, losing her eyebrows and clothes in the fire. She was rescued by Raza Hyder in the rectangular pavilion of the Red Fort, wearing only a dupatta. Raza wrapped his coat around her, marking the beginning of their bond. He regularly visited her in the fort, bringing beauty items, and they eventually married. After the army’s partition, Raza relocated west with his wife. The narrator notes Bilquis’s dislike of the hot Loo wind and her obsession with the notion of fixity.

In the subsequent chapter, the extended family of Raza Hyder in Karachi is introduced. Bilquis resides in the house of Bariamma, Raza’s maternal grandmother. Bilquis befriends Rani Humayun, who is soon married to Iskander Harappa, described as a “fair-

skinned, foreign-educated, sensually full-lipped young millionaire” (*Shame* 73). The house is large, and forty female members await their husbands each night as Bariamma sleeps. While Raza is often away fighting in Kashmir, Bilquis is told that she must share her story to truly belong to the family. After repeated retellings, she is accepted as a member. Raza explains to his wife that “the recounting of histories...is for us a rite of blood” (*Shame* 77). Rani marries Iskander, and Omar Khayyam Shakil, the peripheral hero, arrives on a horse that struggles under his weight. The chapter details the stillbirth of Raza Hyder’s first child, for which Bilquis is blamed, as shame is viewed collectively: “the shame of any one of us sits on us all and bends our back” (*Shame* 84). Bilquis, labeled a “mohajir! Immigrant!” (*Shame* 85), relocates to a simpler residence in the Army Base with Raza. Meanwhile, Rani gives birth to Arjumand Harappa, and Sufiya Zinobia is later born to Raza and Bilquis in the Army Hospital.

Chapter six, “Affairs of Honour,” focuses on Raza’s placement in the Cantonment of Q. district, where he is tasked with protecting the gas resources in Needle Valley. At this time, Sufiya Zinobia is fifteen months old. Parallel to the Hyder family story is the narrative of Rani Humayun and Iskander Harappa. Rani is situated in “Mohenjo, the Harappa country state in Sind” (*Shame* 94), where Iskander’s cousin, Little Mir Harappa of Daro, visits to plunder Iskander’s house over a dispute involving a woman. Meanwhile, Raza is working under Chief Minister Aladdin Gichki and encounters Maulana Dawood in Q. Regular phone calls continue between Rani and Bilquis. Sufiya Zinobia recovers from a brain fever but is left “slowed down for the rest of her years” (*Shame* 100), marking her as a source of shame, especially to Bilquis, who confides to Rani:

“He wanted a hero of a son; I gave him an idiot female instead...that birdbrain, that mouse! I must accept it: she is my shame” (*Shame* 101).

Bilquis has an affair with Sindbad Mengal, which proves fatal for him when Raza discovers it. The chapter also highlights South Asian beliefs related to physical omens. For example, when Bilquis announces her second pregnancy, her left eye starts winking, an omen of impending bad news. The narrator elaborates:

“An itchy palm means money in the offing. Shoes crossed on the floor mean a journey; shoes turned upside-down warn of tragedy. Scissors cutting empty air mean a quarrel in the family. And a winking left eye means there will be bad news soon.” (*Shame* 103)

The narrative is complex, shifting fluidly between past and future events, with the narrator freely moving through the timeline. Before the much-anticipated duel between Raza and Iskander (Isky), the narrator provides historical context. At a party in Karachi, Raza is drawn to Marshal Aurangzeb’s wife, Atiyah Aurangzeb, known as Pinkie, but Iskander wins her over. Their affair lasts for years, defined by mutual loyalty. When Raza visits Iskander’s house with his family, a comment by Omar Khayyam Shakil sparks tension. Omar remarks that Isky did Bilquis a favor “by pinching Pinkie Aurangzeb from under Raza’s nose. ‘If Isky hadn’t been there maybe our hero’s Begum would have to console herself with children, because there would be no man to fill her bed’” (*Shame* 108-109). Enraged, Raza challenges Omar to a fight outside Iskander’s house, but Omar never shows up. Bilquis persuades Raza to return inside, easing tensions between the two families.

After Naveed’s birth, Bilquis’s old fears resurface, marked by a fear of the hot afternoon wind. Raza, meanwhile, overthrows Gichki’s regime by imposing Martial Law, reflecting the onset of military

dictatorship often justified as serving the people's interest. Maulana Dawood, acting as God's representative, becomes close to Raza. In the chapter's final paragraph, the narrator satirically imagines conversations between God and Pakistan's rulers, where each ruler justifies his actions as being for the people's good, only for God to ask:

"Look, I do all these things for this country, but what I don't understand is: why don't people seem to love me any more?" (*Shame* 112).

**Check Your Progress:**

How does the relationship between Raza Hyder and Bilquis Kemal develop from their first encounter to their eventual marriage? What role does the political turmoil surrounding the Partition play in shaping their bond? (in 100 words)

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The third part of the novel, "*Shame, Good News and the Virgin*", consists of two chapters. Chapter seven, "*Blushing*", begins with the story of a daughter murdered by her father for dating a white boy in London. The narrator names her Anahita Muhammad, attributing the incident to a profound sense of shame, emphasizing its importance among South Asians. He notes:

"We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride" (*Shame* 115).

The ghosts of this girl, along with another girl and a boy, are said to reside within Sufiya Zinobia. The second girl, an entirely fictional character of Asian origin, is assaulted by an imagined group of boys on a train but later retaliates. The third self in Sufiya Zinobia is a boy who dies by self-immolation. Sufiya's character is thus constructed from these imagined phantoms.

The narrator indicates that ten years have passed in the story, during which Raza Hyder becomes the Minister of Education, Information, and Tourism after meeting with President Field-Marshal Mohammad A. in Karachi. However, he is soon reassigned to command the Military Training Academy, supported by Maulana Dawood throughout this period.

Meanwhile, Sufiya Zinobia's character is further developed as someone who blushes excessively, not only for herself but for the world. The narrator explains:

“The brain-fever that made Sufiya Zinobia preternaturally receptive of all sorts of things that float around in the ether enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings” (*Shame* 122).

In contrast, Iskander, upon learning from Pinkie that Little Mir had gained favor with the President, resolves to abandon his vices, including his friendship with Omar Khayyam. This transformation earns the admiration of his daughter, Arjumand, the "virgin Ironpants," emphasizing their bond.

The chapter also reveals the death of Omar Khayyam's brother, Babar, who had joined the tribal guerillas. He is killed during an operation led by Raza Hyder. Now a successful immunologist with published papers, Omar returns to Nishapur for the forty-day mourning period. It is later disclosed that Babar, nicknamed 'the emperor' by the guerillas, was struck by eighteen bullets.



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The chapter also reveals Omar Khayyam's obsession with Sufiya Zinobia, whom he has treated for seven years. He eventually asks for her hand in marriage, resulting in a quiet wedding ceremony.

The fourth part of the novel focuses on Iskander Harappa's rise to Prime Minister through allegedly rigged elections. In Chapter nine, "*Alexander the Great*", the narrator discusses how the elections and their aftermath in the East Wing lead to the division and formation of a new nation. The narrative is nonlinear, with events mentioned before their culmination, gradually developing the incidents leading to the action. Iskander faces trial for allegedly killing Little Mir Harappa. Haroun, also accused, evades capture by fleeing the country. Iskander is imprisoned for two years before dying under suspicious circumstances. Arjumand and Rani are placed under house arrest in Mohenjo for six years, linked to Iskander's conflicts with American ambassadors, suggesting foreign interference.

Chapter ten, "*The Woman in Veil*", explores Iskander's obsession with power and the gruesome acts committed by the beast within Sufiya Zinobia. Omar, unable to sleep with his wife, is appointed as a senior consultant at Mount Hira Hospital, secured through Raza Hyder, his father-in-law, who aims to restore the army's confidence after the East Wing defeat. Tensions escalate as Iskander rejects Raza's demands for army funds and slaps him during a meeting. Naveed and Talvar Ulhaq, meanwhile, have so many children that "everyone had lost count of how-many-boys-how-many-girls" (*Shame* 207). Omar resides with the Hyderys but is denied intimacy with Sufiya, leading to an affair with the Parsee ayah, Shahbanou, who is later dismissed for immorality. Headless bodies are found near a slum, prompting Talvar's vision of a veiled, blood-covered

woman. Raza discovers a burqa with dried blood patches in Sufiya's room, confirming suspicions. He burns it and discards the ashes.

In the next chapter, "*Monologue of a Hanged Man*", General Raza Hyder, under 'Operation Umpire', seizes control, leading to Iskander's imprisonment. Arjumand is sent to Mohenjo under house arrest. Iskander is accused of killing Little Mir, a charge confirmed by Talvar Ulhaq, who testifies in court to prove his loyalty. Naveed commits suicide, leaving a note about the overwhelming realization of her numerous children. Iskander engages in a verbal altercation with Colonel Suja, resulting in his death by gunshot. Raza confesses to Omar his awareness of Sufiya's crimes, prompting Omar to take responsibility. Sufiya attacks Omar, but she resists the beast within, leading to an internal struggle. The chapter concludes with Sufiya's escape from the attic where Omar had confined her.

The last chapter of part four, "*Stability*", depicts the ongoing violence and brutality of Sufiya Zinobia. The narrator remarks:

"What had escaped, what now roamed free in the unsuspecting air, was not Sufiya Zinobia Shakil at all, but something more like a principle, the embodiment of violence, the pure malevolent strength of the beast" (*Shame* 242).

Four years later, Omar retires and sends his pension to Nishapur. In the north, Raza becomes President but is haunted by Iskander's and Maulana Dawood's voices, leaning towards religious extremism with the motto "Stability, in the name of God" (*Shame* 249). As Raza's power declines, a journal links his daughter to the headless murders, signaling his fall. During the coup, Raza, Bilquis, and Omar manage to escape.

In the final section, Omar leads his companions to his house in Q. The mothers greet them with malevolent intentions, soon revealed. Omar and his companions fall ill, likely from malaria, rendering

them unconscious. The mothers recount the story of a feud between Omar's great-grandfather Hafeez and his brother Rumi, accusing Omar of similar betrayal. Bilquis dies in her sleep, and Raza is killed by the three sisters, Chunni, Munni, and Bunny, who then disappear. Sufiya arrives and finds Omar in bed, resembling their wedding night. The beast within her kills Omar by decapitating him with her infamous gaze. An explosion follows, ending her life and the tragic story.

**Check Your Progress**

1. How does Sufiya Zinobia's character embody the themes of shame and violence in the novel? (100 words)

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2. In what ways do the political developments in the novel, particularly Iskander Harappa's rise and fall, reflect the broader themes of power, betrayal, and external influence? (100 words)

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**4.4 Summing Up:**

This unit has provided a comprehensive summary of *Shame*, highlighting key events and crucial developments in the novel. By examining these events, students are better equipped to navigate the narrative's structure and themes. As emphasized throughout the

unit, Rushdie's narrative is characterized by a complex use of magical realism—a distinctive technique that blends the ordinary with the supernatural, making the extraordinary appear as a natural part of the story. This understanding, supported by the unit's critical insights, will enable students to appreciate Rushdie's unique storytelling style and thematic exploration.

Each chapter of the novel has been discussed in detail, offering a step-by-step guide to the unfolding plot. This systematic approach will not only provide clarity but also instill confidence in students as they engage with the text. The unit also touches upon important thematic aspects, such as shame, power, identity, and hybridity, which are central to the novel's portrayal of personal and political conflicts. These explanations serve as a foundation for students to engage in further analysis.

For more in-depth technical analysis and thematic exploration, the next unit will offer extended discussions on the narrative techniques, symbolic elements, and broader socio-political commentary in *Shame*. To truly grasp the novel's nuances and complex narrative style, it is essential that students actively read and interact with the text. The combination of reading the novel alongside these guided interpretations will deepen students' comprehension and enrich their overall understanding of Rushdie's work.

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#### **4.6 Model Questions**

- What is the significance of the novel's title, *Shame*, in relation to its central themes?
- How does *Shame* reflect the contemporary political landscape of Pakistan?

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**UNIT 5**  
**SALMAN RUSHDIE: *SHAME***  
**(THEMES AND TECHNIQUES)**

**Unit Structure**

**5.1 Objectives**

**5.2 Introduction**

**5.3 Critical Overview**

**5.4 Narrative Technique**

**5.5 Important Themes in the Novel**

**5.6 Summing Up**

**5.7 References and Suggested Reading**

**5.8 Model Questions**

**5.1 Objectives**

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to

- Critically assess the novel
- *Understand* the features of Salman Rushdie's narrative
- *Understand* different themes depicted in the novel in the text
- *Evaluate* and place Rushdie's novel in postcolonial paradigm
- *Understand* the basics of Rushdie's narrative techniques

**5.2 Introduction:**

In the previous unit, we explored Salman Rushdie's *Shame* through a detailed summary and analysis of each chapter. The discussions offered insights into the novel's plot, characters, and key themes such as shame, power, violence, and hybridity. By examining Rushdie's use of magical realism, the unit provided a foundation for understanding the unique narrative techniques that define the novel.

This comprehensive exploration was intended to guide students in approaching the text with confidence and a deeper appreciation of its complexity.

Building on this foundation, the current unit will delve into the themes and techniques of *Shame* in greater detail. Previously, we also situated *Shame* within the broader literary landscape of its time and compared it to Rushdie's other works. This unit will focus specifically on the novel's critical reception, narrative style, and thematic depth. Through this analysis, students will not only enhance their understanding of *Shame* but also gain valuable insights into recurring motifs in Rushdie's writings, including his commentary on postcolonial issues and the blending of reality with fantasy.

By examining these aspects, students will develop a comprehensive understanding of the features of postcolonial literature as demonstrated in Rushdie's work. Additionally, this unit aims to equip students with analytical tools and critical perspectives that will enrich their reading of *Shame*. It will encourage them to apply their own creative insights when exploring Rushdie's other novels. To fully benefit from this unit, students are encouraged to read and reflect on the text itself, engaging with its intricate layers of meaning and its commentary on society.

### **5.3 Critical Overview**

*Salman Rushdie's Shame* is a well-known novel that discusses various issues involving the politics and history of Pakistan. In the novel, Rushdie reveals history through the lens of postmodernism and postcolonial writing techniques. The book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1983, with the Booker Prize website describing it as a work where "Salman Rushdie combines magic realism with a



fierce rivalry to illustrate his central theme – the shame begets violence and violence begets shame” (*Shame*). Rushdie satirizes Pakistan’s political scenario after Partition, an event that holds personal significance for him. Born in Bombay on June 19, 1947, just two months before the independence of India and Pakistan, Rushdie’s own life is intertwined with these historical events. His family, originally from Delhi, decided to remain in India, but in 1964, they migrated to Pakistan. Rushdie was educated in England, but his obsession with South Asian culture and his birthplace became central to his creative writing. For Rushdie, migration becomes both an inseparable part of life and a broader human condition. The narrator of *Shame* reflects this by stating:

"I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity.... that is to say, we have flown." (*Shame* 85).

This narrator can be seen as semiautobiographical. Rushdie suggests that migrants defy the gravitational pull that ties people to one place, floating beyond history, memory, and time. However, this upward flight does not imply a lack of roots but rather a multiplicity of roots, reflecting the complexity of a migrant’s identity. In an interview, Rushdie states:

"I don’t think that migration, the process of being uprooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It’s not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than of absence." (Qtd. in Frank 141-142).

Beyond migration, the novel explores how the political and personal intersect. Rushdie introduces readers to the concept of "sharam," emphasizing that the English word 'shame' inadequately translates this Eastern notion (*Shame* 38-39). The novel starkly portrays the consequences of shame and honor, with characters like Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder—loosely based on Pakistani leaders Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Zia-ul-Haq—highlighting the contrasts between Western liberalism and radical military dictatorship. Through the conflict between two families, Rushdie exposes how political and personal struggles have destabilized not the actual Pakistan, but a fictional version of it, as the narrator repeatedly asserts. These characters, represented as caricatures, allow Rushdie to satirize the unpredictable power dynamics that have shaped Pakistan's history, suggesting that political chaos often bleeds into the personal sphere.

Aijaz Ahmed argues that in *Shame*:

"We also find in *Shame* an actual portrayal of Pakistan —and, in Rushdie's own words, 'more than Pakistan'—as a space occupied so entirely by power that there is no space left for either resistance or its representation; whoever claims to resist is enmeshed already in relations of power and in the logic of all-embracing violences." (1462).

Rushdie's novels are often elusive to thorough critical interpretation due to their intricate nature. There is an element of mystification in his works, leaving readers awestruck. His narrative techniques, including flashforward, flashback, and non-linear storytelling, draw readers' attention. Tribhuwan Kumar questions the essence of the novel, asking:

“The questions that haunt the readers' mind are: whose shame? How it shapes the story? What is its result in the lives of major characters?” (103-104).

As a postmodern novel, *Shame* also challenges the center-periphery dichotomy. Rushdie shifts the peripheral character Omar Khayyam Shakil to the center, making him the story's hero. Omar, a hybrid figure, belongs to a different culture, yet Rushdie uses historical archives to place him in an unfamiliar milieu where he cannot articulate his own story—forcing the narrator to speak for him. The narrator states:

"Maybe my friend should be telling this story, or another one, his own; but he doesn't write poetry any more. So here I am, instead, inventing what never happened to me..." (*Shame* 28).

This highlights Omar's translated identity—his sense of living at the edge, mirroring the struggles of migrants caught between multiple worlds.

Albay further elaborates:

"We could claim that this sense of rootlessness, and the sense of being shattered and being put in an upside-down situation creates the hybrid identity that Khayyam Shakil yearns for in the long run. Since identity is created in the language, another trope that needs to be emphasized is the concern with translation." (29).

The critical overview of the novel covers its multifaceted aspects, encouraging various interpretations. Given its complexity, *Shame* can be analyzed through diverse perspectives, offering students ample opportunity for in-depth exploration. Whether approached through the lenses of postcolonialism, migration, power dynamics, or narrative structure, Rushdie's novel invites readers to question rigid definitions of identity and the ever-blurring lines between the personal and the political.

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### 5.4 Narrative Technique

The novel is a modern-day fairy tale, and Rushdie's use of magical realist language and storytelling style, combined with the narrator's constant reminders that the tale is not about a country called Pakistan, convinces readers that the narrative is a satire of Pakistan's political situation. In the novel, history is submerged into a parallel world of fiction, where historical facts lose their relativity due to the fairy-tale narrative, which creates an alternative version of history. It has already been mentioned how the male members of the two families in the novel depict the rivalry of two historical figures central to Pakistan's political turmoil. The novel avoids directly inserting historical figures into the narrative, compelling readers to interpret them symbolically. The self-reflexive narrator, similar to Rushdie's Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, is unreliable, often reminding readers that he is recounting the story based on family legends, thus further enhancing the fictionality of the narrative.

As a postmodern novel, the narrative structure of *Shame* is fragmented, with a self-reflexive narrator frequently interrupting the

story. It is marked by rigorous digressions from linear plot development, with broken and discursive narration. These fragmented elements suggest the narrator's inability to form a comprehensive understanding of history's unfolding. He admits that his grasp of history is piecemeal, necessitating a similar approach in storytelling. He confesses:

"I have learned Pakistan in slices... I think what I'm confessing is that, however I choose to write about over-there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits." (*Shame* 69).

Although the narrator is a slippery construct, often blurring the border between reality and the writer's territory, in Rushdie's novel, he goes further by actually crossing the border and assuming the role of the writer himself. As a migrant, both Rushdie and his narrator (if distinct) experience fragmentary history and identity. As discussed in earlier sections, the postcolonial subject's identity is shaped by an "excess" of places rather than a singular origin, which manifests in the narrative as well. The narrator permeates the novel with this sense of fragmented experience, reflecting Rushdie's metafictional style. Throughout the narrative, the readers encounter a narrator who doubts the authenticity of his own story, affirming his unreliability. Additionally, he offers both commentary and criticism on events, further blurring the line between fiction and reality.

Rushdie's narrative is also layered with *intertextual references*, borrowing elements from traditional folktales, political speeches, and historical anecdotes. This intertextuality not only enriches the narrative but also serves to enhance the postmodern skepticism about historical 'truths'. For example, the narrator's reference to fairy tales underscores the novel's critique of myth-making in national histories. Moreover, the playful incorporation of allusions to *One*

*Thousand and One Nights* adds a distinct cultural layer to the text, highlighting the hybridity that defines both the narrative and its characters.

The narrator's dual presence—as both a storyteller and a character—adds another layer to the narrative. He becomes a friend to Omar Khayyam Shakil, effectively intertwining himself into the story. This self-insertion is a classic example of Rushdie's playful narrative technique, inviting readers to explore multiple dimensions of critical thinking.

Rushdie uses satire as a tool to expose the vices and follies of Peccavistan (i.e., Pakistan), particularly its political upheaval and social conditions. It is a hallmark of postcolonial novels to employ humor, irony, and wit to denounce societal flaws. For instance, Rushdie critiques the use of martial law in Pakistan as a political strategy to seize power. During Raza Hyder's expedition to Needle Valley in Q, he seizes power from Chief Minister Gichki under Martial Law. Rushdie satirizes the political flamboyance of Pakistan by showcasing how martial law can be imposed whenever the military deems it convenient.

Additionally, Rushdie's satirical approach extends to his critique of gender dynamics within postcolonial societies. Through Sufiya Zinobia's character, Rushdie not only explores the theme of 'shame' but also critiques the patriarchal structures that define women solely through their ability to uphold familial honor. Sufiya's transformation into a beastly figure symbolizes a rebellion against these oppressive norms, making the narrative a commentary on the intersection of gender, power, and postcolonial identity. In addition to political satire, Rushdie targets religious orthodoxy in the novel. Through the character of Maulana Dawood and his close relationship with Raza Hyder, Rushdie demonstrates how military regimes consolidate their power by exploiting religious channels.

The novel's narrative techniques, therefore, go beyond storytelling; they serve as tools for cultural criticism. By employing techniques such as *temporal distortion*, multiple perspectives, and symbolic imagery, Rushdie not only challenges the linearity of history but also questions the authority of any single narrative—whether national, historical, or personal.

### **Stop to Consider**

In fictional works, authors often use the narrative techniques of flashback and flashforward to add depth to the story and manipulate its sequence.

**Flashback** involves traveling back in time to reveal significant details or events. It provides crucial information, explains the motivations behind characters' actions, and sets the context for the current narrative. By doing so, it enriches the reader's understanding of the characters and their backgrounds.

**Flashforward**, on the other hand, moves ahead in time to reveal key details about the future. This technique can foreshadow significant events, create suspense, or offer a glimpse of potential outcomes, thereby manipulating the reader's expectations.

### **5.5 Important Themes in the Novel:**

The novel contains many complex themes that are revealed as the story progresses. One of the major themes is shame itself. The narrative emphasizes the interconnectedness of shame, shamelessness, and violence, suggesting that these emotions are inseparable. Through the narrator, Rushdie delves into the etymology of the word to both transfix and elaborate its meaning in

its untranslated form. Shame is a loose translation of the word *sharam*, which is derived from “shin rè mim (written, naturally, from right to left); plus zabar accents indicating the short vowel sounds. A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuances” (*Shame* 39). David Hart, in his study of the novel, comments that “shame is a cultural norm as well as a cultural construct, and the consequences of shame are unlikely to be the same when distinguishing shame in the West from shame in the East” (3). This difference in cultural interpretation shapes the characters' actions, portraying how deeply embedded the concept of shame is in South Asian societies. Thus, when the three mothers advise Omar Khayyam Shakil not to feel *sharam*, they imply that he should also not feel “embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts” (*Shame* 39).

Sufiya Zinobia's character is a central representation of shame. From the beginning, she blushes excessively, which the narrator, more a shadowed presence of the author, interprets as an acknowledgment of her being a source of shame to her family. The narrator describes Sufiya as embodying three characteristics—one of which is derived from a fictional girl who avenges herself violently after being humiliated. The narrator makes a powerful statement:

"Humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them... I feel gleeful about this notion: it's a seductive, silky thing, this violence, yes it is" (*Shame* 117).

Sufiya's blushing signifies her internalization of shame, ultimately transforming her into a beastly figure. Her outbursts of violence, starting with the killing of animals and culminating in the murder of



her husband and herself, are direct consequences of this long-held shame.

The theme of traditional values is highlighted through the description of Nishapur and its inhabitants. Old Mr. Shakil raises his three daughters under strict conditions, denying them formal education, which suggests that he views them as his shame. This repression leads the daughters to develop their own language for communication. After his death, they break free of old values, quickly organizing a party where one of them becomes pregnant. This act symbolizes the breakdown of old values and the emergence of shamelessness. The traditional pull is further evident when the three mothers accuse Omar of betraying his brother, echoing a historical family betrayal that they believe is inherent in their bloodline.

One parallel theme running alongside shame, shamelessness, and violence is the fictionalized representation of historical events. Rushdie blends cultural elements into the narrative, emphasizing themes like marriage, family, children, betrayal, and political instability. Shame and shamelessness are juxtaposed through the characters of Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil. Sufiya's character partly derives from the real-life incident of a British-Pakistani girl killed by her father for having a relationship with a white boy, symbolizing how a daughter's actions can bring shame upon a family. As the heroine, Sufiya not only brings shame to her parents by being born a girl but also becomes a national symbol of shame when her violence escalates from personal to public, ultimately leading to decapitation of both animals and men. This evolution of Sufiya's character underscores the destructive potential of repressed shame, linking personal disgrace to national dishonor.

Dictatorship and caricature of political figures also serve as critical themes. There is little doubt that the novel targets the problematic

relationship between politicians and military personnel in Pakistan. It draws upon the lives of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia-ul-Haq, represented by Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, respectively. Rushdie mocks the serious issue of political power dynamics, illustrating both the careers and rivalry of these two figures. Through this portrayal, the novel exposes nationalist jingoism, flawed secularism, and rigged elections. The contrasting developments of these characters highlight the transition from a Western-oriented playboy (Iskander) to a devout religious figure (Raza), demonstrating the shifts in Pakistan's political landscape.

One of the significant themes is the oppression of women. The novel examines the problem of female identity and power dynamics within a patriarchal society. Different female characters exhibit diverse forms of defiance against the oppressive male authority. Rushdie explores the complexity of women's resistance, which manifests when they confront male dominance directly. As discussed earlier, the Shakil daughters create their own language when denied education. Raza Hyder's daughter, Sufiya Zinobia, symbolizes the diabolical outcomes of subjugation, shame, and violence, transforming into an embodiment of rage and destruction. Her character illustrates the catastrophic effects of patriarchal expectations. Similarly, Bilquis and Rani, wives of two powerful men, endure psychological suffering under male dominance.

However, they also exhibit forms of subtle resistance—Bilquis through silence, and Rani through artistic creativity—suggesting that women's defiance can take on less visible but equally powerful forms. This nuanced portrayal of women's oppression extends beyond the domestic sphere, serving as a critique of the nation-state, religious fundamentalism, and identity politics. The novel uses female characters not only to reflect the personal consequences of

patriarchy but also to critique larger socio-political structures that perpetuate gender inequality.

By examining these themes, *Shame* provides a multifaceted commentary on the intersections of personal and political conflicts, offering a layered critique of postcolonial society.

### **5.6 Summing Up:**

In this unit, students have explored a critical overview of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, gaining insights into various perspectives that enhance their evaluation of the novel. The unit has provided students with tools for critical thinking, not only in analyzing *Shame* but also in approaching Rushdie's broader body of work. It has emphasized the narrative techniques commonly employed by Rushdie, such as magical realism, fragmentation, metafiction, and unreliable narration, each contributing to the novel's unique storytelling style. By delving into these techniques, students have gained a deeper understanding of how Rushdie manipulates time, space, and character development to convey complex ideas.

The unit has also explored important themes, such as shame, violence, political satire, cultural identity, and gender oppression, and their broader historical and political implications. Students have examined how Rushdie's portrayal of postcolonial issues reflects the personal and national conflicts in South Asia, often using fictionalized history as a means of critique. The focus on cultural concepts like *sharam* (shame) has further highlighted the novel's engagement with Eastern sensibilities, offering a nuanced understanding of the socio-political dynamics that shape its characters and plot. Additionally, students have observed how Rushdie's background as a migrant writer influences his narrative,

resulting in themes of hybridity, fragmented identity, and cultural dislocation.

The unit has reiterated the politically motivated nature of Rushdie's work, emphasizing that understanding his background and philosophical orientation is crucial to a comprehensive analysis of his novels. *Added:* It has also drawn attention to Rushdie's use of satire as a critical tool, particularly in portraying the political instability of Pakistan, gender dynamics, and the misuse of religious orthodoxy as mechanisms of control.\*

Students are encouraged to extend their understanding by reading Rushdie's non-fiction works, such as *Imaginary Homelands* and *Step Across This Line*, which offer additional insights into his thoughts on migration, cultural identity, and the role of the writer in society. These readings will help students gain a full picture of Rushdie's thematic concerns, enriching their comprehension of both his fiction and non-fiction narratives.

### **5.7 References and Suggested Readings**

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### **5.8 Model Questions**

- How does Rushdie explore the concepts of shame and shamelessness through the characters and narrative?
- How does Rushdie's narrative style contribute to the novel's exploration of identity and politics?

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## **BLOCK-IV**

**Unit 1: Yesar Kemal: *Memed, My Hawk* (Introduction)**

**Unit 2: Yesar Kemal: *Memed, My Hawk* (Reading the Novel)**

**Unit 3: Yesar Kemal: *Memed, My Hawk* (Themes and Techniques)**

**Unit 4: Ismail Kadare: *The File on H* (Introduction)**

**Unit 5: Ismail Kadare: *The File on H* (Reading the Novel)**

**Unit 6: Ismail Kadare: *The File on H* (Themes and Techniques)**

## UNIT-1

### YESAR KEMAL: *MEMED, MY HAWK* (BACKGROUND)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 1.1 Objectives

#### 1.2 Introduction

#### 1.3 Biographical Sketch

#### 1.4 Placing the Work

#### 1.5 Summing up

#### 1.6 References and Suggested Readings

#### 1.7 Model Questions

#### 1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are to

- *familiarize* you with the context of the novel
- *present* the author's personal account
- *give* you a glimpse of the background of Modern Turkish literature

#### 1.2 Introduction

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish literature is marked by various socio-cultural upheavals and transformations. With the declaration of Republic on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1923 after the collapse of Ottoman Empire, Turkey saw a series of comprehensive reforms in several domains such as law, politics, society, and culture. Following the World War II, Turkey has undergone a shift from autocratic one-party control to a multi-party system which resulted in an establishment of the new dynamics of relationship between the common people and the

government. Modern Turkey has experienced clashes and collisions of multiple ideologies like traditionalism versus modernism, socialism versus capitalism, folk culture versus European influences, religion versus secularism, regionalism versus nationalism etc. Modern Turkish literature reflects the influence of these principles and the socio-political issues arising from coexistence of multiple ideological values. It is a dynamic and evolving field that offers rich insights into Turkey's complex history and society. Through its diverse voices and themes, it continues to engage with contemporary issues while preserving a deep connection to the nation's cultural heritage. Amidst the socio-political turmoil in Modern Turkey, there was a desire to reconnect with traditional values and return to folk cultures as a means of asserting one's identity.

Regional values and practices found their way into literary representation, which plays a significant role in modern Turkish literature. These values and practices serve as a bridge between the nation's rich historical traditions and contemporary societal changes. Integration of traditional folk songs and music reflects the cultural heritage and adds an auditory dimension to the literary experience. Descriptions of folk dances and performances bring cultural practices to life within the narrative. Many works set in rural areas depict traditional village life, emphasizing the connection to the land and agricultural practices. Incorporation of folk heroes and archetypal characters, such as the wise elders or the bandits, provides a link to cultural narratives and moral lessons. Works like *Snow* and *My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk include references to folk culture as they explore the tension between tradition and modernity. In novels like *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Elif Shafak weaves in elements of folklore, myth, and traditional rituals to examine themes of identity and cultural heritage. Yashar Kemal's



novels, such as *Memed, My Hawk*, are rich with folk elements that portray the lives of rural peasants by integrating local myths and legends.

Turkish literary practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century consider the broader social consequences of the transition and recognise the significant gap that evolved throughout ages between urban regions and rural areas. Anatolia holds significant importance in modern Turkish literature. It serves as a rich source of inspiration and a central theme for many writers. This region, with its diverse cultural heritage and historical significance, has provided a backdrop for numerous literary works that explore the complexities of Turkish identity, society, and history. The theme, “Going towards Anatolia,” had become the base of constructing the Turkish nationality; starting from the last years of the Ottoman Empire and lasting through the early republican nation-building operations. Namely, the word, “Anatolia,” also expressed a common conception binding the Late Ottoman intelligentsia and Early Republican elites. To grasp the emergence of Turkish nationalism and its relations to the idealization of Anatolian land and its people, it is crucial to review the position of the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman society in the world context (especially in European relations) on the verge of the 20th century” (Sezer 37).

Modern Turkish literature often deals with the crucial changes that Anatolia has gone through with the introduction of new governance system. The period from the downfall of the Ottoman Empire to the formation of the Republic of Turkey is frequently studied by focusing on Anatolian individuals, who operate as a means for examining wider social transformations. A significant number of contemporary Turkish writers direct their attention towards the juxtaposition of rural and urban lifestyles in Anatolia. Halide Edip Adivar’s *The Clown and His Daughter* and *The Shirt of Flame*,

Refik Halit Karay's *Stories from the Homeland* and *Stories of Exile*, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu's *The Stranger*, Reşat Nuri Guntekin's *The Wren* and *The Green Night*, Orhan Kemal's *On Fertile Lands*, Kemal Tahir's *The Tired Warrior* and *Mother State* are some of the important examples which, along with other subjects, draw attention to the transformations and struggles experienced by the Anatolians. The authors center their attention on the juxtaposition of rural and urban existence in Anatolia. The juxtaposition emphasizes the conflicts between conventional and contemporary values, which is a common motif in modern Turkish literature. In novels and short stories, the challenges and modes of resistance of the rural people as well as the issues of urbanization are often depicted. The writers tend to place Anatolia's folk cultures, which were disregarded and overlooked for centuries by the rich and powerful people of imperial culture, in contrast to the cosmopolitan societies of Istanbul and Izmir. Yashar Kemal played a vital role in highlighting the value of this marginalized area through his literary representations. His works can be regarded as a tribute to the vastness and richness of Anatolia which gave rise to a new awareness of national identity. Press in the significance of Anatolia in the history of Modern Turkey, Ahmet O. Evin writes: "Turkishness of the Republic could only be realized through the accommodation of Turkish culture, the folkways, local values of the Anatolian peasantry. The ideological concern of establishing one nation was reflected in literature with the rise of a new type of fiction taking a panoramic view of the country. It was also during this period that Turkish literature took a decisive turn towards social engagement, even at the expense of ignoring the individual. For writers, the vast and unexplored terrain of folk culture, new national identity, the reception of Kemalist reforms, the vast social transformations and dislocations following wars, and the drawing of national boundaries afforded a very rich field to cultivate. The entire national experience would naturally be

the foremost theme of fiction. These developments also served the purposes of the Kemalist regime in disseminating a new consciousness of national life” (Evin 9-10). Modern Turkish literature employs various modes of representation to address the contemporary socio-cultural issues and complex themes. While embracing modernist techniques like stream of consciousness, magic realism, symbolism or allegorical modes, many Turkish authors also retain elements of realism to critically examine the social and political factors. Yashar Kemal’s works use realistic depictions of rural life with broader social commentary. In discussing the diverse literary representations of social issues in contemporary Turkish literature, Talat Sait Halman talks about the ways in which authors use different approaches to accomplish their ends: “Modern Turkish literature is marked by the bi-polarity of social realism and art for art's sake. In all genres there has been a massive output depicting the plight of the lumpen proletariat. The literature of engagement found fertile ground in the 1950s in fiction. But neo-surrealism, neo-symbolism, theater of the absurd, stream of consciousness techniques, hermeticism, and obscurantist verse also flourish. Autochthonous folk poetry, a time-honored tradition in the countryside, was brought by the minstrels into the urban areas” (Halman 227).

Although Modern Turkish literature appears to be preoccupied with certain socio-political issues of the nation, evaluating it just on the basis of the narrow context it seems to provide would be a reductive mode of inquiry. Turkish literature has made significant contributions to the history of world literature through its rich and diverse literary traditions, which encompasses various forms and styles. Burcu Alkan and Çimen Gunay-Erkol, while situating “Turkish literature as world literature,” thoroughly discuss “how much and what elements of Turkish literature make it through the

gateway of the world literary sphere and why” (Alkan and Gunay-Erkol 3). They define world literature as “an immense field that reaches over a great temporal and spatial realm. It also bears internal complexities arising from the mobile, multicultural, and cosmopolitan nature of texts, peoples, cultures, and languages” (Alkan and Gunay-Erkol 4) and the “multitude of works within the Turkish literary tradition fares in relation to the dynamics of such processes” (Alkan and Günay-Erkol 4). Renowned Turkish writers such as Pamuk, Kemal, and Shafak have gained international acclaim through the representation of the complex human values. Through translations and global literary exchanges, Turkish literature continues to influence and be influenced by other literary traditions, placing itself in the broader context of world literature.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. How significant is the regional focus in Anatolian writers' works for Turkish readers and beyond? How do Anatolian writers influence the overall development of modern Turkish literature?
2. Why do modern Turkish writers believe it is important to incorporate folk culture in their literary practices? In what ways do the writers use folk culture as a means of exploring contemporary issues?

### **1.3 Biographical Sketch**

Yashar Kemal was born in a village situated on the Chukurova plains of Turkey's Southern Anatolia in 1923. His parents were farmers of Kurdish origin. Kemal's early life was marked by struggles and misfortunes. His father was murdered when Kemal was just five years old, an event that later affected influenced his

writing. He too lost his right eye in an accident during childhood. He attended rural schools for his primary education before becoming a factory and agricultural worker. His passion for literature grew from his interest in folk-elegies and folksongs, which introduced him to the world of the stories of rebels and bandits. At the age of seventeen or eighteen, Kemal became a “teller of folktales and a collector of folklore” (Kemal and Halman 15). Later, following his employment as an agricultural labourer, he settled as a public letter-writer in Kadirh, which provided him with the opportunity to pursue his literary interests. He published a small volume of elegies that he had collected from the local communities living in the villages situated nearby the Taurus Mountain in 1943. In 1952, he published a collection of short stories, followed by his first novel, *Ince Memed*, in 1955, which he had started writing in 1947. Subsequently, he produced three more sequels to *Ince Memed*, namely *Ince Memed II* (1969) or *They Burn the Thistles* (1972), *Ince Memed III* (1984) and *Ince Memed IV* (1987), making it a tetralogy. The *Ince Memed* tetralogy tells the story of Memed, a young boy who grows up to be a bandit as a result of the oppression and injustice he experiences in rural Turkey. Kemal's works mostly address the questions of social justice, the economic condition, and the identity crisis of the poor and underprivileged. His works often portray the complex realities and lived experiences of the Anatolian people in the face of poverty and feudalism. *Anatolian Tales*, a collection of short stories by Kemal, portrays the everyday existence of Anatolian villagers. Kemal's trilogy, comprising *The Wind from the Plain* (1960), *Iron Earth, Copper Sky* (1963), and *The Undying Grass* (1968), explores the survival strategies of the Anatolian people and how they engage with the natural environment, incorporating aspects of folklore. The author's works, *Legend of the Thousand Bulls* and *Legend of Ararat*, are reinterpretations of the ancient Anatolian myths with an adherence to the folk epic tradition.

His body of work often features tales about poor peasants struggling against the greed and abuse of corrupt middlemen and cruel landlords. *The Wind from the Plain* is a prominent example of this. *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* also examines the historical factors that led to the unequal distribution of wealth, giving rise to a conflict between farmers and landowners in the Chukurova region. Kemal tends to draw attention to the tensions and transformations caused by the progress of industrialization in his works. His belief that industrialization can have both beneficial and negative impacts on human existence is evident in his writings. *The Lords of Akchasaz* (1979) is about the gradual decline of the aristocracy and feudalism as landlords and upper-class people struggle to adapt to the advancing forces of industrialization. The Sea of Marmara, in his *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, is perceived as a realm of purity and beauty, which stands in contrast to the chaotic and corrupt city of Istanbul. *Kill the Serpent* (1971) provides a thorough analysis of the blood-feud tradition and the underlying circumstances created by community pressure in bringing about outcomes such as matricide. The story employs the technique of stream-of-consciousness to a certain degree in representing the account narrated by the imprisoned protagonist.

Kemal was a social and political activist. Kemal strongly opposed to the government's idea of establishing Turkey as a unitary state. Republican Turkey witnessed the imposition of Turkish as a "unified national language to help form a homogenous national community" as part of "the official language policy". However, this "policy that denies the existence of various ethnic and local languages in Turkey began to be questioned especially by Kurdish ethno-nationalists voicing the demands to use Kurdish for public matters" (Colak 67). Kemal encountered numerous challenges due to his advocacy for Kurdish rights and the promotion of freedom of

expression in Turkey. He was put on trial for raising his voice in support of the Kurdish people; and his views and activism led to multiple arrests. In 1971, Kemal had to spend twenty-six days in prison without any formal accusations due to his membership in the Central Committee of the banned Workers Party. In 1996, he received a twenty-month prison sentence for what the Turkish authorities referred to as "inciting hatred". But the government could not keep him in prison for long as a "strong outcry from the world's press followed, and his appeal for suspension of the sentence was successful" (see Kemal and Halman). However, he continued to be a source of trouble for the Turkish government.

Kemal was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1997 as "an advocate of human rights who has selflessly stood up for the poor, the exploited, and those persecuted for political or ethnic reasons". Kemal has received numerous awards for his work as an author and activist. Kemal died on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, leaving a lasting impact through his great literary works and commitment to humanitarian causes. Readers all over the world continue to read and enjoy his literary works.

### **Stop to Consider**

Here is an excerpt from Yashar Kemal's 1997 Peace Prize acceptance speech for the German Book Trade. In this speech, he primarily talks about the relationship between literature and society. Here, he seems to suggest that literature serves society or can serve as a medium to reflect social-political realities and bring about positive changes. Here, you will also get a glimpse of Kemal's views on language politics, which may help you situate him as an author in a more specific context. Consider your own views on literature as a medium of expression after going through

the passage:

People have always created their own worlds of myths and dreams, perpetuating their lives in those imaginary worlds. At times of duress, they have created more such worlds, which have given them haven and facilitated their lives. In their transition from one darkness to another, having acquired the consciousness of death, they have realized their lives and the joy of living in the world of myths and dreams they have created.

Since the word is the human being, people have also sought refuge in the power and the magic of the word. Both in storytelling and in writing, I have always felt the magic and the power of the word deep in my heart. Consciousness is subject to development. As my awareness grew, I sensed in the core of my heart that human beings can be greatly supported by the wings of eloquence. Roger Caillois, the prominent French critic and philosopher, and a friend of mine, often said to me: "You attach a great deal of importance to the word. For you, it is as if the word governs the world." My reply was: "Even if it has not or does not, it is paramount among the powers that create and govern the world."

Ever since my youth I have been reiterating that people who read my novels and short stories should reject warfares, loathe wars, and always strive for peace and brotherhood. Those who read my writings should not tolerate man's exploitation of others. Poverty is the shame of humanity. The disgrace of poverty should be driven out of all hearts. A curse on whoever coined the term "primitive man," because no human being can be primitive. No one should utter this accursed phrase. My readers should never commit an evil deed. They should always do good. Thank goodness, in our day and age, the source of good and evil is



gradually becoming evident.

What I mean to say is that I am an "engaged" writer with a firm commitment to my integrity and to the word. Also, since my youth I have always affirmed that the world is a garden filled with the flowers of a myriad cultures. We all know that it is a and folktales. They produced a very rich folk literature based on the power of the word, an art of enchantment. Today, many Kurdish intellectuals themselves are not aware of this. Furthermore, they have failed to undertake a deep-rooted and strong effort to collect folkloric materials. Even at Turkish garden of culture with thousands of flowers. Throughout history, cultures have always nurtured, influenced, and cross-pollinated one another. Civilizations and cultures have never harmed or destroyed each other. Plucking any one culture from our world would obliterate a color, a scent, a wealth. Take my native land of Anatolia, and beyond it the Mediterranean: because they served as the breeding ground for thousands of cultures which they preserve, they are a wellspring for world civilization and universal culture today. Take a look at my country. The Ottoman state was a multilingual, multicultural, multifaith empire. So was Anatolia, its heartland. And Anatolia was also the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia and the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Throughout history, Anatolian cultures have maintained a process of cross-fertilization. A glimpse at Anatolia's Aegean coast prior to the Christian era will reveal a wide variety of languages and cultures, which produced the philosophers of Miletus as well as Homer. Having created hundreds of masterpieces, they have constituted a rich source of and for universal culture.

Since the proclamation of the Republic, in present-day Anatolia too, despite all the prohibitions and all the attempts to demolish them, many cultures manage to survive, groping and limping

along. d deep The Republic banned all these languages and culture for reasons not fully understood as yet. They say this is done for the sake of a unitary state, because e it was impossible to create a unitary state in multicultural Anatolia. Anatolia was always multicultural al and should remain so forever. The passion for a unitary state led to a resolve to make Turkish the dominant language and Turkish culture the single sovereign culture. In the process, Turkish language and culture have been enfeebled. To cite one example: if the language and culture of the Kurds, who have always constituted one-third of the Anatolian population, had remained free, this might have enriched Turkish language and culture. By the same token, Circassian, Laz, and other Caucasian languages as well as Arabic, Syriac, and Assyrian would have cross-fertilized and enriched not only each other but also Turkish and Kurdish. Present-day Anatolian cultures might not have been as fertile a source for universal culture as ancient Anatolian cultures, but, like them, they would still have tributed a great deal.

(Kemal 16)

#### **1.4 Placing the Work**

The majority of Kemal's literary works deal with the social and economic conditions of individuals living in rural areas of Turkey. The primary motifs explored in his works include social injustice, corruption, oppression, individual identity, community values, poverty, folk traditions etc. Kemal's works address the impacts of the early republican agreement, which prioritized the modernization and nationalization of the country over addressing the specific needs and issues of the rural community. Furthermore, he aims to explore the crucial aspects of the processes of the formation of national

identity and modernization during the early phase of Republican Turkey by examining the gap between the ruling party and the people it governs through the lens of villagers.

Growing up in an Anatolian village, he had direct access to the circumstances under which the rural people live. Kemal's novel, *Memed, My Hawk*, for which he is best known, is set in rural Anatolia. Kemal finds a rich cultural and linguistic legacy in Anatolia. According to him, its beauty lies in the fact that it is a place where individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds reside, creating a lively and dynamic atmosphere. The novel starts with an elaborate description of its setting, encompassing the features of the villages surrounding the Taurus Mountain. He portrays the condition of the struggling villagers, who continue to grapple with the feudal system and poverty even after the establishment of republican rule in Turkey. The novel also examines the newly established government's execution of the system of law and justice and how it fails to provide equal opportunities and protection to all classes of society. Apart from Yashar Kemal, Anatolia has been the center of attention for many prominent Turkish authors, such as Fakir Baykurt and Orhan Kemal. Their writings gave birth to a new form of literature which specifically deals with the plights and struggles of the rural people with the use of realist mode of writings. Sabahat tin Ali, who was killed at the border while attempting to flee to Bulgaria, is known for his pioneering use of socialist realism in his writings that reflect the challenges faced by the people of Anatolia. This category of fiction, which attempted to reveal the suffering of the poor and deprived, gained immense popularity and became the dominant form in Turkish literature in the 1950s. The practice 'came to fruition with the emergence in the mid-1950s of a brave new genre called "The Village Novel," which reached its apogee with Yashar Kemal's

*Memed, My Hawk* (Halman 228). Village literature endeavours to show how the peasants are threatened by both social injustice and natural disasters. Their literary works, typically set in Anatolian villages and urban areas, portray the challenges and hopes of common individuals, offering readers a close and detailed examination of the socio-economic structure of the region. Orhan Kemal, one of the most important and successful Turkish authors, elaborately represents the challenges faced by the working-class people in major cities. Kemal Bilbasar, Talip Apaydin, Samim Kocagoz, and Dursun Akcam are some other prominent authors known for their meticulous portrayal of village life and small towns. *Revenge of the Snakes* by Fakir Baykurt, who himself grew up in a village, is an exemplary work belonging to the genre of the Village Novel. Through its detailed portrayal of social injustice, the natural environment, and the collective spirit of the villagers, *Memed, My Hawk* serves as a critique on the nature of struggles and modes of resistance of rural communities in Turkey. *Memed, My Hawk* is one of the most significant contributions by Kemal to the genre of the village novel in modern Turkish literature.

**Self Asking Question**

How would you consider this novel in a different medium, such as a film or play? What elements would you emphasize, and how would you handle the novel's complex themes and characters in that medium? (Give your answer in 200 words)

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## 1.5 Summing Up

In this unit, I have provided a glimpse of the developments that took place in the literary field in Turkey as it went through a number of social and political changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We have tried to look at the importance of Anatolia in inspiring modern Turkish authors by its diverse cultural heritage and folk traditions. Various aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish literature, like exploration of tensions and conflicts between tradition and modernity, rural life and social justice, farmers and landlords etc. are also touched upon. This unit discusses how Yashar Kemal's novel, *Memed, My Hawk*, occupies a significant place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literary world of Turkey. It also provides a description of the attributes of world literature with the objective of demonstrating the significance of the novel *Memed, My Hawk* as an example of world fiction. With this, we will proceed to the second section, which will offer a detailed account of the characters and events portrayed in the novel. This background study will help you understand the novel's events and characters in relation to its given contexts. However, it is recommended that you read other sources that are accessible on Turkish literature in order to acquire a broader understanding of the novel.

## 1.6 References and Further Readings

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### 1.7 Model Questions

- Discuss the early events in Kemal's life that influenced his writing career.
- What are the central themes in *Memed, My Hawk*, and how do they reflect Turkish society?

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## UNIT 2

### YESAR KEMAL: *MEMED, MY HAWK* (READING THE NOVEL)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Summary of the Novel

#### 2.3 The Characters

#### 2.4 Critical Reception

#### 2.5 Summing Up

#### 2.6 References and Suggested Readings

#### 2.7 Model Questions

#### 2.1 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are to

- *outline* the key events in the novel
- *provide* an overview of the major characters and important incidents
- *help analyze* various critical receptions of the novel

#### 2.2 Summary of the Novel

There are thirty-eight chapters in Yashar Kemal's novel, *Memed, My Hawk*. The novel opens with a vivid description of the "slopes of the Taurus Mountains... on the southern coast of Turkey" leading to "highland plains" inhabited by people whose primary source of livelihood is agriculture. One such plain is Dikenli, with its "own laws and customs", encompassing five small villages. These villages are populated by "tenant farmers" under the rule of a tyrannical landlord, Abdi Aga. Ince Memed (or Slim Memed), the eponymous

protagonist of the novel, tries to escape the oppressive rule of Abdi Agha, who often beats him “to death” and makes him plough the field full of thistles which “devour” him and “tear at” his legs “like a mad dog”, by fleeing from the village, Deyirmenoluk, to the village of Chukurova. Memed's interest in Chukurova is intrigued by Dursun, one of Abdi Agha’s employees. Dursun often contrasts Chukurova with Deyirmenoluk, highlighting the differences between the two villages. Unlike Deyirmenoluk, Chukurova doesn’t have any agha which makes it possible for the farmers to cultivate their own crops independently having no obligation to share it with anyone and without any fear of being beaten by their landlord. However, Memed’s escape leads him to the village of Kesme where he meets a kind man called Suleyman. He provides Memed with shelter and offers him a job as a goatherd. Meanwhile, the villagers, having found no trace of Memed for days, presume him to be dead. His mother, Deuneh, falls gravely ill as she “refuses to eat or drink” out of worry for her son. Abdi Agha, however, is more concerned about the oxen that Memed took with him to herd. He sends Dursun, Osman and Ali to find Memed, warning them not to return until they have recovered the oxen. Although they manage to spot the oxen, they fail to find Memed, which further convinces the villagers that Memed is dead. One day, a man named Husuk from the village of Deyirmenoluk discovers Memed herding his goats. Despite Memed’s request to keep his whereabouts a secret, Husuk informs Deuneh, and soon the entire village comes to know about it. Abdi Agha then personally seeks out Memed at Suleyman's village. But he neither beats Memed nor Deuneh this time. Instead, he imposes a punitive measure, allocating to them a mere quarter of the wheat of the Stork's-eye field, which is insufficient to sustain them throughout the winter. As their resources run out, Memed and Deuneh start starving. Moved by their plight, Durmush Ali, a benevolent individual, responds to their distress by offering a



portion of his own crops to Deuneh. Other villagers too bring food to Deuneh without Abdi Agha's knowledge. However, this kind gesture from the villagers only provides temporary relief, as the mother and son are able to sustain themselves "only for about fifteen days". With no alternative solutions available, Deuneh is compelled to make the difficult decision to sell the sole valuable possession of the family—their cow—to Abdi Agha in exchange for a supply of wheat.

Meanwhile, Memed's interest in the town grows as he learns about its grandeur from various individuals, particularly Dursun. Dursun paints a vivid picture of it, describing the town as a place where "windows shone in the sunlight. Thousands of shiny panes, like crystal palaces... A town fairy kings, with palaces" (Kemal 59). Once Memed visits the town with his friend, Mustafa, what strikes him the most is that the town does not have any agha – "There is no Agha here. Everyone is his own Agha". Unlike the villages of Dikenli, the town is not *owned* by anyone. In the town, Memed meets Corporal Hasan from whom he learns more about the town and other villages. This leaves a profound impact on Memed. He begins to see the world in a new light and starts to question the authority of Abdi Agha. He plots a bold escape from Abdi Agha's oppressive rule once and for all by running away with his mother and Hathe, his beloved, to the distant lands of Chukurova. But his mother disapproves of his plan, refusing to *abandon* her home and knowing the dangers of her son's love Hathe, who is betrothed to Veli, Abdi Agha's nephew. Despite his mother's objections, Memed and Hathe decide to follow their hearts, and under the cover of darkness, they elope, determined to forge a new path. The news of Memed's escape spreads like wildfire through the village, prompting Abdi Agha to summon Lame Ali, the village's skilled tracker, to set a trail for Memed. Husuk, who caused misery to Memed by

revealing his first escape to Deuneh and eventually to Abdi Agha, attempts to thwart Lame Ali's efforts, seeking to protect Memed and Hache this time. But Lame Ali, for whom *nothing else matters when it comes to tracking*, track them down in the forest by using his tracking skills. As Abdi Agha and his men launch an attack on them, Memed retaliates with his concealed gun, ultimately killing Veli and wounding Abdi Agha. As Memed and Hache lose each other in the tumultuous aftermath, Hache is brought back to the village framed as the murderer of Veli. Later, following the false testimony of individuals threatened and manipulated by Abdi Agha, Hache is sent to prison. And Abdi Agha beats Memed's mother mercilessly which eventually becomes the cause of her death.

Hache's mother visits her in prison, consistently expressing her anger and resentment towards Memed for causing misery to her daughter. Initially, she refrains from taking any action in the fear of Abdi Agha, but later she goes to Mad Fahri, a "public writer", to write a petition pleading Hache's release from prison which proves to be a futile attempt. Despite facing injustices and hardships, Hache finds solace in Iraz, a kind-hearted woman who was unjustly imprisoned for taking a stand against her son's killer. Without Memed's knowledge, Hache and Iraz eagerly wait for him to free them from prison.

Memed, meanwhile, joins the Mad Durdu's brigandage with the help of Suleyman. As Memed embarks on his new path, he encounters various obstacles and clashes as an outlaw living in the mountains. He discovers that the life of a brigand is marked by struggle, danger, and uncertainty. Memed's partnership with Mad Durdu is also put to the test as they encounter disagreements, revealing fundamental differences in their methods and values. Mad Durdu's ways are brutal. He is "the only brigand who takes the drawers too" after robbing people in order to "let them know that

they had been robbed by Mad Durdu” (Kemal 111). Memed strongly condemns this. According to him, for “a man to return to his home and his village without his drawers, stark naked, is worse than death. That’s what one should not do; one should never humiliate people” (Kemal 129). Memed is also opposed to Durdu's stubbornness and inflexible attitude, which he believes poses a significant threat to the team's safety. The consequences of Mad Durdu's obstinacy become apparent when Sergeant Asim launches a surprise attack on their group. Mad Durdu's refusal to retreat to a safer location leads to chaos, resulting in Sergeant Rajep, one of their own brigands, being severely injured. Memed's animosity towards Mad Durdu reaches a peak when Mad Durdu treacherously attacks Kerimoghlu, the compassionate chief of the Black-haired tribe, who had previously shown kindness to Memed, Jabbar, and Sergeant Rajep by providing them with food, shelter, and health care, saving them from Sergeant Asim's pursuit. Memed intervenes, stopping Mad Durdu's attempt to rob and humiliate Kerimoghlu, by threatening to kill him if he doesn't back off, causing a permanent split between the two. Memed sets out on a new path, joined by Jabbar and Sergeant Rajep, who abandon Mad Durdu's leadership, to form a new band of brigands.

Memed’s courage, bravery and resourcefulness as a brigand earn him the admiration and respect of his fellow brigands and transform him from an infamous rebel to a hero in the eyes of the local villagers. Abdi Agha, fearing Memed's wrath, runs away from his village. Memed, accompanied by Jabbar and the injured Sergeant Rajep, returns to Deyirmenoluk to confront Abdi Agha. Memed visits Durmush Ali's house, where he learns the shocking news of Hache's imprisonment and his mother's death from Huru, Durmush Ali's wife. Although Memed's experience as a brigand is defined by difficulty and unpredictability, his love for Hache serves as a

motivator, driving him to seek justice for his beloved. Memed, with Durmush Ali's assistance, sends for Lame Ali, who Abdi Agha had left homeless for refusing to testify falsely against Hathe. Together, they vow to track down Abdi Agha. Lame Ali, haunted by the guilt of aiding Abdi Agha in capturing Hathe and Memed, eagerly agrees to join Memed's quest for justice, seeking redemption for his role in Abdi Agha's schemes. Lame Ali's search ends in Aktozlu, where he discovers Abdi Agha hiding in the household of Headman Huseyin, a "brave man" who has a reputation for protecting his guests at all costs. Memed, Jabbar and Sergeant Rajep set out for Aktozlu village to kill Abdi Agha after receiving his whereabouts from Lame Ali. But their mission takes a disastrous turn. They fail to kill Abdi Agha; and instead, they inadvertently set fire to the whole village of Aktozlu, reducing it to ashes. Believing Abdi Agha to be dead, Memed returns to his village and distributes the lands among the villagers which earns him their respect and admiration. However, Memed soon becomes a source of disappointment for the villagers when they learn that Abdi Agha is still alive. Subsequently, Sergeant Rajep's wounds deteriorate, resulting in his death.

Abdi Agha escapes and takes refuge in the town seeking protection from Ali Safa Bey, a corrupt and powerful man. Ali Safa Bey's power comes from his association with the legal system and his supply of ammunition to various groups of brigands, who serve as his enforcers making him one of the most powerful individuals in the town. Abdi Agha pretends to be a victim of Memed's wrath and offers Ali Safa Bey a village as bribe in order to convince him to take revenge against Memed. Ali Safa Bey hires Kalayji Osman, a brigand chief known for his cunning ways who "never fought face to face with anyone and always struck from behind," to capture Memed. Kalayji cunningly uses Horali, a former comrade of Memed's from the band of Mad Durdu, to beguile Memed into his

trap. Horali finds out Memed by asking villagers about his whereabouts, pretending to be an old friend who was separated from him during the fire of Aktozlu village. However, Memed sees through Horali's tricks. He plays along and accompanies Horali, pretending to be unaware of Kalayji's ambush, all the while concealing his true intentions and awaiting the perfect moment to strike. Once they arrive, Memed attacks Kalayji's team before they can act, leading to Horali's death and leaving Kalayji wounded. Memed's fame spreads throughout the villages, causing concern for Abdi Agha and Ali Safa Bey. Memed becomes a hero to the villagers of Vayvay village, who had been enduring Kalayji's oppressions for years. Big Osman, one of the villagers, refers to Memed as his "hawk". Soon, the entire village begins to regard him as their "hawk". In Abdi Agha's absence, Dikenli undergoes significant changes; and Memed's acceptance as a bandit hero grows considerably. The individuals who gave false testimony against Hache withdraw their statements. Yet, the corrupt system refuses to release Hache from prison. Memed decides to rescue Hache, seizing the opportunity presented by her transfer to Kozan. Though Jabbar does not support his plan to free Hache from the police, as Sergeant Asim is determined to capture Memed at any cost, Memed remains resolute in his mission to liberate Hache from the corrupt system. Memed's heart remains true to Hache. He is determined to prove her innocence and free her from her unjust imprisonment, and reunite with the woman he loves, no matter the challenges that lie ahead. Lame Ali expresses his readiness to assist Memed. Memed executes the operation and successfully retrieves Hache and Iraz from the police. He takes them to Alidagh, "a mountain of terrifyingly steep precipices, the lair of long-horned violet deer" with "rocks as sharp as knives" that one "cannot clamber over them, they cut so deeply into man's flesh" (Kemal 312). Once more, Memed's name is on everyone's lips – "In the coffee-house, from

morn till evening, the only talk was about Slim Memed” (Kemal 308). This infuriates Abdi Agha, who is now powerless to act. Both the police and the brigands pursue Memed together but fail to capture him. Even Black Ibrahim, “an old brigand who knows these mountains and all the tricks of trade”, is unable to seize Memed. In the meantime, Hache becomes pregnant. Day and night, she awaits the government's promised amnesty, dreaming of building a house of her own and living a peaceful life. But Sergeant Asim relentlessly pursues them. He compels Lame Ali to arrange a trail for Memed, which eventually leads to Memed's discovery. In the skirmish, Hache dies as a bullet hits her shortly after giving birth to her son.

Memed surrenders to Sergeant Asim for the sake of his son. But Sergeant Asim lets Memed go, realizing that capturing someone in their helplessness is not an act of bravery. With the government granting amnesty to all the prisoners and bandits, Memed returns to his village. But Huru reignites Memed's quest for justice by reminding him that Abdi Agha, the perpetrator behind his woes, is still alive. Memed relies on Lame Ali to gather information about Abdi Agha and discovers that he is still in town. After killing Abdi Agha, he retreats to the mountains, entrusting his son, who is named Memed, to Iraz's care, without leaving any trace of himself thereafter.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What, according to you, are the most significant dimensions of a literary text? Do you think that it's important to know the historical background of a literary production in order to understand the text? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Do you think that the process of categorizing a literary text can overshadow a reader's reading experience leading to a limited understating of it? Is it important to keep one's mind open while reading a writing?

### 2.3 The Characters

#### **Memed:**

Memed, the central character of Yaşar Kemal's novel *Memed, My Hawk*, grows up under the tyranny of a ruthless landlord, Abdi Agha. His experiences with injustice and brutality shape him into a rebellious figure. Memed's mother, Deuneh, is his sole family. After his father's death, Memed grows up in a challenging environment without any fatherly protection. However, he possesses a courageous and brave personality from his childhood. At the age of eleven, Memed displays remarkable courage and determination by taking a bold stand against Abdi Agha's oppressive rule. He makes his escape from Deyirmenoluk and appears "bare-footed... with blood clot on his legs" at the door of Suleyman of Kesme village surprising him with his bravery (Kemal 11). Suleyman calls this boy, with a "little face" which is "thin and dry" and "huge brown eyes and skin tanned by the sun", a "young lion" (Kemal 11). Memed understands his vulnerability under Abdi Agha's dominance well. He knows that the only way to break free from Abdi Agha's control is to flee his village. Memed's failed attempt to flee Deyirmenoluk doesn't stop him from dreaming of a safer and more peaceful life for himself and his loved ones. He makes his second escape attempt when he is around 18 years old, taking with him Hathe, whom he dearly loves. The confrontation between Abdi Agha and Memed after being caught compels Memed to choose a more challenging path, marking the beginning of his life as a brigand.

As he becomes a brigand, Memed's actions grow bolder and more impactful, targeting the oppressive feudal system that exploits the poor. Unlike Mad Durdu and other typical brigands, who might be driven by greed or malice, Memed's actions are rooted in a sense of justice and the desire to protect and uplift the oppressed. He faces

constant danger, betrayal, and the moral ambiguity of using violence to achieve his ends. Memed's actions as a brigand reflect his immense inner power. This is evident in the way he reacts against Mad Durdu's cruelty. He strongly protests by warning Durdu to refrain himself from any further unkind activities. He warns Durdu: "Since I have joined you we've stripped at least five hundred people of their drawers" (Kemal 128). Kerimoghlu, the rich head of the Black-haired tribe, acknowledges the fact that Memed is not inherently a brigand, rather he is a product of harsh circumstances. He remarks: "I was puzzled about you, Memed. You don't look in the least like a brigand. But what can you do? Who knows how cruel the man [Abdi Agha] was. That's human nature, you never know what's inside a man" (Kemal 144). Memed is not driven by vengeance alone but by a broader vision of justice and freedom. His compassion and generosity inspire others to join his cause and support his fight against oppression. When other bandits regard Memed as a powerful brigand after he accidentally burns down the entire village of Aktozlu, he does not take pride in it. He rather expresses his regrets: "Not a single house left. All because of that north-easterly. It wouldn't have happened but for the wind. I'd have died rather than let this happen" (Kemal 221).

Memed's personal relationships are also characterized by his loyal and affectionate nature. His love for Hache is one of the examples which reveals his gentle and caring nature. Despite the numerous challenges they face, Memed's love remains steadfast and pure which highlights the tenderness that contrasts with his fierce exterior. Memed's physical appearance mirrors the combination of contrasting aspects of his personality. He is described as "short and gnarled... like a firmly rooted oak, strong and tough. Only one point, one tiny point, was still fresh. His lips were red as a child's, delicately carved. A smile always seemed to hover at the corner of



his lips. Somehow it matched his hardness, his bitterness” (Kemal 52). His final act of surrender to Sergeant Asim reflects his affection towards his newborn, establishing him as caring and responsible father. His personality and actions show that even in the face of brutality and violence, kindness and empathy can prevail.

**Abdi Agha:**

Abdi Agha, who owns five villages, is a forty-year-old “goat-bearded” cruel landlord. He represents the oppressive feudal system that exploits the poor villagers. He is feared and obeyed by the villagers because of his authority and control over the land and their livelihood. The peasants grow crops under Abdi Agha’s dominance but do not receive their fair share, which causes them to go hungry for a large portion of the year. In every winter, “more than half the village” comes “starving to Abdi Agha’s door” (Kemal 46). Instead of any compassion, he threatens and beats them viciously if the villagers don't comply with his demands and orders. He is known for his cruelty and harsh treatment of the villagers, exploiting their labour and keeping them in a state of constant fear and poverty. If Abdi Agha does not beat a villager who "wrongs" him, he makes that person suffer even worse consequences. The villager would be required to endure the penalties of his wrongdoing for the rest of his life. However, his offence is forgotten if Abdi beats him. That’s why villagers “who thought they had wronged Abdi Agha would come and sit in front of him and wait there until he had beaten him” (Kemal 113). Abdi Agha serves as the primary antagonist in the novel. Memed's struggle for justice and freedom is caused by his drive to overthrow Abdi Agha's oppression and free the people from his authority. Memed refers to him as “leech” who’s “sucked the blood of five villages” (Kemal 103).

The character of Abdi Agha undergoes a significant transformation. As Memed's resistance gains momentum, Abdi Agha's grip on the

village weakens. His once-unquestioned authority is shattered, and he is left humiliated and powerless. In response to the growing rebellion, Abdi Agha becomes increasingly desperate to maintain his power. He becomes “utterly demoralized”. He grows “thinner” and his cheeks “sunken” (Kemal 308). His behaviour and ongoing references to Memed indicate his increasing sense of powerlessness and anxiety: “My five villages! I am even afraid to walk about the town. I’ve taken a house just opposite the police station and placed sandbags against the windows to protect me from their shots” (Kemal 287). Eventually, he is killed by Memed.

### **Hatche:**

Hatche, the daughter of Osman, is Memed’s beloved from the village of Deyirmenoluk in the novel. Hatche is described as a strikingly beautiful young woman. Her neck is “as slender as a swan’s”, while “tiny locks of hair” are “curled behind her ears” (Kemal 79). She is not the only one with outstanding physical beauty, she is also an exceptional knitter and singer. She “knitted stockings and kerchiefs for Memed and invented songs over them, expressing her love, desire and jealousy in the colours of embroidery”. People who “saw her stockings were thrilled, and those who hear or sing her songs still feel a thrill like the freshness of spring when everything is green” (Kemal 70). Throughout the novel, however, Hatche endures immense hardships, including imprisonment and threats to her life as a result of Abdi Agha’s oppression. Her existence is marked by the terrible conditions under the rule of Abdi Agha. She has no right to make any personal decisions. She is forcefully engaged to Abdi Agha’s nephew, Veli. Her entire life gets destroyed after she decides to follow her heart once and choose Memed as her partner. Her character is defined by both her inner strength and the difficulties she faces. She spends her whole life with the hope and desire of a trouble-free life which

remains unfulfilled. Ultimately, she dies being hit by a bullet shortly after giving birth to her son on the mountains.

**Lame Ali:**

Lame Ali is a tracker with an unmatched expertise in the field of tracking. His tracking skills, however, prove to be the sign of both weakness and strength in the course of events. He reluctantly sets trail on Memed twice leading to disastrous outcomes. He is unable to resist the urge to follow a trail when asked. He “would track down his own father, even if he knew that the old man would then be hanged. It’s enough for him if there’s a trail to follow” (Kemal 88). But his tracking ability also helps Memed greatly in meeting his required ends. As a human being, Lame Ali is gentle and kind-hearted. The term "Lame" refers to his physical impairment, a limp that he has had since childhood. Although he has physical restrictions, he takes an active part in the daily activities and struggles faced by the villagers.

Lame Ali plays a crucial role as Memed’s supporter and ally. His knowledge of the villages and the strategic mind make him an asset in Memed’s fight against Abdi Agha. Lame Ali’s plays an important role in the novel.

**Deuneh:**

Deuneh is the mother of Memed and the widow of Ibrahim. She is a strong, hardworking woman who has encountered many hardships in life. Deuneh has spent her life working tirelessly to provide for her family, particularly after the death of her husband. After Memed escapes from Abdi Agha and begins his rebellion, Deuneh becomes a target. She dies as a direct result of the abuses inflicted upon her by Abdi Agha and his men.

**Mad Durdu:**

Mad Durdu is a fearsome brigand who Memed joins after fleeing his village. He is from the village of Aksoyut. His “father had gone to the wars and never returned” and even his childhood, he had been a “wilful little brat” (Kemal 98). He has “a large mouth with thin lips and a long red scar reaching up to his scalp from his right cheek” (Kemal 107). His brutal methods make Memed abandon his band and form his own. Suleyman sees him as a “plunderer, a thief” rather than a brigand. He describes him as a “mad dog”. He possesses such an extraordinary level of tenacity that he is “always ready to face death any minute” (156). Eventually, Mad Durdu is compelled to come to terms with a tragic end.

**Jabbar:**

Jabbar is a comrade of Memed from Mad Durdu’s band. As they face challenges and common enemies, including Abdi Mad Durdu and Abdi Agha, Jabbar and Memed find themselves drawn together by their shared struggle. Together, they plan and execute actions to undermine Abdi Agha's authority and support the villagers in their fight for justice.

**Sergeant Rajep:**

Sergeant Rajep is one of Memed’s strong and loyal comrades from the troop of Mad Durdu. "Nobody knew about Sergeant Rajep's past" or why he became a brigand. He is described as “gifted from birth with an ability to make friends” (147). He has a strong reputation as a brigand. He abandons Mad Durdu and joins Memed. He works for Memed's welfare with his severely wounded body until his death.

**Ali Safa Bey:**

Ali Safa Bey is a highly powerful individual who engages in corrupt practices and forms an alliance with Abdi Agha in order to pursue Memed, with the aim of owning the Vayvay village. He is “the son of an old Agha who had lost his, but had still managed to send his son to the Imperial School at Adana, then to the Law Faculty of Istanbul” (Kemal 232). Midway through his education, Ali Safa Bey quits the school and starts practicing law in the town. Later, when he realizes the importance of land, after giving up practices and trying several occupations, his “appetite” for it becomes “truly insatiable” (Kemal 233). He starts “obtaining control of the lands of the other” by using his education as a means of exploiting others. Ali Safa Bey's authority is further enhanced by his supply of ammunition to various brigands.

**Iraz:**

Iraz is an afflicted mother whose son, Riza, is raised in a challenging environment without any paternal support and care. She becomes widow when she is only twenty, “with a nine-months old baby in her arms” (157). Iraz's son is murdered by his cousin, Ali, over a dispute concerning land at the age of twenty-one. Once a beautiful lady, with "light-brown eyes" that would "shine brightly and her slanting eyebrows would give a strange beauty to her broad, sun-tanned face with its small pointed chin and a lock of black hair curled down over her broad forehead," she now finds herself in a "dreadful condition" following the death of her son (Kemal 164). Her lips are now “bloodless” and eyes “bloodshot” from crying. Subsequently, she seeks vengeance and receives imprisonment as a result. She meets Hache in the prison which leads to a mother-daughter bond between the two. Soon after, she consistently remains in the company of Hache and adopts Hache's son after her death.

**Durmush Ali:**

Durmush Ali is a generous individual from the village of Deyirmenoluk who provides supports and assistance to Memed and his mother during their difficult times. He is “sixty, the largest man in the village, as healthy as an old plane-tree with tiny eyes in a broad face” (Kemal 48).

**Sergeant Asim:**

Segreant Asim is a powerful and strong-willed police officer who relentlessly pursues Memed till the end.

**Suleyman:**

Suleyman is a compassionate villager from Kesme village who helps Memed in his struggles.

**Huru:**

Huru is Durmush Ali's outspoken wife and strong supporter of Memed.

**Kalayji Osman:**

Kalayji Osman is a cunning brigand who sets up an ambush for Memed on Ali Safa Bey's orders, which leads to his own death.

**Big Ismail:**

Big Ismail is an old man who is more than ninety years old. Most of the local lands and people are familiar to him. He keeps recounting their story of "migrations, exile, and the long struggle against the ottoman" (Kemal 229).

**Bekir Effendi:**

Bekir Effendi, a wise man, is the cousin of Kalayji Osman. On the day of his wedding, Kalayji Osmankills him.

**Mad Fahri:**

A public writer who earns money by writing petitions for other people, Mad Fahri is known for being "always drunk." Previously, he had been a lawyer by profession. But after getting "dismissed from his position as a clerk of the court for accepting bribes" (122), he starts his profession as a letter writer.

**Horali:**

Horali, one of Memed's comrades from Mad Durdu's band, turns out to be a traitor as he sets a trap for Memed on Kalayji Osman's orders. Later, he is killed by Memed.

**Husuk:**

Husuk, also known as "old Beet-root" among the villagers, is a reaper from the village of Deyirmenoluk. He is a well-wisher of Deunch and Memed.

**Corporal Hasan:**

Corporal Hasan is an old man from the town. He introduces Memed and Mustafa to the town's features, which are completely new to them, and provides Memed with perspectives on the world that differ from living under Abdi Agha's rule.

**Kerimoghlu:**

Kerimoghlu, chief of the Back-haired tribe, is a "wise" and rich man. He has a "childlike manner," as when he has to ask a question, he "would blush and smile in confusion before bringing himself to speak" (Kemal 143).

**Mustafa:**

Mustafa is the son of Bald Ali and Memed's childhood friend.

**Black Ibrahim:**

Black Ibrahim is a skilled brigand who is hired by Ali Safa Bey to capture Memed.

**Big Osman:**

Big Osman is an elderly man from Vayvay village who, for the first time, refers to Memed as his hawk after Memed wounds and kills the tyrannical Kalayji Osman.

**Headman Huseyin:**

Headman Huseyin, a brave man from Aktozlu village, is well-known for his hospitality to his guests.

**Politician Ahmed:**

Politician Ahmed is a letter-writer and Mad Fahri's deadly enemy. He is Ali Safa Bey's "special henchman."

**Veli:**

Veli is Abdi Agha's nephew to whom Hathe was forcefully betrothed. He is killed by Memed.

**Jennet:**

Jennet is Deuneh's neighbour and friend.

**Dursun:**

Dursun is an employee of Abdi Agha who sparks Memed's curiosity about Chukurova and the town with his descriptions of them.

**Black Mustan:**

Black Mustan is a brigand and enemy of Mad Durdu.

**Mustafa Effendi:**

Mustafa Effendi is a shopkeeper from the town.



**Yellow Ummet:**

Yellow Ummet is Lame Ali’s distant relative who lives in the village of Chukurova.

**Self-Asking Questions**

What narrative style does Kemal use in his novel? Do you think that it serves a specific purpose on his part given the nature of the subject he deals with in his work? (Give your answer in 120-180 words)

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.....  
.....

**2.4 Critical Reception**

With the publication of his first novel, *Memed, My Hawk*, first published in Turkish under the title *Ince Memed* in 1955 and then translated into English by Edouard Roditi in 1961, Yasar Kemal achieved international fame. The novel found instant popularity upon its publication among Turkish readers, and it continues to be so. It’s regarded as an “outstanding” book “about the Middle East” (Mikhail 197). Sunday Review praises it as a novel with the “sense of heroism, the animal tenderness, the marvelous feeling for the land, and the intuitive narrative rhythm give the book raw vitality and pure immediacy”. Its success paved the way for a 1984 film adaptation called *Memed, My Hawk*, which too won the hearts of its viewers. Nevertheless, the Turkish authorities found the work to be unsettling. The government even refused to grant permission for shooting the film adaptation in Turkey. David Barchard states in his obituary of Kemal: “Not everyone approved. When a leading

Hollywood producer contemplated a film version, he was warned that the Turkish authorities considered Kemal to be a communist and he backed off. It was not until 1984 that Peter Ustinov directed and starred (as Abdi) in a film version of *Memed, My Hawk*. Even then Ustinov was denied permission to film in Turkey”.

*Memed, My Hawk* won the Varlik Prize as the best novel of the year in 1955. It has been translated into many languages and has received multiple awards from all around the world. Given the worldwide popularity that *Memed, My Hawk* has received, Roditi's role as a translator is extremely significant. By translating the novel into English, he “has played no small role in introducing modern Turkish literature in the West. It was in his translation that Yasar Kemal's widely discussed novel *Memed, My Hawk* first became available to American readers” (Rosenfeld 414). However, there were critical reactions to the translated versions of Kemal's novels, such as *Memed, My Hawk*, and *The Wind from the Plain*.

Describing the beauty of the original versions of the novels, Çıgdem Balim writes: “For the first-time reader of Yashar Kemal one would advise one of his more captivating novels such as *Memed My Hawk* where there are breathtaking heroes and a steady flow of events. *The Wind from the Plain* does not flow so easily. The reader who has the good fortune of being able to read the book in the original Turkish is still fascinated by the poetry of the language and the usage of the local dialect and expressions which create vivid images. The English translation is good but lacks the beauty of the original language of the novel. The original is a true Anatolian epic reeking of the Taurus mountains; the translation has made it comparatively boring and unnatural. However, it is not an easy task to translate Yashar Kemal” (Balim 194-5). Orhan Pamuk, on the other hand, expresses a critical viewpoint regarding the extensive popularity of books. He believes that a book's centrality in terms of its relation to

the author can be considered as a reductive factor. He states in an interview: “In Turkey, the first book anyone reads by Yaşar Kemal is *Memed, My Hawk*. The sales of or interest in those books overshadow all the others. There are bad examples of this too. In Turkey this is the case with Reşat Nuri Güntekin’s *The Wren*, for example: The Wren is a lightweight, melodramatic love story about an idealistic teacher... Luckily, I don’t have any one book that takes center stage! My most popular book varies, both in my own country and throughout the world” (Tokman 11).

## **2.5 Summing Up**

In this section, I have provided you with an overview of the storyline, emphasising significant occurrences and the functions served by the characters. I have focused on the major characters like Memed, Abdi Agha, Hatche, Mad Durdu, Lame Ali, Iraz, Sergeant Rajep, Ali Safa Bey etc. whose contribution to the development of the plot is greater and more significant. I have also briefly touched upon the perspectives on Kemal’s *Memed, My Hawk* and its success. In the following unit, you will be given a detailed analysis of different aspects that are essential for a thorough comprehension of the novel.

## **2.6 References and Further Readings**

Balim, Çiğdem. Rev. “*The Wind from the Plain* by Yashar Kemal and Thilda Kemal.” *Third World Quarterly*. 1993, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 194-195

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## 2.7 Model Questions

- How does Kemal explore the concepts of justice and resistance through the character of Memed?
- What is the significance of the novel's title in relation to its central themes?

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## UNIT-3

### YESAR KEMAL: *MEMED, MY HAWK* (THEMES AND TECHNIQUES)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 3.1 Objectives

#### 3.2 Introduction

#### 3.3 Title

#### 3.4 Major Themes:

##### 3.4.1 Feudal Structure and Individual Identity

##### 3.4.2 Community Life and Shared Responsibility

##### 3.4.3 Heroism, Revenge Motif and Social Justice

##### 3.4.4 Folk Culture and Village Life

##### 3.4.5 Gender Identity

#### 3.5 Narrative Technique

#### 3.6 Summing Up

#### 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

#### 3.8 Model Questions

#### 3.1 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are to

- *give* you a critical interpretation of the novel
- *discuss* the significance of the title
- *elaborate* the techniques used in the novel

#### 3.2 Introduction

So far, you have been acquainted with some significant aspects in Yashar Kemal's novel, *Memed, My Hawk*. However, a thorough understanding of the novel's underlying ideas and motifs is

necessary in order to engage in a more critical reading of it. In this section, we will attempt to examine the multiple interpretations associated with the novel, as well as the author's use of diverse approaches and modes of representation. Our objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the novel by examining it from various angles, so broadening the range of our investigative methods.

### **3.3 The Title**

The title of the novel, *Memed, My Hawk*, bears a metaphorical meaning in the larger context of the novel. The metaphor of the hawk in the novel represents the transformation of Memed, the eponymous protagonist of the novel, into a powerful figure. The hawk, a creature that soars above and escapes the confines of the earth, represents Memed's aspiration to rise above the oppression of the feudal system. The hawk becomes a symbol of Memed's individual identity—free, powerful, and fearless. It represents Memed's ability to set himself free from the confinement of the oppressive forces around him, particularly the cruel Agha. As Memed begins to rebel, he rises above his limitations and takes on the qualities of a hawk. Memed's capacity to rise above his circumstances and reclaim his freedom is symbolized by the hawk's power of traversing the landscape from above. It is out of his hands, though, how Memed is identified as a hawk. The villagers, who admire Memed as their saviour, collectively acknowledge Memed as their hawk. The use of the possessive pronoun "My" in the title implies a sense of personal attachment since it indicates that the villagers perceive Memed as their own hero, someone who battles on their behalf.

### 3.4 Major Themes

#### 3.4.1 Feudal Structure and Individual Identity

*Memed, My Hawk* explores the newly formed feudal structure that emerged in Turkey's rural areas, such as Chukurova, following the Republican proclamation. Chukurova plays a significant role in the history of Modern Turkey. Apart from witnessing the Ottoman and French occupation, “all the people of the Chukurova joined in the fight to throw the enemy out of the plain” (232). After the country was liberated, a “new government was set up and a new era began” (232). With the establishment of the new government, people started nurturing a hope for positive changes in terms of socio-political structure. However, though “the new Government tried to put an end to the feudal land tenure, abolishing what remained of unbounded power of the feudal landlords... [But] a class of newly enriched was coming to the fore, most of them seeking to gain possession of as much of the fertile soil as possible” (232).

In the novel, Kemal depicts an Anatolian landscape where the feudal system is an everyday reality. It reflects on the journey of a young boy, Memed, who makes difficult choices in life in order to liberate himself from the oppression of social hierarchy. Memed is from Deyirmenoluk, one of the five villages of Dikenli. All the inhabitants of Dikenli, one of the “highland plains, with five villages clustered on it”, are “tenant farmers, the land belonging to Abdi Agha” (6). The novel vividly portrays the complex realities of feudal system, where landlords like Abdi Agha “wants to be a sultan and to make slaves of five villages” (55). The peasants are trapped in a cycle of poverty and indebtedness, and they are forced to surrender a significant portion of their harvests to the Agha. Abdi’s absolute power over the land and its people leaves them with barely enough to survive which shows how feudalism perpetuates economic exploitation and social inequality. Abdi Agha treats

peasants as mere property, exploiting them without regard for their well-being.

The feudal system depicted in the novel is deeply rooted in the social, economic, and political life of the villagers. The Agha employs punishment and reward as key tools of domination to maintain control over the villagers. He administers physical punishments, such as beatings, imprisonment, or exile, to those who disobey or challenge his authority. These acts of violence are usually carried out in the presence of other villagers to make the victim an example of the consequences faced by those who resist. For example, he is furious when he learns about Memed's escape, and he creates a sense of terror among the villagers regarding the repercussions that Memed would encounter as a result of his actions. He instructs Osman and Ali to locate Memed, as well as the cattle that Memed has taken with him. He warns that if any harm comes to his cattle, he will take severe action against Memed: "If anything happens to the oxen, I will break every bone in his body. I'll grind his bone to powder" (23). Abdi Agha adapts his strategy of domination based on the requirements of the given circumstances. When he requires the assistance of the people in specific situations, he offers them various rewards in exchange for the favour he receives. After Memed kills Veli, he approaches the villagers with a profitable proposal to have them testify falsely against Hache as the murderer. He says: "This year I'll only expect a quarter of your crops from you. Besides, I give you all the cattle. All the animals that you're now tending shall be yours" (117). And the strategy works easily on the villagers as they leave "the Agha with smiling faces. Three quarter of their crops and the cattle! It was an unheard boon" (117). Moreover, Abdi Agha possesses immense power not just through wealth but also through his connection with the



authority and legal system. The novel reveals the corrupt relationships between landlords, authorities, and the legal system:

That night authorities stayed as guests at Abdi Agha's house. Double mattresses were spread for them. Lambs were roasted in their honour under the covering of earth. Whenever the magistrate came to the mountain villages the meat was prepared for him in this way. Roasting under earth is undoubtedly the testiest way of preparing the meat. (119)

This concentration of power creates a climate of fear and submission among the peasants. The prolonged and pervasive nature of feudal oppression has a psychological impact on the villagers. Many villagers internalize their subjugation, believing that their situation is unchangeable or divinely ordained. This mindset of resignation stifles any impulse toward collective resistance. Instead, the villagers focus on survival, accepting their suffering as an inevitable part of life. The novel shows how this psychological conditioning is one of the most crucial aspects of oppression, as it prevents people from pursuing alternative ways of living. The powerful persons like Ali Safa Bey take advantage of this vulnerability of the villagers and use divide-and-rule tactics to prevent any collective organizing: “Ali Safa Bey showed the cunning of a fox and always found new ways of wresting land from them. He might thus start by stirring up trouble between two or three villages and, by supporting one side, obtaining control of the land of the other. This was his easiest device and proved very practical...” (233). Kemal also critiques the broader traditional power structures that support and sustain feudalism. The collaboration between local authorities and feudal landlords highlights how the system is maintained by a network of control and power. Ali Safa Bey derives his power from his connection with the legal system and his supply of ammunition to multiple bands of outlaws, who act as his

protectors, thus positioning him as one of the most fearsome figures in the town. Ali Safa Bey's wife consoles Abdi Agha after he takes refuge in the town due to his fear of Memed: "The governor's wife came to us yesterday and said that her husband was furious about it. She assured that they'll do everything to catch that bandit..." (237).

Memed's individual identity in *Memed, My Hawk* is complex and multidimensional that evolves throughout the novel. The violence inherent in the system created by landowners like Abdi is carried out through brutal punishments exercised on those who resist. Memed's state of being, for example, under the control of the Agha is pitiful. He shares his plights with Suleyman under the domination of the Agha like this: "My father was dead and Abdi Agha took what little we had away from us. If my mother complained, he beat her cruelly and would beat me too. Once he tied me to a tree and left me there in the middle of the plain, far from the village. I stayed tied to the tree for two days, till Mother came and freed me" (20). Memed's journey, however, from a helpless peasant boy to a legendary figure of rebellion reflects a complex process of self-discovery and identity formation. As Memed begins to resist Abdi Agha's authority, his identity shifts from that of a passive victim to an active rebel. His decision to flee his village and later take up arms against the landlord is a significant moment of self-assertion. Memed, unlike others, is unwilling to accept the given circumstances in which was born. From a young age, he appears to possess a natural inclination towards resistance. He is rather willing to accept death than to submit himself to Abdi's authority. His awareness of the consequences of going against Abdi's expected parameters cannot prevent him from making the difficult decision to flee the village. He declares to himself: "I won't turn back. I will be a goatherd. I will plough. Let my mother look for me. But if I cannot find that village, I'll die of hunger. I'll die, and that's the end of it" (9). He

possesses a rebellious spirit, with the idea of the town playing a significant role in determining his individual identity. The town represents more than just a physical place for Memed; it becomes a space of power and potential change in contrast with the rural villages dominated by feudal lords. When Memed and his friend, Mustafa, visit the town, they find it hard to believe that the town is not owned by any agha. Memed's journey to the town marks a new beginning in his life. While, in Dikenli, Memed has known only rigid social hierarchies, the town offers him a different set of social interactions. This contrast emphasises the restricted and oppressive nature of rural life under feudalism. Memed's interactions with Corporal Hasan highlight his growing awareness of the broader social and political structures that sustain the feudal order:

Memed felt as if in an alien world. Sleep wouldn't come to him. His thoughts preoccupied him, flooding his head. He considered the greatness of the world. Deyirmenoluk village was just a spot in his mind's eye, Abdi Agha just an ant. It was probably the first time he had ever thought things out in a broader perspective. He thought with passion and yearning, yearning for vengeance. He had grown in his own eyes and began to consider himself a man. Turning from side to side in his bed, he murmured: "Abdi Agha is only human, so are we..." (65)

His journey to the town, his encounters with its inhabitants, and his experiences with the legal system all contribute to his transformation from a simple peasant to a conscious rebel. However, the town is not depicted as entirely positive or as a pure alternative to the villages. The officials in the town are often shown as corrupt or complicit in the oppression of the villagers. The legal system, rather than serving justice, is manipulated by the rich powerful class to maintain their control. This complicates the idea of the town as a

place of refuge or change. It also takes into consideration that the problems of the rural areas are deeply entrenched in the broader social structures, including those based in the town. Unlike many of his peers who have resigned themselves to their fate, Memed harbours a deep sense of defiance against the power structures that oppress him. The characters Husuk and Lame Ali, for example, reflect the complex nature of power relations between feudal lords and tenants. Although they oppose Abdi Agha's oppression and despise him, they are fearful and submissive when it comes to asserting their voice. Husuk is a well-wisher of Memed and is determined to prevent any harm from coming to him. Yet, when Abdi Agha enquires about the whereabouts of Memed after his first escape, Husuk behaves submissively:

When they brought him Husuk was wearing only his white underpants and a shirt. He was struggling between two men who held his arms tightly. "What do you want with me at this time of night? What's the trouble? God curse you for a lot of cuckolds!"

"I called for you, Husuk," said Abdi Agha.

Husuk contained his anger somewhat. "You shameless bastards, why didn't you tell the Agha wanted me? He then turned to towards Abdi. "Excuse me, Agha." (37)

This shows Husuk's helplessness in front of the Agha. But the way Memed comes to terms with the given circumstances is different. His understanding of his surroundings and his placement within them distinguish him from others. His early attempts to run away from the village and later, his decision to take up arms against Abdi Agha, reflect his growing sense of resistance and unwillingness to accept his identity as a miserable peasant. He finds it distressing when the Agha punishes him. He complains: "For two

years I've ploughed his fields. The thistles devour me. They bite me. Those thistles tear at your legs like a mad dog. That's the sort of field I ploughed. Everyday Abdi Agha beat me, beat me to death. He beat me again yesterday morning. Until I ached all over" (14). He fully understands his circumstances and devises a solution by escaping from Abdi's village. This rebellious nature becomes a core part of Memed's identity that distinguishes him as someone who is not content with mere survival but seeks to challenge and change his circumstances. Not only does Memed have ambitions for himself, but he also has dreams for other people:

Memed had heard, though he didn't know where, that Chukurova was fertile. This thought gave him pleasure and hope. Besides, there were no thistles in the soil of Chukurova. Once settled there and a family man, he would return one day to his village and tell them about the Chukurova. Then the whole village would follow him down to the Chukurova. Abdi would remain alone in the village. He did not know how to sow or reap and would die of hunger. (71)

The lack of collective, however, protest among the villagers against the feudal system is a significant aspect of the narrative. There are many villagers who do not even know that there could be other worlds with alternative modes of existence beyond their immediate surroundings. Those who possess the imagination and curiosity to surpass established boundaries often lack the courage to challenge the established power structure. When Osman asks Dursun – “How big is the earth?” – Dursun can reply that it is “huge” (24). However, this knowledge holds no practical significance in Dursun's life. When other people wish to accomplish the same thing but are unable to do so, Memed is brave enough to follow his own spirit. That's the reason why Ali feels happy when Memed leaves

the village:“He’s gone. Let him go. He’s done well. He’s gone to the city of glass, to that warm soft earth. He’s done well. Let him go if he wants” (26).

### **3.4.2 Community Life and Shared Responsibility**

In *Memed, My Hawk*, community life and shared responsibility are portrayed as both strengths and limitations for the villagers. Community life and shared responsibility play crucial roles in shaping the social dynamics of the villages. The novel portrays a tightly-knit rural community where people depend on each other for survival, yet are also constrained by the oppressive social structures. This duality of community life—marked by both solidarity and subjugation—reflects the complexities of living under a system that demands cooperation but limits collective agency. Community life in the novel is characterized by a strong sense of solidarity among the villagers. Despite the troubles imposed by the landlords like Abdi Agha, the peasants support each other in their daily struggles. The novel also depicts moments where the community comes together in response to crises. For instance, when someone is in danger or facing extreme misfortune, the villagers often rally together to provide support.

When Abdi Agha holds three quarters of Deuneh's portion and gives her only one quarter of the crops instead of giving her due, Durmush Ali supplies food for Deuneh. After that, several people come up to offer assistance to Deuneh. However, this shared responsibility is often limited by the fear of retribution from Abdi Agha, which curtails the villagers' ability to act collectively against the sources of their oppression: “After Ali, other villagers came and brought food to Deuneh. Abdi never knew of it” (49). This conflict between shared responsibility and the fear of the landlords is also evident in

the way Memed's heroism is perceived by the villagers of Deyirmenoluk. While Memed benefits from the support of his community, his journey of rebellion also puts him to the test by the boundaries of traditional communal roles. The villagers cheer up for Memed when they learn that Memed has killed Abdi Agha like this:

"No more begging like dogs."

"Our slim Memed!"

"No more selling the cows..."

"No tyranny!"

"Everyone can go where he wishes."

"Everyone can have guests in his own home."

"Everyone his own master!"

"Our slim Memed!"

"Abdi Agha roasted alive, and a great village destroyed!"

"Roasted, roasted!"

"The Chukurova is quaking with fear."

"Our Slim Memed!"

"He'll fetch Hache out of the prison and all five villages will celebrate their wedding!"

"Our Slim Memed!" (260)

When Memed divides Abdi Agha's land among the villagers, they admire his bravery and are grateful for his efforts to challenge the existing power structures that have long exploited them.

His actions generate hope and a sense of justice among the villagers, who have long suffered under the cruel rule of figures like Abdi Agha. But when the villagers discover that Abdi Agha is still alive, their reaction towards Memed shifts significantly. The villagers may distance themselves from Memed to avoid the inevitable retribution from Abdi Agha and his allies, prioritizing their safety over their earlier admiration for Memed's heroism. This is how they react:

“He’s come down from his mountain and thinks he’s become a man, that Memed!”

“That pauper Ibrahim’s son!”

“He’s become a man and is distributing our Abdi Agha’s fields!”

“Look at the size of him!”

“The idiot!”

“He’s become a brigand and burns villages.”

“He can’t even carry a gun...”

“He’s become a brigand and wants to hand out our Agha’s fields and oxen as if they were his own!”

“He used to fawn at our Agha’s door like a dog.”

“That pauper Ibrahim’s good for nothing son...”

“Strutting about arrogantly, the good for nothing!”

“And the poor girl rotting in prison because of him!”

“He’s burnt all the thistles so we can plough without hurting our legs!”

“Coming to this village and boasting that he’d killed Abdi Agha.”

“Our Agha can kill a hundred dogs like him with one shot!”

“Our Agha!” (264)

The villagers are gripped by fear because they know that Abdi Agha will seek revenge not only against Memed but also against those who have supported or been associated with him. They fear the wrath of Abdi Agha, who they believe will return with even greater cruelty. This duality reflects the complex dynamics within community life under oppressive rule of landowners. The villagers' reaction also shows how power dynamics affect community behavior.



### Check Your Progress

1. How does *Memed, My Hawk* explore the moral ambiguities of an outlaw? Does the novel suggest that violence is a justified response to oppression, or does it problematize this notion?
2. How does Kemal portray the tension between individual desires and collective responsibility in the novel? In what ways do the characters' personal struggles reflect broader questions about duty, sacrifice, and justice?
3. How does Kemal use the novel to critique the broader socio-political structures of the time? To what extent is *Memed, My Hawk* a political novel, and how does it address the dynamics of power-structure?
4. How does the depiction of rural life in *Memed, My Hawk* compare to other novels you've read that focus on rural settings? What unique insights does Kemal offer about the relationship between people and the land?

### 3.4.3 Heroism, Revenge Motif and Social Justice

In *Memed, My Hawk*, brigands, including the protagonist Memed himself, are portrayed as products of social oppression rather than mere criminals. The novel explores how systemic injustices and harsh living conditions turn individuals into outlaws not by choice but by necessity. The lack of legal and social means against the injustices they suffer pushes some individuals to become brigands, as they see no other way to fight back against their oppressors. Banditry, in this context, becomes a form of resistance, a way for the oppressed to reclaim some sense of agency and power. The novel suggests that the existence of brigands is a sign of a deeply flawed social structure. Brigands like Big Ahmet or Memed are

often viewed by the oppressed peasants not as criminals, but as folk heroes:

Big Ahmet was a legend in these mountains. Mothers would silence their squalling babes by warning them: “Big Ahmet’s coming!” But Big Ahmet was greatly loved at the same time. He had been able to foster the two feelings together among the mountain people. Otherwise he would never have been able, as an outlaw, to survive a single year in the mountains. Brigands live by love and fear. When they inspire only love, it is a weakness. When they inspire only fear, they are hated and have no supporters. (56)

The novel presents brigands as products of social oppression, driven to a life of banditry by the injustices they face in a deeply unequal society. The novel portrays brigandage as a form of resistance against a corrupt and oppressive system, while also exploring the moral complexities. Memed's mother desires the death of Abdi Agha and prays, “May the hand of his killer be bright. He will straight go to Heaven. Abdi’s father was not like this. He used to look after his farmers” (49). Memed’s transformation into a legendary brigand is celebrated by the villagers, who see him as a symbol of resistance and hope. However, the novel also questions the nature of heroism by illustrating the individual sacrifices that are associated with it. Through Memed's character, Kemal explores themes of identity, justice, and the complexities of heroism. Memed's identity as a hero is complex, as it involves both triumph and tragedy. Moreover, he is filled with both rage and vulnerability when he gives serious consideration to the question of whether it is ethically correct to take Abdi Agha's life:

Overwhelmed by the hatred he felt, he thought of what it meant to kill a man, to finish him, to destroy him utterly. He realized suddenly that this was wholly in his power. The scene of the shots fired in the forest rose again before his eyes. He saw Veli dying, kicking and struggling in the earth and mud. That was not killing a man; as he had fired he had not realised he was taking a man's life and this had made it all seem easy and possible. Now he was bent on killing a man in cold blood, on destroying something that felt love and anger and other emotions. Memed was suddenly obsessed with the idea that he had no right to do this. (184-5)

Although he chooses the path of a brigand, Memed's compassionate nature is central to his character, and it is what sets him apart from other brigands in the story. When he leaves his mother alone in the village of Deyirmenoluk, he expresses his concerns for her: "Little mother, my little mother, who is reaping your wheat now? Infidel Abdi Agha! Our wheat will dry up and wither. Who is reaping the wheat, little mother, now that I am not there?" (31). Because Memed adheres to a code of ethics even as a rebel, he opposes Durdu's methods, which he sees as lacking moral justification, and leaves the group to pursue his own form of justice. The manner in which Mad Durdu robs these innocent individuals and then sends them home naked is something that he cannot stand:

Seeing the wayfarer's pitiful state, Memed felt even bitter... Memed's face was dark with anger and his hands were trembling. However many bullets may be there in his rifles, he wanted to fire them all into Durdu's head. Only with greatest difficulty could he restrain himself from shooting. (110)

Throughout the novel, various other brigands are mentioned who act out of greed, cruelty, or self-interest. These characters are used to illustrate the darker side of brigandage, where violence is used to oppress rather than liberate. When brigands like Mad Durdu, Kalayji Osman, Black Ibrahim, and Black Mustan represent the dangers of exercising power and violence without a moral inclination, the actions of the brigands like Slim Memed, Big Ahmed, Sergeant Rajep, and Jabbar turn them into folk heroes. The novel also portrays the harsh realities of brigand life, emphasizing the severe physical, emotional, and social challenges faced by those who choose this path. Memed undergoes significant physical changes during his time as a brigand hero. His appearance reflects “no trace of weariness in him, only health, dignity and agility in his gait, his speech, his every movement” (243) and he also “gained some weight. There was colour in his cheeks. His black moustache was longer. His expression had become harder, as if he were ready at any moment to meet an attack” (279). There are pressures of uncertainty within the group of brigands. They live in constant fear of being betrayed by their own people. Suleyman knows the brigands' ways and asks Memed to always be cautious and ready to face an attack at any time: “If they find your weak spot they will never leave you in peace to the end of your days, and nobody will respect you” (98). Furthermore, the mad ways of Durdu are justified by showing how it inevitably leads to rebellion as a response to injustices:

He's a mad dog and won't last long on the mountain. Sooner or later he'll get shot. Brigands like Durdu never last more than a year at most... But in some ways Mad Durdu isn't so bad. He's been treated badly. One day he was invited back to his own village and they gave him food and drink and they

betrayed him to the police. He escaped only by the skin of his teeth and has been in a rage ever since. (97)

Memed is forced to accept the brutal ways of life in the mountains as powerful people like Ali Safa Bey, Sergeant Asim, and Captain Faruk start pursuing him together. He spends much of his time hiding in the rugged mountains, where he faces extreme weather, hunger, and exhaustion. At times he experiences moments of isolation – “Memed suddenly felt indescribably lonely. Everything around him seemed to disappear” (104). When initially “Iraz and Hathe were pleased that Memed had become a brigand” (172), but later Hathe curses the brigand life as she has to live in constant fear: “Ah, this brigand's life, these mountains, this fear! I'm afraid, Iraz, I can't help it. My heart is all tight and tense” (324). Moreover, the revenge motif of a brigand brings about changes in his life blurring the lines between right and wrong. Sergeant Rajep is one such brigand who cannot be put in an either/or frame of reference. While he helps Memed fight against oppression, he also commits acts of violence that conflict with his sense of right and wrong. Unlike Memed, he takes delight in the fact that they accidentally set fire to the entire village of Aktozlu. Memed cannot find the reason behind this and wonders about what kind of person Sergeant Rajep is: “...How please he was with the burning of this village, wasn't he, Jabbar? If the whole of the Chukurova had been burned to ashes, he would have been even more pleased. But he was naturally kind. Perhaps he had met with a lot of trouble in the Chukurova. Who knows?” (226). While the novel takes the violence and lawlessness involved in brigandage into consideration, it also emphasizes how circumstances beyond their control drive the outlaws to such extremes. This complexity reflects that brigandage is not a black-and-white issue but one deeply rooted in the social conditions of the time which turn the brigands like Memed into a folk hero.

### 3.4.4 Folk Culture and Village Life

In *Memed, My Hawk* by Yaşar Kemal, village life is depicted with detail, focusing on both the beauty and the severity of rural Anatolian life. The novel provides a portrayal of the everyday realities, struggles, and social dynamics of village life in early 20th-century Turkey. “Yaşar Kemal starts his masterpiece *Memed, My Hawk* with a sharp description of the rural landscape of Anatolia. He romantically describes the landscape through the Taurus Mountains rising from the Mediterranean coast... Yet, when the story continues, he dramatically portrays a picture of the Turkish village and villagers still grappling with poverty and social underdevelopment after more than 30 years of republican rule” (Sezer 177). The cultural traditions of Anatolian villages, including oral storytelling, songs, and rituals, are integral to the discourse of village life in the novel. These traditions serve as a means of preserving the villagers' history, values, and collective memory. The stockings, for example, that Iraz and Hache “knitted” while in prison “became famous in the town” – “The stockings of the girl who killed her fiancé and of the woman whose boy was killed”. Iraz’s misfortune of being imprisoned for attempting to take revenge against her son’s murderer turns into a song that is widely valued by the villagers.

Memed's heroism and tragedy too eventually becomes a topic of folk culture and popular myth as he embodies the traits of a traditional folk hero—bravery, loyalty, and a sense of social justice. Memed’s heroic deeds are recorded by the villagers in the form of folk songs – “In one day perhaps ten songs were composed about Hache’s rescue from the guards” (311). Both Iraz and Hache, though different in their circumstances and actions, contribute to the folk culture in ways that reflect the relationship between suffering and creativity in the face of oppression: “The saddest of designs

went into the stockings. Hatçe and Iraz did not copy any known designs, but created pattern after pattern of their own, in colors more bitter than poison. The town had never seen such striking and beautiful stockings” (168). She knits stockings and handkerchiefs for Memed “which are an expression of love” (52). Hatçe turn her love and longing for Memed into embroidery. By capturing scenes from their life together—moments of joy or pain of separation—she creates a mode of storytelling through knitting that captures the essence of their relationship. And these “embroidered stockings were like a folk song, knitted with all the fantasy of a song. The matching and mingling of different colours, yellow and red, blue and orange, all produced warmth and softness, a work of love and compassion” (52). Hatçe not only draws on traditional cultural symbols in her embroidery, but reinterpret them in a way that reflects her passionate love for Memed. According to Barry Tharaud, “Kemal also suggests part of the psychology of folk art when he shows us how love stimulates imagination” (566).

Oral narratives, in the novel, also play a significant role in shaping the villagers' understanding of their world and their place in it. The legends and tales passed down through generations provide a sense of continuity of cultural identity, which connects the villagers to their past and asserts their cultural heritage. In oral tradition, stories often grow with each telling, and Memed’s story is no exception. His actions are exaggerated by the villagers, making him appear almost superhuman – one such exaggerated tale about him is that "bullets don't touch Slim Memed" (320). As Memed embarks on his journey of rebellion, stories about his life as a brigand hero begin to spread among the villagers which contribute to the creation of the legend of Memed. They help to build the legend of Memed, influence the actions of both the oppressed and the oppressors, and thus blur the line between myth and reality. As stories about his

bravery circulate, they take on a life of their own, with each retelling enhancing his reputation. These narratives about Memed, which are passed from mouth to mouth, also have a significant psychological impact on the Agha and the authorities. Sergeant Asim feels “deeply humiliated” when he finds Memed’s name is everyone’s lips: “Memed's just a slip of a boy, but he can twist this big sergeant round his little finger” (328). Abdi Agha’s fear of Memed undermines his confidence and weakens his control making him leave his own village and take refuge in the town. Through this, the novel demonstrates how stories and perceptions can have a profound impact on the course of events and alter the power-structure in a community. The novel explores how rumours, a crucial aspect of village life, can amplify a person's actions and transform them into legends:

He's a giant of a man. He took a huge line log in his hand and went from house to house, setting each on fire. He rushed through the village like a whirlwind. If the fire of one of the houses subsided, he would dart forward and set alight it again. You should have seen this Memed! His eyes flashed in the darkness of the night. One moment he was tall as a poplar, then small again. Bullets can't harm him. We kept firing at him, but it was all of no avail. (251)

Through storytelling, song, proverbs, and oral traditions, the people preserve their history, express their collective emotions, and resist the forces of oppression. Kemal’s depiction of this culture underscores its significance as a means of cultural survival.



### Self Asking Question

What does the novel suggest about the nature of justice? Do you agree with Memed's methods of seeking justice, or do you find them problematic? Give reasons for your answer.

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### 3.4.5 Gender Identity

The portrayal of women's characters in the novel is a subject to scrutiny. It shows a society where traditional gender roles are strictly maintained. Men are seen as the primary decision-makers and protectors of the family, while women are expected to be obedient and manage the household. The novel represents a society where women are identified with certain stereotypical roles and behaviour. Reflecting on the condition of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Turkish women, Janet Browning wrote: "There are many aspects of daily life in Turkey which further illustrate the inferior status and subordination of women in public life in Turkey: places of public entertainment or relaxation are frequently the sole preserve of men, such as coffee houses and drinking places, some cinemas, parks, tea gardens and pastry shops." (Browning 110). The social values which are depicted in the novel display the patriarchal nature of feudal society, where men like Abdi Agha hold power and control over women and the land. This portrayal reflects the larger patriarchal context of the setting and the time in which the novel was written. In the Chukurova villages, it's common for men to make derogatory remarks about women, making them appear to be brainless creatures. Durmush Ali, who is portrayed as a kind and good-

hearted man, advises Lame Ali to disregard Huru's words because, in his opinion, they are meaningless: "Don't take offence, Ali. Women don't improve with age." (204). Abdi Agha perceives women as weak and powerless. He often compares those men who are fearful and naive with women. When the villagers fail to find out Memed's instructions, he shouts on them: "We'll go and look for them... You can stay here and warm yourselves. What a crowd of weak-hearted women!" (92). Characters like Hathe, who is subjected to a forced marriage, are shown mainly in terms of their suffering and victimization. This focus on women as victims can be seen in terms of their subordinate position in the society because it emphasizes their powerlessness and reinforces the notion that women are inherently weak or in need of rescue by male characters, like Memed. The narrative is dominated by male characters like Memed, Abdi Agha, and other male characters, while the women's perspectives and voices are often marginalized or under-represented.

The character of Hathe's mother, however, problematizes the either/or perception of a woman. She is portrayed as a strong and hard-working woman, but her personality, in comparison to her husband, is shown to be *distressing*. This is how she is described in the novel: "Hathe was the daughter of Osman, a mild man, quiet, never interfering. But her mother was a real termagant. Whatever quarrel or disturbance there might be in the village, she was always at the heart of it. A tall, strong woman, she attended to all the business of the house and even ploughed the fields" (69). Although they are perceived in a negative light by the villagers, both the characters of Huru and Hathe's mother challenge the passive and submissive image of a woman. The novel, along with the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system, also draws on instances of female resistance.

Characters like Hache, Iraz, Deuneh etc. display courage and determination in the face of male dominance. Hache's refusal to accept her forced marriage and her decision to run away with Memed, even at considerable personal risk, is a powerful act of resistance against the patriarchal system that seeks to control her life. Similarly, Iraz supports her son's rebellion, subtly resisting the oppressive forces that dictate their lives. Iraz perceives her breasts not as a sexual object but rather as a symbol of connection between a mother and her child. She claims that the "breasts from which my Riza sucked his milk cry out for vengeance" (323). These acts of resistance highlight the strength of women in the face of patriarchal oppression. The novel, however, is more preoccupied with the struggles of individuals of all kinds against oppression and poverty. Shouleh Vatanabadi, in her review of Kemal's work, discusses how the author focuses on the overall human condition rather than specifically on women. She rightly observes: "The women and those who are dispossessed in the village are at the center of Kemal's attention, but he shows all the villagers, regardless of sex or economic position, are victims" (Vatanabadi 29).

### Self Asking Questions

If you are asked to rewrite a scene from *Memed, My Hawk* from a feminist perspective, how will it change the narrative? What new insights or emotions might that bring to the story? (Give your answer in 200 words)

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### 3.5 Narrative Technique

The novel uses the techniques of social realism in depicting the lives and struggles of ordinary people, particularly those from the working class or marginalized communities. The novel is narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, which allows the narrator to provide insights into the thoughts and feelings of its characters. It uses realistic mode of representation, without romanticization or idealization, to highlight social injustices and inequalities. The narrative technique that the novel uses, however, is a complex one as it occasionally employs flashbacks and shifts in time to provide backstory and context for the characters and events.

According to Barry Tharaud, Kemal “portrays a historical background that includes the material foundations of the oppressive political economy of the "late capitalism" of present-day Turkey. Kemal's oppressed individuals - including the elderly, children, and women, who are often among the victims of capitalist societies, are center stage, and their plight reflects back on the historical origins of their condition as well as forward to contemporary Turkey” (Tharaud 568). Kemal promoted his Marxist ideologies in his early writings. Suzan Fraser writes on the author’s Marxist philosophy as evident in *Memed, My Hawk*: “Reflecting the author’s leftist views, the book’s young peasant-turned-brigand hero takes stand against injustices suffered by villagers at the hands of powerful lords.” The novel can be viewed as a Marxist novel as it portrays the struggle between the oppressed and their oppressors, and critiques the existing social order. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* defines the goal of a Marxist writer like this: “A writer fully committed to Marxism would feel compelled to transform the modes of production so that his or her work would show the transformation of social relationships. The ideal Marxist work would present not just a powerful story but a workable solution to

socio-economic ill” (Guerin 329). *Memed, My Hawk* can be interpreted from the perspective of Marxist ideology as it examines the questions associated with Marxist ideas about class struggle, alienation, and the potential for revolutionary change.

*Memed, My Hawk* can be regarded as a folk epic due to its incorporation of elements characteristic of folk epics. Memed possesses the qualities of a folk hero, with his courage, determination, and commitment to justice. The narrative spans several years and involves a wide range of characters and events, giving it a grand, sweeping scope. This epic scale allows Kemal to explore the social, political, and economic conditions of the time in great detail, making the novel not just a personal story of Memed but also a broader commentary on rural Anatolian society. The novel draws heavily from Turkish folklore and oral traditions, incorporating stories, legends, and cultural practices. The story unfolds in a rural landscape, evoking a sense of timelessness and connection to the land. Memed's story takes on a legendary quality, with his exploits and struggles becoming part of the collective memory of the community. “In structure and narrative style,” Saliha Paker wrote, “*Memed My Hawk* (1961), his first and most popular novel dealing with the heroic exploits of a young outlaw in arms against the oppression of a feudal landlord, draws directly from the native folk epic” (Paker 981). By incorporating these elements, *Memed, My Hawk* becomes a modern folk epic, blending traditional storytelling mode with a contemporary narrative style to create a powerful and enduring tale of resistance, freedom, and human spirit.

### Self Asking Questions

What effect does the specific narrative technique have on your understanding of the characters and events? Do you feel more connected to the characters because of this narrative style, or more distanced? (Give your answer in 200 words)

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### 3.6 Summing Up

In this section, I have made an effort to examine some of the significant thematic aspects of the novel. For your convenience, the unit has been broken up into a few different parts, each of which emphasises on a different aspect of the novel. Literary works, however, contain the possibilities to generate diverse interpretations. The purpose of this discussion is only to familiarise you with the various ways in which the novel can be interpreted. You are suggested to make use of a variety of analytical frameworks on order to obtain a more critical understanding of the novel.

### 3.7 References and Suggested Readings

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### 3.8 Model Questions

- How does *Memed, My Hawk* represent contemporary Turkey?
- Comment on the interplay between personal and political histories in the novel.

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## UNIT-4

### ISMAIL KADARE : *THE FILE ON H* (INTRODUCTION)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 4.1 Objectives

#### 4.2 Introduction

#### 4.3 Biographical sketch

#### 4.4 Kadare's Literary works

#### 4.5 Placing the text

#### 4.6 Summing up

#### 4.7 References/ Suggested Reading

#### 4.8 Model Questions

#### 4.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to introduce the readers about the life and works of the eminent Albanian writer in English, i.e. Ismail Kadare. Kadare's distinguished role as a prominent poet, novelist, short story writer, screen playwright, his life and literary contributions shall be examined to have a better grasp on his work. This section will enable you to understand the life and works of Kadare and a background of the text and approach the prescribed text from a renewed perspective.

In line with this objective in mind, this unit is framed to

- *familiarize* yourself with the biography of Ismail Kadare.
- *define* the plethora of works by Ismail Kadare.
- *illustrate* the significance of Kadare's work in the context of world literature
- *evaluate* the novel from a critical perspective.



## 4.2 Introduction

Born in 1936 in Albania, Ismail Kadare is a renowned novelist, poet and playwright. His works provide an insight into Albanian history, culture and politics which helped him gain international acclaim. Despite being viewed as a dissident during Albania's communist era, his life has been a series of changes occasionally interrupted by stability. His works while addressing the issues pertaining to Albanian history and culture, also explores themes of oppression and psychology through original and distinctive voice. His delicate handling of unique subjects of Albanian decent and ability to transform the same to the global readers reflect his mastery of both Albanian and world literature. Because of his acute literary prowess, his works have been likened by literary maestros like Gogol, Kafka, Orwell and Garcia Marquez.

Kadare is well received as a prominent author in the contemporary world. His delineation with unique themes has helped him attain literary merit in various genres like poetry and prose. He is known for his diverse literary ventures, encompassing subjective realism, folk tale allegory, dystopia, satire and legend. His works delve into Albanian history, folk beliefs, communism, the Ottoman Empire and totalitarianism. Kadare's novels, plays, screenplays, poetry and essays have been acclaimed globally integrating Albanian literature into the broader literary landscape. Several critics have expressed their admiration for Kadare's style which highlights his unique voice deeply rooted in Albanian soil yet universally resonant.

### SAQ

How does Kadare transport Albanian history to global readers through his works? (70 words)

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Ismail Kadare's writing style is characterised by allegorical depth and a unique blend of grand tragedy and the grotesque. His works address issues which serve as a symbolic criticism of the system. His literary prowess is conspicuously evident in his ability to create a microcosmic scene of Albanian history in his works. Because of his delineation with themes such as totalitarianism, myth and historical identity, readers draw a resemblance of his works with Orwell and Kafka. He intricately weaves these themes into his narrative which shows his deep understanding of Albanian culture and history.

**SAQ**

Comment on the relevance of Ismail Kadare's works in world literature? (40 words)

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Ismail Kadare wrote during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His writing spans a wide range of themes, often reflecting on Albanian history, politics and society. His works often explore the complexities of power, identity and human condition. He gained international recognition for his novels which have been translated into many languages.

Kadare's delineation with political '-isms' such as communism, dictatorship and national identity is noteworthy in his works. His writings explore socialist realism, myth making and the impact of totalitarian power on society. Kadare's literary approach involves a critical examination of political power structures, authoritarianism and the relationship between writers and tyranny as seen in many of

his novels. Additionally, his works address the question of construction of Albanian national identity through the lens of ‘other’ reflecting on nationalism and the complexities of identity formation.

Because of his bold proclamation on political agendas, most of his works were also banned. However, this did not debar him from exploring the varied politics in his works. Though he reflects to be a political writer, his works serve to be a critique of existing political regime.

Kadare uses the Albanian language in his works. He values the Albanian language deep heartedly for its richness and adaptability. The language which he employs has some resemblance to classical Greek. He finds his native language to be a means of expression with modalities similar to ancient Greek. Through his works he highlights the unique qualities of Albanian verbs and their dual meanings which issues of reminiscence of ancient Greek. His choice of language testifies his resonance with classical languages. His writings have enhanced Albanian literature to an extent that his success has passed the way for other Albanian writers to have their works recognised globally which has indeed contributed to the visibility and appreciation of Albanian literature on a broader scale.

**Stop to Consider:**

Kadare’s narratives often bridge the gap between the local and the universal, reflecting the distinct Albanian spirit within the broader context of human experience. Kadare effectively captures the essence of Albanian oral traditions, folklore, and the nation's tumultuous history, thereby offering readers a vivid portrayal of Albanian culture and societal issues through the lens of a globally accessible language.

**SAQ**

Elaborate on the writing style adopted by Kadare in his works. (60 words)

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### **4.3 Biographical sketch**

#### **4.3.1 Life of Ismail Kadare**

This section shall provide an informative analysis on the biographical reflection of the author Ismail Kadare. The life of Kadare shall help you to contextualize his novels and extract a better understanding of the same. The personal history will aid to provide a subjective study of his novels. In the process of unfolding the biographical details the politics of the region also gets investigated. His life has been a myriad exposition of experiences that lends a plethora of ways to analyse his works.

Ismail Kadare (1936-) was born in the town of Gjirokaster, situated in the southern part of Albania. Though not much of his biographical information is accessible for the reading public, he is recognised as one of the renowned Albanian writers who have earned international repute because of his works. The popularity of his works can be measured in terms of his works being translated across the globe in many languages. His childhood was spent amidst grand and exotic ambience abundant with mountains, tall stone house which dates back to the historic Ottoman Empire. The grandeur of his native place kindled an aesthetic inspiration in him. The writer in him evolved amidst the exquisite view of his hometown. Kadare was raised by his Muslim parents, but his religious affiliations proved him to be atheist. He was the only son

of Halit Kadare, his father and Hatixhe Dobi, his mother. His father served as a civil servant while his mother was a homemaker.

Though he was untouched by the political affiliations during his childhood, writing was a hobby which he inculcated while he was in his tender days. His literary afflictions can be testified from the fact that he published his collection of short stories while he was only 12 years. As he grew old, he continued publishing several poetry collections. He received several scholarships which aided him in his studies. This facilitated him to pursue his studies from Moscow where he was inexposed to the plethora of world literature in 1960. During his childhood, his native place witnessed several changes in the political domain with shifting power from one hand to another.

Albania was then invaded by Italian rule, followed by the Communist group of Albania- People's Socialist Republic of Albania.

Kadare pursued his primary and secondary education in Gjirokaster. For his further studies, he shifted to the University of Tirana where he studied Languages and Literature at the Faculty of History and Philology.

#### **Stop to Consider**

Kadare's characters are a unique blend of realism and the surreal as they are often perceived to be struggling with the ambiguity between waking and dreaming. The line between reality and fantasy is frequently blurred in his stories. Furthermore, his characters are often moulded by the complex relationship between the personal and the political. This interplay between the personal and the political is a defining feature of Kadare's character development.

Kadare's liking towards teaching and passion for knowing new things enabled him to attain a teacher's diploma in the year 1956. At

the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow he was introduced to the avenues of World Literature. He published several short stories however his ultimate fame was received only after the publication of his first novel, *The General of The Dead Army*. This was the beginning of a new history in making as after this his series of fictions testified his interest in versatile topics. His active involvement in the political scenario gained him ample experience to delve into political themes in his writings.

Kadare also served as a Member of Albanian parliament during Communist rule from 1970 to 1982. However, his political works invited enough controversies leading to facing censorship of his works. Despite several conjectures surrounding his works there were many admirers of his political satires. His success can be deduced from the fact that he even won the inaugural Man Booker International Prize in the year 2005. There are several other accolades engraved in his name. His engaging works convinced many to believe in his potential of even winning the Nobel Prize in Literature someday. The popularity of his works can be seen from the fact that his works have been published in about thirty languages.

#### **Stop to Consider**

Kadare's mastery and popularity can be realised from the fact that he has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature 15 times. Though his works might serve to be artistic masterpieces, his political satires are extremely pinching. It is because of his bold and fearless proclamation of political reality of his region he is often regarded as a prominent critic of totalitarianism.

#### **Kadare's Political Preferences**

Kadare's political interest can be witnessed in his involvement in political affairs of his country. He held the position of Deputy head of the Democratic Front under Nexhmije Hoxha who was the wife of the dictator Enver Hoxha. Kadare's political ideology stood in stark contrast to the Stalinist regime. Though Kadare had a limited political career, his writings were highly influenced by the political climate in Albania during the communist regime of Enver Hoxha. Kadare was a member of the Albanian parliament from 1970 to 1982. However, he was exposed to severe controversy and censorship in Albania due to his critical views of Stalinist dogma. In mid 1980s, as the political situation worsened, Kadare defected to France to escape the communist regime and its secret agents.

Despite his limited direct political involvement, Kadare's literary works often explored themes of Albanian history, politics and the impact of totalitarianism. Most of his works depicted the absurdity and cruelty of totalitarian power. His works are framed like allegory to circumvent censorship and convey his critical views. After the fall of communism in Albania, Kadare was approached by both major political parties to become a consensual President, but he declined. Instead, he continued to focus on his literary career which has earned him numerous international accolades and recognition as one of the greatest writers and intellectuals of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **4.3.2 Awards, Accolades and Recognition**

Ismail Kadare is one of the most acclaimed and awarded writers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Some of his major awards and accolades include:

- **Man Booker International Prize (2005):** Kadare was the inaugural winner of the Man Booker International Prize in 2005, which recognizes a writer's overall contribution to fiction on the world stage. The judges praised his "full catalogue of work" including novels like *The General of the Dead Army* and *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost*.
- **Prix mondial Cino Del Duca (1992):** Kadare received this prestigious international literary award in 1992.
- **Herder Prize (1998):** He was awarded the Herder Prize in 1998, which honors outstanding achievements in the humanities.
- **Prince of Asturias Award of Arts (2009):** The Princess of Asturias Foundation bestowed this award on Kadare in 2009, praising "the genius of Albanian literature" and his narration of Albania's history and traditions.
- **Jerusalem Prize (2015):** Kadare was awarded the Jerusalem Prize in 2015, which is given to writers whose work expresses the idea of the freedom of the individual in society.

### **Other Honors**

- Kadare was elected as a lifetime member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences of France in 1996.
- He was also made a Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur by France in 2016.
- He was awarded the Park Kyong-ni Prize in 2019 and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2020.



### **Stop to Consider**

Ismail Kadare gained international recognition as a writer in the early 1970s. His novel *The General of the Dead Army*, originally published in 1963 in Albanian and later translated into French in 1970, played a significant role in bringing his work to an international audience. The novel's success marked the beginning of Kadare's prominence on the global literary stage.

#### **4.4 Kadare's Literary works**

This section offers insights into Kadare's literary works, which have gained acclaim beyond regional borders. By examining his works closely, readers will discover the recurring themes he explores and understand why many of his works were banned. It will also highlight Kadare's role as a significant figure in world literature, demonstrating how he transcends geographical boundaries. Through this analysis, readers will appreciate his impact and relevance on a global scale.

Ismail Kadare had a distinguished literary career spanning several phases. He began writing at a young age in the communist children's magazine *Pionieri* at the age 12. He then published his first poetry collection *Frymezime djaloshare* (Boyish inspirations) in 1954 and *Enderrimet* (Dreams) in 1957. At the age of 17, he won a poetry contest which allowed him to study literature at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow from 1958-1960. There, he was exposed to both socialist realism and Western literature, though he rejected the dogmatism of socialist realism. There he read works by Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Ernest Hemmingway in addition to studying the European literary tradition.

Kadare's first novel *Qyteti pa reklama (The City Without Signs)*, was published in 1959, marking his transition to prose fiction. His breakthrough work was the novel *The General of the Dead Army* in 1963 which brought him international fame. Over the following decades, Kadare continued to write acclaimed novels, poetry and essays, establishing himself as a leading figure in world literature. His literary proficiency enabled him to be recipients of many prestigious awards. Despite living under strict censorship in communist Albania, Kadare developed literary strategies to evade censorship, using devices like parables, myth and allegory to convey his messages. While he was expected to become a "Soviet writer" and "engineer of human souls" during his Moscow studies, his exposure to Western modernism and rejection of dogmatism allowed him to develop a unique literary style blending Albanian themes with techniques from European tradition. This early experience shaped his lifelong project of situating Albanian literature within world literature.

#### **Recurrent themes of Kadare's novels at a glimpse**

Kadare's diverse body of work explores Albania's rich history, culture, and identity, while also engaging with broader themes of power, tradition, and the human condition.

Albanian history, politics, and folklore: Kadare's fiction often draws heavily on Albania's history, political landscape, and traditional folklore and customs. His novels frequently examine the tensions between Albania's past and present, and the impact of political forces on the country's culture.

Blood feud tradition: Many of Kadare's works, such as the novel *Broken April*, delve into the longstanding Albanian tradition of blood feuds and the code of honor that governs them. These themes

have a bearing on understanding the persistent nature of blood feud as a mode of life, and the relevance of its insights into contemporary feuding behavior.

**Ethnicity and identity:** Kadare's writings grapple with questions of Albanian ethnic identity, particularly in the context of the country's complex relationships with neighboring cultures and empires.

**Totalitarianism and dissent:** While Kadare has denied positioning himself as an outright dissident, his works, such as *The Palace of Dreams*, often contain veiled critiques of totalitarian power and the challenges of dissenting under authoritarian regimes. He had a literary toolkit that allowed him to scrutinize totalitarian power and the tensions that simmered beneath it.

**Myth and folklore:** Kadare incorporates Albanian myth and folklore into his works, using them as dynamic instruments for dealing with the dictatorship and the transitions that followed. Myth is essential to his novella *Agamemnon's Daughter*, where he recites the myth of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to explore contemporary themes.

A gist of his prominent works is listed below to familiarize the readers to Kadare's literary pursuits:

*The General of the Dead Army* (1963) –It is Kadare's best-known novel, which tells the story of an Italian general tasked with recovering the remains of fallen Italian soldiers in Albania after World War II. In the 1960s, an Italian general is sent to Albania to locate and collect the remains of Italian soldiers who died during World War II and return them to Italy for burial. Accompanied by a priest, the general struggles with the futility and meaninglessness of his task as they dig up the countless unmarked graves across the

Albanian countryside. As the general and priest interact with the local Albanians, they are confronted with the lingering bitterness and resentment towards the Italian invasion during the war. The novel examines the difficulty of reconciling the past and making amends for the atrocities of war. Kadare uses the general's mission as a metaphor to reflect on the lasting impact of conflict and the challenges of moving forward. The novel was initially criticized in Albania for avoiding the typical communist propaganda, but has since received widespread critical acclaim and has been adapted into several films. Kadare's debut work is considered one of his most important and influential novels.

*The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978) - A novel set in medieval Albania that chronicles the construction of a stone bridge and the societal changes it brings. *The Three-Arched Bridge* is a 1978 novel by Albanian author Ismail Kadare that explores the construction of an important bridge in Albania in the 14th century, just before the Ottoman invasion. Narrated by an Albanian Catholic monk, the story depicts the political and cultural tensions surrounding the bridge's construction. The bridge is seen as a symbol of progress and connection, but also faces resistance and sabotage from local ferry operators who fear losing their business. As the bridge is built, a mysterious "volunteer" is immured within it, which is interpreted as either a sacrifice or a punishment for sabotage. The novel uses the bridge as a metaphor to examine the complexities of cultural change, the struggle between tradition and modernization, and the looming threat of Ottoman conquest in the Balkans. Kadare's lyrical and allegorical style creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and foreboding as the bridge project becomes entangled in deception, superstition and violence.

*The Palace of Dreams* (1981) - A thought-provoking novel that explores a totalitarian state's secretive agency that analyzes the dreams of citizens. *The Palace of Dreams* is a 1981 novel by Albanian author Ismail Kadare that explores the concept of a totalitarian state controlling the subconscious of its citizens. The story follows Mark-Alem, a young man from a powerful aristocratic family, who is given a job at the mysterious Palace of Dreams. This vast bureaucratic institution is tasked with collecting, sorting, and interpreting the dreams of the empire's citizens, searching for "master dreams" that could reveal threats to the state. As Mark-Alem navigates the labyrinthine Palace, he becomes increasingly unsettled by the power wielded over the private thoughts and visions of the people. The novel uses the concept of dream interpretation as a metaphor for the state's intrusion into the innermost lives of its subjects. Kadare's lyrical and allegorical style creates an atmosphere of unease and paranoia, reflecting the realities of life under Albania's communist dictatorship at the time. *The Palace of Dreams* was banned in Albania upon its initial publication, cementing Kadare's reputation as a bold critic of totalitarianism through his imaginative and thought-provoking fiction.

*Broken April* (1978) - A tale set in the Albanian highlands that examines the harsh realities of a centuries-old code of honor and revenge. *Broken April* is a 1978 novel by acclaimed Albanian author Ismail Kadare that explores the centuries-old tradition of blood feuds in northern Albania in the 1930s. The story follows two intersecting narratives: a) Gjorg, a young man forced by his family to kill another man to avenge his brother's murder, must then wait to be killed himself by the opposing family. He has only 30 days of grace before his own death is sealed under the ancient Kanun code of honor killings. b) A writer named Bessian and his new wife travel through the Albanian highlands on their honeymoon. Their brief

encounter with Gjorg leaves a lasting impression, especially on Bessian's wife, as they witness the brutality and senselessness of the blood feud tradition. Kadare uses the story to examine how the past continues to haunt the present in Albania, with the Kanun's rigid code of revenge killings tearing families apart across generations. The novel contrasts the harsh realities of life in the remote mountain villages with the more modern perspective of the visiting writer and his wife *Broken April* has been praised for its powerful storytelling and insight into a little-known aspect of Albanian culture. It established Kadare as one of the most important voices in 20th century Albanian literature and has been adapted into film. The novel's themes of tradition, honor and the cycle of violence continue to resonate.

*Doruntine* (1979) - A haunting story that blends Albanian folklore and history, centered on the mysterious return of a woman to her family home. *Doruntine* is a 1980 novel by acclaimed Albanian author Ismail Kadare that reimagines the traditional Albanian ballad "Kostandin and Doruntine". In a medieval Albanian town, two women - a mother and her daughter Doruntine - are on their deathbeds, having experienced a shocking event. Years earlier, Doruntine had married and moved away, but her brother Kostandin had promised their mother he would bring Doruntine back if she ever needed her. Soon after, Kostandin and his 11 other brothers all died in war. Yet one day, Doruntine suddenly appears at her family's home, claiming Kostandin had returned from the grave to bring her back on horseback. An investigator named Stres is tasked with uncovering the truth behind this mysterious resurrection. As the story spreads, it takes on mythic proportions, with people debating whether Kostandin truly rose from the dead to fulfill his promise, or if there is another explanation. Kadare weaves together elements of

Albanian folklore, religion, and the power of familial bonds to create a captivating and ambiguous tale.

*Spring Flowers, Spring Frost* (2000) - A novel that follows a bank worker and artist navigating the strange and often surreal world of post-communist Albania, *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost* is a 2000 novel by acclaimed Albanian author Ismail Kadare that explores the aftermath of communism in Albania in the 1990s. The story is set in a small town in northern Albania, where the harsh blood-feud traditions of the Kanun mountain code have reemerged after decades of suppression under communist rule. Against this backdrop, the novel follows the story of Mark Gurabardhi, an artist struggling to adapt to the new social and political realities. As mysterious events from the past resurface, Mark becomes entangled in the lingering tensions and violence that still grip the town. Kadare uses the setting to examine how ancient customs and superstitions collide with the modern world in post-communist Albania. The novel contrasts Mark's personal love story with the broader societal upheaval, creating a "Kafkaesque backdrop" of uncertainty and unease. With its rich storytelling and exploration of universal themes, *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost* is considered one of Kadare's masterpieces, showcasing his talent for blending local traditions with larger questions of culture, history and the human condition.

*The Successor* (2003) - A political thriller that examines the fate of one of the presumed successors to Albania's former dictator Enver Hoxha. *The Successor* is a 2003 novel by acclaimed Albanian author Ismail Kadare that fictionalized the mysterious death of Mehmet Shehu, the designated successor to Albania's communist dictator Enver Hoxha. The novel follows the aftermath of the Successor's death, which is officially ruled a suicide but is shrouded in uncertainty and speculation. Kadare explores the paranoia and arbitrary nature of power within Albania's totalitarian regime

through the perspectives of various characters, including the Successor's family, the architect who designed his home, and the potential next successor. The story examines how the all-encompassing control of the Party and the Guide (Hoxha) leaves no room for individual agency or truth. Even those closest to the Successor are unable to determine what really happened, as the rules and investigations are constantly shifting. Kadare uses the Successor's death as a metaphor for the instability and moral decay at the heart of the communist system. The novel creates a Kafkaesque atmosphere of unease and ambiguity, reflecting the lived realities of life under Albania's dictatorship. *The Successor* is considered one of Kadare's most powerful and insightful works on the nature of totalitarianism.

**SAQ**

Comment on the recurrent themes explored by Kadare in his novels. (50 words)

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How does Kadare juxtapose reality and fiction in his novels? (60 words)

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### Check Your Progress

1. How does Kadare treat the inbuilt politics of Albanian history in his novels?
2. How Kadare negotiate the question of power and politics in his novels?
3. How does Kadare explore the themes of history, politics, and culture of Albania in his novels?
4. What have you found unique in Kadare's works?

Kadare's other works of considerable merit includes:

- *The Monster (1965)*
- *The Wedding (1968)*
- *The Castle (1980)*
- *Chronicle in Stone (1971)*
- *The Great Winter (1973)*
- *The Dark Year (1980)*
- *The Wedding Procession (1980)*
- *The Twilight of the Gods of the Steppe (1981)*
- *A Moonlit Night (1985)*
- *Concert at the End of Winter (1988)*
- *The Pyramid Arcade (1992)*
- *The Shadow (1994)*

His volumes of poetry comprises of:

- *Shekullu im (My Century, 1961)*, which contains the poems "Childhood" and "And when my memory"
- *Vjersha dhe poema ze zgjedhura (Selected poems and poems, 1966)*, which includes the poem "Poetry"

#### 4.5 Placing the text

In this section, the novel *The File on H* will be introduced to you. It will also help you to approach the text from a critical purview. Among all the other texts described above, *The File on H* is the one text which is often anthologised as one of the most well received works by Kadare. It was praised by critics for its innovative way of storytelling and inventive way of providing insights into Albanian history and culture. The Kirkus Reviews described it as a “part political parable, part comic roundelay” that gently skewers both scholarly tunnel vision and nationalist paranoia while subtly rendering the enduring power of ancient stories. In the novel Kadare’s take on two American academics pursuing a theory about Homeric epics and the suspicious locals who think they are spies is well conveyed in an impartial manner. The critics of the novel appreciated how Kadare used the premise of American researchers studying Albanian oral epics as a vehicle to explore themes of cultural identity, political suspicion, and the mysteries of ancient stories in an engaging and thought-provoking way.

#### Stop to Consider

The novel *The File on H* was widely received by critics, who appreciated its unique blend of political satire, historical narrative and cultural commentary. Critics praised Kadare’s sharp satire of the Albanian Communist regime.

The novel, first published in 1981, is set in Albania and revolves around two Irish-American scholar who travel to the country to study its epic poetry traditions, only to become entangled in the political machinations of the Communist regime. Ismail Kadare's novel *The File on H*. presents a rich portrait of themes and historical

context, rooted in the intellectual pursuits of the 1930s while reflecting the political realities of mid-20th century Albania. This fictionalized narrative draws inspiration from the groundbreaking research conducted by scholars Milman Parry and Albert Lord, who explored the origins of Homeric epics through the lens of oral tradition. Kadare's story revolves around two Irish-American academics from Harvard University, who embark on a journey to a remote village in northern Albania. Their mission is to delve into the oral epic poetry traditions of the Albanian highlanders, convinced that these traditions might illuminate the enigmatic origins of Homer's works. The scholars arrive with cutting-edge technology in the form of a state-of-the-art tape recorder, a symbol of modernity and progress in their academic endeavour. However, their presence is misinterpreted by the local authorities, who suspect them of being spies. This misunderstanding sets off a series of comedic yet tense events, as the officials conduct an exhaustive investigation into the scholars' true intentions. This premise not only underscores the absurdity of totalitarian suspicion but also serves as a critique of the climate of fear that pervaded Albania under the oppressive regime of Enver Hoxha, particularly during the years following World War II.

Kadare intricately weaves elements of Albanian history into the narrative, creating a backdrop that reflects the ethnic and cultural tensions in the region. The interwar period serves as a critical setting, marked by animosities between Albanians and Serbs. This historical context is crucial for understanding the psychological landscape that the characters inhabit, where loyalty, betrayal, and national identity are constantly negotiated. The stakes are high, not only for the protagonists but also for the villagers, caught in the crossfire of broader geopolitical struggles.

Originally published as a short story in 1980, Kadare's work underwent a transformation into a full novel by 1981, titled *Dosja H. (The File on H.)*. While the initial release did not face censorship from Albanian authorities, it quickly garnered attention for its subtle critique of totalitarianism. Readers began to draw parallels between the book's themes and the realities of Hoxha's regime, leading to its eventual condemnation and ban. Despite this suppression, the novel had already achieved significant popularity, with around 20,000 copies sold prior to its banning, highlighting the deep resonance it found with the public.

Critics have lauded *The File on H.* for its satirical and absurdist qualities. Kadare's writing often evokes the spirit of Gogol's comedic absurdity, blending humour with a profound critique of societal structures. This interplay between comedy and tragedy serves to engage the reader on multiple levels, provoking both laughter and contemplation. The absurdity of the scholars' plight, mistaken for spies while seeking to uncover the roots of epic poetry, echoes the bizarre realities faced by individuals living under authoritarian regimes, where even the most innocent pursuits can lead to dire consequences.

The novel's translation history further underscores its significance. The English version, translated from French by David Bellos in 1998, has made Kadare's work accessible to a broader audience. This translation plays a crucial role in bringing the complexities of Albanian culture and history to the forefront, allowing readers outside of Albania to engage with its rich narrative landscape. Kadare's ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers speaks to the universal relevance of his themes, particularly those surrounding freedom, identity, and the quest for understanding amidst repression.

While *The File on H.* does not provide direct answers to the Homeric question, it adeptly uses this inquiry as a springboard to explore deeper themes related to Albanian identity, history, and the political climate of the time. Kadare's approach is both playful and indirect, inviting readers to ponder the connections between oral tradition and literary heritage. In doing so, he encourages a broader reflection on the nature of storytelling itself and its role in shaping national identity.

In summary, Kadare's *The File on H.* is not merely a novel about two scholars on an academic quest; it is a deep exploration of identity, history, and the implications of totalitarianism. By situating the Homeric question within the specific context of Albania's tumultuous past, Kadare invites readers to engage with the complexities of culture and politics in a way that transcends time and place. The novel stands as a testament to the power of literature to critique, reflect, and ultimately illuminate the human condition amidst the shadows of history. Its critical acclaim and lasting impact highlight Kadare's importance as a literary figure, whose work continues to resonate with readers and scholars alike.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. How has the translation of the text facilitated the readers?
2. Have you noticed the subtle critique of totalitarianism by Kadare in *The File on H.*?
3. How has Kadare explored the question of identity, history and totalitarianism?
4. How does Kadare bring in an absurdist question in the text?

#### **4.6 Summing Up**

The Introductory section of the unit on the Background has thus acquainted you with Ismail Kadare. Kadare as a pioneering writer along with his recurring themes explored in his masterpieces has been illustrated at length in this section. The introduction to his regular preoccupations in his novels will help you to contextualize Kadare's works. Kadare as a political writer extends his revolutionary opinion through his characters to highlight the inherent politics of the Albanian society. Ismail Kadare navigates Albanian politics through a nuanced and allegorical approach in his literature. He often employs historical and mythological settings to critique contemporary political issues indirectly, thus avoiding direct confrontation with the authorities. His works reflect the oppressive nature of totalitarian regimes, the struggle for individual freedom, and the impact of political tyranny on society. By using allegory and symbolism, Kadare critiques the political landscape of Albania subtly, allowing for multiple interpretations while maintaining a degree of safety in a politically repressive environment. This method enables him to address sensitive political themes and question authority without overtly provoking censorship or retaliation.

The second section introduced you to the biographical details of Ismail Kadare. The events which had a lasting mark in his literary career has been explained to help you approach the text and undertake a Biographical study of his novels. It further introduced the significant works of Kadare with special emphasis on the recurrent themes widely explored in his works. Ismail Kadare is renowned for his adeptness at weaving together historical events, cultural traditions, and societal norms with fictional narratives, thereby imbuing his works with a profound sense of reality. Through his novels, Kadare masterfully draws from real-life

experiences and historical contexts, providing a rich and detailed depiction of Albanian society which has been examined in the section thoroughly. His exploration of universal themes such as power dynamics, human endurance, and the complexities of identity resonates deeply with readers across different cultural backgrounds. Central to Kadare's storytelling is his use of allegory and symbolism, which enriches his narratives with multiple layers of meaning. These literary devices allow him to delve into the complexities of human nature and societal structures, encouraging readers to contemplate broader truths beyond the immediate storyline. Moreover, Kadare's characters are intricately shaped by their historical and cultural environments, giving them a sense of authenticity that anchors his tales in a recognizable reality despite the fictional elements. Overall, Kadare's ability to blend historical accuracy with imaginative storytelling, coupled with his profound insights into human experience, underscores his status as a literary master whose works transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. His narratives serve not only as compelling stories but also as poignant reflections on the human condition and the enduring impact of history on contemporary life. The aforementioned issues have been closely stated to provide a clear picture of the text under study.

The concluding segment on *The File on H.* has provided an overview of its significance. Through this section, you gain the ability to evaluate the novel critically. As you delve into the text, you'll gain insights into Kadare's critique of Albanian society, where he intertwines political themes with social commentary. This section also touched upon various interpretations of the work, which will be further explored in upcoming units. While Kadare's other works hold merit, *The File on H.* stands out as his most widely read and analyzed piece.

Therefore, it is essential to read the text of novel to uncover the additional complexities it addresses. It is highly advisable to also consider Kadare's other works to deepen your overall understanding of his literary corpus. This approach will contribute to a more suitable appreciation of *The File on H.* as a seminal work by Ismail Kadare.

#### **4.7 References and Suggested Readings:**

1. Cox, John K. "The Albanian Experience of Communism in the Fiction of Ismail Kadare." *Wilson Center*, 25 February 2005, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/319-the-albanian-experience-communism-the-fiction-ismail-kadare>
2. Ke, Jing, "The four others in I. Kadare's works: a study of the Albanian national identity." (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 730.  
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/730>
3. Halla, Barbara. "'In Ismail Kadare's Shadow: Searching for More in Albanian Literature.'" *Asymptote Journal*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2018/08/15/in-ismail-kadares-shadow-searching-for-more-in-albanian-literature/>.

#### **1.8 Model Questions**

- Discuss the early events of Kadare's life that influenced his storytelling.
- In what ways did Kadare's works bridge traditional Albanian literature and modern literary influences?

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## UNIT 5

### ISMAIL KADARE : *THE FILE ON H* (READING THE NOVEL)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 5.1 Objectives

#### 5.2 Introduction

#### 5.3 What happens in *The File on H*?

#### 5.4 List of characters

#### 5.5 Summing up

#### 5.6 References and Suggested Readings

#### 5.7 Model Questions

#### 5.1 Objectives

The unit aims to introduce Ismail Kadare's novel, *The File on H*, by focusing on key themes and issues within the text. This approach will facilitate a detailed analysis of the plot and provide insights into the motivations and behaviors of the characters. Through examining the plot, readers will gain an understanding of the novel's contemporary themes and the skilful characterization that reveals its underlying motifs. The context of the novel will help you decipher the ingrained Albanian politics by throwing light on the perception of the people of Albania. Thus, through textual analysis, we aim to situate the novel within its historical and thematic context.

Aligned with this objective, the unit is meticulously crafted to

- *comprehend* the context in which the text is situated
- *read* the text of *The File on H*.
- *evaluate* the characters' roles and analyze their actions throughout the narrative

- *analyze* the novel from your viewpoint to develop a personal interpretation of the text

## 5.2 Introduction

Ismail Kadare is a novelist of colossal literary importance in world literature who is able to masterfully blend Albanian history and folklore with universal themes. In his peculiar way of narration, he can cross the most striking divisions between the local and the global into rich, complex telling, exuding from the pages, to resonate with the reader. Kadare frequently uses allegory and myth to critique political regimes and explore the human condition, crafting a compelling portrait that transcends time and place. His works vividly depict Albanian society and is characterized by an intricate interplay between the real and the surreal, the historical and the mythical. The characters created by Kadare are deeply rooted in their cultural and historical contexts; hence, they shed a lot of light on Albania's intricate socio-political fabric. His new techniques of narration challenge the traditional concept of storytelling, making readers affiliate themselves with the fluidity and multifacetedness that goes with reality.

In Kadare's works, characterizations are profound, subtle, and they reach down to the roots of culture, identity, and the human condition against a charged political background. Satire and absurdity through his works tinge with dark humour as it probes deep into the nature of stories and the persistence of ancient myths. Due to his strong literary reputation and achievements, Ismail Kadare has received substantial critical acclaim and prestigious awards. In 2005, as he won the inaugural Man Booker International Prize for his works, Jury member John Carey described him as “a universal writer in a tradition of storytelling that goes back to Homer”. (Carey) Such distinction came in the form of international awards—the Prince of

Asturias Prize for the Arts in 2009 and the Jerusalem Prize in 2015. Not only through his praiseworthy art of characterization is Kadare's rich nuanced exploration into the human psyche completed, but through complex character development and dynamics of family life mixed with symbolic representations, which give profound insight into the psychological toll from living under such regimes. As the famous critic Alison Flood puts it in his well-received essay for *The Guardian*, "In a double sense, Kadare can be called a universal writer," considering that universal themes coexist with his being deeply rooted in Albanian culture—thereby making the works of Kadare both significant locally and resonant globally. Many of his characters are symbolic representatives of universal psychological themes and the human experience under totalitarianism. Hence, his works are acclaimed to have been able to plumb the depths of "the infernal mechanism of totalitarian power and its effects on the human soul." Further, comparisons of Kadare's work to such writers as Franz Kafka, George Orwell, Gabriel García Márquez, and Milan Kundera have been drawn, sealing the fact that he is a "universal writer" whose works represent the timeless and universal condition of man across cultures. Thus, with that sort of reasoning, Kadare is described by some critics, like Alison Flood, as a "universal writer" because he succeeded in inventing narratives rooted in Albanian culture and equally significant for the universal audience by bearing timeless themes of relevance to the human condition.

As Julian Evans said in his article for The New York Times, "Kadare is capable of using 'Albanian themes to reflect on universal experiences'". He said that of all, this is the greatest ability of Ismail Kadare: using Albanian themes to get to the universal experience of the human being. This literary approach by Kadare doesn't remain within the local context alone; after all, he subtly deals with all intricacies within personal and political life under totalitarianism.

His novels are an attempt at making a discovery of the power game, personal identity, and the strength of society in relation to the historical and political background of Albania. Through his characters and narrations, Kadare enunciates the consequences of totalitarianism on human beings; he rejects the theme of 'oppression-resistance, human autonomy, human dignity'. It nuances the psychological and emotional dimensions with characters torn between regimes of an authoritarian nature, associating through an experience of empathy with universal struggles of readers. It is in this high regard that Evans holds for the works of Kadare that his art stretches beyond political criticism to the basic fundamentals of human existence and societal dynamics in extreme situations. He invites wider reflections on human nature and society through Albanian themes, thus urging readers to consider universal messages of his narratives as a means toward deeper understanding of history and humanity.

Much of *The File on H.* has taken its cue from real historical events, and a long history of academic debate about the roots of the Homeric epics serves as a vehicle in exploring themes related to cultural identity, political oppression, and the enduring power of ancient storytelling traditions. The novel is loosely based on the real-life research conducted by American scholars Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the 1930s who travelled to the Balkans, particularly Albania, to study the oral tradition of epic poetry and its connection to the Homeric epics. The sharp satire, absurdity of humour, and insight into Albanian culture and history seem to have paid off for the novel, even if a few reviewers had mixed opinion in their assessments. Kadare's reputation as a leading literary figure no doubt helped that work along. The Los Angeles Times included the novel in their list of the best fiction of 1998. Critic Richard Eder wrote that the book is "as satiric and absurd as something by the

early Evelyn Waugh or Lawrence Durrell." The critic's comments suggest that Kadare crafted the narrative with a similar sense of biting wit and surreal, farcical qualities that characterized the works of those literary giants. Just as Waugh and Durrell used absurdity to skewer societal pretensions and hypocrisies, Kadare seems to have applied a comparable satirical lens to his depiction of the bumbling Albanian authorities and their comically inept attempts to investigate foreign scholars.

Eder's comparison implies that *The File on H.* offered readers a similarly engaging blend of social commentary and outrageous, almost Kafkaesque humor. This assessment underscores how Kadare's novel was recognized by the prestigious Los Angeles Times as a standout work of fiction that year, praised for its ability to blend insightful cultural critique with an entertaining, absurdist sensibility. The inclusion of *The File on H.* on the LA Times' best of 1998 list, along with Eder's evocative review, helped to bring wider attention and acclaim to Kadare's work, solidifying his reputation as a master of allegorical storytelling and satirical social commentary.

Structurally, the novel *The File on H.* follows a linear chronological structure, telling the story of two Irish-American scholars who travel to Albania in the 1930s to study oral epic poetry. It employs a complex and layered narrative structure that enhances its exploration of historical and political themes. The novel is structured around the investigation into the life and activities of an unnamed protagonist, referred to only as H. This investigation unfolds through various documents, reports, and testimonies compiled in a file by an unidentified bureaucratic entity. The novel incorporates letters, reports, and official documents as primary narrative devices. These documents form the backbone of the story, providing fragmented insights into H.'s life and his poetic inspiration. It is narrated in the third-person omniscient point of

view, allowing the reader insight into the thoughts and motivations of various characters. Overall, the novel's structure combines elements of historical fiction, satire, and allegory to explore the themes of cultural identity, political oppression, and the enduring power of storytelling traditions. Kadare's use of absurdist humour and symbolic representation adds depth and complexity to the narrative.

### **5.3 What happens in *The File on H.*?**

It has been assumed that from the above discussion, you have drawn a certain understanding related to the text *The File on H.* The textual background supplemented so far has enabled you to place the text within a context. As a path-breaking work in the domain of world literature, this novel has been able to captivate the minds of readers across the globe with its excellent take on how academic pursuits get intertwined with the complex socio-political landscape of the time. The extensive discussion on the plot will primarily focus on placing the text within context and Kadare's brilliant narrative structure. This will help you unravel the intricacies of Albania's internal politics while uncovering traces of Homer's epic poetry in the region. In this regard, the learners are requested to refer to some of the histories pertaining to Albania, such as *The History of Albania: From Its Origins to the Present Day* by Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto. This comprehensive history book will provide an overview of Albania's complex past, including the country's experiences under Ottoman rule, the interwar period, and the communist regime - all of which are relevant to the setting and themes of *The File on H.* I also highly recommend reading the text before delving into the plot, as this will facilitate the development of a personal interpretation and enhance further discussion or analysis. Engaging with the text will provide a comprehensive understanding

of its depth and meaning, enabling you to approach the novel from various perspectives to form a well-rounded interpretation.

The novel comprises 13 chapters, with each chapter meticulously arranged to reflect on the larger subject matter.

*Chapter 1:* The first chapter of *The File on H.* by Ismail Kadare sets the stage for the novel's intricate exploration of cultural preservation, political paranoia, and the clash between tradition and modernity. It introduces readers to the central characters, Max Ross and Bill Norton, two Irish-American scholars who arrive in Albania in the 1930s to study the country's ancient tradition of epic poetry. This initial chapter is crucial as it establishes the novel's thematic foundation and provides a glimpse into the complex socio-political landscape of Albania. As the scholars arrive in the small town of N-- --, they are immediately struck by the stark contrast between their modern, Western perspective and the deeply traditional, insular world of rural Albania. The description of their journey and their first interactions with the locals are filled with a sense of cultural dissonance. The scholars come equipped with recording devices, eager to capture the oral tradition that has been passed down through generations. Their presence and their technological equipment immediately arouse suspicion among the townspeople and the local authorities. However, we get the perspective of the governor's wife, Daisy who seemed to be thrilled to welcome the foreign guests. She builds her imagination about the guests and is excited to witness them.

**SAQ**

Why are the two American-Irish scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, so interested in studying Albanian oral epic poetry and the Homeric question? What are they hoping to discover?

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*Chapter 2:* The second chapter introduces Dull Baxhaja, “The Eaves” who was a popular spy and was entrusted with the task of keeping vigilance on the newly arrived “two foreigners” by the governor. His perception of the two foreigners has been extended in the chapter. The items carried by the foreigners were speculated to be heavy items like stones, iron or a threat- “Those weren’t suitcases but the devil himself!” (Kadare 16). The manager of the Globe Hotel was flabbergasted to find the two foreigners speaking “something completely different”. The chapter is surrounded by suspicion, speculation and doubt by the locals about the foreigners. Mr. Rrok, the owner of the Venus soap factory, was more concerned as to why the foreigners chose their place which is not even a “historic site” or a “strategic town”. The postmaster asserted that probably the foreigners had an eye on their land. As the governor welcomed the guests to his place, the other members present became alert while Daisy became super excited. To her utter surprise, the two foreigners were different than what she expected but she wasn’t disappointed at all. The appearance of the guests has been discussed from Daisy’s point of view. After the introduction to the guests the intention of the visitors was revealed. From the meeting, the jury gathered information about the intention and whereabouts of the



visitors. However, the spy Dull Baxhaja continued with his job of tracking the whereabouts of the two foreigners.

### **Stop to Consider**

The tape recorder could be seen as a symbol of surveillance and control. In a society where information is tightly controlled, the ability to record and disseminate voices might be perceived as an intrusion by foreign powers or local authorities, prompting a defensive reaction.

*Chapter 3:* The chapter further testifies the ongoing vigilance of the spy. The behaviours of the two foreigners were constantly monitored by the local people. The record of the two foreigners were revealed to the governor through the notes of the two men which were confiscated by the government from the two visitors. Though the notes revealed the real intention of the two, it failed to convince the governor. Despite the reluctance to read the notes which according to him was similar to a novel, it failed to interest him. Though he failed to extract any evidence of them being spies, he convinced himself that they must really be spies. The idea of researching Homer is nothing but a means of camouflaging their hidden mission according to the governor.

Though he was more perplexed after reading the notes of the two foreigners, his wife Daisy eased him after his tiresome read.

*Chapter 4:* The enthusiastic crowds gathered to see the two Irishmen, each of them filled with their doubts and questions about the intention of the foreigners. The two foreigners unaware of the suspicious gaze of the onlookers felt delighted about the weather. Bill and Max had a trivial discussion about the weather, the ball and

Daisy's glance at Bill. Max teased Bill of making eyes with Daisy, the governor's wife. They were on their way to Buffalo Inn where they were welcomed by Shtjefen, the innkeeper. The innkeeper gave them ample information about the age-old instruments played in the region. One such instrument was the "*lahuta* the long-necked instrument with one string". (Kadare 51) Meanwhile, the personal investigation of the governor with the help of the spy Dull Baxhaja is still going on. He inspected the files and documents and was curious about the trunks which the Irishmen carried. Dull and the governor were surprised to witness the innovative instrument-the tape recorder. They also discovered the maps and speculated that those maps were the blueprint of their secret mission. The chapter also hints at the hindrance on the part of the local investigators who could barely speak English. The governor extensively relied on the reports of his informers.

*Chapter 5:* The Chapter shifts to the apartment of Max and Bill who seemed to be relaxing. The innkeeper facilitated with many information about the rhapsodes in the region. He even said that he was unsure whether the *lahuta* players would be willing to play in front of the tape recorder. The innkeeper assured to make all the arrangements for the smooth functioning of the visitor's research. The innkeeper was more like a "living encyclopaedia of bard lore". The visitors encountered the highlanders from the epic zone, the very subject of their research. They were surprised to see the costumes of those highlanders who were earlier found in epic poetry. Through their files, the readers get an insight into the long history of Albania where the Albanians and the Slavs had been in ceaseless conflict over many issues. They were trying to prove that the material from which Albanian epic poetry is made is Homeric in

origin. The scholars sorted out their notes and cards for their further research.

*Chapter 6:* The innkeeper, Shtjefen arranged for the first rhapsode in the Buffalo Inn for the research of the scholars. The rhapsodes refused to take any payment for the night. The scholars brought the tape recorder to record the performance for the sake of their research. Shtjefen arranged a soothing ambience with tall oil lamps used only for special occasions. The rhapsodes were surprised to see the tape recorder. Bill was happy to realise that the sound of the *lahuta* would not be lost in the air but would be preserved for eternity in the recorder. The two scholars were mesmerised by the performance of the rhapsodes as it was “unnatural, cold, unwavering, full of anguish that seemed to come from another world.” (Kadare 68) After the performance, as Max played the recorder the rhapsodes were surprised to witness the innovative system. With their minds full of doubts and apprehensions, they proceeded to the next ballad. After the end of their performance the highlanders, *lahuta* players shot some questions to Max and Bill. They were worried as to whether the song would rust in the recorder if kept for a long time to which they answered gleefully. The chapter is filled with notes where Max writes about initiating their work on Homeric enigma. The meaning of the songs of the rhapsodes heard last night was described at length in the notes. They tried to draw a resemblance between the songs and Homeric poems. Furthermore, Shtjefen arranged for several other rhapsodes, some of them who even sang without *lahuta*.

*Chapter 7:* The first rhapsodes who played in the first returned. As promised earlier, he sang again. Bill and Max started recording and

comparing the sound with their earlier transcript. To their surprise both the transcripts were identical except for an omission of two lines. As they were researching that the omission might be due to forgetting, the visitors received an invitation to a ball from the governor and his wife. Though they were apprehensive, they accepted the invitation with the view that they would meet some singers for their research. They were received at the governor's mansion but they failed to connect with the surroundings at the ball. Both were mostly preoccupied with the thoughts of their research and the rhapsodes at the Buffalo Inn. Both started imagining the elite fashion that they were witnessing at the ball, was it prevalent also during Homer's time? Daisy, being a good host tried her best to comfort the guest. However, the two visitors seemed to be carried away by the thought of their research. When they returned, the governor's other guests found them antisocial or uncivilised. Bill was mesmerised by the solitary light blinking in the distance, while Max dozed off.

*Chapter 8:* The note of the visitors reflects on how they were curious and serious about their research work on Homer's epic poetry. They reflected on the key role of memory and forgetting by the rhapsodes. The omission and addition of lines are a sort of regular occurrences in their songs which was evident from the recorder. The journal recorded by the visitors testifies to their minute observation of the rhapsodes, their way of singing and the importance of eye-ear coordination. The difficulty in singing the epic ballads was acknowledged by the innkeeper. The Homeric scholars believed that rhapsodes are mostly poor-sighted. They also addressed issues such as what happens when the song is transmitted from one era to another. Based on their research conducted they were even convinced to believe that the Albanians must have been

the originators of oral epic. They even researched on the process of “Homerization” i.e. the process through which a real-life event is turned into an epic material. They further talked about the significance of figures of speech and the models of forms of language in preserving epic poetry. They even acknowledged the fluid nature of language which is subject to change with time.

*Chapter 9:* As Bill and Max were involved with their research, they were driven by the thoughts of their respective lives. Rumours were circulating about the tape recorder. Once while Max was rewinding the recorder, the screech sound made some guests in the inn complain that a murder was going on upstairs. Thenceforth Max kept the volume of the recorder low. The guest believed that the sound of the tape recorder was the voice of the demons. Some even accused Shtjefen of letting the devil reside in his hotel. One day Bill and Max received an envelope where newspapers from their hometown were being sent. They received a mixed reaction from the newspaper articles about them. Some were appreciative while others were critical in their approach. One Saturday, the scholars had visitor who was dressed like a monk. He was someone who used to collect epic poems and was willing to share his opinion and experience. The foreigners were glad to meet him. He honoured the two researchers for conducting their research on the Albanian epic and Albanian people. He greeted them both and went his way while Bob and Max returned to their room.

*Chapter 10:* Their research on the essence and integrity of epic tradition gets enhanced the more they get involved. They even imagined themselves in Homer’s position and wondered how Homer created magic without files, cards, notes, tape recorders or

even eyesight. While discussing Homer's blindness, it was brought to light that Bill's eyesight was also steadily getting worse. They discussed the nature of creating, composing and preserving epic poetry. The importance of space, time, action and characters in epic poetry is asserted in the discussion in this chapter. The epic weather was always wintry and soothing. Initially, they assumed that epic poetry from six thousand feet above sea level would be set in a snowy landscape. However, a detailed study of the ballads revealed that the typical climate of Albanian epic poetry matched an even higher altitude, around twelve to fifteen thousand feet above sea level, placing the action in a realm between the earth and the heavens. From their research, they have withdrawn that the Albanian epics aligned with those of the ancient Greeks. The role of the tape recorder in deciphering the Homeric enigma is noteworthy. The spy Dull Baxhaja sent his latest report to the governor. He had reported every detail and interaction of the foreigners with people. The report mentioned the advent of the monk Dushan who was seen galivanting in the Buffalo Inn. Dull followed the monk and the hermit Frok and reported their perspectives of the visitors. Both of them considered the visitors snakes, who were carrying a satanic device. He reiterated that with the device the foreigners would mow down their songs and joy in life. With this note, the monk concluded and so did Dull's report to the governor.

*Chapter 11:* The chapter opens with Daisy waking up beside her husband which leads her to assume that it is a Sunday. She woke up by the thought of the foreigners. The governor gets a call from an English-speaking minister who enquires about the two Irishmen. The news makes Daisy apprehensive about the action of the governor. She was concerned about the foreigners and became quite protective about them and she daydreamed of saving them from the

spies of her husband. The English-speaking informer comes and stays at the Globe Hotel. Spy was a profession that was quite an open secret in the town of N. A leak in the investigation to protect the foreign scholars occurred, which was possibly due to Dull dozing off during his surveillance of the men. Post this event, Dull issued his resignation to the governor. There were speculations about the reasons that triggered him to resign, conjectures state that the advent of the new English spy must have been a probable reason. But vaguely it was revealed that he had witnessed a lady who went to help the foreigners at the Buffalo Inn. Probably this triggered him to resign from the post of spy to the governor.

*Chapter 12:* Bill's eyesight was gradually improving. They planned to trek the mountains before spring faded to find the dwellings of the eleven rhapsodes. New developments mark the plot of the chapter: a new English informer was seen meeting the governor's wife secretly. Something seems to be brewing between them, as she sent him a letter stating, "I wish to meet you on an important matter. I beseech you, please ensure that this remains strictly confidential" (Kadare 121). Her attempt to meet the two Irishmen had failed the previous day, so she sought another way to convey her message. The new English informer visited her, but their conversation turned flirtatious, and she couldn't communicate much. Just as she was about to go to sleep with her husband, the new English informer banged on the door. Daisy was scared and filled with apprehension about what was to follow. The informer brought news that the Irishmen had been assaulted at the inn and that the governor needed to attend to them immediately. The report summarized the event of the attack on the foreigners: bandits had attacked many travellers in the inn, destroying the scholars' equipment, particularly the tape recorder. The police apprehended Frok, who was in his cave.

Although the bandits were caught, the damage was irreversible. The tape recorder, which preserved evidence of Homeric epic poetry, was shattered, and a journalist condemned the loss as "catastrophic."

**Stop to consider**

The bandits represent a society steeped in suspicion and mistrust of outsiders. The tape recorder, a symbol of modern technology and foreign influence, is perceived as a threat to their traditional way of life. This reflects the broader theme of resistance to change and the fear of the unknown. Kadare often uses allegory to comment on political and social issues. The bandits' attack on the visitors can be interpreted as a metaphor for the broader geopolitical tensions and conflicts, particularly those involving the Balkans, where traditional societies grapple with the pressures of modernization and foreign influence.

*Chapter 13:* After the horrendous incident, the Irishmen were under the surveillance of the government at the Globe Hotel. They packed their luggage as they were about to leave the place. They left the reels of the broken tape recorder behind as those were fully damaged. Both were shrouded in gloom at the loss of their hard work. Just as the research was to be placed systematically, the devastation took place. They could witness the glow in the rhapsodes but could not retain it for long. The people of the town started talking about the irrelevance of outdated research about the connection of Homer with the town. Bill gradually began losing his sight. All their hard work was trashed into the ashes of oblivion. Perhaps it was Homer's revenge, a revenge on who tries to decipher the Bard's mystery. Meanwhile, the gynaecologist informed about Daisy's pregnancy and the air of secrecy prevails. The father of the



child was not the governor but perhaps one of the scholars. On the other hand, Max found out in the newspaper that the trail of the bandits was to begin soon. The article also stated the chauvinist outlook of the Slavs who brutally attacked scholars even before someone chose to work on Albania's classical roots. Such scholars are considered by them to be enemies who have intruded to corrupt their heritage. The newspaper has produced an epic poem on the two Irishmen to their utter surprise. The lines of the poem begin as "A black *aprath* rose from the waves....' The word *Aprath* stood for the tape recorder in Albania. The mysterious nature of the tape recorder is reinforced in the poem. Bill is amused by the lines of the poem though he couldn't read it due to his fading eyesight. Max found Bill enchanting the lines to be absurd and seemed worried about Bill but for them, death too does not seem to hold any significance anymore."

**Stop to Consider**

The novel explores the clash between modernity and tradition. The attack can be seen as a manifestation of this clash, where the bandits, embodying traditional values, react violently to what they perceive as an encroachment by modern technology and Western influence, represented by the visitors and their tape recorder.

**SAQ**

What message or commentary does the ending convey about the preservation of culture and history?

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#### **5.4 List of Major Characters:**

**Max Ross:** One of the Irishmen from America who landed in the town of N. along with his fellow researcher to study the traces of Homeric epic tradition. He came from Harvard to conduct his study on epic poetry and its influence of Homeric tradition. He was married back home and was mostly preoccupied with his research and making notes about their study in Albania. Often, he turns out to be Bill's confidant who motivates him and supports him during any confusion. He seemed to be more serious about his research work. He mostly studies the reels of the tape recorder. His behavioural pattern showcases him to be methodical, cautious, and deeply analytical. His cautious nature often puts him at odds with his more passionate colleague, Bill, but also provides a counterbalance to Bill's impulsiveness. Throughout the novel, Roth's character evolves as he confronts the political realities and cultural complexities of Albania. He becomes more attuned to the nuances of the local context and more aware of the dangers they face. After vesting all their toil in the research, the tragic end devastated him along with his colleague. However, they gathered courage and did not lose hope.

**Bill Norton:** Bill was a fellow researcher from Harvard who accompanied Max in the research. His demeanour captivated the governor's wife, and he found himself psychologically influenced by her. Like Max, he was also passionate about his research and meticulously maintained a record of their progress in the research. It is observed that at times he became impulsive, and deeply invested in deciphering the cultural significance of their work. Bill's character brings a sense of urgency and emotional depth to their mission. His passion for oral traditions and his willingness to take risks contrast with Max's cautious approach, creating a dynamic interplay between the two scholars. Bill's character is marked by his

growing frustration with political interference and increasing commitment to preserving epic poetry. His character reflects the emotional and personal stakes of their research. He was shattered by the climax when the bandits assaulted him and ruined the reels of the tape recorders. The incident had a lasting impact on his health as he gradually began to lose sight.

**The Governor:** The duty-bound government official who followed every order religiously. He, along with the other bureaucrats was suspicious about the arrival of the two foreigners. He sent a secret mission to discover the actual intention of the visitors. For the safety and security of the state of N., he even appointed spies to track the progress of the foreigners. He was mostly preoccupied with his professional duties and, hence, could barely give time to his wife, Daisy. He appointed spies who tracked every action of the foreigners. As a matter of courtesy, he arranged for a welcome party, a ball to welcome the visitors. He also made arrangements for their stay at the Globe Hotel, but the scholars preferred to stay at the Buffalo inn. Most of the actions in the novel are conveyed through notes and reports he collected from his reliable sources. Towards the end, when the assaulters attacked the visitors, he rushed to get a pulse of the incident. However, he wasn't much involved in the protection of the visitors compared to his wife.

**SAQ**

Why are the Albanian officials so suspicious of Max and Bill when they arrive in the country? What do they think the scholars are really after?

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**Daisy:** She is the governor's passionate wife, deeply intrigued by the news of the foreigners' arrival and eagerly anticipating their welcome. Her unfulfilled desire for pregnancy subtly reveals itself through her subconscious expressions. Meeting Bill sparks fantasies in her mind. She insisted on hosting a welcoming party for the foreigners, despite often being surrounded by elite political bureaucrats whose views sometimes contradicted her desires. She even went beyond legal bounds to protect the foreigners from spying eyes. In her efforts, she secretly attempted to meet Bill, which unfortunately failed. She also covertly invited the new English-speaking informant to aid the foreigners, but this plan also fell through. Eventually, her wishes are fulfilled as she becomes pregnant, though the identity of the father remains uncertain.

**Dull Buxhaja:** A spy appointed by the governor to monitor the activities of the two Irish-American scholars, Max Roth and Willy Norton, as they research the oral tradition of epic poetry in Albania. He was a diligent spy who faithfully carried out his duties, submitting detailed reports that influenced the governor's decisions. Dull Baxhaja serves as an informant for Albanian authorities, characterized as conscientious and meticulous in his surveillance of the scholars. His reports provide comprehensive insights into their movements and interactions. In the novel, Dull Baxhaja symbolizes the pervasive paranoia and surveillance under the totalitarian regime, illustrating the government's oppressive tactics and the widespread fear among citizens. His resignation comes after a sense of guilt when he dozed off during duty or maybe because he discovers Daisy's secret visits to Bill but cannot disclose this to his superior, the governor.

### **Minor Characters**

**Shtjefen:** The proprietor of the Buffalo Inn, he provided crucial resources for the visitors' research. He successfully arranged for the

rhapsodes to perform in front of the tape recorder, enabling the scholars to gather extensive information on the local epic tradition. He ensured a conducive environment for their study and often acted as a mediator between the scholars and the rhapsodes.

**The English-speaking informer:** The new spy, appointed after Dull Baxhaja's resignation, appeared more aggressive and cunning than his predecessor. His interactions with Daisy hinted at his flirtatious nature, evident in their secretive conversations. While he promptly submitted his reports to the governor, they lacked the meticulous detail characteristic of Dull Baxhaja's reports.

**The Monk Dushan:** they were the traditionalists who were apprehensive about the arrival of the scholars. They believed that such scholars would corrupt their indigenous songs, traditions and cultures. He considered the foreigners to be laughable and the tape recorder they carried to be satanic device.

**The Hermit Frok:** He carried the same opinion as Dushan. He lived in the cave and the news of the two scholars' arrival devastated him. He was scared that such scholars would ruin their epic songs and destroy their rich heritage. He went to the extent of attacking the scholars and destroying their tape recorders. He was later arrested by the police and cursed by his own people.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What is the primary objective of the Irish-American scholars Max Ross and Bill Norton in Albania?
2. How do the local authorities in Albania react to the presence of the two scholars?
3. What challenges do Max Roth and Willy Norton face while conducting their research?

4. How do the bandits and local villagers perceive the scholars and their tape recorder?
5. What is the significance of the *lahuta* in the context of the scholars' research?

### 5.5 Summing Up

This unit aims to provide you with an in-depth understanding of the plot and storyline of the novel while familiarizing you with the characters' actions. The goal is to enhance your comprehension of the key events that have shaped each character's identity. A chapter-by-chapter analysis of the text will uncover new dimensions of the narrative and encourage the exploration of fresh perspectives. By examining the intricate layers of the text, you will gain insights into the novel that may not have been apparent before. The diverse cast of characters allows you to experience the world and its events through their distinct viewpoints. As a result, this unit will help you develop a thematic understanding and grasp various techniques used throughout the novel. This comprehensive approach will not only enrich your reading experience but also deepen your appreciation for the complexity of the characters and the overall narrative. By the end of this unit, you should feel equipped to engage critically with the text and articulate your insights regarding its themes and stylistic elements.

### 5.6 References and Suggested Readings

Kadare, Ismail. *The File on H*. Translated by David Bellos, Arcane Publishing, 2013.

Moser, Andreas. "The Happy Hermit". *The File on H*. by Ismail Kadare. 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017. <https://andreasmoser.blog/2017/02/04/the-file-on-h-by-ismail-kadare/>

Weitzman, Erica. "Ismail Kadare's *The File on H.* and the Comedy of Epic." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 111, no. 3, 2016, pp. 818–839. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.111.3.0818>

### 5.7 Model Questions

- What is the significance of the novel's title with reference to its central themes?
- In what ways does the novel's structure reflect the complexities of historical documentation and interpretation?

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## UNIT-6

### ISMAIL KADARE: *THE FILE ON H* (THEMES AND TECHNIQUES)

#### Unit Structure:

#### 6.1 Objectives

#### 6.2 Introduction

#### 6.3 Major Themes

#### 6.4 Narrative Techniques

##### 6.4.1 Point of View and Narration

##### 6.4.2 Narrative Structure

##### 6.4.3 Critical Reception of the Novel

##### 6.4.4 Characterization

#### 6.5 Summing Up

#### 6.6 References/ Suggested Reading

#### 6.7 Model Questions

#### 6.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to-

- *To investigate* the prominent themes in the novel,
- *To assess* the narrative structure employed in the novel,
- *To analyse* the art of characterization prevalent in the novel,
- *To interpret* the other relevant issues addressed in the novel.

#### 6.2 Introduction

Based on the previous unit's analysis of the plot and character portrayal, it is assumed that you have grasped the plot development and characterization in Kadare's novel *The File on H*. The previous unit will now help you to extract the themes and techniques



employed in the novel as a result of reading and re-reading the text. So far you have identified the characters and their behavioural patterns. Situating the text within the realms of national security and cultural preservation, a subversive interpretation of the characters' intentions will provide a fresh and innovative reading approach. The political factors surrounding the novel might be veiled in the first reading of the novel. However, deeper political insights will be evident once an in-depth analysis of the text is undertaken. Issues pertaining to the conflict between tradition and modernity hold special significance as the theme persists in the reaction of the insiders towards the outsiders. The factor of surveillance and paranoia is also another subject of inquiry in the novel. The pervasive government surveillance and resulting paranoia reflect the oppressive political climate in Albania. The reaction of the locals to the foreign scholars underscores themes of isolation and fear of the unknown or the outsider. The multiple perspectives, the framed narrative, and the interwoven plotlines elucidate the innovative narrative style adopted by the author. The complex nature of the plot is evident from several chronological disruptions intervening in the progress of the plot. The use of epistolary form further provides a unique perspective from subjective ends. The realism of the narrative can be deduced from the multiple viewpoints which are constantly at work.

The next section will outline the key themes derived from a critical analysis of the text. Following the discussion of themes, the narrative techniques will be examined in detail to highlight the novel's innovative elements.

### **6.3 Major Themes:**

**Surveillance and National Security:** In Ismail Kadare's novel *The File on H.*, the theme of surveillance and national security is

prominently explored. From the outset, the arrival of the two scholars triggers a sense of national threat among the government officials. They become highly suspicious and take extensive measures to protect their national security from the perceived intrusion of the foreigners. Characters are under constant watch, and detailed reports on their activities are meticulously documented. The Albanian authorities immediately suspect the American-Irish scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, upon their arrival to study Albanian oral epic poetry. The officials assume the scholars might be spies due to their detailed maps, language skills, and the use of a new "contraption" - the tape recorder. To ensure national security, the governor assigns a loyal spy, Dull Baxhaja, to closely monitor Ross and Norton's movements and activities. Dull conducts extensive surveillance, including searching their luggage, making photocopies of their journal entries, and setting up a hidden hideout in the attic above their hotel room to eavesdrop. The government's appointment of spies to monitor the foreigners underscores the perceived threat to national security. The scholars' every move is under vigilance, and the collected notes, documents, and files serve as testimonies of this extensive surveillance. This constant monitoring of the scholars reflects the broader theme of an oppressive regime using surveillance to maintain control and ensure national security. The information gathered about the foreigners is crucial for the authorities to safeguard their nation and protect their people. Kadare's portrayal of this surveillance state highlights the paranoia and control exerted by the government, illustrating the impact of such measures on both the watchers and the watched.

**Cultural Identity and Nationalism:** The theme of cultural identity and nationalism is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative of *The File on H.*. Set against the backdrop of Albania under a totalitarian regime, the novel explores how cultural heritage and

national identity are perceived, protected, and manipulated. The local villagers in the novel fiercely guard their traditions and oral epic poetry, viewing them as integral to their identity and heritage. When the American-Irish scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, arrive to study and record these traditions with their tape recorder, they are met with suspicion and hostility. The villagers fear that the scholars' documentation could distort or undermine their cultural legacy. This fear underscores the villagers' deep attachment to their traditions as a means of preserving their collective identity in the face of external influences. On the other hand, the Albanian authorities, represented by the governor and his officials, also exhibit a strong sense of nationalism. They see the scholars' activities not only through the lens of cultural preservation but also as potential threats to national security. The government's surveillance of Ross and Norton, through spies like Dull Baxhaja, reflects their determination to control and protect Albania's cultural and political integrity. A sense of nationalism is built among the authorities of Albania as soon as the foreigners visit their land. They unite against the foreigners and collectively stand to resist them.

**Personal and Political:** The interplay of personal and political dynamics is intricately depicted in the novel. The narrative underscores how individual motivations and relationships are deeply entangled with broader political forces. Central to this theme are Max Ross and Bill Norton, the Irish scholars from America, who venture into Albania to study oral epic poetry. Initially driven by scholarly curiosity, their academic pursuits quickly become entwined in political suspicion. The Albanian authorities, viewing them through a lens of espionage and cultural threat, scrutinize their every move. This transformation highlights how personal endeavours can swiftly acquire political dimensions under oppressive regimes. Daisy, the governor's wife, further complicates

the theme by engaging in a personal relationship with Bill. Her romantic entanglement is not merely personal but also scrutinized as a potential political manoeuvre by state spies like Dull Baxhaja. This portrayal underscores how personal intimacies can be politicized and exploited within a surveillance state. The villagers' reactions to Max and Bill also illustrate the theme's depth. Their hostility towards the scholars stems from a fear of cultural erosion and national identity compromise. This reflects a broader sentiment of protecting their cultural heritage amidst perceived external threats, intertwining personal attachment with nationalist sentiments. Throughout the novel, Kadare navigates these intricate dynamics to explore how personal choices intersect with political imperatives and ideological pressures. The characters' struggles underline the pervasive influence of politics on individual lives, where personal freedoms are overshadowed by state surveillance and control. The novel prompts readers to contemplate the blurred boundaries between personal aspirations and political realities in totalitarian contexts. It challenges us to reflect on how power dynamics shape personal decisions and relationships, illustrating the complex interplay between individual agency and state authority in oppressive environments.

**Nature of Art and Storytelling:** Central to this theme is the scholars' quest to study Albanian oral epic poetry, which serves as a repository of cultural heritage. Max Ross and Bill Norton, the American-Irish scholars, arrive in Albania with the intention of recording and analyzing these oral traditions using a tape recorder. Their endeavour highlights the transformative power of storytelling and art in preserving and transmitting cultural memory across generations. However, the scholars' project is not merely academic; it becomes entangled in political intrigue. The Albanian authorities view their activities suspiciously, interpreting their documentation

of oral epics as a potential threat to national security. This tension underscores how art and storytelling can inadvertently provoke political responses, reflecting Kadare's exploration of the dual nature of cultural expression as both a unifying force and a potential source of conflict. The novel also delves into the manipulation of art and storytelling for political ends. Characters like Dull Baxhaja, the spy tasked with monitoring the scholars, exemplify how narratives can be controlled and shaped to serve political agendas. Dull's surveillance and scrutiny of the scholars' activities highlight the oppressive regime's efforts to suppress narratives that challenge its authority or disrupt nationalistic narratives. Moreover, Kadare critiques the commodification of art and storytelling through the character of the governor's wife, Daisy. Her fascination with the scholars and her romantic interest in Bill illustrates how personal desires and political motives can intersect, further complicating the interpretation and preservation of cultural narratives. Throughout the novel, Kadare prompts readers to reflect on the power dynamics inherent in the creation, dissemination, and reception of art and storytelling. He portrays how these narratives can simultaneously uphold cultural identity and heritage while also being subject to manipulation and censorship in authoritarian contexts. It challenges readers to consider the transformative potential of narratives and their complex role in shaping individual and collective understanding of history and culture.

**Homer and epic poetry tradition:** The theme of Homer and the epic poetry tradition serves as a central motif, intertwining myth, history, and national identity within the narrative. The novel revolves around the arrival of two scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, whose mission is deeply inspired by the legacy of Homer, the ancient Greek poet whose epic poems, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are foundational texts in Western literature. Through their

study, Max and Bill seek to uncover parallels between Albanian oral epics and Homer's works, exploring connections that suggest a shared cultural heritage spanning centuries and civilizations. Kadare uses the figure of Homer symbolically, representing not only the poetic tradition but also the enduring power of storytelling and mythmaking. The scholars' fascination with Homer reflects a broader quest to understand the origins and significance of oral epics in Albanian culture, which are portrayed as repositories of historical memory and cultural identity. However, the scholars' academic pursuits become entangled in political intrigue as Albanian authorities view their activities with suspicion, fearing foreign influence and espionage. This juxtaposition highlights the tension between preserving cultural heritage and guarding national security, illustrating how interpretations of epic poetry can be politicized in contexts of authoritarian rule. The novel also explores the transformative impact of storytelling through the interactions between the scholars and local rhapsodes. These oral poets, who perform epic narratives passed down through generations, embody the living tradition of epic poetry. Their performances not only entertain but also educate and inspire, preserving collective memories and cultural values through poetic expression. The novel, thus, illuminates the theme of Homer and epic poetry tradition by examining how these narratives shape individual and national identities. It underscores the enduring relevance of ancient myths and epics in contemporary contexts, inviting readers to contemplate the timeless themes and universal truths embedded within these poetic traditions.

**Political and racial tension:** In Ismail Kadare's novel *The File on H.*, the theme of political and racial tension is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, reflecting the complex dynamics of power, identity, and xenophobia in a totalitarian regime. The arrival

of the American-Irish scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, to study Albanian oral epic poetry is met with immediate suspicion and hostility from the Albanian authorities and local populace. The government's reaction to the scholars underscores a pervasive fear of foreign influence and espionage, reflecting broader political anxieties. The scholars are perceived not as benign academics but as potential spies, and their research is viewed as a threat to national security. This suspicion illustrates the deep-seated paranoia that characterizes the regime, where any form of foreign presence is seen as a potential danger to the state's control and ideology. Racial tension also surfaces as the locals view the scholars with a mix of curiosity, distrust, and resentment. The scholars' efforts to document and preserve the oral traditions of Albania are misconstrued as attempts to appropriate and corrupt the indigenous culture. The local villagers, fiercely protective of their heritage, see the scholars' tape recorder as a "satanic device," symbolizing technological intrusion and cultural imperialism. This fear of cultural erosion highlights the villagers' struggle to maintain their identity in the face of perceived external threats. Moreover, the character of Dull Baxhaja, the loyal spy, and his successor, reflects the regime's use of racial and political tension to maintain control. Their surveillance and manipulation of information about the scholars reveal how the state exploits these tensions to reinforce its authority and suppress dissent. The spies' detailed reports and the governor's paranoia emphasize how political motives can distort perceptions and fuel xenophobia. Kadare also explores the intersection of personal relationships and political dynamics. The governor's wife, Daisy, becomes involved with Bill, adding a personal dimension to the political intrigue. Her interactions with Bill, scrutinized by spies, highlight how individual actions are politicized and how personal connections can become entangled in broader political conflicts. Overall, *The File on H.* uses political and racial tension to explore

themes of power, identity, and resistance. Kadare portrays a society where fear and suspicion dominate, illustrating the corrosive effects of totalitarianism on both individual lives and cultural heritage. The novel invites readers to reflect on the consequences of political and racial tensions and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by the narratives of those in power.

**Tradition and Modernity:** In *The File on H.*, the theme of tradition and modernity is a central concern, reflecting the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing technological advancements. This theme is explored through the interactions between the American-Irish scholars, Max Ross and Bill Norton, and the local Albanian community, as well as through the broader socio-political context of Albania under a totalitarian regime. The scholars' mission to study and document Albanian oral epic poetry represents an intersection of tradition and modernity. They employ modern technology, specifically the tape recorder, to capture and preserve the ancient oral traditions of the Albanian rhapsodes. This use of contemporary tools to study and safeguard traditional art forms highlights the potential for modernity to serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. However, the local populace views the scholars and their technology with suspicion and hostility. The tape recorder, a symbol of modernity, is perceived as a "satanic device" that threatens to corrupt and appropriate their indigenous culture. This reaction underscores the fear that modernity could erode traditional values and practices, leading to a loss of cultural identity. The novel also portrays the Albanian authorities' struggle to balance tradition and modernity within the context of national security. The regime's suspicion of the scholars reflects a broader anxiety about foreign influence and technological intrusion. The authorities' efforts to control and monitor the scholars' activities reveal their desire to maintain cultural purity and political sovereignty in the



face of external threats. This tension is further exemplified by the character of Dull Baxhaja, the loyal spy, who meticulously documents the scholars' movements and interactions, embodying the regime's paranoia and resistance to modernity. Additionally, the theme of tradition and modernity is evident in the relationship between the scholars and the rhapsodes. The rhapsodes, who perform epic narratives passed down through generations, represent the living tradition of Albanian oral poetry. Their interactions with the scholars highlight the potential for dialogue and exchange between traditional and modern perspectives. However, the rhapsodes' initial reluctance to engage with the scholars and their technology illustrates the challenges of bridging the gap between these two worlds. The novel also explores the personal dimension of this theme through the character of the governor's wife, Daisy. Her fascination with the scholars and their work reflects a desire for modernity and a break from the constraints of traditional societal roles. Her interactions with Bill, which are scrutinized by the authorities, underscore the tension between personal aspirations and the pressures of a traditional, surveillance-driven society. In *The File on H.*, Kadare presents a nuanced exploration of the interplay between tradition and modernity, highlighting both the potential for cultural preservation and the risks of cultural erosion. The novel invites readers to consider the complexities of maintaining cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world and the ways in which modernity can both support and threaten traditional values and practices.

#### **Stop to Consider**

*The File on H.* by Ismail Kadare can be considered a political novel that explores themes of government surveillance, nationalism, and ethnic tensions.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Analyse the themes in the novel *The File on H*.
2. Comment on treatment of the theme of tradition and modernity in the novel?
3. What does the destruction of the tape recorder symbolize in terms of cultural preservation and resistance to foreign influence?
4. Elucidate on the political and racial tensions as depicted in the novel?

In what ways does Kadare intertwine personal desires and relationships with broader political forces in the novel?

**SAQ**

How does the novel explore the relationship between artistic expression and political power? (50 words)

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**6.4 Narrative Techniques**

**6.4.1 Point of View and Narration**

Point of view is among the most important tools in a narrative though it is a concept that falls under the narrative theory. It refers to the deliberate decision that is made by an author in order to tell a plot in a certain way. The narrative point of view is most critical in fiction since it offers an essential perspective on the action. In choosing the perspective, the author necessarily establishes the

parameters of how the reader evolves his or her understanding of the novel's overarching form. In narratology, it is Gérard Genette who provided the concept of focalization, in order to talk about perspective. Focalization is about the filter, by which the flow of a story is observed and communicated. Genette distinguishes between three types of focalizations: There is *zero focalization* where the narrator has all the information, *internal focalization* restricted to one character, and *external focalization* with only exterior vision into the situation but no insight into the main character's head.

*Zero Focalization* is a type of narrator who has full knowledge of all the characters and all that happens or has happened to them. This means that this type of focalization offers a clear view where the reader gets to understand many players' views and hence a better view of the whole picture. It is important because, more than any other component of the story, the setting and characters help explain the situation and the actions of the characters involved. *Internal Focalization*: This point of view only encompasses a single character's mental state. It establishes closeness and lets the reader know every detail about a particular character, hence, enabling the reader to develop that character as a personality and feel for him. It also hinders knowledge, giving readers suspense and mystery as the reader experiences the plot as the character.

*External Focalization*: Here, there is no head-hopping, and the story is told from an outsider's perspective and his reaction or thoughts are also not shown. This approach can lead to an objective narrative that gives a somewhat dispassionate viewpoint; the physical action and the characters' spoken/ written words are prioritized. Another narratologist, Wayne C. Booth's Concept of the Implied Author stands significant in understanding perspectives in narratives. Wayne C Booth also postulates the idea of the "hypothetical author" which is the author that the reader constructs

in his or her mind with regard to whoever is presenting the narrative. The presence of the implied author influences the readers' perception and reception of the text.

*Reliable vs. Unreliable Narrator:* Evaluating the status, Booth also highlights the importance of orientation that defines the criteria of trustworthy and untrustworthy narrators and shapes the readers' opinions. An unreliable narrator leads to the emergence of dramatic irony and gives readers the role of the analyzer of main events.

The primary mode of narration of *The File on H.* by Ismail Kadare is the third person narrative mainly adopting an omnipotent viewing angle. This narrative perspective helps the reader to get a glimpse of the main character's thought process, emotions and views at different phases of the novel. To be more precise, in *The File on H.*, the narrator, who is depicted as omnipotent, is able to penetrate the characters' psychology and focus on the inner world of Max Ross, Bill Norton, the governor, his wife Daisy as well as others. Such a piece of knowledge allows the narrator of the work to give a broad look at the events taking place in the story. Thus, readers get an insight into different aspects of characters that reveal their motives and actions from the third person, omniscient point of view. For instance, the readers are able to grasp the programmes of study of Max and Bill, their relationship with the culture of the place they are researching in, and last but not least, their political sociology of engaging in a research of such kind. Even though the author is all-knowing, therefore privy to every character's thoughts, the actions of the characters are relayed in the third person and do not influence the reader as to how they should perceive certain events. It contributes to avoiding bias in presenting the political conflicts and cultural differences shown in the novel. The omniscient narrator also gives necessary historical references and information concerning the requirements for the context of the show, in the

Communitistic Albania backdrop. This context enhances the reader's comprehension of the political and socio-cultural conflicts that define the contextual formations of the characters and their choices. Although readers become privy to the characters' thoughts and feelings through the choice of an omniscient narrator, the latter's position allows for a lack of complete immersion in the character. At the same time, such distance helps readers approach the allegedly oppressive themes of the novel related to surveillance, repressions, the confrontation of traditions and the modern world, etc. *The File on H.*, as a novel can be looked at from a broad perspective because it is written from the third person's perspective, so the author grasps the identities of characters and the context of the novel profoundly. In giving readers a viewpoint on the balance between individual and collective greed, political ambitions, and social clashes in a totalitarian society, it occupies an important and strategic position in Kadare's narrative strategy.

**SAQ**

1. In what ways does the third-person omniscient point of view shape the narrative in *The File on H.*?

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2. Comment on the title of the novel. (50 words)

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**6.4.2 Narrative Structure:**

The narrative structure of *The File on H.* by Ismail Kadare can be considered complex in terms of style and interrelatedness which

allows for the conveyance of the actually expressed message as well as the indication of characters and themes' depth. This storyline indicates how the author builds the structure of the novel in a rather complex way in order to gain the reader's attention and stimulate him/her in regard to the delivered themes.

*Multiple Perspectives:* The novel is focalized through the eyes and minds of Irish-American scholars Max Roth and Willy Norton, the local peasantry, the governor's wife, and other information providers. This way of presenting a story gives the readers a chance to look at it from various perspectives and comprehend the characters' dynamics and ambitions.

*Framed Narrative:* The novel itself uses a very conventional frame narrative structure, where the actual main plot of the scholars' research is told within the frame of various reports and observations from spies and local authorities. This structure is based on the facets of surveillance and paranoia.

*Interwoven Plotlines:* Kadare carefully intertwines the storylines connected with the scholars' study, political intrigues of the local authorities, interpersonal relationships and destinies of the characters, as well as historical and cultural settings. The plots, therefore, intertwine to form a complex fabric of events that deals with different issues in a much deeper level.

*Chronological Disruptions:* It proves that the plot is not only chronological but frequently jumps to the past and presents the information connected with the characters' backgrounds. This kind of structure also mirrors the chaotic research process the scholars are trying to undertake to critically analyze history and culture.

*Epistolary Elements:* It is useful to note that the novel includes letters, reports, etc.; this gives the story a realistic side and the

chance to see it from different perspectives. All these features build on the aspects of observation, registration as well as the search for information that the work promotes.

*Dialogues and Monologues:* A large number of conversations and inner thoughts contribute to the development of characters and show the viewers the main ideas and concerns of the characters. At the same time, this technique is useful when the writer wants to convey the cultural and political environment of the setting.

*Symbolism and Allegory:* The plotline of the novel is highly allegorical, and elements such as the scholars' tape recorder, the traditional songs, and the local myths all translate to larger ideas such as the struggle of traditional culture against the encroaching modernity, and the nature of history within the narrative framework. The allegorical approach embodies a narrative strategy which opens up other avenues for interpretation of the text.

*Cultural and Political Commentary:* A story, which contains commentaries on Albania, its people, society and politics, is a defining part of this film. The work's layout makes it possible for these commentaries to be seamlessly woven into the accounts, thus becoming a part and parcel of the whole narration.

The above-discussed narrative techniques have been critically scrutinized to provide a clear understanding of the narrative style used in the novel. The narrative methods have been critically analyzed after a close reading of the text. Kadare's masterful combination of narrative techniques provides a representative example of his great contribution to world literature as it represents an original form of story creation which is completely fresh in world literature. His handling of chronological breaks and framed narratives marks excellent examples of his expert handling of original narrative innovations.

**Stop to Consider**

Critics have acknowledged the adeptness of Kadare to fuse the background of his knowledge of history and politics into a storyline that keeps readers riveted, and, in that sense, established his power of narration. The conflict between tradition and modernity in the novel concerns itself with questions of power and authority. Kadare's metafictional method of extrapolation straddling the putative boundary between tale and reality is sophisticated, brilliant, and complex. Yet, through his realistic depiction of both the cultural and political situation in Albania and universal truths concerning human nature and society, he manages to present a literary masterpiece.

**SAQ**

In what ways does this narrative structure mirror the political and cultural tensions represented within the novel itself? Justify with the help of textual instances.

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**6.4.3 Critical reception of the novel**

Since its publication, *The File on H.* by Ismail Kadare has received much critical praise for its vivid story, effective themes, and probing insight into matters of political and cultural importance. Kadare's opus is highly respected by literary circles; his adept storytelling, multivalence of characters, and an artfully interwoven plot have been singled out. The work is especially appreciated for the technique of narration because it unites elements of historical fiction within the political allegory. Kadare's ability to weave a



multifaceted story that spans different times and places while maintaining coherence and depth has been lauded.

Indeed, critics have had much to say about the themes of *The File on H.*, such as surveillance, cultural identity, and tradition versus modernity. In that aspect, it has been seen that the novel explores such issues in a rather totally relevant yet timeless totalitarian regime. Immensely thought-provoking symbolism, such as that of the tape recorder as a modern intrusion into traditional culture, is used to create an effect in getting the message across.

The novel is generally seen as an indictment of the political nature of totalitarianism, censorship, and state control. Critics have praised Kadare for his sensitive presentation of the Albanian political scene and the broader meaning of life under a repressive regime. The way Kadare intertwines personal and political storylines to parallel the effects of state surveillance on the lives of common citizens is particularly praiseworthy.

The strong presence of Albanian culture and history in Kadare's work has not gone unnoticed, and critics have often appreciated its manifestation within his storytelling. His discovery of Albanian oral epic poetry and its cultural identity is considered a major contribution to literature, for the serious reasoning it brings toward the comprehension of a cultural tradition not so well known in the world. Academics have engaged with *The File on H.* for its rich potential for scholarly analysis. It has been an ongoing subject of interest to many academic papers and discussions, including narrative structure, thematic elements, and political allegory. His works are very often taught in courses on world literature, post-colonial studies, and political fiction.

The international reception of *The File on H.* has further consolidated Ismail Kadare's position as a frontrunner of

contemporary literature. Translations of the novel had great receptions across different cultures of the world and the proof of its universal themes and the universality of its political and cultural commentary is evident throughout the novel. While single awards for *The File on H.* are not reported in isolation, his body of work has won many prizes, including the inaugural Man Booker International Prize in 2005. Public acknowledgement of Kadare's literary genius does sometimes include his novels, such as *The File on H.*

Hence, *The File on H.* is a work of great respect in the performing arts and by far immensely original in literary skill and thematic depth, providing incisive political and cultural analysis. Through the novel, Kadare continues to be one of the most important living writers, offering a complex narrative that explores deep meanings for readers and scholars alike.

#### **6.4.4 Characterization**

In the novel *The File on H.*, Ismail Kadare very skillfully weaves a tapestry of characters, each contributing to the intricate plot and multi-dimensionality of the theme in the novel. The art of characterization combines here with a depth of psychology, symbolic representation, and socio-political commentary where every one of whom becomes integral to the larger tapestry that the story is.

*Academic Scholars:* Max Ross and Bill Norton are the two American-Irish scholars whose academic pursuits form the foundation of the plot in the novel. They are portrayed as characters infused with a sense of passion for the research and naivety about the nature of politics they are getting themselves into. The contrasts provided by the paranoid Albanian authorities in the backdrop of their dedication to scholarship serve to bring out the theme of intellectual curiosity versus state control in bold relief. Their temperament shows that Max is characterized as cautious, deliberate

and the counterpoint to the more impassioned, spontaneous Bill. This counterpoint between the two scholars gives depth to their characterization by developing individual characteristics that will interactively shape their experience in Albania.

The characterization of complexity and contradiction is evident in the portrayal of the character of Daisy. Daisy is a multi-layered character whose actions and desires are central to the entire personal versus political dynamics that the novel works upon. Her passion and her nature of being a rebel set her, against the elite political background, as representative of personal resistance in times of regime repression. Her unfulfilled desire to get pregnant and her daydreams about Bill are enough to add layers of personal motivation that come to intermingle with the political narrative, showing how personal lives are affected by political circumstances.

The depiction of a Loyal Spy is evident in the portrayal of Dull Baxhaja. Dull Baxhaja stands for surveillance and control, with an eye on every move the scholars make. He shows how deeply the surveillance state is entrenched, down to the detailed documenting of activities of scholars and himself at work in the state machinery of control. His character is shaped by a moral conflict. Even though he is a loyalist, at times Dull goes through moral conflict, more so when he uncovers Daisy's secret meetings. This inner turmoil brings more depth into his character and outlines the human side of those serving oppressive systems.

The aggressive and sly portrayal of the New English-Speaking Informer showcases the variety of approaches Kadare had in framing the characters. Unlike Dull, this character seems to be more aggressive and cunning. His flirtatious contact with Daisy and the less comprehensive reports compared to that of Dull's show another

style in the same position portraying how differently people operate in enacting authority and control.

The portrayal of the Villagers and Traditionalists testifies to the presence of cultural guardians. The villagers, suspicious of the scholars, exemplify cultural preservation against modern intrusion. Their characterization as hostile traditionalists towards the tape recorder and scholars underlines the tension between the preservation of cultural identity and adjustment to modern influences.

Apart from the prominent characters, most of the minor characters represent symbolic roles and embody broader social and political themes. Thus, the innkeeper helps the scholars in doing their research, which symbolizes the link between traditionalism and modernism. The rhapsodes performing oral poetry embody living tradition which is the same thing the scholars are on the lookout to study.

Hence, Kadare has used multiple perspectives to add depth to the story. Each one views the events in a different way, therefore adding characterization to the entire novel. This helps the reader to gain a much deeper understanding of many of the characters and what is happening with them, thereby shedding light on the general themes. In this novel, Kadare uses dialogue and inner thoughts to reveal the motivation of the characters, what they fear, and what they aspire to. This makes the portrait more nuanced in a way that makes them closer to human beings, which thus makes their actions understandable. His dialogues are like separate characters, each one having a very different personality and view of its own.

The characterization in *The File on H.* forms part of its stringency and thematic power. The characters in Kadare are not single individuals but personifications of a more extended account of

social, cultural, and political currents. Their interactions, inner life, and feelings, through this generalizing approach, open out onto all complexities in an investigation reaching to the bottom of the human condition within the context of life under a totalitarian regime.

**SAQ**

How does Kadare use multiple perspectives in *The File on H.* to enrich the narrative? (50 words)

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**Check Your Progress**

1. Comment on the narrative style adopted in the novel.
2. How does the non-linear plot structure affect one's view of the plot and characters in the novel?
3. Analyse Kadare's art of characterisation in *The File on H.*
4. Examine how using different narrative voices and viewpoints influence the perception of the central conflict by the reader in the novel.

**6.5 Summing up**

This unit provided a wide coverage of the main themes, methods, and issues explored in the novel that comprise its core. The discussed matters will help facilitate a wider understanding of the controversial issues taken up in the book. The in-depth investigation of the themes has given an insight into the story. The techniques used have been looked at in various ways to help you understand the

development of the narrative. The novel has been criticized from various angles, and this gives readers sufficient room for subjective interpretation of the novel. This module is designed to aid in the appreciation of content and the thematic structure of *The File on H*. However, the readers are encouraged to also formulate their subjective interpretation after reading the units on Ismail Kadare's *The File on H*.

### **6.6 References and Suggested Readings**

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### **6.7 Model Questions**

- How does Kadare explore the concepts of historical research and the search for truth through the character of Max?
- How does Kadare's use of allegory and symbolism enhance the narrative of the novel?

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