ENG-02-IX (1)

Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University

MA in English
Semester 2

Paper IX
Fiction II

Block 1
Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Contents:

Block Introduction:

Unit 1 : Background

Unit 2 : Introducing the novel

Unit 3 : Themes and Techniques

Contributors:

Dr. Pradipta Borgohain	Reader, Dept. of English Gauhati University

Editorial Team

Dr. Pradipta Borgohain	Reader, Dept. of English Gauhati University
Dr. Uttara Debi	Asst. Professor in English IDOL, GU
Prasenjit Das	Asst. Professor in English KKHSOU, Guwahati
Sanghamitra De	Lecturer in English IDOL, GU
Manab Medhi	Lecturer in English IDOL, GU

Cover Page Designing:

Kaushik Sarma	:	Graphic Designer CET, IITG

January, 2011

© Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. Further information about the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University courses may be obtained from the University's office at IDOL Building, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14.
Published on behalf of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by Dr. Kandarpa Das, Director and printed at Maliyata Offset Press, Mirza. Copies printed 1000.

Acknowledgement

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

Block Introduction:

Writers such as Thomas Hardy and George Eliot tried to revive tragedy in the Victorian era - in the novelistic form. While Eliot was the more learned of the two, both writers can be said to harbor a certain consistent philosophy of life. This philosophy, arrived at after much reading of ancient classical literature and contemporary scientific studies essentially goes by the name of 'determinism.' According to this philosophy, human beings are fated to endure hardship since things are predetermined to happen in a certain way. However, this does not absolve human beings of social responsibility or of the necessity of being kind and generous to fellow humans.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is the most classical of Hardy's novels. Here Hardy elaborates and explores several classical precepts about tragedies: the great but flawed hero who is morally blind but who gains important insights towards the twilight of his life, the heart-breaking reversal of his social fortune, the remorseless causality which propels him to his doom once he commits a fatal error in the beginning.

However, once again the social context in which Hardy operates cannot be ignored, and the Study Material duly acknowledges this and alerts you to be aware of social interpretations. After all, Hardy was trying to revive the tragic mode in very changed, democratic times. The Industrial Revolution had ensured tremendous social mobility (dislocation if you look at the negative aspects) which meant that fixed social stations characteristic of classical tragedies was unacceptable. This tragedy is 'class' tragedy as much as it is a classical tragedy. The events, which have a crucial bearing on the protagonist's career stem from his particular social position. As in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, it is made apparent that characters from even lower classes could claim to be proper tragic heroes. The only difference between the two novels is that while Tess can boast of fairly noble pedigree and now seems to have fallen on hard times, Michael Henchard of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* rises from the lower strata to become an eminent personage, the mayor of a town. It is from that eminence that he falls again.

Hardy had a flair for the dramatic, which meant that he could create very effective scenes and memorable dialogue. However, there is another sense in which Hardy is 'dramatic.' He had a penchant for plot making. Like many of the other writers in this course, but perhaps to an even greater extent,

Hardy is a consummate plot maker. Many of the traditional novelistic elements such as plot, setting, characterization and point of view can be studied with great profit in this novel because the artist Hardy shows the co-relation between these elements. Indeed, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, with its linearity of plot, interconnection between events, and the very functional role played by settings and characters is one of the most successful exercises in plot architectonic and dynamic.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a transitional novel, written towards the end of the Victorian era, and several anticipations of modern tendencies can also be detected in this novel. Try to detect such tendencies as you read the work.

Contents of Block 1

Unit 1 Background

Unit 2 Introducing the novel

Unit 3 Themes and Techniques

Unit 1
Background

Contents:

1.1 Objectives
1.2 Introduction to Thomas Hardy and His World
1.3 Biographical Sketch - List of Important Dates
1.4 Placing the Work
1.5 Summing up

1.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit I intend to

- *familiarize* you with Thomas Hardy's celebrated novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
- *convey* to you the necessary background information about Hardy's life and world
- *contextualise* the novel in the conflict between victorian and modern sensibilities, and between tradition and innovation, which is a recurrent theme in Hardy's major works.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THOMAS HARDY AND HIS WORLD

If you have already made a study of English novels, you will be familiar with the name of Thomas Hardy. Famous for his novels like *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES, FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD* and *JUDE THE OBSCURE*, Thomas Hardy had started his literary career mainly as a poet. Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, a rural region of southwestern England that was to become the focus of his fiction, into the family of a master mason and building contractor, also called Thomas Hardy. Hardy's mother Jemima, whose tastes included reading Latin poets and French romances, provided for his education. After schooling in Dorchester, Hardy was apprenticed to John Hicks, an architect who lived in the city of Dorchester. This location later served as the model

for Hardy's fictional 'Casterbridge'. Although Hardy gave serious thought to attending university and entering the church, a struggle he would dramatize in his 1895 novel *JUDE THE OBSCURE*, his declining religious faith and lack of money encouraged him to pursue a career in writing instead. Hardy spent nearly a dozen years toiling in obscurity and producing unsuccessful novels and poetry.

As already mentioned, Hardy had began his literary career primarily as a poet. But, unfortunately, his writings failed to create any stir in the literary and commercial worlds. May be this was a blessing in disguise because then Hardy took to writing novels and in the process produced a few masterpieces!

SAQ

Think of at least three other well-known writers who first tried their hands at one mode of writing but then switched to another mode or literary genre and achieved success therein. (20 words.)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

It was the novelist George Meredith (the author of popular works like *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) and *The Egoist* (1879)) who first advised Hardy to write a novel. However, success was hard to come by and Hardy's first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, written in 1867, was rejected by the publishers.

It might appear that Hardy had learned from his failures that a career in writing was not for him. But this was not to be. He continued to write, totally undaunted by his lack of success. *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) was his first critical and financial success. This book convinced Hardy that he could earn his living as an author. From then on, he devoted himself entirely to writing and produced a series of novels, among them *The Return Of The Native* (1878) and *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* (1886). Hardy's work in general reflected his stoical pessimism and sense of inescapable tragedy in human life.

Although he built a reputation as a successful novelist, Hardy considered himself - first and foremost - a poet. To him, novels were primarily a means of earning a living. Like many novelists of his day, he wrote according to the conventions of serialization (the process of publishing a work in periodic installments). To ensure that readers would buy a serialized novel, writers often left pressing questions unanswered at the end of each installment. This practice explains the convoluted, often incredible plots of many nineteenth-century Victorian novels. But Hardy cannot be labeled solely a Victorian novelist. Nor can he be categorized as purely a modernist, in the tradition of writers such as Virginia Woolf or D. H. Lawrence who were determined to explode the conventions of nineteenth-century literature and substitute a new kind of novel in its place. In many respects, Hardy was trapped between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between Victorian and modern sensibilities, and between tradition and innovation.

Hardy set most of his novels, poems and short stories, around the market town of Dorchester ('Casterbridge'), near his boyhood home at Bockhampton, on the edge of 'Egdon' Heath. Although both Anthony Trollope (1815-82) and George Eliot (1819-80) had used similar settings in their novels, Hardy's rural backdrop is neither romantic nor idealized. From the publication of his first novels Hardy's critics accused him of being too pessimistic about humanity's place in the scheme of things. In 1901, Hardy expressed the notion that 'non-rationality seems . . .to be the [guiding] principle of the Universe.' In all his fiction, chance is the incarnation of the blind forces controlling human destiny, as Lord David Cecil remarks in *Hardy the Novelist*. Ironically the blind forces seem to favor certain characters while they relentlessly pursue and persecute those who deserve better, such as Tess, as well as those whose ends we might regard as proof of poetic justice, such as Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Lucetta in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. An entry in Hardy's notebook dated April 1878 gives us a clue to the guiding principle behind his fiction: *'A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions.'*

SAQ

Do you remember how the new findings in science had caused an uproar in Victorian society?(80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Radical findings and formulations in the disciplines of geology and biology delivered body blows to man's cherished belief of being the chosen one of God. Suddenly people were told that they were descended from the apes and not Adam and Eve. Also, God did not create the world in six miraculous days, but the world as we know it came into existence after a painstaking and agonizingly slow geological process stretching over millions of years. Much of the disquiet and doubt resulting from such discoveries are recorded in Tennyson's 1850 Victorian poem "In Memoriam".

You can refer to the study material on "Darwinism" and "The Working Classes" (in Paper One, "Literature and Social History") to find out about the upheavals in Victorian society. The paragraph above may lead you to think that such revolutionary ideas in society must certainly have had a dramatic impact and that people were suddenly forced to adopt beliefs contradicting their traditional ones. There is much to debate here because cultural history tells us that contradictory ideas can coexist within the same milieu and also the acceptance of a new idea is often coloured by the way of its coming into common knowledge.

Hardy himself had abandoned Christianity. Having read the writings of Charles Darwin, Hardy had accepted the theory of evolution. He further studied the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.

Arthur Schopenhauer:

German philosopher (1788-1860), who is known for a philosophy of gloom or pessimism and who was influenced by Buddhism and Hindu mysticism. Schopenhauer's notion of the Immanent Will describes a blind force that drives the universe irrespective of human lives or desires.

Though his novels often end in crushing tragedies that reflect Schopenhauer's philosophy, Hardy described himself as a *meliorist*, one who believes that the world tends to become better and that people aid in this betterment. Humans can live with some happiness, he claimed, so long as they understand their place in the universe and accept it.

Hardy died in 1928 at his estate in Dorchester. True to the rather dramatically romantic fantasies of his fiction, Hardy had his heart buried in his wife's tomb. This is notable, because Hardy had deep differences with his wife Emma while she lived.

The centre of Hardy's novels was the rather desolate and history-freighted countryside around Dorchester. His novels bravely challenged many of the sexual and religious conventions of the Victorian age, and dared to present a bleak view of human nature. In the early 1860s, after the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Hardy's faith was still unshaken, but he soon adopted the mechanical-determinist view of nature's cruelty, reflected in the inevitably tragic and self-destructive fates of his characters. In his poems Hardy depicted rural life without sentimentality: his mood was often stoically hopeless. *"Though he was a modern, even a revolutionary writer in his time, most of us read him now as a lyrical pastoralist. It may be a sign of the times that some of us take his books to bed, as if even his pessimistic vision was one that enabled us to sleep soundly."* (Anatole Broyard in *New York Times*, May 12, 1982).

Because he could always call up so clearly the dark as well as the more cheerful aspects of his early experience, Hardy in his mature years was rarely tempted to indulge in indiscriminate nostalgia for the past. He was always deeply conscious, however, of the process of change itself and of the many relics, good and bad, of earlier days and ways, which were constantly being swept away. Hardy, in fact, was born just in time to catch a last glimpse of that English rural life which, especially in so conservative a country, had existed largely undisturbed from medieval times until the onset of the new forces - population expansion, urbanization, railways, cheap printing, cheap food imports, enclosures, agricultural mechanization and depression, pressures and opportunities for migration and emigration - which so swiftly and radically impinged upon it in the middle of the nineteenth century.

1.3. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A purely 'biographical sketch' may sometimes lead us to think in terms of the private, and intimately psychological features of a writer. Here we give you an outline of dates which are important in filling in the gaps of Hardy's life. The dates help us to keep in view the complex interplay of themes and deeper concerns of Hardy's writings all of which combine to give his work a powerful resonance of his times.

List of Important Dates

1830 Liverpool to Manchester railway line opens, marking the beginning of the railway era

1840 Thomas Hardy born 2 June, Higher Bockhampton, first child of Thomas and Jemima

1847 Railway arrives in Dorchester; *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* published

1857 Matrimonial Causes Act establishes divorce courts

1858 Darwin's *Origin of Species* published

1862 Hardy becomes an assistant architect in London

1867 The Second Reform Bill grants the right to vote to the urban working class. Hardy returns to Bockhampton from London due to ill health.

1869 First women's college established at Cambridge; Mill's *The Subjection of Women* published

1870 The first Married Women's Property Act gives women the right to retain possession of money they earn

1873 Beginning of agricultural depression and decline that continues into the twentieth century

1874 Hardy marries Emma Gifford; *Far from the Madding Crowd* published

1884 The Third Reform Bill grants agricultural workers the right to vote; Hardy appointed a Justice of the Peace, joins local antiquarian societies

1885 *The Mayor of Casterbridge* published

1927 Hardy dies after several days of illness

1.4. SUMMING UP

In this unit I have given you mainly biographical information about Hardy which may help you to appreciate some of his outstanding preoccupations and concerns. I have also briefly touched on some of the influences on his writing and towards the end given you a list of important dates.

* * *

Unit 2
Introducing The Novel

Contents:

2.1 Objectives
2.2 Introduction
2.3 What Happens in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
2.4 List of Characters
2.5 Summing up

2.1 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you will recount all the important occurrences in the novel, following the thread of the narrative. By the end of this unit you will be able to

- *list* the important characters in the context of the novel
- *get* an overview of the important incidents in the novel

2.2 INTRODUCTION

We can begin this section with some references to a famous essay by Henry James, the famous American novelist, dated close to the time of *The Mayor*. This essay, "The Art of Fiction", by James, was written around 1884, almost contemporaneous with Hardy's novel. You should note that James, in his essay, takes to task some well-known critical distinctions and makes certain other claims for the novelist. For instance, he declares that a novel should be "interesting". Just listen to what he says :

"I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art--that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other

organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts."

As we proceed below with our unit, we shall forego (as we have done elsewhere) James's standards in trying to conduct our analysis of Hardy's work. But it is indeed interesting to note that James point to the difficulty of isolating a single function in any piece of writing. Any given passage in a novel should be seen as contributing to a multiplicity of functions. In the process of analysis, therefore, we tend to compartmentalize and isolate the different parts of a literary text. It would be useful to keep such insights in mind as we move on to our analysis.

2.3 WHAT HAPPENS IN *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

The first chapter of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one of the most surprising opening chapters in literature. A man, feeling encumbered by his wife, auctions her and their child off to a total stranger and begins a new and, at least for the time being, highly successful life

The carefully paced and dramatic events of Chapter I give you a strong indication that you are going to be following the life of an energetic and impetuous man, and also a man of questionable moral character. You will probably ask yourself as the chapter ends: Will Henchard escape punishment for his moral "crime"? How will he be punished in the end? By provoking these questions in your mind, Hardy has aroused your interest.

Stop to Consider

Every word and every image is carefully chosen. Pay close attention to the descriptions of the characters and to the imagery that Hardy uses in the first few chapters as these set the tone for the rest of the novel. Notice the echoes of the horse auction in the auction of Susan Henchard. Think about the bird flying through the furmity tent. Note Henchard's temper and Susan's passive acceptance of her sale.

As the book opens, three people - a husband, a wife, and an infant daughter- are entering the large Wessex village of Weydon-Priors. The man is an unemployed hay-trusser, a skilled farm worker. He and his wife are walking

together physically, but they are mentally far apart. Hardy emphasizes this mental separation by describing the "perfect silence" between the husband and wife, and the fact that the wife "enjoyed no society whatever" from having her husband alongside her. You also learn that this distance between the couple is not a new thing. No recent incident has separated them. Instead, their alienation from each other is clearly a natural part of their relationship. As Hardy notes, they have a "stale familiarity" about them. Recognizing the type of relationship that Michael and Susan Henchard have with each other will help you understand why he auctions her later in this chapter, why she agrees to leave with the sailor after the auction, and what kind of marriage they will have when she returns to him later in the novel.

The landscape also reflects a sense of alienation. The vegetation has turned from green to blackened-green, and the leaves are "doomed," on their way to eventual winter death. There is dust everywhere, and only one weak bird is singing a "trite" song. Yet the landscape is also ageless. Readers, like the Henchards, have entered Wessex, a region bounded by tradition and superstition and still untouched by technology and other aspects of the modern world.

SAQ

The opening scene or chapter of a literary work is extremely significant. In some cases it is the determining factor. How much importance will you accord to the opening of this novel? (30 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Can you make a comparative assessment of the opening of this novel and the opening of any other novel from your syllabus? (50 words.)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

The next morning, Michael Henchard awakens in the furmity tent, only vaguely remembering what happened there the previous evening. He spots Susan's wedding ring on the floor, then discovers the sailor's money in his pocket. As his memory returns, he begins talking aloud to himself.

Henchard is obviously upset. He feels a series of emotions but, strangely, not shame. Hardy describes Henchard as having a "gloomy curiosity" and even a sense of revitalization as he faces the new day. He is "surprised and nettled" that Susan has left with the sailor, and he worries that he might have identified himself while drunk the night before, but is soon relieved to learn that no one knows him. Initial annoyance with Susan quickly builds to anger. How could she have taken him so literally? Then he remembers her passivity. Therefore, he must be responsible for what happened.

Henchard takes two steps to correct the situation, both ineffectual. He goes unobserved to the village church and takes a solemn oath not to drink again for 21 years. Then he begins looking for Susan, although he knows neither the sailor's name nor his hometown. However, Henchard's pride and shame keep him from revealing the true story behind his family's disappearance. Had he done so, people might have been more willing to help him. In any case, after several months he gives up the search and moves on to Casterbridge.

The second chapter contrasts sharply with the first. It is much shorter and less dramatic. Yet it reveals even more about Henchard's character: He acts quickly and often makes errors. He sometimes regrets his mistakes, but his way of handling them is not to undo what he has done but to take a new course of action.

Chapter III opens the second section of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In the first paragraph, Hardy includes several echoes of Chapter I. The scene is again the dusty road leading to Weydon-Priors. The leaves are turning brown once more. And strangers are once again entering the village. The strangers are Susan Henchard and her daughter Elizabeth-Jane, a girl of about 18.

The echoes continue. The two women arrive in the village on Fair Day. In fact, they have come to the village exactly 18 years after the auction. They even head toward the place where furmity is being sold.

While he is echoing the past, Hardy also presents numerous contrasts. Eighteen years have made quite a difference. The village and the fair are considerably run down now. The furmity woman no longer has a tent. She serves her brew, now "thin slop" instead of "rich concoction," from a pot over an open fire outdoors. Yet she still spikes it illegally with rum.

The most intriguing contrast lies in Susan Henchard's reason for returning to Weydon-Priors. She first arrived there with Michael Henchard and left with Richard Newson, the sailor. Now Newson has been lost at sea, and Susan is looking for Michael Henchard. Does she intend to resume her marriage with Henchard?

Elizabeth-Jane asks her mother why they have come to this place and learns that her mother first met "father"- Newson- here. Susan tells her they have returned to the village to try to locate their kin, Michael Henchard, who is related to them "by marriage." As Susan approaches the furmity woman, her daughter wonders why she wants to talk to someone as disrespectable as the old hag. Elizabeth-Jane's comments illustrate both her primness and her lack of memory or knowledge about the past.

Susan has kept her past a secret from Elizabeth-Jane, fearing that her daughter might be upset by the truth behind Susan's relationship with the sailor, Newson. Susan had moved with the sailor to Canada, then back to England. More and more, Susan doubted the morality of her life with Newson. He understood and arranged, conveniently, to become lost at sea. Susan has decided that finding Henchard might help resolve all her problems. The two women enter Casterbridge on a Friday evening. Elizabeth-Jane is struck by how old- fashioned the town appears. The town band playing outside the King's Arms Hotel attracts Susan and her daughter. The most important town leaders are dining inside the hotel, and many of the minor townspeople are gathered across the street where they can observe the proceedings. They learn that Henchard is the mayor of the town. Susan overhears the same information. Both women are surprised, but they react very differently to the news. Elizabeth-Jane is impressed and interested, while Susan is nervous and overwhelmed. She says, "Now I only want to go - pass away - die."

Stop to Consider

Why do you think Susan reacts this way? There could be at least three reasons. Speculate about them, keeping in mind the connection between motive and character.

Another new character enters Casterbridge in this chapter. As you will see, each new character has a significant effect on the plot and on Michael Henchard's life. This character, Donald Farfrae, enters on a note of mystery and magic.

As Henchard tells the tradesmen in the hotel dining room that it is impossible for him to replace the bad wheat, he is overheard by a young stranger standing just outside the dining room windows. The tall young man hastily jots down a note on some paper, asking the waiter standing in the doorway to take the note to the Mayor. He also asks the waiter to suggest a moderately priced hotel, thus revealing his Scottish frugality. The waiter points out the Three Mariners down the street.

Elizabeth-Jane has been observing all this, even noticing the Mayor's reaction to the young man's note. Henchard's mood changes to excitement. Elizabeth-Jane turns to her mother and suggests that they also find a room at the Three Mariners. Susan is, however, concerned that they can't afford to stay there and so Elizabeth-Jane decides to work for their room and board. She is instructed to bring the Scotsman his dinner and studies his appearance briefly, but he doesn't even notice her. Coincidentally, the two women are staying in the room next to the Scotsman's. Together, they overhear a conversation between Henchard and the Scotsman. Susan's face is "strangely bright" when she learns that Henchard still feels shame about having auctioned his family.

The role of coincidence in Hardy's novels is remarkably important. Find out instances of coincidence in this novel and analyze the role that such coincidences play in furthering or complicating the plot.

Hardy has often been branded a fatalist. A cursory glance through his novels almost convinces us of such a reputation. But we could also question whether Hardy's tragic vision resembles the Greeks' rather than that of Shakespeare.

You can find out instances of coincidence and chance in this novel and perhaps in some of Hardy's other novels too. You should evaluate these instances to find out whether they are just structural devices which further the plot or whether they are integral to Hardy's tragic vision.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth-Jane clears away Farfrae's dishes and becomes an outside observer, watching Farfrae join the other hotel guests in the sitting-room where he sings a song about Scotland. Farfrae's lonely song about Scotland draws an emotional response from all the listeners, including Henchard, who hears the song while standing outside the hotel, and Elizabeth-Jane, who is clearly attracted to Farfrae.

The next morning, Henchard again presses Farfrae to stay and work for him. Farfrae tells Henchard he is definitely leaving, but his responses indicate some wavering, and finally he does decide to stay.

Susan decides to send Elizabeth-Jane to Henchard with a message. Henchard opens his office door to admit Elizabeth-Jane, but another man jumps in front of her. He announces that he is the new manager, Joshua Jopp, the man who Henchard had at first thought Farfrae was. Jopp has come to claim his new job, but he learns that the position is already filled. Angry and disappointed, he leaves. The scene is abrupt and mysterious. Knowing Hardy's technique of foreshadowing, you are probably wondering what kind of threat the angry Jopp might pose to Henchard later on.

Elizabeth-Jane then delivers her mother's message. Henchard is shocked to learn about Susan, but he immediately concentrates on the girl instead. He asks if she is Susan's daughter and what her name is. When she says, "Elizabeth-Jane Newson," Henchard feels certain that the girl doesn't know about the auction nor the identity of her real father. He invites Elizabeth-Jane into his home. Noticing Elizabeth-Jane's "respectable" but old-fashioned clothes, he encloses five guineas with a note to Susan. The amount is significant. It is the sum that Newson paid for Susan and her daughter. The note contains Henchard's request that he and Susan meet secretly at a place called The Ring.

Having symbolically bought Susan back, Henchard determines to make amends for having sold her in the first place. Is Henchard sincerely remorseful, or does he once again show his pride by believing he can erase the past? At the end of this chapter, see if you feel more positive or more negative about Henchard than you did before.

The place Henchard has chosen to meet Susan is an old Roman amphitheatre, known as The Ring. Hardy notes it is not a place for happy meetings. Furtive appointments are held in The Ring. Hardy describes it as desolate, decaying, a place of violence, where bloody incidents have occurred.

Check Your Progress

1. Based on your own reading of this particular part of the novel, write a note on 'The Ring', analyzing it in terms of the relation between plot, atmosphere and character.
2. Analyse the first three chapters of the novel in terms of their 'expository' function.
3. Explore 'coincidence' in the novel as a structuring device.
4. How far do you think 'morality' is an important concern in the novel ?

Hardy is now ready to sow the seeds for the most significant conflict in the novel- that between Henchard and Farfrae and the philosophies each embodies. Hardy begins this conflict rather innocently with a conversation between the two men. Look carefully at this conversation. As you read, make a simple chart on which to note contrasting characteristics of the two men. Add to your chart as you read. This can be an excellent source for preparing to write papers or to take tests on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

The action begins when Henchard returns home from his meeting with Susan and notices that Farfrae is still "overhauling" the books. He admires Farfrae's meticulousness but pities him at the same time for his concentration on petty details. He considers himself above details. Henchard persuades Farfrae to stop working, inviting him to dinner.

After dinner, Henchard confides the two most important secrets in his life to Farfrae and asks the young man's advice. He tells Farfrae about the auction and Susan's recent return. When Farfrae suggests that Henchard make amends by again living with his former wife, Henchard reveals his second secret: he has also had an affair with a woman on the island of Jersey, a relationship that ruined her reputation. He planned to marry her to make things right, but Susan's reappearance will prevent him from doing so.

Once he has installed Susan and Elizabeth-Jane in their cottage, Henchard begins courting Susan. Rumors soon begin flying around Casterbridge about the couple: the energetic and class-conscious mayor and the pale, humble woman whom the boys in the town dub "The Ghost." Henchard is undeterred by the gossip. He is driven not by love but by the desire to make amends to Susan, to provide a home for his daughter, and to punish himself for his past misdeeds.

The marriage takes place and Susan and Elizabeth-Jane live in Henchard's house. While Susan finds kindness and comfort in her new home, Elizabeth-Jane sees a whole new world opening up for her. However, she believes her good fortune might quickly disappear if she tempts Providence by flaunting her new-found affluence. In this respect, she contrasts sharply with Henchard.

A gradual rift starts appearing between Henchard and Farfrae. Farfrae's ability to ingratiate himself with the common people of Casterbridge - as he demonstrated earlier at the 'Three Mariners' - increases the Scotsman's popularity while at the same time arousing Henchard's jealousy. Finally, their partnership ends over what others would consider a trivial incident.

Both men begin planning holiday celebrations, with Henchard believing that as Mayor, he should be able to outdo Farfrae. Henchard advertises an elaborate fair, complete with contests and athletic events, while Farfrae plans a modest celebration inside a tent. Henchard is certain he will win out over his onetime friend and rival at last.

The holiday arrives with heavy rains. Henchard's games are rained out and his booth collapses. Even after the rains stop, no one comes to Henchard's celebration. Instead, they go to Farfrae's tent, which has been erected so as to protect the people from wind and rain. Even Susan and Elizabeth-Jane are there. You can make a telling assessment of both man's characters based on this little episode. Henchard dismisses Donald from his service. Farfrae opens his business, which grows as Henchard's continues to falter. Farfrae's rise and Henchard's decline underscore Hardy's continuing theme of modernization displacing traditionalism in Casterbridge, Wessex, and all of England.

SAQ

Write a summary of the episode highlighting the contrast between Henchard and Farfrae. (100 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Susan becomes very ill and is dying. In an interesting stroke of irony, Henchard at the same time receives a letter from the other woman in his life, Lucetta. She is the woman from Jersey with whom he has had the affair, which he revealed earlier to Farfrae. Lucetta writes that she now fully understands why Henchard couldn't marry her before, and she asks that Henchard return all of the letters she had written him in the heat of passion and anger. She suggests that Henchard give them to her in person when she passes through Casterbridge the following week.

On reading the letter, Henchard feels another pang of guilt and vows that he will marry Lucetta should he ever be in a position to do so. Packing up her letters, Henchard waits for her on the appointed evening, but Lucetta never arrives. Henchard feels relieved.

Before she dies, Susan writes a letter to Henchard with instructions that he is not to open it until Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day. The letter, however, initiates a new mystery. What secret does it contain?

Three weeks after Susan's death, Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane have a talk. Henchard feels very lonely. He no longer has a wife or a close friend. He now feels he doesn't really have a daughter either because she doesn't know that he is her true father. Henchard decides to tell Elizabeth-Jane the truth, or at least part of it. He says that Susan and he were once married and thought each other dead, which is why Susan married Newson. Henchard tells her he is her real father and later asks the girl if she will now agree to change her name to his. Elizabeth-Jane says yes but wonders why her mother didn't wish her to make the change. Henchard attributes it to Susan's whim.

Henchard decides to look for some proof to present to Elizabeth-Jane. He comes across the letter that he is not supposed to open until Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day. Susan's letter is poorly sealed, however, and Henchard feels little need to heed her request. The letter contains the worst possible news: Susan reveals that their own Elizabeth-Jane died in infancy. The girl who now lives with him is really Susan and Newson's daughter.

Henchard is devastated. He begins to wonder if he is not a prisoner of a fickle fate. The following morning Elizabeth-Jane takes Henchard's arm at breakfast and calls him "Father." It should be a glorious moment for Henchard, but he feels miserable, as dark and dry as dust and ashes. Elizabeth, on her turn, is stunned by the cold and hostile behavior from the man who only the previous evening was so warm and fatherly.

This chapter (Chapter XIX) ends the second section of the plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This segment has chronicled Michael Henchard's personal life from the happiness of reunion with his family, through to the development of a close friendship with Farfrae, to the depths of loss of each through death, temperamental difference, or simply fate.

SAQ

Write a note on the importance of 'plot' and 'structure' for the theme of 'fate' in the novel. Show how this also involves the 'development' of character. (150 words. You should work this out in detail because it will show you how 'form' and 'content' work together.)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

The arrival of another stranger marks the opening of the third section of the novel. Hardy doesn't reveal the person's identity for a few chapters more. Do you think he is trying to pique your interest or does he have another reason for not identifying the newcomer?

This chapter (Chapter XX) and the next add to the fable or fairy-tale atmosphere that Hardy weaves into the novel. As Elizabeth-Jane suffers bitter and unwarranted attacks from her "wicked step-father," an apparent fairy godmother or good witch arrives to rescue her.

The democratic Elizabeth-Jane does many things that Henchard considers "social crimes," but which you and I would probably admire. She does many of the household tasks herself, rather than burden the servants. She even provides refreshments for Nance Mockridge, one of the women who works in the yard. In a voice loud enough for the worker to overhear, Henchard chides Elizabeth- Jane about serving Nance: "Ye'll disgrace me to the dust!" This outburst seems to echo the same image of dust and despair that appeared at the end of the last chapter. Nance replies in anger that the girl has waited on others worse than she, and then tells Henchard that Elizabeth-Jane was a serving-maid at the Three Mariners. Henchard is sure the incident will ruin his reputation in the town.

The same afternoon, Elizabeth-Jane goes into town where she overhears many of the local merchants talking about the beautiful lady and her new home, High-Place Hall. Elizabeth-Jane walks to the house at nightfall and studies it. You see the structure through her eyes but you want to see and know more.

The sense of mystery is enhanced when Elizabeth-Jane sees a stranger approaching the house from an alleyway. Because she hides, she doesn't realize that the stranger is Henchard. Henchard enters but obviously doesn't stay long, since he arrives home only a few minutes after Elizabeth-Jane.

Noting how coldly Henchard treats her, Elizabeth-Jane decides this is the time to leave. Broaching the subject of moving to Henchard, she is relieved when he agrees. Elizabeth-Jane and the beautiful stranger begin making plans together, and a few days later, Elizabeth-Jane is ready to leave.

Hardy presents a brief flashback to explain Henchard's mysterious visit to High-Place Hall. Remember that he has used this stylistic technique several times earlier in the novel.

> A literary, dramatic or cinematic device in which an earlier event is inserted into the normal chronological order of a narrative. Flashback can also refer to the scene or event described. This technique is also used quite frequently - albeit in a different way - in *Wuthering Heights*.
>
> A synonymous term is "analepsis". Jeremy Hawthorn gives "retrospection, retroversion, cutback or switchback". As he points out, 'flashback' is a term from pre-structuralist days and includes less than what is gained with "analepsis". In *Wuthering Heights*, as Hawthorn shows us, analepsis is the term to describe the whole section dealing with the 'second generation'.

The night before, Henchard received a note from Lucetta telling him of her intention to move to Casterbridge to be near him. She writes that she knows about the death of his wife and hopes he is now ready to keep his promise to marry her and salvage her reputation. She hopes to see him within a day or two. After receiving Lucetta's note, Henchard goes to High-Place Hall to visit her. He fails to see her because he doesn't realize that she has changed her surname from Le Sueur to Templeman (that is, from sensual French to proper English).

In a second letter the next day, Lucetta clarifies the reason for her change of name and explains why she has invited Elizabeth-Jane to move in with her. The girl's presence when Henchard visits Lucetta will satisfy propriety and formalize their relationship. Henchard admires Lucetta's wiles and sets out to see her at once, feeling mixed emotions towards her. What he doesn't expect, however, is her strong will. She refuses to see him that evening, but asks him to return the next day. Henchard, deciding that two people can play Lucetta's game, resolves to put her off for a while as well. Meanwhile, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane become acquainted. Both spend a lot of time looking out the large picture window of the house. Elizabeth-Jane notices Farfrae among the trees outside, while Lucetta watches for Henchard.

The unexpected visitor turns out to be Donald Farfrae, who has come to see Elizabeth-Jane. Lucetta covers her mistake with a blush. Lucetta is immediately attracted to the young Scotsman. She sees qualities in him that remind her of a musical instrument. (Remember, Hardy often links Farfrae with music and with the biblical musician David.) As they make small talk, Lucetta chats about loneliness while Farfrae discusses his business ventures. The flirtation seems mutual.

Farfrae leaves after promising to return soon. Henchard then arrives in response to Lucetta's latest note. Asserting his will, he adds that he is in a hurry. Lucetta responds by claiming she has a headache and therefore won't detain the Mayor. When Elizabeth-Jane returns, Lucetta greets her warmly. She now wants the girl to stay, hoping this will keep Henchard away from High-Place Hall.

This confrontation with Lucetta is the second battle of wills that Henchard has had to fight recently. The first was when he rashly fired Farfrae. That Henchard has lost both battles, and at the same time lost two close friends, illustrates his loss of control over the events and people in his life. Elizabeth-Jane, on the other hand, settles comfortably into High-Place Hall.

In the next two chapters, Lucetta becomes the focal point of love on the part of both Farfrae and Henchard. Elizabeth-Jane becomes a bystander. First, Farfrae visits High-Place Hall. He indicates that he has come to see both women, but he has eyes only for Lucetta. Elizabeth-Jane stoically accepts this fact. Fate seems to be against her again.

Henchard's passion for Lucetta is also aroused by her lack of interest in him. He realizes that being cool toward her will not win her over; he must go on the offensive. Thus, he calls on Lucetta. Impressed by the richness of the house and its furnishings, he feels, for the first time in many years, like a rough, unsophisticated laborer. This drives him to be more aggressive than he had planned. He almost demands that Lucetta accept his proposal in order to reclaim her fallen reputation.

Indignant, Lucetta replies that Henchard only cares about the past and Jersey. "I am English!" she exclaims. She is no longer a Le Sueur, but is now a Templeman. She believes that by changing her name, she can change her past as well. Clearly, she has not learned the most important lesson towards which the novel purports: people cannot change their fate, their past, or the order which guides the events of their lives. After Henchard has gone, Lucetta makes up her mind. She will love Farfrae and not be a slave to her past.

SAQ

Is she right in renouncing her commitment to Henchard? (60 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

What value judgments, if any, does Hardy imply in his portrayal of this tricky situation? (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

With whom does your sympathy lie at this juncture and why? (80 words.)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Henchard meets Farfrae on a fine spring morning. He asks if the Scotsman remembers his story of the second woman in his past. Henchard says the story has a new chapter. He has asked the woman to marry him, but she has refused. Farfrae replies that Henchard therefore no longer has an obligation to her. The two men part, with Henchard now reassured that Farfrae is not his conscious rival for Lucetta's affections. Yet he still suspects that he has a rival. This encounter also tells you that Farfrae is ignorant of Lucetta's "shady" past. How do you think the proper Scotsman might feel if he knew about Lucetta's affair with Henchard?

The love rivalry comes to a head soon afterwards. Henchard visits Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane when Farfrae arrives. The four sit stiffly at the table. Lucetta offers more bread, and the two men grab the same slice, tearing it in two. Remember that bread is an important symbol for Henchard, the wheat merchant. In your opinion, what does Farfrae's tearing of the bread mean?

Later, Henchard, spying on Lucetta, overhears Lucetta and Farfrae declare their love for each other. He follows Lucetta back to her home and barges in without knocking, demanding to know why she won't marry him. When she balks, he threatens to reveal their affair ("in common fairness to other men," particularly Farfrae) if she doesn't promise before a witness to marry him.

Lucetta resigns herself to his demand. Henchard is aware of her unwillingness, but he doesn't care. Elizabeth-Jane is summoned to act as witness. Lucetta makes the promise, then faints. Elizabeth-Jane tries to talk Henchard out of his plan, but he refuses. Ignoring the suggestion, Elizabeth-Jane wonders what kind of hold Henchard has over Lucetta.

The next morning, Henchard serves as justice of the peace and hears the case of a woman arrested for vagrancy and indecent behavior. Seeing the woman, Henchard believes he may know her, but isn't certain. (With this, Hardy prepares you for another of the novel's many significant coincidences.) Henchard asks if the woman has anything to say for herself. She begins a story about a wife and child auctioned by the husband in her furmity tent at Weydon-Priors fair nearly 20 years earlier. She accuses Henchard of being that man, and says he is no better than she. Henchard's past has come back to haunt him. He finds himself being judged while he is serving as judge.

The town leaders at the court discount the woman's story but Henchard admits that it is true. He could easily have denied it and saved his reputation. Why do you think he chose not to do so? As Henchard leaves the town hall, he finds himself surrounded by a large crowd of the town's lower-class people. Notice how different this meeting is from the last time Henchard was observed by the townspeople in the King's Arms (Chapter V). He has been symbolically driven from his lofty place (what the furmity woman has called his "great big chair"). Within a few chapters, he will fall so far as to live among these people.

The news of Henchard's past spreads quickly throughout Casterbridge and reaches Lucetta. She is overwhelmed by it. Can she really marry such a terrible man? She decides to go away for a few days, and tells Elizabeth-Jane, who hasn't yet heard the news. Henchard comes to call while Lucetta is away. On one of his visits, he learns that she has returned but is out for a walk.

Elizabeth-Jane goes to meet Lucetta on her walk, and the two women are attacked by a ferocious bull. They run into a barn but the bull follows. Suddenly a man appears, turning the bull away from the women. It is Henchard. Elizabeth-Jane leaves Henchard and Lucetta together and walks toward home.

Henchard tells Lucetta he has reconsidered the promise he forced from her, adding that for her sake he is willing to postpone their wedding for a year or two. Lucetta instead offers to pay him for saving her from the bull. Lucetta's offer of money seems to echo Henchard's offer to Lucetta in his long-ago letter in which he informed her that he could not marry her because of the return of Susan. Their roles have now reversed.

Henchard refuses Lucetta's offer, telling her he believes his creditors might give him more time to pay his debts if they thought he might marry the wealthy Miss Lucetta Templeman. Lucetta then makes the stunning revelation that Henchard's principal creditor has already witnessed her marriage to Farfrae earlier in the week.

When Lucetta reveals that she has married Farfrae instead of Henchard, Elizabeth-Jane determines to leave the house at once. She is upset both by Lucetta's "improper" behavior and by her own failure to win Farfrae. She moves to a house across the street from Henchard's and thinks about her future.

This chapter (Chapter XXX) marks the end of the third major section of the novel. The section began with Lucetta's arrival in Casterbridge to marry Henchard and ends with her marrying Farfrae. Henchard has started to pay for his past sins. He is inexorably losing his position to Farfrae. Old ways and old people are being turned out, and new ways and new people are taking over. Nearly all of the loose ends in Henchard's life have been accounted for. Only one lie, Elizabeth-Jane's true parentage, remains to be revealed.

Following the furmity woman's courtroom revelation, Henchard experiences a rapid financial collapse. At the same time, his social life and self-esteem also collapse. "He passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to descend rapidly on the other side." Used to conducting business with a handshake and strong eye contact, he now seldom looks up from the ground when he meets people. Several business setbacks have forced him to the edge of bankruptcy.

Elizabeth-Jane feels sorry for Henchard and wants him to know that she still believes in him and forgives him for his behavior toward her, but he refuses to see her. Henchard has moved into the slum area of town. He occupies a few rooms in Jopp's cottage. This move seems to be another example of Henchard's urge to punish himself. He has isolated himself from the powerful people in the town and has made himself dependent on someone he neither respects nor likes. He refuses to see anyone, including Elizabeth-Jane.

Having moved Henchard to the poor side of town, Hardy begins to focus on the people and places in that district. He points out two bridges in the area. One is frequented by the lowest characters in the town, such as Jopp and the members of the town chorus. The other is often visited by failures who are contemplating suicide. Henchard goes to the latter bridge, where Jopp seeks him out. Ever vengeful, Jopp tells Henchard that Farfrae and Lucetta have moved into his former house and have even bought his old furniture at auction. "Surely he'll buy my body and soul likewise!" Henchard says.

The landscape turns symbolically blacker as Farfrae drives up to see Henchard. Farfrae says he has heard that Henchard intends to move away, urging him to stay, much as Henchard had urged Farfrae long ago. He

invites Henchard to move in with Lucetta and him, but Henchard refuses. Farfrae mentions the furniture he has bought and offers Henchard his pick of it. Henchard is moved and wonders aloud if he has wronged Farfrae in some way and is therefore suffering now because of his past sins.

Elizabeth-Jane hears that Henchard is sick and comes to nurse him. With her help, he recovers quickly. Being reunited with Elizabeth-Jane seems to turn the clock back in Henchard's mind. He applies for a job as a journeyman hay-trusser in Farfrae's yard.

Henchard hears that his rival may soon become Mayor of Casterbridge. He begins counting the days until he is released from his oath against drinking. The expiration of the oath seems to symbolize for Henchard a return to his old self. He doesn't realize that he must pay further for his sins.

One Sunday, Henchard joins the regulars at The Three Mariners as they drink and sing psalms. Henchard spots Farfrae and his new bride, Lucetta, walking outside with members of the upper church (that is, the upper classes). Henchard searches for the perfect psalm to match his mood: Psalm 109. This bitter psalm calls for the death and destruction of a man and his family: exactly what has happened to Henchard. The choir members at first balk at singing the psalm, but Henchard bullies them into it. They are later regretful when Henchard reveals he has directed the psalm at Farfrae. Noting Henchard's agitated state, Elizabeth- Jane leads her father home.

SAQ

There are some strong literary parallels between this scene and similar moments in some other well-known works. One is reminded of Antigone leading the blind king Oedipus by the hand in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Can you think of any other examples? What about *King Lear*? (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Elizabeth-Jane continues to observe Henchard and Farfrae, fearing that Henchard will do something which will be detrimental to both. (Note that Hardy once again uses an outside observer to relay the action to you.) One afternoon, she notices Farfrae in the hay-loft. Unnoticed, Henchard is a few steps behind him. Henchard raises his hand as if to push Farfrae down, but he stops. Henchard obviously isn't a murderer, either. What do you think stops him from destroying Farfrae and Lucetta? Is Hardy showing fate at work or Henchard's "character"? Henchard is a paradoxical mixture of powerlessness and power. This combination frightens Elizabeth-Jane, who decides to warn Farfrae. Farfrae doesn't believe her at first. "But we are quite friendly," he says. Farfrae is oblivious to the fact that by taking over the older man's house and business and hiring him as a common worker, he may have deeply hurt Henchard's pride. Once again Hardy shows Farfrae's lack of feeling and his insensitivity to Henchard.

Other businessmen in the town support Elizabeth-Jane's warning, however. They convince Farfrae to abandon the idea of establishing a fund to set up Henchard in his own small business. Henchard mistakenly believes Farfrae is behind the withdrawal, and feels even more bitter toward him.

Farfrae tells Lucetta about Henchard's hostility, and she becomes alarmed. She tries to talk Farfrae into moving away, and he seems agreeable. Just then, however, a member of the town council arrives to tell Farfrae that the current mayor has just died, and to ask if Farfrae will become mayor. Farfrae agrees. Again fate has intervened.

Fearing that Henchard, in his hatred toward Farfrae, might expose her secret, Lucetta seeks out Henchard, begging him to return her letters. He puts her off. Later, he remembers that the letters are still in the safe in his former home. This memory brings "a grotesque grin" to Henchard's face.

The next night, Henchard comes to retrieve the letters from Farfrae. Henchard states that they were written by the second woman in the story he had told Farfrae long before. Farfrae asks what has happened to the woman, and Henchard replies that she "married well." He begins reading the letters aloud to Farfrae. Their passion reminds Farfrae a little of Lucetta, but he attributes the similarity to the fact that all women are alike. At first, Henchard planned to identify the signature on the letters, as a final blow, but he loses his nerve, or may be has some compunction.

As is common in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the conversation between Henchard and Farfrae is overheard by an outside observer, Lucetta. She is almost paralyzed with fear. Later, she is relieved to find that Farfrae still doesn't know that she wrote the letters. She debates telling him the truth, but instead decides to retrieve the letters. Characteristically, she writes another self-incriminating note to Henchard and sets up an even more dangerous meeting at The Ring, the Roman amphitheatre where Henchard originally met Susan when she returned to Casterbridge. Henchard is moved by Lucetta's pleas, and promises to return the letters to her. While Henchard may have seemed vengeful or weak at the end of the last chapter, he impresses you as being sensitive in his meeting with Lucetta. As for Lucetta, she, too, is tempting fate and hiding behind a new identity, just as Henchard has. From what you have seen so far, it's fair to say that her ambition may prove disastrous.

SAQ

Do you think that we can apply E.M.Forster's well-known categories of "flat" and "round" characters here ? How would you categorize Henchard, or Elizabeth-Jane, or Farfrae, or Lucetta, or Susan ? Forster pointed out the necessity of having "flat" characters in the novel. Attempt the categorization. (150 words.)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Hardy makes sure that you are aware of Henchard's warning to Lucetta at the end of the previous chapter. He then develops that situation by introducing the evil Jopp at the beginning of the following chapter. Although Henchard may not be a blackmailer, Jopp is. He asks Lucetta to convince her husband

to give him a job. He also mentions that he knew her in Jersey. Jopp becomes even more of a threat later in the chapter when Henchard foolishly hands him the packet of letters to deliver to Lucetta. Jopp quickly discovers the nature of the poorly sealed packet, then stops for a quick drink at an inn in Mixen Lane, the poorest part of town, before heading to Farfrae's house with the package.

Hardy gives you a detailed description of Mixen Lane and its inhabitants. Notice all the images of darkness, dissipation, and destruction. This is a place that seems immune or impervious to the reach of law or of the will of the mainstream, civilized community.

Coaxed by the others at the inn, Jopp opens the packet of letters and begins reading them. The listeners show mock horror at hearing that the proper Mrs. Farfrae has had an affair. They decide to sponsor a skimmity-ride through the town. This ancient custom is a parade to ridicule adulterers.

Now a new character appears on the scene. Throughout the novel, you have seen that new characters have helped introduce new twists in the plot. The unnamed character is too well dressed for Mixen Lane, but he stops for a drink anyway, even contributing a coin to help pay for the skimmity-ride.

The next morning, Jopp brings the letters to Lucetta, who burns them immediately. She believes that the episode of the letters is finished and that her reputation is safe, but you should know better.

Henchard, the man of pride, has very little pride left. But he is still not able to admit his downfall as this chapter begins. He appears before the town council in the same grand clothes he wore as Mayor to ask that he be permitted to participate in a forthcoming celebration being planned for a visit by a member of the Royal Family. His clothes are now sadly tattered, as is Henchard's reputation, and he is told that he can be a spectator but not a participant. "If ye are included, why not others," Mayor Farfrae says. Henchard replies, "I have a particular reason for wanting to assist at the ceremony." Why do you think the event is so important to him? He is risking what little pride is left simply by appearing before the council. Perhaps the historical significance of the Royal visit is important to him. He still wants to be a part of Casterbridge's history. Perhaps he can't stand the idea of being a spectator rather than a participant. Being passive is not part of his character.

Or perhaps he just wants to be seen again, to have a place in the public eye. "I'll welcome his Royal Highness, or nobody shall!" he declares. Wearing the clothes he wore as Mayor seems to emphasize his desire to maintain his former position in the town.

Henchard makes certain he is seen at the celebration. As the Prince's carriage approaches, Henchard steps in front of it. Wearing a bright ribbon and carrying a homemade flag, Henchard attempts to shake hands with the Prince.

Lucetta is aghast at the sight. Henchard has ruined her most glorious hour as the Mayor's wife. Elizabeth-Jane is terrified and incredulous. Farfrae, annoyed, pushes Henchard out of the way. Although Henchard is angry at Farfrae's treatment of him, he walks away, defeated and bitter. The proper ladies in the crowd discuss Henchard's relation to Farfrae, much to Lucetta's annoyance.

Jopp's evil presence carries over to this chapter. He encounters Henchard and inflames Henchard's already seething case against both Farfrae and Lucetta. Henchard decides that he must confront Farfrae. In Farfrae's barn, Henchard challenges the new mayor to a wrestling match to the death. Saying that he is the stronger man, Henchard ties one hand behind his back to make the fight fair. Henchard seems to be a curious mixture of bully and fair fighter. The battle is over quickly. Henchard forces Farfrae to the edge of the loft and is about to push him to his death. He cannot do it, however. This marks the third time that Henchard has stopped himself from destroying Farfrae or Lucetta.

He leaves the barn in shame, realizing that even his physical (animal) strength, upon which his pride has been based, has not been enough to help him triumph over his "enemies" or his fate. He begins walking toward the bridge of failures again. There he hears, but doesn't heed, the beginnings of the skimmity-ride.

Hardy has built up your anticipation of the skimmity-ride for several chapters. Now it finally occurs in Chapter XXXIX. First, like a movie director, Hardy places all the principals. He has already shown that Henchard is out of the way at the bridge of failures. Next, he has Farfrae receive an anonymous note that directs him to leave town. Finally, he places Lucetta near the window in her house where she will be sure to see the event. After all,

Lucetta is the one who will probably be most affected by the ridicule of the skimmity-ride.

The marchers proceed through the town, banging drums and tambourines and carrying two stuffed figures: effigies of Henchard and Lucetta. Lucetta, hearing several maids describing the figures, is drawn to the window to see the parade. "It's me," she says. The admission signals the end of all her hopes about a good, free life. Elizabeth-Jane rushes into Lucetta's room and tries to pull her away from the window, but the damage has been done. Lucetta is certain that Farfrae will see the effigies and know of her unfaithfulness. She collapses in an epileptic seizure. Since Lucetta is pregnant, the doctor fears it may prove fatal. He says that Farfrae must be sent for at once. Since epileptics usually have a history of such seizures, do you feel it a weakness in the novel that Hardy has not indicated previously that Lucetta is epileptic?

One of the most interesting points about the much discussed skimmity-ride is that you never really see it. Neither do most of the people in the town. One maid even says, "There- I shan't see it, after all!" You hear about the parade from the different maids and from Lucetta who insists "I will see it!" and "Donald will see it!" Then it seems to simply disappear. The town leaders and constables keep searching for concrete evidence of the spectacle, but they can't find any. Farfrae, for whose sake the parade has been planned, isn't even in town when it occurs. In some ways, the skimmity-ride, for all that it has taken place, seems to be more in Lucetta's mind than anywhere else. It pushes to the surface all her guilt and fear. Perhaps this is why she is so affected by the procession that ridicules her past affair.

As if to emphasize the distance that has come between Henchard and the other characters, Hardy presents the action in this chapter through Henchard's eyes. Henchard has become an outsider, observing the action rather than playing an active role.

Henchard leaves the bridge of failures and enters the town just as the skimmity-ride is ending. Looking for Elizabeth-Jane, he goes to Farfrae's house. He tells the people at Farfrae's house, who are searching for Farfrae, that the new mayor has changed his earlier plans and has gone in the opposite direction. Remember that he overheard Farfrae's plans while perched in the loft. The others don't believe him because, as Hardy notes, "He had lost his good name." Henchard decides to find Farfrae himself.

When Henchard catches up with his former friend and rival, he addresses him humbly as "Mr. Farfrae." But Farfrae is suspicious. He thinks Henchard wants to trick him into an ambush and kill him. Henchard becomes desperate. Hardy uses words such as "implored" and "deprecated" to describe Henchard's behavior and point out his ineffectualness. Farfrae ignores Henchard's insistence that something is wrong at Farfrae's house. Henchard returns to town where he curses himself as being "a less scrupulous Job," a man who has lost even his own self-respect. The reference to Job clearly shows Henchard's sunken mental state.

Job:

A patriarch whose story is told in the Old Testament. To test his faith, God took away everything from him: his property, animals, and family-members. God also inflicted many diseases on him. Job passed the test and everything was restored to him, but his story is marked by the occasional bitter complaints or laments he makes about his lot.

Henchard sees Elizabeth-Jane at Farfrae's house and learns that Lucetta is near death. Noticing Elizabeth-Jane's warm look toward him while they conversed, Henchard sees a "pin-point of light" for the first time in the evening's darkness. He begins to wonder hopefully if he can learn to love her as his own daughter. With that thought in mind, he returns to Jopp's cottage. There Henchard learns that a sea-captain has called on him. Who can the mystery man be? Remember, only one other sailor has appeared in the novel: Newson. Just as Henchard is thinking of finding a daughter's love in Elizabeth-Jane, will her real father return to take her away from him? Perhaps Henchard truly is a Job figure, doomed to constant suffering for his sins.

Farfrae returns, but he is too late. Lucetta dies during the night. As this fourth section of the novel ends, another of Henchard's women has died and the third may be taken away from him momentarily. He is lonelier than ever.

Newson indeed calls again, but Henchard, who suddenly cannot bear the thought of parting with Elizabeth, sends him off with a lie about the girl being

dead. Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane soon have a warm conversation, but he is plagued by the thought of Newson's return. The thought plunges Henchard into a "leaden gloom." He goes for a walk, crosses a bridge, and looks into the waters below. He sees what he thinks is a body, his own body! What Henchard actually sees is the effigy that had been paraded in the skimmity-ride through town the day before. It is a curious psychological moment. Henchard, the observer in the last chapter, is now detached even from himself. Symbolically, he is dead. Henchard brings Elizabeth-Jane to see the figure. She confirms that it is his effigy. Realizing that Henchard is in a suicidal frame of mind, she decides to move in with him to protect him. Interestingly, if Henchard had not seen the effigy, he might have jumped into the water and killed himself. The skimmity-ride killed Lucetta, but one of the effigies used in the procession saved Henchard.

A period of relative calm settles over the lives of the main characters. Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane are living together as father and daughter, and Henchard is running a small seed business purchased for him by Farfrae and the town council. Henchard now resumes his role as the observer in the novel. A budding romance develops between Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae. This romance troubles Henchard for two reasons: he doesn't want to lose Elizabeth-Jane to anyone, and he especially can't stand the idea of his enemy winning her hand. Nevertheless, he uncharacteristically refrains from intervening. Fear of loneliness has made the once-forceful Henchard hold his jealousy in check. He wants to retain the love of his "daughter." For a fleeting moment, he contemplates revealing Elizabeth-Jane's true parentage thus causing the proper Farfrae to forsake her, but he fears the knowledge would drive her into Newson's arms instead of his.

As the romance between Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane blossoms into an engagement, Henchard's self-esteem sinks lower and lower. He sees himself as a "fangless lion," a very different image from the "raging bull" he has been compared to earlier.

When through his telescope he sees Newson approaching the town, Henchard knows that his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane is doomed. He returns home and learns from Elizabeth-Jane that a stranger wants to meet with her. Sadly, Henchard tells her to see the man, adding that he is going to leave Casterbridge - not because of her impending marriage but to allow

the two of them (Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane) to lead separate lives. Elizabeth-Jane is reunited with Newson that evening at Farfrae's. She learns that Henchard kept her true parentage a secret and sent Newson away with a lie. Elizabeth feels very strongly about this lie and resolves to forget Henchard. Then she, Newson, and Farfrae turn their thoughts to the wedding plans.

The last two chapters of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* form an epilogue, much as the first two chapters served as a prologue. Henchard, once again a wandering hay-trusser, returns to Weydon-Priors. He seems to be trying to retrace his history. Hardy notes that externally there was nothing to stop Henchard from starting all over again and achieving "higher" things, but internally his life is empty. Yet his thoughts are still on Elizabeth-Jane and Casterbridge.

When he learns from some passersby that Farfrae is soon to marry, he decides to return to Casterbridge for the wedding. Henchard buys a new suit and searches for a wedding present, choosing a caged gold finch. The caged bird, like Henchard himself, is imprisoned by fate.

Henchard arrives at the wedding. He leaves the bird outside and enters the house. He hears music and observes dancing. It pains him to see that Elizabeth-Jane's dancing partner is Newson, who has resumed his role as father. Hardy presents a series of dark images at this point to illustrate Henchard's feelings. Finally, Elizabeth-Jane greets him, addressing him coldly and formally as "Mr. Henchard." She tells him bitterly that she can no longer love him. Henchard is too devastated with pain and self- loathing to defend himself. He leaves the house, promising never to trouble her again.

Although Hardy included this chapter in his serialization, he omitted it from the first edition of the novel. He included it in later editions, however, because of popular demand. The chapter has a strange resonance to it. Henchard seems like a wounded bird, making one last attempt at flight before dying. Some readers feel the chapter is useful because it emphasizes Henchard's total isolation from the community: life will continue comfortably in Casterbridge, and Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae will be happy, without Henchard. This sets the stage for Henchard's last request in the final chapter. Other readers feel that Hardy overdoes his debasement of Henchard, and that Chapter XLIV adds nothing new.

In the novel's final chapter, Henchard, a wanderer again, roams onto Egdon Heath where he is later followed by Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae. The Heath is a timeless place, and a man's history means very little within it. It is a fitting setting for the end of Henchard's struggles.

Henchard is drawn to the Heath by Elizabeth-Jane's rejection of him. Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae are drawn there by the discovery of the bird cage in which Henchard had brought his wedding present. The bird had died of starvation without uttering a sound. Just as its caged existence symbolized Henchard's feelings of imprisonment and isolation, the bird's death also symbolizes the lack of love in Henchard's life. Elizabeth-Jane is moved by the present, which she considers Henchard's repentance, and she is determined to find him again.

At first unable to find Henchard, Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane are about to turn back. Then they see Abel Whittle in the distance. They follow him to a cabin where he tells them that Henchard has died moments before. They find it strange that Abel has remained with Henchard. After all, Henchard often abused Abel unmercifully when he worked for Henchard. Abel explains that he has stayed with Henchard because of the way Henchard cared for Abel's mother when she was dying. Other, more symbolic reasons also explain his presence. For one thing, Henchard left Casterbridge as an outcast, feeling like Cain. Having Abel beside him emphasizes his link to Cain, although this is a Cain who has atoned and made his peace with Abel. Abel also seems a bit like the wise fool, thus linking Henchard with King Lear as well. Finally, having to depend on Abel demonstrates that the once-great Henchard has in the end sunk lower than the most common workman. His pride has been destroyed. He has been punished for his hubris.

Stop to Consider

Is it possible to come up with a somewhat more positive interpretation of Henchard's final moments? Can his end be compared to that of other tragic heroes? Would you judge him as harshly as he does himself?

Henchard leaves a tragic will pinned to the head of his bed. He asks that he be neither mourned nor remembered - particularly by Elizabeth-Jane. Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae decide to abide by the terms of the will. What does the will suggest about Henchard's view of his life?

The final paragraphs of the novel are devoted to a brief presentation of Elizabeth-Jane's future life, one filled with calmness and comfort, but not necessarily happiness. There is a certain melancholy tone to the ending. The hare has lost the race, and the tortoise has won. But the scene seems devoid of the energy and animation that Henchard epitomized. Hardy seems to say that in the fallen, fate-dominated world of the novel, people are meant to endure, but not to rise too high.

2.4 LIST OF CHARACTERS

MICHAEL HENCHARD:

The Mayor of Casterbridge is almost completely dominated by one character: Michael Henchard, the nomadic hay-trusser who becomes Mayor of a Wessex town. Even when Henchard is not present, the other characters always seem to be talking about him or wondering how to deal with him. He is larger than life, as are his successes and failures. As you read *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, you are likely to be impressed by Michael Henchard, but you may have trouble deciding whether you admire, loathe, pity, or condemn him. Don't worry if you can't seem to arrive at an easy conclusion or convenient assessment of his character: Hardy probably means you to complexly respond to him. Some readers see Henchard as a victim of capricious fate, while others feel that he deserves all of the grief he has to endure in the course of the novel.

Stop to Consider

Hardy subtitles the novel, 'A Story of a Man of Character.' What do you think he means by the word 'character'? One noted critic, Irving Howe, states that character 'indicates energy and pride of personal being.' The word character also implies consistency. Do the three terms - energy, pride, and consistency - clearly encapsulate the character of Michael Henchard?

Henchard's energy is amazing. You might think of him as a billiard ball in constant motion. He is a man of action. He rushes headlong, bounding from one hasty act to another. He may regret an action, such as auctioning his family, but he never tries to take back anything he has done. Instead, he

may do something else, equally rash, in order to make amends for his first action.

Pride is another major character trait of Michael Henchard. His personal pride separates him from the other people around him. It is at the core of his successes as well as his failures. Hardy points out Henchard's pride throughout the novel, starting with his initial description of the main character. Henchard's walk is that of a skilled countryman, not that of a general laborer, and 'in the turn and plant of each foot there was, further, a dogged and cynical indifference personal to himself...'

Henchard's combination of energy and pride results in his becoming a prosperous merchant and the town leader. However, the combination also proves self-destructive. He is driven to outdo Farfrae, and this leads to the breakup of their friendship and partnership, and, ultimately, to Henchard's bankruptcy. He cannot accept the truth of Elizabeth-Jane's parentage, and he becomes estranged from her as well. In addition, he cannot comfortably allow Lucetta to marry another man.

Consistency is another major character trait of Michael Henchard, surprisingly true for a man who is so impulsive. He is always the same man. His wife Susan points out this consistency several times as she and Elizabeth-Jane seek their 'distant kin.' In Chapter IX, she says, 'He was always so.' Do you think Henchard's consistency is an admirable trait? Henchard tells people exactly what he thinks of them, and they know exactly what to expect of him. Yet his inflexibility makes him an almost impossible person to live and work with.

However, you may have another opinion. Maybe you think he is not a consistent character. If you think so, back up your stand with evidence.

Stop to Consider

Hardy leaves a major question about Henchard for you to answer: Is he a villain who commits evil acts, or is he a pawn of fate? Does he deserve the terrible end that he suffers? Hardy seems to admire Henchard, but he does not allow Henchard to find peace and happiness.

SUSAN HENCHARD:

Susan Henchard's personality is a sharp contrast to that of her husband's. While her husband is active, she is passive. Henchard is confident and enthusiastic; she is confused and bitter. In Chapter II, Hardy describes Susan as being a fatalist. She is resigned to whatever life brings her: even being auctioned off to another man whom she accepts as her new mate. Susan's actions add a fatalistic tone to the whole novel. Yet what happens to her influences much of the action of the novel. Hardy also uses the word 'mobility' to describe Susan. She is a moveable person, physically and emotionally. She does not live for herself. Most of her actions are motivated by the desire to help her surviving daughter. She leaves with the sailor in the hope of finding a better life for Elizabeth-Jane, and she returns to Henchard in the hope of helping the second Elizabeth-Jane get ahead in life.

Hardy purposefully only sketches Susan for you. She is undeveloped as a character. If she were stronger, she might deflect your attention away from Michael Henchard. Think about it. Do you feel real sympathy for what happens to Susan?

Yet, when Susan does act or make decisions, she unwittingly influences many of the major events. She leads the family into the furmity tent. She accepts the auction, rather than fighting for her rights as Henchard's wife. She reminds the furmity woman of the auction and of Henchard's whereabouts. She leaves behind the poorly sealed note that reveals Elizabeth-Jane's parentage. She even gives both girls the same name, which adds to Henchard's confusion. Susan Henchard may be a minor character but she has major influence in this novel.

ELIZABETH-JANE :

Elizabeth-Jane is the embodiment of a proper young woman. She is reserved, innocent, and polite. You may think that some of her views, particularly those she expresses early in the book, are a little prim. For example, she is concerned about Susan's talking with the furmity woman and is shy in approaching Farfrae. By Victorian standards, however, Elizabeth-Jane should be concerned with acting properly at all times. She must live up to her status as a mayor's daughter.

Elizabeth-Jane becomes a more interesting and more fully realized character as the book progresses. As the only person in the novel who grows and changes, she works very hard at educating herself academically and socially. She is always trying to improve herself. At the beginning, Elizabeth-Jane may seem to be a prig or a naive small-town girl, but she grows into a gentle, kind-hearted woman. She never becomes cynical. She can even forgive Henchard for his lies to her, although her forgiveness comes a little too late. Elizabeth-Jane is also the only character who seems to express warm feelings, even love, toward others. Susan and Farfrae are stoical; Henchard and Lucetta are over-emotional. One question you will have to answer for yourself is whether Elizabeth-Jane is really a heroine.

Does her emergence in a position of strength at the end of the book show that she has actively grown or passively survived?

Elizabeth-Jane touches all the other main characters in the novel. She serves as a sounding-board for the others. Elizabeth-Jane is a listener and confidante, offering protection and advice. She also acts as an outside observer for you. You learn a great deal about Henchard, Susan, Lucetta, and Farfrae from Elizabeth-Jane's interaction with them, and their reaction to her.

DONALD FARFRAE:

If you feel that Michael Henchard represents energy in the novel, then Donald Farfrae represents reason. He is different from Michael in that he thinks more than he feels. He has a sharp business mind and writes every transaction in ledger books. Henchard makes deals with handshakes; Farfrae makes them with contracts. Henchard uses brawn and personality; he even challenges Farfrae to a fight to the death. Farfrae uses intelligence and logic. Notice the difference in the way the two men feel toward each other. Henchard's emotions toward Farfrae are strong ones that range from love to anger to hatred to jealousy. Farfrae's feelings about Henchard are mild ones that range from respect to friendship to annoyance to pity to mild indifference.

Farfrae's courtships of both Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane don't show much depth, either. Notice how rapidly he forgets her and moves on to a new relationship with Elizabeth-Jane.

You may have mixed feelings about Farfrae. He is admirable in his basic honesty and good will. These qualities win him the respect of most of the people - rich and poor alike - in Casterbridge. But he is also callous in his disregard of Henchard's feelings. He appropriates everything of Henchard's, even his house and furniture, and goes so far as to paint his own name over Henchard's on the signpost when he takes over Henchard's business. Farfrae is successful, but is he the 'man of character' that Henchard is? Henchard is always colorful, even in utter defeat; Farfrae is usually drab. Yet Farfrae survives at the end, and Henchard doesn't. Whom do you think Hardy admires more? Whom do you admire more?

LUCETTA TEMPLEMAN:

Throughout the novel, Lucetta seems to play the role of 'the other woman.' She has an affair with Henchard while he is still technically married to Susan, then she marries Farfrae instead of accepting Henchard's offer to clear her reputation. Lucetta may have changed her name to the properly English Templeman, but Hardy lets you know that she is French at heart. To British readers, her Frenchness implied sensuality and possibly even moral looseness. In Chapter XXII, Hardy writes, "She had arrived at Casterbridge as a Bath lady (a proper Englishwoman), and there were obvious reasons why Jersey (where she was condemned as a loose woman), should drop out of her life." But it never does.

Lucetta is flighty and at times conniving. She is also the one character in the novel who feels sexual passion. This sexuality makes her a more interesting character, but it also gets her into trouble. Her rapid romance with Farfrae contrasts greatly with Elizabeth-Jane's slow-building relationship with him. Lucetta is as impulsive as Henchard and even more emotional. Why else would she suffer a stroke at seeing herself paraded in effigy in the skimmity-ride?

Like Henchard, Lucetta is also self-destructive. This may be seen in the way she writes letters to Henchard or her meetings with him after she has married Farfrae.

Lucetta also has a snobbish streak that brings her trouble. She wants to be the great lady of Casterbridge. Her attitude causes Joshua Jopp, Henchard's

fired grain manager (see below), to want to destroy her and leads the townspeople to enjoy humiliating her.

RICHARD NEWSON :

Newson, the sailor who buys Susan and her daughter at the auction in the furmity tent, appears only at the beginning and end of the novel. In each instance, he helps point out glaring weaknesses in Henchard's character. His dealings with Henchard bring out the mayor's self-indulgent side. Each of Newson's appearances also marks a downward turning point in Henchard's life.

Hardy never develops Newson's character fully. His role seems mainly to serve as a contrast with Henchard. Newson's willingness to "disappear" so that Susan can find peace of mind shows his kindness and sensitivity. Elizabeth-Jane's loving feelings for him confirm these characteristics. He is also jolly and forgiving, two qualities Henchard doesn't possess.

Some readers feel that Newson's reappearance at the end of the novel, after having been deceived by Henchard ten months before, is too much of a coincidence, a convenient opportunity for Hardy to finally push Henchard out of the way. Think about this criticism. Decide if you think Newson's return helps to give the novel a fitting ending or one that is too contrived.

JOSHUA JOPP:

Joshua Jopp is an almost standard villain, the type of character who often appears in a Dickens novel. Feeling that he has been wronged by Henchard and put down by Lucetta, he bears grudges toward both. Jopp is a poisonous influence on the action of the novel. Like a rat, he appears most often at night or in dark places. He directly causes Lucetta's destruction by helping to instigate the skimmity-ride. When Henchard moves in with Jopp, their association symbolizes Henchard's tremendous downfall.

MRS. GOODENOUGH, THE FURMITY WOMAN:

The furmity woman appears four times in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: twice in Weydon-Priors, first playing a major role in the auction, and then,

18 years later, giving Susan the message that leads her [Susan] to Casterbridge. Mrs. Goodenough again appears twice in Casterbridge, where she both reveals Henchard's "crime" and participates in the skimmity-ride. Each time you see her, the furmity woman's appearance and fortunes seem to have deteriorated further. She goes from mistress of the furmity tent to tender of an outdoor pot, to town vagrant. Although her fall is in direct contrast to Henchard's rise, in the end, she helps to bring him down to her level. Mrs. Goodenough seems to fill a role as Henchard's conscience and an instrument of his self-destruction. Perhaps that is the reason for her name. She reveals to Henchard that he is not always good enough.

ABEL WHITTLE:

Abel Whittle makes two brief, but significant appearances. First, he is the subject of Henchard's verbal abuse and humiliation when he continually fails to arrive at work on time. Henchard's almost cruel treatment of Whittle seems to mark a turning point in Henchard's business fortunes. The second time, Whittle acts as Henchard's companion in his final days and announces the former mayor's death.

Whittle is a simple man but a faithful one. He stays with Henchard at the end because of the latter's kindnesses toward Whittle's mother. His first name is significant also. As Abel, his companionship helps Henchard recognize his own 'Cainness.' (Remember that Cain, in the *Bible*, became an outcast after killing his brother Abel. Henchard's association with Abel emphasizes Henchard's alienation from the rest of Casterbridge society.) Abel's surname, Whittle, seems to refer to the whittling down of Henchard's fortunes. In the end, only Abel Whittle, the lowliest of the people of Casterbridge, is left to remember and mourn the man who was once the most powerful person in the town.

THE TOWN CHORUS :

Several minor characters appear in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, filling you in on past events and giving the common people's impression of their leaders. These people- such as Mother Cuxsom, Nance Mockridge, Christopher Coney, and Solomon Longways stand outside the windows of

the hotel, drink in the Three Mariners Inn, or gather in the side streets of the town. They serve as a kind of Greek chorus in the novel.

Chorus:

This takes us to ancient Greek drama of the 5th and 6th centuries, BC. Drama of that time comes down to us as Athenian theatre as seen through the works of the three great tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the comedies of Aristophanes.

In the rich cultural flowering following upon the Greek victory against the Persians at Salamis, Sophocles played a leading role. 'Theatre' was not what we understand in the modern sense of entertainment, amusement or invention. It was a product of convention and highly stylised. Aeschylus, whose drama comes earlier than Sophocles', created plays within a convention where the play was little more than a poem sung or recited by a 'chorus'.

With Sophocles, the dramatic action is fuller and draws upon real life. In Sophoclean drama, the 'Chorus' is an essential part of the play, presenting the dominant theme in lyric terms, standing between spectator and the stage, at the point of the footlights, so to speak. The Chorus was both spectator and actor and their presence brought vividness to the action, heightening it and making it urgent.

The town chorus here maintains the traditions and superstitions of Wessex life. Significantly, they are the only true Wessex citizens in the novel. All of the other characters are outsiders who have migrated to the region.

2.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit I have tried to guide you through the novel, pausing to make elaborative comments on the more crucial moments of the narrative. That does not mean, however, that what I failed to include is of no importance. Unless you read the whole novel thoroughly whatever I say here will not make any sense to you. I also provided you with a list of characters that may be helpful for quick references.

* * *

Unit 3
Themes and Techniques

Contents:

3.1 Objectives
3.2 Introduction
3.3 The Plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
3.4 Themes
3.5 Narrative Technique
3.6 Characterization and Setting
3.7 Language and Style
3.8 Summing up
3.9 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to

- *offer* you an analysis of the important themes and techniques of the novel,
- *understand* the author's handling of plot, point of view and characterization.
- *assess* the novel in its totality with special attention to language and style.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The Mayor of Casterbridge was first published as a weekly serial in *The Graphic* during 1886 and Hardy himself noted the frequent interruptions in his writing of the novel. The extensive revision of the original text to fulfill the demands of serial publication was responsible for the lack of artistic wholeness in the plot and Hardy recognizes this weakness. He revised the work again before its publication in book-form, deleting some accidental confrontations between Henchard, Lucetta and Farfrae. The serial publication in *The Graphic* includes Henchard's marriage with Lucetta but

the 1895 edition concentrates on the idea of an illicit relationship. So you can easily see how the plot of the novel is affected by the various revisions. But Hardy still believed that the plot was organic and coherent. The unifying elements of the structure of classical Greek tragedy are present in the novel and a quality of consummate artistry is easily discernible. Hardy observes the unities of place, action and time within the framework of the novel.

3.3 THE PLOT OF *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

The story line of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* consists of plot twists, coincidences, echoes, and a series of minor and major climaxes. Throughout, Hardy deals with time in interesting or unusual ways. He can take several chapters to cover the events of a single day or whisk through six months in a single paragraph. He even leaps completely over a period of nearly 20 years and lets you in on the events of those years little by little as the major characters reflect on the past.

Because *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was originally serialized in twenty magazine issues, the narrative is episodic. You might want to think of the book as a script for a television series. (In Hardy's time, books and magazines provided entertainment similar to television in our time.) Hardy creates just enough suspense at the end of one episode to make you want to read the next episode. That's just what a television writer does to make sure you'll be there for the next show. Look for the elements that connect one episode to another or lay the groundwork for future events. Despite the constraints of serial publication, it can still be argued that Hardy establishes deeper ways of connecting his plot and making the narrative coherent and ring 'true' and not artificially contrived.

The Mayor of Casterbridge may be divided into five sections:

1. Chapters I and II- the auction and oath
2. Chapters III-XIX- from Susan's return until her death
3. Chapters XX-XXX- from Lucetta's entrance until her marriage to Farfrae
4. Chapters XXXI-XL- from Henchard's bankruptcy until Lucetta's death
5. Chapters XLI-XLV- from Newson's appearance until Henchard's death

Each section develops an important link to Henchard's downfall. Each part opens with Henchard asserting the strength of his character and ends with Henchard's strength being undercut. At the end of section 1, Henchard has lost all contact with his family. At the end of section 2, he learns the truth about Elizabeth-Jane. At the end of section 3, he has admitted his guilt and lost public favor. At the end of section 4, he grieves over Lucetta's death and learns of Newson's arrival. At the end of section 5, he dies unremembered.

The first two chapters serve as a prologue to the action proper and in spite of the time gap the next chapter gives a thrust to the sequential progression of the novel. The plot of the novel gets an impetus with Henchard's self-dramatizing acts and a chain of events stems from these acts ending with the tragic death of the protagonist. In fact, a relentless causality seems to be a striking facet of Hardy's writing. The establishment of continuity through a linkage of events may be a plot-device, but this reflects Hardy's gloomy belief that in life one event holds the dangerous potential of precipitating another event which leads to yet something else, and finally things are out of control of humans.

We can also make out two plot-levels : one surface and the other subterranean . The rustic characters mainly belong to the sub-plot, but they also contribute to the movement of the main plot through their schemings. The rough crowd in Mixen Lane literally plot (against Lucetta) and such plotting in no small way enhances the sense of a 'plot' (with its accompanying sense of complications and connections: necessary features of traditional plot). In general, oscillating between the past and present the plot moves through a pattern where the repressed (subterranean) elements from the past return to direct the course of the novel. Think of the role of the Furmity Woman here.

Check Your Progress:

1.Read the first twenty chapters and try to find out the important developments in the plot.

2. Identify all the events which promise to lead to future actions and events with significance.

3. Distinguish between 'story' and 'plot' in relation to *The Mayor*.

The plot records the 'movements' of other characters too. The plot moves following a pattern of rise and fall, a pattern which also includes the repetition of certain events. Various characters such as Newson and the furmity-woman appear and reappear linking the past and the present. When Farfrae's stock rises, Henchard's falls and the taut balance is maintained until late in the novel. Another notable thing is that while Henchard declines socially and materially, his moral stature rises.

SAQ

How correct is it to say that Henchard's 'moral' stature stands in inverse relation to his social and material well-being? (100 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

The pattern of rise and fall with its attendant twists (i.e., one kind of fall coming across as a kind of rise in a different sense) is a dominant and striking feature of the plot. The plot heavily depends on character, especially Henchard whose gestures and behavior define the plot dynamics. Hardy quotes Novalis' comment that 'character is destiny,' and destiny here is analogous to the plot of life.

In a plotted novel, very little occurs that is insignificant. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* abounds in significant or meaningful events. However, the beauty of the work lies in that there is ample scope to come up with varying interpretations of the events even when one is discussing them only in terms of their implications for the plot. For instance, the little note written by Donald to help Henchard in solving the problem of bad wheat leads to something positive for the mayor: he gets some breathing space from his farm-related

problems. However, isn't it true that as result of this note Henchard makes Donald stay with him, and that finally Donald's establishment in Casterbridge spells doom for Henchard?

Stop to Consider

Think of at least four occurrences in the first ten chapters of the novel and then come up with as many consequences of these occurrences as you can think of. Some of these will have very immediate and obvious consequences, but ponder on more far-reaching outcomes as in the example I gave above.

3.4 Themes

In discussing the major themes in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* we must first proceed to examine Hardy's novel to determine the meaning of the term "theme."

The theme of a work of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the unifying generalization about life stated or implied by the narrative. To derive the theme of a story, we must ask what its central purpose is: what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals. Theme is neither a clichéd moral nor a framework on which to hang the other elements of the work; rather, it arises naturally from an interaction of all the other elements of the work: characters, setting, conflict, atmosphere, imagery, symbolism, and even narrative perspective.

A complex work may have more than one theme. The themes can be elusive and it's a challenge to simply identify the themes. Even though such a jaded relationship as that of the Henchards at the beginning of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* may be related to the Hardys' marital problems, it would be unwise to say that in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the theme concerns the impossibility of finding personal fulfillment inside a conventional marriage-after all, Elizabeth-Jane's and Donald Farfrae's is a conventional marriage, but (insofar as the narrator describes it) it seems moderately happy.

The central theme of the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* may be as enigmatic as 'anything is possible at the hands of Time and Chance, except, perhaps, fair play' (Ch. 1). However, the novel's subtitle, *A Study of a Man of Character*, suggests that it must be related to Henchard's capacity

for suffering, since for Henchard - in part owing to his failure to communicate his true feelings and his tendency towards 'introspective inflexibility' (an inability to understand his own motivations)-'happiness [is] but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain' (Ch. 45), for that is the lesson that the youthful Elizabeth-Jane apparently learns from her step-father. And yet the 'unbroken tranquility' she enjoys in maturity, as Farfrae's wife, forces her 'to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen. . . .' Thus, Hardy's essentially gloomy, nihilistic view of the human condition colors even the conventional 'happy ending' in a second, better marriage that Hardy may have derived from Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Certainly, neither Henchard nor Lucetta realizes any satisfaction from an existence (and, apparently, a pleasant existence socially and materially) founded on a lie. Both characters' fates illustrate the pattern of a secret in the past unexpectedly being brought to light and blighting present happiness. Lucetta refuses to 'be a slave to the past' (Ch. 25), and determines to bury the secret of her former relationship with Henchard (and, therefore, her social obligation to marry him) in order to satisfy her present passion. Similarly, Henchard's lie to Newson about the death of Elizabeth-Jane is directly responsible for her rejection of him. Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae both escape the tragedy because, although they too are guilty of minor duplicities, they are essentially altruistic and 'single-hearted.' It is not enough, Hardy seems to imply in this novel, to meet the vicissitudes of life heroically or defiantly - one must do so with love, empathy, and charity.

Hardy's novel banks on the theme of the 'Value of a Good Name' and its manifold implications. The reading of the first few chapters will give you an indication of this. When Henchard wakes to find that the sale of his wife was not a dream or a drunken hallucination, his first reaction is not remorse as we would expect; but the concern whether he had divulged his name to anyone during the course of the previous evening. Further, in the course of the novel, Susan warns Elizabeth-Jane of the need for discretion at the Three Mariners Inn: their respectability (and, more importantly, that of the mayor) could be jeopardized if anyone discovered that Henchard's family performed chores as payment for lodging. The importance of a solid reputation and character is rather obvious given Henchard's situation, for Henchard has little else besides his name. He arrives in Casterbridge with nothing more than the implements of the hay-trusser's trade, and though we

never learn the circumstances of his rise to the respectable position of a Mayor, such a climb presumably depends upon the worth of one's name. Throughout the course of the novel, Henchard attempts to earn, or to believe that he has earned his position. He is, however, plagued by a conviction of his own worthlessness, and he places himself in situations that can only result in failure. For instance, he indulges in petty jealousy of Farfrae, which leads to a long drawn-out competition in which Henchard loses his position as mayor, his business, and the women he loves. More crucially, Henchard's actions result in the loss of his name and his reputation as a worthy and honorable citizen. Once he has lost these essentials, he follows the same course toward death as Lucetta, whose demise is seemingly precipitated by the irretrievable loss of respectability brought about by the "skimmity-ride."

SAQ

Consider this question: does a character (e.g. Henchard, or Susan) stand to 'illustrate' a theme ? Would it be correct to say that the same character may sometimes not relate to any other 'theme' in a novel? Or, are we simply tracing 'themes' as readers ? Where and how a novelist indicate a 'theme'? (100 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Another recurrent theme in the novel is the impossibility of erasing the not so pleasant past. Henchard's fateful decision to sell his wife and child at Weydon-Priors continues to shape his life eighteen years later, while the town itself rests upon its former incarnation: every farmer who tills a field turns up the remains of long-dead Roman soldiers. The Ring, the ancient Roman amphitheater that dominates Casterbridge and provides a forum for the secret meetings of its citizens, stands as a potent symbol of the indelibility of a past that cannot be escaped. The terrible events that once occurred here as entertainment for the citizens of Casterbridge have, in a

certain sense, determined the town's present state. The brutality of public executions has given way to the miseries of thwarted lovers. Henchard's past proves no less indomitable. Indeed, he spends the entirety of the novel attempting to right the wrongs of long ago. He succeeds only in making more grievous mistakes, but he never fails to acknowledge that the past cannot be buried or denied. Only Lucetta is guilty of such folly. She dismisses her history with Henchard and the promises that she made to him in order to pursue Farfrae, a decision for which she pays with her reputation and, eventually, her life.

SAQ

Consider the importance of the idea of a 'past' in relation to the novel's characters. Do you think this is a valid assessment of Hardy's construction of the novel? (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Michael Henchard's self-willed isolation and the tragic predicament of his life (apart from the moments of mercantile prosperity) occupy the interest of the readers of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Hardy explores the main theme in relation to the condition of his protagonist. For our convenience we can try to list the important themes like the theme of ambition and self education, the role of fate, theme of change and isolation, the theme of the fall of the mighty, failed communication of the characters and the theme of the tension between self and society. Fate and chance occupy an important place in Hardy's scheme and the role of nature is another prominent aspect of his novel. The part played by fate and chance helps to underline the supreme cosmic irony operating in the Hardyean universe. Henchard seems to be victimized like Eustacia Vye by a malignant and cruel fate which points to the insignificance of human beings in the larger scheme. In spite of his impulsive nature chance occurrences play an important role in his life. Henchard's meeting with Farfrae, the re-appearance of the furmity-woman

etc. all point to the fact that the heavy legacy of the past cannot be escaped. The repressed past returns to haunt us in the form of fate or chance. It seems that Henchard's death is the terrible retribution for his past sin where he transgressed the social and moral codes of the society by selling his wife like an animal and thereby making a mockery of the sacred vows of marriage.

Clash between the old and new ideas coupled with the desire for financial success etc. give this work a new direction. Pride, greed, self-assertion, conjugal relationship - nothing escapes Hardy's imaginative exploration and we witness the great drama of these resounding themes in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Check Your Progress

1.Analyze the Casterbridge community in terms of its social divisions, laws and customs on the basis of the evidence offered by the text and prepare a note on the role of society in the lives of the main characters.

2. Comment on the role of 'irony' in the novel.

3. Consider to what extent desire for worldly success can be said to be the prime motivation in Hardy's characters. Explore the idea that 'desire' can be the name given to 'pride' in the main characters.

Hopefully you have got some ideas about the theme and let's now illustrate the themes and start our discussion. The theme of ambition and self-education will be useful to begin with. To rise in the world of prosperity, ambition coupled with the desire to educate and adopt oneself is vital and Henchard's life well exemplifies this idea. Henchard in his drunken stupor sells his wife and daughter, vows to abjure drinking and after the lapse of nineteen years we see him at the apex of the Casterbridge community. His mercantile prosperity and political influence distinguish him from the Henchard we have seen before. But a careful reading shows that the seed of ambition and desire for upward mobility are always present in Henchard's mind. He is largely a self-taught and self-made man who rises from nowhere to the height of prominence. You can notice that Henchard carries his tool-box always with him and Hardy subtly introduces the theme of ambition with Henchard's increasing prosperity. But, Henchard's ambition to rise is not

free from the potential of destruction. Henchard's fall is therefore rapid due to his obstinacy and self-will if we momentarily exclude the role of fate. Elizabeth-Jane, Farfrae, and Lucetta are all examples of the desire for recognition and prominence. The effort to assert oneself through education and proper guidance is more evident in Elizabeth-Jane than in the other characters. Throughout the text we are the witnesses of her development and Hardy gives a detailed picture of her attempts to study, dress elegantly and of course to nurture her inner talents.

The fate of the characters seem to be a continual struggle of self-assertion and the Casterbridge society also plays a dominant role. The themes of the isolation of the individual coupled with the struggle between the self and the society are minutely evoked. Self is to be located and recognized by the society and sometimes it is shaped as well as destroyed by the restriction of the society. In a sense the public and the private sphere of existence continue to clash. Therefore we can infer that Henchard's isolation is self-willed but it is the Casterbridge society which rejects him when his prominence is gone and Farfrae becomes the mayor. As we mentioned in our discussion about the plot Hardy shows how possibilities of life are diminished in a community through a pattern of rise and fall. The old mayor and the owner of the community now turns into an exile and the insider/outsider dialectic becomes apparent. All the characters search for a sense of stability within the society. The total environment with its brooding burden of a historical past, tides of agricultural change, and commercial developments projects the setting where the mighty falls and the generations clash. The theme of change operates at every level of the novel. Relationships, fate, power-structure: all these are mutable factors in the world of the novel.

SAQ

Do you think that Hardy has successfully re-defined tragedy as a generic form with *The Mayor*? What does it say of Hardy as novelist? (150 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

You can see that Henchard is viewed as a mighty tragic figure whose trajectory of life - his rise and downfall - constitutes the staple of a tragic plot. Hardy carefully places Henchard at a high station only to enhance the tragic grandeur of his destiny. Falling from such a height Henchard appears to be a tragic outsider in every sense of the term and his death on Egdon heath evokes our sympathy. This downfall is related with the rise of Farfrae and the clash of generations gives a new dimension to the texture of the novel. Based on the great Victorian myth of 'getting on' each character tries to outwit the other and in the process the old generation yields to the new one. Farfrae with his sympathetic attitude and easy-going, charming manners wins the heart of the people in Casterbridge. But Henchard is never viewed as a part of the society where he prospers. Again Farfrae symbolizes the new energy which revolutionizes the pattern of agriculture with the increasing use of machinery. Henchard on the other hand follows the traditional methods, he knows nothing about the proper method of conducting farm-business and it is Farfrae who restores his business.

While Farfrae uses his cunning and technological know-how Henchard characteristically takes the retrograde step of visiting the weather-prophet. Here Hardy draws on the Darwinian scheme of the survival of the fittest. The clash between generations also includes the conflict between Elizabeth-Jane and Henchard. Unable to comprehend the desires of the new generation, Henchard totally misunderstands the tender sympathy of his daughter. A man who is obsessed only on himself can hardly think of anyone whose presence challenges his sense of self. Pride, guilt, money etc. all add to the dramatic coherence of the novel and Fate and retribution plays a dominant role in the process.

To illustrate the clash between generations, Julian Moynahan connects Henchard's career with that of Saul, the melancholy king in the Old Testament, and David. Farfrae clearly resembles David, the energetic, polite, young Bethlehemite outlander. The rivalry between the two, David's attaining the kingdom of Israel, his musical sensitivity, and the jealousy and suspicion of Saul help to draw a parallel with the Henchard-Farfrae conflict. For more information try to read the essay 'The Mayor of Casterbridge and the Old Testament's "First Book of Samuel" in the **Norton Critical** edition of the novel.

Another major theme in this novel is the theme of communication which also serves to highlight issues such as conjugal relationship, morality, place of woman etc. The first chapter enacts the scene where we witness the silence prevalent between the walking couple. The lack of communication between Henchard and Susan is apparent when we see Henchard's coldness and reticence. Ironically Susan never tries to bridge the gap and accepts the treatment meted to her to be natural. This inability and sometimes deliberate refusal to comprehend and communicate is sustained throughout the novel. We can see that Henchard even fails to communicate with himself apart from his wife and daughter. Susan also fails in this regard and the necessary trust is absent in their relationship. To take an example, she writes the truth about her daughter in a letter only to be opened after her death. Henchard always follows a mechanical regularity to maintain his relation with Susan and Lucetta. The warmth of conjugal life is overshadowed by the presence of secrets not shared through a proper communication. Everyone in the novel lives with this problem. Nobody is able to share and feel together. Lucetta withholds the information of her marriage from Henchard. He on the other hand cannot tell the truth of Elizabeth-Jane's parentage. Henchard restricts and restraints himself and his insularity adds to his tragedy.

Hardy here also questions the notion of marriage institutionalized by a society where the natural bonding is missing. This novel highlights the position of women and the treatment meted out to them. Henchard is a victim in the larger scheme of things but it is undeniable that he is one of the prime victimizers of women.

Interestingly it is Henchard who desires love and sympathy more than the other characters. But at the same time he is the man who runs away from the attachment offered to him by people such as Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae. In a sense he himself introduces the sense of alienation into his existence by forsaking all human ties. He is indeed a complex character whose psychic turmoil overwhelms us. Indeed, the novel can be called the saga of a man and his self-willed alienation.

Check Your Progress

1.After having got some ideas about the themes try to analyze the importance of various letters and notes in the development of Hardy's basic themes.

2. Turn to the pages where Farfrae is demonstrating the seed-drill. Again, concentrate on the scene where Henchard's Wagon meets Farfrae's and is overturned. How will you reconcile these two scenes with the theme (of 'getting on') we have dealt with ? Give a well-argued answer.

3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Though the voice of the omniscient narrator dominates the narrative of The *Mayor of Casterbridge*, we can easily find out the presence of other voices also. Hardy's narrative here is characterized by the mixture of various narrative voices. The inconsistency in the narrative voice is easily discernible here and it frequently moves between strong personal feelings and objectivity and between factual description and the evocation of atmosphere. In addition to all this there is a certain circularity of narrating whereby human destinies return relentlessly to an earlier point or stage. The life of the individuals move in circles and the successive generations repeat the experience of the generations gone before. In spite of the efforts of the characters to escape from their past, the past reappears and experience seem to be circular in nature rather than linear.

Stop to Consider

Take a close and careful look at the beginning and ending of the novel. What aspects or what notable events of the beginning and closing moments of the novel seem to underscore the circularity I just talked about?

Take this into your consideration: "closure", as a critic points out, usually comes at the end of a narrative when a conflict has been resolved. Stories are expected to end. Endings can be satisfying or unsatisfying. Closure does not have to come at the end of a narrative. It need not even come at all. Therefore, ending is distinct from closure.

"Closure" has to do with a range of expectations. It is not only the resolution of the central conflict in a story. It is something we look for in a narrative. A novelist thus goes to some effort to either satisfy or even to frustrate this expectation. In fact, we could even say that sometimes we even enjoy being in a state of suspense; being without closure.

With the increasing theoretical concern about visual reality the camera eye of Hardy's narrator being assigned the role of observer and interpreter is noteworthy. But sometimes the narrator is not so privileged as to be entirely omniscient and it seems that the characters have their own inner life unknown to the narrator and thereby inaccessible to the readers. The tone of anonymity is already present in the opening scene of the novel where a series of pictorial representations follows with little authorial guidance or interpretation.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is written from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator. **[Also look at the PGCS material on *Hard Times* to learn about point of view and first person and third person narrators]**. The third person omniscient narrator is the favorite narrative mode for most Victorian novelists. It allows them the flexibility to shift from experience to experience, perspective to perspective. As an outside, all-knowing observer, the narrator in Hardy's novel can jump through time as he chronicles Henchard's rise and fall, as well as reveal the private thoughts of each character. He can also anticipate or review actions or speeches. He can even make value judgments, which he often does.

Note, for example, the following passage from Chapter IV, in which the narrator comments on Susan Henchard's actions and motives, briefly mentions the thoughts of another character, and makes some value judgments of his own:

> But Susan Henchard's fear of losing her dearly loved daughter's heart by a revelation had little to do with any sense of wrong-doing on her own part. Her simplicity - the original ground of Henchard's contempt for her - had allowed her to live on in the conviction that Newson had acquired a morally real and justifiable right to her by his purchase, though the exact bearings and legal limits of that right were vague. It may seem strange to sophisticated minds that a young matron could believe in the seriousness of such a transfer; and were there not numerous other instances of that same belief the thing might scarcely be credited. (Chap IV)

The narrator is not the only observer who comments on the action of the novel. Hardy often places two characters on the scene at one time, with a third character (usually Elizabeth-Jane) observing from a place 'off-stage.'

Think of Henchard and Farfrae talking in the inn while Susan overhears them (Chapters VII and VIII), or of Henchard contemplating pushing Farfrae from the hay-loft while Elizabeth-Jane silently watches the scene (Chapter XXXIII). Do you think this technique gives you a closer 'insider's' view of the action, or does it seem distracting to you? Hardy controls your observation of the action by linking you with the outside observer.

Stop to Consider

Where can you detect narratorial incoherence? Do you find that the assertions of the third person omniscient narrator are contradicted and undermined by some of the other dominant voices of the novel? Identify such moments and explore the implications for the narrative as a whole.

In terms of focalization or the perspective adopted we come to the passages where the focalization is from outside the story although the events are mediated by one of the characters. The dominance of the impersonal narrator can be found in the chapter describing Susan's settlement into the new marital state and the blossoming of her daughter under favorable circumstance. We can detect a specifically male tone in the authorial voice where the description of Elizabeth-Jane is concerned. In this chapter the narrative shifts from the domestic to the mercantile world and Elizabeth-Jane herself becomes a narrative consciousness. Her point of view is frequently used in the novel. (Please recall the elevated position of her room from where she watches over the bond of friendship between Henchard and Farfrae, the granaries, the hay stores, the garden etc.)

Elizabeth-Jane performs the function of the second narrator and gradually wins our trust. Based on a past which cannot be revealed completely the narrative trajectory sometimes reinforces and sometimes undermines the stable authority of narrative voice. A progressive fragmentation of narrative voice and its hierarchy is evident from a careful reading. Beginning with the voice of the omniscient narrator we 'descend' to Elizabeth-Jane and even the rustic characters who perform the narrative function at times. But the text is not free from narratorial incoherence and slippage. By and large, however, the novel attempts to establish the correspondence of the self and the truth-telling powers of the omniscient narrator.

3.6 CHARACTERIZATION AND SETTING

Most of the action of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* takes place inside Casterbridge, the largest town in Hardy's Wessex. Hardy focuses carefully on the architecture and the historic nature of the town. As is typical in a Hardy novel, the landscape almost takes on a life of its own. Casterbridge itself seems to be a character in the novel. It has moods and emotions and a magnetic appeal that affects the other characters.

Casterbridge is part Roman, part Wessex, and part Dorchester. It is a place of ancient artifacts, rustic customs (including skimmity-rides), and early nineteenth-century architecture and life-styles. Casterbridge is a traditional place preparing uncomfortably for industrialization and modernization.

Hardy, who was an architect, provides a very detailed look at the bridges, roads, buildings, inns, marketplace, and surrounding areas of the town. As you read *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pay careful attention to the way Hardy describes the different landmarks. For example, he points out cracking paint or worn paths to symbolize deterioration, and he interplays images of light and darkness to add to the gothic character of many of the locations. Each landmark seems to have a symbolic function. Bridges are for contemplation of one's turns of fortune. Inns are for gatherings of social classes. Houses are for looking out onto the town, for enclosing one in high status (Henchard's house, later occupied by Farfrae and Lucetta), or for locking one away from the world (Jopp's cottage).

In only the first two and last two chapters of the novel the action occurs outside Casterbridge. These chapters concern the auction that begins Henchard's troubles and the death that ends them. In the first two and last two chapters, Henchard is a restless wanderer. In these prologue and epilogue sections of the book, Hardy shows the bleakness of the Wessex landscape and its magnetic power as well. Once people enter Wessex, they are seldom able to leave or stay away for good.

The *Mayor of Casterbridge* is sub-titled 'A story of a Man of Character' and Hardy here quotes Novalis's comment that "Character is Fate". The action of the novel is dominated by the man of character, Michael Henchard and the method of characterization revolves around a complex interplay between character and fate. We often feel that what happens to Henchard is what he brings down on his own head through impulsiveness and

stubbornness. But at the same time, it's impossible not to feel (as he himself feels) that fate is against him. There is a close interrelationship between plot and characterization too. Characters are prey to unseen forces, often conveniently called fate. Thus they are determined, just as the plot is also determined - that is, we feel that whatever will be, will be.

Having said that, one has to say that characterization is not all that static an affair after all. Many of the characters succeed in surprising us, their evolution or development is not consistent or predictable. The other way to put it is to say that Hardy chooses to reveal aspects of character in installments, as it were, so as not to undermine our interest and fascination for them. This partial revelation is also contingent on plot requirements. A character trait often comes out under the pressure of circumstances.

Another broad generalization that can be made about Hardy's method of characterization is that the world is not simplistically cleaved into two opposing camps of good and bad characters. Most of the characters are 'mixed,' they have the potential for goodness or badness, amelioration and destruction almost in equal measure. Even the stock villain Jopp is a bit of victim to begin with.

Stop to Consider

Try and apply the dictum 'character is fate' to Elizabeth Jane and Lucetta and test whether it holds true or not even to some extent. Also make a list of the characters that genuinely surprises you after an initial presentation, either through some unexpected development of that character or through revelations that contradict the initial presentation.

3.7 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Hardy's language in the novel is replete with rich suggestiveness and he uses references from all possible sources. As we can see the visual and pictorial quality of the novel is reflected in its language also. From our reading of Hardy's background we can trace the importance of church and religion in the life of the Victorian people. So naturally Hardy makes use of the Bible and related sources for loading or amplifying his meanings. Biblical references, similes, classical authors, popular songs, and contemporary

writings all add to the over all effect of suggestiveness and evocativeness. The echo of the *Old Testament* in particular is easily discernible with references to figures such as Job and Cain. Even when the references are not explicit the parallels are brought out by the critics, between Henchard and Farfrae and Saul and Dravid, for example.

Apart from the classical quality of language the rich native idiom must be noted as well. Do you remember the elegy on the death of Susan Henchard composed by Mother Cuxson? Hardy uses the language of rural life in the nineteenth century to recapture its flavor and atmosphere. The dialect words, the homespun vocabulary and malapropisms are frequently used in the novel for the required effect.

Of stylistic devices used the first thing which attracts us in the intense visual perfection of the novel. If we go back to the initial chapters, we see how the camera eye of Hardy's narrator first gives us a distant shot and afterwards zooms the picture. Hardy mixes sight and sound in his description of Casterbridge and his cinematic accuracy is apparent when he describes the long shot of the travelers approaching Weydon. The movement of the body, their profiles etc are done by zooming and the scene of evening light adds to the effect. Seen against the background of the setting sun the town of Casterbridge acquires the romantic aspect of a long cherished land of prosperity and magical quality. We can also see how Hardy enhances the sense of secured, enclosed community life through the sound and rhythm of the words he uses: 'within the walls were packed the abodes of the burghers.'

Hardy uses the technique of cataloguing to describe the inside of the town, its structural quality etc. The houses, roads, shop-windows, churches etc. are described in detail to give the impression of a busy community life. Hardy also uses the list technique while dealing with Henchard's planning for sports activities. (You may read David Lodge's chapter on "lists" in *The Art of Fiction* in this regard.) Hardy's method is to evoke the structure rather than providing a mere description of it.

3.8 SUMMING UP

Concentrating on issues like themes, narrative technique and characterization this unit provides the basic information necessary for the study of this novel

3.3 deals with the themes of ambition, power, pride, self education, fate and chance. 3.4 offers a critical discussion of how Hardy's narrative progresses, and of the issues of point of view, narrator, and narrative voice. Hardy's art of characterization and his use of setting is the focus of 3.5 and 3.6 has a brief consideration of his style and language.

3.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Bloom, Harold, ED. *MODERN CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS: THOMAS HARDY'S* The Mayor of Casterbridge. NEW YORK: CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS, 1988.

Casagrande, Peter J. *UNITY IN HARDY'S NOVELS: REPETITIVE SYMMETRIES*. LAWRENCE: UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KANSAS, 1982.

Daleski, H. M. *THOMAS HARDY AND THE PARADOXES OF LOVE*. COLUMBIA: UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI PRESS, 1997.

Edwards, Duane D. *"THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE AS AESCHYLEAN TRAGEDY," STUDIES IN THE NOVEL*. 4 (1972): 608-618.

Guerard, Albert J. *THOMAS HARDY: THE NOVELS AND STORIES*. CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1949.

Howe, Irving. *THOMAS HARDY*. NEW YORK: MACMILLAN PUBLISHING CO., 1966.

Kramer, Dale. "CHARACTER AND THE CYCLE OF CHANGE IN *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*," IN TENNESSEE STUDIES IN LITERATURE, VOL. 16 (KNOXVILLE: UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE PRESS, 1971). 111-120.

Lerner, Laurence. *THOMAS HARDY'S THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE: TRAGEDY OR SOCIAL HISTORY*. LONDON: SUSSEX UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1975.

Mickelson, Anne Z. *THOMAS HARDY'S WOMEN AND MEN: THE DEFEAT OF NATURE*. METUCHEN, NEW JERSEY: SCARECROW, 1976.

Paterson, John. "*THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE* AS TRAGEDY," *VICTORIAN STUDIES* 3 (1959): 151-172.

Taft, Michael. "HARDY'S MANIPULATION OF FOLKLORE AND LITERARY IMAGINATION: THE CASE OF THE WIFE SALE *IN THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*." *STUDIES IN THE NOVEL* 13 (1981): 399-409

* * *

ENG-02-IX (2)

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Gauhati University

MA in English

Semester 2

Paper IX

Fiction II

Block 2

E.M. Foster: *A Passage to India*

Contents:

Block Introduction:

Unit 1 : Background

Unit 2 : Introducing the Novel

Unit 3 : Themes and Techniques

Contributors:

Sanghamitra De — Lecturer in English, IDOL, GU

Editorial Team

Dr. Uttara Debi — Asst. Professor in English, IDOL, GU

Prasenjit Das — Asst. Professor in English, KKHSOU, Guwahati

Sanghamitra De — Lecturer in English, IDOL, GU

Manab Medhi — Lecturer in English, IDOL, GU

Cover Page Designing:

Kaushik Sarma : Graphic Designer, CET, IITG

January, 2011

© Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. Further information about the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University courses may be obtained from the University's office at IDOL Building, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14. Published on behalf of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by Dr. Kandarpa Das, Director and printed at Maliyata Offset Press, Mirza. Copies printed 1000.

Acknowledgement

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

Block Introduction:

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is his last full-length fictional work published after fourteen years of silence. Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* is Forster's fifth novel and shows the signs of his matured understanding of human relationship. The novel was begun by Forster in 1912 and its publication was a significant event in his literary career as it was his first novel in fourteen years. The publication of *A Passage to India* broke Forster's prolonged silence which followed his masterpiece *Howards End* (1910). The *Manchester Guardian* welcomed his 'reappearance as a novelist' and praised the novel's 'imagination and humour', the *Observer* reviewer hailed the novel as 'far greater, more spiritual, less insolently bored' than the earlier works. *A Passage to India* is replete with the promise of a new beginning and is animated with new energy. Forster's humanistic impulse as expressed in the epigraph to his 1910 novel: "Only connect" finds its best expression in *A Passage to India*. Exploring the issues of personal and political relationships and the possibilities of cross- cultural friendship, Forster's novel is widely read for his extraordinary insight. Set against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s, *A Passage to India* was selected as one of the 100 great works of English literature by the Modern Library and won the 1924 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. *Time* magazine included the novel in its "TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005". (www.wikipedia.org) Forster's novel is concerned not simply with the passage to India, but also with a passage to England through India. Exploring the polarities between Hinduism and Islam, the text is being interpreted from various angles- postcolonial, feminist, and liberal. The attempt at cultural stereotyping and paradigms of empire and colony is instrumental in the racial and political underpinnings of the text which aims to describe the journey leading to mutual realization beyond cultural, racial and social barriers. *A Passage to India*, can, therefore, be easily read as a novel dealing with the irreconcilability of class differences, the racism and oppressive rule of the British in India, the impossibility and failure of friendship between an Englishman and an Indian, the so-called mystery and "muddle" of Indian civilization and psychology. The symbolic landscape of India along with its implicit "muddle" has invited critical attention from all quarters and Forster's text is resonant with his liberal-humanist outlook. As readers, our aim is to

participate and intervene continually in the emerging discourse, i.e., to read and interrogate the text to avoid the finality of meaning as Forster's text is irreducible in the true sense of the term.

This block is divided into three units and each unit is designed to make you address the issues involved in the making of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and discern the common threads in Forster's masterpiece. Unit 1 deals with the background of the novel which aims to provide you a detailed reading of the life-history and the works of the author, E. M. Forster. We have tried to contextualize Forster's *A Passage to India* in the specific literary and socio-historical context. Attempts have also been made to situate the writer in his proper context for a better and comprehensive appraisal of the prescribed text. Unit 2 of this block concentrates specifically on the text prescribed for study and here, we have tried to enable you to address the complexity of the novel by discussing the story of the novel in detail so that you find it easier to understand the various complex issues like racism, irreconciliability of class differences, the impossibility and failure of 'friendship' between two alien races, the polarities between Hinduism and Islam, racial stereotyping, the 'philanthropic pretence' of colonizers. Dealing with the major themes and techniques of *A Passage to India*, unit 3 builds on the issues explored in the previous units. The aim behind keeping a separate unit on the themes and techniques is to enable you address the intricacies of the novel *A Passage to India*. A comprehensive understanding of the text involves an examination of the common threads in the novel prescribed and attempts have been made here to be comprehensive enough to leave room for further observations from your reading. We have also added the information necessary for your understanding of E. M. Forster's work and we hope that the list of suggested readings will help you for further reading.

Contents:

Unit 1: Background

Unit 2: Introducing the Novel

Unit 3: Themes and Techniques

Unit 1
Background

Contents:

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

1.1 OBJECTIVES

In this first unit of this block, we aim to provide you with a general introduction to the circumstances of E.M. Forster's life and times and his fictional oeuvre. An attempt has also been made here to acquaint you with *A Passage to India* the novel prescribed for study. After going through the unit you will be able to

- *gain* a comprehensive knowledge of E.M. Forster's personal and national identity
- *relate* the novel to Forster's personal history and the socio- political ambience
- *locate* the text in its proper context
- *identify* the nature of his literary preoccupations

1.2 INTRODUCTION

A Passage to India (1924) is a novel by E. M. Forster set against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s. It was selected as one of the 100 great works of English literature by the Modern Library and won the 1924 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. (www.wikipedia.org). Forster's writings are influenced by the various trends in Modernism and he is an influential figure in modern fiction. The time of composition of *A Passage to India* invites attention to the writing of other modernist writers like T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Marcel Proust. Reading Forster's fiction in terms of

its relation to modernist experimentation is interesting as his fiction remains largely realist and antagonistic to modernism's experiments, like the novels of D.H. Lawrence. The peculiarity of Forster's writings is partly influenced by the marginal status of modernism in Britain, and its minor role in the national ideology. Critics have approached the issue of Forster's modernity by tracing his nostalgic yearning for the Britain which was agricultural and non-industrial. In fact, the ending of Forster's last novel, *Maurice*, exemplifies this nostalgic attachment. As Forster commented in the 'Terminal Note' of this novel, 1960: "it belongs to the last moment of the greenwood". Again, referring to his second novel, *The Longest Journey*, he continues that it "…belongs there too, and has similarities of atmosphere. Our greenwood ended catastrophically and inevitably".

According to the critics, Forster's modernity is visible in his yearning for a peaceful and uncorrupted life exemplified by a return to the pastoral and a nostalgia for the past. Denial of the experience of the urban street and the crowd coupled with the craving for a lost world distinguishes Forster's modernity. Unlike James Joyce's Ulysses or, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Forster's novels, therefore, stress his liberal-humanist outlook and in this context, the use of Italy and India in Forster's novels can be interpreted as a complicated way of reassertion of England's values. Forster's yearning for the inexplicable force of life finds its expression in his search for the alternatives away from the socio-cultural barriers and in this context he appears to be a truly modern writer. Modernism emphasized the transgressive and the contemporary writers often invoked the transgressive through homosexual themes as depicted in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. E.M. Forster's works share this transgressive attitude characteristic of modernism. Moreover, the element of nihilism in his writings is also characteristically that of a modernist. A sense of negativity and self-hatred, constantly runs through *Maurice*. This sense of nihilism, which draws upon Schopenhauer, is also apparent in the text we are going to read , A Passage to India, especially in the context of Mrs. Moore's experience in the Marabar Caves, in Chapter XIV, when the echo tells her that 'everything exists, nothing has value'. *A Passage to India* played a significant role in the 'thirties and 'forties in changing public opinion towards Britain and the role it played in India. The novel is criticized for the arguably fair portrayal of India and a humanist critique of British-Indian relations

during the last decades of the Empire. So, Forster's relation to modernism, homosexuality and empire is problematic. For writers of 'Raj' fiction like Rudyard Kipling imperialism, as symbolized by a passage from England to India carried complex implications of exile, guilt and liberation. But Forster's essays on colonialism before *A Passage to India* stress and explore the nexus between empire, commerce and religion. Adapting the title of a poem by Whitman, *A Passage to India* this novel offers the complex mingling of the poet's romanticism with Forster's self-critical modernism.

The World Wars and their impact also influenced Forster's attitude to human relation. Once he sadly recounted, 'Two great wars demanded and bequeathed regimentation which the public services adopted and extended, science lent her aid and the wildness of our island, never extensive, was stamped upon and built over and patrolled in no time. There is no forest or fell to escape to today…'

SAQ

Reading this far, would you expect "modernism" to be a context for Forster's fiction, or its concern? (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Stop to Consider

E. M. Forster and the Liberal Tradition

Liberalism is an ideology which emphasizes on individual liberty and equality of opportunity. The origin of Liberalism can be traced to the age of Enlightenment and this political philosophy rejects the centralizing assumptions dominating the theories of government like the Divine Right of Kings, hereditary status, established religion and economic protectionism. John Locke is an influential thinker whose emphasis on the equal dignity and worth of individuals helped to shape the liberal tradition. (www.wikipedia.org)

F. R. Leavis describes E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* exemplifying the liberal spirit. Defining the liberal tradition as 'the indispensable transmitter of something

that humanity cannot afford to lose', Leavis opines that Forster was a spokesman for "the finer consciousness of our time, the humane tradition as it emerges from a period of 'bourgeois' security, divorced from dogma and left by social change, the breakdown of traditional forms and the loss of sanctions embarrassingly 'in the air'; no longer serenely confident or self-sufficient, but conscious of being not less than before the custodian of something essential".(Leavis1962:277). In *A Passage to India*, Leavis discovers "an expression, undeniably, of the liberal tradition; it has, as such, its fineness, its strength and its impressiveness; and it makes the achievement, the humane, decent and rational- the 'civilized'-habit, of that tradition appear the invaluable thing it is."(Leavis1962:277).

Lionel Trilling, on the other hand considers Forster to be a liberal novelist and at the same time one 'deeply at odds with the liberal mind'. According to him Forster should be read in relation to 'what, for want of a better word, we may call the liberal tradition', a tradition defined as that loose body of middle-class opinion which includes such ideas as progress, collectivism and humanitarianism' (Trilling 1944:13). Both Leavis and Trilling consider Forster as a beacon representing the cultivated and 'the finer consciousness of our time' and destined to reduce the darkness of the contemporary society threatened by increasing commercialism. Trilling opines that Forster is a talisman against 'that acrid nationalism that literary men too often feel called upon to express in a time of crisis'. (Trilling 1944:13)

1.3 Biographical Sketch (1879-1970)

Edward Morgan Forster was born on January 1, 1879, in 6 Melcombe Place; Dorset Square, London NW1. Forster's father was an architect who died in 1880 when he was only a year old. As a consequence of his father's early death, Forster's childhood was dominated by his mother and his aunts. He was educated in Tonbridge School in Kent and the years at Tonbridge School in Kent were difficult for young Forster as he suffered from the cruelty of his classmates. "Tonbridge left him with an utter dislike of public-school values." He attended King's College, Cambridge, from 1897 to 1901 and the atmosphere of Cambridge proved more congenial to Forster's intellectual development. In 1901, he was elected to the Apostles which was a turning point in Forster's life as, through them, he met the members of the Bloomsbury Group. He was a peripheral member of this group in the 1910's and 20's.

Stop to Consider

Cambridge Apostles

"The Cambridge Apostles, also known as the Cambridge Conversazione Society, is an intellectual secret society at the University of Cambridge founded in 1820 by George Tomlinson, a Cambridge student who went on to become the first Bishop of Gibraltar.

The origin of the Apostles' nickname dates from the number, twelve, of their founders. Membership consists largely of undergraduates, though there have been graduate student members, and members who already hold university and college posts. The society traditionally drew most of its members from St John's, King's and Trinity Colleges.

The society is essentially a discussion group. Meetings are held once a week, traditionally on Saturday evenings, during which one member gives a prepared talk on a topic, which is later thrown open for discussion; during the meetings, members used to eat sardines on toast, called "whales". Women only gained acceptance into the society in the 1970s.

The Apostles became well-known outside Cambridge in the years before the First World War with the rise to eminence of the group of intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group. John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey and his brother James, G.E. Moore, and Rupert Brooke were all Apostles and subsequently prominent as members of Bloomsbury".

(www.wikipedia.org)

Bloomsbury Group

"A loose coterie of writers linked by friendship to the homes of Vanessa Stephen (from 1907 Vanessa Bell) and her sister Virginia (from 1912 Virginia Woolf) in Bloomsbury-the university quarter of London near the British Museum--from about1906 to the late 1930s.In addition to the sisters and their husbands-Clive Bell, the art critic, and Leonard Woolf, a political journalist-the group included the novelist E. M. Forster, the biographer Lytton Strachey, the economist John Maynard Keynes, and the art critic Roger Fry. It had no doctrine or aim, despite a shared admiration for the moral philosophy of G. E. Moore, but the group had some importance as a centre of modernizing liberal opinion in the 1920s, and later as the subject of countless memoirs and biographies."(Chris Baldik)

After completing his graduation, Forster travelled to Egypt, Germany and India in 1914 with his mother. After returning he began to write essays and short stories for the Cambridge-based journal, the liberal *Independent*

Review. His first short story, 'The Story of a Panic' appeared in 1904. Forster spent several months in Germany in 1905 and came back to England for the publication of his first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, which also appeared in 1905. Forster's first novel chooses the narrowness and lifelessness of the English as the central theme of the story. Written with his characteristic humour, sympathetic understanding of character, and lightness of tone made the novel a success and gave the novelist a promising career. This novel, concentrating on the story of Lilia Herriton, a widow in her thirties who is urged to spend a year in Italy by her brother-in -law, Philip, who believes in the ennobling and transforming power of the experience of her sojourn. Creating a radiant atmosphere of humour, Forster's first work is interesting in showing his characteristic mastery of dialogue and character. Forster here shows how a group of well-bred and civilized English people are confronted by a situation which is beyond their comprehension. The contrast between the vitality of disreputable, violent, pitiable Gino, an Italian twelve years junior to Lilia who marries the widowed Lilia Herriton and the snobbery of the English people come to the forefront in this novel where the marriage proves to be a catalyst. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* was adapted into a film by Charles Sturridge in 1991.

In 1906, Forster was busy in lecturing on Italian art and history for the Cambridge Local Lectures Board and became a close friend and tutor of an Indian Moslem, Syed Ross Masood. Their friendship was influential in Forster's life and his second novel, *The Longest Journey*, appeared in 1907. It is important to remember that *A Passage to India* is dedicated to Syed Ross Masood and 'the seventeen years of our friendship'. Masood entered the writer's life in 1906 when the latter was appointed to coach him in Latin. The relationship was never fulfilled sexually, yet for Forster it 'woke him up out of his suburban and academic life and showed him new horizons and a new civilization (P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, 1977-8, I, 146). His visit to India in 1912-13 was prompted by this friendship. *The Longest Journey* is read and interpreted as an inverted *bildungsroman*. This novel deals with the life of the lame Rickie Elliott from Cambridge, a sensitive, intelligent young man with modest fortune and literary talent. The text shows the protagonist embarking on a spiritually bankrupt life when he decides to marry the beautiful but shallow Agnes. His decision to abandon writing, his passion for the marriage, is not rewarding and leads him into a

state of living death and emotional starvation. This novel was followed by his third novel *A Room with a View* in 1908 and this novel was widely read and recognized. Influenced by Forster's extended tours in Italy with his mother and based on the material gathered from the holidays, *A Room with a View* is a novel about the typical behaviour of the English abroad. Set in Italy and England, the novel tells the story of a young woman oppressed by overpowering culture of Edwardian England. *A Room with a View* is read both as a romance and a critique of English society at the beginning of the 20th century. Celebrated for the optimism depicted, this novel is the story of young Lucy Honeychurch's trip to Italy with her cousin Miss Barlett and her consequent choice between the free-thinking George Emerson and the repressed aesthete, Cecil Vyse. Merchant-Ivory produced an award-winning film adaptation in 1985. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* can be collectively read as Forster's Italian novels as both the novels are replete with references to the famous Baedeker guidebooks. Concerned with the narrow-minded mentality of the middle-class English tourists abroad these two novels share many thematic similarities with the short stories collected in *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment*. Although considered by some to have less serious literary weight, *A Room with a View* also shows how questions of propriety and class can make connection difficult. Forster's reputation was established with the publication of *Howards End* in 1910. *Howards End*, 1910, is described as an ambitious 'condition - of - England' novel which is concerned with the clash between two Edwardian middle-class families, one was interested in art and literature and the other was concerned only about business. This novel is about class struggle in turn-of-the-century England and the main thematic concerns are the difficulties, troubles and the benefits, of relationships between members of different social classes. Here, Forster depicts the different groups within the Edwardian middle classes represented by the Schlegels (bohemian intellectuals), the Wilcoxes (thoughtless plutocrats) and the Basts (struggling lower-middle-class aspirants). It is frequently observed that characters in Forster's novels die suddenly. This is true of *Where Angels Fear to Tread, Howards End* and, most particularly, *The Longest Journey*.

This novel, like Forster's another best-known work, *A Passage to India*, explores the irreconciliability of class differences. Lionel Trilling in his book, *E.M. Forster*, (1943) identified *Howards End* as 'undoubtedly Forster's

masterpiece', because it develops to the full the themes and attitudes of the early books and, connects them 'with a more mature sense of responsibility'. Other critics have disagreed with Trilling. For instance, Frederick Crews, in *E.M.Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (1962), opined that Margaret's '"connection" with the Wilcoxes is merely diagrammatic' and that Forster's plot must finally retreat to an un-convincingly "moral" ending'. In the pre-war years, Forster wrote short stories concerning symbolic fantasies and fables, which were collected in *The Celestial Omnibus,* 1914. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* share many themes with short stories collected in *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment*.

Stop to Consider

Oliver Stallybrass wrote about the epigraph of *Howards End*-

"Only connect…" such is the epigraph of a novel much concerned with the relationships, and the possibility of reconciliation between certain pairs of opposites: the prose and the passion, the seen and the unseen, the practical mind and the intellectual, the outer life and the inner."

Do you think 'the possibility of reconciliation between certain pairs of opposites' helps us to address the theme of cultural confrontation in Forster's fiction?

Forster's new novel with a homosexual theme, *Maurice*, was completed in 1914 and went through several revisions during his life and was finally published posthumously in 1971. It was written from 1913 onwards. Forster showed it only to his selected friends like Christopher Isherwood. Published after a year of his death, *Maurice* is a homosexual love story which presents familiar themes as depicted in Forster's first three novels, such as the suburbs of London in the English home counties, the experience of attending Cambridge, and the wild landscape of Wiltshire. The novel was controversial as Forster's sexuality was not known or widely acknowledged. Critics continue to argue over the extent to which Forster's sexuality influenced the novel. It was seen as revolutionary for its time in describing same-sex love without hiding or condemning it. The public and legal attitudes to homosexuality delayed the publication of this novel as visible in a note found on the manuscript "Publishable, but worth it?". Forster desired for a happy ending for the novel but he was sure that the ending would add to the

existing controversial status of the book. By the time Forster died, British attitudes and law had changed and *Maurice* is read as powerful condemnation of the repressive attitudes of British society and a plea for emotional and sexual honesty. In the novel, the priggish and conforming titular character finds himself increasingly attraction to his own sex and gradually undergoes a profound emotional and sexual awakening. *Maurice* is also significant for the exploration of the possibility of class reconciliation as one facet of a homosexual relationship. The foreword to *Maurice* describes Forster's struggle with his own homosexuality. Similar issues are explored in several volumes of homosexually-charged short stories as the collection, *The Life to Come*, which was also published shortly after his death.

Following the outbreak of World War I. Forster joined the International Red Cross and served in Alexandria until 1919. Copies of his book *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922) were destroyed in a fire before circulation, and the book was not revised and reprinted until 1938. During the war he met the Greek poet, C.P Cavafy, a selection of whose poems he published in translation in his collection, *Pharos and Pharillon (A Novelist's Sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages).*

In 1912, Forster visited India with R.C Trevelyan, G. Lowes Dickinson and G. H. Luce. After observing the British in India he developed an intense loathing for imperialism and questioned the validity of the British presence in India. In 1921-2 Forster returned to India as secretary and companion to the Maharajah of the native state of Dewas State, Senior, and resumed work on a novel which he had begun, and then put aside, after his first visit. *A Passage to India* (1924) was his most acclaimed novel. It was also his last, and for the remaining 46 years of his life he devoted himself to other activities. Forster achieved his greatest success with *A Passage to India* (1924). The novel takes as its subject the relationship between East and West, seen through the lens of India in the later days of the British Raj. Forster connects personal relationships with the politics of colonialism through the story of the Englishwoman Adela Quested, the Indian Dr. Aziz, and the question of what did or did not happen between them in the Marabar Caves.

His Clark lectures were published as *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) and he was offered a three-year fellowship at King's College. *The Eternal Moment*, a volume of pre-war short stories about the supernatural, appeared in 1928, and *Abinger Harvest* (1936) was a collection of the shorter essays and criticism. Forster describes the driving force behind his novels in his critical text, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927, as the effort to see 'through' novels and not 'round' them. He discards the weighty 'historical' view with its 'tendencies', 'influences' and 'periods'. Instead we are to imagine all novelists at work together in a circular room.

Forster was an active member of PEN, arguing (in 1928) against the suppression of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, and later (in 1960) in defence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In 1934 he became first president of the National Council for Civil Liberties. After his mother's death in 1945 he was elected an honorary fellow of King's and lived there for the remainder of his life. *Billy Budd* (1949), based on Melville's novel, was a libertto written with Eric Crozier for Benjamin Britten's opera, a collection of essays, reviews and broadcasts, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), reflected his concern for individual liberty, and *The Hill of Devi* (1953) recalled his second visit to India and included letters sent from Dewas Senior. In 1949 Forster refused a knighthood, but 20 years later, the year before his death, he was awarded the Order of Merit. *The Life to Come* (1972), a collection of earlier short stories which like *Maurice* treated the homosexual theme was published posthumously.

SAQ

Which works of Forster are counted among his most famous? How would you describe his constant preoccupations? (40+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

1.4 PLACING THE WORK

Forster's last completed novel, *A Passage to India*, differs from his other major works in its overt political content. Unlike the lighter tone and more subdued political subtext contained in his earlier works, *A Passage to India* is replete with political undertones as this novel deals with the political occupation of India by the British, a colonial domination that ended after the publication of Forster's text and still during his lifetime.

The colonial occupation of India serves as a significant background of the novel as the role of Britain in political affairs of India was important in shaping the course of Indian politics. In August of 1858, the violent revolts against Britain by the Indians led the British Parliament to pass the Government of India Act. This transference of political power from the East India Company to the crown was influential in establishing the bureaucratic colonial system in India headed by a Council of India. The typical attitude of the British in India exemplified their effort to undertake the "white man's burden," as captured by Rudyard Kipling. This ruthless attitude of the English bureaucracy towards the ruling nation is brilliantly described in *A Passage to India* through characters like Ronny Heaslop and Mr. McBryde. Indian nationalism started emerging around 1885 when the first meeting of the Indian National Congress was held and nationalism found expression in the Muslim community as well, around the beginning of the twentieth century. Reforms in the Indian political system occurred with the victory of the Liberal Party in 1906, culminating in the Indian Councils Act of 1909, but nationalism continued to rise. The assistance in World War I was not beneficial to the Indians as the relations between the British and Indians hardly improved. After the war the lack of proper representation in the government, coupled with the massacre of hundreds of Indians at Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh during a protest, were instrumental for wide-spread protest. It is around this time that Gandhi emerged as a powerful force in Indian politics, and it is also around this time that Forster wrote *A Passage to India*. The Indian Independence Act was passed in 1947 and ordered the separation of India and Pakistan while granting both nations their sovereignty. The Amritsar massacre was shocking for sensitive minds and Forster was profoundly disturbed by the consequences of the incident. *A Passage to India* is rich in references to Amritsar and critics opine that the name of the defence barrister, Amritrao, is deliberately chosen as an allusion to Amritsar. In 1906,

Fortser became a tutor in Latin to Syed Ross Masood, an Indian Muslim patriot and developed an intense affection for him. Forster met Masood in Aligarh in 1912-13 when he visited India for some months and travelled together. Masood passed his Latin exam, went to Oxford and enjoyed a distinguished career in Indian education, ending his days as Sir Syed Ross Masood. He achieved great posthumous honour in Pakistan, where a 'Ross Masood Education and Culture Society' was founded in Karachi. In fact, with those Latin lessons Forster's *A Passage to India* had begun, more than seventeen years before his novel was published.

After Masood had moved from Oxford to London, to read for the bar, Forster got acquainted with a number of Masood's fellow Indian students, notably one Abu Saeed Mirza. He was also put in touch by Sir Theodore Morison with a princely ex-pupil of the latter, the Hindu Maharajah of Chhatarpur. Forster wrote numerous letters to his mother and to other relatives and friends on his first and second visits to India. His contemporary entries in notes and diaries inform us that he travelled far and wide, and the places he visited included Bankipore, the model for Chanderpore, the Barabar Caves near Gaya, which suggested the Marabar, and in each case as the guest of the Maharajah - Dewas Senior and Chhatarpur-the joint models for Mau.

Stop to Consider

Interestingly, in his visits to India, Forster spent as much time among Anglo-Indians as with Indians. However, as he confesses in his letter to Edmund Candler, 28th June, 1924, he 'always felt miserable in a Club, and almost always felt happy among Indians'. The novelist himself sums up in his manuscript-cum-typescript of the 1950's, at King's College, Cambridge, 'Three Countries': 'Looking back on that first visit of mine to India, I realize that mixed up with the pleasure and fun was much pain. The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me. It was not a tourist's outing and the impression it left was deep'.

In *A Passage to India*, the character of Cyril Fielding, the British professor exemplifies the same feeling of being miserable while socializing with the fellow British. As expressed in Forster's letters, Fielding too enjoys the company of the Indians and his organization of a separate party for his Indian friends after the failure of the so-called 'bridge-party' illustrates his feeling of being at home with the Indians.

After returning to England, Forster started translating his impressions of India into fictional art. His diary entries cover the period from 1909 until 1967 and contain three entries during July and September. In September 1913, Forster started working on *Maurice* and *A Passage to India* remained incomplete, continuing the former only between April and June 1914. In his diary entry for 31st December, Forster pessimistically declares: 'Shall never complete another novel'.

The outbreak of the war in August 1914 was also another disturbing factor for Forster's completion of this novel as he went to Alexandria for three years' work with the Red Cross. In his letter to Edward Arnold, 7 and 17 November 1914, he wrote about his difficulty in finishing his novels: '…but when all contemporary life seems crumbling I find more difficulty than ever in attempting a picture of it, and turn with greater relief to criticism, and the past'. His stay at Dewas as a private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas State, Senior, from March 1921 is visible in *The Hill of Devi*. Here, he witnessed the nine-day festival commemorating the birth of Krishna and opined it to be 'the strangest and strongest Indian experience ever granted me' .You can read the section on this festival in *A Passage to India*. In January 1924, he borrowed the title of a poem by the American poet Walt Whitman, and concluded the novel entitled, *A Passage to India*.

1.5 SUMMING UP

After going through the preceding sections, you must have already gained a detailed knowledge of E. M. Forster's relevant biographical details along with his literary preoccupations. Forster's personal and national identity is influential in tracing the historical context in which he wrote the novel, *A Passage to India*. Attempt has also been made to familiarize you with his major works so that you can easily trace the connections between the novel prescribed and the author's other works. The detailed analysis of the historical and cultural context of modernism will help you see the major influences that shaped E. M. Forster's works. The following units will elaborate the issues raised in this unit in the specific context of *A Passage to India* .With this background information, we can better appreciate the various aspects of the work as we study it in detail in the next two units.

* * *

Unit 2
Introducing the Novel

Contents

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

2.1 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit of the block, an attempt was made to familiarize you with E. M. Forster's literary preoccupations and the issues relevant to his growth as an artist. This is the second unit of this block and here we intend to provide you with a detailed description of *A Passage to India* by discussing the novel in its totality. After going through this unit you will be able to

- *narrate* the story of Forster's *A Passage to India*
- *situate* the major characters in the context of the novel.
- *contextualize* the novel in the particular literary movement
- *discuss* the wide variety of critical approaches to this novel

2.2 THE STORY IN BRIEF

Forster's *A Passage to India* is rich in graphic details and a congenial humour informs the text. The story is divided into three parts: Part 1 - Mosque, Part 2 - Caves, and Part 3 - Temple and each part is significant in the development of the narrative. The first chapter of the first part 'Mosque' opens with the description of Chandrapore, a city which is part of the British Raj. Forster introduces the readers to his setting by providing two contrasting sides of the locale. The monotonous and dreary landscape of the city where the natives live stands in a sharp contrast to the orderly 'little civil station'

inhabited by the British colonisers. It foreshadows the cultural confrontations that will provide the substance of the narration.

SAQ:

How do you read the opening description of the city of Chandrapore? Do you think Forster's creation of the image of India through the opening lines is biased? (60+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

The next chapter introduces the readers to the protagonist, Dr. Aziz, an educated Indian doctor serving the British. Aziz's growing discontent over the fact that the British in India fail to comprehend their culture and thereby despise them is visible in his discussion with his friends. Although Dr. Aziz was initially friendly with the British, soon his enthusiasm gave away to despair. While discussing the attitude of the English people, Aziz and his friends discuss that they have changed over the years and have become more intolerant and cold. Mahmoud Ali contends that it is impossible, while Hamidullah believes that these friendships are only possible in England. Among these two friends of Aziz, Hamidullah studied at Cambridge and remembers the warm and cordial treatment he received. But in India though the English people come and behave as polite gentlemen toward the Indians, their attitudes change drastically and "They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any English woman six months. All are exactly alike". The note from Chandrapore's Civil Surgeon, Major Callendar, disrupted the ongoing merriment of Aziz and his friends. The surgeon sends the note by a servant requesting Aziz to visit his house immediately but does not give a reason. His indifference and arrogance enrages Aziz and his friends whose merriment is interrupted. Although upset, Aziz arrives quickly at Callendar's compound only to find that the Major had left for work without showing him the basic courtesy of informing him

of his absence. Enraged and frustrated, Aziz argues with the servant and sees two ladies--Mrs. Callendar and another British woman walking past .They ignore his greeting and he leaves the compound dejected and stops to rest at a Mosque. The Mosque provides him with peace and rejuvenates him. An older woman walks in when Aziz is in the Mosque and he does not like the intrusion. He interrupts and shouts at the woman angrily explaining that the Mosque is a holy place and she should not enter there with her shoes. The woman, Mrs. Moore, tells him that she has already removed her shoes and Aziz apologizes immediately, explaining that few women have the decency to remember to follow this custom. Mrs. Moore's intelligent reply, 'That makes no difference. God is here' immediately impresses Aziz. Mrs. Moore, the lady, and Aziz thus become friends and start talking about their children. Mrs. Moore informs that she is the mother of Ronny Heaslop, the City Magistrate, and has two more children, a son, Ralph, and a daughter, Stella, back in England. Aziz is happy to see the similarity between them as he also has a daughter and two sons. Both realize their dislike for the arrogant Mrs. Callendar. Aziz feels comfortable with Mrs. Moore and is excited by the fact that she also sympathizes with him. He calls her an 'Oriental' because unlike the English people she understands and values emotions. Aziz escorts Mrs. Moore back to the club but he is not allowed to enter in the English club like other Indians.

Stop to Consider

Orient

The Orient is a term which simply means the "east". It originated in Western Asia to describe the parts of the world that were in the "far east" of their known world at the time. It is now used in English as a metonym to describe Eastern Asia and depending on nationality in reference to certain Southeastern Asian minorities as well.The term "Orient"is derived from the Latin word *oriens* meaning "east" (lit. "rising" < *orior* "rise"). The use of the word for "rising" to refer to the east (where the sun rises) has analogs from many languages.The opposite term "Occident" is derived from the Latin word *occidens* meaning "west" (lit. "setting" < "occido" "fall/set"). This term was once used to describe the West (where the sun sets) but is falling into disuse in English.

Orientalism

Orientalism refers to the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern Cultures in the West by writers, designers and artists. An "Orientalist" may be a person

engaged in these activities, but it is also the traditional term for any scholar of Oriental studies.Orientalism was more widely used in art history referring mostly to the works of French artists in the 19th century, whose subject matter, color and style used elements from their travel to the Mediterranean countries of North Africa and the Near East (or western Asia).

These meanings were given a new twist by 20th century scholar Edward Said in his controversial book *Orientalism*, in which he uses the term to describe a Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of hostile and deprecatory views of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. When used in this sense, Orientalism implies essentializing and prejudiced outsider interpretations of Eastern cultures and peoples. Said was critical of this scholarly tradition and also of certain modern scholars, particularly Bernard Lewis.

In contrast, some modern scholars have used the term to refer to writers of the Imperialist era who had pro-Eastern attitudes, as opposed to those who saw nothing of value in non-Western cultures.(www.wikipedia .org)

On her return to the club, Mrs. Moore is intercepted by Adela Quested, the most important woman character of the novel. Adela's arrival and her desire to 'see the real India', and befriend the Indians is significant for the repercussions produced. The readers are informed that Mrs. Moore's son, Ronny Heaslop, asked his mother to bring his fiancé, Adela, to India with her. The purpose of Adela's visit to see her fiancé in Chandrapore is, precisely, to ensure that she likes him at work as much as she had liked him socially. Both the ladies seem to be more liberal than the city magistrate, Ronny, as visible in their conversations. For example, on the following day, as Mrs. Moore recounts the story of her encounter with Aziz at the Mosque, Ronny gets upset about her encounter with a Muslim in the Mosque as he believed that Muslims are not trustworthy. Ronny's reaction disappoints his mother but Adela, on the other hand, seems to be fascinated by Mrs. Moore's encounter with the Muslim doctor. Ronny's subsequent negative attitude and his idea of duty for England is disturbing for the ladies as the magistrate treats the issue of treatment of the Indians as a 'side issue'. Mrs. Moore is upset and insists that they should be pleasant to the Indians 'because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God is love'. But her son barely responds to her thoughts and considers his mother's religious thoughts as a symptom of her old age and growing senility.

The readers also get a picture of the other English people of the British Raj in Chandrapore like Mrs. Lesley, Mrs. Callendar and the Collector, Mr. Turton, in this chapter. The two ladies insist that the natives should be avoided. Mr. Turton plans to organize a 'Bridge Party' where the English women could meet the Indians, Adela asks him to introduce her only to the Indians that he comes across socially but Turton's reply that he does not consider Indians to be friends is symbolic of their attitude. After the Turtons leave, Ronny comments to Adela that the Bridge Party will be beneficial to the Indians. Adela and Mrs. Moore find the Bridge Party to be unsuccessful and dull when they see that a large group of Indian guests arrives early and waits idly for the British hosts. The party turns out to be a farce and Mrs. Turton and Ronny laugh sarcastically about the party's turnout. The very term 'Bridge Party' is ironic in terms of the plot structure in *A Passage to India* as there is no interaction between the British hosts and the Indian guests. The Bridge Party fails to create a 'bridge' between the people divided by racial differences. Adela's interest in conversing with the Indians increases when she finds Mrs. Turton addressing a group of Indian women in Urdu which she learned to command her servants. Forster also presents us with a portrait of a typical awkward and nervous Indian woman, Mrs. Bhattacharya, in this fifth chapter, whom Adela and Mrs. Moore befriend.

SAQ:

Comment on the ironic significance of the term 'Bridge' Party in the context of racism in the novel. (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Mr. Fielding appears to be the most successful Englishman in the party who comfortably mingles with the Indian guests. When he meets the ladies, he complains about the cruel treatment meted out to the Indians and invites them to meet some of his Indian friends. Adela promptly suggests that he should also invite Dr. Aziz. Here, Forster introduces another significant

character of the novel - the middle-aged Fielding, who is the Principal of the Government College in Chandrapore. The British find him to be a controversial figure for his frequent interaction with the Indians. But unlike his compatriots, Fielding is matured and sensitive to the reality. He invites Aziz and his mystical Hindu colleague Prof. Godbole, alongwith Mrs. Moore and Adela, for tea and likes Aziz instantly.The atmosphere of Fielding's tea party is very friendly and comfortable and Aziz invites the women on an excursion to the caves at Marabar. The invitation is not accepted by Ronny who considers Aziz to be slack like all other Indians. Ronny permits his mother and friend to go for excursion only when British people escort them. In the same chapter Adela is upset for her behaviour at the party and regrets revealing to the guests that she had no intention of staying in India and marrying Ronny. While riding in Nawab Bahadur's new car, Adela and Ronny feel a renewed attraction for each other.

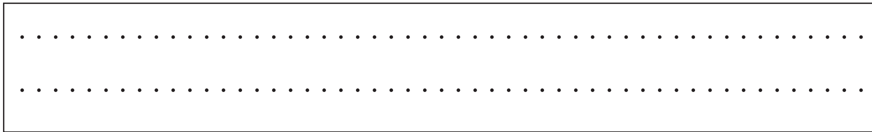
"Caves", the second part of the novel, is the most significant section in the novel as it contains the central episode of the conflict between the British and the Indians. Forster devotes Chapter Twelve entirely to the description of the Marabar Caves, a series of tunnels that are indistinguishable from each other. In Chapter XIII, we see Aziz waiting for the two ladies early at the station for the planned excursion to the famous Marabar Caves with Fielding and Godbole. Aziz arrives at the station early and Mrs. Moore and Adela also arrive on time. But Fielding and Godbole fail to arrive on time and Aziz is nervous anticipating the trouble of travelling alone with the ladies. Ronny also disapproves of the women being left alone and sends over a servant to follow them to make sure they are not left alone with Dr. Aziz. Fielding and Godbole arrive too late and miss the train and Aziz is left to travel alone with Mrs. Moore and Adela. Both Mrs. Moore and Adela insist on sending away the servant to make Aziz comfortable.

SAQ:

Do you find any similarities in the perceptions of India in the case of Mrs. Moore on the one hand and Ronny on the other? How would you relate the perceptions to thematic structure of the novel? (60+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .



When they arrive at the caves, everything is set up for their comfort to ensure and achieve true hospitality. The arrangement includes a guide, elephants, servants and food. Aziz tells Mrs. Moore and Adela that their friendship is special because it involves great obstacles. Aziz, Adela and Mrs. Moore visit the caves, which all seem similar and they hear the reverberating sound of an echo. As they enter the caves shrouded in complete darkness, Mrs. Moore is haunted by the sound of the echo in the caves and feels something naked, a baby in actuality, touching her. The sound of the echo haunts her and she feels exhausted and wants to take rest after her experience. Adela and Aziz continue to explore other caves. Adela's mind is preoccupied with her engagement to Ronny and she realizes that she does not love him. On their way, they become separated and Aziz fails to find her. He hears the sound of a car halting, and thinks that Miss Derek, Adela's friend, has picked up Adela. Fielding joins Aziz and Mrs. Moore and they board the train back to Chandrapore. But Aziz is arrested with charges unknown to him at the station.

Fielding promises to defend Aziz and he comes to know from Turton that Adela has accused Aziz of 'insulting' her and making improper advances to her in the caves. Fielding does not believe the charges against his friend although Aziz is imprisoned. In the club, the Britishers, the Turtons, the Lesley, the Callendars and others accuse Godbole of having been bribed to make Fielding late and miss the train to Marabar. Fielding becomes enraged by the false accusations and announces that if the Muslim doctor is found guilty, he will resign from his post as Principal and leave India and from the club as well. Mrs. Moore becomes isolated as the trial approaches and distances herself from everybody. Adela confesses to Ronny about her doubts of Aziz's guilt but the city magistrate encourages her to press charges against Aziz. Mrs. Moore leaves for Britain before the trial and dies en route, unable to endure the heat and travelling conditions. At the trial, Adela continues to hear "echoes". The Indians in the courthouse begin to jeer at Adela to reveal the truth and clear the name of Aziz. When she is called to the witness box, Mr. McBryde presses her until finally she admits that she is

not sure of Aziz's guilt. However, Adela withdraws her charge and all of the Indians in Chandrapore celebrate Aziz's victory. Adela walks the streets in a daze and Fielding takes her to his office for her safety.

SAQ:

What are the issues that the trial brings to the fore? Is it a question of justice or a question of racial prejudice? (60+80words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Aziz becomes suspicious of the growing relationship between Adela and Fielding. Fielding denies the rumour of the affair between them but Aziz believes the rumour to be true and thinks that the former will marry Adela for her money. When he thinks about Fielding's relationship with Adela, Aziz is disturbed that his friend Fielding is betraying him for his 'enemy'. Fielding is again asked to come to the club. Aziz begins to write poetry about his motherland and the nation after the trial. He decides to move out of the Raj to a free Indian state. Fielding and Adela return to England.

"Temple" is the third part of the novel. Here we find a description of Aziz's life two years later. He has moved to a post in a native state, Mau, and is living happily with his children, writing poetry and reading Persian. The novel describes the scene of the religious 'Birth' ceremony of Lord Krishna taking place in the Hindu region of Mau where both Aziz and Godbole reside. Godbole is now the Minister of Education in Mau. Aziz gets the information of his old friend Fielding's official visit in the town. Fielding is married and his wife and brother-in-law accompany him. Aziz assumes that his friend has married Adela and does not want to see him. The trial and its consequences created a rift in their friendship and Aziz does not reply to Fielding's postcards and letters. The two friends meet each other by accident and have a cold conversation. But Fielding explains to Aziz that he did not marry Adela, but Mrs. Moore's daughter, Stella, and that his brother-in-law is Ralph. Fielding is disappointed to find that Aziz has assumed Adela

to be his wife. After hearing the truth, Aziz requests his old friend not to bother him in Mau. However, in the next chapter, the doctor goes to the European Guest House where Fielding, his wife, and his brother-in-law are staying. He sees Ralph and inquires about his bee stings from earlier in the day for a follow-up visit and examines his patient. He tries to forget the incident in the caves and asks Ralph if he still thinks him unkind. Ralph replies that he does not think Aziz to be unkind as he considers him to be a friend. Aziz calls him 'an Oriental' and Ralph informs Aziz of Mrs. Moore's impression of him. Aziz takes Ralph out in the water and they hear chanting and festivities from the palace. As the chants reach their peak, a wave pushes their boat into a boat holding Fielding and Stella. The two boats collide and the four plunge in the water and achieve a sort of spiritual epiphany and mutual friendship. Fielding and Aziz, the two old friends go for their last horse-ride together in the jungle and finally are reconciled to each other. Aziz gives Fielding a letter he wants him to deliver to Adela, thanking her for her behaviour two years ago as he wants to erase all of the misunderstanding that took place in the Marabar Caves. The two friends discuss the politics and future of India and Aziz prophesizes that they can become friends only when the British are driven out Fielding is confused as he thinks that they can be friends now. But their horses begin to pull away as they discuss the fate of their friendship. The novel ends with the significant lines about the impossibility of mutual friendship: 'But the horses didn't want it - they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there" .

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the suitability of the ending of *A Passage to India*. Can you link the ending with the major theme of the failure of cultural reconciliation in the novel?
2. Does the narrator's description of Marabar caves symbolize a sense of neutrality? Explain with textual references.
3. Is Forster's position on race in *A Passage to India*, typical or atypical of his age? Explain why.

4. Do you think that Ronny's fiancée, Adela suffers from gender discrimination both from the Indians as well as her own English people? Elaborate your answer by analyzing the Ronny-Adela relationship.

2.3 THE CHARACTERS

Dr. Aziz

Dr. Aziz, the widowed Muslim doctor, is the protagonist in *A Passage to India*. He is an idealistic, young Indian doctor and the novel is centered on his experiences during the British Raj. He befriends some of the English people like Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested and Fielding and his character develops though his relationships in the course of the novel. He shares a comfortable understanding with Mrs. Moore and the central incident in the fiction, Adela's mysterious experience in the Marabar caves is also linked with him. He is the first character to enter and he and Fielding are the last characters to be seen in the final paragraph of the novel. Dr. Aziz takes Adela and Mrs. Moore on a tour of the Marabar Caves and is accused of assaulting her in the cave's darkness. The trial which follows is significant as it damages the already strained relations between the British and the Indians. Aziz seems to be the touchstone against which all the other characters are tested. Critics have considered him as a foil for the English characters. He is read as the sympathetic native against whom the feelings and reactions of English characters can be measured.

The readers first meet Aziz in an informal dinner party with his Muslim friends where the British appear as an intrusive power and the subordinate position of Aziz and his companions are visible. The Muslim doctor realizes the impossibility of relations between Indians and English. The character of Aziz is fully presented in chapter VI as the entire chapter is a meditation on his wife, and a climactic part of his thinking process. His first encounter with Mrs. Moore too is impressive as it not only hints at their subsequent sympathetic relationship but also, perhaps, his latent desires. Moreover, Forster portrays Aziz as sharing something profoundly religious with Godbole. It is not Hinduism, but the expression of a basic truth that lies behind all religions. Critics have also explained that Aziz's semi-mystic, semi-sensuous overturn points towards the fundamental unity of sexuality and

religion, an idea that Forster explored during his first trip to India. Frances B. Singh points out that Aziz has many similarities with the young and enthusiasistic workers of the party as he is a Western-trained professional, a doctor like another of the leaders of the Young Party, Dr. M A. Ansari (1880-1936), and a poet with a Muslim sensibility. Another major influence affecting Aziz is M.K. Gandhi. As Singh elaborates his point, Aziz's concept of independence in the last chapter parallels Gandhi's idea of transforming ill-will into affection and achieving that state of friendship which Gandhi regarded as one of the goals of 'swaraj'. Although indebted to party politics, Aziz' character is seen undergoing a transformation on Gandhian lines by the end of the novel. Tracing the connection between Forster and Gandhi, critics like Singh and G.K. Das comment on the importance of the third section of the novel, Temple. According to them, apart from foreshadowing Forster's commitment to love and 'connection', this section confirms his affinity towards the Gandhian idea of living in harmony with Indian communities. Forster's uniqueness lies in the attempt to represent a Muslim doctor as a witness of Gandhian 'swaraj', which is influenced by Hinduism. So in the text, the readers witness Aziz's metamorphosis into a political Hindu and he himself declares, 'I am an Indian at last'. In the character of Dr. Aziz, Forster creates the figure of the new Indian who traverses cultural boundaries and represents the essence of the diversity of India's culture. Moreover, his trial helps to project the Indians as 'other', the savage counterpart of the civilized British.

SAQ:

Does E.M.Forster try to thoroughly "indianize" the character of Aziz? If so, explain how this is accomplished? (50+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Ronny Heaslop

Ronny Heaslop is Adela Quested's fiancée and Mrs. Moore's son. Ronny Heaslop, the exemplary imperialist, is the city - magistrate and a passionate upholder of Anglo-India's self-serving dogma. His commitment towards 'the duty of England' without recognizing the complex and biased operations of the imperialist venture makes him participate unconsciously in the game of cultural identity formation. Ronny believes that Indians are resistant to the notion of truth and in the court the continual confrontation with this impenetrable "other" provides him with sustaining pleasure. His job as a colonial magistrate, coupled with his sense of duty, demands continual sacrifices on his part and the demands of dealing with a group of people whose culture he fails to comprehend influences his attitude towards the Indians. Ronny's attitude towards the ruled, therefore, reveals the complexities inherent in his character. Mrs. Moore comes to the conclusion that for Ronny Indians are simultaneously the source of resentment and self-righteous gratification. Critics therefore, view Ronny as the consummate British magistrate as he takes pleasure from a psychic economy of renunciation. Ronny's sense of satisfaction coming from the "drawbacks of the situation," makes him emblematic of British Imperialism. His mother is worried when she sees her son extracting pleasure under the auspices of duty from his daily sacrifice of sympathy to the native Indians. Ronny's sacrifice can be related to the notion of the 'white man's burden' , the burden of sacrificing one's own pleasure to colonial subjects in the name of a greater good. His 'duty' explains his psychic relation to the other, or the symbolic order of British colonialism. Forster is, therefore, justified in using the term, 'martyr', for Ronny as he truly bears 'the sahib's cross' and its consequences. His devotion to the notion of white martyrdom is visible in his continual efforts to valorize his commitment.

The character of Ronny is interestingly complex and has multiple shades. He sometimes appears to be insensitive to others only because he is cocooned within the self-deceptive world of idealism. Ronny refuses to accept Aziz's innocence although Adela repeatedly tells him that Aziz never tried to violate her. According to him Adela is 'neurotic' and therefore cannot distinguish illusion from reality. Adela repeatedly tells Ronny that Mrs. Moore, his mother also considers Aziz to be innocent but Ronny tells her

that she is imagining things and his mother never made such a statement. When Mrs. Moore also confirms Aziz's innocence in the presence of Ronny, he claims that 'she never said it', and finally, sums up, 'Who cares what she thinks?'. This scene points out Ronny's willingness to deny even the evidence of his own senses as he denies witnessing his mother making a certain statement in his presence. The magistrate fails to value truth the way he fails to address the mysterious presence of the Other. For him, Aziz's innocence makes him experience a threat to his own sense of self which is defined by the attributes it lacks. The Muslim doctor's triumph over the charges of sexual assault will lead to his 'symbolic' death and he must, therefore, prevent it.

SAQ:

Would you say that the ideas of "illusion", "reflection" and "representation" define the relationships among the characters in the novel? (90words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Adela Quested

Adela Quested is the most important character after the Muslim surgeon, Aziz, in Forster's novel. Basically the narrative revolves around these two characters. Adela is a school teacher who comes to India with Mrs Moore to visit her fiance, Ronny Heaslop, the city- magistrate and Mrs Moore's son. Adela's desire to 'see' India and her belief in an untroubled 'mimesis' is significant as it helps to explore the problem of cultural difference in the novel. Her desire to capture the indestructible and essential truth of India makes her believe in the self-sustaining mimetic representation which provides an imaginary sense of wholeness and consistency. In her search for the essence of real India, Forster shows the failure of mimesis and her subsequent belief in the imaginary wholeness. Moreover, Forster states that Adela's search for a mimetic representation of India is in itself a form of imperialism. Aziz also reaches this conclusion and Adela herself gradually comes to a

similar realization during and the trial. Adela unconsciously participates in the system of oppression and the attempted "rape" of Adela is the pivotal moment in the novel.

Critics have stressed the racial significance of the rape. According to Brenda R. Silver the novel's deployment of sexuality within a discourse of power makes it possible to understand that to be 'rapable' is 'a social position' cutting across 'biological and racial lines', as she explains in her paper, 'Periphrasis, Power and Rape in *A Passage to India*'. Again, addressing the novel's attempt to reconfigure colonial sexuality into 'a homoeroticization of race,' Suleri argues in "The Rhetoric of English India", 1992, that this translation of an imperial erotic revises 'the colonialist-as-heterosexual-paradigm,' presenting instead an alternative colonial model in which 'the most urgent cross-cultural invitations occur between male and male, with racial difference serving as a substitute for gender' (133, 139).The depiction of the reactions of the characters to Adela's rape in the novel helps to explore recurrent themes in Anglo-Indian and British writings about India. Adela is subject to gender discrimination and sexual fantasy from both the races and Brenda Silver's reading construes Adela Quested's charge of rape as an act of resistance against the silencing of women and Indians. It proceeds from conflating distinct and specific forms of oppression in the interest of appropriating all discourses of discrimination, as well as the counter-discourses these engender, to a feminist critique. Hence Silver privileges Quested's exercise of female autonomy over her exercise of white authority, a move which Parry criticizes for seriously distorting the fiction's exposure of Anglo-Indian racialized sexual anxieties. According to Benita Parry, to the Anglo-Indians, Miss Quested is the victim of the infamous lust of Indian men; and in the story of her derangement, the Indian landscape figures as a violent male principle-the rocks of the Marabar Hills appearing to rise "abruptly, insanely," and her body pierced by the spines of cactuses growing on the hillside. So Adela's characterization helps to illustrate the novel's sexual and gender politics.

SAQ:

Would you agree that 'sexual anxiety' in the context of colonial relations qualifies the novel's characterization? (90 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Mrs. Moore

Ronny Heaslop's mother, Mrs. Moore, is another important character in the novel. She comes to India to visit her son and is accompanied by Adela Quested, her son's fiancée. The character of Mrs. Moore is significant as her character exemplifies the crucial themes of the novel. Being the symbol of spirituality and universal love she is the personification of the religious theme of the novel. Mrs. Moore is sensitive to her surrounding and enjoys love and respect from Adela and Aziz. Both of them share mutual respect for each other and Mrs. Moore possesses the qualities inherent in a good Christian. The mystical experience in India draws her to the spiritual world and her character becomes more significant after her death. Her moral and psychic dilemma as a consequence of the echo ensuing from the depths of the Marabar Caves leads her to conclude, "Pathos, piety, courage they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value". The geological stratum of India which is "older than anything in the world . . . without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere ... bear[ing] no relation to anything dreamt or seen" introduces a sense of dislocation in her and intensifies the psychic turmoil. The physical environment of the Marabar caves infringes on her consciousness as she fails to comprehend the mystery embedded in the landscape. Mrs. Moore's emergence from the darkness of the caves into the sunlight is interpreted as her arriving at the primordial sense of being. The caves are the archetypes or psychological symbols leading to the ultimate meaning and the echoes heard by Mrs. Moore and hallucinations suffered by Adela Quested are important moments of discovery for both of them. Mrs. Moore's visit to India proves disastrous, as Adela has the hallucination that she has been sexually assaulted by Aziz

and returns to Chanderpore in hysteria. Mrs. Moore suffers a breakdown with the arrest of Aziz and the consequent ostracization of Fielding. She dies on her way back to England. Mrs. Moore's quest for meaning ends with her death and understanding her ambiguous character along with her belief in her 'poor little talkative Christianity' offers another dimension to the reading of the novel. Mrs. Moore can be viewed basically as an idealist who personifies disillusionment as the surrounding provides her with less support to continue her intuitive judgment. Unlike her son, she appears to be intuitive throughout the novel and possesses the capacity to see beyond the veneer of practical understanding. Mrs. Moore's stream of thoughts makes her a complex character and her mystical experiences relate to the hidden mystery of the landscape.

SAQ:

Does Mrs. Moore exemplify a sense of Oriental 'mystery'? Give your opinion. (60 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Godbole

The 'Deccani Brahman', Narayan Godbole, is a professor at the Government College in Chandrapore. In *A Passage to India* Godbole is introduced apparently as a figure of fun "he wore a turban that looked like pale purple macaroni … socks with clocks. The clocks matched the turban, and his whole appearance suggested harmony - as if he had reconciled the products of East and West." Although Forster insisted on his originality in the characterization of Godbole, G. K. Das in his celebrated article, 'The Genesis of Professor Godbole', traces interesting sources behind the creation of this character. His sources include the actual meeting between Forster and an Indian by the name 'Godbole', the familiar tradition of the 'Chitpavan' Brahmans of the Deccan, to which community the Godboles belong; and the personalities of the two Hindu Maharajahs of the Dewas State, Senior,

and Chhatarpur. According to Das, Forster's portrayal of Godbole in *A Passage to India* draws attention to all these essential details like the pride, ambition, social importance, and subtle ability of 'Deccani Brahman', Godbole's community, and its jealous attitude to the British in India. Narayan Godbole, the Brahmin priest, is the representative of the community's claims to superior learning and knowledge of Hindu philosophy. Das further states that the personality of the Maharajah of Dewas Senior, Sir Tukoji Rao Puar, with whom Forster had stayed as private secretary, seems to have influenced the portrayal of Narayan Godbole to some extent. The 'Deccani Brahman' Godbole's amusing eccentricities, his principles in the matter of food, reflect the eccentricities of the Maharajah of Dewas. Narayan Godbole's community occupies an important position in Indian society and he also enjoys an important position for his sincerity at Chandrapore. He is appointed as the Minister of Education in the Hindu native state of Mau.

SAQ:

Identify the lines and passages from the novel that describe Narayan Godbole as a "figure of fun". (70 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Godbole's character illustrates Forster's contacts with Hindu India as he has incorporated the elements gathered from his experience in creating this character. In the character of Godbole, Forster attempts not to present a fully convincing picture of the Hindu religion as Forster's actual contacts with Hinduism were limited in spite of his curiosity. In *A Passage to India*, Forster emphasizes Godbole's religious beliefs and his beliefs are different from the other characters in the novel. When Fielding wants his opinion on Aziz's arrest, Godbole replies by elaborating the philosophy of God's presence and absence, which he had first referred to in Fielding's tea-party. For this Deccani Brahman good and evil 'are different, as their names imply. But…. they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one,

absent in the other. .. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence'. Godbole emerges as a dignified character in the last part of the novel, 'Temple'. Forster's final section provides the readers with a vivid description of Godbole as the 'bhakt' or devotee and his intense devotion as a means to reach the divine.

Fielding

Cyril Fielding is the British headmaster of the government-funded college for Indians at Chandrapore. The unmarried liberal, Anglo-Indian professor in his forties, is a complex character whose intention is suspected by his fellow Britons in India because he honors the Indians and befriends them and tries to uplift their status by educating them. Fielding's tolerant and respectful toward Indians makes him different from his compatriots and his friendship with Dr. Aziz is significant in the context of the novel exploring the possibilities of cross-cultural friendship. Although Fielding's logical mind fails to comprehend the 'muddle' and mystery of India, his liberal attitude coupled with his profession of teaching helps to uplift the natives. Fielding appears to be a character with exceptional qualities who befriends the Muslim surgeon, Dr. Aziz, and encourages the Indians to think freely. Cultural and racial differences intrude into their relationship leading to misunderstandings until finally they are separated. Fielding's profession as a liberal professor under the colonial regime highlights his situation in India. His sensitive conduct at the 'Bridge' party aimed at cross-cultural friendship proves the fact that he is not a racist. After the failure of the Bridge party Fielding organizes a tea party and here we see his determination and poise in tackling the race problem. At the party, unlike Turton, Fielding is the only person to remain with the Indian guests and welcome them. He is accommodative and supportive and the Indian guests respond to his words. Fielding's doctrine of liberal humanism is put into practice when he deliberately avoids the Western snacks and eats the Indian gram at the party. His doctrine of liberal humanism is beautifully summed up in his statement: 'the world … is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence'. The sincerity of his friendship is the most striking part of the liberal professor's character. Fielding's liberalism transcends the racial divide

and he tirelessly befriends the central Indian character of the novel, Aziz, against all odds. Threatened by social ostracization by fellow Anglo-Indians, Fielding supports his friend even after Aziz is falsely accused on charges of molestation. Moreover, Fielding empathizes with Adela when the trial is over even at the risk of damaging his reputation. Amongst all the characters in Forster's *A Passage to India* novel, Fielding seems to be the most compassionate and egalitarian in his views. In the last part of the novel Fielding's relationship with Aziz becomes complicated. In the text, Forster explains about their friendship: 'When they argued …something racial inevitably intruded - not bitterly but inevitably, like the colour of their skins.' Fielding and Aziz become estranged owing to various reasons and they are reunited in the religious festival in Mau. Fielding tries his best to clarify Aziz's doubts about his loyalty towards him in their reunion. His sincerity is apparent in his effort to transcend the rift created by time and insists that he and Adela were mere friends rather than a married couple. The friendship of Fielding and Aziz is problematised from the beginning for the political and cultural imperatives of colonialism. Their final estrangement emphasises the impossibility of cross- cultural friendship and the consequent reconciliation between the two races.

2.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

In spite of the controversial subject, Forster's novel *A Passage to India* was well accepted both by the reading public and the critics. *A Passage to India* is one of the most widely read modern novels and is praised for its delicacy of characterization, the effective portrayal of the British and the Indians and the subtle humour. In India, *A Passage to India* enjoyed a wide readership and Forster's reputation as a benefactor was established among the middle-class readers. The first Indian reviewers praised the novel for its documentary accuracy. Nihal Singh opined that the novel will help to open the eyes of the British readers and make them aware of the political realties of India. Nirad Chaudhuri's celebrated diatribe 'Aziz would not have been allowed to cross my threshold' (*Encounter*, ii, no.6, June 1954, 22) added to the increasing corpus of critical writing on Forster. His article "attacked it for sublimating the brutal realities of the conflict between independence and the Raj to the tame Bloomsburian pieties of 'personal

relationship', and argued that 'with such material, a searching history of the Muslim destiny in India could have been written but not a novel on Indo-British relations, for which it was essential to have a Hindu protagonist' " (Chaudhuri 1954:19, 22). As mentioned earlier, F.R Leavis' celebrated essay dealing with *A Passage to India* reads the novel as 'a classic of the liberal spirit'. Lionel Trilling, the famous American critic, in his book published in 1943 established Forster's reputation as the 'landmark and touchstone of the liberal consciousness'. George H. Thomson draws on Jungian notions of archetype to claim the novel for a tradition of 'mythic' narrative, motivated not by the relationships and conflict of individuals in historical place or time but by the search for ecstatic transcendence (Thomson, 1967). Defying the novel's realist preoccupations with character and story, Thomson concludes that Forster does not 'belong in the realist tradition', in favour of an integrative 'deep structure' of myth, symbol or archetype, inevitably to minimize the political dimensions of the text.

A Passage to India has also been re-written and adapted into other versions and there have been two significant adaptations of this novel. These include Santha Rama Rau's play on this novel in 1956 and David Lean's 1984 film version of the text. These re-workings of Forster's novel are criticized for radically altering its atmosphere in terms of landscape as well as motif. Forster critiqued the former's playscript as:

"... I tried to indicate the human predicament in a universe which is not, so far, comprehensible to our minds. This aspect of the novel is displayed in the final chapters. It is obviously unsuitable for the stage, and Miss Rau - most rightly in my judgment - has not emphasized it, and has brought down her final curtain on the Trial scene."

David Lean's film also differs from the original text and has many discrepancies with respect to Forster's novel. In the film, the third section was shot in Kashmir, as Kashmir was more picturesque than Mau. Moreover, the film failed to do justice to the question of humanism and the issue was ignored to some extent. The film also suggested an essential continuity between sections I and III with no attempt to comment on the significance of religion in the text.

2.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have tried to discuss the storyline of E.M.Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. An attempt has been made to acquaint you with all the important characters in this novel to facilitate a better understanding of Forster's literary preoccupations. The triadic structure of the novel along with the detailed analysis of the plot will enable you to relate the major characters to the development of the story .The discussions in the second unit will also help you to understand the novel in the larger context of its various themes, techniques and symbolisms in the next unit.

* * *

Unit 3
Themes and Techniques

Contents:

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

3.1 OBJECTIVES

In the previous units, you have already gained familiarity with Forster's literary preoccupations. Unit 3, the last unit in this block discusses the literary devices like major themes, narrative technique, title and the images and symbols which contribute to the enduring popularity of the novel prescribed for study. In this unit our attempt is to offer a detailed discussion of *A Passage to India* by addressing the important issues in detail.

After going through the unit, you will be able to

- *describe* the importance and appropriateness of the title of the novel
- *identify* the major themes
- *find out* the narrative techniques employed by Forster in *A Passage to India*
- *identify* the prominent images and symbols
- *write on* different aspects of the novel

3.2 INTRODUCTION

A Passage to India, dealing with the political occupation of India by the British, is different from Forster's other major works for its political content. Unlike the lighter tone and subdued political subtext explored in works like

Howards End and *A Room With a View*, *A Passage to India* published fourteen years after *Howards End*, is concerned with the problem of reconciliation between races and cultures. Exploring the nuances of the 'passage' between the territories and possibilities of 'friendship', homoeroticism and mutual bonding across alien cultures, the novel is one of the enigmatic texts of modernist literature. A complete understanding of the novel demands close attention to the issues of colonialism, racism and nationalism. The theme of establishing personal relations amidst antagonism and hatred emerges as the dominating issue incorporating the themes of the power of Nature, masculine brutality and feminine quietude. *A Passage to India* works on several levels. It seems to explore the problematic relation between Britain and India and the consequent relations between British and Indian people at the surface level. But as mentioned earlier, the novel is also about the necessity of friendship and about the difficulty of establishing friendship across cultural boundaries. Rich in symbolism, *A Passage to India* also addresses questions of faith, both religious faith and faith in social conventions and in the following sections we aim to deal with these issues in detail.

Stop to Consider

Walt Whitman's poem *Passage to India* in his epic *Leaves of Grass* begins with the very title phrase:

"Passage to India!
Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
The earth to be spanned, connected by network,
The races, neighbours, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be crossed, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together."

Whitman's poem *Passage to India* was written to celebrate the grand opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. As interpreted by Whitman, the canal fulfilled the long cherished dream of communicating with other cultures and traditions by making the spiritual and cultural voyage possible. The opening of the canal is significant when seen in the context of the poet's concept of harmonious union and co-existence.

3.3 THE TITLE

E.M Forster's novel *A Passage to India* explores the dilemma of achieving a balance between personal relations and the demands of the imperialist venture. Contesting the possibility and validity of the 'passage', the title is significant and suitable for the issues explored in this novel. The title is borrowed from the famous American poet Walt Whitman's visionary poem, 'Passage to India' (1871) where he exalts the land of mysticism, India. India, in this poem, is viewed as the symbol of mystical fulfillment. Unlike Whitman, Forster's use of the title involves the issues of race, class and gender. His adaptation of Whitman's phrase as the title of his novel is interesting in the context of *A Passage to India* exploring the nuances of a 'passage'. The title of the novel relates to the thematic plane and is subtly connected with the ending of the novel. The title is concerned with the possibility of the 'passage' between cultural and racial barriers but the postponement of the mutual friendship between Aziz and Fielding problematises the notion of 'passage' throughout the novel and culminates in the final scene. The impossibility of the journey leading to communication and thereby reducing the gulf between the British and the Indians invokes the idea of "a passage not easy, not now, not here, not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable". Tracing the connection between Forster's and Whitman's use of the phrase, we find Forster adding the indefinite article "A" to Whitman's phrase. The adding of the article helps the novelist to introduce a sense of multiplicity and uncertainty as "a" passage is suggestive of the fact that there may be many more passages than the one taken by the writer or any of the characters. The existence of multiple routes opens new vistas for the readers to explore and thereby helps to decentre the notion of the supremacy of the novelist. It can be said that unlike Whitman's self-generated and self-sustained romanticism, Forster's use of the phrase represents a more self-examining and self-critical trend of modernism.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the elements that 'India' encapsulates in Whitman's poem? Are they the same as Forster's ideas in the title of the novel? Give your opinion.

2. Do you think Forster's *A Passage to India* troubles the traditional idea of India to be found in Whitman? Justify your stand.

Although there are striking similarities between Forster's novel and Whitman's poem like the connotation of spirituality associated with the phrase, homoeroticism is an important fact in the life of both the writers and thereby informs their works. In the poem "Passage to India", 1871, Whitman celebrates the opening of the Suez Canal and the scientific achievement leads him to imagine other prospects:

'Passage indeed O soul to primal thought,
Not lands and seas alone, thy own clear freshness
The young maturity of brood and bloom,
To realms of budding bibles…
Passage to more than India!' (ll. 165-9; 224)

According to critics, Forster's adaptation also hints at the fact that the journey to India is not simply a geographical movement, but a symbolic transition. Forster's title is resonant with the cartographic reference to a voyage into unknown territory, a journey replete with imperial and sexual aggression. The structure of the novel corresponds to the various stages in the voyage to the inexplicable and mysterious and the triadic structure relates to the Indian seasonal cycle. The route or 'passage' aimed at uncovering the hidden truth moves from Islam through India's more speculative traditions and critics offer conflicting interpretations of this 'passage' in terms of the representation of religion. The presence of the word 'India' in the title is also interesting as it connotes the various ideas in construing 'India'. Critics have argued over recognizing Forster's India as an empty space symbolic of the amorphous state of mind and have offered various interpretations of Forster's 'passage' in terms of society, spirituality and religion.

3.4 MAJOR THEMES

The major themes of *A Passage to India* are: the theme of inter-racial relations, its difficulties and its participants, the theme of 'India' (as described in the title), the theme of value as related to the Marabar Caves, East versus West, Orientalism, representation and its difficulty, and homoeroticism.

Colonialism and imperialism are the most important concerns to illustrate the theme of inter-racial relations in *A Passage to India*. The colonial occupation, Britain's prominent place in India's political affairs, and the consequent domination of India comprise the background of the novel.

The Political 'Passage'

With the passing of the Government of India Act in August of 1858, political power was transferred to the crown from the East India Company by the British Parliament. The consequent attitude of the British influenced by the system of sovereignty where there exists no meaningful relation between the rulers and the ruled finds its best expression in characters like Ronny Heaslop and Mr. McBryde Forster's *A Passage to India*. It seemed that the British in India were undertaking the 'white man's burden' only. Indian nationalism, the presence of Mahatma Gandhi, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh were some of the important events when Forster was writing the novel. Forster's visits to India between 1912 and 1921 are significant for the shape of *A Passage to India* .The germ of this novel originated with his first visit in 1912 and the second in 1921. Spanning a ten-year period, Forster's novel witnessed events like the First World War, the continuance of wartime repressive measures in the Rowlatt Acts, Gandhi's return to India from South Africa and the start of his civil disobedience campaign, the First Government of India Act, and an upsurge in Indian nationalist feeling, British promises of independence, and the massacre at Amritsar. Consequently *A Passage to India* is firmly rooted in this history which influenced the writing of this novel.

Forster's novel documents the impossibility of inter-racial relations by questioning whether it is possible to share a friendly relation within the colonial regime. The political control of India by the British invites attention to Forster's harsh criticism of the British as thorough racists. Aziz and Fielding's mutual friendship is threatened by the typical attitude of the colonizers from the beginning and the novel's ending too offers no hope of reconciliation. The ideological issues of gender, race and class are explored in this context of inter-racial relations and colonial oppression in the novel. As pointed out, the problem of representation lies at the core of the novel as the writer himself belongs to the category of the oppressors. Forster's inclusion within the imperialistic machinery problematises the concept of 'representation' as it works on multiple levels-social, cultural and also at the textual levels.

Witnessing the effects of empire, theorists of the novel locate the exploration of these issues in the form of figurative recasting and the discourses that represent those oppressions. Edward Said discerns the assertion of narrative authority as characterizing the British novel during the age of imperial consolidation and further connected the emergence of literary modernism

with changes in metropolitan apprehensions of empire. As Said explains in *Culture and Imperialism*, the turn from 'the triumphalist experience of imperialism ... into the extremes of self-consciousness, discontinuity, self-referentiality and corrosive irony ... which we have tended to derive from purely internal dynamics in Western society and culture, includes a response to the external pressures on culture from the imperium'. Offering a different argument Fredric Jameson maintains that the modernist crisis in the novel was intensified by imperialism in his book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Thus, colonial fictions as suggested by Said and Jameson, then, should be read as a subset of the English novel, and inscriptions of empire's overt and cryptic presence in this type of literature can be interpreted as continuing the same area of enquiry. In this novel, Forster's attempts to render India legible within western fictional modes. Edward Said's remark that, for him, the most interesting thing about the book is the use of India 'to represent material that according to the canons of the novel form cannot in fact be represented-vastness, incomprehensible creeds, secret motions, histories and social forms', (*Culture and Imperialism*, 214) supports this argument. *A Passage to India*, therefore, construes India's material world, cultural forms, and systems of thought as resistant to discursive appropriation by the colonizers. Unlike critics considering Forster as the disrupter of the imperialist discourse in Anglo-Indian literature, Sara Suleri in her essay, 'The Geography of *A Passage to India*', sees him as the founder of the Western and colonialist image of India: '*A Passage to India* ... represents India as a metaphor of something other than itself, as a certain metaphysical posture that translates into an image of profound unreality. It thus becomes that archetypal novel of modernity that co-opts the space reserved for India in the Western literary imagination, so that all subsequent novels on the Indian theme appear secretly obsessed with the desire to describe exactly what transpired in the Marabar Caves'. Sara Suleri states that Forster's approach to India implies that the sub-continent is merely a passageway back to the West. According to her the failure of the liberal humanist imagination to comprehend the mysterious otherness of India is translated in the novel into a failure on the part of India itself. The English inability to interpret the otherness of India is not differentiated from the novel's depiction of India's essential unreality. The echo 'bou -oum' in the Marabar cave thus becomes an Indian rather than

an Englsih problem. Suleri therefore, points out that the desire of some Western academics to characterize Forster as an advocate of Indian nationalism is perhaps indicative of a certain willful unawareness of the ideological effects and manipulations of imperialism.

SAQ:

Does Forster use historical events in the novel? Do you think that he is inclined to a less historical, and more philosophical, interest in the depiction of India? (80+60 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Forster's *A Passage to India* is concerned with the problem of representation of India and the other thematic issues related to this problem. The problematics of representation invites attention to the question of realism as 'representation' in the novel involves some amount of fictionality on the part of the narrator/author. Forster's deployment of factual details about India coupled with the elements of fictionality creates the 'India' that we find in *A Passage to India*. As readers, while considering Forster's 'India' as real, one should take into account the 'elements of fictionality' implicit in textual representation. The ideological positioning of the novel within British writing about India influences Forster's representation of India in *A Passage to India*. Forster offers the reader the semiotically saturated physical landscape of the country by depicting India's natural terrain and cognitive traditions which resist easy categorization into the Western categories of representative simplicity. Forster's India can be read as "a direct expression" of "the truth of things" which exists "prior to symbolization", (Benita Parry).The material and spiritual presence of the landscape resists inclusion within epistemological categories:

"The triumphant machine of civilization may suddenly hitch and be immobilized into a car of stone, and at such moments the destiny of the English seems to resemble their predecessors', who also entered the country

with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust".

A Passage to India seems to be concerned with the unrepresentability and the self-declared incomprehension that lurks within its boundaries. Sometimes you may feel that the novelist is trying to translate the incomprehensible mystery of the Indian civilization into a palpable reality through the various strategies of representation.

The Problem of Representation and Forster's Modernism

Critics are of the opinion that *A Passage to India* examines issues of representation in a characteristically modernist fashion. Lionel Trilling, offers an influential reading of the novel to explain the central problems of aesthetic representation by quoting Forster's dictum that 'possession is one with loss'. According to Benita Parry, in this novel, Forster examines one of the central problems of modernist representation-the confrontation of the 'civilized mind' of 'the modern West' with 'the primitive memories dormant in man'. Sara Suleri, on the other hand, offers a critical stance quite antithetical to that of Benita Parry as she claims that *A Passage to India* stages a 'secret attack on difference', which makes it 'that archetypal novel of modernity'. David Medalie argues that this novel is a 'fully fledged and seminal modernist work' because it captures the 'great drama of loss and recovery' characteristic of modernism. Mohammad Shaheen asserts that Forster's primary achievement in the novel is the articulation of 'an experience of alienation expressed in the impossibility of reconciliation' characteristic of the modernist questioning of the principles of 'order, harmony, and law which form the basis of liberal humanism'.

The critics opposing the stance taken by Trilling, Parry, etc. opine that Forster's staging of the representational crisis in *A Passage to India* actually reflect the moral and political chaos indicative of the sub-continent's reality. According to Sara Suleri charges 'the failure of representation becomes transformed into a characteristically Indian failure'. Shaheen argues that 'throughout the novel', India signifies 'some kind of 'sound and fury' muddle' that is opposed to European 'order and form' (76). Edward Said presents an interesting variation of this argument in *Culture and Imperialism*. In Said's opinion, Forster, by representing the barriers to Fielding and Aziz's friendship in terms of 'ontological' rather than 'political' difference, merely

reaffirms stereotypes about Indians by taking recourse to the assumption that Indians can hardly be taken seriously as political agents. 'Forster's India', Said states, 'is so affectionately personal and so remorselessly metaphysical that his view of Indians as a nation contending for sovereignty with Britain is not politically very serious, or even respectful'. By representing difference in ontological rather than political terms, Forster neutralizes Indian nationalism as a political force and the Indians in the novel appear as a 'metaphysical' puzzle and exist outside the political realm. Said's argument, therefore, depends on the assumption that the efficacy of Indians as political agents demands their mimetic reproduction within the realm of political discourse.

SAQ:

Comment on the symbolic use of landscape in *A Passage to India*? Do you think the description to be adequate in terms of the political tone of the novel? Illustrate with textual references. (60+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

In Forster's novel, India appears to be the cultural 'other' concealing an essential truth and sustaining racial differences for mysterious reasons leading to fragmentation produced by the distorted image of ourselves. According to Timothy Christensen the problem of culture within *A Passage to India* is, then, fundamentally one of 'misrecognition': the recognition of oneself in the field of the 'Other' is always shown to be a misrecognition, in which some essential feature, the very thing that defines the truth of one's being, is withheld or concealed. Forster foregrounds this problem of cultural misrecognition in a way that can be read as a critique of the limitations of humanism when confronted with the problem of empire. The desire to accept the cultural 'other' as an equal within the symbolic domain through a sympathetic cross-cultural understanding appears to be impossible in British India. Consequently, Forster warns that Fielding's dictum of 'good will plus culture and intelligence' is 'a creed ill suited to Chandrapore', and the readers witness its failure throughout the novel especially in Chapter V.

'Othering'

This term was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. Whereas the Other corresponds to the focus of desire or power (the M-'Other' or Father-or Empire) in relation to which the subject is produced, the other is the excluded or 'mastered' subject created by the discourse of power. 'Othering' describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. In Spivak's explanation, othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing 'Other' is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects.

Although Forster's novel is embedded within a literary tradition that heavily relies on prior configurations, it can be said that *A Passage to India* eschews both 'the Scented East of tradition' and the corrupt land of a febrile British imagination. We may consider the configurations of India to be rooted in the western structures of feeling. As a result, the use of India as an icon of the metaphysical, derives from what has been described, by critics like Aijaz Ahmad, as a 'scholarship ... replete with preferences for the speculative, religious-minded, idealist and/or Orientalist kind' (277).

SAQ:

Do you think Forster's *A Passage to India* displays some of the crucial characteristics of an 'Oriental' text as defined by Said? (80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Critics have read Forster's *A Passage to India* as also displaying his homoerotic interest in India. According to Said, any historical moment is composed of a myriad of emergent as well as hegemonic voices. Parminder Bakshi finds Said's opinion suggestive and tries to describe how the appropriation of the Orient by the West for the display and exploration of forbidden desires intersects with Forster's own homosexual interests in the essay 'Politics of Desire: E.M. Forster's Encounters with India'. This novel

belongs to the tradition of homosexual Orientalism and, as Bakshi states it provides a culmination to the Italian journeys in Forster's early novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*. British rule in India helped Forster to illustrate the barriers of male friendship and he uses the racial and political prohibitions of the friendship of Dr. Aziz and Fielding to signify a wider, universal oppression of homosexual love. Thus, for Bakshi, Orientalism is used in the novel as a device for advancing the theme of homoerotic love.

Stop to Consider

E.M.Forster's *A Passage to India* is dedicated to Syed Ross Masood and 'the seventeen years of our friendship'. Masood can be seen as an important influence in Forster's life since 1906 when he was appointed to teach him Latin. Their relationship was never fulfilled sexually but for Forster it 'woke him up out of his suburban and academic life and showed him new horizons and a new civilization (P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, 1977-8, I, 146). Forster's visit to India in 1912-13 was inspired by this friendship.

In *A Passage to India*, the word 'friend' is replete with homoerotic resonances as it recurs throughout the novel. Multiple interpretations of this word are implicit in the narrative from the beginning. The question 'as to whether or no it is possible to be 'friends' with an Englishman' is the central topic of discussion for almost all the characters. Hamidullah and Mahmoud Ali discuss the possibility of friendship between the Indians and the English, Adela expresses the wish to befriend the Indians and the approaches towards 'friendship' help to assess the characters. Adela's wish is consistent with her character as she is keen on maintaining the demands of 'friendship' with Ronny after she breaks with him. She tries to compensate the bad treatment of the Indians at the Bridge Party by her own 'friendliness'. The novel abounds in such scattered references to 'friendship' and ironically, we are informed about Fielding that 'all his best friends were English'. Bakshi also states that the novel generates a more specific, personal and Romantic notion of a friend. Aziz's boyhood experience provides us with the ideal and abstract image of a 'friend'.

Forster uses classical allusions to denote the ideal of 'friendship' in his 'Italian' and 'English' novels. In *A Passage to India* he uses references to Indian religion and mythology and according to Bakshi the reference to Krishna is one of the central homoerotic motifs in the text. The homoerotic ideal of a friend is presented as an absence in the novel. This desire for a friend is all-consuming and is expressed in Godbole's hymn to Krishna.This sense of absence is repeated in the text and is part of the very fabric of the novel. The references to friendship appear, not in some direct narrational focus on male friendship, but rather as an almost 'metonymic deflection from its consequences'.

SAQ:

Discuss the various connotations of the word 'friend' with reference to Forster's own homosexuality. Do you think the word 'friend' acquires different meanings in the Indian context? (80 +60words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

A Passage to India basically deals with the theme of cultural reconciliation and the notion of 'friendship' also throws light on the possibility of such reconciliation. Although contemporary racial and political issues impinge on the novel, Forster tries to dissociate friendship from politics. Bakshi opines that the main characters, like the Muslim doctor, are detached from the political scene of the novel and Forster thereby pits the values of personal relations against the political factors that divide men.

According to Bakshi, in Forster's novel, the libidinal is woven into an intricate narrative web; a discourse in the tradition of homosexual Orientalism is inseparable from the fiction's meditations on friendships within colonial conditions. In what Suleri calls "the most notoriously oblique homoerotic exchange in the literature of English India," a multivalent transaction within a relationship over-determined by colonialism is visible when Aziz inserts his stud into Fielding's collar. Suleri opines that this scene belongs to a discourse

where "colonial sexuality" is reconfigured into "a homoeroticization of race". Moreover it also impinges on both the novel's performance of cross-cultural interactions, and its contemplation of other cultural modes.

Seen in the context of Forster's preoccupation with homoeroticism, the Hindu ritual of Gokul Ashtami appears to be significant. Parry opines that this festival represents "a similarly coded display of sensual desire situated in the context of a stranger's bemused esteem for Indian cultural forms". She elaborates that although described as "[n]ot an orgy of the body," the ceremonies are "invoked in a scarcely veiled vocabulary soliciting the presence of a homoerotic content". Amongst the celebrations of Krishna's birth, which also include enactments of the merry and polymorphous God sporting with milk-maidens, are "performances of great beauty in the private apartments of the Rajah . . . [who] owned a consecrated troupe of men and boys, whose duty it was to dance various actions and meditations of his faith before him.. . . The Rajah and his guests would then forget that this was a dramatic performance, and would worship the actors" (299). But this yearning to discover an untroubled absorption of homosexual love into religious devotions does not exhaust a narration which, albeit from a distance of disbelief, also animates a hunger for the sacred. (Benita Parry)

SAQ:

Attempt an analysis of the Hindu festivals in the context of promoting a cross-cultural relationship. Why do you think festivals are important in the novel? (80 +60words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

But, more importantly, the evocations of the homoerotic, as well as the heterosexual disturbance assailing an Englishwoman, has been variedly read as scenes within the fiction's larger drama. The further significance of the naked and voiceless figures who, although being the objects of western libidinal surveillance, as noted by Parry, elude its narrative grasp. To him,

the import of silence within the novel resides rather in the lowly Indians, whose aphonia alludes to their habitation of a realm beyond the ken and the control of western knowledge, and who join India's material being and cognitive traditions in resisting incorporation into a western script. (Parry)

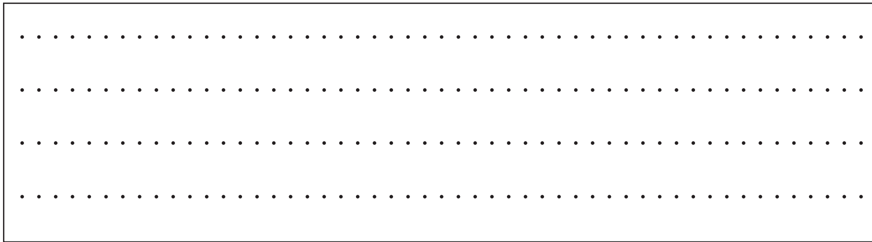
Forster's homoeroticism, together with his liberal opposition to imperialism, are seen by critics like Benita Parry to place him on the fringes of contemporary social attitudes. It is likely that he would have been comfortable with the Indian Congress view of Anglo-Indian relations in that time. Today we cannot affirm Forster's depiction of the theme of reconciliation as reflecting prevailing contemporary British ideas of imperial relations.

3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

A Passage to India is an interesting study in terms of the narrative technique which differs from Forster's earlier novels. Forster's earlier novels begin with the English characters and their affairs but *A Passage to India* begins with the chapter which describes the landscape devoid of human presence "except for the Marabar Caves- and they are twenty miles off- the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged, rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream." In this novel we see a transition to the description of the world of the human from the panoramic description of landscape. Landscape dominates the first chapter and there is a shift to the level of the human in the next chapter. Forster's description of the shift from the panoramic view of the landscape to zooming in onto the level of the human reminds us of the technique used in cinematic shots the panoramic establishing shot from which the camera zooms in onto the human level.

SAQ:

Comment on the opening of the novel and analyse how the cinematic overview of the landscape helps to suggest the theme of communication in the text. (60+80 words)



The overwhelming presence of the Marabar Hills is introduced in the opening and Dr. Aziz is the first person to appear in the shadow of the looming Marabar. The action of the novel begins when the Muslim doctor is seen dining with his Indian friends. Unlike his earlier novels where the British middle-class dominate the action, Forster begins the dramatic action of this novel with the lives of Indian people, an alien race. The initial appearance of Aziz socializing in his own milieu shows how Forster has inverted the technique used in his earlier works. The caves in the Marabar Hills are crucial elements in the plot of the novel. The central action of the novel involving Adela, Mrs Moore and Dr. Aziz takes place in the caves. So, the caves and the constant reference to the mysterious echo, are structurally important for the progress of the narrative. Forster also uses frequent allusions to the supernatural as a part of his narrative technique. Forster, through this strategy, aims to make the reader understand experiences of the meta-linguistic as emanating from the unspoken and the inexpressible part of the mind and existence. *A Passage to India* also explores the possibility and failure of communication on social, political and religious levels and the problem Forster faced was to select the appropriate genre of his narrative. Although he initially thought of writing this novel as a travelogue, the realistic mode of writing was not appropriate for his purposes of striking a balance between politics and the theme of personal relations. As a result he switched to the mode of fiction-writing to describe the passage of trust and mutual friendship in this novel.

3.6 IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

Symbolism operates as the structural principle of *A Passage to India* and is the primary vehicle for the exploration of its meaning. The tripartite division adds to the symbolic unity and the consequent complexity of the novel. The Marabar Caves operate as the most significant symbol in the text as the

caves symbolize the demolition of all distinctions leading to the erasure of all meaning. Wilfred Stone's *The Cave and The Mountain* attempts an extended psychoanalytical reading of the caves as the symbolic centre, both of the text and of the unconscious mind. The Marabar Caves, representing the primal absence, around which identity is formed, become the spring of action in the novel not as a symbol, but as a central absence to which "nothing attaches," which contain "nothing inside them," or which has no meaning and to which no meaning can be attached. The terrifying "[b]oum" resulting from this primal abyss reduces all meaning to the level of a signifying sound.

Racial stereotypes help to illustrate the disorienting confrontation with this primal absence represented by the Marabar Caves by allowing the British to maintain an imaginary sense of their own symbolic consistency through displacing this 'absence' which marks the emergence of the self onto the cultural 'other'. Basically, this process of misrecognition contributes to the process of constituing the cultural self. Almost all the characters like Major Callendar, Ronny Heaslop, Cyril Fielding, Adela Quested, and Mrs. Moore succumb to this process of creation of the cultural self as all experience the Indian other as an empty being, a being lacking an "interior", or a being stubbornly concealing the essential truth.

Stop to Consider

Some critics have located the Marabar Caves themselves within a canon of modernist literary symbols. Such is the case when John Marx considers the Caves alongside Lily Briscoe's painting in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which is said to present the problems of a non-mimetic representation by "represent[ing] the relationship between mother and child without creating their 'likeness'". This is similarly the case when Deborah Raschke situates the Marabar Caves in the company of Briscoe's painting and "Stephen Dedalus's enigmatic forging in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; [and] the culminating toothbrush hanging on the wall in Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night"-all of which capture the oscillation "between a desire for an impossible certainty . . . and a reciprocal terror that ultimately nothing can be known"

As elaborated by Parry, the Marabar Caves are symbolic in terms of the spatial and cosmic imageries in the novel. The novel's cosmic reach and non-realist registers are inspired by an imagined India whose infinite embrace offers vistas of a sphere more comprehensive than the time-space world and intimates an ecumenical ethic admitting all animal, vegetable, and mineral forms to its prospect. Such allusions to an atemporal, ahistorical universe are underwritten by non-linear narrative movements which interrupt the sequential recitation of quotidian events. Not only is the fiction's itinerary spatial -- from Mosque to Caves to Temple -- but images recur in unrelated situations: a wasp, flies, a stone, a pattern traced in the dust of Chandrapore and repeated on the footholds of a distantly located rock in the Marabars.

Stop to Consider

In response to a question about what had happened in the Caves, Forster indicated that India had enabled his venture into the realms of the unfathomable:

"My writing mind is ... a blur here- ie. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts of daily life. This isn't a philosophy of aesthetics. It's a particular trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was India. It sprang straight from my subject matter. I wouldn't have attempted it in other countries, which though they contain mysteries or muddles, manage to draw rings round them. Without this trick I doubt whether I could have got the spiritual reverberation going. I call it "trick": but "voluntary surrender to infection" better expresses m y state." (Letter to G. Lowes Dickinson)

The Caves are, therefore, the central part of the novelist's representation of India as null and void. The echo in the caves challenges all categories of meaning based on the power of reason. According to Suleri the novel should be read "as an allegory in which the category of 'Marabar Cave' roughly translates into the anus of imperialism-an infelicitous choice of imagery when conducting a discussion of the novel's "engagement with and denial of a colonial homoerotic imperative"(Rhetoric, 132, 147).Critics have also read the Caves as a figure of absence and silence which helps to replicate the inscrutability of the East within the western structure of the surrounding text. The Marabar Caves are also described as figures without a history. Moreover, the text is replete with words like "primal," "dark," "fists and

fingers," "unspeakable," which express the fear and insecurity the imperialists experienced when confronted with what they fail to master.

The Caves can also be interpreted as a symptom of what the novel is unable to comprehend intellectually, or to accommodate within its preferred sensibility, or possess in its available language. The caves, hence, according to this explanation of Parry, become both the non-verbal expression of a physical space and the doctrines of an exorbitantly transcendental philosophy. But as the site of a cosmology incommensurable with positivism, humanism, or theism, and as the most potent figure of an India which challenges the west with its irreducible and insubordinate difference, the representation of the Caves is neither circumscribed by dread of a maleficent essence.

SAQ:

Analyze the symbol of the caves in the novel. Do you agree with the view that the caves are symbolic of the failure of representation? (60+80 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

On approaching the Marabar Hills, "a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear . . . sounds did not echo or thoughts develop… Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion" (152). This sensory and intellectual detachment from the empirical world is translated into the severing of words from their referent in the novel. On arriving at the Caves, the narrative encounters meanings, sensations, and events that escape codification in its available language. Their reputation "does not depend upon human speech", and their echo- "'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it". This untranslatable murmur puzzles Mrs. Moore and her "poor little talkative Christianity" (161), of a trust in language. When trying to communicate the attraction Hinduism holds for Stella and Ralph Moore, the rationalist Fielding confesses, "I can't explain, because it isn't in words at all". In attempting to

render comprehensible the unexplained or inexplicable significance of the imitations, impersonations, symbols, and images invoked during the all-embracing Hindu festival of Gokal Ashtamti, the narrative admits its inability to transcribe an event which cannot "be expressed in anything but itself".

The association of the nuances of the word 'nothing', like the reverberation of the sound 'bou -oum', with the caves enhances the importance of the symbolism of the caves in the novel. To accept Mrs. Moore's reception of the Caves as a primordial centre where dissolution of ethical meaning takes place is to be deaf to the connotations of the "nothing" emanating from the Caves. The reiteration of negatives likes no, not yet, never, renunciation, relinquish, refuse, etc, in the text help to arrive at meaning by elaborating the themes of the novel. In configurations of the Indian landscape, Parry notes, negatives mark a deviation from English and Mediterranean scenes, and with this a disturbance of western perceptions. There are a range of ways in which negative meanings are implied: as we come across events that do not happen, invitations that are neglected, omissions which are social solecisms. But with the Caves, negatives take on affirmative resonances whose import is anticipated by the circumlocutions of the opening paragraph which we have already described: "Except for the Marabar Caves ... the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary.. .. There are no bathing steps on the river front…".The opening description, coupled with the further reverberations, alert the readers to the possibility that negation has alternative signification in the novel: "Nothing, nothing attaches to them... Nothing is inside them . . . if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil".

Again, the Marabar Caves can also be read as representative of the sterility of the spiritual wasteland that is realized in India. The emptiness of the caves is sometimes interpreted as awareness of the supreme absolute. We can interpret their hollowness representing a higher aspect of reality. The caves can also be seen both as natural phenomena or natural symbols as well as archetypes or psychological symbols to arrive at a most imposing array of meanings.

SAQ:

Do you think that the caves have a range of multiple significances? Elaborate with proper textual references. (80+60 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

So we can conclude by tracing the real significance of the symbol of the caves in terms of the mood and themes of the novel. The Marabar caves retain their mysterious and extraordinary aura and belong to the domain of the supernatural and to some extents the spiritual. The picturesque description of the caves coupled with the interplay of light and shade lends a symbolic aura to the texture of the novel. We can, therefore, rightly say that the symbols, image and other lexical items help to illustrate Forster's growing preoccupation with the metaphysical, the transcendental and the cosmic which constitutes an important aspect of the multilayered novel.

3.7 SUMMING UP

This is the last unit of this block and here our attempt is to acquaint you with the various themes and techniques of *A Passage to India*. As you know, Forster's techniques and themes, his passionate concern with human relation, validity of the presence and domination of the colonizers, the sense of moral responsibility, political violence are influential in shaping the attitude of the readers as well as the writers. The previous units in this block will help you to trace the connection between Forster, his background and his literary preoccupations .This third unit aims to help you gain a comprehensive knowledge of E. M. Forster's writing with special reference to *A Passage to India*. As you know, the reading of the text remains the most integral part in deciphering the meaning and also in gaining familiarity with the writer; we hope that the issues explored in this block will lead you to a fruitful reading of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* based on your own interpretative capacity.

Check Your Progress

1. What glimpses of India do you get from your reading of Forster's *A Passage to India*? Elaborate you answer with special reference to the novelist's vivid descriptions of the natural landscape of India.

2. Discuss how socio-economic factors of race, class and gender shape character and episode in this novel. Elaborate your answer with special references to Aziz and Fielding.

3. *A Passage to India* recognizes multiculturalism within a strong Orientalist paradigm. Give your opinion.

4. Do you think Forster's representation of India is biased? Justify your answer.

5. Elaborate on the title and the triadic structure of the novel *A Passage to India*.

3.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Armstrong, Paul B. "Reading India: E. M. Forster and the Politics of Interpretation", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 38, 4. Winter 1992, 365-385.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* Routledge, 2000.

Banerjee, Surabhi. *E. M. Forster: A Critical Linguistic Approach*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1995.

Chris, Baldik. *Oxford Concise Dictionary Of Literary Terms*, (Indian Edition). New Delhi: Oxford, 2004.

Christensen, Timothy. "Bearing the White Man's Burden: Misrecognition and Cultural Difference in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Spring 2006.

Crews, Frederick. *E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism*, New Jersey: Princeton, 1962.

Das, G. K. *E. M. Forster's India*. London: Macmillan, 1977.

---. "The Genesis of Professor Godbole", *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 28, 109, Feb.1977, 56-60.

Davies, Tony & Nigel Wood (eds.) *A Passage to India*. New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd., 2003.

Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*, (e.d.) Christel R. Devadawson, New Delhi: Longman, 2006.

Hawkins, Hunt. "Forster's Critique of Imperialism in A Passage to India", *South Atlantic Review*, 48, 1, Jan.1983, 54-65.

Parry, Benita. "Materiality and Mystification in A Passage to India", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 31, 2, Thirtieth Anniversary Issue: II, Spring, 1998, 174-194.

Silver, Brenda R. "Periphrasis, Power and Rape in A Passage to India", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 22, 1988, 86-105.

Singh, Frances B. "A Passage to India, the National Movement, and Independence", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31, 2/3, E. M. Forster Issue, Summer - Autumn, 1985, 265-278.

Tambling, Jeremy (ed). *E. M. Forster: Contemporary Critical Essays, New Casebooks*. London: Macmillan Press, 1995.

Trilling, Lionel. *E.M. Forster*. London: Harcourt, 1980.

* * *

ENG-02-IX (3)

Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Gauhati University

MA in English

Semester 2

Paper IX

Fiction II

Block 3

Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*

Contents:

Block Introduction:

Unit 1 : Background

Unit 2 : Introducing the Novel

Unit 3 : Themes and Techniques

Contributors:

Dr. Pradipta Borgohain	Reader Dept. of English, Gauhati University

Editorial Team

Dr. Pradipta Borgohain	Reader Dept. of English, Gauhati University
Dr. Uttara Debi	Asst. Professor in English IDOL, GU
Prasenjit Das	Asst. Professor in English KKHSOU, Guwahati
Sanghamitra De	Lecturer in English IDOL, GU
Manab Medhi	Lecturer in English IDOL, GU

Cover Page Designing:

Kaushik Sarma	:	Graphic Designer CET, IITG

January, 2011

© Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University. Further information about the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University courses may be obtained from the University's office at IDOL Building, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14. Published on behalf of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University by Dr. Kandarpa Das, Director and printed at Maliyata Offset Press, Mirza. Copies printed 1000.

Acknowledgement

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

Block Introduction:

Dickens is a central figure in Victorian literature and his immense corpus is a veritable introduction to the teeming panorama of Victorian life. In his hands the novel became arguably the most durable popular form of sophisticated entertainment. This is a signal achievement, considering that few other novelists in English literature have his reformist zeal. Most, if not all of Dickens' novels have a social 'bias' in the way they deal with one or the other social institution, and the various maladies that bedevil the functioning of these institutions. However, *Hard Times* is still special in its single-minded focus on a particular problem that Dickens saw as afflicting his age. This was the problem of Utilitarianism, a mechanical philosophy that encroached upon different spheres such as education and factory life.

Discussions of plot normally pose a special challenge to the Dickens critic. Like some of his other contemporaries and immediate followers such as George Eliot, Dickens wrote huge, seemingly unwieldy narratives. Keeping track of different story lines in such a narrative is a complicated task. A deeper unity or coherence may be found in Dickens' later novels such as *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. *Hard Times* is however a shorter and therefore simpler novel as far as the plot-mechanism is concerned. Dickens strove hard to achieve compactness and intensity in this novel. His manipulation of plot and allied aspects, such as point of view, is notable and our study material here duly focuses on them.

Another debatable issue in Dickens criticism is the question of 'realism'. For many, Dickens belongs to the realist tradition. The nineteenth century is indeed the great age of realism, and many factors buttressed the realistic convention. Dickens is in many ways a proponent of realism, and he always had his finger on the pulse of the life of the people. However, he is at the same time a remarkable apostle of imagination, and in his obsession with qualities such as intuition and the emotional life, seems to belong to an earlier age. *Hard Times*, as the title itself suggests, is a novel committed to social diagnosis and amelioration. Yet, even in this novel Dickens' empathy for the imaginative life shines through. Rather than sketching a direct program of action and social reform, Dickens resorts to suggestiveness and symbolic modes of salvation.

The factors that you then have to contend with, while reading Dickens, are his great popularity and intimate relationship with the ever-increasing reading public (this again necessitates some acquaintance with the mechanism of serial publication - see the relevant portions of the study material), his love of the imaginative, instinctive life which also includes a blend of humor and sentimentalism, and his seriousness and commitment to social criticism. The challenge is to see how well he integrates these different aspects in novels such as *Hard Times*.

Unit 1
Background

Contents:

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

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to help you in

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

1.2 INTRODUCTION

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

Serial publication was a uniquely Victorian phenomenon and this mode of publication is now extinct. In the Victorian period there were many literary and cultural magazines such as Dickens' own Household Words and Master Humphrey's Clock. These magazines catered to a varied range of interests of a growing number of literate and curious readers. These magazines or periodicals contained stories, sketches, satirical commentaries on life and other miscellany. Novels also made their appearance in these magazines, normally in the form of "monthly numbers." Afterwards these numbers would be collected and published in a single volume or in two or three volumes.

The nature of serial publication had significant implications. The most important perhaps was the establishment of an intimate bond between writers and readers. In the case of an immensely popular writer such as Dickens, you could actually substitute the word "reader" with the word "audience" as the later term more effectively conveys the sense of a writer engaged in a public ceremony, conscious of the needs, desires and tastes of a large group of people at the same time. As these novels appeared in periodicals, which contained other matters of general social interest, there was a compulsion for a novelist to be "social" as well, to be treating concerns, which everyone shared, in a manner that would be lucid and enjoyable. If a novelist could get the formula right, he could be assured of great and immediate popularity.

The formula was often simple. In the words of the novelist Wilkie Collins, Dickens' friend and occasional collaborator or co-author, 'make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait.' To give one example to clarify this point: by making his readers laugh a bit first, and then by introducing pathos and suspense Dickens managed to rouse the intense concern of his readers for the young female protagonist of his novel *The Old Curiosity Shop Little* Nell to such an extent that the sales figure of his periodical *Household Words* rose to 100,000 copies!

As you perhaps know, today we associate such huge readership figures with popular magazines, and occasionally, with best-selling crime novels. Serious writing does not normally command a wide readership. But the wonderful thing about Victorian novels was that they could deal with serious themes in a serious way and yet be assured of striking popularity. Now *Hard Times* is a more serious work than most of the other works by Dickens, and was consequently not as popular.

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

1.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Now for a few words about the life of this man who created all those memorable if occasionally sensationalistic plots, and who by generously exploiting the possibilities of serial publication, established a unique and truly unprecedented rapport with his readers/audience. Charles Dickens: These words are enshrined in the hearts of all Englishmen. It is not easy for us to appreciate the extent to which this writer has become a national institution in England, a part of English folklore, and a figure comparable in popularity and esteem to another literary giant, the dramatist William Shakespeare, and to other eminent non-literary personalities such as Queen Elizabeth, William Churchill and others. I would like to borrow the simple words of critic Stephen Wall to clinch the point: "Dickens became a fact of English life very early in his career, and he has remained one ever since."

We, in India, have also imbibed Dickens from our childhood. His popular works such as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* somehow find their way into even school syllabuses, albeit in greatly abridged versions or in translated forms. Then there are the film versions such as the evergreen musical *Oliver!* and others, all testifying to the writer's universal popularity. If you have seen any of these movies, think of the qualities, which might have struck a sympathetic chord with you. The movies would of course highlight qualities or aspects, which every Englishman could identify with, and which would be of a spectacular, eye-catching nature. Nowadays many of Dickens' movies are on offer as television serials as well. This underscores the fact that Dickens had a very visual imagination, and also had a great sense of drama.

Certain aspects of Dickens' life are again part of common knowledge and have actually acquired a mythic or folkloric aura. Dickens' childhood has especially come under scrutiny by biographers. The writer himself has also 'used' his childhood to make memorable observations on the joys and difficulties of growing up. Doesn't it seem wonderful to you that a writer who is one of the most important and highly regarded in the world has written so much about children?

Charles Dickens was born on 7 February 1812, at Landsport near Portsmouth, to John and Elizabeth Dickens. John Dickens, the father, was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The father's job was a reasonably respectable

one, and should have assured the family of a life without any great hardships. However, John Dickens was a somewhat imprudent man and thus got into debt-related difficulties. As a result of this, he found himself in the debtors' prison called The Marshalsea in London in 1824.

This proved to be a traumatic event for young Charles. Biographical critics have never wearied of harping on this event for its importance in molding Dickens' character and career. Of course, they have been given the invitation or opportunity to do so by Dickens himself. The novelist has incorporated this miserable episode of his life into the narratives of *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*. In the later novel, there is a haunting portrait of the debtors' prison, The Marshalsea. It becomes a symbol of human degradation, misery and parasitism (the main character William Dorrit, perhaps modeled partly on John Dickens, becomes indolent and dependent on his younger daughter for having a good and comfortable time). *David Copperfield*, which is even more autobiographical, reflects the event that was a consequence of John Dickens' imprisonment - the young Dickens' stint in a shoe-blacking factory. While his father was released from prison after only three months, the family continued to be poor. As a result, Charles was monetarily deprived of education and the normal joys of childhood and sent to the blacking factory mentioned above. This experience is rendered in artistic form in D*avid Copperfield*.

Stop to Consider

Let me tell you a word or two about biographical criticism here. Very often you will see that a great writer will 'sublimate' a painful real experience through the medium of art. That is, they come to terms with that experience by 're-visioning' it through artistic treatment, which would obviously mean a re-creation, not just bare repetition. As you can see, Dickens does it in his novels. Another Victorian novelist, Charlotte Bronte, does something similar in her celebrated autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre*. In this novel you can see the depiction of a school called Lowood, a place of suffering and deprivation for young girls. The novelist has obviously drawn on her memories of the school at Cowan Bridge where she received her early education, and whose harsh and severe routine apparently took the lives of her two elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth.

Many more such examples can be found in the annals of literary history. While the 're-presentation' of biographical events many not always be as direct and

obvious as in the case of Dickens and Bronte, we may be surprised to find the extent to which novelists have fashioned capacious, panoramic and enduring visions of life in novel form based on their own necessarily limited experiences. But there are also dangers of pursuing biographical criticism beyond a certain point. After all, life is not art, and vice versa. Then again, one can get into difficulties by trying to demarcate life/biography from art/novel. Where does life end and art begin? Recent criticism has also exposed many fallacies about art or narrative being simply a reflection or imitation of social life in general and the life of the writer in particular. You can read path-breaking essays such as "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes to appreciate the limitations of an author-centric approach to literature, the most extreme manifestation of which would be biographical criticism.

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

Fortunately, Dickens did not have to spend a very long time in the factory. He went back to school and afterwards launched his working career through

occupations such as being a clerk in a solicitor's office and then a parliamentary and newspaper reporter. He would use these experiences in a creative fashion in many of his novels, ranging from the light and buoyant *Pickwick Papers* to the solemn and disturbing *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. An early exposure to governmental inaction and injustices of various kinds gave a strongly reformist orientation to Dickens' writing from the beginning. The novel under consideration, *Hard Times*, is certainly one that is essentially about injustice, although the nature of proposed reform is open to question.

The element of joy and entertainment that is present together with a searching social critique in *Hard Times* and other works is also traceable to facts of Dickens' life. (Once again please note that I am not making out a case for an out-and-out biographical approach to Dickens' works - it's just that it's useful to mine information that is available, and not approach a literary work as an isolated artifact as the New Critics did.) After trying his hand at other forms of journalism, Dickens became a full-time novelist with the publication of *The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club* (1837). With financial success greeting him with each successive work after this, Dickens became free to indulge his passions. This included publishing his own literary and miscellaneous journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and becoming involved with the theatre as writer, actor and director. In 1857 he would stage his best-known play *The Frozen Deep*. Dickens also read his novels aloud to large audiences, an activity which could also be called a theatrical performance.

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

While most of Dickens' novels are city-based or London-centric, there is also a great deal of mobility, with stagecoaches rattling to and fro from the countryside and occasionally a train thundering by. Travel was opening up spaces and horizons in Dickens' world - in this context one remembers the words of a critic such as Ivor Brown: "He [Dickens] lived his early life in a world where distance had meaning." In contrast, Ivor Brown feels, distance has been abolished in modern times. At the risk of making a gross simplification one could say that Dickens and his contemporaries played with space, modern writers play with time. One of the consequences of Dickens' fascination with travel and distance was that he often posited faith in traveling bands of entertainers apart from occasionally offering exile or travel abroad as solutions for the besetting problems of life. In this context one can mention the roles played by the troop of Crummles in Nicholas Nickleby, the waxen works traveling show and the Punch and Judy showmen in The Old Curiosity Shop, and of course Sleary's Circus in Hard Times.

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

1.4 PLACING THE WORK

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

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

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

But they are not rigidly uniform in spirit or form. Of all these novels, *Hard Times* is the shortest. It is indeed a very short novel by Victorian standards,

and the compressed length itself is an indication that Dickens was trying out a different kind of novel, with perhaps a slightly different aim in view. While you will be studying two more Victorian novels in this course, not a single one of these three novels is typically Victorian in form. Victorian novels ran to great lengths, often more than 800 or even 900 pages in some editions. They were called 'double-decker novels' by some, and the novelist-critic Henry James termed them 'loose baggy monsters.' What he meant was that they were shapeless in form because of their great length. While recent critics such as Peter Garrett have seen a certain homogeneity and a complexly interwoven unity in some of these sprawling novels by Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray and Trollope, the feeling does persist that it's difficult to achieve intensity of focus and coherence of purpose in very long Victorian novels.

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

Hard Times is different. I gave you all the information about the long Victorian novels so that you are in a position to appreciate its uniqueness. The scope of this novel is limited. I suppose you could say that the novel is short

because Dickens was not trying to instruct and amuse at the same time. 'Instruct' may be a rather simplistic term to use here, but it's unquestionable that Dickens wanted his novel to be instructive. It's been called a parable, a classification that is quite revealing. Dickens did not want to dilute his purpose or blur his focus by wanting to amuse or entertain at the same time. Certainly, no Dickens novel can be entirely barren of comicality or amusement, but I can tell you that relatively speaking, *Hard Times* is an austere work.

Check Your Progress

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

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

1.5 SUMMING UP

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

* * *

Unit 2
Introducing the novel

Contents:

2.1 Objectives
2.2 What Happens in Hard Times?
2.3 The Characters
2.4 Summing up

2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

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

2.2. WHAT HAPPENS IN HARD TIMES?

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

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

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

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

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

Gradgrind tries to trace the source of Louisa's waywardness, and he is helped in his search by Bounderby who attributes Louisa's unacceptable behavior to the presence of the circus-child Sissy Jupe.The two men decide to talk to Sissy Jupe's father. Accompanied by Sissy herself, they go to a public house called the Pegasus' Arms.

They don't find Sissy's father but instead meet circus performers such as E.W.B. Childers, Kidderminster, and the owner Mr. Sleary. They are typically Dickensian minor characters, odd in speech and manners, but genuinely kind-hearted. Their behavior contrasts sharply with that of the hard-hearted Bounderby. A subtle contrast also springs up between Bounderby and Gradgrind, as the latter shows signs of compassion towards Sissy and thus betrays a humanity, which is completely beyond Bounderby. It is discovered that Sissy's father has gone off, no longer able to face the fact that he is becoming a failure as a circus performer, a clown who cannot make people laugh any more. While Mr. Sleary's company is only too willing to look after the orphaned girl, Sissy herself wants to continue her education,

and this she can do only by accompanying Mr. Gradgrind to his home. In fact, this is Mr. Gradgrind's condition. He had come seeking Sissy's father with the intention of announcing that she, being a poor pupil (and a source of moral contamination) cannot continue in his school anymore. However, in the altered circumstances, he takes pity on her and makes his offer.

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

Meanwhile, Mr. Bounderby's designs on Louisa become clear. He proposes to marry her. His housekeeper Mrs. Sparsit perhaps had an intention to marry him herself, but is disappointed in her hopes. However, she strikes a posture of actually pitying her employer for his intention of marrying Louisa. Bounderby's proposal has the full approval of Louisa's father, who has a

discussion with his daughter prior to the marriage. Louisa reveals her grievances about her blighted childhood to her father. Mr. Gradgrind has never bothered to see things from Louisa's perspective, to appreciate her feelings. All this Louisa conveys to her father, but Mr. Gradgrind is only very vaguely disturbed by some of the things he hears from his daughter's lips and has no full appreciation of what is wrong with Louisa.

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

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

Once again, names are significant. These characters are called Stephen Blackpool and Rachel. You might know that Stephen and Rachel are Christian or biblical names. Stephen was the first Christian martyr according to the New Testament, while Rachel is an Old Testament figure, daughter of Laban and the favorite wife of the patriarch Jacob. In this novel, Stephen and Rachel are hard-working employees in one of the factories owned by Bounderby. There is a strong emotional attachment between the two, and for the suffering Stephen, Rachel represents spiritual hope and enlightenment. Stephen would marry Rachel, but he is already married to a dissolute, drunken woman. All workers under Bounderby have a hard lot of it, but Stephen's troubles are compounded by his socially unbreakable bond with his wife. Seeking to break this bond, Stephen goes for help and advice to Bounderby, his master. But Bounderby is typically unhelpful, and sends Stephen off with pompous, self-righteous words about the sanctity of marriage or words to that effect.

Stephen's crisis deepens, as he is isolated from his fellow workers. A professional trade-union leader and troublemaker named Slackbridge has

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

To end the story of Stephen: Rachel and others send for him, so that he can clear his name by coming back to the scene of the crime. However, he

seems to delay in coming back, and anxiety grows amongst those who wait for his return. Actually he has fallen into an old and abandoned mine-pit and fatally injured himself. He is discovered by Sissy and Rachel, and is brought out of the pit. However, he dies, looking at Rachel and the starlight above, the two things becoming one in his mind.

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

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

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

Stop to Consider

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

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

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

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

Sissy and the circus-group, much reviled in the beginning by the likes of Gradgrind and Bounderby, take on the roles of redeemers or rescuers towards the end. Mr. Gradgrind is a greatly changed man in the closely moments of the novel. His blind pride in his system has been humbled. Two of his model children have turned out badly, shaming and unsettling him. While Louisa's marriage has failed in the worst possible way, Tom has become a liar and robber, the source of shame to his family and the cause

of injury and suffering to an innocent man. Louisa has come home and will probably recover gradually through the healing touch provided by Sissy. It now remains to do something about Tom. Here also Sissy and her group will step in, almost in return for Gradgrind's gesture of taking the orphan Sissy into household.

SAQ:

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 THE CHARACTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5 SUMMING UP

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

* * *

Unit 3
Themes & Techniques

Contents:

3.1 Objectives
3.2 Introduction
3.3 The Themes of *Hard Times*
3.4 Plot, Point of view, Narration and Characterization
3.5 Comedy and Vision
3.6 The Symbolic Imagination
3.7 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- *understand* Dickens's themes and techniques in *Hard Times*
- *name* the different elements that made up this novel

3.2 INTRODUCTION

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

a period of time these became the stock of available literary themes and motifs.

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

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

Stop to Consider

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

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

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

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

3.3 The Themes of *Hard Times*

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

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

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

Dickens was very concerned with these two interconnected themes throughout his career. To be a good individual, it's important to have grown

up as a happy child. Such a happy childhood also entails receiving an education, which, instead of fettering the imagination, sets it free. Unfortunately, in Victorian England, children seldom receive such healthy and emancipated education. Elsewhere in his career Dickens has vividly portrayed the physical brutalities and atrocities inflicted on children. Here, he deals with the mental aspect, exploring the way Utilitarian education constraints children from attaining their true potential.

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

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

Let's look at the theme of 'industrial unrest' first. The Industrial Revolution really gathered pace in the 19th century and irrevocably transformed the face of England. People's lives changed for the better in may respects due to The Industrial Revolution, but there were 'downsides' or negative developments as well. Many people were uprooted from their homes and became wanderers. (You will come across this phenomenon at the beginning of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.) Then there was the exploitation of factory-workers by the owners. Throughout the early part of the19th century there were agitations and strikes by workers demanding higher wages and better

living conditions. While things had stabilized to an extent in the 1850's, the times were not entirely quiet. In fact, *Hard Times* was written in the backdrop of strikes by workers at Preston, Lancashire, which Dickens saw for himself in 1854.

SAQ:

1. How do we identify a 'theme' in a work ? (100 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

2. How do we evaluate the importance of setting in a novel ? (100 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

3. What happened during the Industrial Revolution ? (300 words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

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

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

Victorian novels very often encompass a very long span of time during which people are born, get married, die, and in between also grow or develop in different ways. Even a short novel such as *Hard Times* is no exception. The question of growth or development is hinted at through the very choice of the titles of the three Books in the novel: Sowing, Reaping and Garnering. While these terms are biblical in inspiration and therefore carry moral and spiritual overtones, Dickens also seems to have more mundane, and even psychological aspects of growth in mind. The novel is greatly, if obliquely concerned with the growing womanhood of Louisa. Actually you will notice that Louisa is presented somewhat ambiguously, the ambiguity the result of the notorious Victorian reticence regarding sexual matters. She appears as a child in the beginning but is kissed by Bounderby who clearly has designs on her. The theme of repression or stifled growth is

quite marked in her case, right from the beginning: 'there was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn ...' (Book One, Chapter III,). Throughout the novel we associate Louisa with fire. However, as suggested by the words above, this fire is internal, perhaps the self-destructive fire of one whose normal growth to a state of maturity is impeded by stern and restrictive parenting.

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

Stop to Consider

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

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

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

Check Your Progress

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

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

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

Now to talk about the guiding theme of the novel. Is it utilitarianism? While some may call it a theme, indeed *the* theme of the novel, I am calling it the subject because it's a real, historical concept, which lends itself to various themes in the novel. However, the seamless and artful manner in which it is

projected into the narrative is undeniable. For example in a particular discussion with Louisa, Sissy Jupe reveals the heartless aspect of Utilitarianism. She says that when she was asked about the percentage of people who died when 'only' 500 people out of 100,000 died by fire or drowning, she said 'nothing,' because this percentage was nothing or meaningless to 'the relatives and friends of the people who were killed.' (I, ix). Hers is the humanist position, concerned with the preciousness of each individual life set against the lifeless, statistical stance of the Utilitarian who cares nothing about individual suffering in his obsession with calculations and measurements.

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

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

Another thing to notice is that the themes I have identified are not isolated and separate. I have already mentioned that the theme of 'ambition' is related

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

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

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

Stop to Consider

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

Left Column	Right Column
Spirituality	Parenthood
Avarice	Factory Life
Generosity	Life of the Rich
Isolation	Circus Life

3.4 Plot, Point of view, Narration and Characterization

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

First of all, what is 'plot' and how is it different from 'story'? Let's start with the well-known distinction provided by the great 20th century novelist E. M. Forster in his little critical book *Aspects of the Novel*. While story is 'a

narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence,' a plot 'is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.' The elementary but telling example given by Forster is the following: Story: The king died and then the queen died; Plot: The king died and then the queen died of grief. In plot, causation (here 'grief') overshadows the time sequence or chronology (here 'then', elsewhere 'afterwards,' 'after that' etc.).

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

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

The causality aspect identified by E.M. Forster can be played around with. In another novel of this course, *Wuthering Heights*, you will notice that there has been a reversal - you first see the effect (Heathcliff's ownership of Wutheing heights and his mastery over everyone there), which whets your appetite for finding out the cause (arguably, Hindley's ill-treatment of Heathcliff, although other causes can be found). This is also what I meant by saying that plot is the way events are presented to the reader. In the very beginning Emily Bronte chooses to present a scenario that actually belongs to a rather late moment in the story.

Wuthering Heights is a daring and experimental novel that heralds modernist experimenting in narrative resulting in a disappearance of the 'plot.' Perhaps she was unusually alive to the mystery and complexity of human life which cannot be neatly encompassed within an Aristotelian plotting framework with its markers of a clear chronological beginning, middle, and end. Hardy and Dickens offer more traditional plots. To turn our attention now to Dickens, you can safely say that he follows chronology - this is a writer

who begins at the beginning and ends at the ending. The beginning in *Hard Times* is the childhood of characters such as Tom, Louisa and Sissy, and the end comprises of the marriage of Sissy and the death of Tom. The middle has moments such as Sissy's struggles, Tom's degradation, and Louisa's marital woes.

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

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

Stop to Consider

Impressionistic vignettes: Deriving from Impressionism, an art movement beginning in the 1870's characterized chiefly by concentration on the general impression produced by a scene or object and by the use of unmixed primary colors and small strokes to produce the illusion or impression of actual reflected light, impressionistic vignettes are short, graceful sketches which convey general impressions rather than objective reality.

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

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

However, you can also see 'plot' as a synthesis, a totality, and not merely a progressive, action-oriented arrangement. 'Synthesis' is the word that the

Aristotelian critic R.S. Crane uses while talking about plot: '(plot is) the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thought that constitute the matter of his intention.' He then says that there can therefore be plots of action, of character, and of thought.

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

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

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

By now you will have appreciated that plot is not a mere progression of events, nor simply a concatenation of such events. Plot in the deeper sense eschews mere linearity or straightforward progression. It comprises of the variety of incidents, and the right blend of surprise and suspense, the creation

of tension in the minds of the reader, and aesthetically satisfying resolution. While plot is clearly to be demarcated from description (e.g. travelogues) where the focus is on the spatial rather on the sequential, plot can include meaningful description.

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

SAQ:

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

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

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

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

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

While by talking about plot it is implied that the focus is exclusively on the work itself and the way it is structured through a certain interrelationship between the various elements of narrative, I should tell you that 'plot' is sometimes used in a more global or broader sense. Critics such as Peter Brooks, borrowing Freudian terminology, talks about 'masterplot,' and more relevantly for us, about 'official' plots of education and progress. Another critic, Gillian Beer, invokes the term 'Darwin's plots' to describe Victorian evolutionary narratives. Plot in this sense demonstrates a correspondence between the impersonal structuring process inherent in a specific narrative, and social issues and concerns beyond it. At a larger, macro-level, plot can stand for an entire world-view or philosophy. Thus the intricate perfection of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* is supposed to correspond to God's perfect design, His creation of the world. That was Fielding's aim anyway, and he certainly succeeded in creating a kind of perfect plot that could claim to be 'divine' in its achievement despite all the realistic and secular concerns that the novel cradles. At a slightly more immediate level, certain plots are peculiar to an age, and are available to the writer for selection and treatment (as are themes - remember what I said about themes being partly chosen for the writer by an age in which he lives?)

Some of the plots current in Dickens' age were the sensation/mystery plot, the evolutionary plot or and the plot of education and advancement. Dickens very often incorporates all these plots in the same novel. *Hard Times* is no

exception. It deals with the progress of children such as Tom, Louisa and Sissy. The plot is about the impediments they encounter, as also about the gradual revelations of their fates. It also has to do with the creation of anxiety, tension, expectation etc.

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

Causality, which I have identified as a basic plot-principle, obviously operates powerfully in the novel in keeping with its spirit of displaying the unhappy consequences of human pride, arrogance, insensitivity or greed and irresponsibility. Gradgrind's neglect of the inner or emotional needs of his children lead to the warping of their characters. Both become repressed and secretive characters. Tom's way out is to go elsewhere, so to speak, while Louisa turns self- destructively inward. While Tom gambles in secret, away from the eyes of his family, Louisa simply broods alone, keeping her true feelings smoldering but hidden. This then leads to the hopeless financial entanglement of Tom, and the poignant conjugal calamity of Louisa.

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

There is an important sub-plot in the novel, and this involves the story of the suffering worker Stephen Blackpool. Sub-plots, or mini, subsidiary plots and a plenitude of minor narrative strands were the staple of Victorian fiction. These enhanced color and variety, and almost in the tradition of Shakespearian drama, reinforced the lessons and insights of the main plot. The sub-plot of Stephen is arguably less dynamic than the main plot. While it spans Stephen's life from the moment when he tries to free himself from his miserable and meaningless marriage to his death, nothing much really happens in his story. He is a doomed character from the beginning, and there is rarely a glimpse or hint from the narrator that his story will turn out all right after all. That is to say, there are no turns in the narrative, no reversal or twist that drastically seem to change things for him. It proceeds in an exorable, deterministic fashion. It is no surprise when he is martyred to another man's folly and perfidy, true to his name. This part of the novel is full of reveries and bouts of contemplation. Dickens however takes the trouble to see that Stephen's plot is not isolated from the main plot. In fact, throughout the entire narrative Dickens tries to relate everything to everything else. As far as Stephen's plot is concerned, it is crossed by the plot involving the Gradgrind children. When Louisa visits Stephen at the moment of the latter's great distress after the dismissal from service by Bounderby, with the intention of giving him financial help, her brother also accompanies her with a very different motive. We might say that the plot thickens at this juncture, as one narrative line joins another narrative line. As stated in an

earlier Unit, and as you see from your own reading of the novel, Tom gains a pledge from Stephen to be seen near the bank prior to the robbery. Stephen obliges, and after the robbery, suspicion falls on him. When he comes back summoned by Rachel to clear his name, he falls into the old mine-pit and dies. Tom's plot of degradation thus becomes entwined with Stephen's plot of martyrdom. Dickens arranges things in such a way that the same set of events extracts maximum sympathy for Stephen while showing Tom at his worst and thus bringing down opprobrium on his head.

There is a more subtle connection between the plots of Stephen and Louisa. Both are unhappy and neglected 'children.' Stephen is the hapless victim of the callous tyranny and unsympathetic attitude of his master, the malevolent father figure of Bounderby (employer-employee relations are often seen in parent-child terms or with the use of filial metaphors) while Louisa is martyr to the insensitive and dogmatic policies of her father Gradgrind. These two patriarchs, one head of a real family and the other head of a metaphorical family, wreak destruction in the lives of those under their protection. The plots of Stephen and Louisa are thus connected through what we might call analogical correspondence, and remind us of R.S. Crane's formulation of the plot of thought. At the same time, in the interests of unity and homogeneity it is important that the plot lines of these two major characters should physically converge, that they should have at least one real encounter. To simply hint at an emotional parallel between two major characters is not really Dickens' purpose, as this would make things too abstract.

Stop to Consider

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

These days we talk much about openendedness, positing it as a virtue for novels striving for complexity. In such novels the author offers the reader the liberty of choice and a variety of options at the end. Openendedness is a striking feature of modern and postmodern novels. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* John Fowles plays with and perhaps parodies alternative possibilities of ending a novel. However, this aspect is not totally

unknown in earlier, more traditional novels either. Once again, *Wuthering Heights* is a prime example. The reader oscillates at the end between Lockwood's and Nelly Dean's interpretations regarding whether Heathcliff and Catherine quietly slumber or roam the landscape like restless spirits. As for *Hard Times*, there is a just a touch of ambiguity about the final fate of Bounderby ('Did he see any faint reflection of his own image making a vain-glorious will, whereby five-and- twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age, each taking upon himself the name, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, should for ever dine in Bounderby Hall, for ever lodge in Bounderby buildings …'), but otherwise this is a novel which is quite emphatically closed or rounded off. Dickens here is quite faithful to the Victorian practice of accounting for each prominent character. Closure is also summary, you might say, and nothing more remains to be done or said.

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

'Suspense' and 'Surprise'

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

While many narratives do not keep the reader guessing about possible outcomes, the mystery novel or the detective novel relies heavily on what the critic Seymour Chatman calls the suspense-surprise complex.

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

Check Your Progress

1. Analyze the elements of suspense and surprise in the incident of Tom's robbery of the bank. How does Dickens manipulate suspense and surprise here?

2. Are there any great surprises at all? What kinds of emotions are generated in the reader through the use of the suspense-surprise complex?

3. Explore the different functions of 'plot'.

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

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

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

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

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

Point of View

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

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

The Third Person point of view is again divided between the omniscient and the non-omniscient. In omniscient point of view we have the narration from an impersonal source or voice (not a character) who speaks in the third person ('Old Stephen descended the two white steps…') and who knows everything. Much of 18th and 19th century fiction belongs to this category of narration. Being omniscient, such a point of view sweeps between character and character and ranges over large chunks of experience, often presenting a very diverse picture. In many instances of traditional fiction,

such omniscient narration is also very intrusive. That is, the narrator is not just content on reporting or describing, but also feels impelled to analyze or comment on the events narrated. Henry Fielding's jocose intrusions in novels such as Tom Jones and *Joseph Andrews* are legendary and valued for their own sakes, and not because they throw any light on the events depicted. The 19th century realist novelist George Eliot intrudes in a different, far heavier way. She often steps in with her arsenal of philosophical knowledge and wisdom and elaborates the implications of what she has reported or described.

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

These are not watertight categories. Thus another possible category related to the non-omniscient mode of narration is the limited point of view exemplified by the novels of Henry James. Here the narrator confines himself to the experiences or thoughts and feelings of a single character or at most a few characters. However, because the style of the novel puts us in contact with the refined sensibility of James himself, this mode of narration is somewhat akin to the omniscient point of view at times. In any case, we do not have here the Hemingway kind of Spartan objectivity of presentation, which mostly uses dialogue or externalized descriptions of setting and character. Henry James has famously talked about 5 million ways of telling a story, guided and controlled, however, by a single center of consciousness. This center of consciousness he usually locates in one single character of a fairly high degree of sensibility, such as Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of A Lady*.

SAQ:

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

Here we may introduce a related distinction between 'showing' and 'telling,' perhaps first widely formulated by the critic Wayne C, Booth in his seminal

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

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

Stop to Consider:

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

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

One great example is the character of Sissy Jupe. This is a character who exemplifies the golden heartedness that Dickens often idealizes and sets against the intolerable burden of living in a world crawling with swindlers, thieves, tyrants and even murderers. There must have been tremendous temptations to step in here in the persona of the third person narrator and sing paeans in Sissy's praise. However, Sissy's healing powers are presented

with tact, delicacy and economy. For a long time in the novel, Sissy is actually out of sight, although she is unquestionably the moral center of the novel. Towards the end her presence is once more substantial as she is very active on behalf of the Gradgrind family. Apart from providing selfless love and care to the ravaged Louisa she also helps the Tom to escape to the safe sanctuary of Mr. Sleary's circus. On learning about this later bit of goodness this is the reaction of the grateful Mr. Gradgrind, the man who had judged Sissy so harshly in the early part of the narrative: 'He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, "It is always you, my child!"'(III, vii,)

Stop to Consider:

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

This is a good example of showing as against telling because the reactions - the feelings and thoughts - of a character are used rather than the narrator's own comments on Sissy, to draw the reader's attention to Sissy's redemptive powers. There is no question that the mode of narration is omniscient: look at the way the all-knowing voice ranges from the state of the working-class denizens of Coketown to the mental landscape of Louisa. However, this omniscience is kept in check and regulated effectively. Necessary satirical comments are passed on the negative attitudes prevailing towards the working poor, but not much is revealed about what Louisa thinks. Since he leaves it to the imagination, the impression that Louisa is seething inside and is hurt and tormented is somehow stronger.

Point of view can be manipulated to regulate our sympathies. Thus, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* our sympathies swing from Henchard to Elizabeth and back to Henchard. The novel is predominantly seen from the perspectives or points of view of these two characters. However, in *Hard Times* point of view is a tricky matter. Whose point of view are we really getting? Is it Gradgrind's? Louisa's? Stephen's? You will find that unlike many other novels, including several by Dickens himself, there is no single protagonist. While Sissy is the moral or idealized center, she does not occupy much

space in the narrative. While hers is a significant presence, things are rarely seen from her perspective. On the other hand, one person whose point of view we get in fairly sustained way, is Stephen Blackpool. However, he is somehow not as important a character in terms of the effects of his action upon the narrative. What does it then imply?

Stop to Consider

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

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

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

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

SAQ:

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

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

All good writers, however, have to strike some balance between mere functionality of a character and what one may think of as the character's intrinsic vitality and even lifelikeness. Sissy and Gradgrind are successful creations because they have important roles to play in the main narrative but are memorable characters in their own rights. Sleary, with his odd looks and ways, is another such character. Characters are memorable not only because they are funny or have odd tricks of behavior but also because they are representative or embody some important trait or even worldview or philosophy. Thus Gradgrind stays in our mind as a hard, unswerving upholder of the Utilitarian philosophy. Dickens does his best to make the negative features of this mechanical philosophy vivid to us the readers. This is one of the early descriptions of Gradgrind: 'The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on

the schoolmaster's sleeve.' The description runs on, appropriating even the setting to present the portrait of a dogmatic character ramming down a lifeless, boring education into a group of helpless children. At the other extreme is someone like Sleary whose very looseness of appearance is a favorable affirmation of his flexible and friendly philosophy of life.

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

Character and Plot

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

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

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

What about *Hard Times*? Do you think that we have a full description of Gradgrind at the beginning and that the rest of the narrative simply bears out or reinforces the impressions we get from this initial description? What about Louisa? Is there any proper description of her character at all?

Daiches actually feels that the best novels combine both. There is a description or portrait of the character in an early moment, but it's the course of the events, which also determine character. Try and apply this to a reading of character in *Hard Times*. Look closely at whatever description of character you are presented with, and then try to relate it to subsequent developments. How many of the traits of the characters are modified in the light of the later events? How many of these traits or features are actually focused by the events?

You can appreciate that some of the above concerns are related to the plot and point of view-related issues of 'surprise' and 'suspense' and 'showing' and 'telling.' Do you see the connections? I will leave you to think about them.

Stop to Consider

One somewhat controversial way to make the assessment of character interesting for you is to accept the cues offered by Seymour Chatman. He feels that at one level characters are verbal constructs only, but we should not impose limits on the way we can expand and open up these constructs. In his own words, 'should we restrain what seems a God-given right to infer and even speculate about characters if we like? Any such restraint strikes me as an impoverishment of aesthetic experience.'

It may be absurd to ask how many children Lady Macbeth had, but the question whether she was a good mother is perhaps more legitimate, because such a question impels us to consider 'goodness' in the context of the world of *Macbeth*. Similarly, do we think it would be rewarding for you to speculate the kind of life Sissy led with her father (some of this life is reported to us) and how this life compares to the life Louisa leads with her father? What about James Harthouse? What was his life in upper class society like? Have those experiences any bearing on the novel?

3.5 COMEDY AND VISION

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

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

SAQ:

1. Why do you think Dickens's comic powers are muted in *Hard Times*? (60 Words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

2. Is it some artistic failure on his part, an exhaustion of vitality, or is it a deliberate strategy to posit a non-comic vision of the world? (60 Words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

3. Does the recession of comic powers also have something to do with the changing times? (60 Words)

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

. . . .

3.6. THE SYMBOLIC IMAGINATION

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

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

Fire and its related element smoke do figure quite insistently in the novel. All good novels will provide a realistic justification for including an item or element, which may then be expanded to resonate symbolically. Fire is perfectly natural in *Hard Times*, an industrial novel. There are factories

belching smoke and fire. Dickens' quick imagination appropriates this simple and mundane fact and transforms it into an extremely visual and suggestive tableau :

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

This is no mere ornamental or perfunctory us of symbols. The symbolic imagination is here working to animate an entire world, with the invocation of words such as 'savage' and 'serpent.' It is commonly said about Dickens that he makes the inanimate landscape come alive, while very often people are shown as becoming puppet-like or wooden. It's as if in urban, mechanized society people's life passes into objects.

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

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

Something slightly akin to, but not exactly synonymous with fire is light. Light is a more positive symbol in the novel. The character of Rachel is insistently associated with light, so much so, that she is almost an unreal, symbolic character. The chapter called "Rachel" begins with the phrase 'A candle faintly burned in the window,' and soon after, the suggestion innate in

the literal event is caught in the transfiguring expression 'the light of her face shone in upon the midnight of his mind.' (Book I, Ch xiii) If any doubt at all lingers about the role that Rachel is to play or about the relation between light and her character, it is removed by the concluding sentence of the chapter: 'As the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachel, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life.'

The clarity of the symbol of light does not betoken its effectiveness or success. Light is applied in a very conventional and uncomplicated way to the character of Rachel. She herself does not really come to life and seems condemned to play a merely symbolic role. In contrast, the symbol of fire seems more potent, as its ambiguity challenges us to come up with interpretations that will do justice to the complexity of Louisa's situation. Also, the symbol is not simple, straightforward and unidimensional - after all, we have to link the private fire of Louisa with the greater fire raging in the novel, primarily in the factory scenes.

While Dickens can be magnificent in evoking the reality of a situation through the usual realist methods of detailed, item-by-item description, he also has frequent recourse to the use of symbols and metaphors. This sometimes helps him in hinting at truths and states of existence beyond the pale of quotidian perspectives, for example, when he uses light to signify transcendence of earthly woes and the efficacy of divine judgment as against the impotence of secular judgment (he is more successful in this regard in other novels such as *Great Expectations*). In general, symbols and metaphors- powerful tools to stimulate the reader - seem to extend or expand his meanings.

Check Your Progress:

1. Apart from the symbols of light and fire what other symbols can you find in the novel? Locate and analyze at least two more symbols in terms of their effectiveness in illuminating character or advancing plot.
2. What are the various consequences of adopting different points of view? Illustrate your answer with instances from *Hard Times*.
3. Apply the concepts of 'showing' and 'telling' to *Hard Times*.

4. Explain the relation between character and plot with reference to either Bitzer or any other character in the novel.
5. Evaluate the characterization of Sissy Jupes or Gradgrind.
6. Explore the failure of the 'comic vision' in *Hard Times*.

3.7 REFERENCES And SUGGESTED READINGS

Barthes, Roland, "The Death of the Author," in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge, rev.. Nigel Wood. Delhi: Pearson Education, 2003.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Charles Dickens' Hard Times* (Modern Critical Introductions), Delhi: Worldview, 2003.

Brown, Ivor, *Dickens in His Time*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963.

Calderwood, James L. and Harold E. Toliver, eds. *Perspectives on Fiction* (This book contains the essays by David Daiches, R.S. Crane and Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog). New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Forster, John, *The Life of Charles Dickens*. (2 Vols.) ed. A.J. Hoppe. London: J.M. Dent, 1966.

House, Humphrey, *The Dickens World*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Miller, J.H. *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Tomashevsky, Boris. "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, eds. Lemon and Reis.

Wall, Stephen. *Charles Dickens* (Penguin Critical Anthologies), 1970.

* * *