

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

**MA in English
Semester 4**

**Paper 20
European II - Modern European Fiction**



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Block 1: Short Russian Fiction

Block 2: The Novel in Russian

Block 3: The Novel in German

Block 4: The Novel in French

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Block 1:

Short Russian Fiction

Block Introduction:

This block is concerned with short Russian fiction and here an attempt has been made to give you a brief account of the rise of the short story as a genre. The history of the Russian short story has also been connected with the socio-political and literary movements in Russia. The Russian short story emerged at the end of the 18th century, and “did not follow a single course of development and did not immediately take shape as a special and independent genre. For a long time it was ‘dissolved’ within such ‘minor’ prose forms as the novella, the anecdote, the joke and the fairy-tale. The term ‘short story’ did not come into use until the late 1820s. However, for two decades after this, all short prose works were usually called novellas. Only at the end of the 1840s did the short story finally acquire status as a genre although, as before, the dividing line between it and the novella was indeterminate and fluid. It is therefore hardly surprising that many writers often referred to their smaller works sometimes as novellas and sometimes as short stories.” (Bazhanova, G. 1985: 6. *Anthology of Russian Short Stories*).

The development of the short story in Russian literature, in the 19th century and afterwards, is not a stable process. At times, it was pushed aside by other literary genres; on other occasions, it was at the leading position. The emergence and development of the short story in Russia as, incidentally, of other forms took place under unique circumstances. Throughout nearly the whole of the 19th century, Russian literature was the only possible form of manifestation for the political activity of the advanced social consciousness.

Apart from tracing the development of short fiction, the aim of this block is to help you study and contextualize Gogol’s “The Overcoat” and Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Illyich” in the socio-political scenario of Russia.

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Unit 1

Russian Short Stories

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Form of the short story
- 1.4 Major Exponents
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit will give you a brief account of the rise of the short story as a genre during the 19th century. By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- *make* a quick survey of the early stages of short story writing
- *connect* the life and career of short story writers to the stories you have to study

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The genre of the short story was born in the early 19th century, and with the passage of time, it started gaining popularity among fiction readers. This, to some extent, has something to do with shrinking leisure time and shrinking patience.

A short story is fictional work of prose that is shorter in length than a novel. Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition,” said that a short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from a half hour to two hours. In contemporary fiction, a short story can range from 1,000 to 20,000 words. It ought to carry objective matter-of-fact description with poetic atmosphere and/or present a unified impression of tone, colour and effect, as Poe stated.

Critically it is agreed that the short story must conform to certain conditions. First, the writer must work hard to make the one and only impression. His time is too limited; his space is too confined; his risk of dividing the attention of the reader is too great, to admit of more than this one impression. Therefore, he selects some moment of action or some phase of character or some particular scene, and focuses attention upon that. In our daily life, we may witness this kind of brief, clear-cut impressions frequently. When we pass on the street corner two women talking, and from a chance sentence or two, we form a strong impression of the character of one or both. Sometimes we travel through a scene so sad and depressing or so lovely and inspiring that the effect is never forgotten. Such glimpses of life and scene are so vivid. To secure this single strong impression, the writer must decide which of the three essentials—plot, character, or setting—is to have first place.

Russian authors give more importance to the social ideas and ideals as compared to other writers. They create their works as reflection of the spirit of their people. The two main requirements for Russian writers are: humanitarian ideals and fidelity. Thomas Seltzer indicates this in his book *Best Russian Short Stories*:

The Russians take literature perhaps more seriously than any other nation. To them a book is not a mere diversion. They demand that fiction and poetry be a true mirror of life and be of service to life. A Russian author, to achieve the highest recognition, must be a thinker also. Everything is subordinated to two main requirements - humanitarian ideals and fidelity to life. This is the secret of the marvelous simplicity of Russian-literary art. Before the supreme function of literature, the Russian writer stands awed and humbled. He knows he cannot cover up poverty of thought, poverty of spirit and lack of sincerity by rhetorical tricks or verbal cleverness. And if he possesses the two essential requirements, the simplest language will suffice.

One of the essential traits of Russian writers is the quite unaffected conception that the poor are on a plane of equality with the so-called upper classes. So when we compare them to some English writers who wrote with their profound pity and understanding of the poor, there was yet a bit of remoteness, perhaps, even, a bit of caricature, in their treatment of the

lower class. They depicted the sufferings of the lower class to the rest of the world with a “Behold how the other half lives!” The Russian writes of the poor from within, as one of them, with no eye to theatrical effect upon the well-to-do.

In Russian Fiction, as Thomas Seltzer states, there is no insistence upon peculiar virtues or vices. The poor are portrayed just as they are, as human beings like the rest of us. A democratic spirit is reflected, breathing a broad humanity, a true universality, an unstudied generosity that proceed not from the intellectual conviction that to understand all is to forgive all, but from an instinctive feeling that no man has the right to set himself up as a judge over another, that one can only observe and record.

The simplicity, sincerity, and veraciousness are other traits of Russian literature that we find some Russian writers taking over the perfect form, profiting by its enforced obligations of unity, simplicity, and harmony, and handling it with variety, with interest, and with originality. They dealt with the life immediately around them, with the life of their own people, with the life they knew best; and they gave to the short-story a richness of human flavour.

1.3 FORM OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story is a literary genre, which is usually a fictional prose narrative depicting one character’s inner conflict or sometimes his conflict with others. It generally takes place over a short period of time, and usually has one thematic focus that makes it more concise than novellas and novels. Mostly the short story has a single plot, a single setting, a restricted number of characters and situations; and creates a single dynamic effect on a reader. Novels, on the other hand, tend to be more complex and layered. They usually show conflicts among many characters, revealed through a wide range of episodes, stimulating a complexity of responses in the reader.

Due to a variety of assumptions concerning the length of the short story, it is not easy to determine what exactly separates a short story from longer fictional formats. According to its classic definition given by Edgar Allan Poe in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition” in 1846, the short story

is a work which is supposed to be read in one sitting. In contemporary usage, the term short story most often refers to a work of fiction no shorter than 1,000 and no longer than 20,000 words.

The novel is a long work of written fiction that involves many characters and tells a complex story by placing the characters in a number of different situations.

The length of a novel can be 200 pages or more. Therefore, novels contain richly detailed tales than briefer literary forms such as short stories or novellas. The novel is considered to be the most flexible type of literature, and thus the one with the most possibilities.

The word *novel* came into use during the Renaissance (14th century to 17th century), when Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio applied the term *novella* to the short prose narratives in his *Il decamerone* (1353; *Ten Day's Work*). When his tales were translated, the term *novel* passed into the English language. The word *novella* is now used in English to refer to short novels.

Writers are like artists and are fond of experimenting with different techniques, adding new elements, mixing and combining them, which makes it difficult to draw lines of demarcation between the three forms of fiction - short story, novella, and novel. Therefore, though these terms have certain distinctive features, they have to be regarded as approximate rather than absolute.

SAQ:

How would you distinguish between a short story, a novella and a novel?
(40+40 words)

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We should distinguish between short tales and the modern short story. Short tales go back to very early times, some can be found in the Bible, some

were written down by the Egyptians as long ago as 2000 BC, and some in the Middle Ages. They are characterized by emphasis of narrative over characterization and dramatization of a simple theme. On the contrary, the modern short story gives more importance to style, language, characterization and mood rather than to the narrative itself. The short story can also be of two types, such as commercial and literary fiction. Commercial short fiction mostly has featured predictable plots, stock characters and conflicts, and superficial treatment of themes. Literary short fiction, which began in the 19th century, uses complex techniques to depict the dilemmas without solutions.

Longer forms of fiction contain some such core elements of dramatic structure as **exposition** that sets the time, place, situation and introduces main characters; **complication** that brings out the conflict (where the main character/protagonist is in a conflict with another character/antagonist or in an internal conflict with some antagonistic psychological/spiritual force; **rising action/crisis** which is the decisive moment for the protagonist and their commitment to a course of action; **climax** represents the most interesting and crucial part of the story; and **resolution** which resolves the conflict and **moral** realisation.

Short stories may or may not follow this pattern because of their short length. Some of them do not follow these patterns at all. For example, modern short stories only occasionally have an exposition. More typical, though, is an abrupt beginning, with the story starting in the middle of the action. As with longer stories, plots of short stories also have a climax, crisis, or turning point. However, the endings of many short stories are abrupt and open; and may or may not have a moral or practical lesson.

SAQ:

What elements of dramatic structure do longer forms of fiction contain?
(50 words)

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The short story employs certain techniques to influence readers by stimulating emotional, imaginative, and intellectual responses in the reader. They are: point of view, style, plot, structure, and a variety of devices. It is the writer's choice and control of these techniques that determines the impact of a story on a reader.

The **three basic point-of-view techniques** are *omniscient* (the all-knowing author narrates), *first person* (the author lets one of his characters narrate), and *central intelligence* (the author filters the narrative through the perceptions of a single character). A seldom-used point-of-view technique is the **objective** (the author poses as a **purely objective observer**, never giving the reader access to a character's thoughts). Furthermore, a combination of different types of point-of-view techniques can be employed by writers depending on their objectives. For example, it can be a third-person central intelligence, in which all the elements of a story are filtered through the perceptions, emotions, imagination, and thoughts of the main character, or it can also be **Interior monologue** (author focuses on a character's thoughts) or **dramatic monologue** (the author lets the character speak to one or more identified or unidentified listeners) which are other forms of first-person point of view. The first-person narrator can either be identified or anonymous, and even ambiguous as to gender. Usually a single character narrates, but sometimes there are as many as ten, or even non-human characters.

Style is the author's careful choice of words and arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs to produce a specific effect on the reader. An author's style evolves out of the chosen point-of-view technique. The omniscient point of view produces a relatively complex style; the first-person point of view results in a simple style if it is recorded as "spoken," more complex if written; and the central intelligence generates a style that typically is slightly elevated above the intelligence level of the focal character.

The short story employs a variety of plot forms and structure. A **traditional plot** has a beginning (introduction of the problem), middle (development of the problem), and end (resolution of the problem). Some writers prefer less predictable plots. Some complicate the structure of their plots with the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards; with a frame that encloses the story (a story within a story); or with subplots (secondary storylines) or double

plots (two or more equally important narratives progressing simultaneously, usually converging at the end). Among other devices that enhance plot structure are foreshadowing, reversals of fortune, digressions, abrupt transitions, and juxtapositions of contrasting characters or settings.

Writers employ a wide range of rhetorical devices for contrast and emphasis, including paradox, metaphor, patterns of imagery, repeated motifs, symbolism, and irony. Irony provides the reader with a contrast between reality and the fallibility of human perception, which is at the heart of most modern fiction.

Among the ways of looking at the subjects, themes, and art of the short story is to review the astonishing range and varieties of types of stories. These include tales, fantasies, humour and satire, character studies, confession, biography, history, education, religion, and local colour types.

The *short story cycle* is a series of stories unified not by plot but by the reappearance of a central character or characters in the same locale. The author Mikhail Lermontov focuses on character study in his cycle of stories *A Hero of Our Time* (1840). *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1852) is a cycle of tales by Ivan Turgenev in which a huntsman's visits to various rural locales are used to paint a picture of Russian life during that time.

Characteristic features of the short story vary from country to country. The changes in the spiritual and socio-cultural life of a nation affect not only the content of literature, but also its forms, including the development of the different genres.

The history of the Russian short story has also been connected with the socio-political and literary movements in Russia. The Russian short story emerged at the end of the 18th century, and "did not follow a single course of development and did not immediately take shape as a special and independent genre. For a long time it was 'dissolved' within such 'minor' prose forms as the novella, the anecdote, the joke and the fairy-tale. The term 'short story' did not come into use until the late 1820s. However, for two decades after this, all short prose works were usually called novellas. Only at the end of the 1840s did the short story finally acquire status as a genre although, as before, the dividing line between it and the novella was

indeterminate and fluid. It is therefore hardly surprising that many writers often referred to their smaller works sometimes as novellas and sometimes as short stories.” (Bazhanova, G. 1985: 6. *Anthology of Russian Short Stories*)

The ‘short story’ is often confused with the ‘short short story’. But the characteristics of the short story are “neatly turned plot, economy in disclosing character, absence of lengthy descriptive passages, an unexpected twist in the development of the action,” (ibid.: 6), etc., whereas these features occur quite frequently, but not always in the Russian short story. In 1835, V. Belinsky (a leading Russian critic who had a considerable influence on the course of Russian literature) first attempted to classify Russian minor prose. Since the short story as an independent form was still only in process of emergence, he did not distinguish it from the novella. “There are occasions,” he wrote, “which, so to speak, are inadequate for drama or the novel, but which are profound and concentrate into a single moment more life than could be experienced in centuries: the novella catches them and confines them within its tight framework. Its form can accommodate anything you like - the light sketch of manners, and the stinging sarcastic mockery of man and society, and the profound mysteries of the soul and the cruel game of the passions. Short and swift, light and profound at the same time, it flits from subject to subject, breaks life up into trifles and tears pages out of the great book of life”.” (ibid.:7).

He distinguished the most essential features of the short story from other literary genres, “above all the capacity through one fact, one event, or one character to give an idea of the main processes taking place in society and the human mind. The artistic merit of the short story is defined above all by the extent to which the writer can choose from a multiplicity of events and persons passing before him, exactly the ones that reflect what is most characteristic for a given period of society’s development.” (ibid.:7). Furthermore, the writer must trace profoundly and creatively interpret that event or character, and help the reader plunge into what is happening around him.

The most typical features of the short story are brevity, an easy-to-follow storyline, impressive artistic detail, “a special inner rhythm and profound implications conveying the complexity of the phenomenon or characters portrayed-such.” (ibid.:7)

It is very important to keep in mind while defining the characteristic features of the short story that “each period of social and literary development leaves a mark on its structure, modifying and transforming it.” (ibid.: 8).

The development of the short story in Russian literature, in the 19th century and afterwards, is not a stable process. At times, it was pushed aside by other literary genres; on other occasions, it was at the leading position. “Each era engendered not only new ideas, but also definite forms in which they were embodied. Belinsky noted that ‘if there are ideas of the age, then there are also forms of the age.’ The short story sometimes became such a form of the age. It proved particularly popular during the periods of spiritual searchings and shifts in the consciousness of society, when it was essential to solve the most urgent social problems—political, philosophical, aesthetic, legal and so on.” (ibid: 8).

The short story, as a very up-to-date and flexible medium, facilitated a rapid response to the problems troubling society and made it possible to explore anything new that appeared in various spheres of human activity. Of course, it was certainly not always possible to solve the complex tasks of the time in artistic terms, but the very statement of those urgent problems was a significant fact testifying to the great possibilities of the form. Many examples can be quoted of the short story being used to raise, for the first time, urgent social problems.

The emergence and development of the short story in Russia as, incidentally, of other forms took place under unique circumstances. Throughout nearly the whole of the 19th century, Russian literature was the only possible form of manifestation for the political activity of the advanced social consciousness.

It was this special role of literature in Russian life during the last century that largely determined the ideological tendentiousness of works in all genres, including “minor prose”.

(Bazhanova, G 1985. *Anthology of Russian Short Stories*. Moscow: Raduga Publishers.)

SAQ:

What are the main characteristic features of Russian ‘short story’? (70 words)

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1.4 MAJOR EXPONENTS

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 29 (O.S. January 17), 1860 in the town Taganrog in the southern part of Russia. He died of tuberculosis in Germany on July 15 (O.S. July 2), 1904. He is one of the greatest playwrights and short story writers whose innovations in form, technique and expressions have invaluablely changed Russian literary traditions. Chekhov is satirical, and the main object of his satire is the fading Russian ‘intelligentsia’ incapable of action and achievement of its dreamy idealism.

Chekhov shows a melancholy tenderness for his awkward heroes, incapable, most of them, of taking a footing in life. There are ideal types of women in his tales and plays, and, as we see in the half-ironical, half-pathetic ‘The Kiss’, Chekhov pities more than he condemns such dreamy ‘failures in life’ as the hero of that tale.

(Tonsend, R.S. (translator) (1967). *Russian Short Stories*. London: Everyman’s Library)

Most of Chekhov’s stories deal with human silliness and domination of banality and triviality. He emphasized mood and character. His characters are drawn with compassion and humour in a clear, simple style noted for realistic detail. They are sensitive and decent who dream of improving their lives but ultimately fail because of their sense of uselessness and helplessness. He skillfully criticized the backwardness he saw in Russian social and political life under the tzardom without lecturing his readers, but also presented highly individualized characters with their specific problems. His early works, mostly

consisting of humorous sketches and tales about contemporary Russian life published under pseudonyms such as “Antosha Chekhonte” and “Man without a Spleen”, were written mostly for money to support himself and his family while studying for his medical degree in Moscow. Under this strain, he contracted tuberculosis, which ravaged him all his life. The introduction of internal drama to his works became an innovation that had enormous influence on both Russian and foreign literature.

Chekhov’s material is only delimited by humanity. He is equally at home everywhere. The peasant, the labourer, the merchant, the priest, the professional man, the scholar, the military officer, and the government functionary, Gentile or Jew, man, woman, or child—Chekhov is intimate with all of them. His characters are sharply defined individuals, not types. In almost all his stories, however short, the men and women and children who play a part in them come out as clear, distinct personalities.

(Seltzer, Th. *Best Russian Short Stories*. New York: The Modern Library)

Thomas Winner in his book *Chekhov and His Prose* (1966) arbitrarily divides Chekhov’s creative career into three main periods. During the first period (1880-1887), Chekhov contributed primarily to humour journals, and wrote at a rapid pace. These early works already showed his wit and irony, which was to increase in subtlety and indirection in the later serious writings. After 1887, he stopped writing for humour journals and started writing more carefully. During the second period (1888-1893), he wrote a long story “The Steppe”, wherein he experimented with the actionless plot and impressionistic style. He turned to the themes of isolation as well as of opposing poles as beauty and ugliness; sensitivity and banality; life and death. Written during this period, “A Dreary Story” (1889) revealed his search for a coherent worldview that led him to study the Tolstoyan doctrine of nonresistance to evil. However, his trip to the Sahalin penal colony in 1889 to study Russian prison life changed his attitude to Tolstoyanism. During these years, he also turned to themes like oppression of peasants (‘Peasant Wives’, 1891), hypocrisy of the upper classes (‘The Wife’, 1892) and the *vie manquee* (‘The Teacher of Literature’, 1889, 1894).

SAQ:

Attempt a definition of ‘Tolstoyanism’. What are the aspects of Tolstoy’s philosophy? (60+70 words)

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Some of his stories of the last period (1883-1904) show his concern with the Russian society especially peasantry (‘In the Ravine’, 1900, ‘My Life’, 1896 and ‘the Peasants’, 1897). Such works showed the inactiveness and helplessness of the society. He also returned to his earlier themes with more mature and complex voice. He raised the problem of isolation, the *vie manqué*, and the conflict between beauty and banality in ‘Rothschild’s Fiddle’ (1894), ‘The Teacher of Literature’ (1894), ‘The Lady with the Pet Dog’ (1899), etc. These three periods mark the evolution of Chekhov’s style from that of the early humor stories to the complex forms and techniques. (Winner, Th. (1966). *Chekhov and His Prose*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston)

Chekhov’s works emerged from the realistic prose tradition, and mostly, from the influence of Turgenev’s short stories. From Maupassant, he borrowed the art of brevity and the striking conclusion. The new literary form created by Chekhov including the actionless plot indeed initiated the modern short story.

L.N. Tolstoy said, “The distinction and value of his works is in their clarity and closeness not only to the Russian, but also to any human being irrespective of their nationality”. A person’s inner world became Chekhov’s research subject. He is considered a master of the short story and the novella. The experience of working for humorous magazines made him sharpen his story writing skills, and put maximum content into a minimum volume. A short story cannot contain spacious descriptions, interior monologues, and therefore, ‘literary detail’ comes to the foreground. These very details bear a huge load of meaning.

Chekhov can say everything about a person in one phrase. For example, if we take his story “Death of a Clerk”, we can find that the hero is very similar to Akaky Akhaimovich in many ways. Accidentally having sneezed on the general Brizhalov’s bald head, Chervyakov constantly apologizes. The last phrase is the explanation to everything: “Coming straight home, without removing his uniform, he lies on the sofa and . . . dies.” The hero dies even without removing his clerk uniform as if he had been stuck to it. A fear of higher rank killed a person. Here, Chekhov brings out the theme of the ‘little man’. After acute sympathy to Gogol’s Akaky Akhaimovich and Dostoevsky’s humiliated heroes, Russia laughed at the stupid death of a ‘little man’, since sympathized with their “brothers who were below them”. Like Pushkin, Gogol and many other writers, Chekhov deliberately chose certain names for his characters. The name tends to convey a lot about the person. The main hero’s surname is Chervyakov, meaning ‘a worm’. This indicated that he was miserable, indecisive and humble.

Anna Sergeevna, the heroine of the story “The Lady with the Pet Dog”, comes to Yalta, unable to bear her home conditions and her husband whom she neither loves nor respects. She is prepared for an affair with Gurov who seems to be from a different, or even better, world. The symbol of this stuffy world from which she tries to escape is lorgnette. Before she falls in love with Gurov, Anna Sergeevna loses it, and this is the beginning of an attempt to escape. Later, Gurov sees her again in the theatre with a “vulgar lorgnette in her hands”. The attempt to escape fails.

Belikov – “the person who keeps himself in cottonwool” – in contrast to Anna Sergeevna, does not make any attempt to change the course of his life or make it more interesting. He believes that diversity can bring uncertainty. He has a strong desire to surround himself with “a frame”, “a box” to protect himself. This is the reason for covering and keeping all his things in boxes. All his life, Belikov was scared of something. It appears that life itself scared him, because after death, his face bore a pleasant and cheerful expression. He was put into the box from which he would never have to get out.

As mentioned above, we can come across all types of people in Chekhov’s stories: doctors, teachers, clerks, students, military people, peasants, beggars, policemen and prisoners. All professions, all ages – the whole of

Russia indeed! Chekhov ridiculed everything that hindered an honest and just living: boldness of the strong and ingratiating of the weak; cowardice, rudeness and indifference in “Death of the Clerk”. He finds the fakes who pretend to be the protectors of the motherland in “Winter Prishibeev”; scandalists, hooligans and drunkards in “The Mask” and “In Banyan”. He ridicules those who idealized the men, for example, in his story “Malefactor”, a man has his own logic, needs and he refuses to accept those of others.

Critics’ attention, readers’ affection and most of all the support of the leading literateurs like D.V. Grigorovich, A.N. Plesheev and V.G. Korolenko were considered by Chekhov as an invitation to professional literary work that made him reconsider his attitude to literary work as fun and a way to earn money. The story ‘Steepe’, published in 1888 in a magazine *Severnyi Vestnik*, revealed the main distinctive features of his style as an absence of a hero expressing the author’s ideological position; recreation of the surrounding world destroyed by human’s emotional perception; transfer of a spiritual state of the characters through occasional ‘words’ and ‘gestures’.

Chekhov wrote about love with great mastery, discovering his characters by diving into human feelings in “The Lady with the Pet Dog”, “Witch”, “A Boring Story”. He showed unusual human types in his stories like “Gooseberry” with the main hero Nikolai Ivanovich Chimsha Himolaisky; “Tonych” with the hero Dmitry Ionych Startzsev; “The person who keeps himself in cotton wool” with the main hero Belikov. In his stories, Chekhov does not point fingers at his characters. He leaves it to his readers to make conclusions. His language is vivid, employing words close to life. As Gorky rightly noticed, “If you read his stories, you feel how hard was life in Russia.” However, Chekhov believed that everything would change and his country would have a bright future.

A new layer of life which was new to Russian literature became a subject of Chekhov’s interest and his literary thought. He opened to his reader an ordinary everyday life wrapped in routine, which was passing by the consciousness of the majority serving only as a background for real, decisive and extraordinary events and occasions.

Thus, Chekhov’s hero is a man acting mechanically without exploring life to its fullest and without being aware of himself in this life. The entire life of this hero passes by waiting for some decisive turning point. However, when this

event takes place, it turns out that this person is not able to act or deal with the situation; he is not able even to understand what is going on. As a result, life goes on along that very beaten path, to that very outcome which will prove that one more person has failed to be moulded as a personality and one more life has been purposeless. All his works are perceived as a diagnosis: failure of a personality.

Chekhov's Russia consists of questions, hundreds of solved and unresolved destinies. A clear picture starts emerging from this variety and complexity of elements and lines.

He wrote about individual lives – this became a literary discovery. Under his able artistry, literature became a mirror of a minute, having significance only in one particular person's life and destiny. His themes of the senseless and selfishly wasted life of the little man; that of isolation; and ineffectiveness of action set new trends in literature.

For the last three years of his life, Chekhov was happily married to Olga Knipper, an actress with the Moscow Art company. Although they were often separated, they were together at a German health resort when he died, at the age of 44.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky was one of the greatest writers in Russian literature. His characters are extremely individual and exceedingly complex. They are usually developed in very dramatic plots. The struggle between good and evil for dominance in the human soul is the main theme in his works. Thus, being a profound philosopher and psychologist, he attempts to resolve this struggle by leading his characters to salvation through purifying suffering, and describes the depth and complexity of a human soul with incredible insight. His narrative style is incredibly powerful, and so is the subtlety of his characterization.

Dostoevsky's short stories express high creative power and profound thought. They reflect the whole immensity of the author's world, 'concentrated with gem-like brilliance and startling clarity.' Unlike his larger works, his short stories enable the reader to gain a clearer and deeper insight into his genius by 'withdrawing from the conflict of human passions and of surveying the human scene with complete detachment.'

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in Moscow on November 11 [O.S. October 30] in 1821, and died on February 9 [O.S. January 28] in 1881. He was a fiction writer whose works have had a lasting effect on world literature. His works explore human psychology in the troubled political, social and spiritual context of the XIX century Russian society.

In Dostoevsky, indeed, the passion for the common people and the all-embracing, all-penetrating pity for suffering humanity reach their climax. He was a profound psychologist and delved deeply into the human soul, especially in its abnormal and diseased aspects. Between scenes of heart-rending, abject poverty, injustice, and wrong, and the torments of mental pathology, he managed almost to exhaust the whole range of human woe. And he analysed this misery with an intensity of feeling and a painstaking regard for the most harrowing details that are quite upsetting to normally constituted nerves. Yet all the horrors must be forgiven him because of the motive inspiring them—an overpowering love and the desire to induce an equal love in others. It is not horror for horror's sake, not a literary *tour de force*, as in Poe, but horror for a high purpose, for purification through suffering, which was one of the articles of Dostoevsky's faith.

(Seltzer, Th. *Best Russian Short Stories*. New York : The Modern Library)

Belinsky, one of Russia's greatest critics, pointed out such characteristic features of Dostoevsky's art as mastery in description of life in an amazingly truthful way; his skillfulness in description of personalities and the social conditions of his heroes; his profound understanding and fantastic artistic recreation of the dreadful side of life, which later made him one of the giants of both Russian and world literature. According to Belinsky, Dostoevsky's weakest point was the use of excessive repetitions and digressions that tire the reader.

Belinsky was also the first to indicate Gogol's influence on Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky as a writer of great talent cannot be called an imitator of Gogol, though he certainly owes a great deal to him. Gogol's influence can even be seen in the structure of his sentences, but there is so much originality in Dostoevsky's talent that this obvious influence of Gogol will most probably disappear with his other shortcomings as a writer, though Gogol will always remain, as it were, the fount from which he drew his inspiration.

(Translator) Magarshack, D. *The Best Short Stories of Dostoevsky*. New York: The Modern Library

Dostoevsky admired Gogol. He said, “We all have descended from Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’”. He appreciated Gogol’s faith in ‘the divine spark in man’ irrespective of his social and spiritual degradation. This high regard for this deeply humane attitude to the ‘downtrodden’ made him admire Charles Dickens.

Dostoevsky’s first published work ‘Poor Folk’ (1846) reveals his characteristic compassion for the downtrodden.

‘White Nights’ published in 1848 characterised the tendencies of young Dostoevsky’s early works. It is an autobiographical story with a sentimental theme that was developed against the background of his own personal impressions while strolling in Petersburg at night. In the story, Dostoevsky uses gentle humour with delicacy touching genuine feelings. He re-wrote it seventeen years later under the title ‘Notes from the Underground’ as a mature thinker and creative master.

Satiric in nature, ‘The Christmas Tree and a Wedding’ is one of Dostoevsky’s most artistic early short stories. It is about using marriage as a way to get wealthy. He brings out the culmination in the last sentence with a crushing force by contrasting the young vulnerable victim of a stupid social structure to the pitiless wealth pursuer.

Being considered a founder of 20th century existentialism, his ‘Notes from Underground’ was called ‘the best overture for existentialism ever written’ by Walter Kaufmann. In fact, this story is a rigorous and insightful reflection on the human being’s destiny; it penetrates deep into the human heart and mind. It is not about an individual, but about all mankind. Nietzsche referred to Dostoevsky as the only psychologist from whom he had something to learn – “he belongs to the happiest windfalls of my life, happier even than the discovery of Stendhal.” According to him, “‘Notes from the Underground’ cried truth from the blood”.

‘The Dream’ makes life worth living even if it may never come true. In this story, he also stresses the arrogance of the intellect, saying that mind without heart, and reason without feeling are destructive.

Dostoevsky was sentenced to four years of hard labour in a Siberian penal colony for involvement with a group of radical utopians. During this period, he suffered great physical and mental pain, including repeated attacks of epilepsy. The prison experience changed him profoundly. He abandoned his belief in the liberal, atheistic ideologies of Western Europe, and turned whole-heartedly to religion and to the belief that Orthodox Russia was destined to be the spiritual leader of the world.

His characters can be divided into the following categories: humble and meek Christians; self-destructive nihilists; cynical debauchees; rebellious intellectuals, who are driven by ideas, and not by commonplace biological or social imperatives. In comparison with Tolstoy's realistic characters, Dostoevsky's characters are symbolic, and therefore, he is considered one of the forefathers of literary symbolism, particularly Russian symbolism.

His themes include wounded pride, spiritual regeneration through suffering, rejection of the West, affirmation of Russian orthodoxy and tsardom, suicide, and marriages that did not work. He created dramatic works where conflicting views and characters are developed into an intolerable climax. And therefore, his works are characterized as being 'polyphonic'.

He published *Writer's Diary*, a monthly journal from 1873 to 1881, which was a great success. He published short stories, sketches and articles on current events.

In his later years, Dostoevsky lived at the resort of Staraya Russa which was close to St. Petersburg. He died on February 9 (January 28 O.S), 1881 of a lung haemorrhage associated with emphysema and an epileptic seizure.

He wrote the following short stories: 'Mr Prokharchin' (1846), 'Polzunkov' (1847), 'The Landlady' (1847), 'White Nights' (1848), 'A Christmas Tree and a Wedding' (1848), 'A Weak Heart' (1848), 'An Honest Thief' (1848), 'A Nasty Story' (1862), 'Winter Notes on Summer Impressions' (1863), 'The Eternal Husband', 'The Peasant Marey' (1876), 'A Gentle Creature' (1876), 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man' (1877).

Alexandr Sergeevich Pushkin

Pushkin was born on June 6 (O.S. May 26) 1799 and died on February 10 (O.S. January 29) 1837. He was the founder of modern Russian literature,

giving Russia her modern literary language in verse and prose, creating excellent models in poetry, drama, novel, short story. He developed a style of storytelling that mixes drama, romance and satire. His talent set up new records for development of the Russian language and culture, marking the highest achievements of 18th century and the beginning of literary process of 19th century.

Despite being significantly influenced by the western geniuses like Shakespeare, Byron, and being himself a romantic poet in the Western sense, Pushkin was at the same time a deeply national writer, and his works possess an inner truth which has ever since been a characteristic feature of Russian literature.

Pushkin's genius was of a composite nature. His pessimistic outlook on the problems of existence often gave way to a light-hearted mental attitude characteristic of eighteenth century France; the Voltairean religious skepticism of many an irreverent poem has a counterpart in deeply religious poems, such as 'The Madonna' and others, very national in the simplicity of religious emotion. He also united a patriotic disposition and strong national pride with revolutionary feelings, manifested in his poems to the heroes of the December uprising in 1824. Altogether, Pushkin was, as Dostoyevsky has appropriately called him, a universal mind and soul.

Tonsend, R.S. (translator) (1967). *Russian Short Stories*. London: Everyman's Library

"Pushkin is unique among great writers...in his attitude to literary forms. All his works are an examination, often amounting to an inspired parody of one or another of them; and it is this more than anything else which makes a complete aesthetic comprehension of his work so difficult in translation. (It is also...the starting point of Russian formalist criticism, with its thesis that 'the perception of its form reveals the content of the work'.)" Bailey, J. (1971). *Pushkin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Published in 1831, *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* showed a deep understanding of the different sides of Russian life pervaded in a truly national feeling. Pushkin had his own understanding of prose. About ten years before he wrote *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, he noted, 'Precision and brevity – these are the prime merits of prose. It

demands ideas and yet more ideas – without them, brilliant expressions serve no purpose’. He followed these principles in his own creative practice.

The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin served as a basis for the development of a special kind of Russian short story whose salient features were as follows: profound content, comprehensiveness of form, a neatly worked out plot and elegance of composition.

(compiled by Bazhanova Galina) (1985). *Anthology of Russian Short Stories from Classical to Modern*. Volume One. Moscow: Raduga Publishers

The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin contains five stories which are considered masterpieces. Pushkin employs a supposed narrator, Belkin, who takes the reader to the Russian country house, to the forest, to the post station, to the army circles, etc. Thus, his narrative is full of ‘framing’ devices. For example, in one of the stories called “The Stationmaster” from *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, he applies a complicated technique involving a series of fictitious narrators. This hierarchy of narrating sources are:

- Pushkin (author)
- Belkin (collector-editor)
- A.G.N. (primary first person character narrator)
- Samson Vyrin (protagonist-narrator)
- Many extra-textual voices (the doctor, the cab driver, etc.)

Frames, stylization and their subsequent ironization by further framing overshadow ‘the reality’ they bracket. Life takes place behind and between the frames which ironize each other, so that the sense of genuine reality is created in deliberately negative way by omission and implication.

Pushkin makes money matters pervade the fibula. For example, Minsky:

- generously overplays the services of the station master
- bribes the doctor to fake illness and stay at the house while he courts Dunya
- keeps Dunya in luxury
- tries to pay off her father’s claims on her.

Moreover, Pushkin introduces 'financial considerations' into 'the frame' where:

- the primary narrator repeatedly mentions his expenditures;
- A.G.N. keeps track of paying the various drivers who bring him to the station;
- The stationmaster himself purchases Vyrin's narrative with a glass of punch; just as in the end he buys the story's denouement from Vanka.

Dunya's kiss, 'bought' by A.G.N. indicates 'acquisition of money'. Pushkin ironically transforms an aesthetic value into a commercial one. His framing strategies epitomize the closing scene:

- "A ragged urchin, red-haired and squint, ran up and led me to the end of the village."
- "Never in my life have I seen such a melancholy cemetery. This is the grave of the old postmaster," said the little boy, leaping on to a mound of sand in which a black cross bearing a brass icon had been stuck."
- "- 'And did the lady come here?' I asked
 - 'She did,' replied Vanka, 'a very nice lady...gave me a silver kopek piece.' I too gave the small boy a five kopek piece and did not regret either my journey or the seven roubles it had cost me."

Thus, this story abounds in different stylistic devices and narrative techniques to frame his satire in presenting 'a little man' – Vyrin – in his narrative. Pushkin's satire is always "...a humanizing process, but [he] never openly makes fun of his target". Bailey, J. (1971: 311). *Pushkin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pushkin's narrative genius had always lain in his capacity to balance and to separate, to present a tale whose unity is complete, but whose elements and actors are held in unobtrusive but rigorous isolation from one another. Prose brings out a new side of this gift, and *The Queen of Spades*, written three years after *Tales of Belkin*, displays it in the tension which holds the protagonists so far apart, and in particular Hermann, the Napoleonic hero,

the man of will, obsession and dream, and the old Countess with her magic secret for success in gambling which might put power and wealth within his grasp.” Bailey, J. (1971: 316). *Pushkin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Queen of Spades, published in 1834, was a pearl of Russian romantic literature. It shows, with fascinating artistry, both sides of Pushkin’s talent – his Western sense and the deep attachment to the Russian spirit. ‘The incredible ghost story is told with a great power of imagination, yet with sufficient psychological motives to make it real’. The background of the story provides a strong realistic impression, giving a true picture of Russian high society under Alexander I, with detailed descriptions of household life. The main heroine of the story, an old Countess, who though represented 18th century French culture and spirit, remained true to the Russian instinct of pity for the victim of betrayed love that made her tell the fatal secret to the unfortunate gambler.

Furthermore, Pushkin and Gogol created the first realistic ‘minor prose’ works aiming at solving not only personal problems, but those of Russian life in general. This resulted in creation of works presenting reality in all its aspects and complexities. So, Pushkin represents the majestic entrance to the temple of Russian literature.

Thus, “Pushkin could serve art for art’s sake because he was not serving art for the sake of the artist. . . prose fiction for Pushkin is a liberating because a genuinely impersonal instrument, taking for granted the neutral existence of everything to which it gives artifice, proportion, and accord: it can never create its own exclusive world of style.” Bailey, J. (1971: 354). *Pushkin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

He wrote the following stories: “The Negro of Peter the Great” (1827); “The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin” (1831); “The Queen of Spades” (1833); “Kircall” (1834).

Lev Nicolaevich Tolstoy

Tolstoy was born on September 9 (O.S. August 28) 1828, and died on November 20 (O.S. November 7) 1910. He was a great Russian fiction writer. Tolstoy’s fiction depicts realistically the life of the Russian society to which he belonged. Matthew Arnold said that Tolstoy’s work is not art, but

a piece of life. Isaak Babel added to that by saying, 'if the world could write by itself, it would write like Tolstoy.'

Tolstoy advocated nonviolence and a Rousseauistic simplicity of life. He was an anarchist, and disapproved of all the organizations based on force including the government and the church.

The position of Tolstoy (1828-1910) in the process of the literary development of Russia stands in contrast to Gogol. Where Gogol accuses, Tolstoy takes the defence of Russian realities and of the psychology of the Russian masses. Tolstoy sees in the mind and the soul of the Russian peasant, all that is good and supremely wise, and would like to see all the standards of culture subordinated to the instinct of truth of the Russian masses, as opposed to the egotism and perverted morals of the higher classes. He praises above all that quality of forbearance which is the subject of 'Korney vasiliev', and is a recurrent problem of many tales and novels of Russia's great writer. (Tonsend, R.S. (translator) (1967). *Russian Short Stories*. Everyman's library: London).

Tolstoy is the revolutionist, the iconoclast. He has the complete independence of mind. He utterly refuses to accept established opinions just because they are established. He probes into the right and wrong of things. His is a broad, generous universal democracy, his is a comprehensive sympathy, his is an absolute incapacity to evaluate human beings according to station, rank or profession, or any standard but that of spiritual worth.

(Seltzer, Th. *Best Russian Short Stories*. New York : The Modern Library)

Most of Tolstoy's short stories were written between the ages of 22 to 34, that is from 1851 to 1863, his first literary period. Tolstoy started his literary career with the short story, and continued writing it throughout his life. His first short story "A History of Yesterday" (1851) starts with the description of the evening spent with distant relatives. Then the hero falls asleep, and thinks about the problem of dreams.

To the technique of delving into motivation in his diary, he has added the spice of Laurence Sterne's analytical method in the *Sentimental Journey*, which Tolstoy had been reading and part of which he later translated as an exercise in style. Sterne's influence is obvious in Tolstoy's concentration on peculiar details, in the posturing and digressions, in the analysis of conscious

and subconscious thoughts and feelings of characters reacting to particular situations, and in the transformation of all the confused associations of thought that enter the hero's head as he falls asleep.

Simmons, J. Ernest (1964). *Leo Tolstoy Short Stories*. New York: The Modern Library

The autobiographical element prevailed in his fiction and his powers of invention. His imagination was undoubtedly extraordinary. Most of his short stories are outcomes of some of his personal experiences, for example, the Caucasian group including "The Raid", "The Wood-Felling" and "Meeting a Moscow Acquaintance in the Detachment" belongs to this category. Apart from this, "A Billiard-Marker's Notes" was inspired by a terrible gambling experience that Tolstoy had with a billiard-marker in Tiflis, where he had been in 1851. The mastery with which he can turn an autobiographical experience into an independent and powerful study of moral degeneration is great. Another memorable story "The Snow Storm" was inspired by a fierce blizzard. The tale is really a tone poem of elements. The repeated motifs of snow and wind have the quality of the incremental repetition of a folk ballad. He describes the bitterness of the cold so evocatively that it makes the reader experience the sensation. The contrast of freezing weather and the traveler's dream of a hot summer day were also drawn from Tolstoy's childhood.

In 1851, he joined the army. During this time, he wrote "Sevastopol in December 1854" that depicts the siege. He talks about the self-sacrificing heroism of the defenders, and their firm determination to repulse the invaders.

The change in his attitude is clearly reflected in his second story about Sevastopol - 'Sevastopol in May 1855' where he criticizes with irony and satire the officers who make use of 'patriotism' for their personal interests. The famous sentence at the end of 'Sevastopol in May' "the hero of my tale-whom I love with all the power of my soul, whom I have tried to portray in all his beauty, who has been, is, and will be beautiful-is Truth" (Simmons, J. Ernest (1964). can be considered his credo for the rest of his long life both as a writer and thinker.

In August 1855, Sevastopol was abandoned by the Russians and the third narrative 'Sevastopol in August 1855' was written by the writer which was full of well developed characters.

In the studied objectivity, and particularly in the leisurely, panoramic method of narration and in the manner in which plot is sacrificed to accumulating detail, one may detect the influence of Thackeray, whom the young Tolstoy had been eagerly reading and admiring over this period.

(Simmons, J. Ernest (1964). *Leo Tolstoy: Short Stories*)

The subject of war, with its military figures, depicted in the three Sevastopol narratives, is developed in his masterpiece *War and Peace*.

In 1856, Tolstoy published two short stories: "Meeting a Moscow Acquaintance in the Detachment" and "The Snow Storm" which was described earlier. At the same time, he was thinking about new literary paths, about art: 'awfully lofty and pure'. His fiction 'Lucerne' though being not the new art he was thinking about, "showed a significant shift of focus from the objective realism of his war stories to what might be described as the subjective realism of a moralistic emphasis" (Simmons, J. Ernest. 1964). In this story, he deliberately uses his art to show and criticize the materialistic Western civilization by comparing the triviality of its sophisticated members with the simple man represented by the little street singer.

"Albert", another story by Tolstoy, was intended to convey his belief that art must be based upon "moral truths that went beyond 'convictions' of the politically and socially minded authors. It was a protest against society's inability of appreciating virtuoso performances on the violin." (Simmons, J. Ernest (1964))

One briefer story which was written to exemplify the moral truth of pure art was "Three Deaths" where that very moral truth is expressed in the contrast between the death of the old peasant and the tree, and the death of the irritable invalid lady and simple conviction. With this, the first period of Tolstoy's literary development ended.

These early stories showed many of the characteristic features of his mature art, irrespective of whether he was telling about war, family, or moral truths. In 1863 the writer wrote a short story "Strider: the Story of a Horse" which was a satire against the evils of modern society, 'especially the institution of property'.

Tolstoy's early fiction had been an important step toward the creation of such a literature in Russia.

He wrote the following short stories: “Polikushka”, “A Prisoner in the Caucasus”, “Promoting a Devil”, “Quench the Spark”, “The Raid”, “Repentance”, “Sebastopol Sketches”, “Three Deaths”, “The Three Questions”, “Too Dear!”, “Two Hussars”, “What Men Live By”, “Where Love is, God is”, “Wisdom of Children”, and “Work, Death, and Sickness”.

Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev

Ivan Turgenev was born on November 8 (O.S. October 28), 1818, and died on September 3 (O.S. August 22) 1883. He was a novelist, dramatist, and short-story writer, and was considered one of the foremost Russian writers. Like many of his educated contemporaries, he disapproved of serfdom. He could “reveal many of the problems inherent in Russian society, and . . . persuade his readers to acknowledge the existence of these problems, irrespective of what their answers might be.” (Ralston, W.R.S. (translator). (1914: v). Liza. *Ivan S. Turgenev*. London: Everyman’s Library.)

He had a strong social consciousness, and mostly dealt with the problems of human welfare. He was the artist who truthfully represented life and appreciated the form. Being influenced by German society, and called ‘westernizer’, he sought the regeneration of Russia in radical progress along the lines of European democracy.

The very first work of importance by Turgenev is “A Sportsman’s Sketches” (Sketches from a Hunter’s Album/Notes of a Hunter) which was based on his own observations while hunting birds and hares in his mother’s estate, dealt with the question of serfdom, that is thought to help induce Alexander II to emancipate the serfs and therefore, to influence in bringing about its abolition. Almost all his succeeding books “presented vivid pictures of contemporary Russian society, with its problems, the clash of ideas between the old and the new generations, and the struggles, the aspirations and the thoughts that engrossed the advanced youth of Russia; so that his collected works form a remarkable literary record of the successive movements of Russian society in a period of preparation, fraught with epochal significance, which culminated in the overthrow of Tsarism and the inauguration of a new and true democracy, marking the beginning, perhaps, of a radical transformation the world over.” (Seltzer, Th. *Best Russian Short Stories*. New York : The Modern Library).

“His stories give an extraordinary illusion of reality: everything happens so naturally and casually that our first impression is that we are just getting a glimpse of an unpredictable succession of actual events. Closer examination, however, reveals to us that this apparent casualness masks a prepared and orderly plan, in which every haphazard-seeming incident and character plays a necessary part.” (Berlin, I. (translator). (1950). ‘First Love’ by Ivan Turgenev. London: Hamish Hamilton).

As far as “reality” is concerned, Turgenev himself once said: “. . . To achieve a reproduction of the truth, the reality of life accurately and powerfully is the greatest happiness for a writer, even if this truth does not coincide with his own sympathies.’ . . . for in striving for the truth, Turgenev sometimes came up against his “own sympathies”—both political and social—and overcame them” (Isaaks, B. (translator). (1951). *Fathers and Sons. A Nest of the Gentry*. Moscow: Progress Publishers).

He also could skillfully make reality delightful by quiet incidents which are neither dull, nor insignificant. This is achieved due to his delicate sense of what is “beautiful”. “This is of the very fibre of his nature; every glance he gives at the world calls it into play; noting here the graceful turn of a woman’s neck, there the shimmer of a cornfield in the sunshine, or the distant sound of a voice singing across the twilight fields. So that his vigilantly accurate picture of reality is inevitably also a picture of what is beautiful in reality.” (ibid.: vi). He remains true to the facts while portraying the picture of humanity. His heroes are civilized people of good nature, delicate charm and deep feelings.

“First Love” is a marvelous piece of fiction. It is a story of a boy of 16 who falls in love with Zinaida, an enchanting girl who is a bit older than he. Zinaida and her mother have moved in a house next to that of his parents. Then he finds out that she has an affair with his terrible father. Years later, he finds out about her death in childbirth. “The subject which this plot is designed to illustrate is the contrast between the boyish ardent love of the hero, and the more mature and tragic passion which animates the object of his affections.” (ibid.:vii.). The story is very simple, but deep and real. Turgenev gives his reader food for thought; he just describes an action and leaves his reader to interpret and conclude according to his values and beliefs. And

the strength of this very method is in that it gives a more persuasive image of reality, for example, “the hero is sitting on a fourteen-foot wall, Zinaida passes underneath. “Jump down to the road to me if you really do love me,” she says, jokingly. As if he was pushed from behind, the boy finds himself jumping” (ibid: viii). None of the rhetorical devices would be able to describe the obsessive force of passion that fills him. The story comes to an end on a sad note. “The news of Zinaida’s death disturbs the hero’s heart with a profound and complex emotion; in part, poignant regret for the irrecoverable past; in part, sad surprise that he feels her loss so little – how transitory, it comes home to him, are the most intense emotions – but predominantly bewildered, terrified awe at the precariousness of the human situation when seen in the light of death. . . . Our angle of vision is shifted to disclose the drama of which we have been reading against a new and more universal perspective. Suddenly this ephemeral summer’s romance is revealed in its relation to the whole tragic destiny of man. (ibid.:x).

Ernest Renan, the French scholar, said in Turgenev’s funeral speech: “Honour and glory to the great Slav race whose emergence on the avant-scene is the most amazing phenomenon of our age. Honour and glory to it for finding so early its spokesman in this incomparable artist. He belongs to the whole of mankind.” (Isaaks, B. (translator). (1951). *Fathers and Sons. A nest of the gentry*. Moscow: Progress Publishers).

His fantastically crafted novellas and short stories are considered his greatest works, including:

“Dnevnik Lishnego Cheloveka” (1850); “The Provincial Lady” (1851); “A Sportsman’s Sketches” (1853); “Yakv Pasyukov” (1855); “Faust” (1858); “Asya” (1858); “First Love” (1860); “King Lear of the Steppes” (1870); “Torrents of Spring” (1872); “The Song of the Triumphant Love” (1881); “The Mysterious Tales” (1883).

Stop to Consider:

Which writers were “Slavophiles” who supported Russian culture and advocated an isolationist view, and which ones were ‘Westernizers’, who viewed Russia’s future in light of Western Europe? Explain and support with examples.

1.5 SUMMING UP

This unit has given you a brief account of the rise of the short story as a genre during the 19th century Russia. An attempt is made here to help you trace the history of the emergence of short fiction. This unit has enabled you to make a survey of the early stages of short story writing as well as the important writers and their contribution to the genre. Hence, you should be able to connect the history of the genre to the stories you will study in the next units.

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761559304/short_story.html

<http://reference.howstuffworks.com/dostoevsky-fyodor-encyclopedia.htm>

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Unit 2

Gogol and “The Overcoat”

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 The Form of the Short Story
- 2.4 Gogol and His Works
- 2.5 Reading the story
 - 2.5.1 Themes
 - 2.5.2 Characters
- 2.6 Critical Reception
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit brings to you Gogol’s famous short story “The Overcoat”. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *introduce* Gogol and his short story “The Overcoat”
- *give* a short description of his works
- *analyze* the story’s style, plot, narrative techniques, verbal and stylistic devices; storyteller; use of humour;
- *analytically discuss* the story with referenced to its key themes
- *introduce* critical receptions of the story such as film adaptation and ballet

2.2 INTRODUCTION

“We are all descended from Gogol’s *Cloak*” (M. F. Dostoevsky)

Gogol’s universe is “one of the marvelous, unexpected - in the strictest sense, original - worlds ever created by an artist of words.” (D.S. Mirsky)

Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) was a major Russian playwright, novelist, and short story writer. In the West, his works are liked for ornamental use of language, romantic treatment of theme, and use of the fantastic, the grotesque, and caricature. In Russia, he was loved as a humorist. He was one of the first to criticize his country’s way of life, and was called ‘the father of modern Russian realism’. In this tradition, his masterpieces are the novel *Dead Souls* (1842), the play *The Government Inspector* (1836, 1842), and the short story “The Overcoat” (also known as “The Cloak”) (1842). Gogol’s work is realistic in its concern for rich detail, but he is primarily famous for creating a fantastic world of imagination. Petty vice and human folly are caricatured in almost all his mature work.

With Nikolai Gogol (1809-52) begins the true history of Russian literature, or rather its tragedy, and Gogol’s masterpiece, “The Cloak”, shows this tragic spirit at its highest. Gogol was the first to reveal the tragedy of the Russian personality crushed by the arbitrary state power of tsardom. The hero of “The Cloak”, a small official, who has lost not only his dignity but all sense of personality under the tyranny of the all-powerful and soulless bureaucratic regime, is one of the most impressive types of Gogol’s relentless satire of Russian officialdom. However, Gogol’s compassionate love for the wretched and the miserable in Russia, and his faith in Russia’s future distinguishes his work. “The Cloak”, above all, is Gogol’s pathetic and inspired plea for pity, and reflects the essentially Russian cult of commiseration and pity which becomes afterwards the keystone of Dostoevsky’s message to the world.

(Tonsend, R.S. (translator) (1967). *Russian Short Stories*. London: Everyman’s Library)

Gogol’s main contribution, similar to Pushkin’s, was his introduction of the social element in Russian literature. He held up a mirror to Russian officialdom, and the effects it had produced on the national character. Gogol’s realism reveals the complexity of life, its movement, a birth of the new.

Pushkin, who said about Gogol, “Behind his laughter you feel the unseen tears” was his close friend and inspirer. “Gogol invents nothing but the simple truth. . . the terrible truth”. Gogol himself said that “the comic is everywhere, only living in the midst of it we are not conscious of it, but if the artist brings it into his art on the stage, we shall roll about with laughter and only wonder why we did not notice it before”. A light bantering tone for producing effects of intimate sadness seemed to Gogol to be peculiarly Russian, a native predisposition to irony and satire, especially where pain was in question. “Russians,” Gogol said, “were in the habit of laughing at the sufferings of the human soul”, and the laughter he had in mind was neither cruel nor frivolous, it was the laughter of sympathetic detachment—the kind which his “The Overcoat” exemplifies with its absurd little man living his pitiful life against the dark, unknown and grotesque nemesis to wreak his vengeance on the insensitive world which has disregarded and abused him when he was alive.

“The main and most persistent characteristic of Gogol’s style is its verbal expressiveness. He wrote with a view not so much to the acoustic effect on the ears of the listener as to the sensuous effect on the vocal apparatus of the reciter. This makes his prose ornate and agitated. It is all alive with the vibration of actual speech. This makes it hopelessly untranslatable - more untranslatable than any other Russian prose of the 19th century.

The other main characteristic of Gogol’s genius is the extraordinary intensity and vividness of impressionist vision, sometimes skirting expressionism. He saw the outer world romantically metamorphosed, a singular gift particularly evident from the fantastic spatial transformations in his Gothic stories, *A Terrible Vengeance* and *A Bewitched Place*. His pictures of nature are strange mounds of detail heaped on detail, resulting in an unconnected chaos of things. His people are caricatures, drawn with the method of the caricaturist - which is to exaggerate salient features, and to reduce them to geometrical pattern. But these cartoons have a convincing quality, a truthfulness, and inevitability - attained as a rule by slight but definitive strokes of unexpected reality.

Like Sterne before him, Gogol was a great destroyer of prohibitions and romantic illusions. It was he who undermined Russian Romanticism by making vulgarity reign where only the sublime and the beautiful had reigned. “Characteristic of Gogol is a sense of boundless superfluity that is soon

revealed as utter emptiness and a rich comedy that suddenly turns into metaphysical horror”. His stories often interweave pathos and mockery, while the most comic of them begins as a merry farce and ends with the famous dictum: *It is dull in this world, gentlemen!*”

It is a very simple tale though told with inimitable humour, it manages to convey without a word of ‘sentiment’ - the deep humanitarianism, the pity for the sufferings of the ‘disherited’, which has since become the absorbing theme of Russian literature.

Thus, in the little world of people from the lower rungs of society, Gogol reveals the same worries and joys of life that people from the higher strata of society experience. The bright guest in the form of the coat lights up Akaky’s small room for a very short while, and has left it forever; this, as a result, kills Bashmachkin.

SAQ:

1. Why was Gogol thought to be an expressionist? (60 words)

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2. What was Gogol’s connection with religion like? How did it influence his personal and professional life? (60 words)

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2.3 THE FORM OF THE SHORT STORY

In “The Overcoat”, Gogol shows his mastery in detail, satire and humanism, presenting to us one more “little man” who is not destined to be happy in this unjust world full of drawbacks. Akaky expected very little of his life - a coat. Even that little need was not met. He suffered from social inequality and died from it. However, Gogol’s “little man” Akaky gained self-

consciousness; he became aware of his feelings and his miserable position, and had the strength to protest; though he did it only after his death, he did protest. Though this protest was timid and weak, he made an attempt to defend his rights. He raised his voice against the present governmental structure. This puts him a step higher than Pushkin's Vyrin from "The Station Master" who could love, but was powerless before the governmental machinery and was not able to protest. Gogol laughs at everything evil in the society; he wants to show that nothing happens in a little world of a clerk, and unless this story with a coat, there would be nothing to talk about him. He raises the problem of the society where the theft of a coat equals the theft of life. Gogol adopts a comic tone, so that the reader can feel his irony. In addition to this, a reader can feel the voice of the author where Gogol has become a prophet of the Russian humanist tradition. Ironizing misery of his main hero, the author hyperbolizes his sufferings, by making him save on everything: Akaky does not drink tea, economizes on electricity, attempts to walk on his tips, etc. Gogol also employs hyperbole while describing Akaky's feelings in anticipation of a new coat—he becomes alive, strong like a human being who is determined, and sets a goal, and when the coat is at last ready, it is a climax of Akaky's happiness. For the first time in his life, he does not write anything, he notices a lot of new things in the streets, things that he hasn't noticed before as if he was reborn; life seems to be wonderful and colourful to him. He even follows a lady unconsciously without realizing why he is doing that. In short, he is 'living'. Unfortunately, this life does not last long. Thus, every detail carries a significant message.

Gogol's narrative abounds in framing patterns, where frames and stylization and their subsequent ironization by further framing overshadow the reality they bracket. Life takes place behind and between the frames which ironize each other, creating the sense of genuine reality in a deliberately negative way by omission and implication.

This story is characterized by multiplicity of meanings and dimensions from various perspectives. It can be interpreted by symbolists, formalists and psychoanalysts differently. The story is full of tongue-twisting names, rhymes, and puns—again and again proving Gogol to be a verbal gymnast. Gogol's prose is poetic and onomatopoeic. Rhetorical figures abound in his writing. Rhythmic and phonetic considerations help determine each phrase.

According to L. Michael O'Toole (*Structure, Style and Interpretation in the Russian Short Story* (1982)), "The digressions in "The Overcoat" fulfil many functions... Some of them operate as elements in the narrative structure" for example, the choice of the hero's surname, Bashmachkin, which is translated from Russian as "Shoes" probably implying his insignificance, since 'shoes' are an item of clothing worn on the lowest parts of the body, below everything, indicating his position from all the perspectives, showing his humbleness and misery – showing that he is a "little man" who is deprived of many things in life, who does not question or ask for more, and when he loses the most precious thing he has had in his life he dies out of grief unable to bear this loss, and is able to take revenge only after his death; and the long preface about the long process of choosing a Christian name introduces to a reader some vital facts about Akaky's past through a series of flashbacks. Most of Gogol's characters fates are partly predetermined by their names (or lack of a name, as with the Person of Consequence), for example, the naming of Akaky is essential, since "it was through this bizarre naming procedure that Akaky 'came into being'. So the fantastic account of how he received such a very pedestrian name turns out to be more significant in his earlier life..... As many of Gogol's most brilliant critics have shown, the naming episodes are as much elaborate games with words and sounds as anything else. The rather idiotic etymological pun about the surname Bashmachkin not implying that his forefathers wore 'shoes' perhaps the way for another etymological pun whereby the narrator assures us that despite its "recherche" strangeness, the name Akaky was not 'sought' - and then goes to relate the frantic search through the calendar of saints' names which led to his 'late' mother choosing Akaky in desperation. Even the 'late' is a rather gruesome temporal pun, since his mother is referred to as recently expired all the time she is struggling to choose...." (ibid.:21).

"We are in a grotesque world where names, puns, rumours and reputations become reality and the real is diminished, distorted or magnified to fantastic proportions. The very archaic and exotic sonority of all the alternative possible names gives way to the flat and unsonorous 'Akaky' which manages to combine a Russian child's word for faeces, the Greek word for humility, a humbly obedient six-century saint, and the anguished repetition of the existential question 'kak?' (How?). A detailed analysis of this infinitely rich

word play of this passage would show to what extent the *kak* root, or its answer *tak* figures in the frantic search for a name:

Kakoye ona khochet vybrat' ... which [name] she wanted to choose...

Net, imena-to vse takiye... No, the names were all the sort...

Kakie vse imena, ya, pravo, What sort of names they all were

Nikogda ne slykhivala takikh... I really never heard such a sort...

Vidno, yego takaya sud'ba... obviously such was his fate...

Kak I otets yego... takim obrazom... like his father... And so on.”
(ibid.: 22)

All the functions like “combining apparent plot motivation, temporality, philosophical import, etymological, lexical and grammatical puns, pure phonetic sound play, ... syntactic rhythms and intonation curves” are fused so skillfully that “the verbal play becomes part of the narrative structure: life is not separable from the act of talking about life: like Akaky himself, life is a verbal coincidence. In the same way, digressions which appear to function primarily as a mode of characterization, such as the descriptions (despite the author’s intentions!) of Petrovich and his wife, of Akaky’s speech mannerisms or the family life of the Person of Consequence, or those where the prime intention appears to be the depiction of social setting, such as the vignette of how the clerks of St. Petersburg spend their evening or the tale of the titular councilor who made himself a waiting-room around his desk to ape his superiors, are equally examples of verbal play in their own right.”
(ibid.: 22).

“...the stylistic mannerisms of the ‘lyrical’ digressions are not significantly different from those which sustain or vary the tone of the other digressions: (1) the vagueness: ‘one young man who had recently been appointed’, ‘all but permitted himself’, ‘as if pierced through’, ‘as if everything had changed before him’, ‘some kind of unnatural force’; (2) hyperbole: ‘suddenly’, ‘everything’, ‘unnatural’, ‘for a long time after at the merriest moments’, ‘many times’, ‘how many’ ...’ and even in that man’. Of course the emotional tone of the vocabulary, the inversions, the diminutives and the exclamatory ‘bozhe!’ are distinctive to the ‘lyrical’ digression, but our sensitive young

clerk has no greater claims to credibility as representative of the author's views than the touchy captain or Akaky's godmother. All the digressions in the story, whether 'lyrical', 'linguistic', 'sociological' or 'philosophical' contribute to the story's rich verbal texture and to the flirtatious relationship between the author/narrator and his readers; none can claim any priority as 'thematic'. (ibid.: 24)

Furthermore, L. Michael O'Toole identified some more stylistic devices as:

1. Hyperbole

(a) Adverbial:

Altogether quite recently; in some places even totally drunk; and even his brother-in-law and absolutely all the Bashmachkins; he would take it and get down there and then to writing it; they would tell right in his presence all sorts of...stories; and inflict stinging flicks indiscriminately on all noses; have no idea whatsoever;

not to finish off sentences at all, so that very often...and then nothing at all would follow and he himself would forget;

(b) Morphological (particularly verb prefixes and suffixes) [is obvious in the Russian version]

(c) Syntactic (particularly intensified negative contrast)

nothing gets angrier than all kinds of departments;

they weren't in the least looking for the name...there was no way they could give any other;

The porters not only didn't stand up ... they didn't even look up;

Hardly anywhere could you find a man who would live like that;

It wasn't just... No...;

Not just titular councilors, but even privy...indeed even those;

She was emitting so much smoke that you couldn't even see the cockroaches;

2. Qualification (a mirror-image of hyperbole):

a) Morphological (particularly diminutive and other modifying suffixes):

Shortish in height, somewhat pock-markedish, somewhat gingery, apparently even somewhat short-sightedish, with a slight bald-patch above his forehead; a uniform that wasn't green, but of a kind of gingery-mealy colour. Its tiny collar was narrowish and lowish;

And something or other would stick to it...either a scrap of hay or some little thread or other;

b) Syntactic:

A clerk that you wouldn't exactly call remarkable;

When and at what season he had come to the department and who had appointed him was something no-one could recall;

Our northern frost, although, for all that, there are some who say that it's very healthy;

For some time he had begun to feel that he was somehow getting particularly hard stung in the back;

He wondered finally whether there mightn't be just the odd fault;

3. Anti-climax (often as much rhythmic as lexical after a graded hyperbole):

Shortish in height<somewhat<somewhat<somewhat even<haemorrhoidal;

His father<and granddad<and even his brother-in-law<and absolutely all the Bashmachkins>had worn boots;

He burst into tears and made such a face<as if he had a premonition>that he would be a titular councilor;

Took to drinking rather heavily every feast-day,<at first on the main ones, then indiscriminately, on all church feasts, wherever there was a little cross marked in the calendar, so much smoke, that you couldn't see even the cockroaches;

4. Incongruity (involving many other devices we are examining):

The potential names available (vs.) Akaky's actual name;

A stark imperative perepishite (copy it) (vs.) an over-gracious euphemistic request: vot interesnoe, khoroshenkoe deltse (here's an interesting, nice little matter);

The clerk's vision of Akaky's relationship with his seventy-year-old landlady;

Such semantic non-sequiturs as:

He was particularly skilful (vs.) at arriving under a window just in time;

Only perhaps if, coming from goodness knows where, a horse's muzzle came to rest on his shoulder... (vs.) only then would he notice...; up the stairway, which, to do it justice... (vs.) was all awash with water and slops...;

The landlady was emitting so much smoke in the kitchen, (vs.) that you couldn't even see the cockroaches;

Slightly tipsy (vs.) or as his wife used to put it: 'he's up to his eyes in vodka, the one-eyed devil'.

The typical Gogolian device of confusing animate and inanimate phenomena, and so on.

5. Puns. If the other stylistic devices [that have been mentioned above] normally involve a relationship between parts of sentences, the special virtue of the pun is that it sets up an incongruity within a single word.....:

(a) Etymological:

Bashmachkin	→	bashmak (shoe)
Vyiskannym		ne iskali (seek)
Sovetnikam		ne dayut sovetov (council)
Znachitel'noye litso		ne uronit li znacheniya (would he not lose importance)

(b) Semantic

Proizoshel Akaky Akakiyevich		proizoshlo vse eto
(Akaky Akakiyevich came about		all that came about)
Kto opredelil ego (who had appointed		defined him)
Ne na seredine stroke		skoree na seredine ulisy
(not in the middle of the street		rather in the middle of the line)
Yel kusok govyadiny s lukom		yel vse eto s mukhami

(ate a piece of beef with onion ate all that with flies)

Kholod propekhal v spinu on byl raspechen generalom

(the cold burned his back he was grilled by a general) and so
on. (ibid.31-33.)

SAQ

Which stylistic devices did Gogol employ in his story “The Overcoat”?
(50 words)

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2.4 GOGOL AND HIS WORKS

His father, Vasily Gogol-Yanovsky, was an educated and gifted man, who wrote plays, poems and sketches in Ukrainian. Little Gogol came into the world at Sorochintsi, Ukraine on March 31, 1809. His formal education began at seven in a provincial private school. At 12, he attended Poltava boarding school, and in 1820, Gogol entered the School of Higher Art in Nezhin until 1828. Bernard Guerney describes him as a student in his foreword to *Dead Souls*:

As a student, he was bright and ...resourceful, rather than assiduous, impossible in mathematics and, in language, hopelessly xenophobic: he was nicknamed *Universum Mundus*, after the introductory phrase in a Latin chrestomathy, which phrase remained the *Ultima Thule* of his Latinity; he could not read the easiest French without a dictionary; Goethe and Schiller, he maintained, could not possibly have written in so vile a tongue as German; English was strictly for the birds, not only vocally but because of the facial contortions it demanded. He excelled, however in composition, draftsmanship, music, elaborate acrostic pasquinades, practical jokes and, above all, in school theatricals.

In 1829, on leaving school, Gogol moved to St. Petersburg with the intention of becoming a full-time professional writer. His first published work, a long narrative in verse, was received with indifference by the critics, and the sensitive Gogol fled from Russia in shame. When he returned from Europe in 1829, Gogol first tried to find work as an actor. Bernard gives a short account of that:

Accounts of Gogol's tryout for a state theatre vary. According to one, Gogol had an attack of stage fright before the luminaries on the hearing committee, dried up on his lines when he did not mumble them, gave a "wilted" performance and, at best, would have been considered only for roles just a frog's whisker about walk-ons. According to another source, his acting was "expressive, masterly and absolutely natural," and since it ran counter to the artificiality and affectation prevalent at that time he would hardly have been found acceptable by the "theatrical aristarchs." At any rate he did not bother to return for the verdict on his audition.

Gogol was eventually forced to take a minor post in the civil service to support himself. His experiences in the government bureaucracy are reflected in some of his later stories, especially "The Nose" and "The Overcoat".

It was only with the publication of his *Dikanka Nights*, a collection of fantastic stories of a new kind that Gogol won recognition, comparative success, and most important of all, the friendship of Pushkin, Zhukovsky and other literary figures. These stories also promoted Gogol from obscurity to a position as one of the nation's leading young writers.

Stop to Consider:

Aleksandr Pushkin left a strong influence on Gogol's choice of literary material after he met him in 1831. This influence can be seen clearly in *Dikanka Nights*, which were based on Ukrainian folklore. In these tales Gogol used the same narrative device as Pushkin had in *Tales of Belkin*.)

Between the years 1831 and 1834, Gogol tried teaching twice, but he didn't succeed as a teacher. First he taught in a finishing school for young ladies, but things didn't go well with him. His second assignment was as

assistant professor of Medieval History at the University of St. Petersburg. This academic venture proved a failure, and Gogol's teaching career was brought to a close.

Except for short visits to Russia in 1839-40 and 1841-42, Gogol was abroad for twelve years, travelling throughout Germany and Switzerland. Gogol spent the winter of 1836-1837 in Paris, where he spent time among Russian expatriates and Polish exiles, frequently meeting with the Polish poets Adam Mickiewicz and Bohdan Zaleski. After having chosen Rome for his headquarters, he became enamoured with the Eternal City, which answered to his highly developed sense of the magnificent, and where even the visions that always obsessed him of vulgar and animal humanity assumed picturesque and poetical appearances that fitted harmoniously into the beautiful whole.

He also made a pilgrimage to Palestine in 1848. From Palestine, he returned to Russia, and passed his last years in restless movement throughout the country. While visiting the capitals, he stayed with various friends such as Mikhail Pogodin and Sergei Aksakov. During this period of his life, he also spent much time with his old Ukrainian friends, Maksymovych and Osyp Bodiansky. More importantly, he intensified his relationship with a church elder, Matvey Konstantinovsky, whom he had known for several years. Konstantinovsky seems to have strengthened in Gogol the fear of perdition by insisting on the sinfulness of all his imaginative work. His health was undermined by exaggerated ascetic practices, and he fell into a state of black melancholy. On the night of February 24, 1852, he burnt some of his manuscripts, which contained most of the second part of *Dead Souls*. He explained this as a mistake—a practical joke played on him by the Devil. Soon thereafter, he took to bed, refused all food, and died in great pain nine days later. Gogol was buried at the Danilov Monastery.

Gogol's Works

Gogol's Poems

When Gogol started his writing in secondary school, he started with poetry, and according to the existing texts, we can't say that he was an exceptional poetic talent. He had "Hanz Kuekhelgarten" published at his own expense, under the name of "V. Alov". Unfortunately it was met by the magazines

with mockery. He bought all the copies and destroyed them, swearing never to write poetry again. When we criticize Gogol's poetry, we shouldn't ignore the fact that Gogol was not Russian by birth. He was Ukrainian, and Ukrainian was his native mother tongue while Russian was his acquired language.

Dikanka Nights

The two volumes of *Dikanka Nights* were published in 1831 and 1832 when Gogol was 22 and 23. These short stories introduced Gogol to the literary society, and represented a new kind of talent. They showed Gogol's rich imagination and sense of humour as well as his creative discipline.

Mirgorod

It has four stories: "The Old-World Landowners", "Taras Bul'ba" in Volume I and "Vii" and the "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovic Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovic" in Volume II. Written between 1832 and 1834, they were published early in 1835. Gogol was just 26 when they were published.

Arabesques

The *Arabesques* are organized into two parts. In Volume 1, Gogol puts a foreword which is followed by seven essays and two stories, "The Portrait" and the fragment, "A Chapter from an Historical Novel"; Volume 2 includes six essays and three fictional pieces, "The Nevsky Prospect", a fragment from "A historical novel", "The Prisoner", and finally, "Diary of a Madman". Later in 1942 Gogol published "The Nevsky Prospect", "The Portrait", and the "Diary of a Madman" with "The Nose", "The Overcoat", "The Carriage", and the fragment, "Rome" as *The Petersburg Stories*.

Gogol started writing "The Nose" in 1832; early in 1835, in March, the first version was ready, but was rejected by the *Moscow Observer* as "filthy". It was finally published, not without further trouble with the censors, in Pushkin's journal, *The Contemporary*.

Dramatic Works:

- His first play was "The Order of St. Valadimir, Third Class" (1832). This was to remain a fragment, probably because of Gogol's inability to deal with the complicated plot, not to mention his desire to avoid trouble with the censors.

- Gogol's experiments in theatre resulted in a completed play, "The Gamblers (An Incident out of the Remote Past)". It was probably begun in 1836, was published for the first time in 1842, and was performed the next year in 1843..

- "The Marriage", begun in 1836, after some reworking was completed in 1842.

- "The Inspector General" or, as it is sometimes known by its Russian title, "The Revizor".

Towards the end of his life, Gogol wrote: "In *Revizor* I tried to gather in one heap all that was bad in Russia, as I then understood it; I wished to turn it all into ridicule. The real impression produced was that of fear. Through the laughter that I have never laughed more loudly, the spectator feels my bitterness and sorrow."

In light of what he said, try to find out how would it be possible for such a satire either to be printed or performed in Russia?

- "The Morning of a Busy Man" is a five scene play introducing two "busy" men.

- Another fragment, "Lawsuit" which dates to 1839 or 1840, is merely a sketch of a scene

- Another sketch belongs to the same year (1839): "In the Servants' Quarters".

- In the 1842 edition of Gogol's *Collected Works*, there was one more unfinished play, simply called "Fragment". Gogol had reworked it several times, starting apparently in 1837, but never getting beyond these few scenes.

- *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*

Two years before his return to Russia, Gogol had published *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847). In this work, many ideas and topics explored, they give important insights into his fictional works and vice versa.

This work, which purports to be a collection of letters from Gogol's correspondents together with his replies, is in fact entirely the work of Gogol.

It reads like a lengthy and discursive catechism, in which the questions are supplied by the letters of the “correspondents” and the answers by Gogol’s replies. The main point of the world view revealed in this book is that a creator God has made everything in a certain way, assigned all beings to a certain station, and that the creation of God is just and good. Any attempt by an individual to leave the station into which he or she was born, then, is tantamount to opposing God’s will. Such rebellion carries with it its own punishment in the form of personal and social misfortune.

Dead Souls

Gogol began working on *Dead Souls* in 1835. For the next six years, he devoted almost all of his creative energy to this novel. His compulsive craftsmanship is evident in that the entire work was revised at least five times; the author stated that some passages had been rewritten as many as 20 times.

2.5 READING THE STORY

“The Overcoat” is a story of a simple clerk, Akaky Akakievich. He is a copyist who works in an unnamed department. The story is not about the nobility, but an office worker in St. Petersburg. He was not a very important officer, and his colleagues and superiors constantly made fun of him. He never talked back to them, and so the teasing continued every day. He led a very dull life.

Stop to Consider:

The Name: Those who attended his naming ceremony came up with many options, but his mother didn’t choose any of them. Therefore, he was named after his father Akaky; his name remained Akaky Akakievich. His life is comparable to his name—mundane and unimaginative.

His life was only concerned with his office and home. He was so immersed in his work that he used to take back papers to copy at home. The winter in St. Petersburg was harsh, and he used to go out in an overcoat which was very dear to him even though it was in tatters. We can say that his work

was his life, and his overcoat was his love. The overcoat was so much a part of him that his colleagues called it 'the mantle'.

One day he saw that the back portion of his coat had worn away, and the lining too was in pieces. He decided to take it to Petrovich, the tailor, and get it patched up. Petrovich was a one-eyed drunken tailor who was an ex-serf, and did only repair work. After having inspected the coat, he said that no amount of repair could hold the coat properly, and so he had to stitch a new overcoat.

Akaky returned another day, and they decided to buy cloth and get a new coat stitched for forty rubles. Akaky knew that he couldn't do without a proper overcoat. He decided to go without food at night, and to stay indoors and do as little laundry as possible—all this so that he could save up for the overcoat. He was excited and nervous at the same time. He became restless. All he could think of was the new overcoat; he wasn't even worried about his work anymore. Petrovich delivered him the new coat. The beauty of the coat was more appealing to Akaky than the warmth it provided him. Akaky left for office, and Petrovich admired his creation from the streets.

Once he reached his office, his colleagues spotted the new coat and talked about it. They even demanded a party in its honour. One of his superiors hosted a party, and there Akaky received more praises for his coat. On his way home, he was attacked by two hooligans. They stole his coat and kicked him, and all the while the incident was witnessed by a watchman at a patrol booth nearby. He doesn't help Akaky and he decided to raise a complaint at the Superintendent's office. There, he met a Very Important Person. This Person turned out to be very rude and inconsiderate. Akaky realises that he'll get absolutely no help from him.

Due to the shock, he fell off the stairs, staggered on the road, and somehow reached home. He plunged into a state of depression and fell sick, which was aggravated by the cold Russian winter. In a few days, Akaky died. He received a lowly funeral, but it seemed as though nobody missed him at the office, and his position was soon filled by another man. A few days after the funeral, people noticed a ghost who attacked passers-by and snatched their overcoats. They said it looked like Akaky Akakievich.

One evening, when the Important Person was out in his carriage, the ghost attacked him and demanded for his coat. It was Akaky's ghost, and he was after the general's coat. He doesn't hurt the general, and leaves after grabbing

his overcoat. The story ends with another ghost appearing in another part of the city. It is much taller, and has a moustache. People claim that it resembled Akaky's attackers.

Prose was reserved almost entirely for official documents, historical writings, correspondence, and official journals. However, Gogol used it in his stories and novels. It also seems appropriate in "The Overcoat" as it is the story of a simple clerk like Akaky Akakievich. Gogol uses humour, social satire, tragedy, and varying degrees of sympathy to elaborate this story, which clearly reflects the contemporary Russian bureaucracy at that time.

"The Overcoat" is recounted from the perspective of an unnamed first-person narrator. The narrator is not involved in the events of the story, but seems to be aware of the characters' thoughts and feelings. With the opening section, Gogol establishes the tone of the story. It shows us how Akaky's family, his colleagues and officers treat him, and also the things that Akaky is most passionate about.

SAQ:

By giving a third-person narrative, has the author been able to disassociate himself from the story? (50 words)

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2.5.1 THEMES

"The Overcoat" is a satirical short story by Gogol, which has focused on the attitudes shown towards a simple and unassuming clerk. Some of the major themes in the story are the symbol of the coat, pathos, power structure, bureaucracy, social satire, supernatural elements, and Akaky as a 'little man'. Subjects of realism, comical and fantastic elements in "The Overcoat" have led to a wide range of opinions concerning the story's themes, and the meaning of its dream-like ending.

Symbol of the Coat

Akaky's overcoat is a very important multi-layered symbol. It represents a basic human need to keep oneself warm in the harsh winters, but it also stands for a certain status that is assigned to Akaky once he dons the new coat. With it, his co-workers and superiors address him with more respect, and let him into their social circle. It symbolizes material wealth and status.

Akaky gets a "new life" when he acquires the new coat, and he looks and takes care of it as if it were his love interest. We are reminded of all the sacrifices he made in order to make sure that he has forty rubles to pay Petrovich for the new coat. Akaky begins to care more about his beautiful coat and less about the people around him. Even though he spends a lot of money, it makes him feel more confident, more accepted by the people around him. The coat is very dear to him; it gives him new friendships, a new world, and a new life.

Besides what the coat means for Akaky, it could also represent another idea. Akaky's old coat appears to represent a Russia that has worn thin, where people without rank or authority are subject to constant taunts by the dominant forces in the offices. They suffer from hunger, poverty, cold and humiliation. The new coat appears to provide warmth, acceptance, prosperity, freedom, and helps to earn a position of respect in the society.

SAQ:

How would you describe Akaky's relationship with his coat? (50 words)

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Pathos and Collective Remorse

The author weaves the story in such a way that as readers we feel for Akaky, we try to identify with the way he lives, and all the things he does to acquire a new coat. At last, we feel sad when it is stolen by a couple of hooligans. Gogol explains each and every instance and event in great detail.

This guides us to focus on Akaky's frugal life, his submissive character, and the sympathy the story demands of us.

There is an element of collective remorse amongst his colleagues. When they come to know that Akaky's beautiful new coat is robbed, they try to collect money and buy him a new one. We see a change in the Important Person too. He used to scold and shout at his subordinates, and used to treat them badly. He does the same to Akaky by refusing to help him, and blaming Akaky for the loss. After he learns about Akaky's death, he is a different man. He changes the way he deals with people, and also feels guilty that he didn't do anything for Akaky. He goes through a phase of self-reflection.

SAQ:

Was Akaky's life any better than that of Petrovich who was an ex-serf?
(70 words)

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Power Structure

Life was hard for the common man and the working class in 19th century Russia. Those who were serfs earlier now formed the working class. Therefore, their standard of living didn't improve much even after getting a job. Their pay, working conditions and living quarters were poor and inadequate. The government favoured the rich and influential nobility. Even if the common men were capable of a better job, it would be given to men from the upper class.

There was a clear divide between the rich and the poor, between the noble class and the working class. If we take Akaky's example, we see that even though he was a faithful worker who was very efficient and loyal, he was treated as a nobody. No one missed him or cared much about his passing away. Even in the case of Petrovich, he has to work hard to eke out a decent living.

The higher officials and police department had their own style of functioning. They didn't bother about the common man's problems. They were more worried about themselves. There was widespread corruption in Russian society.

SAQ:

What are the key features that differentiate Akaky from the Important Person in terms of power? (100 words)

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Bureaucracy

The Russian government was complete with officials who were ill-trained and incompetent. They had come to power as they were noblemen, or with the help of influential people. Talent played no role here. As a result, they didn't even know how to behave with their subordinates.

The bureaucracy in "The Overcoat" is portrayed as a very inept one. When Akaky's coat is stolen from him on the road, the patrol man just watches from his booth, and doesn't stop the robbery. When he goes to complain about it, the officials there avoid him or just say that the job doesn't concern them. We see that Akaky is a victim of bureaucratic inefficiency, and it leads to his death later on. As a victim, he doesn't get anywhere with the incompetent bureaucracy.

The system that was supposed to take care of him lets him down, and he is left to himself to find retribution, which he does in the end by returning as a ghost.

Social Satire

Gogol hints at the problems in society, and how they affect the people, especially the working class. The depiction of Akaky's life is an excellent

example of social satire. The rigidity of Russian society is portrayed through examples in this story.

“The Overcoat” portrays the lack of human compassion that exists between the characters in the story. It is also seen towards the end of the story where his colleagues and the officials refuse to help him get his coat back. This story is a case of satire and social protest.

Supernatural Element

“The Overcoat” is a realistic expression of the social contours of contemporary Russia in the 19th century. Towards the end of the story, it takes on a fantastical turn. Akaky didn’t get justice in his lifetime; his ghost gets his redemption in the last part of the story. The unexpected events at the end add a magical element to it.

The happenings towards the end change the attitude of the Important Person. He becomes a little more humane in his dealings with his subordinates and colleagues.

A handful of Gogol’s stories carry a twist in Christian mythology. A similar trait is seen in “The Overcoat”. Akaky can be compared to Christ. They are both traumatized by people in their time, but the difference lies in Akaky’s revenge. Akaky is the sacrificial lamb who is wounded without a cause.

Stop to Consider:

Think of possible alternative endings for the story. For example, if the ghost didn’t take revenge, if the Important Person was harmed, or if Akaky got his coat back, etc.

Little Man

Russian writers of the 19th century wrote some of their novels with a ‘little man’ as the protagonist. In “The Overcoat”, Akaky is an ill-treated government clerk who doesn’t even have the means to a proper living. He is left alone to fend and fight for himself.

The literal meaning of the name ‘Akaky’ is derived from Greek. It originally meant “lacking evil” or “harmless”. At one level, the reader feels pity for the

little man and his plight. At another level, one could also see this as a mockery of the poor common men in Russia. Akaky does his best to get back at the system. Even though his ghost takes revenge, we are to decide whether he gets his retribution after all.

2.5.2 CHARACTERS

Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin

He is introduced as: “So, in a *certain department* serves a *certain official* - not a very prominent official, it must be allowed - short of stature, somewhat pockmarked, rather red-haired, rather blind, judging from appearances, with a small bald spot on his forehead, with wrinkles on his cheeks, with a complexion of the sort called sanguine. . . .”

That almost sums up Akaky’s profile. He is an ordinary and unimportant clerk occupying a very low level in the social hierarchy. Akaky is quite passive to his colleagues’ insults and taunts. He carries on his work silently. The character of Akaky is one of the first instances in Russian literature to introduce the “little man”. Akaky’s only job is to copy documents given to him by his superiors. He has worked for a long time, doing the same job in the same unspecified government department. His only interest is his work. Later on, it shifts to his new coat.

The new coat gives him a sense of pride. People notice him and the coat at his office and comment on it. It helps to give him a social standing and status that he never had till then. He realises that the respect that he gets is only because of his new coat. Nonetheless, he basks in its glory. At one point, he turns greedy, and decides to even go without electricity and food to acquire that coat. He spends all his time fantasizing about it, and finally dies for it.

The monotonous life of Akaky, his obsession with the one thing that would ensure his status, and the irony of his retribution—all steer us to think more deeply about the concept of the ‘little man’.

Important Person

‘The Person of Consequence’ is a petty official Akaky consults for help in retrieving his stolen overcoat. In introducing him, the narrator paints him as

the epitome of all that is pretentious and inconsequential in the strictly hierarchical bureaucracy of Russia's government. Though his authority is only a few levels higher than Akaky's, this man is so intimidating to Akaky that his "severe reprimand"—a tirade about the importance of going through appropriate bureaucratic channels—leads to Akaky's fainting, falling ill, and eventually dying.

'The Person of Consequence' reappears in the final part of the story as he is confronted by and loses his own overcoat to Akaky's avenging corpse. On his way to visit a mistress at the time, the official rushes home to his wife and children vowing to practice better morals, and from then on, he treats his underlings with a little more kindness.

Narrator

The narrator in "The Overcoat" has a very strong and considerable role to play in the story. The omniscient character of the narrator lends a crucial axis on which the plot is based.

There are various questions to be answered here: How far does the narrator go to help us identify with Akaky, the victim here? Do we associate the narrator with the author, Gogol? How does the narrator connect to the other characters in the story?

The narrator has accessed more information than any other character in the story, and can also delve into the other characters' innermost feelings and emotions. The narrator identifies with each character, and gives them more than just a part to play. He/she frequently uses pompous words and sentences that mark the language of the bureaucrats and authorities. In the same way, he/she has distinguished a separate style for Akaky's language.

Sometimes, the narrator's tone is sarcastic; at certain other points, especially when Akaky loses his coat, it is sympathetic.

2.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Some of Gogol's stories have been adapted into film and opera. A Russian composer Alfred Schnittke wrote the eight part "Gogol Suite" as 'incident music' to "The Government Inspector" performed as a play, and a composer Dmitriy Shostakovich set "The Nose" as his first opera in 1930, despite the

peculiar choice of subject for what was meant to initiate the great tradition of Soviet opera.

The story “The Overcoat” has been adapted into a variety of stage and film interpretations.

Films

A number of films have used the story, both in the Soviet Union and in other countries. They are:

- “The Overcoat” (1916)- an American silent film directed by Rae Berger
- “The Overcoat” (“Shinel”) (1926)- a Soviet silent film directed by Grigoriy Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
- “The Overcoat” (“Il Cappotto”) (1952)- an Italian film directed by Alberto Lattuada
- “The Bespoke Overcoat” (1955)- a British film directed by Jack Clayton based on wolf Mankowitz’s 1953 play of the same name
- “The Overcoat” (“Shinel”) (1959)- a Soviet film directed by Aleksey Batalov
- “The Overcoat” (1997) – a Greek film
- “The Overcoat” (2001) – a Canadian made-for-TV film produced by the CBC
- “The Namesake” (2007) is woven with references to “The Overcoat” and Gogol. The film is based on the 2004 novel by Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri.

Ballet

- The Russian composer German Okunev was working on a ballet version of “The Overcoat” when he died in 1973, and therefore, V. Sapozhnikov completed and orchestrated it.
- A recent adaptation by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling, set to music by Russian composer Dmitriy Shostakovich, was performed by actors using dance and mime. A film version was produced by the CBC.

- The Danish choreographer Flemming Flindt created a version for Dennis Nahat and the Cleveland-San Jose ballet. The main role was performed by Rudolph Nureyev at the world premiere at Edinburgh Festival in the summer of 1990.

2.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have read about Gogol and his short-story *The Overcoat*. An attempt is made here to familiarize you with Gogol's oeuvre. After going through the various sections, you have had a fair idea of Gogol's *The Overcoat* and the significance it has in the world of Russian Literature. This unit has also helped you to analyze the story's style, plot, narrative techniques, verbal and stylistic devices; storyteller; use of humour; as well as the key themes and critical receptions of the story such as film adaptation and ballet.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

[http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0036-0341\(196401\)23%3A1%3C25%3ATCOTIR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V&cookieSet=1](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0036-0341(196401)23%3A1%3C25%3ATCOTIR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V&cookieSet=1)

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Unit 3

Tolstoy and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 The Form of the Short Story
- 3.4 Tolstoy and His Works
- 3.5 Reading the story (plot/narrative/storyteller)
 - 3.5.1 Themes
 - 3.5.2 Characters
- 3.6 Critical Reception
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit brings to you Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *familiarize* yourself with the life and works of the writer Tolstoy
- *identify* the genre of short story and the form of short story in which *The Death of Ivan Ilych* had been written
- *analyze* the plot, the narrative and the storyteller in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
- *understand* and analyze the various themes interwoven in the short novel
- *study* and analyze the characters in the novel
- *know* about the critical reception to this novel
- *read* further on Tolstoy and his works

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Lev Tolstoy has been hailed as one of the most important figures in modern literary history. He captivated his readers with the power of his craft and his fictive vision, and went on to captivate the whole world with his theological and spiritual vision. Devoting his life to introspection and excelling not only as a writer but as a scholar and philosopher, Tolstoy has influenced a wide range of writers and philosophers, from Ernest Hemmingway to Martin Heidegger. His *Voina I Mir* (1869, *War and Peace*) and *Anna Karenina* (1877) are almost unanimously praised as compelling documents of human existence and are considered excellent examples of the realistic novel.

His own introspection of human psychology and society, and his conviction about life were projected in his novels through his heroes. In almost half of his short novels, Tolstoy attempts to identify the principle of life with reason. It is the human conscience (which is considered as irrational by Tolstoy) that brings about the essential change in his heroes. These changes often occur through mystical circumstances. In almost all his works, Tolstoy's fascination for the concept of morality remains quite visible.

After having created two of the greatest novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy decided to put down his pen. He withdrew into himself, gave up all his normal pursuits in order to find the truth his mind craved for. The personal crisis, or rather the spiritual crisis, he faced led him to write on such issues. This raised him from a writer to a religious leader, a sage and a prophet. He started questioning the problems of life in its socio-political and cultural context.

Vanity and sexual desires tormented Tolstoy till the end of his days. But it was the fear of death that tortured him insistently than the above two. Two of his finest stories of the later period are devoted to this theme (fear of death). And here in this unit, we would deal with one of them— *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. We would analyze the various themes, characterization and narrative techniques of this short novel.

The Death of Ivan Ilych is the first novella which Tolstoy published after his conversion to radical Christianity. It magnifies a man's struggle with how to live his life. It is a shocking account of the agonizing end of an ordinary man who has achieved all the pleasures of the world. It is the story of a man

who had been climbing the ladder of success and had become what he wanted to be—an imitation of what his superiors were.

Tragedy strikes Ivan Ilych in the form of a mysterious illness from which he fails to recover. His illness plays a vital role in bringing out the real self to him. He fails to understand the reason behind his suffering. As he ponders over it, the picture of his past rises before him. He starts doubting his own life: “What if my whole life has been wrong?” It is this doubt that leads to a new awakening in him. By the time he had seen the light of his awakening, it is too late. The harm is already done.

In this unit, we would look into the spiritual crisis faced by Ivan during the last days of his life, along with various other themes. We would look into the form of the story, a brief analysis of the themes and the characters which play a puppet into the hands of the writer. The unit would end with a brief discussion on the critical reception of the story.

3.3 THE FORM OF THE SHORT STORY

During the earlier period of his literary career, Tolstoy experimented with a fictional form longer than short story yet considerably shorter than a full length novel. The Russians have a felicitous word for this genre, ‘*povest*’, which is defined in their dictionaries as: “A literary work of a narrative nature, in size less than a novel.” We tend to designate various names to this genre of writing viz. novella, novelette, short novel, long short story and so on.

The term ‘short novel’ seems most adequately to suggest their form and content as well as the fact that in such tales Tolstoy was consciously preparing himself to undertake the full-length novel. However the terms ‘novella’ and ‘novelette’ are used to signify subsets within the broader category of short novels. ‘Novella’ is used in the sense of a short short novel, and ‘novelette’ is used in the sense of a very short short novel. Thus if the short novel is a genus, then the novella would be a shorter species (50,000 words or else), and the novelette would be an even shorter species (say 30,000 words or less)

The Death of Ivan Ilych is a novella. However some prefer to stick to the term ‘short novel’, for it seems more adequate to suggest their form and content as well. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* involves a number of characters and a frame of reference too extensive for a concentrated focus of the short

story, but is not extensive enough for the expansive structure of full length novel. So, it is safer to call it a short novel rather than venturing into various other terms.

3.4 TOLSTOY AND HIS WORKS

Born in a noble family at Yasnya Polyana (1828), Tolstoy (Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy) was raised by his aunts for he lost his mother at the age of two and his father died when he was nine years of age. At 16, he was sent to the University of Kazan. Soon he became bored of his studies and started spending his time on wine and women. When he started yearning for a more meaningful existence, he returned to his estate in 1849 and made several attempts to help and educate the serfs there.

In 1851, he followed the footsteps of his brother and entered the army in Caucasus. This is where he started writing *Childhood*. This became the first part of an autobiographical trilogy, which includes *Boyhood* (1854) and *Youth* (1857). Tolstoy called it “a jumble of events from [his friends’] childhood and my own”. He deals with the pain of growing up, the realization of his social status, and spiritual conflicts - themes that continued to occupy his artistic vision throughout his career.

The development of Tolstoy’s work may be compared to the peeling off of the leaves of an onion. The onion is the world, and the leaves are the deceptions of civilization that have obscured the precious centre. Tolstoy is convinced that the last leaf will reveal the beauty and goodness of life. (Wasiolek, 7)

In 1854, he took part in the defense of Sevastopol, descriptions of which were published in Nekrasov’s journal *The Contemporary*, attracting considerable attention for their unvarnished picture of war. In 1855, he quit his army service and devoted his time to his estate and literary life. His diary of the period reveals his intense dissatisfaction with his own life. “During this whole time I did not conduct myself as I wanted to conduct myself” (April 1847). “I am so weak! I must fear idleness and disorderliness as I fear gambling” (November 2 and 3, 1853). “I shall destroy myself unless I improve myself” (September, 1855).

He set up a school for peasant children on his estate, emphasizing a spontaneous approach to learning. In 1862 Tolstoy married Sophia Andreyevna Bers, a young, well-educated woman who bore him 13 children. However the marriage was not a stable one. During this time he wrote *The Cossacks* (1863) and his masterpieces *War and Peace* (1862–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1873–76).

The Cossacks is often considered by the western critics as one of his most beautiful works. The novel gives us an objective picture of Cossack life. The foundations of *War and Peace* rest in the deep and lasting interest in history which Tolstoy acquired as a young man (Christian, 97). *War and Peace* is a vast prose epic of the Napoleonic invasion of 1812. It illustrates Tolstoy's view of history as proceeding inexorably to its own ends, a view in which mankind appears as an accidental instrument.

Anna Karenina was written at a time when Tolstoy was going through a personal crisis. It is his most popular work, depicting the tragedy of a woman's faith in romantic love. What appalls the reader is the change that occurs in Anna. She changes from a beautiful, warm person to one who becomes increasingly querulous, petty and vicious (Wasiolek, 130). It reflects Tolstoy's changed view that joy is possible in marriage. The novel juxtaposes two main stories that reveal this theme; the sinful romance and doomed life of Anna and the innocent, hopeful romance between Levin and Kitty. Levin, the Tolstoy figure, gives Kitty his diary just as Tolstoy did. Levin ends his moral struggles by marrying young Kitty, moving to a rural estate, and putting his faith in God.

About 1876 the doubts that had beset Tolstoy since youth, fed by his Puritan temperament in conflict with his sensuality, gathered force. The result of his painful self-examination was his conversion to the doctrine of Christian love and acceptance of the principle of nonresistance to evil. He converted to extreme rationalism, rejected many government and church doctrines, disavowed lust and private property, and published pamphlets on his new ideas. He inspired a large following and was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Tolstoy's insistence on putting his beliefs into practice and abandoning all earthly goods led to a permanent breach between himself and his wife. His children, with the exception of the youngest daughter, Alexandra, sided

with their mother. In 1910, at 83, Tolstoy left home with Alexandra without a specific destination. He caught a chill and died at the railroad stationmaster's house at Astapovo.

Moral questions are central to Tolstoy's later works, which include the story *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1884), the drama *The Power of Darkness* (1886), and the novel *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889). To his last period belongs the essay "What Is Art?", in which he argued for the moral responsibility of the artist to make his work understandable to most people; he denounced acknowledged masterpieces, including his own earlier works. His last works also include the novels *Hadji Murad* (1896–1904) and *Resurrection* (1899–1900) and the drama *The Living Corpse* (pub. 1911).

3.5 READING THE STORY

The Death of Ivan Ilych by Tolstoy remains a compelling narrative for contemporary readers. It is significant because it portrays the reality of death which man refuses to accept. It portrays man's physical deterioration and subsequent spiritual rejuvenation at the moment of death.

The story is narrated by a third person voice, telling Ivan's story from what often seems like an objective point of view. The narrator narrates the events—both great and small—in Ivan's life in the same tone. Events that seem significant are often thrown together with the most trivial ones. His marriage, the death of his children, his 'fall'—all have been described in a very impersonal way.

As Ivan Ilych treats all aspects of his life, from his work to his friends and family, in the same decorous and proper manner, everything within his life is met with the same air of indifference. Perhaps it is the very same reason why the narrator gives him such an indifferent treatment as well.

The first section of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* takes place in Shebek's private room, where Ivan Ilych's colleagues first learn of his death. Instead of sympathizing, they are more interested in finding out who would replace the vacancy created by Ivan's death.

Ivan's temporal disease is first recognized in the opening line of the second chapter, when the narrator tells us that Ivan's life had been "simple and

commonplace - and most horrifying”. The horror seems to lie in Ivan’s approach to life. Friendship, one thing he had abandoned, is a condition that ties one to the social relations of the past. Hope is a condition that ties one to the future. He dropped his concern with the past and future so that he could devote himself to the empirical. He seems to have a faith that the past has no significance and the future holds little worth thinking about.

When Ivan’s colleagues hear about Ivan’s death, the first response to the news, by Vasilyevich is, “Now I’m sure to get Shtabel’s post”. The word ‘now’ points to the temporal position of the thoughts of these characters. But unlike the rest of the novel, in this first chapter the narrator shares the diseased view of time. The narrative of the first chapter—and the first chapter alone— shares this diseased sense of time in so far as a narrative can be assumed to convey some attitude about time.

The structure of this second chapter points to a different conception of time than Ivan’s—one in which the past and future do matter. The narrator does not allow us to see Ivan as a temporally isolated figure, as Ivan himself does. For most of the rest of the novel, the narrator follows Ivan’s life from young adulthood, and the narrative supplies its own past. We see events leading to other events, in a very clumsy sort of duration.

In the rest of the book, when the narrator is ‘telling’ us about Ivan’s problem, it is easy for the reader to use his distant stance to toss off Ivan’s problem as an easily identifiable one. But before we are allowed to enter this simple condemnation of Ivan, Tolstoy forces us, unwittingly, to view the world through a similarly closed mindset. This allows the reader to feel the visceral results of this mindset. We enter the chapter confronted by the spectre of a dead man, but never have to confront the idea of death because the deluge of empirical details numbs our emotions.

But we are also allowed to see how apparently safe this attitude is from the inside. There is no immediately apparent harm done by the narrator’s perspective in the first chapter. By allowing the reader to feel this, Tolstoy shows the reader that this is frequently an unidentified problem that we all fall into, and not one that we should easily ignore in ourselves.

3.5.1 THEMES

Spiritual death and physical death

Tolstoy wrote this novella when he was undergoing a personal spiritual crisis. The fear of death tormented Tolstoy insistently and therefore the finest stories of his later period are devoted to the theme of death.

The novel revolves around the theme of death. Various themes could be seen in death's shadow – death (physical and spiritual), denial of death, and detachment from life, and so on.

The characters in the novel are not ready to accept death as something that is natural to all human beings. People present at the funeral consider death as something that has happened to the deceased. To them it is an odd occurrence, and therefore they fail to understand the fact that death is an end awaiting everyone.

The tragic flaw in Ivan is his denial of death. He has always wanted to lead a comfortable life. He refuses to accept any kind of disturbance to his “proper and decorous” life. That's why when he falls, he is permanently laid down. He fails to come out of it, and his whole life is at stake. The death of spirituality in him refuses to accept the impending death of his physical self. However, being ill and just left to himself as a lonely dejected soul, he devotes his time to self-introspection. He is uncertain of the final value of his earthly existence. He realizes that his whole life had been wronged. He fails to find answers to the important questions in life. He tries to understand the people around him who are exactly like what he has been to them. The presence of Gerasim adds new meaning to his life. There is a spiritual awakening in him. He is now no more afraid of death, and is ready to accept it with open hands. So we can see that spiritual death and physical death go hand in hand with each other. It is because of the spiritual death; Ivan refuses to accept physical death. When he comes out of his spiritual crisis, he is ready to accept his own death. The acceptance or denial of death depends on how one chooses to live his life. This is quite evident in the case of Ivan.

Cruel indifference towards others

The characters (almost all, except Gerasim) lead a very artificial life. Theirs is a life of deception which hides the true meaning of life. Throughout the novel, we find characters having a shallow relationship with others. They

don't seem to be worried about each other's welfare. In fact it's the other way round. There is a self-serving attitude behind every relationship one has. Everyone is indifferent to the woes of others.

Ivan tries to avoid the problems of his wife when she is pregnant. He feels that she is doing it intentionally, so he does not care to find out about her needs. He shows sheer indifference towards her. However she reciprocates with the same level of indifference when her husband falls ill and fails to recover from it. She reprimands him for not taking his medicine on time, and hires a peasant to take care of him. She is indifferent towards his suffering, and ignores the fact that he is dying. His daughter too is the same for she is more interested in her romantic life than in the sufferings of her father.

It's not just Ivan or his wife who are indifferent towards each other. Even his friends and colleagues are the same. After his death, they are more interested in finding out who would fill the vacancy created by Ivan's death. Even Peter, the closest of his friends, attends the funeral for the sake of courtesy. His heart longs for a game of bridge with his friends, and wants to avoid the discomfort provided by attending the funeral.

However, the only person devoid of such indifference is Gerasim. He accepts the harsh cruelties of life and sympathizes with the sufferings of Ivan Ilych. He breaks down the isolation of Ivan by comforting him both physically as well as spiritually.

Corruption and power

Power is what Ivan desired. After graduating from his law school, with the influence of his father, Ivan was attached to the governor as an official for special service. However he liked to treat men who were directly dependent on him (especially the police officials) in a very polite manner as if he were letting them feel that "he who had the power to crush them was treating them in this simple, friendly way." He felt that every man without any exception was in his power, and he just needed to write a few words on a sheet of paper and that person would be produced in front of him as an accused person or a witness. This consciousness of his power to ruin anybody gave him pleasure. However he never abused his power.

While waiting for a more desirable post he kept declining many proposed transfers. He was expecting to be offered the post of presiding judge in a university town, but somehow Happe came in between and grabbed the appointment. Ivan became irritable and quarrelled with both Happe and his superiors. The superiors became colder towards him and passed him over when other appointments were made. This shows the corruption level that existed in the upper class society.

Suffering leading to redemption

Ivan's fall from the step-ladder brings out the twist in his story. He suffers a lot of pain. He is bed-ridden and fails to recover from it for a long time. However it is this illness which gives meaning to his otherwise meaningless life. The increase in pain increases his understanding of the shallow life he had spent. The pain grows to affect his usual activities—his dinner, his bridge, his relation with his wife, his work and his enjoyment. His pleasant aristocratic life becomes unpleasant and indecorous. He grows more irritating towards people around him. He comes to see the indifferent attitude shown by his own people. The pain is difficult to bear, and it gradually starts affecting his inner life. He starts questioning his own life. The past starts appearing in front of his eyes. Initially he feels that people around him are being very cruel to him. He sees that they are ignoring his pain; when they cannot ignore it anymore, they start blaming him for it. He realizes that it is his pain, and he has to suffer it all by himself. But disease, the isolation, the indifference of those about him, and his contemplation make him understand the fact that it is his own life that has been wronged. He tries justifying his life in vain. But it is in the final hours of his life that he gets to see the truth of his life. And it is this truth that makes him lose his fear of death. Through his suffering, he finds redemption. His final moments are not depressing or painful, but full of hope. Sincerity, pity, and compassion are all marks of a good life, and breaking through to them is possible even on one's death bed.

Disease

Tolstoy uses illness as a device to confront an ordinary self-satisfied mortal with an extraordinary situation, rout his confidence and reason, and destroy him. The protagonist who has been living a very ordinary life is struck down by a mysterious illness which even the doctors cannot diagnose. This illness worsens as he plunges himself into self pity. He becomes more irritable as he senses the indifference of people around him. He believes the whole

world to be cruel. However, he soon realizes the truth about the life he has been leading—a life of falsity. This leads to the attainment of peace in the form of death where he finally finds redemption.

Rural versus Urban

The theme of rural life versus urban life could be drawn from the life represented by the characters in the fiction. Urban life, represented by Ivan, is full of hypocrisy. All that matters to him is his material gains. Relationships are shallow. There is no bond of affection with his family members. There is always a fear of personal involvement in other's sufferings. Ivan's sole aim in life is to climb the ladder of success to become yet another aristocrat. In this desire to lead a sophisticated aristocratic life, he indulges himself in all kinds of pleasure. When his wife is pregnant, he avoids being with her. He does not care for her problems or her needs. The same is reciprocated by his wife when he is on his death bed. She refuses to accept the fact that he is dying. Even his so called friends are more interested in playing a game of bridge rather than wasting their time on his funeral ceremony, hence avoiding any kind of discomfort to their daily routine.

However, Gerasim representing the rural life stands just opposite to all these features of an urban life. He is everything that Ivan is not. He represents the rural life, considered to be the true life. Unlike Ivan, he is happy with his low life. He accepts the harsh cruelties of life as a matter of fact. The rural life helps cultivate mutually affirming human relationships which help break isolation and foster comfort through empathy. This is exactly what one finds in Gerasim. He sees others not as means to ends, but as individual beings. There is this self-sacrificing love for others that infuses his life with meaning. He is sympathetic towards Ivan's condition. He provides Ivan both physical (by holding the legs) as well spiritual support. He prepares Ivan to meet death as he himself is unafraid of death. Thus it could be said that the rural life lived by Gerasim is an authentic life unlike the artificial one led by Ivan and his friends.

Snobbery of the Aristocrats

Ivan's desire for propriety, decorous life and comfort is an attempt to survive in the world of false appearances. He spends the whole of his life in achieving what is right in the eyes of the society. He considered his duty to be what was so considered by those in authority. As a fly is drawn towards the light,

he was attracted towards people of high station. Even when he was qualified for the civil service; he ordered fashionable clothes and other accessories from the best of the shops. He amused himself pleasantly and decorously. When he finds himself in a suitable profession with a high salary, he buys his dream house and goes for the best of the interior decorations. To the world outside, he is a happy man with all the comforts of life. Unfortunately all this pleasantness does not help him. The aristocratic life that he leads is shallow from inside and is full of deception. It is a life devoid of compassion. He lives in a world of make-believe, from which he fails to come out.

Conjugal life

Unhappy marriages seem to be a common theme in Tolstoy's novels, especially those written in the later half of his life. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* has another unhappy marriage. As Ivan tends to follow what his superiors have been doing, he marries Praskovya Fedorovna as is expected of him. However the marriage becomes an unhappy one as she becomes pregnant. Ivan feels that she is doing things to draw his attention. The proper and decorous lifestyle cherished by Ivan and also by the society is disrupted because of her behaviour. Instead of paying attention to her emotions and her needs, Ivan drifts away from family life. In order to escape from his discomfort, he starts keeping himself busy with work. He tries to carve out a life independent of her. He plays bridge with his friends and adopts a formal attitude towards his family.

Praskovya starts reciprocating his indifference. She is no more emotionally intimate with him. Even when her husband is dying, she does not acknowledge the seriousness of the situation. She blames him for his own sufferings. She reprimands him for not taking his medicines and suggests that he should meet more doctors. This indifference leads to sheer hatred in Ivan's heart. However, she indulges in self pity and believes herself to be extremely tolerant towards his moans. Even when he is dead, she is more interested in knowing whether she would be able to get some money from the government. Such is the sad status of the marriage between Ivan and Praskovya.

Hedonism

Hedonism is an important theme in the novel, which finally leads to the 'fall' of Ivan. He craves for the ultimate pleasure without any pain. He imitates his superiors and aims for higher rank. He has a reasonably good salary

with which he buys the house of his dreams. He tries to decorate his house according to the standard set by the society he is part of. He expects everything to be perfect, and tends to become intolerant to any kind of tampering with the interior decoration. In his attempt to fix up the curtains (which had been disturbed), he has a fall that makes him permanently ill. In the beginning, we find him to be so very particular about his proper comfortable life that he even doesn't care for his wife's feelings. Even when she is pregnant, instead of attending to her needs, he would rather play bridge with his friends to avoid any kind of discomfort to his happy life. This is the very reason why he refuses to accept the fact that he is dying. He denies death for he has always wanted a comfortable happy life. Death was too much for him to take in.

SAQ:

1. What are the various forms of short novels? How would you classify *The Death of Ivan Ilych*? (50 words)

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2. List out the major themes found in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. (60 words)

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3.5.2 CHARACTERS

Ivan Ilych

A life devoid of compassion and empathetic human connection often leads to a futile ending. Ivan's life is no different in this respect. The flaw in Ivan's character is that his life had been most simple and most ordinary, and thus most terrible. His life runs on the track laid down by his superiors. He just

wants to resemble them in what he does and where he lives. He is so obsessed with materialistic comfort that he grows increasingly intolerant to anything that threatens his well-being. In his pursuit of an aristocratic lifestyle, he doesn't even realize that he has isolated himself from the world. It is sad that he doesn't realize what he has been losing in his life. By the time he realizes it, the harm has been done. It is his mysterious illness that makes him understand the shallowness of his entire life. It is in death that he finds the real meaning of life.

Gerasim

The character of Gerasim stands in contrast with that of Ivan. A peasant who takes up the job of nursing Ivan during his illness, Gerasim is full of life and energy. His love for others infuses his life with meaning. Unlike the other characters in the novel, he is genuine in showing his compassion towards Ivan. He is ready to accept the harsh cruelties of life, and therefore does not ignore the fact that his master is dying. He provides Ivan with both physical (by holding the legs) as well as spiritual support (by empathizing with his plight). Even though he is poor, he does not complain about his situation. He is at peace with himself. It is from his life that Ivan gains the enlightenment. It is from him that Ivan gets the courage to come to terms with death. Gerasim, one could say, is a truly spiritual character.

Peter Ivanovich

Peter is Ivan's closest friend and colleague. Like Ivan, Peter's relationships with people are fake and shallow. In fact, all his relationships are based on a self-serving agenda. Even though he had known Ivan from his days as a student, he seems to be least sad about Ivan's death. He attends the funeral only for the sake of courtesy. He wants to escape from the unpleasantness of attending a funeral and longs to play a game of bridge with his friends. In fact he is more interested to find out who would be promoted to fill Ivan's position. He truly represents Ivan's social milieu. However he does get affected by the thought of Ivan's suffering, and does not fail to notice the expression of "fulfillment" on the face of Ivan's corpse. However he tries ignoring the warning that Ivan's dead face expresses, and convinces himself with the fact that he is alive and it is Ivan who is dead.

Praskovya Fedorovna

Though proud of her husband's successful life, Praskovya never seemed emotionally attached to Ivan. However, one cannot blame her for her behaviour because she merely reciprocated Ivan's cold and indifferent attitude. She tolerates Ivan and his grudges, and politely ignores the fact that he is dying. Even after Ivan's death, she is more interested in finding out whether she could get any financial help from the government. Her life is as shallow as her husband's was.

3.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The Death of Ivan Ilych is regarded as one of Tolstoy's masterpieces. Many consider it the *chef d'oeuvre* of the second half of his literary career. At the time of its publication, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* was considered to be a biting satire on the aristocratic class in Russia. The sickness of Ivan could be read as the sickness of the bourgeois of 19th century society. Later the critics focused their attention on the treatment of death in the novel. It was interpreted as the reflection of mortality of mankind. Some critics found the novella to be a perfect example of Tolstoy's didacticism. Reviewers have found similarities between Tolstoy's novella and Charles Dickens's *The Christmas Carol*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, and Tolstoy's own work, particularly the essay *Ispoved* (1882; *A Confession*). Some commentators drew a parallel with Tolstoy's own ideology and theology. The narrative has been considered by some reviewers as the embodiment of his post-conversion philosophical concerns.

The portrayal of an ordinary man facing his society's denial and the black tunnel of his own death has won Tolstoy the admiration of several writers. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* perfectly demonstrates a man's struggle with how to live his life. Several critics especially those of an existentialist bent emphasized the loneliness and isolation of Ivan Ilych. Ivan fights his own self when he is struck down by the mysterious illness and is confined to loneliness. However occasionally, some qualification is made to this view. Jahn, for instance sees Ivan's contact with Gerasim as a beginning to the reversal of isolation. George Gutsche contends that Ivan's death was not actually 'lonely'.

His wife and people around him pretend as if everything was normal. Besides his very young son, the one person who speaks honestly (without words) to the dying Ivan Ilych is the young peasant Gerasim, “wearing thick boots, spreading about him the pleasant smell of tar from the boots and the freshness of the wintry air, in a clean hempen apron and a clean cotton shirt with the sleeves rolled up on bare, strong young arms.” This is Tolstoy and the simple, powerful peasants, on whom he was to pin so many of his hopes for the future of Mother Russia.

The Death of Ivan Ilych is unremitting. When it ends,

“It’s over,” said someone above him.

He heard these words and repeated them in his soul. “Death is over,” he said to himself. “It is no more.”

Tolstoy named it *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. He could just as well have entitled it *The Death of Death*. (Igor Masarek)

Check Your Progress:

1. Describe the major characters in the novella.
2. Draw a contrast between the characters of Ivan Ilych and Gerasim.
3. Comment on the narrative technique used by Tolstoy.
4. Comment on Tolstoy’s role as a social critic.

3.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we attempted to familiarize you with the one of the greatest writers of Russia – Tolstoy, and his work *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. We also introduced you to the new genre of short novel experimented with by Tolstoy, and various other related terms: novella, novelette, very short novel, and so on. Apart from reading the story on the basis of its narrative, narrator and the plot overview, we also placed our focus chiefly on various themes in the novel. The theme of spiritual death which dominates the novel is interwoven with various themes like disease, suffering leading to redemption, snobbery and so on. We also emphasized a critical analysis of the major characters, primarily focusing on the contrasting characteristics of Ivan and Gerasim.

3.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Block 2

The Novel in Russian

Block Introduction

This block is concerned with one of the most famous novels of Western literature, *Crime and Punishment*, by Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky. You will read much about him in the block below but some of the details of his life are worth noting. Melchior de Vogû, in 1881, called him a “true Scythian” implying that he was alien to Western ways of thinking. This can be contested with the fact that Dostoevsky trained himself to master literary writing by educating himself in the European classics. Indeed, this novel at hand often reads like a well-worked and enriched creation drawing on diverse influences like Shakespeare, Dickens, Hugo, Zola, Poe, to name only a smattering of all the writers whom he admired and hoped to emulate. *Crime and Punishment*, however, stands beyond any pedantic comparison of these ‘influences’. It is perhaps too rich and complex for easy comparisons. For one thing, the novel maintains an almost perfectly symmetrical structure. All the six parts are nearly equally laid out with corresponding numbers of chapters. The epilogue works as a ‘supplement’ showing the protagonist entering upon a new graph in his life. The rest of the novel shows a kind of narrative not confined to any simple design of events and characters. All of this shows why the novel has been regarded as a psychological document charting the deeper corners of the mind of a man who has committed a heinous crime.

Dostoevsky’s commitment to the literary world led him to writing short stories, novels, bringing out the journal, *Vremya*, which was closed by censors in 1863, and then again the journal, *Epokha*. He contributed to the polemics of the 1860s and it might be interesting for you here to consider that Dostoevsky expressed decided views on the merits of both Westernization and Slavophilism. Dostoevsky’s four masterpieces deal with murder: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Some commentators draw a connection between this fact and his experience of the murder of his father by the peasants of the estate he had owned south of Moscow.

The novel reveals a close concentration on the contents of the protagonist's mind which brings it almost in line with a 'stream-of-consciousness' technique. But Dostoevsky did not actually carry out the original plan of the first-person narrative although there are very many moments when we intimately identify with the delirious anxiety that Raskolnikov is steeped in and then hold our breath in relief when he escapes the clutches of Porfiry. This is one of the reasons why French scholars sought Dostoevsky's insights regarding madness, murder, and hallucination. Freud's essay of 1928, "Dostoevsky and Parricide" is testimony to the importance he has for the study of psychology. Dostoevsky's reputation, however, went beyond the literary to the field of politics, religion and ethics. His immersion in controversies meant that till as late as the 1950s Dostoevsky's name was not included in the literary history of Russian literature. It was only around 1956 that the Soviets conceded to the restoration of his name.

You will enjoy reading this novel because of its rich complexity. It almost reads like a thriller which you cannot put down till a sequence of events is played out. Reading for academic purposes means that you pay attention to the smaller details in his portrayal of the murderer's psychology. Again, keep sight of the explicitly 'Russian' elements of the work. Our block here is fairly comprehensive so you should be able to find answers too many of the problems that bother you.

Contents:

Unit 1 : The Russian Novel

Unit 2 : Dostoevsky and his works

Unit 3 : *Crime and Punishment*

Unit 4 : Themes and Techniques

Unit 1

The Russian Novel

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Major Trends
- 1.4 Cultural Context
- 1.5 Important Themes
- 1.6 The Setting
- 1.7 Important Novelists
- 1.8 Summing Up

1.1 OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will take a look at Russian literature in general, and the Russian novel in particular. Due emphasis is put on the part played by Fyodor Dostoevsky. The desired advance from the part of the learner is a realization of the cultural as well as socio-political context which generated these profound works of literature. You should also be perusing the various modes of writing of fiction in Russia which culminated in a handful of classic novels. Thus by the end of this unit, you would be able to:

- *locate* Dostoevsky in the Russian literary tradition
- *analyse* his novels with regard to his contemporaries
- *survey* Russian fiction in its early as well as contemporary manifestations

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Russia has a rich literary tradition that stretches from the early 19th century to the present day. Its great men of letters have done particularly well with the novel, allowing themselves to be influenced by other strong traditions, such as the British and the French.

Stop to Consider:

During the centuries of monarchy, French has stayed for long as the rulers' language in Russia. During the Romanov dynasty, the vernacular has been considered unfit for literary practices. This, however, turned into a blessing in disguise, for being in constant communication with the Continent brought about many a wind of European literary leading into Russia very early.

Novels, in the present understanding of the term, emerged only during the 18th century. There are scholars who consider the novel to have originated much earlier itself, i.e. from Cervantes' Spanish picaresque classic *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (ca.1605). For argument's sake one will have to sanction a few other works, such as *Gulliver's Travels* (Jonathan Swift), and *Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe), as well into the league of early novels. Nevertheless, on a general consensus, it was only during the 18th century that prose fiction distinguished itself visibly from the earlier favourites: the picaresque and the romance. In Britain, we have, for instance, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1470) and an historic Romance *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* along with Swift and Defoe preceding *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson and *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding. The latter two were definitely products of the age, whereas the former are perennially read as allegoric romances.

Stop to Consider:

These are some of the key figures and works that prefigured the development of the novel in Europe:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (c. 1375): an alliterative romance in verse about an Arthurian legend concerning Gawain, one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

Malory, Sir Thomas (d.1471): Medieval English writer, whose most famous work *Le Morte d'Arthur* is a prose translation of a collection of legends concerning King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, selected from French and other sources. Coming towards the end of the medieval age, this book was a nostalgic return to the ideals of courtly love, heroism or chivalry, and honour that dominated the literature and culture of the Middle Ages. It is, again, one of the precursors of the modern novel as it came to be during the 18th century.

Troyes, Chrétien de: A 12th-century French poet who is known for his courtly romances on Arthurian themes, such as *Lancelot* and *Perceval*.

In Russian history, it was common to have prose writings in the early ages, for the land abounded in mythology and folklore of the indigenous kind. The earliest known prose writing in Russia, *The Primary Chronicle* (ca. 1113), happens to be a history of sorts. The work states that in Kiev, the Grand Prince constructed giant statues to several deities in the 10th century: Perun, king of the pantheon and god of thunder, lightning, and war with his giant axe; Dazhbog, god of the harvest and sunshine; Simargl, a winged dog who protected seed and new crops; Stribog, a god of the wind, cold, and of conflicts; Mokosh, also known as or “Mother-Damp-Earth” who was mother-earth, birth-giver and caretaker of all life; and Khors, the god of the sun, chaos, and darkness. The *Chronicle* however is cited as a far too incomplete list of the then pagan deities by contemporary scholars. The enormous number of deities and their multitudes of adventures that we find in Russian folklore could be considered as indicators of the vital imaginary world of the early Russian authors.

It should also be noted that these deities were very much a part of the everyday life of the folk. Ancient Russian lords, for instance, swore oaths by the names of Perun and also Volos (a god of livestock, commerce, and light). To further the discussion, it seems that the peasantry worshiped differently. Early sermons from the Orthodox Church make constant admonitions against worshipping “Rod” and “Rozhenitsa”, but these names almost never occur in official texts concerning the nobility. This indicates that these gods, whose names mean “Kin” and “Birth-giver”, respectively, were gods of the household popular with the peasantry (who was not so concerned with warfare and commerce). Later when Tolstoy or Dostoevsky would write about a dark intervention of gods in the life of man, they would draw their inspiration from these pure energies blended excellently with Christian monotheism.

Indeed, most importantly, popular folk-belief seems to have not been concerned as much with the gods themselves as with keeping in harmony with natural (and supernatural) forces. In Russian novels, we find a strong revival of this element of nature and its anthropomorphic role. However, there is also an argument which says that these strains of imagination were not the provenances of later literature. These folklorists/ historians call the early writings the “lower mythology” of Russia. Scholars like E. Anichkov,

who said that Russian paganism was “particularly impoverished; its gods were pitiful, its cult and customs crude,” constantly disparaged the attempts to link Russian literature with its indigenous folklore. However, it does not seem to have been so much crude as just very decentralized and complex. In Russian paganism, capricious spirits rule the world. They constantly troubled the peasant who did not pay him due sacrifices with pranks of varying degrees of mischief.

SAQ:

1. How would you place mythology and folk imagination as the wellsprings of Russia’s literary imagination? (50 words)

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2. Why does E. Anichkov flag the attempt to place Russian paganism as the provenance of the Russian literary imagination? (60 words)

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When Russia was “baptized”, the peasants did exceptionally well at accepting Christianity without giving up their pagan beliefs. This was despite the constant reprimands of the Church, but also in part due to the Church’s own actions. For example, it attempted to replace Kupala with a holiday that honoured John the Baptist. This only strengthened the “folk nickname” that the peasants had already given John—”Ivan Kupalo” or, translated loosely, “John the Bather”. The straw man used in the pagan ritual is to this day known as “Ivan Kupalo”, which must be sacrilege in most Christian religions. Yet this intricate interweaving of faiths is characteristic of Russian folk-belief, and is termed “dvoeveri” or, double-faith. Peasants also kept their beliefs in their various gods and spirits, although in perhaps altered forms.

Stop to Consider:

The Primary Chronicle (ca. 1113): A history of sorts, this chronicle speaks about the various mythological roots in the collective consciousness of Russia

Cervantes, Miguel de (1547-1616): Spanish master, who sealed the reading of romances in the age with his profound work *Don Quixote* (1605-15)

1.3 MAJOR TRENDS

The early history of Russia, like those of many countries, is one of migrating peoples and ancient kingdoms. In fact, early Russia was not exactly 'Russia', but a collection of cities that gradually coalesced into an empire. Russia, as we know it, emerges with the establishment of one of its oldest cities, Moscow, in the 14th century. As a sign of the city's importance, the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was transferred to the city, making it the spiritual capital of Russia. Even though Moscow was an established centre of power, the various dynasties that ruled Russia in the subsequent decades were not very concerned about bringing Russia to its fuller potentials. With the rapid changes in economic and political life that were taking place elsewhere in Europe, Russia was lagging behind by centuries till Peter the Great, a powerful and efficient king of Romanov dynasty decided to change all of that. The various reforms that Peter the Great envisioned, however, failed to take root in Russia, and it was not until the reign of Catherine the Great that his desire to make Russia into a great European power was in fact achieved. The history took to dramatic speeds with Napoleon's Russian campaign, and the Revolution.

Side by side, the history of prose literature was also developing traits and features of its own. Evolving through centuries in three major veins, Romantic, Realistic and Modernist, Russian fiction was coming of age slowly.

The Petrine age, responsible for the Westernization of the land, saw the flowering of Romantic imagination in literary circles. The Romantic age gave more importance to poetry than prose, and hence Russia witnessed its golden age of literature through poets such as Zhukovsky, Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov and Fyodor Tyutchev. The main body of literature of the initiator of the Romantic Movement, Zhukovsky, however, consisted of his more or less free translations from European literature. His main

contribution was as a stylistic and formal innovator who borrowed liberally from European literature in order to provide models in Russian that could inspire 'original' works. Zhukovsky was particularly admired for his melodious renderings of German and English ballads. Pushkin (1799-1837) was the most well-liked and well-known literary figure of this, and perhaps all, time. He pioneered the Russian vernacular movement, and in his works that blended drama, romance, and satire, Russia found its language getting a definitive structural glamour. His most admired work is a novel in verse: *Eugene Onegin* (1825-1832). It is also known as *Evgeni Onegin*.

SAQ:

Give an account of how and why poetry flourished more than prose in 18th- century Russia. (100 words)

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Pushkin played an absolutely unique role in Russian literature. Russian literature virtually begins with Alexander Pushkin. His talent set up new records for development of the Russian language and culture. He became the father of Russian literature in the 19th century, marking the highest achievements of the 18th century and the beginning of the literary process of the 19th century.

Alexander Pushkin introduced Russia to all the European literary genres as well as a great number of West European writers. He brought natural speech and foreign influences to create modern poetic Russian. Though his life was brief, he left examples of nearly every literary genre of his day: lyric poetry, narrative poetry, the novel, the short story, the drama, the critical essay, and even the personal letter. From him derive the folk tales and genre pieces of other authors: Esenin, Leskov and Gorky. His use of the Russian language

formed the basis of the style of novelists like Ivan Turgenev, Ivan Goncharov and Leo Tolstoy. Pushkin was recognized by Nikolai Gogol, his successor and pupil; and Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky, a classic Russian critic produced the fullest and deepest critical study of Pushkin's work, which still retains much of its relevance. Pushkin became an inseparable part of the literary world of the Russian people. He also exerted a profound influence on other aspects of Russian culture, most notably in opera. Translated into all the major languages, his works are regarded both as expressing most completely the Russian national consciousness, and as transcending national barriers. Pushkin's intelligence, sharpness of his opinion, his devotion to poetry, realistic thinking, and incredible historical and political intuition make him one of the greatest Russian national geniuses.

SAQ:

What is the importance of Pushkin to the literary evolution of the novel in Russia? (70 words)

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In the post-Romantic age, a realistic strain in writing set in. This movement could be cited with the emergence of such titans of literature as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. With this shift, poetry was taken over completely by fiction. Most of these writers belonged to the latter part of the nineteenth century. The latter part of the 19th century could thus be roughly regarded as the age of Realism. The names to be noted, mainly, are those of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky (both are referred to variously as the greatest novelists and their works are attributed with the finest strains in realist fiction). Other contemporaries are Ivan Turgenev, Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Goncharov.

Leo Tolstoy—who was a master-figure for a lot of people including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.—is remembered in world literature for

the two gems of fiction he has given: *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*. In their scope, breadth and realistic depiction of 19th-century Russian life, the two books stand at the peak of realist fiction. The Tolstoys are a well-known family of old Russian nobility; the writer's mother was born a Princess Volkonsky, while his grandmothers came from the Troubetzkoy and Gorchakov princely families. Tolstoy was connected to the grandest families of the Russian aristocracy, and always remained a class-conscious nobleman. He cherished his proficiency in French, and kept aloof from the general intelligentsia. Tolstoy's first literary effort was a translation of *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. In 1852, he completed his first novel *Childhood* and sent it to Nikolai Nekrasov for publication in the *Sovremennik*. Tolstoy did not believe in Westernized progress and culture, and liked to tease Turgenev by his outspoken or cynical statements. His lack of sympathy with the literary world culminated in a resounding quarrel with Turgenev in 1861, whom he challenged to a duel but afterwards apologized for doing so. The whole story is very characteristic and revelatory of Tolstoy's character, with its profound impatience of other people's assumed superiority and their perceived lack of intellectual honesty.

Matthew Arnold commented that Tolstoy's work is not art, but a piece of life. Arnold's assessment was echoed by Isaak Babel who said that, "if the world could write by itself, it would write like Tolstoy." Virginia Woolf argued that Tolstoy was "the greatest of all novelists." His first publications were three autobiographical novels, *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* (1852 – 1856). *The Cossacks* (1863) is an unfinished novel which describes the Cossack life and people through a story of Dmitri Olenin, a Russian aristocrat in love with a Cossack girl. *War and Peace* (1869) is generally thought to be one of the greatest novels ever written, remarkable for its breadth and unity. Its vast canvas includes 580 characters; many historical, others fictional. The story moves from family life to the headquarters of Napoleon, from the court of Alexander I of Russia to the battlefields of Austerlitz and Borodino. The novel explores Tolstoy's theory of history, and in particular the insignificance of individuals such as Napoleon and Alexander. *Anna Karenina* (1877), which Tolstoy regarded as his first true novel, was one of his most impeccably constructed and compositionally sophisticated works. It tells parallel stories of an adulterous woman trapped by the conventions and falsities of society, and of a philosophical landowner (much like Tolstoy)

who works alongside the peasants in the fields and seeks to reform their lives. His last novel was *Resurrection*, published in 1899, which told the story of a nobleman seeking redemption for a sin committed years earlier and incorporated many of Tolstoy's refashioned views on life. An additional short novel, *Hadji Murat*, was published posthumously in 1912.

SAQ:

Distinguish between the realism of and ingrained philosophy in Tolstoy with that of Dostoevsky. (50 words)

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Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821 – 1881) was the other important figure in the literature of the period. Known for a seething psychological insight into the human psyche, he is considered as one of those writers who pioneered Existentialist thoughts later in the 20th century. his *Notes from Underground* (1864), written in the embittered voice of the anonymous “underground man”, was named by Walter Kaufmann as the “best overture for existentialism ever written.” He completed a translation into Russian of Balzac’s novel *Eugénie Grandet* in 1843, but it brought him little or no attention. Dostoevsky started to write his own fiction in late 1844 after leaving the army. In 1845, his first work, the epistolary short novel, *Poor Folk*, published in the periodical *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*), was met with great acclaim. Dostoevsky was arrested and imprisoned on April 23, 1849 for being a part of the liberal intellectual group, the Petrashevsky Circle. Dostoevsky’s experiences in prison and the army resulted in major changes in his political and religious convictions. Firstly, his ordeal somehow caused him to become disillusioned with ‘Western’ ideas; he repudiated the contemporary Western European philosophical movements, and to instead pay greater tribute to traditional, rural-based, rustic ‘Russian values’. Even more significantly, he had what his biographer Joseph Frank describes as a conversion experience in prison, which greatly strengthened his Christian,

and specifically Orthodox faith (Dostoevsky would later depict his conversion experience in the short story, *The Peasant Marey* (1876)).

Dostoevsky focused his new found condemnation of Western European philosophy especially on the nihilist and socialist movements; and much of his post-prison work—particularly the novel, *The Possessed* and the essays, *The Diary of a Writer*—contains both criticism of socialist and nihilist ideas, as well as thinly veiled parodies of contemporary Western-influenced Russian intellectuals (Timofey Granovsky), revolutionaries (Sergey Nechayev), and even fellow novelists (Ivan Turgenev).

In short, Dostoevsky’s post-prison fiction abandoned the European-style domestic melodramas and quaint character studies of his youthful work in favour of dark, complex storylines and situations, played out by brooding, tortured characters—often styled partly on Dostoevsky himself—who agonized over existential themes of spiritual torment, religious awakening, and the psychological confusion caused by the conflict between traditional Russian culture and the influx of modern, Western philosophy. With the publication of *Crime and Punishment* in 1866, Fyodor Dostoevsky became one of Russia’s most prominent authors in the 19th century. Another of his great novels, *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in 1880. With these two works, his position in the literary imagination was firm-founded.

SAQ:

What are the major points of comparison and distinction between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky? (200 words)

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The Sovietization of Russia in 1917 brought about yet another turn of the screw, and saw the emergence of modernist literature in Russia. Maxim Gorky, Nobel Prize winner Mikhail Sholokhov, Valentin Kataev, Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ilf and Petrov came to prominence as part of this newly found Soviet literature. Whilst socialist realism gained official support in the Soviet Union, some of the writers—such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Boris Pasternak, Andrei Platonov, Osip Mandelstam, Yury Trifonov, Isaac Babel and Vasily Grossman—secretly continued the classical tradition of Russian literature, writing “into the desk”, with no hope of publishing such works until after their deaths. The Serapion Brothers insisted on the right to create a literature independent of political ideology. This brought them into conflict with the government. Even the authorities refused to tolerate the experimental art of the Oberiuts. Meanwhile, Russia had *émigré* writers such as Nobel Prize winner Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin, Alexander Kuprin, Andrey Bely, Marina Tsvetaeva and Vladimir Nabokov.

Stop to Consider:

‘Socialist realism’ was the officially approved style of art in the USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution which sought to infuse the spirit of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ into artistic endeavour. By these standards, modernist art came to be looked down upon as decadent bourgeois art.

The modern writers focused on themes where an oppressive regime’s lack of sensitivity curbs literary freedom. They also constantly experimented with forms of narration. The most famous of these authors, Vladimir Nabokov, had a great command of English, and his language in the controversial masterpiece *Lolita* (1955) won acclaim from the English-speaking community. Writers such as Pasternak were highly disillusioned with the system, and wrote their pieces with no hopes of getting published and read. Mayakovsky gained a high place in the literati of contemporary Russia, but found it unbearable to cater to the political urges over his imagination. This poet is hailed one of the best exponents of a school of poetry named ‘futurism’. In 1922, Mayakovsky wrote a short letter “On Futurism”, in

which he described futurism not as an aesthetic stylization, but as a tradecraft in words able to solve in words any contemporary problem. According to Mayakovsky, futurists made no distinction between the different genres of poetry. For futurists, love-poetry and the call for a struggle against typhoid are merely different sides of the same literary process, a process with the goal of presenting life not as it is, but as it undoubtedly will be and should be. It was thus surely a breeding of the nationalist dreams that writers undertook in Soviet Russia.

SAQ:

Attempt to describe the compulsions behind socialist realism. How would you distinguish it from social realism? (50 + 70 words)

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In fact, *socialist realism* remained the only permitted style in Stalinist Russia; writers like Nobel Prize winner Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (who built his works on the legacy of the Gulag camps) or Venedikt Erofeev continued the tradition of clandestine literature. In addition, Soviet authorities put pressure on the Nobel Prize committee to deny Konstantin Poustovsky the Literature Prize in 1965. The prize was awarded instead to Mikhail Sholokhov who was more loyal to the Soviet regime. Post-Communist Russia saw most of these works published and became a part of mainstream culture. However, even before the decay of the Soviet Union, tolerance for non-mainstream art had slowly started to grow, especially during the Khrushchev ‘Thaw’. Some works of Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov were published in the 1960s.

SAQ:

1. What are the major cultural contexts of the rise of the Russian novel?
(100 words)

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2. Who were some of the contemporaries of Fyodor Dostoevsky? (60 words)

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Check Your Progress:

1. Distinguish between the ‘European’ and the ‘Russian’ origins of the novel.
2. Write a note on the significance of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* in terms of his contributions to the language and literature of Russia.
3. Trace the historical reasons for the eventual close association of the novel with ‘reality’.
4. Which literary traditions contribute to the distinctive features of the Russian novel?
5. Relate *Crime and Punishment* to its background.

1.4 CULTURAL CONTEXT

The politics of the Soviet Union with respect to Russian culture was controversial. On one side, there was a politically motivated desire to create a “Soviet people”, which was expressed in the notion of Soviet culture,

exemplified by socialist realism in the contemporary literature. From the other side, there were periodical campaigns of preservation of national cultures. Every ethnicity had ‘great national writers’ and folk cultural practices were officially supported.

Russian architecture follows a tradition whose roots were established in the Eastern Slavic state of Kievan Rus. After the fall of Kiev, Russian architectural history continued in the principalities of Vladimir-Suzdal, and Novgorod, and the succeeding states of Tsardom of Moscow, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the modern Russian federation.

Stop to Consider:

Below is a brief sketch of the various ‘periods’ of Russian history:

Medieval Russia (988 – 1230):

The medieval state of Russia was the predecessor of modern states of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and their respective cultures, including architecture

Early Muscovite Russia (1230-1530):

The Mongols looted the country so thoroughly that even capitals (such as Moscow or Tver) couldn’t afford new stone churches for more than half a century. Novgorod and Pskov however managed to escape the Mongol yoke, and evolved into successful commercial republics. Many dozens of medieval churches, from the 12th century on, have been preserved in these towns.

Middle Muscovite period (1530–1630), Late Muscovite period (1612–1712)

Imperial Russia (1712–1917): In 1712, Peter I of Russia moved the capital from Moscow to St Petersburg.

Post Revolution (1917-1932)

Post-war Soviet Union: Stalinist architecture put a premium on conservative monumentalism. In the 1930’s, there was rapid urbanization as a result of Stalin’s policies.

The great churches of Kievan Rus, built after the adoption of Christianity in 988, were the first examples of monumental architecture in the East Slavic lands. The architectural style of the Kievan state, which quickly established itself, was strongly influenced by the Byzantine. Early Eastern Orthodox

churches were mainly made of wood, with the simplest form of church becoming known as a 'cell church'. Major cathedrals often featured scores of small domes, which led some art historians to take this as an indication of what the pagan Slavic temples should have looked like. The Saint Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod (1044-52), on the other hand, expressed a new style that exerted a strong influence on Russian church architecture. Its austere thick walls, small narrow windows, and helmeted cupolas have much in common with the Romanesque architecture of Western Europe. The originality, however, did not last long. And as more of Europhilism set in in the succeeding centuries, the churches and the belief too underwent a change from their Spartan austerity to Baroque plans. The first baroque churches were small chapels built on the Naryshkin family estates near Moscow, hence the name of 'Naryshkin baroque' often applied to this style. Some of these churches are tower-like, with cubic and octagonal floors placed on top of each other (the Saviour Church at Ubory, 1697); others have a ladder-like composition, with a bell tower rising above the church itself (the Intercession Church at Fili, 1695).

SAQ:

1. What kind of 'cultural' influences can be traced in the history of the territory called Russia? (70 words)

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2. To what extent do the settings in novels relate to the changes in landscape and architecture? (50 words)

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Speaking about the music culture therein, Russia being an amalgam of a lot of Caucasian as well as ‘russified’ groups always had a rich and interesting variety of music. Dozens of ethnic groups, each with their own forms of music, enriched the oeuvre.

The first important Russian composer was Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), who added religious and folk elements to classical compositions, composing pioneering operas like *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. Though these operas were distinctively Russian, they were based on the Italian tradition. Prominent Russian composers include Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and in the 20th century, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Shostakovich and Alfred Schnittke. Of these, Tchaikovsky remains the best known outside Russia, and his fame as the country’s most famous composer is unquestioned. He is best known for ballets like *Swan Lake* and the *Nut Cracker Suite*. In the 1910s romances (in exotic Russian, Caucasian, Gypsy and Italian styles) became very popular. The greatest and most popular singers of romances usually sang in operas at the same time. The most popular was Fyodor Shalyapin. Singers usually composed music and wrote the lyrics, such as Alexander Vertinsky, Konstantin Sokolsky, Pyotr Leshchenko. Musically and structurally based on romances are the bard songs (starting in the 60’s) and the criminal songs. The bard genre can be compared to the American folk revival movement of the 60’s, closer to poetry than music. Artists like Bulat Okudzhava, Alexander Galich and Vladimir Vysotsky all wrote their own songs, and the recordings were distributed underground. Prison songs were largely popularized by Arkady Severny. In spite of oppression from the government, the Soviet era too produced many significant musicians. Some émigrés remained popular abroad, like pianist Vladimir Horowitz, whose 1986 performance in Moscow, the first in his native land, was a landmark event.

In the 1960s, Vyacheslav Shchurov organized concerts featuring folk-singers from across Russia, beginning in 1966. Shchurov thus inspired a wave of singing ethnomusicologists who appeared among the urban intellectuals and recorded rural folk musicians. Perhaps the most important group to follow in Shchurov’s wake was the Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble. A group of musicians called bards arose at the same time. Generally ignored by the state, bards like Vladimir Vysotsky helped lead a popular return to traditional music. The 1960s also saw the beginning of Alla Pugacheva’s music career,

which still continues. The same period saw the birth of Russian rock with the band Pojuschie Gitary who created a style called VIA and later released the first Russian rock opera, *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Other rock bands of the era included Tsvety, Sinyaya Ptica and Golubiye Gitary.

In the 1980s, popular folk-oriented groups had arisen. The Cossack Kazachy Krug and Pesen Zemli became most popular.

Stop to Consider:

During the period of Soviet domination, music was highly scrutinized and kept within certain boundaries of content and innovation. After the fall of the USSR, western-style rock and pop music became the most popular musical forms in Russia.

The Russian language with its redoubtable resistance to easy translations, has carved a special niche for humour and political satire therein. As it happens with any language that is indulgent and rich in its verbal texture, Russian also generated a lore of humour and satire that is amazingly comprehensive in its scope. For most of Russian history, humour remained an expression of the human spirit. Under the ascetic dogmatism of the clergy in medieval times, human laughter was pagan and suspicious, and political satire was considered potentially dangerous under autocratic monarchies. Though independent political satire could be extremely dangerous during most of the Soviet period, the official satirical magazine, *Krokodil*, was given considerable license to satirise political events and figures of the day. In spite of, or perhaps even because of its oppression, Russian humour flourished as a liberating culture and a means to counter and ridicule the elite. During the Brezhnev stagnation period of the Soviet Union in the 1970s and early 1980s for instance, due to a relatively peaceful and politically stable environment, sharp political wit addressed social shortcomings. With the end of authoritarian regimes in Russia in the 1990s, the decline of political humour has been lamented as being a symptom of Westernisation. New features of post-communist Russian society, such as semi-criminal businessmen, instead led to the emergence of other stereotypes for satirical jokes. Typical of Russian joke-culture is a series of categories with fixed

and highly familiar settings and characters. Surprising effects are achieved by an endless variety of plots and word-plays. A specific form of humour is chastushkas, songs composed of four-line rhymes, usually of lewd, humoristic, or satiric content.

Dark humour and literary imagination

Dark humour has played an important role in the modern/postmodern writings all over the world. For one, the witty neologisms and startling situations put the reader in a presently impalpable state of emotion. Sometimes playing on the guilt of the reader, dark humour is one of the most ironic of all literary devices. Russia never wanted it.

1.5 IMPORTANT THEMES

It is a well-known truism that Russian subjectivity hopes to see and discover itself in the first place in the mirror of the 19th-century Russian classical novel. Russian literature is thus important for students of Russian history. It describes life, social ills, the development of ideas, political problems, and other issues that were relevant to the life of the authors and members of Russian society.

Stop to Consider:

Have you noticed the way in which the Russian novel is primarily a mirror of contemporary Russian life? The cloister seldom seems to be breaking in the context of the 19th-century novels. Attempt a write-up on this topic. Can you come to certain conclusions about the Russian philosophy of life as depicted in their literature?

Having been a vital response to life as a citizen as well as human being, Russian literature sometimes turns in a sour criticism of the ways of the political/judicial/policing mechanisms of the civilization. The literary masters are known for their contempt and renunciation of the written, codified, artificial law in their works. To ironise written law and legal proceedings is

a frequent device in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The written, artificial law, a man-made creation, is opposed to inner freedom granted by nature and life itself. Freedom cannot be determined by documented legal rights. Natural life itself is a zone of freedom. For that reason, Russia, as the incarnation of the natural, is synonymous with real freedom, as it does not have formal, written, legal freedom.

Russian literature proclaims life itself, freed from all external restraints, as the highest value. The inner freedom of a Russian lies deeper than all the external freedom of Western people, because freedom is synonymous with life. This inner freedom is completely realized when man, nature and life are fused, and not when man is separated from life, as it happens within the system of legal rights, which isolates the individual and forms the basis of 'city life', considered 'slavish'.

At the same time, the search for natural freedom within the space of the Russian novel runs against certain restrictions imposed on the individual by collective life, God and good, which in the Russian novel are considered the highest values: freedom, in the sense of the triumph of evil, that is natural freedom directed against nature itself, is excluded owing to the clear dominance of good. This dominance of good over evil in the classical Russian novel is guaranteed not only ideologically, but in the first place by its narrative structure. In the traditional novel, evil occurs always as an episode, that is, as an element of the plot-structure and in this way inevitably moves the story further, having a 'constructive function' in this context. The teleology of the novel's narration is in itself a safeguard for the good; in its movement ahead it reduces evil to a "moment". Each narrative is inevitably dialectical. Evil is destined to serve the good, that is, the continuation of the narrative.

This mechanism of the neutralization of evil as the ultimate possibility of freedom through its functioning in the teleologically organized novelistic narration is continuously demonstrated in Russian literature.

From time to time, Russian heroes think that nature and God are indifferent to their fate and to the fate of people in general; these thoughts, however, inevitably lead to a still greater belief and the change of their fate for the better.

To make references more specific, an attempt is made to give a miniscule account of all the major threads in Russian fiction by discussing the seminal works of fiction.

Eugene Onegin, the first classic work of fiction was a novel in verse by Alexander Pushkin. It is one of the most significant works of Russian literature. Pushkin, the father of Russian literature, is responsible for transforming the way Russian authors wrote from that point onward. *Eugene Onegin* also introduced many literary themes that future Russian writers would continue. Solitude and belonging are two of them. Dostoevsky's writing, which emphasized the need for spiritual redemption away from religious life, struck a real definitive chord of imagination in Russian (as well as the world) readership. *Crime and Punishment*, his celebrated work, is both a philosophical novel and a psychological one. The protagonist, Raskolnikov, represents one of St. Petersburg's desperate, poor, and hungry individuals who go to great lengths to survive. He is tormented by his own conclusions about soul and spirituality.

Leo Tolstoy's imagination spanned large canvases, and his thought was profound and philosophical. He wrote *War and Peace* as well as *Anna Karenina*, his two magnum opuses. Tolstoy's writing is marked by dense descriptions and plots with twists. Tolstoy, though a member of the Russian literary canon, is often studied as much for his life as for his literature. Tolstoy was so interested in peasant life that he often took to the fields to plough with them, even though he was a member of the upper class. The rhetoric of moral internal monologue was a favourite device for Tolstoy. He uses it quite often in the moments of crisis that his heroes would face.

This class-struggle also formed a significant part of the plots or by-plots in Russian fiction. The problem in communication between generations has also been a theme in major novels. For instance, Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* is a novel that attempts to illustrate the difference between generations, and the drastic changes in schools of thought that occurred in 19th century Russia.

Mikhail Lermontov wrote *A Hero of Our Time* using Byronian themes as well as the idea of the 'superfluous man' that appears so frequently in Russian literature. Generally, Russian fiction, outside a few masters, is replete with such type-characters, which nevertheless does not impair the joy of reading.

SAQ:

In what way do Tolstoy and Dostoevsky both infuse a humanist criticism of human civilization's worse extremes? Would you say that both these writers' works are imbued with their concept of 'humanism' ? (50 + 70 words)

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1.6 THE SETTING

The sudden change from the traditional, psychological way of storytelling to literary modernism in Russian fiction coincides with the tension of the city and village paradigms in fiction. This change in the setting of the novels as the nation progressed to receive the Revolution, modernism, and a new sense of unity is crucial for the fuller understanding of the intricately conceived worlds of many a Russian writer.

Space and Place in Literary theory

Literary theory has been recently placing a high emphasis on the way in which geography, landscape and the cartographic practices end up in making the invisible contours of a work of art or literature. Attempt to 'contextualize' Russian literature with regard to its drastic changes in landscape down the centuries.

In such works as *Eugene Onegin* and *Anna Karenina*, we have a glimpse of both the rural and urban scenarios. In *Anna Karenina*, the alter ego of Tolstoy has most of his pensive and profoundly philosophical visions back in his county. The city-dwellers Vronsky and the Karenin family are shown

incapable of such a deep understanding of the world. Tolstoy was one of those writers who loved being in the Russian village, and consequently depicted a true and appealing picture of the countryside. The opposition between natural freedom and servility as a theme is best discussed with regard to the setting of the countryside, and Tolstoy put this to the maximum use.

The understanding of the countryside in Russian literature is driven (at least in the beginning) by the idea of encroachment of civilized blocks over the Eden of the rural area. The conditions of civilization have a long tradition in European culture, and are symbolized in modern times in the first place by the name of Rousseau. For Rousseau, Nature functions as the bearer of the good, and civilization as the bearer of evil. By Nature, he means “natural man” who lives in the heart of everyone: the contemplation of external nature has, in the first place, the pedagogical function of resuscitating natural freedom and natural good which have been buried in the hearts of men by the conditions of civilization. It is this pedagogy which is practiced by the Russian novel.

The traditional Rousseau-theme is in this case, however, connected with the complementary and very important theme of Russia. The opposition between nature and civilization is understood at the same time as the opposition between Russia and the West, and Russian literature is on the side of Russia. In practice, the opposition between village and city in Russian fiction could be read as the opposition of Russia and the Europe.

There is nothing new here. The German romantics already used the opposition between the natural (village) and the artificial (city) to describe the opposition Germany/France, natural being on the side of Germany, although the entire conception had been borrowed from the Frenchman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Russian literature transfers the same opposition to the opposition Russia/the West, ‘Russifying’ Rousseau and placing Germany under the ‘artificial’ West, after having borrowed from the German romantics their rhetorical device.

So it shall be understood that it is not by chance that Russian heroes go to live in the country; their move is political as well as spiritual. The inner

freedom is completely realised only when man, nature and life are fused, and not when man is separated from life, which forms the basis of “city life”.

1.7 SUMMING UP

This unit has given you a brief account of the Russian literary tradition. Russian literature refers to the literature of Russia or its émigrés, and to the Russian-language literature of several independent nations that were once a part of what was historically Russia or the Soviet Union. Prior to the 19th century, Russia produced very little, if any, internationally read literature, but from around the 1830’s Russian literature underwent an astounding golden age, beginning with the poet Aleksandr Pushkin and culminating in two of the greatest novelists in world literature, Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the playwright Anton Chekhov. An attempt is made here to help you locate Dostoevsky in the Russian literary tradition and analyse his novels with regard to his contemporaries. This unit has also enabled you to make a survey of Russian fiction in its early as well as contemporary manifestations.

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Unit 2

Dostoevsky and His Works

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Biographical Sketch
- 2.4 The Works of Dostoevsky
- 2.5 Placing the Work
- 2.6 Summing Up

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit will give you a brief account of the development of the novel as a genre in Russia, the major novelists of Russia, as well as the ‘background’ of Dostoevsky, and some of his notable literary works. Thus, by the end of this unit, you should be able to

- *make* a quick survey of the development of the novel in Russia
- *connect* the life and career of Dostoevsky to the text you have to study
- *locate* this novel in the context of Dostoevsky’s career and literary history

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Russian novels have always captivated our imagination and attention. The development of the novel in Russia was closely linked to the political situations that prevailed in the country. The contradictions in Russian society, which on the one hand encouraged freedom of thought and innovation, but on the other hand suppressed any kind of political rebellion or discussions regarding the problems of the times, gave birth to fiction. The romantic traditions of France, Germany and the United States also influenced the Russian novel.

Under the tsars and the communists, Russians lacked the freedom to openly discuss politics or the problems faced by the people; hence Russian literature took a deep and serious tone.

Check Your Progress:

1. What other forms of fiction were prevalent in Russia before the development of the novel?
2. What social changes led to the development of the novel in Russia?
3. Attempt a brief description of the political situation in Russia in the 19th century.

Russian writers talked about social problems through the characters of their novels. Perhaps in no other literature in the world has character taken such a central position, especially in discussing questions of morality and humanness. The heroes of Russian novels were people who were good at heart but failed in life, and happy to be so. They were moral yet real, they failed but were still heroic. Russian novels offer a vivid glimpse of life as it is lived in their culture and their country. They mirror various experiences from the lives of the authors, as well as historical and social circumstances of the times.

SAQ:

‘Russian novels act as a mirror to life in Russia’. Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer. (60 words)

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The Russian novel tries to make readers understand the abnormal, exceptional, the superfluous and the misunderstood. The heroes of the novels in the 1840’s and 1850’s were different from the norm, and require a special understanding of their weaknesses. The richness and diversity of the novel

in Russia can be credited to the novels written between 1830 and 1870. In the 19th century, Russian literature underwent a period of explosive growth. The growth and maturity that Russian literature experienced between these forty years is specially marked in the novels.

The novel in Russia grew from a mere experimental form to a prominent genre. By the end of 1960, the Russian novel exerted a dominant influence in Russian literature. It had begun to acquire international importance, which later resulted in giving it a prominent place in the history of the 19th century European novel. These novels were a means to self-discovery by the reader. Karamzin points out that these novels had the power to move the heart and educate the mind. Idealism is an important feature in the evolution of novels in Russia.

The origin of the novel in Russia has been attributed to Narezhny. Narenzhy began his literary career when he was at Moscow University where he studied philosophy for two years. His prose fiction is marked by a coarse and humorous style, filled with long narratives about travel and adventure. His work was often misunderstood by his audience and criticized and oppressed by the censors. He is best known for the picaresque novel *The Russian Gil Blas*. Some of the other major contributors to the development of the Russian novel are Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy.

Pushkin is regarded as the founder of modern Russian literature. He created a unique storytelling style, mixing drama, romance and satire. He was born in Moscow, and published his first poem at the age of 15. He was also the spokesman for the literary radicals of the age. His best-known work is his novel *Eugene Onegin*, one of the classics of Russian literature. The predominant theme of this book is the relationship between art and life. Art is a reflection of life, and life also takes inspiration from art. Pushkin had a major influence on Russian culture, most notably in opera. His works have been translated into all major languages.

Mikhail Lermontov is the successor of Pushkin, and one of the major exponents of the Russian novel. Many a times referred to as “the poet of the Caucasus”, Lermontov was a romantic writer as well as a poet. His only novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, laid the foundation for Russian prose-fiction. This novel is basically a collection of five short stories, with Pechorin

as the protagonist. He symbolizes the alienation of 19th century Russian youth from Russia and the spiritual traditions of orthodoxy. The emotions that Pechorin goes through in the course of the novel are very common human emotions. This novel had a profound influence on later Russian writers.

The father of Russian realism, Nikolai Gogol is also the first writer to criticize the Russian way of life. Some of his major works include *The Overcoat*, *Dead Souls* and *The Government Inspector*. All his works are alive with vibrations of actual speech, and hence translating them is a difficult task. He brings to the surface the defects of human character. His best known work is *Dead Souls*, which deals with the exploitation of serfs by the Russian nobility. The protagonist of the novel is Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov. *Dead Souls* is an elegant, humorous and ironical account of the contemporary reality of Gogol's Russia. The influence of Gogol can be felt in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Notes From Underground*. Most of his stories have been adapted into plays or films.

Dostoevsky's work often depicts the dark, violent and tortured side of Russian life. His novels explore issues such as religious beliefs, guilt, personal identity, reason and free will. His novels are usually complex in nature. His characters cannot be cast into watertight compartments of black and white. All his main protagonists do not conform to the norm of "hero". They are multi-layered personalities struggling with the complexities of life and living. All his novels have deep psychological implications. His treatment of plots and characters make him seem quite modern. His best-known works include *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky is also known for his short stories. Some of his well-known short stories include 'The Christmas Tree and The Wedding', 'The Little Orphan', 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man' and 'The Grand Inquisitor'.

Count Leo Tolstoy is regarded as one of the greatest novelists of all times. His masterpieces *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* stand at the peak of realist fiction for his highly skilful depiction of 19th century Russia. Tolstoy's ideas of non-violent resistance had a major impact on some of the greatest leaders of all times like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Tolstoy's novels gave a realistic picture of the Russian society of his times. Matthew Arnold commented that Tolstoy's work is not just art, but a piece of life itself.

SAQ:

1. What are the larger themes in major Russian fiction? How far do they carry reflections on the Russia of their times? (50 + 70 words)

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2. Which novels fall within the category of 'realist fiction'? Name these novels and discuss why and how they are 'realist'. (50 + 70 words)

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The plot of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* revolves around Raskolnikov, a poor university student who plots to kill a pawnbroker, an old woman, Alyona Ivanovna. He commits the crime in order to test his own ideas about the notion of conscience, morality and human nature. He ends up murdering the old woman and her sister. Once the murder is committed, Raskolnikov undergoes immense emotional turmoil. He journeys through guilt and self-doubt, which makes him confess and suffer the consequences. In the course of his difficult journey, he meets Sonia, the daughter of a poor drunkard name Marmeladov. Sonia is a prostitute. She is portrayed as a pure and innocent soul. Raskolnikov first confesses his crime to Sonia, and then she encourages him to confess to the police. He does so. He is sentenced to eight years' rigorous labour in Siberia, and Sonia follows him there. Eventually, it is Sonia's selfless love that kindles the hope of resurrection in Raskolnikov.

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* revolves around Raskolnikov's spiritual and emotional turmoil through guilt, self-doubt, and final resurrection through Sonia, the prostitute's, selfless love for him.

2.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fyodor Dostoevsky was a journalist, short-story writer and one of the most famous Russian novelists. His works had a profound influence on 20th century novels as they penetrated the human soul. He is also popular as a writer with religious missions. His works includes *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. The novels of Dostoevsky had a significant effect on intellectual thought and world literature. He is amongst the most discussed authors in Russia. It is surprising to note that even in the 21st century, his work is as widely admired as it has ever been.

SAQ:

Comment on the six-part structure (and the final ‘epilogue) of *Crime and Punishment*. (70 words)

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The impact of his works can be felt throughout the world. One of the reasons for this is that his novels seem to be relevant even in our present times. Alex de Jonge rightly claims that Dostoevsky was an artist supremely representative, not only of his own age but also of ours. It is the philosophical, moral, psychological and political issues in his works that have interested readers. Dostoevsky’s powerful literary depictions of the human condition had a profound influence on modern writers, such as Franz Kafka.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is one of the major German fiction writers of the 20th century. Born to a Jewish family in Prague, Kafka is one of the most influential western writers. Some of his major works include *The Metamorphosis* (1915), *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926).

Robert Belknap tells us: “Dostoevsky’s reputation as a psychological novelist emerged chiefly in the West following de Vogue’s description of him as a spirit alien to Western ways of thought. French scholars turned to him for insights into murder, hallucination, and madness, and Freud’s “Dostoevsky and Parricide” (1928) has helped to make Dostoevsky a seminal figure for the entire psychological community.”

Dostoevsky's personal experiences enabled him to portray, with deep sympathy, characters who are emotionally and spiritually downtrodden, and who in many cases epitomize the traditional Christian conflict between the body and the spirit. This section will give you a brief account of his life.

Born into a middle-class family in Moscow, Dostoevsky was the second of seven children born to Mikhail and Maria Dostoevsky. Mikhail Dostoevsky, a retired military surgeon, was an alcoholic. He also served as a doctor at the Mariinsky Hospital for the Poor in Moscow, which was situated in one of the worst areas in Moscow surrounded by a cemetery for criminals, a lunatic asylum and an orphanage for infants. It was this environment that had a lasting impression in Dostoevsky's mind. It was perhaps this that led to his interest in and compassion for the poor, the oppressed and the tormented. He liked to spend time with the patients and stroll in the gardens of the hospital. After the death of his mother in 1837, Dostoevsky and his brother were sent to the Military Engineering Academy at St. Petersburg where he was taught Mathematics, a subject he hated. Shakespeare, Pascal, Victor Hugo and E.T.A. Hoffmann also formed a part of his studies. He received a commission in 1841, the same year in which he wrote two romantic plays: *Mary Stuart* and *Boris Godunov*.

Dostoevsky was an epileptic. He remained a victim of epileptic seizures throughout his life. His experiences with epilepsy are believed to form the basis for his description of the epilepsy of Prince Myshkin in one of his most famous works *The Idiot* and of Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*. From an early age, he had acquired a love for reading, especially the works of Nikolai Gogol, E.T.A Hoffmann and Honore de Balzac. His father, it is believed, was murdered by his own serfs and died in 1839. Some believe that the character of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* is based on Dostoevsky's father; however, critics do not support this claim.

SAQ:

How far can autobiographical elements be said to influence Dostoevsky's characterisation in his novels? (60 words)

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In 1842, Dostoevsky became the lieutenant. In 1843, he completed translating Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet*. It was in the later part of 1844 that he started writing his own fiction. His first work *Poor Folk*, a short novel was published in 1845 in the periodical *The Contemporary*. This piece of work was greatly appreciated. Thus Dostoevsky became a prominent literary figure at the age of 24. His next novel *The Double*, published in 1846, received negative reactions from Belinsky and many others. On April 23, 1849, Dostoevsky was imprisoned for being a part of the Petrachevsky Circle. Later he was sentenced to four years of exile with hard labour at a Katorga prison camp in Omsk, Siberia.

The Petrachevsky Circle was a Russian literary discussion group in St. Petersburg founded by Mikhail Petrachevsky. This group comprised of progressive-minded intellectuals consisting of writers, students, teachers, army officers, etc. These people were opposed to the tsars and the serf system. Dostoevsky was a member of this group. Other members include Pie Schcheyev Maikov and Taras Shevchenko. The discussion of the group centered around western philosophy and literature. This circle was closed by Nicholas I in 1849.

In the year 1854, he was released from prison and spent the next five years of his life as a private and lieutenant in the Seventh Line Battalion of the Siberian Regiment. This is where his relationship with Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva began. They married in February 1857. His experiences in the prison and the army resulted in changing his religious and political ideologies. As his biographer Joseph Frank rightly observes, his experiences in the prison strengthened his orthodox Christian faith. This is depicted by him in a short

story titled *The Peasant Marey* written in 1876. He was disillusioned by Western ideas, and turned to traditional, rustic Russian values. The experiences also influenced his works. In novels such as *The Possessed* and essays such as *The Diary of a Writer*, he criticized socialist and nihilist ideas. Even in the social circles, he mingled with conservatives like Konstantin Pobedonostev. In his post-prison essays, he praised the tenets of the Pochvennichestvo movement, a late 19th-century Russian nativist ideology, closely aligned with Slavophilism. A visible change in his post-prison writings was the emergence of dark, complex story-lines and situations, brooding and tortured characters and a constant conflict between traditional Russian culture and modern Western philosophy.

Kostantin Petrovich Pobedonostev (1827- 1907) was a Russian statesman, jurist and advisor to three Tsars. He was one of the prime representatives of Russian conservatism. During the times of Alexander III of Russia, he held the position of the Ober-Procurator and the Holy Synod, the highest position of supervision of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Slavophilism was a movement in 19th-century Russia, which originated in Moscow in the 1830's. Those intellectuals who were involved in it carried the logic of nationalism to its cultural conclusion. Behind the movement lay the history of Russian experience of Westernization in the 18th century. Slavophilism became possible only when Enlightened thinking was challenged by the romantic idealism of Herder, Fichte and Schelling. The Slavophiles rejected Western European culture, and wanted Russia to develop in line with the traditional values of the country. There were many branches of this movement. Some said that the Tsars were the essence of Russia, while others claimed that democracy was an integral part of Russian history. Slavophiles opposed socialism, and preferred Russian mysticism. They also opposed industrialization.

In the year 1859, Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg. In 1863, he traveled to Europe. In Europe, he met Apollinaria Suslova who later became the model of "proud women" in his novels like *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. His wife's death in 1864 left him completely devastated. His financial condition deteriorated, and it was difficult for him to take care of his wife's son and his brother's widow and children. All this led to a period of deep depression in his life. He suffered from an acute

compulsion for gambling, which left him penniless. It is said that one of his most famous works *Crime and Punishment* was completed in great hurry, as he desperately needed money. *The Gambler* was also written under similar situations. To escape from his creditors, he travelled to Western Europe where he met Anna Grigorevna Snitkina whom he married in 1867. It is during this period that he composed his greatest works.

From 1873 to 1881, he published the *Writer's Diary*, a monthly journal full of short stories, sketches, and articles on current events. The journal was an enormous success. In 1877, at the funeral of his friend Nekrasov, he gave the keynote eulogy. On June 8, 1880, Dostoevsky gave his famous Pushkin speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. It was from this famous event that he came to be known as one of the most famous Russian writers. On February 9, 1881, Dostoevsky died of lung hemorrhage caused by emphysema and an epileptic seizure. He was buried in Tikhvin Cemetery at Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg, Russia. His funeral was attended by forty thousand mourners. His epitaph is the epigraph of his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

2.4 THE WORKS OF DOSTOEVSKY

In this section, we will briefly discuss some of the major works of Dostoevsky.

Notes from Underground, written in 1864, is considered to be Dostoevsky's first masterpiece. The book is written in two parts. It presents the confessions of an underground man, whom Dostoevsky leaves nameless. In the first part, the man introduces himself as a sick and spiteful man. He criticizes the notions of free will, rationalism and romanticism, and makes an attempt to explain his ideas of life and being. In the second part of the book, the nameless man talks about his difficulty in relating to other people. Some other characters are introduced in this part to show the inability of the man to interact with others and to identify with the society at large. As we can see, the novel does not have a rigidly structured plot. It portrays the constant conflict in the mind of the main character between the rational and the irrational. Dostoevsky's underground man became a common character type in many of the novels that followed. The novel put forth Dostoevsky's

claim that human beings are sometimes irrational and controllable, that human needs are unending. This was against Marxist beliefs. Thus the novel was severely criticized by Soviet literary critics.

The Gambler reflects Dostoevsky's own addiction to gambling. It is interesting to note that he completed this novel, under great pressure, to pay off his gambling debts. He got the novel typed by the star pupil of Russia's first school of shorthand dictation and later married her. The novel is in first person narrative. The story is told from the point of view of Alexei Ivanovich. He is a tutor who works for a Russian family living in the suite of a German hotel. He is also in love with Polina. He succumbs to her wishes, and places a bet for her in the town's casino. He wins at the roulette table. This is his first experience with gambling. However, his lady love gives him a cold shoulder. Later in the novel he gets to know about the financial conditions of The General, the head of the family and Polina from Mr. Astley an Englishman who had a good deal of money. The Grandmother, on whom the General depended to pay his debts, refuses to do so. She asks Alexie to be her guide round the famous town. She ends up gambling, and winning a lot of money in the roulette table. Once the grandmother goes home, Alexei returns to his room where he is greeted by Polina. She tells him that De Grioux has helped the General clear all the debts, and that because she is indebted to De Grioux, she cannot reciprocate Alexei's love. Alexei, upon hearing this, goes back to the casino, and wins a lot of money. But Polina tells him that she hates him, and wants to be with Mr. Astley. The novel ends with Alexei gambling and hoping for a reunion with Polina.

One of Dostoevsky's most famous novels is *The Idiot* written in 1868. It seems that his desire to write this novel was to portray a good man through the main character of the novel: Myshkin. The novel begins with three strangers travelling to Petersburg in a train. It is in here that Myshkin meets Rogozhin. In Petersburg, Myshkin meets many people, and also develops an infatuation for Nastasya. Rogozhin also has an eye on Nastasya. Dostoevsky portrays Myshkin as a not so bright character. He is simple, innocent and not well-educated; so people consider him an idiot. But he is an honest, sympathetic and gracious person. It is due to his simplicity and honesty that he has to face many troubles. The novel suggests that in a world full of complexities, a simple, honest and innocent man is considered

to be an idiot, and the only sane place for such a man is a sanatorium. Through the character of Myshkin, Dostoevsky successfully brings out the contrast between the nature of the Russian society and the innocence and isolation of a good man. This is a relevant aspect of human society which rejects simplicity, honesty and innocence as idiocy. The characters of Myshkin and Rogozhin are perpetually contrasted. The novel succeeds in drawing a contrast between the good and the evil. Rogozhin and Nastasya are both affected by this materialistic society.

Dostoevsky's last and perhaps finest novel is *The Brothers Karamazov* written in 1880. This novel revolves around the brutal murder of a father by one of his three sons. Each of the three brothers is marked by a distinct personality. The eldest is Dmitri, a passionate and violent man who is desperate for money. The second is Ivan, an intellectual and an atheist; and the youngest son Alyosha who has love, faith and compassion for everyone. Critics believe that the traits are typical of Dostoevsky's own personality as well. The novel depicts the spiritual struggle between faith, doubt, reason, and free will. It explores the existence of God, the notion of forgiveness and the nature of truth. This novel has influenced some of the great philosophers like Sigmund Freud and Frantz Kafka. The novel begins with a family meeting of the Karamazovs to sort out their differences. The eldest son, Dmitri, is angry with his father. Both Fyodor and Dmitri are competing for the love of Grushenka. Dmitri threatens to kill his father. One of the brothers murders Fyodor. The fate of Dmitri is the issue at stake, and a lengthy exile in Siberia awaits him. This novel explores the conditions of the human mind under extreme pressure. It is also a study of the destructive nature of love, and the question of the existence of God.

It is evident from the discussions above that Dostoevsky's novels had themes which were relevant to his times and are relevant now. Most of his works address universal questions like the notion of good and evil, the existence of God, and the constant human struggle for survival. Through his novels, he tries to peep into the deepest secrets of mankind and grasp the true meaning of existence. His novels also have profound psychological implications. The recurring theme in two of his best known works *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* is murder. Psychological suffering follows murder. The characters undergo a process of transformation

in the course of their psychological journey. Thus his novels can be considered as studies of the human self, trying to explain the various conflicts and contradictions of the human self.

2.5 PLACING THE WORK

Let us now try and understand the Russia in which *Crime and Punishment* was set. The late 19th and the early 20th centuries were times of crisis in Russia. There was rapid industrial and technological development throughout the world. The United States, Japan and Germany began to emerge as greater and stronger powers. Russia was also growing, but it did not have enough capital to support the rapidly developing world economy. There was a political tumult in the country among the intelligentsia, and not only did this influence Russia's economic and social structure, but also led to impressive developments in literature, music, the fine arts, and the natural sciences. We will now look at the particular point in Dostoevsky's career when he wrote *Crime and Punishment*, and also try to understand why the works of Dostoevsky appeal to us even in the 21st century. Dostoevsky started working on *Crime and Punishment* in the summer of 1865. At this point in life, he was in a major financial crisis. He had lost all his savings in a gambling spree, and owed money even for his personal expenses. Thus he accepted a contract by an unscrupulous publisher, and signed over the copyrights to all his existing works, and also agreed to write a novel by the end of the following year. He was paid three thousand rubles, most of which was used to repay the debts. Penniless once again, he decided to concentrate on his writing, and thus was born the idea of a novel about a family ruined by alcohol. *Crime and Punishment* reflects certain aspects of Dostoevsky's life. This novel can be seen as Dostoevsky's reaction to the political situation in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky abhorred the nihilist and the radical movements. *Crime and Punishment* is a brilliant portrayal of a man who, in a way, resembles every man. Interestingly, two main events in the novel are devoted very little space in terms of pages: the murder, and Raskolnikov's punishment. He describes the execution of the murder in no more than a few pages, and Raskolnikov's punishment is mentioned only in the epilogue. Thus one might assume that he has kept the novel open to interpretations. Every reader can have his own opinion regarding the events in the novel. The novel sparks off a debate on a crucial question. Who is a

criminal – a drunkard who abandons his family, a prostitute, a pawnbroker who cares only for money, or a murderer? Are they all guilty or not, and thus raises a greater question: Who among us is not a criminal? This novel received a stunned reception from the public. There have been many arguments regarding the book: some critics view the book as political novel, whereas others say it is a tale of morality, yet others claim that it is a psychological novel. Interpretations might vary, but the fact remains that in *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky succeeded in creating a character that is outstanding and yet reflects every man. We may not identify with the character of Raskolnikov, but we will never forget him. He has crossed the boundaries of age and culture, and has occupied a unique place in world literature.

2.6 SUMMING UP

The introduction to this unit gives you a brief overview of the conditions that led to the development of the novel in Russia. This was done with the objective of helping you get a deeper understanding of Russian novels. The political situation in Russia had a major role to play in the literature of the country. Since the people's freedom of expression was curbed, they were looking for a platform to talk openly about the system. This led to the emergence of the novel. This section also gives a glimpse of all the major contributors to the development of Russian novels. It introduces you to the works of Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Lermontov and the like. What follows is a brief introduction to the novel *Crime and Punishment*.

The second section in this unit is a biographical sketch of Dostoevsky. This section discusses in detail the life of Dostoevsky and the connection of his life with his art. His experiences enabled him to portray characters that have a universal appeal. His understanding of the Russia of his times gave his novels a realistic aspect. He wrote his novels from his own experiences as well as the times in which he was living. Almost all his novels seem to have very deep psychological implications. His works influenced many great writers of the age. The next section discusses Dostoevsky's major works in detail. In the last section, an attempt is made to relate the life of Dostoevsky to the novel *Crime and Punishment*, apart from reviewing the reactions of critics and the general public to this novel.

Unit 3

The novel *Crime and Punishment*

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 The Story in Brief
- 3.3 The Characters
- 3.4 Summing up

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This will provide you with a brief summary of the text as well as a sketch of the important characters in the novel *Crime and Punishment*.

By the end of the unit you should be able to

- *analyse* Dostoevsky's mode of characterisation and
- *trace* the interrelations between different elements of the story

3.2 THE STORY IN BRIEF

Part I-Chapters 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

Crime and Punishment may be defined as a psychological novel, on account of the complexities of the psyche that is involved in the rendering of the plot. The technique that the author adopts in the narration is one embedded in passion and intensity. It is with immense craft that he conveys the entire gist of the novel to the reader when he plunges straight into the heart of the theme with his introductory passages that narrate the tug-of-war that becomes a constant crucifixion in the life of Raskolnikov, even before the crime had been committed. He delves in detail on every aspect of the "plan" that he intends to carry out, and the reader is even initially given a cue of the nature of his plan when he speaks of wanting to "attempt a thing *like that*". Later, we see him heading towards the home of an old woman pawn broker,

Alyona Ivanovna, with whom his plot seems to be intriguingly connected, as we see him taking notice of every single detail of the flat. He pawns an old-fashioned silver watch, promises to bring more things for trade, and then heads from the widow's place straight into a tavern. Here he meets Marmeladov, a middle- aged man, who under a spell of drunkenness, narrates to him the tale of his life. He speaks of himself as a perpetual drunkard who had squandered his entire wealth to satisfy his drinking bouts. He also confesses to having abandoned his family in such a plight that his elder daughter was forced to take up the life of a prostitute to make both ends meet at home.

SAQ:

Describe in brief Raskolnikov's meeting with Marmeladov in the tavern. What is its significance in terms of plot and setting? (50 + 60 words)

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As the story proceeds, we enter into a wider horizon of Raskolnikov's life. We begin to get acquainted with the persons who are closest to him, his mother and his sister. The path is opened in the form of a letter that his mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna writes to her son, the details of which tell us that the mother and the daughter are no better off than the son. It was under the compulsion of abject poverty that Dounia, the beautiful and educated sister of Raskolnikov's, is forced to take up the position of a governess in the family of the Svidrigailov's. She later gives up the job on account of licentiousness on the part of the head of the family, for which she also wrongly suffers blame. The letter proceeds to speak of Dounia's recent engagement with Pyotr Petrovitch, a middle-aged relative of the Svidrigailovs.

Raskolnikov is exceedingly unimpressed by the future prospects that his mother speaks of, and is determined to break off the engagement, which he realized was a burden that his sister had decided to take up for the sake of her brother. We see that the misery of his family serves as a further incentive for Raskolnikov to carry out his “plan”. The final nail in the coffin is struck when he overhears a conversation in the market, which tells him that the old lady’s sister, Lizaveta, was not going to be at home the next day.

SAQ:

Consider the dream that Raskolnikov has and connect its implications with his subsequent actions. (70 words)

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Preparations complete, with an axe that is hung on a noose inside his coat, Raskolnikov heads towards the house of the old woman; the journey being a torture to his criminal conscience that is troubled by the manifold dangers and obstacles that could hinder his objective. Luckily he overpowers them and enters into the flat, where he murders the old woman, and sets out to plunder her assets. Distraction arrives in the form of Lizaveta, who entered through the door he had carelessly left unlatched, and Raskolnikov is forced to murder her so as to conceal his first crime. Further trouble awaits him in the form of two men who come knocking at the door, from whom he escapes, a deliverance that can be accounted only to good fate. Raskolnikov comes back to his clumsy room, and can do nothing other than fall drop dead asleep on his cot, out of irrepressible fatigue.

SAQ:

How is Raskolnikov’s oscillation between horror and determination in the days before the crime is committed accounted for? Does it amplify the major theme of the novel? (80 + 70 words)

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Part II-Chapters 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

Raskolnikov has committed the crime, and life does not wait a moment to render rebuffs. The crime is in his veins, and so is the guilt, and also the awareness that he shall not possibly be spared of either for the rest of his life. Now, he thinks of ways in which to hide his crime from the glaring eyes of the world, he frantically searches for blood on his clothes, and later hides the stolen bounty under a rock beside an out-of-the-way courtyard, and it is in the middle of all this confusion that his terror is further incinerated by a summons to attend the police station, on the issue of an IOU that he had signed. The atmosphere of the police station, reeking with insensitivity and crime strangles him, and the suffocation is complete when he overhears the officers speak of the murder of the old woman, under the pressure of which Raskolnikov falls unconscious. After the fainting fit, as the author says, “his former terror mastered him completely again”.

SAQ:

What does Raskolnikov do to conceal his crime? How successful are his attempts? (70 + 50 words)

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The world that Raskolnikov now enters into is one of utter terror; stupefaction, illness, nightmares and hallucinations swirl his life into a mire of desperation that is bordered on madness, and the impotence that he senses is so intense that he even considers the option of suicide. Raskolnikov finds an unapprehended friend in Razumihin who voluntarily comes forward to help him in his illness, and arranges for everything including his food, a doctor, and even accomplishes in restoring an amiable relationship with the wrathful landlady, only on account of his personal charisma. The ghost of the crime continues to haunt Raskolnikov even in the snugness of his home, as his friends are not able to resist bringing up the topic, which had by then become a murder that attracted public attention in St. Petersburg.

SAQ:

Attempt an analysis of Chapter 4 (Part-II) in terms of the description of Raskolnikov's psychological fears in contrast with the attention that normal society around him gives to the murder. (80 words)

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The circle of vice is complete with the entry of Pyotr Petrovitch Luzhin into the scene, and the sight of him confirms Raskolnikov's worst fears for his sister. The meeting that ensues is stormy, and the man retires on terms that could not in any sense be called affable. It is at this stage that Razumihin and the doctor discover, to their wonder, that the only incident that seemed to interest and excite the sick man was conversations relating to the murder. In the chapter that follows (Chapter 6), we come to know that it is not only his

conscience that is stalking Raskolnikov, but also the law, of which we find a representative in Zametov. We find the officer in a restaurant, engaged in heated conversation with the protagonist. Raskolnikov shall make us aghast with his uncanny conduct, for he almost bluntly confesses to the head clerk of having committed the crime. But we see that the move was also brilliant from the psychological point of view, for it is precisely because he raved about the crime that Zametov instantly dismissed him as innocent. Every incident that Raskolnikov comes across is to him a blow on his head, as when he witnesses a woman attempting to commit suicide, from the site of which he heads towards the flat in which the murder is committed. His behaviour there is so overtly unsettling that the people around consider handing him over to the police, but later dismiss him, mistaking him for a madman.

The novel drips with blood as it oscillates horrifically between murder and death, now in the form of Marmeladov who is run over by a carriage. He is helped by Raskolnikov who recognizes the dying man, and takes him home, where he dies among much tumult. It is in an atmosphere of death and gloom that Raskolnikov, for the first time, meets Sonia, the daughter about whom he had heard quite a lot from her father. The true nature of Raskolnikov, his compassion and his capacity of love, is revealed to the reader in all its intensity when he silently tips off twenty roubles, which comprised all the money that he had, to Katerina Ivanovna. The scene where he asks little Polenka to pray for him is also one that shall be imprinted in our minds for its poignant beauty. He then returns to his home, and finds, to his rather unpleasant surprise, his mother and his sister eagerly awaiting him.

SAQ:

How would you describe Raskolnikov's obsession with the details of his crime—is it theoretical, or emotional? Compare his reactions to the scene of the woman's suicide and Marmeladov's fatal accident. (80 + 80 words)

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Check Your Progress:

1. What are the thoughts that occur to Raskolnikov soon after the crime?
Comment on Dostoevsky’s exploration of the criminal mind.
2. Analyse the perspective from which the scene at the police station is presented. Justify the view that Dostoevsky here presents a more ‘objective’ portrayal of the criminal protagonist which brings him into the arena of normal social interactions.
3. Show the expository nature of the conversation between Razumihin and Zossimov.
4. Analyse the rendezvous between Luzhin and Raskolnikov showing the question of social morality that underlies the novel.

Part III- Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Raskolnikov’s reaction to endearments on the part of his mother and his sister are no different from the cold shoulder he had been giving to all the people who had desired to approach him after the incident. He is hostile towards them, and his only desire is to be away from them; a stance that devastates the ladies, who is then consoled by Razumikhin. He himself was not then in his senses due to the drinks that were acting upon him, and his behaviour towards Pulcheria Alexandrovna and Dounia is rather strange. But he keeps his word to them and keeps them updated on Raskolnikov’s condition, and even brings to him a doctor. The day after that Razumihin profoundly repents the rashness that he had exhibited under intoxication, and is all but servile in his behavior to the mother and daughter, and they quickly become friends so close that Pulcheria Alexandrovna is willing to involve him in their personal affairs, namely, the hostility between Luzhin and Raskolnikov.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the view that the entry of Mrs. Raskolnikov and her daughter, Dounia, “domesticates” the protagonist? What does it suggest of the portrayal of the protagonist’s psychology? (50 + 70 words)

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Later they are back in the sick man’s room where he now awaits them in a better condition, but are not completely relieved as Raskolnikov was even then not willing to meet them. The sensible and sensitive Dounia discovers to her horror that their presence was making him irritable. The oddity of the situation is complete when Sonia enters into it, to invite him for her father’s funeral. The friends then go to meet the officer, Porfiry Petrovitch, so as to redeem the pledge that Raskolnikov had left with the murdered woman. Awkardness is evident in the air as the criminal and the inquirer meet, and their discussion on an article on crime that had been written by him ends in antagonism and gloom. Raskolnikov is excessively intimidated by Porfiry’s approach, for it makes him even more convinced that he has his cue and is on his trail. Horror pursues, when a stranger follows him on the road, calls him “murderer”, and then vanishes into nowhere.

SAQ

What is the significance of Chapter 5, Part Three? (75 words)

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Write a note on the discussion of ideas of ‘crime’ and the ‘extraordinary’ individual between Raskolnikov and Porfir Petrovich . (80 words)

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Part IV-Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Raskolnikov cannot recover from the shock, and he reaches home almost in a delirium, where he falls asleep. A new character has entered on the scene as he wakes up; Svidrigailov, the husband of late Marfa Petrovna, the man whose conduct had led to the dishonour of Dounia is there to meet him, and it is not only Raskolnikov but also the reader who shall get interested in this arrestingly odd personality. His conversation is one that is so cunningly woven that he is successful in justifying himself for the misconduct, without obviously doing so. He is even successful in making Raskolnikov agree to convey the news of his arrival to Dounia, and also let her know about the large amount of money that he intends to give her. Raskolnikov's seeming impotence is once again revealed as he does little to refute the arguments put forward by Svidrigailov, and almost blindly believes him.

The meeting that Pulcheria Alexandrovna had dreaded commences at their place as Raskolnikov and Luzhin sit at a table, and her worst fears come true when the two start accusing each other, as there is no love lost between them. The despicability of Luzhin's character is revealed as the conversation continues, and it prompts Dounia to call off the engagement. For once Raskolnikov is at peace, but his guilty conscience does not allow him too many moments of innocence, for it is steeped in sin. He cannot but renounce his mother and his sister, for the luminousness of their purity scorches him, and he goes away, demanding them not to try meeting him unless he wants to. He then bids farewell to Razumihin after requesting him to take care of his family, and the expression on his horror-stricken face reveals to his friend the reality of the situation.

Raskolnikov wants to walk the road of penitence, and he begins it with a visit to Sonia, and the scene that pursues is one that may be considered as one of the most scintillating moments of world literature. He kneels before Sonia, not Sonia the person, but Sonia the sufferer. She reads out to him the holy book, and he is surprised at her willingness to bear the cross, which certainly has an effect on him, and he promises to reveal the mystery behind Lizavetta's murder.

SAQ:

Comment on Raskolnikov's meeting with Sonia. How does Dostoevsky here elevate his narration to the level of the metaphorical? (80 words)

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Raskolnikov goes, as he had earlier arranged, to meet Porfiry, so as to give him a written complaint in order to redeem the articles that he had pledged with the old lady. As had been the case with their earlier meetings, the atmosphere is dismal as the two enter into conversation regarding the crime. It is a cat-and-mouse game that they play as Porfiry thrusts towards Raskolnikov questions regarding the article, in which Raskolnikov had written explicitly on his concept of crime. According to him, there were two kinds of people on the face of earth, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and he had maintained that while the ordinary had to abide by the rules of the country, the extraordinary had been granted freedom by Providence to break these rules when the situation demanded, so as to benefit themselves and through them the entire world. Raskolnikov had stated that the crimes that these extraordinary men might commit on their path to the accomplishment of a greater good must not be considered as a mistake, and must be neglected on account of their broader capabilities.

SAQ:

Do you think that Porfiry's approach to Raskolnikov is ingeniously psychological and at the same time humane? (70 words)

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The discussion gets on Raskolnikov's nerves, and he bluntly asks the officer to arrest him if he considers him guilty. Porfiry Petrovitch tactically evades all his questions and provocations, and does not give him any clue to confirm his doubts, but as he is about to leave tells him to stay back, for there is a little surprise awaiting him. But it turns out to be a surprise not for the criminal, but for the investigator, as the painter confesses to having killed the old woman, in the most decisive moment. Porfiry begs pardon for having so harassed Raskolnikov, and he in turn suddenly has a boost of confidence, which is further enhanced when the man who had earlier called him a murderer also seeks pardon, for it was the scene at the place of murder when Raskolnikov had gone there a second time that had convinced him that he was the murderer.

Check Your Progress:

1. Explore the view that the scene involving Raskolnikov and Porfiry Petrovich at the Spasskaya police station displays Dostoevsky's heightening of the state of the alienated criminal through terms like 'psychological', 'delirium' and 'game'.
2. Chapters 5 and 6 of Part IV show Dostoevsky exploring the problems of interpretation in criminality in elements like the unknown informer, the self-confessed Nikolai, or Porfiry's legal explanations for their ironic and metaphorical dimensions.
3. Compare and contrast Raskolnikov's theory of crime and punishment with Porfiry Petrovich's.
4. Compare and contrast the characters of Raskolnikov, Luzhin, and Svidrigailov in terms of the theme of criminality.
5. Discuss the exchange between Raskolnikov and Luzhin as the representation of psychological contrasts in character through the use of linguistic devices.
6. Comment on the significance of Raskolnikov's second confrontation with Porfiry Petrovitch.

Part V-Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Pyotr Petrovitch Luzhin, who had been piqued by Dounia and her family, is now in a fit of vexation, for it was an abominable blow on all the plans that he had formulated for his own future, and besides a huge blow on his pride that had considered himself an irresistible match for a lady who was not well off. He had expected the alliance to be considered as a heavenly blessing by the girl who had been slandered, and blamed the latest alteration in her decision to the money she had lately received as per the will of Marfa Petrovna. We are given a glimpse of his life in St.Petersburg as we are introduced to Lebeziatnikov, with whom he shares the lodging. Lebeziatnikov is the propagandist of a new revolutionary community that aims at eradication of conventions in the society, and the radicalism of his rather wild theories and conventions receives an audience in Luzhin, who expressively sneers at it. The conversation then shifts to the topic of Sonia, and Luzhin tells his friend to arrange a meeting with the girl. Sonia comes to the house at Lebeziatnikov's bidding, and listens in silent fear as Luzhin speaks to her. She nervously thanks him for the help he promises to extend to the family and disappears as soon as she is allowed to, with the ten-rouble note that he had presented clutched in her hands. Lebeziatnikov, who had till then not attached any particular virtue to his fellow roommate, now begins to shower praises on him for some queer reason unknown to the reader.

The funeral dinner that was organized by Katerina Ivanovna was in fact beyond her means for the variety of dishes that she had managed to lay on the table, and even then the dinner in the memory of her husband did not go as she would have willed it to. There was none other than Raskolnikov whom she considered worthy of sharing a table with her, and besides, the conversation somehow ends in mudslinging as Katerina Ivanovna and the landlady, Amalia Ivanovna, enters into an argument. The situation that was pungent enough in itself becomes worse as Luzhin suddenly enters into it, with a grave charge. He claims to have a hundred-rouble note missing from his bundle of money, and accuses Sonia of having taken it. Though the mother and the daughter furiously deny the accusation, it is proved otherwise when a hundred rouble note flies off from her pocket when it is searched. But Lebeziatnikov saves the girl from indignation when he claims to have seen the man dropping the money into her pocket, and adds that he had considered it to be incomparable magnanimity on his part. Every part fits perfectly well enough for Sonia to be acquitted as Raskolnikov resolves the

dilemma as to why he would try to humiliate the poor girl. Insulted and infuriated, Luzhin leaves the room, followed by Sonia who runs out of the house amidst the confusion that prevails as Amalia Ivanovna asks the widow and her children to clear her lodgings immediately.

Raskolnikov follows Sonia's trail, after having decided that "the" moment has arrived, and it is the greatest ordeal of his life as he puts across to her the cross that he had been bearing for months together. He makes a statement rather than confess, for he does not consider himself guilty in having killed someone whom he regards only as a "louse". Sonia is petrified as she listens to him and compels him to confess before the entire world. Raskolnikov is unwilling to do so, but all the same is aware that he shall once be caught, and asks Sonia to accompany him through all the hell that he shall have to wade through once the crime is brought to light. She is only too willing and her love for Raskolnikov is one that is almost saintly, for the pristine affection is one that disregards his guilt and grieves over the suffering that he has been through. As she promises to lend him a cross when he is initiated on the path of atonement it is ultimate reconciliation that occurs, not between mortals, but in the serene vistas of the immortal soul.

SAQ

Chapter 4, Part V, plays out a climactic scene. How is the reader prepared for it? Compare and contrast the 'revelations' that take place both in this chapter and in the one preceding it. (40 + 80 words)

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What is the psychological motive for Luzhin's attempt to slander Sonya? (50 words)

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The pathos of the situation is interrupted as Lebeziatnikov enters the room in search of Sonia, carrying the news of her mother's insanity. She could not outlive the insult of having been thrown out of her home and this wounds her off her senses, and she takes to begging on the street, forcing her children to sing and dance like the street urchins. Onlookers are aplenty, some revelling and some pitying, amidst which she falls unconscious in a fit of consumption, and within a while dies in Sonia's lodging. The despondency is somehow smoothed for Sonia as Svidrigailov comes up with an offer to take care of the orphaned children Kolya, Lidya and Polenka. Raskolnikov is chilled with fear and amazement as Svidrigailov, in the course of their conversation, alludes to the old woman's death.

SAQ:

Which do you think is more convincing, Raskolnikov's arguments for the crime, or Sonia's against it? (60 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. Give an analysis of Lebeziatnikov's concept of a radical society.
2. Assess the significance of the funeral dinner and the events that arise out of it in terms of what is revealed of the minor characters like Lebeziatnikov and Katerina Ivanovna.
3. Discuss the view that the theme of redemption is brought out through the figure of Sonya.

Part VI-Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Raskolnikov budes under the weight of the cross that he has brought upon himself to bear; there is not much of his former self that is now left, and he is a walking ghost that cogitates on nothing but the dilemma of a confession.

He is more often than not unaware of his surroundings or the people around. The thought of both Svidrigailov and Porfiry are equally petrifying, and along with this he is also disturbed by the distance that Sonia suddenly maintains with him, in the days that precede her mother's funeral service. We come to know from his conversation with Razumihin that he had been ruthlessly avoiding his mother and his sister who are deeply pained due to his conduct. It is as a consolation that he recommends Dounia to the love and care of Razhumihin, for he is sure of the love that would be imparted to her from this source. Razumihin goes away convinced that Raskolnikov is into some political conspiracy, and this is what agitates him. Raskolnikov's fears are fairly alleviated when Razhumihin refers to Porfiry whom he assumed was satisfied with Nikolay's confession of the crime, and believed in it.

The solace does not suffice for long, as Porfiry himself enters the room, and engages in a conversation with his suspect. Porfiry begins with an apology for having so exasperated the young man with his suspicion, and then gets into the details that had prompted him to ponder on those lines. The initial instigation had been an account of Raskolnikov swooning in the police-station, of which he had come to hear in great detail. It was then that the bait was laid, the rumours of the painter being the confirmed criminal, constituting a part of it. The assumption was further enhanced with the show that Raskolnikov had put up on his visit to Porfiry, when he had come to claim his articles that had been pledged to the old woman, and also his queer conduct on meeting Zametov in a restaurant. It was at a decisive moment that the officer was gifted with a solid proof when a person came up to report on his odd behavior in the flat on an evening, but things had unexpectedly turned topsy-turvy when Nikolay confessed. Unlike Raskolnikov's expectation he ends his talk by expressing his confirmed knowledge of his involvement in the incident, besides claiming that he had laid hands on solid proof. He forces Raskolnikov to confess, and it is the another instance of the author's genius on wings, when he speaks of how only sheer suffering could redeem Raskolnikov from the chasm into which he had inadvertently fallen.

SAQ:

Attempt to understand the ambivalence in Raskolnikov's feelings towards confessing his guilt. What is his understanding of penitence and redemption? Does it match Porfiry's concept of guilt and innocence? Do you think there is a mismatch in the way that the two of them understand words like 'guilt', 'innocence', 'suffering', or 'repentance'? (20 + 30 + 50 words)

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Raskolnikov cannot yet decide whether or not to submit to the purgatory, and goes to meet Svidrigailov for some reason he himself is not aware of. Svidrigailov, who had been until then a mysterious character to the reader, now reveals himself in his true colour and the impression that he creates in the reader's mind is despicable. It is his own words that explain to us that he is a womanizer and a gambler, and his attempts to justify his deeds shall only sow in our hearts, as it does in Raskolnikov's, doubts regarding his transparency in the relationship that he desires to renew with Dounia. It is not much that he talks about the crime, but Raskolnikov fears that he might use the knowledge for his own advantage in pursuing his interest in courting Raskolnikov's sister. Svidrigailov enters into the details of his past, of the circumstance in which he was forced to marry Marfa Petrovna, and also of how Dounia had allured him with her magnetic personality. He then tells Raskolnikov that neither he, nor his sister had anything to fear from him, for he had decided on marrying a young girl of fourteen.

Svidrigailov walks out of the restaurant, and to his panic, the reason for which is revealed later, we find him being followed by Raskolnikov. But he is cunning enough to drive him off his trail, and after the unpleasant conversation with the brother, goes on a pre-planned meeting with Dounia. The two go to his lodgings, and the conversation that follows tells the reader that Svidrigailov had tried a subterfuge of blackmail on her to prompt the

meeting. He had sent her a letter insinuating awareness of the crime of Raskolnikov, and on the personal meeting confirms the fact. Dounia is shaken to the hilt, almost faints, and is furious that Svidrigailov jeers at her despair. The bait is laid bare when Svidrigailov tosses an offer towards Dounia, which is a pact to save her brother in exchange of her love. He is frantic when Dounia denies and is almost on the verge of exerting force on her, for he was aware of the conduciveness of the situation, and did not want to let go of the rarely available opportunity. Dounia is aghast, and even threatens to murder him with a pistol she had brought over with her. The threat is not fulfilled, for she collapses, and Svidrigailov almost has his way, but for some queer reason the imploration in her eyes dissuade him and he lets her go. Svidrigailov then has a hasty day, for he throws away money to people under his patronage, including Sonia and his prospective bride, and then shoots himself on the banks of Neva.

Raskolnikov goes to meet his mother and his sister so as to bid them fairwell, and the scene is an emotional nimbus. He only tells his mother that he is going afar, but speaks in detail about the crime with his sister. Raskolnikov is still defensive and does not consent to have committed a sin, and blames his current status of impotence only on his incompetence. Dounia is shocked by her brother's radical concept of crime, success and society, but the two are reconciled in parting. Raskolnikov shudders at the torment and agony that awaits him, and blames it all on the people for whose sake he wanted to covet a better status; Raskolnikov blames it all on love.

Check Your Progress:

1. Do you think that Porfiry's approach to Raskolnikov in the chapter is sheer tactics or a sincere exposition of principles entrenched in him? Is Raskolnikov self-deceived? Support your answer with textual references.
2. What do you think leads Svidrigailov to commit suicide - a sudden desire for redemption, or hopelessness regarding the fulfillment of his plans? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Compare Raskolnikov who confronts his own 'denouement' with Svidrigailov whose criminality is brought out fully into the open. Is he a foil to Raskolnikov ?

Epilogue

Raskolnikov is now determined to bear the cross and expiate his crime, and takes from Sonia the wooden cross that she had earlier offered to him. He is astonished at the depth of the love and affection that she has for him for no viable reason. He is vexed by his awareness that she shall follow him to Siberia, and also that there was nothing to be done to make her revoke the decision. He sets off on his path of suffering, and on the way bends down and kisses the earth, begging pardon from the whole of humanity inward, and is considered by the crowd as a drunkard. He goes into the inquiry office once but then comes out discouraged, only to return and confess. The case proceeds and he is awarded with eight years of imprisonment, for which he is sent to Siberia five months after the sentence.

The novel concludes with the author giving a quick account of what happens afterwards in the life of Raskolnikov and his kin. Dounia gets married to Razumihin and their mother dies soon afterwards, not being able to bear the grief of her son's departure, of which she knew the reason. Sonia lives close to the prison and keeps Dounia updated on the news about her brother. The innate charm and sweetness of her personality makes her a favourite among the prisoners for whom she willingly conducts errands. Raskolnikov is initially indifferent with every one of the co-prisoners, and is disliked by them. Even Sonia has to suffer neglect and slights so as to be with him. He was disappointed with himself on account of the "idiocy" that had thrust him into such a pathetic situation, and yet could not resolve the crisis of not being able to detect in his self a tinge of repentance for the crime. But then, in an epiphanic moment, love blooms in him. From the moment that Raskolnikov falls in love with Sonia he discovers a new joy, a new light and a new aim in life, for he finally discovers the meaning of being alive.

SAQ:

What do you think is the reason for Raskolnikov's sudden change in his attitude towards life? (80 words)

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Check Your Progress:

1. In the final analysis, Raskolnikov's crime springs from 'theoretical' causes. Is there is any justification for this view? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Give a detailed description of Raskolnikov's initial days in the prison. How does he view his incarceration?

3.3 THE CHARACTERS

Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov: Raskolnikov is perhaps one of the most discussed and critically acclaimed heroes, not only in Russian but also in world fiction. Fyodor Dostoevsky undertakes a tangential diversion from the Aristotelian concept of the hero who was to be the embodiment of virtue and idealism, in the creation of his hero, who abides by the modernist concept of a realistic hero, and is more a representation of a cross section of the society rather than a model upon which the society is to be build.

The popularity that Raskolnikov has enjoyed among the literary circles owes perhaps to his complex psychology that renders him an interesting and intriguing character. Raskolnikov invents his own theory of crime, but is not for a moment spared of doubt regarding the justice of his action. When he tries to defend his crime in front of Sonia or Dounia, it is also his desperate attempt to relieve his mind of the guilt that gnaws and haunts him. Even as he structures arguments in his own favour, he sometimes loses thread and acknowledges that it was only his internal inertia that prompted him to formulate these speculations. The delirium that is persistent is an external expression of the internal torture that is unbearable, and it is all the more harsh because of its lethal combination with his unwillingness to surrender. The frantic efforts to acquit himself drain his energy to the dregs, and he finally has to let go of his life to the mercy of suffering and redemption. Though he wraps his horror in glossed up theories, the breakdown is inevitable; he commits the crime and yearns for the punishment.

An analysis of the character of Raskolnikov cannot be completed unless he is, for some time, thought of as student in his early youth, and apart from his crime. The details that are sporadically laid within the novel tells us that Raskolnikov was a diligent student undermined by his poverty, and we

come to know from the words of Razumihin that his spirits had been so dampened by his circumstances that he even disliked company. The agony arose, as Raskolnikov himself says towards the end of the novel, from the immense love that he had for his mother and sister and his ardent desire to help and protect them. This love is one that he cannot repudiate even when he is on the heights of agony and frenzy and circumstances compel him disguise it in hatred and evasion.

Raskolnikov's capacity for love and passionate desire is even more elaborately revealed in his exceptional relationship with Sonia. His love for her is ardent, even before he confides it to himself, for it is a combination of love and need. She is to him his sole hope and consolation amidst torment and bewilderment; she is his soulmate who is willing to walk with him even beyond the threshold of hell. Raskolnikov's relationship with everybody else in the novel is also painted in hues of love, and we shall see a streak of affection in his willingness to comply with their requests, even when he chides people like Razumihin because he considers himself unworthy of their love. The vigour with which he protects Sonia against the base objectives of Luzhin, the magnanimity with which he aids the dilapidated home of Marmeladov, and his instantenous reaction to any kind of suffering that he witnesses, reveal to us the true person that resides within his criminal psyche.

Raskolnikov, is thus a man of manifold dimensions, and it is precisely this multiplicity of his character that had carved for him a permanent niche in the arenas of world literature.

Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov – Sonia is perhaps one of the most enchantingly complex female protagonists created in world literature. Sonia is, in the tale, a personification of suffering that is taken upon for the sake of others. She enters into prostitution because she cannot stand the dire poverty of her family, and later walks willingly into the tragedies of life in Siberia, because of her incessant love for Raskolnikov. She is a meek and silent person, who has extraordinary resilience and an amazing capacity for life. She does not for a moment try to justify her position, and submits to the rebuffs of life and all the curses and blames that are dispensed on her. The stoicism with which she faces the hazards of life shall stir in the minds of the reader; not with contempt for a woman of ill repute, but adulation for a woman of unbelievable purity of the soul.

Dmitri Prokofych Razumihin- Razumikhin is a character that exists almost as a parallel and a foil to Raskolnikov, for he is also a student who is troubled by similar circumstances. But Razumihin's attitude to life and its tribulations is different, for he faces it with cheerful boldness. He finds for himself means of eking out a living in unfavourable situations, and so is capable of laughing his loud characteristic laugh at the challenges of life. He is capable of taking care, not only of himself, but also of his friend Raskolnikov when he undergoes a difficult phase in life, and later even extends it to his family. The adoration for the family is enhanced with the love for Dounia that inadvertently blooms in his young heart. The image of Razumihin that is framed is that of a handsome young man with indomitable energy, innate charm that wins over everyone; an uncomplicated young man with immense trust in life and in people around him, and also one who has an unlimited capacity for love, friendship and loyalty.

Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikov - Dounia, the dear sister of Raskolnikov is a synonym for pristine magic. She shares several qualities like self-esteem and compassion with her brother, and is angelic in her deport. Her love for her family is unconditional, as is evident from the fact that she is quick in forgiving her brother. The magnitude of her self-respect is revealed when she unthinkingly calls off her engagement to Luzhin the moment she detects insolence and condescension on his part. She is a strong woman who single-handedly resists the advances of a lascivious Svidrigailov, and also a dutiful daughter who stands by her mother in all her moments of woe.

Pulcheria Alexandrovna Raskolnikov - Pulcheria Alexandrovna is the devoted mother of Raskolnikov and Dounia, a woman who, despite her frailty, struggles to make both ends meet in her family. Pulcheria Alexandrovna lives solely for her family, is completely dependent on them for her emotional stability, and breaks down when catastrophe befalls the life of her son.

Pyotr Petrovitch Luzhin- Pyotr Petrovich is Dounia's fiancé and prospective husband when we first meet him in the novel. Even the initial account of the man that is given to us in the letter of Pulcheria Alexandrovna to her son's gives us the impression of a self-made and rich man who has so high an opinion of himself that he looks even upon his future bride with condescension. It is because of the contemptible attitude that the engagement

is called off, and the event exposes the malignancy in him when he tries to wreak vengeance on Raskolnikov by casting a slander on Sonia. He is a completely despicable character who has no inkling of what true worth means, and is equally disliked by every person in the novel.

Andrei Semyonovich Lebeziatnikov – Lebeziatnikov is the man of radical ideas who is all set for creating a revolution in the society. He provides moments of interest to the reader with his unusual theories on family, life and society, and speaks volubly about a radical association of which he is a member. He is, all the same, a good-natured man who comes forward to help Sonia when she is desperately in need of it, and later also provides aid to Katerina Ivanovna when she loses her senses.

Arkady Ivanovich Svidrigailov- Svidrigailov is a rather complex character who is a combination of outright cruelty and generosity. He marauds Dounia like a wild animal looking for his prey, and goes to all extremes to get his hold on her. Though his prospect of marrying a girl of fourteen only because the family succumbs to his will on account of their poor economic circumstances is anything but noble, his final gesture of supplying them with financial aid, and also the willingness with which he helps Sonia and her siblings unveils a different aspect of the man who was base enough to be arrested for debt and then was willing to marry Marfa Petrovna for the sole reason than she would relieve him of the prison. He is also a licentious man who holds affairs with several women, and even admits it to Raskolnikov. The death that he afflicts on himself is the conduct of a spirit that is broken apiece with distress and meaninglessness.

Marfa Petrovna- Marfa Petrovna is the landlady under whom Dounia served as a teacher, and the representation is that of a psychotic landlady. She is a shallow woman of capricious moods; she is quick to condemn Dounia when she finds her to be at fault and equally generous when she discovers that Dounia was not to be blamed. Her death remains a mystery, for it is never clearly stated in the novel whether she dies of a stroke or as a result of her husband's torture. She is a woman of no refinement who likes to talk around the town about her husband's misconducts, and at the same time is the benevolent woman who leaves Dounia a fortune as a compensation for the slight that she had caused to her name, and even arranges a match for her. The account of her that is given by her husband is

that of a parasitical lady who would do anything to marry him and keep him in her hold.

Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov –Marmaledov is an incorrigible drunkard who ravishes all his wealth and dooms his career because of his “unfortunate weakness”. He loves his family, but cannot do much to relieve them from the misery that has befallen them. He is a man of no spine who talks much, but puts little of it into action. He has no control over his life, and finds cowardly respite in submitting to his wife’s erratic moods, and finds a sort of masochistic pleasure in the torture that she inflicts on him. Finally he dies a death that is as pathetic as his life, leaving a feeble bunch of people on the threshold of doom.

Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladov- Katerina Ivanovna is the whimsical wife of Marmaledov who is utterly unhappy with her life. She blames her husband for all her misfortune, and lives in the happy memory of a more fortunate past. She is a woman of feeble temperament, who is haunted with unbearable agony when Sonia enters on the path of sin, and is heartbroken when her husband dies. The sick woman succumbs to insanity soon after her husband dies, and finally finds reprieve from consumption in the lap of death.

The children- The children of Katerina Ivanovna, Katya, Lidya and Polenka offer a kind of relief to the reader among all the pain that pervades him. They are also images that arouse pity in us due to their unfortunate situation in life, but all the same a picture of innocence and consolation, as when Polenka promises to remember Raskolnikov in her prayer.

Amalia Ivanovna- She is the whimsical landlady who has little mercy in her heart. She is quick to pick up a quarrel with the consumptive Katerina Ivanovna, and ruthlessly turns the family out of doors even when she knew that there was no place Katerina Ivanovna could go with her little children.

Pyotr Petrovich- He is an officer of ingenuity who knows his job well. The cunning with which he lures Raskolnikov into his trap is extraordinary. The technique that he employs in the investigation of the crime is not that of interrogation or brutality, but of psychological approach and interpretation that leads him straight into the criminal’s mind. His definitions and arguments place before us a man of deep thought and insight, and the partiality and

help that he extends to Raskolnikov in spite of being aware of his crime, presents to us a gentleman of fine sentiments and sensibility.

Zametov- He is the mediocre officer whom Raskolnikov tricks with ample ease when he puts up a show of being tired of being a suspect and hence confessing.

Alyona Ivanovna- (The Old Woman)- Raskolnikov calls her “a louse” who is of no purpose to anyone or of no help to the society, and the impression that she herself leaves on us is that of a self-centered old woman of no tender feelings, and the descriptions of her holding Lizavetta under her control, and the unscrupulous way in which she conducts her trade leaves in us no sympathy for the old woman.

Lizavetta Ivanovna – Lizavetta is a woman who is much discussed for the peculiarities of her physique. She is a meek young woman who lives under the complete subjugation of her sister and dies an unfortunate death when Raskolnikov is forced to murder her as she comes into her home at the wrong time.

Zossimov -He is the young doctor who treats Raskolnikov when he is ill. The doctor is immersed in self-adoration and has implicit trust in the theories regarding disease and its psychology that he himself has formulated. Razumhin puts him across as a womanizer when he warns him to keep off from Dounia, and also when he readily agrees to stay with Raskolnikov when Razumihin arouses in him hopes of an illicit affair with his landlady.

Nastasya Petrovna - Nastasya is servant in the house where Raskolnikov rents his “closet.” Nastasya brings him tea and food when he requests it, and helps care for him in his illness after the murders.

Ilya Petrovich (“Gunpowder”) - He is the police official whom Raskolnikov encounters after committing the murder, and to whom he confesses at the end of the novel. Unlike Porfiry Petrovich, Ilya Petrovich is rather oblivious and prone to sudden bouts of temper (thus the nickname “Gunpowder”).

Nikolai Dementiev - Nikolai is a painter working in an empty apartment next to Alyona Ivanovna’s on the day of the murders. Suspected of the murders and held in prison, Nikolai eventually makes a false confession.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do the major characters in the novel contribute to the development of its plot?
2. How important a role do you think the minor characters have to play in the novel?

3.4 SUMMING UP

This unit has helped you have an understanding of the major plot of the novel, and also a fair introduction to the characters in it. An attempt is made here to enable you have a more in-depth understanding of the text, and also be able to formulate a method of approach to the text. *Crime and Punishment* is one of the seminal texts in world fiction and Dostoevsky's mode of characterization and story telling contributes to the universal appeal of this novel. After reading this unit, you should be able to analyse and trace the interrelations between different elements of the story of *Crime and Punishment* for a proper understanding of the next unit on themes and techniques.

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Unit 4

Themes and Techniques

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 The Title
- 4.4 Major Themes
- 4.5 Narrative Technique
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal with the various themes that come together in *Crime and Punishment*. You will also be familiarized with the narrative techniques employed by Dostoevsky as well as the religious symbolism that pervades his work. After reading this unit, you will be able to

identify and analyse the broad spectrum of themes running through the novel such as the psychology of a murderer, notion of sin and atonement, rationality and irrationality, notion of duality, existential dilemmas, urban space, etc.

- *gain* an understanding of the narrative techniques and their significance to plot structure
- *obtain* a glimpse of Russia in Dostoevsky's time, specifically St. Petersburg.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

As students of Russian literature, we should learn to distinguish between the early works of Fyodor Dostoevsky and the works after his arrest in 1849. In his earlier works, he was not just a social critic, but also a critic of the human condition in general. His first novel *Poor Folk* has been

considered as a continuation of Gogol's apologia of "the small man" ("malen'kij chelovek"), but we witness a change in his writings thereafter. Dostoevsky's arrest in 1849 affected his style of writing, and as Professor S D Serebriany notes, "Russian society became more and more conspicuous" in his post-prison works. *Crime and Punishment* deals not only with ideas current in Europe at that time, but also with deeply religious concerns. The novel is an intensive study in human psychology. This is also closely bound up with issues relating to legality, justice, atonement and retribution.

This unit provides a comprehensive analysis of the themes in this novel, as they stand in relation to the psychology of human behaviour. We will also cover other themes like education, social obstacles, death, urban space as well as movements like nihilism and existentialism. You should be aware that owing to numerous editions, spellings of character names may vary from publication to publication.

4.3 THE TITLE

The title, *Crime and Punishment*, is significant as it denotes the broad structure of the novel. There are three stages of action in the novel: first while Raskolnikov is planning the murder; secondly, when he commits the act; and most importantly, the 'punishment' that follows. The title is slightly misleading in the sense that it seems to refer to a straightforward crime or detective novel, in which a crime is committed and the criminal is caught and punished. It is, in reality, much more complex than that. Simultaneously, it is also a psychological portrayal of a criminal, in which he suffers enormously for his crime, not through torture or imprisonment, but by being haunted by his own conscience. Raskolnikov is not just a criminal, but a human being – an intelligent young student for whom we feel a lot of empathy, and to whom we relate. Through the choice of his protagonist, Dostoevsky may be implying that the feelings which bring about crimes of this sort are inherent in everyone, and that everyone is capable of it. But he is equally implying that Raskolnikov's reformation, which arises out of his 'punishment', is also achievable by everyone.

SAQ:

Is the title self-explanatory? How far, do you think, does the novel highlight moral concerns in terms of the failure of legal systems of justice and the need for more humane senses of justice and crime? (50 + 70 words)

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4.4 MAJOR THEMES

Psychology of Crime and Knowledge

We already know that the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment* commits a double murder. Raskolnikov initially decides to kill the old moneylender and steal from her. However, what he does not count upon is the early return of the old woman’s sister, Lizaveta. In a moment of passion, Raskolnikov bludgeons the young woman to death. This does little to ease his conscience, since he has gone beyond what Olga Meerson calls his “ideological crime”. The way Raskolnikov sees it, the murder of the old woman is a service to society. He is merely fulfilling a principle. Lizaveta however, does not form a part of his scheme of things.

Let us understand the “ideology” behind the first murder. Raskolnikov belongs to a new generation that believes in the supremacy of power. Power is not merely given; it must be taken, and to take it, one must be daring. The moneylender, for Raskolnikov, symbolizes the “most noisome vermin”. She, by virtue of being “vermin”, takes from others, and deprives families of a happy existence. Raskolnikov almost seems Robin Hood-like in his declaration that this one crime will benefit thousands of others—”Shall not one little crime be effaced and atoned for by a thousand good deeds?” Of course, he seems quite the black version of Robin Hood. In his attempt to rid society of such parasites, Raskolnikov commits murder—a murder based

entirely on the ideologies he has formulated while living at St. Petersburg. Lizaveta has nothing whatsoever to do with Raskolnikov's ideology. Her murder, unlike her older sister's, is not pre-meditated, and therefore, has a stronger bearing on the student's conscience. Yet what compels him from confessing to his crime until the very end of the novel? The answer to this question would lie with the word itself, *crime*.

Dostoevsky was well-versed with criminal psychology, having closely followed the cases of the most infamous criminals of his time. The Lacenaire trial took place in 1835, and the transcripts were considered the most well-documented insights into the criminal psyche. *Crime and Punishment*, however, proved to be a literary masterpiece moving far beyond the Lacenaire transcripts. Dostoevsky used Lacenaire as a case study for his 1866 novel, and combined this with all his research on psychoanalysis. What was central to the Lacenaire case was the criminal's contention that he was a "victim" of society. Lacenaire claimed that all the people he had killed were pre-destined to die since society was his one and only enemy. Shades of Lacenaire may be seen in Dostoevsky's creation of Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov. Although Raskolnikov does not ever state that society is against him, he does believe that society requires a re-organization. And one of the ways that would aid him would be the disposal of "vermin" such as Alena Ivanovna, the moneylender. Raskolnikov does not believe he has committed a crime, and continues to state the same even when both Sonya and Dounia learn the truth. The way in which Raskolnikov reacts to the acts that he has committed has a lot to do with the intellectual thoughts he has been exposed to. As a student of law, he formulates a certain theory to explain crime. He divides man into two distinct categories – ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary man is one who abides by judicial laws, what Raskolnikov refers to as a conservative. Extraordinary man, on the other hand, is permitted to break the law *if* it aids him in the realization of his idea. Ordinary man is content with the existing system. Extraordinary man, however, has the gift of the new word, and may commit crimes "in the name of what ought to exist". Herein lies a clear justification for Raskolnikov's crime. The murder of Alena Ivanovna is a right granted to extraordinary man. There is no doubt that Raskolnikov considers himself to be in the league of the extraordinary (even Razoumikhin remarks that his friend is exceptional). He considers himself a Napoleon.

SAQ:

Accepting the fact that Raskolnikov is no ordinary criminal, how far does the author allow the reader to empathize with the character? Should Raskolnikov be equated with famous literary villain-heroes like Macbeth?
(50 + 60 words)

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In spite of all of Raskolnikov's theories, he cannot escape his emotional responses to the situations he finds himself in. He truly believes that in the execution of his crime, he can be a Napoleon, that is, seize power without hesitation. What he realizes both prior to and after the crime is that there was definite hesitation on his part. The fact that he almost loses his nerve on the night of the murder greatly troubles the young student. He asks himself again and again whether Napoleon would hesitate to kill an old woman and steal three thousand roubles so as to secure his future. The answer is "No". Raskolnikov is unable to explain why exactly he cannot act like Napoleon. What he does not realize is that unlike Napoleon, his conscience is susceptible to the actions he commits. His ideological murder creates what Meerson calls a "sore spot". It is obvious that Raskolnikov is ill at ease after committing a crime, but he is more affected by the murder of the old woman rather than her younger sister. This is perhaps because while he can find no reason to justify the murder of Lizaveta, he spends the entire novel trying to rationalize the murder of Alena Ivanovna. We see Raskolnikov pass through phases of delirium, where he is unable to recollect clearly the events of the day. On returning to his apartment after the murder, he falls asleep on the couch, clutching in his hands the bloodied frayed ends of his trousers. He even forgets that he has buried all the loot under a stone near a marketplace.

The ‘Great’ Man and Society

Napoleon III was the first to formulate the theory that great men are permitted to act immorally and break the law. He postulated that men such as Napoleon I can do so without any hindrance to their conscience. This idea has been theorized in *The Life of Julius Caesar*. It is considered that Napoleon III was not able to do so himself, and therefore was hailed as the apologist of Napoleon I.

The psychology of crime and knowledge is integral to *Crime and Punishment*, as it forms the crux for other themes such as legal issues, retribution, justice, rationality etc. It is even more essential to our understanding of the use of wordplay and double meaning, and other narrative techniques. We know Raskolnikov becomes prone to delirium, and in this state of mind, is keenly aware of what goes on around him. One may be quick to dismiss his suspicions about Porfiry Petrovitch, but it is only through a critical analysis of the techniques used that we can justify Raskolnikov’s paranoia. It is true that he does become excessively paranoid, but it is quite valid in certain instances. The following themes will elaborate upon this issue. The psychology of crime is very closely linked to knowledge.

Comparison with *The Outsider*

The plot and themes of Albert Camus’s 1941 work *The Outsider* parallels much of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, in dealing with the state of mind of a man who commits a murder. Both protagonists, Meursault and Raskolnikov, are from the lower middle-class; both are well-educated and estranged from their respective societies. Existentialism was a popular literary genre in Camus’s day. Existentialism deals with questions of the meaning of life in the modern era, and questions of individualism versus social duty. The ideas of ‘bad faith’ and choice are central to it: those who blindly follow social rules and regulations, believing them to constitute their destiny, live in bad faith, i.e. in an inauthentic existence. Meursault, by making his own choices and taking responsibility for them, is an existential hero. Another central idea is *angst*, the existential dread, or a fear without a cause, which is responsible for Meursault’s alienation.

There are many differences, too, between the two works. *The Outsider* is set in French Algeria, in a colonised situation, which may be partly responsible for the protagonist’s feeling of alienation. Meursault has no family, and is cut off from

the rest of society—from both the French colonists and the Arab natives—whereas Raskolnikov is representative of a large section of Russia’s educated young people. His family and feeling of duty towards his mother and sister are central to the novel. Raskolnikov also finally accepts his role in society, though psychologically he is, for much of the novel, as much of an outsider as Meursault is. Camus, as an atheist, offers Meursault no salvation or redemption, whereas Dostoevsky bases his work on the underlying hope of salvation possible through traditional Orthodox Christianity. In *The Outsider*, Meursault is the only character of real importance, whereas *Crime and Punishment* teems with many complex and important characters. The ending of *Crime and Punishment* implies the possibility of Raskolnikov’s salvation and redemption through suffering, whereas *The Outsider* ends with the certainty of Meursault’s execution.

Biblical/Christian Allegory

The discussion of this theme will deal more with any Biblical allegories that we might uncover than with specific religious symbolism. The symbolism will form another discussion all together. Nevertheless, whether it is an allegory or a symbol, it takes a keen eye to pinpoint Christian allusions. The first character that comes to mind in this allegory is Sophia Semenovna. Sophia, also called as Sonya, is the eye-sore of the Marmeladov family. She is constantly ridiculed by Madame Lippevechzel because of the profession she has taken up, but Katerina Ivanovna is quick to defend her daughter. It would seem that everyone forsakes Sonya including her own mother, if we may consider the latter’s death as a sort of abandonment. Katerina entrusts the children to Sonya, wishing to die in peace. Yet this action is no different than any action she may have taken while alive. This is the case, primarily because Sonya was supporting her siblings, even while her parents were alive. Sonya also represents ‘wisdom’, and her role as the prostitute calls to mind Mary Magdalene. The only person who does not forsake her is Raskolnikov. In no way are we to assume that Raskolnikov is Christ-like, yet he is the one she falls in love with. If you recall the scene of the funeral reception, it is almost a parallel to the time Mary Magdalene is hounded by the angry mob of people. Luzhin, on arriving at the Marmeladovs’, accuses Sonya of stealing a hundred-rouble note from him. The guests initially side with Luzhin, and threaten Sonya and her family. It is at this point in the novel that Sonya realizes that she will never be able to

escape what she really is. Despite this, Sonya emerges as a figure of protection. She evolves into the figure of the “little mother” who offers refuge to Raskolnikov both in St. Petersburg and in Siberia. And just as Mary Magdalene was witness to the resurrection of Christ, Sonya will bear witness to the resurrection of Raskolnikov. Her fervent belief in the raising of Lazarus, and the fact that she is able to quote it from the Bible paves the setting for Sonya to bear witness to the spiritual rising of Raskolnikov.

Raskolnikov draws a parallel to Esau in his rejection of everything that is good. Esau, it is said, rather foolishly gave up all that was good and that was offered to him. Henry M W Russell says that it is easy to mistake Svidrigailov for Esau, “yet Svidrigailov is far more sinister since he lives out a secular religion based on defilement”. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, does not take up a life of depravity. It is true that he commits murder, but at no point does he attempt to tempt others with evil or defile them in the manner that Svidrigailov does. Raskolnikov gives up his life as a student, and hands over his family to Razoumikhin. This is not done with the intention to commit evil, rather it is Raskolnikov’s endeavour to ease both his and his family’s suffering. Russell believes that Svidrigailov is more like a false Jacob who “labours for seven years to pay the price of his marriage to Leah (in the form of Marfa Petrovna)”. He makes no attempt at repentance, only caring to destroy as many human beings as he possibly can. However, Svidrigailov fails in tempting Dounia, and ultimately destroys himself rather than confront the truth that he has been a destroyer of lives.

Lastly, we come to Marmeladov, who LM Lotman likens to the drunkard in an ancient folk tale called “The Story of a Drunkard”. According to the tale, a drunkard sings praises to God on holy days and festivals. When he dies, he is denied entry into Heaven by Peter, Paul and John. The drunk man gains entry by pointing out their imperfections, and they are left with no choice but to let him in. Marmeladov’s vision of the Last Judgement is very similar to this tale. Just as the drunk man is allowed inside Heaven, so also in this vision, the Lord accepts all the drunk men, precisely because they think they are not worthy enough. In spite of being stamped with the seal of the Beast, they are given a chance at salvation.

SAQ:

Attempt to list those scenes in the novel when Dostoevsky makes the ‘Christian’ overtones clear and explicit. (the first important meeting of Raskolnikov and Sonya when he ‘confesses’) (70 words)

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Divided Conscience and Redemption

From the very beginning of *Crime and Punishment*, we witness a certain unease in Raskolnikov’s character. Although he has come to the decision that Alena Ivanovna must be murdered, he questions the execution of the act. Raskolnikov counters any such thoughts by silently reiterating his principles. Each time he is hesitant, the young student thinks about the dream he wishes to achieve. As already discussed in the passage above, ‘Psychology of Crime and Knowledge’, Raskolnikov wishes to create a better world that comprises superior human beings such as himself. When he *does* commit the double murder, Raskolnikov goes into a state of delirium, precisely because unlike Napoleon he cannot separate his conscience from his actions.

SAQ:

List those scenes (and passages) in the novel when Raskolnikov confronts the pangs of his conscience. (80 words)

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We see Raskolnikov oscillate between stubbornly adhering to his principles and desperately wishing to surrender to the authorities. Although initially, the desire to give himself up is strong, he gradually decides that there is no need to atone for something he does not consider a crime. If you remember, Raskolnikov thinks of marching straight to the courthouse just hours after killing the two sisters. "I will go and fall on my knees and confess all" he tells himself when he is summoned to the police station. His decision to stay silent on the murder has more to do with his fortuity than anything else. When he realizes the true reason behind his summoning, he is calm again. However, the moment a mention is made of the murder in the office, Raskolnikov has a fainting spell. His meeting with Porfiry Petrovitch convinces Raskolnikov that the magistrate is onto him, and he realizes that he will soon be apprehended. Even this is not enough to influence Raskolnikov into surrendering. He seeks out Sonya, and persuades her to escape with him. For Raskolnikov, defeat is not a viable option. It is only when he realizes that his Napoleonic idea is not feasible that Raskolnikov returns to Sonya so as to purge himself. He believes that it is his pride that prevents him from making as drastic a move as suicide. Dostoevsky truly captures the hellish state of an individual torn between annihilation, since he can only truly destroy himself after having embarked upon the path he has taken, and redemption. Raskolnikov himself declares "it was myself I killed!"

In a way, one might say that Raskolnikov's conscience prevails as he is exiled to Siberia for eight years. The ritual with the crosses performed by Sonya before the confession is testament to his desire for redemption. May it not be that what Raskolnikov seeks is not redemption, but a ceasing of the endless torture he has undergone? His decision to confess is driven greatly by his desire to live rather than to repent. In the Epilogue, Raskolnikov seems to display barely any remorse for the crime he has committed, although Dostoevsky suggests that the boy is ready for a renewal. What we *can* be sure of is Raskolnikov's divided conscience and a chance to start anew.

Nihilism

Crime and Punishment has been called an anti-nihilist work by many critics. It is an indictment of the 'new ideas' prevalent in Dostoevsky's time among the young, educated middle-classes. We see the parody of such new ideas in Raskolnikov, Lebezyatnikov, Luzhin and many other characters. The

philosophy of nihilism attempts to solve societal problems like poverty and injustice through the destruction of all accepted social codes. Raskolnikov is a nihilist in the sense that he advocates the dismantling of laws and regulations for an elite class of 'extraordinary people'. Nihilism, however, blindly discards both the harmful and helpful aspects of tradition, and suggests no coherent model from which to rebuild the destroyed society and bring about the realisation of ideas of justice and peace. Dostoevsky, justifiably alarmed at the violence inherent in such a solution, laments this trend in *Crime and Punishment*, sympathetically portraying the logical end of nihilism: the destruction of the nihilist himself.

Moral Ambiguity

One of the important questions that Dostoevsky attempts to wrestle with is the moral ambiguity of his character's actions. Can morality advocate murder? 'Thou shalt not kill' is one of the Ten Commandments, and yet Raskolnikov posits a theory that permits exactly the opposite. Let us take a little time to consider the nature of this proposition. The following is an extract from the novel in defense of Raskolnikov's theory:

'The next class, however, consists exclusively of men who break the law, or strive, according to their capacity or power, to do so. Their crimes are naturally relative ones, and of varied gravity. Most of these insist upon destruction of what exists in the name of what ought to exist. And if, in the execution of their idea, they should be obliged to shed blood, step over corpses, they can conscientiously do both in the interest of their idea, not otherwise – pray mark this. It is in so far that my article gives them a right to commit to crime.' (p 194)

The reader must pay attention to the use of the words "conscientiously" and "interest". It is apparent that what Raskolnikov is suggesting is based on what he considers to be a sound theoretical base. Only a *superior* being is permitted to *kill or commit a crime* if it helps in the progression of his *idea*. Raskolnikov refers to Mahomet and Napoleon remarking that all these men were forced to break what was considered tradition in their time so as to lay down new laws. Any of these famous figures who break with the will of society are tantamount to criminals. Raskolnikov takes this a step further, and advocates murder if the ends justifies the means. Such a view can very well lead to full- scale wars, mass-murders, even genocide.

Raskolnikov seems to balance this out by saying such individuals are one in a thousand million, and are hardly ever granted the right to kill. Often their end is met either through decapitation or hanging. It appears as though the death of the superior individual is more likely than the death of other men at his hand. Dostoevsky's stand on the right to take a human being's life may possibly be voiced by Porfiry Petrovitch. The lawyer is clearly distressed by Raskolnikov's moral declaration of the right to shed blood, but he states his position in lucid terms: moral license to kill is as terrible as legal authority to do so to the same effect. What Raskolnikov fails to realize is that no one has the right to kill whatever his justifications may be. What we cannot ignore though is his declamation that the conscience suffers after acknowledging the crime, and *that* is a punishment in itself.

The question of moral ambiguity encompasses not just Raskolnikov's "action", but also his character. We learn in the Epilogue that despite his cold exterior he is rather good-natured. While at the University, he greatly aided a consumptive fellow student, and upon the latter's death, Raskolnikov tended to the deceased's ailing father. Raskolnikov even risked his life to save two children from a burning house. These acts of courage and selflessness work in favour of mitigating Raskolnikov's sentence. Even so it presents a picture of the student that the reader is not made aware of until the very end of the novel. Raskolnikov becomes a character who is neither black nor white. Rather there exist in him two natures, something that even Razoumikhin alludes to. This ambiguity in Raskolnikov's character accounts for his similarity in some ways to Esau. The other morally ambiguous character in *Crime and Punishment* is Sonya Semenovna. The prostitute of the novel is also the saint. Although she is repeatedly forsaken by society, she does not abandon her faith. It is ironic that the woman who is considered to be the most sinful carries within her the capacity for renewal - not just for herself but for others as well. She is, in a way, the saving grace of her family. She is also Raskolnikov's protector, and her relationship with the deceased Lizaveta is central to Raskolnikov's conversion. Without the exchange of crosses between the two women, the scene of Raskolnikov's repentance would lose its import. It is also her relationship with Lizaveta that allays Raskolnikov's conscience, and allows him to pray. Dostoevsky's morally ambiguous characters merely mirror the ambiguity of human nature itself. He confirms that both good and evil reside in us, although one *must* override the other.

Legality and Justice

The problematic notion of legality is explored at length in the novel. For one, there are intensive descriptions of police procedures and other methods of investigation of crime, and at the end, we are told the results of Raskolnikov's trial. One problem the novel raises is whether all people are equally culpable for crime. Raskolnikov's view, at the beginning, is that there are exceptional people who may overstep legal (and even moral) bounds and still remain blameless. The old woman whom he murders is seen as just a louse and harmful to society. However, the novel shows us, at the end, that legality and justice must be blind; that the degree of punishment must not vary along class lines or, indeed, any such arbitrary category. All individuals are responsible for crimes to the same degree, regardless of background or intellect.

The problem with punishment in the legal system is its function—whether it is being used for retribution and mere punishment, or for the rehabilitation of the criminal. The notion of justice is balanced with the notion of mercy, and those in charge of administering justice must possess an understanding of both. Raskolnikov is given a lenient sentence because of his earlier good - courageous and selfless - deeds. The courts, then, do not simply uphold the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law.

Sin and Atonement

Dostoevsky creates a number of characters who are flawed, some more than others. While there are those who are able to redeem themselves, there are others who refuse to acknowledge the crimes they have committed. Svidrigailov, or the false Jacob, falls into the second category. His life has been marred by the evil he forces upon others without a dent to his conscience. Dounia, Raskolnikov, Razoumikhin and Pulkheria Alexandrovna are informed of the rumours circulating about Svidrigailov. He is said to have seduced a number of young girls, and even played a hand in the death of his wife, Marfa Petrovna; yet the country squire claims all innocence. It is in the confrontation between Dounia and him that we learn that Svidrigailov poisons his wife so that he may marry Dounia. Although Svidrigailov's love for Dounia permits her escape from their encounter, it is not enough to make him a better man. He consciously decides the path he must take: suicide, as opposed to atonement. Svidrigailov is weaker than Raskolnikov, and he

succumbs to the “dream” of horrors, where he realizes the world is populated by evil that he has spawned.

Raskolnikov, on the other hand, in spite of his brushes with death (almost being run over by a carriage, contemplating drowning in the River Neva, and Svidrigailov’s invitation to go to America), is determined to live. His desire to put an end to his internal conflict leads him to Sonya’s room where he kneels with her in prayer. The notion of atonement is closely linked with suffering. Raskolnikov suffers even before he puts his fateful plan into action, but his punishment is the suffering he undergoes from the moment he commits murder. Even though he *still* believes he is not guilty of a crime, he is willing to absolve himself by declaring he is a murderer in the public square: “As the cup must be emptied, it cannot matter how it is taken. The bitterer the better.” The confession that Raskolnikov makes in the presence of Elia Petrovitch has a deeply redemptive value. Until now, Raskolnikov has never been able to refer to the murder directly, something that Olga Meerson calls his “taboo”. But it is only in the abolition of the taboo that Raskolnikov’s guilt can be abolished.

Sonya is radically different from both Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov. Russell, in “Humiliation as Christian Necessity”, writes that “Sonya is the only character who understands more fully than Svidrigailov that her human will is worth next to nothing unless turned towards God in a true humility”. Her only atonement lies in her fervent faith, and service to the Lord. This is realized more truly in her role of the “little mother”, and deliverer from sin. Like Raskolnikov, she must suffer, and if not alone, then with the one man who can understand her and love her. She “was his forever, would follow him anywhere, even if destiny were to lead him to the end of the world.”

Check Your Progress:

1. The *Epilogue*, it is said that Raskolnikoff does not repent his deeds, but only his foolishness for having confessed. Do you think he truly atones for his crime?
2. Going by the Biblical notion that man is in the fallen state, do you think Raskolnikoff’s crime was inevitable?

Retribution

Retribution, as a theme, is closely linked to the themes of imprisonment, justice and suffering. Stylistically, one can inquire whether the novel delivers poetic justice, that is, whether the characters meet appropriate ends, with the good triumphing and the evil characters being punished for their crimes. The novel, being an exercise in realism, does not deliver this kind of false poetic justice. The good characters suffer much more intensely than the bad, and the bad characters sometimes triumph or receive hardly any punishment at all. Dostoevsky is again negating the idea of fate, and showing that punishment comes out of the natural consequences of one's actions. Svidrigailov goes mad and kills himself because of his evil actions, and the rejection by the morally upright Dounia. Luzhin is humiliated because of his malignant victimisation of Sonya. However, they do not receive the type of punishment that the title of the novel refers to: a spiritual punishment brought by the soul of the evil-doer himself, such as Raskolnikov experiences.

Retribution denotes punishment, but connotes the idea of vengeance or payback for a crime. Raskolnikov finally goes to prison for his actions, but the imprisonment itself is not as important as the suffering he undergoes in his own mind. Dostoevsky clearly shows that a man who commits such great evil as murder can still be reformed once he has experienced great suffering, such as in the system of imprisonment. His idea of justice is not so much empty, meaningless and vengeful retribution as the criminal understanding the gravity of his crime, repenting, and then being offered a chance to reform his life. He shows that this is naturally brought out through the conscience of the evil-doer, and negates the idea that the state can induce justice through its laws and systems of incarceration.

Question of Freedom

Freedom is an important concept in the novel; it explores many kinds. There is spiritual freedom, freedom from poverty, freedom as opposed to imprisonment and physical confinement, as well as a negative form of freedom: absolute freedom, which makes a man a killer or a tyrant. Absolute freedom is not restrained by moral laws. The Christian injunction is to be humble before God, and serve God and others before serving yourself; this is said to confer upon the individual a spiritual freedom which is absent in 'freedom' as defined by Raskolnikov at the beginning of the novel.

Many of the characters are trapped in the most humiliating and degrading form of poverty possible, from which there is no escape except in alcoholism and forced prostitution. Katerina Ivanovna, being originally from a higher class, feels the humiliation more keenly, but works hard to try and live with dignity. This is exemplified by her washing her family's only rags every night so they can be clean in the morning. Although she forces Sonya into prostitution, she regrets her actions, and loves her stepdaughter deeply. At the end, she is faced to confront the utter hopelessness of her destitution, and retreats into madness.

Dostoevsky's portrayal of the question of freedom and confinement is extremely complex, and examines the ramifications of every possible kind of action and state, from varied perspectives.

Salvation

Salvation is instrumental in Dostoevsky's work, and is intricately connected with the concepts of redemption and atonement. Unless one is willing to atone for his sins, and thereby redeem himself, salvation is not even remotely possible. Christianity places a strong emphasis on the need to atone for one's sins, and advocates that salvation may be achieved by the vilest of human beings once he gives himself up to the Lord. The surest road to salvation is through suffering. Raskolnikov embodies this suffering to an extent, but he cannot gain salvation until he confesses and is prepared to reap the folly of his actions. We see him suffering for the greater part of the novel, but he does not feel humiliated till he is imprisoned in Siberia. His humiliation arises not from his pathetic conditions—his shaven head, his rags, his fetters—but from his realization that he has mistreated Sonya. Immediately after this Dostoevsky writes that this student could see no error in the actions he had committed (the murder of Alena Ivanovna and Lizaveta), and so we know that Raskolnikov's humiliation is also tied to his 'cowardice' in having confessed. Yet it is this humiliation he feels before Sonya that will lead him to salvation. Her role as protector and saint then stands to be fulfilled. In reading the Epilogue, you will notice that Raskolnikov more than being attracted to God or faith is attracted to the love emanating from Sonya. Since the time he confesses to her, Sonya loves him unconditionally. His desire to suffer now is hinged upon his desire to share her love, and consequently upon his desire to have a final chance at happiness.

His faith depends greatly upon Sonya's feelings for him. As mentioned before, Sonya's salvation must co-exist with Raskolnikov's. She can only be liberated if she continues in her role as the wise and noble saint, a role accorded to her by God Himself.

Dostoevsky hints at another path to achieving salvation, though whether he believes in it or not is a question only he can answer. The painter Nikola is what Christians would call an 'Old Believer'. Before he came to St. Petersburg, he diligently prayed and read the Holy Book under the supervision of an Elder. The city changes him, and he finds himself vulnerable to women and drink. Porfiry says that the painter falsely confesses as a form of self-imposed suffering. The painter sees a false confession as atonement for his sin of forgetting the old ways. Harriet Murav provides some interesting insights on the *beguny*, the sect that Nikola belongs to. The *beguny* ("those who flee") are associated with another sect known as the *stranniki* ("wanderers") who believe that the Anti-Christ has already appeared on earth. It is, therefore, unacceptable to submit to any civil or legal authority as man has already been stamped by the seal of the beast. The only path to salvation lies in flight or wandering. Flight also includes all forms of deception such as lying. Nikola's false confession is both the sum of his self-inflicted suffering and his "flight" to salvation.

Check Your Progress:

1. Do you think Raskolnikoff can be called a 'nihilist'?
2. Account for Raskolnikoff's divided conscience. Is it, in any way, related to the ambiguity in his thought and action?
3. To what extent can man be truly free in society? Is Raskolnikov projected as the 'theoretical' exponent of the Dostoevskian view of this theme?
4. Does justice take its course in *Crime and Punishment*?

Anti-heroism

The 'anti-hero' is a term which denotes a protagonist who displays the typical qualities of a villain, or subverts our idea of what is heroic. Anti-

heroes have had a long history in literature, especially the *picaro*, or the 'rogue' character type such as exemplified by Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Anti-heroes are generally used to make a satirical comment on society. While heroes usually lead society, anti-heroes stay on the margins of society, and even overtly fight against it. They can be more clear-sighted about the failings of society, being outside it, and thus can offer critical assessments of it. Raskolnikov is a peculiar type of anti-hero; he is not a *picaro* as such, but he is shown as constantly living on the margins of society, often dryly or contemptuously commenting upon its failures, and finally rebelling against its norms in his behaviour. At the same time, the philosophical underpinnings of his actions are flawed. In his mental world, society is divided into two classes: the ordinary and the heroic, where the heroic types are allowed all license against society, and the ordinary men are simply chattel to be exploited or stepped over on the hero's way to greatness. This contrasts with the real world, where Raskolnikov is simply one of the ordinary men when looked at life in terms of class and role in society. He is not a follower nor a leader. He is more like an artist - outside society, but helping to change it by truthfully commenting upon it.

Anti-heroes are often shown as more moral or better than the society around them, or better than the typical literary hero. Raskolnikov is more morally aware than other members of society. Even Luzhin is more of an anti-villain than a real villain. He could be considered a sort of leader of society, with his high position, but Dostoyevsky's scathing satire shows such 'heroes' and 'leaders' to be merely contemptible. The genre of anti-heroic literature is prevalent in modern times, and subverts the black and white moral world of earlier 'heroic' literature to show the world as complex shades of grey.

Check Your Progress:

1. What are the social obstacles in *Crime and Punishment*? How does poverty affect the progress of characters like Sonya Semenovna and her siblings? Do you think their lives would have been any different if they were not ostracized by society? Support your answer with examples from the text.
2. Comment on Dounia's relations with Svidrigailov as exemplifying the gender-biases of Russian society.

Death

Death is a major theme in *Crime and Punishment*. We witness several deaths—the violent murders of the pawnbroker and her sister, Marmeladov's death by accident, Katerina Ivanovna's consumptive death, and Svidrigailov's suicide. The novel portrays these deaths very vividly, in order to heighten the reader's sense of the sanctity and value of each life, and in order to impress upon the reader the situation in which these characters have lived. The novel contemplates death because it is necessary to understand what life is truly like. Each death is also inter-connected, and creates a great impact on family and society. Katerina Ivanovna's death is especially painful to read since the reader is taken through all her suffering and subsequent madness. She dies in the most pathetic, wretched way possible. Raskolnikov lives the murders of the pawnbroker and her sister over and over again in his dreams and mad ravings. We are taken through the last hours of Svidrigailov's life, and his death is related in a cold and almost light tone that produces a reaction of shock and great disturbance in the reader's mind. The manner in which the characters die is always related to their lives, and often brought about through their circumstances. Dostoevsky never fails to impress this fact upon us, thus negating the idea of fate. The deaths are pathetic, rather than tragic; to show that the deaths of people in extreme poverty or moral corruption are unavoidable; and it is due to the fault of the system in which they live, rather than a necessary outcome.

Existential Dilemma

Existentialism as a philosophy only came into being in the 20th century, and really flourished in the 40s and 50s. However, many of its ideas were anticipated by earlier writers who gave importance to the individual human condition. Existentialism sees man as a rational, thinking creature responsible for each of his actions, and believes, as a key idea, that 'existence precedes essence'. This is in contrast with the Christian theological idea of pre-ordained fate and original sin. An existentialist reading of Dostoyevsky would, therefore, not see Raskolnikov's character as inherently flawed from birth, but call him a murderer simply because he has committed a murder. In this reading, we would not take into account the historical and socio-economic context around Raskolnikov or around any of the other characters. To say,

for example, that Raskolnikov is driven to commit the crime due to his class and background, would lessen the responsibility he must bear as a rational individual who makes all his own choices in full awareness of their consequences.

Existentialism is so resolutely individual-centered that it can be seen as anti-social. It sees the traditions and norms of society as inauthentic—something we might call ‘constructed yet naturalised’, today—and rebellion against these norms to be heroic. Raskolnikov eventually repents and allows himself to be punished, truly believing that this surrender to social laws and regulations to be the first step on the path to deliverance. As an existential figure, he is a failure, because he constantly tries to evade responsibility for his actions, and because he succumbs to the lure of social normality. Existentialism would regard Raskolnikov’s madness and sickness as the only sane and healthy condition for an authentic hero. This madness that he experiences is only a version of the existential *angst* that existential writers and playwrights explore in the mid-20th century—an alienation, a fear without a cause, that defines human existence. In an existentialist reading of the novel, the true existential hero of the novel is Svidrigailov. Although existentialism does not advocate suicide as an authentic option to face the consequences of your actions, Svidrigailov is constantly aware of his own responsibility in his earlier deeds, and never takes recourse to an inauthentic idea such as Christian redemption to wash away his sins. Part of existential heroism is recognising oneself as an unredeemable sinner, in the Christian sense of the word. It is impossible to erase one’s earlier actions; all one can do is understand, and take responsibility for the consequences of those actions.

Paranoia

Crime and Punishment can above all be called a chronicle of the paranoid. In dealing with the criminal mind, Dostoevsky demonstrates that it can become unstable and prone to hallucinations. Paranoia constantly hounds Raskolnikov once he commits murder, evident from the delirium he goes into for days on end. His paranoia leads him to believe that Elia Petrovitch, Nicodemus Thomich, Porfiry Petrovitch, Zametoff and the “man from the earth” know the truth behind the double murder. Raskolnikov’s paranoia also causes him to worry excessively, and he forgets at times that he has

hidden the treasure stolen from the moneylender. In this highly sensitive state of mind, he collapses into nightmares even before he actually kills anyone. His incomplete resolve in killing the woman literally determines the extent to which he will fall prey to paranoia. Once he does commit murder, his dreams become more brutal, and only worsen his condition. His paranoia abates in the presence of his protector Sonya, and peaks immediately after leaving her. Henry M W Russell points out that once Sonya cures him of his Napoleonic idea, Raskolnikov achieves *nepsis*, what Orthodoxy calls a state of sobriety. Hereafter, Raskolnikov will no longer fall prey to delirium. The paranoia that Raskolnikov finds himself engulfed in does have its advantages. Being a man of the “new word”, his paranoia heightens his sensitivity to the language of those around him. No doubt this creates a delicious irony in the narrative (as Raskolnikov misreads what people say), but it also allows him to correctly assess the motives of characters such as Luzhin and Porfiry. Raskolnikov thus, is able to determine that Luzhin is not as selfless and noble as he makes himself out to be just by reading a letter from Pulkheria Alexandrovna. Similarly, Raskolnikov knows that Porfiry is attempting to ensnare him; something that Razoumikhin does not deduce despite his close proximity to Porfiry Petrovitch.

SAQ:

Can you locate any other pieces of literature that have attempted to study paranoia? Is schizophrenia in any way related to paranoia?(80 words)

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Trauma and its relation to Madness and Sanity

It is obvious that the paranoia that Raskolnikov experiences can be linked to the physical, emotional and mental trauma he undergoes. The anxiety that he harbours takes a severe toll on his health, and leaves him bed-

ridden time and again. Zosimoff is quick to assess that Raskolnikov's illness is related not just to his living conditions, but also to mental causes such as anxiety, care and preoccupation. At one point, he questions Raskolnikov on what these conditions are. He also tells Raskolnikov and his family that until Raskolnikov is able to deal with this "cause", he cannot expect his physical condition to improve. The emotional trauma plaguing Raskolnikov manifests itself in the form of horrid dreams of dying horses, dying old women, and a plague that originates in Asia. Such aggravated mental, physical and emotional states lead one to wonder whether Raskolnikov is indeed sane or not. When he goes to visit Sonya, he is convinced of her madness. Since she chooses to live the life of a prostitute, she must either be depraved or insane. Raskolnikov decides that it is the latter. Ironically, Sonya herself deems Raskolnikov to be mad. It should be noted that every time Raskolnikov leaves his apartment and wanders while he is or rather after he is delirious, his actions are attributed to his "completely raving state". In fact, whenever Razoumikhin excuses his behaviour by saying Raskolnikov is sick, the student insists that he is entirely sane. You will remember that in the Epilogue, when it is declared that Raskolnikov murdered by virtue of being temporarily insane, he vehemently denies it. Although he introduces the concept of defense in the name of temporary insanity, Dostoevsky chooses not to use it as a part of the plot construction. Raskolnikov is always aware of what he is doing, sometimes not fully aware of the consequences, but aware nevertheless. We may call Raskolnikov mad for thinking that he could walk out with a bloody axe without a hitch in his plan. We may call Raskolnikov mad for not thinking if anyone would show up at Alena Ivanovna's apartment during the time of the murder. We may even call Raskolnikov mad for nearly blurting out a confession to Zametoff at The Crystal Palace. But it is only in so far that we may declare Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov to be insane. For the rest of it, no matter what the outcome of the novel is, Dostoevsky does his best to project Raskolnikov as a man who firmly believes in acting sanely.

Family Ties

How important is family to Raskolnikov? From the letter addressed to him, it seems that Raskolnikov is held in high regard by both his mother and his sister. He is the one who overviews all family decisions, and he is also the most highly educated. The decision that Dounia and Luzhin should wed is

the only one that is taken without the consultation of Raskolnikov. Being a sharp young law student, Raskolnikov immediately sees through the superficiality of Luzhin. It takes a while for the women in the family to agree with Raskolnikov, and Dounia finally chooses her brother over prospective husband. It brings to mind what Pulkheria Alexandrovna writes in the letter, that Dounia would give her life for her brother owing to the strong bond between them. And yet the relation between the siblings is rather strained. After the murder, Raskolnikov develops an aversion towards his family, precisely because they do not know the truth. The fact that he is a murderer torments Raskolnikov to the effect that he harbours antagonistic feelings towards anyone who showers him with love. However, the strain between his sister and him is less than the strain between his mother and him. Perhaps this is because the bond between mother and son runs deep, and perhaps also because Pulkheria is more vocal about her feelings than Dounia ever is. Raskolnikov decides that the only way he can ease his family's suffering and so also his, is by disappearing without ever telling them that he is a killer. When Dounia learns the truth from Sonya, all that she wishes is that her brother is still alive. It is strange how brother and sister slip into a sort of ease while they discuss the murder, and appear to be closer to each other than they ever have been in the novel. Raskolnikov's parting words to his sister are that she should not forsake their mother. He leaves her with the knowledge that Razoumikhin will not forsake her, knowing that though he himself is abandoning a family, he is also leaving them with one.

The meeting between Raskolnikov and his mother is probably the only scene where we see a truly vulnerable Raskolnikov capable of love and emotion. The hatred he feels for his mother dissolves into infantile affection. The very first question he puts to his mother is whether she will continue to love him the way she does now. He is painfully aware of how vulnerable he has made himself at this moment. Yet the Raskolnikov presented to us before he confesses is one who desperately requires assurance that he is not alone. The tears he sheds as he kisses his mother's feet and embraces her are not only symbolic of his real feelings for her, but are also a necessity. Knowing that her love is unconditional makes his journey easier, and assures him that his mother will hold the true image of her son in her heart even when she discovers he is a murderer. It is interesting that while mother and son part in the form of an embrace, brother and sister part through furtive glances on a street corner.

Dostoevsky presents one last family in his psychological novel; that of the Marmeladovs. As readers, we already know that Sonya is the sole breadwinner of her family, even though her father is a government official. The young children have an abusive mother and an alcoholic father. They must watch their family slowly disintegrate as Marmeladov dies under the feet of a horse, and Katerina Ivanovna loses her sanity and dies of consumption. However, the reader is told that there were happy times. As Polenka tells Raskolnikov, Marmeladov was most fond of Leda, and always bought her presents. He also taught the children to read the Bible and helped them with grammar. Her happiest memory is recounting the entire family united in prayer, particularly for their deceased father, and their erring sister, Sonya. It becomes clear that family ties in this novel are not simply based on love and sacrifice, but also on the notion of faith and religion.

The Idea of Charity

Charity has always been associated with the notion of kindness and generosity. The Church, above all other institutions, is a staunch advocate of it. While charity may have its religious connotations, Dostoevsky also demonstrates that in the wrong hands it may be used as a tool of manipulation. Luzhin begrudging Dounia and her brother uses the idea of charity to his own villainous advantage. Sonya is called to Lebeziatnikoff's apartment on the pretext of discussing monetary matters. However, unnoticed by Sonya, Luzhin slips a carefully folded hundred rouble note into her pocket. This note is later on used to incriminate Sonya until Lebeziatnikoff clears her name. Lebeziatnikoff remarks that he thought Luzhin had secretly slipped the note in, since the latter was aware that Lebeziatnikoff was opposed to the idea of charity. With his socialist background, Lebeziatnikoff firmly believes that private charity only creates more trouble. It is incapable of eradicating misery. Luzhin's motives only prove to Lebeziatnikoff the danger of private charity. If this is what charity means for Luzhin, it is very different at the other end of the spectrum. Raskolnikov generously gives his savings to assist Katerina Ivanovna with the funeral preparations. He does not so much as think about the import of his actions in that single moment. This is what makes Raskolnikov a highly ambiguous character. There is more than one time when he thinks of giving away his money to more needy people. It is of equally religious significance that he refuses charity shown towards him. When Raskolnikov refuses

charity, he is not simply refusing a monetary sum but also an opportunity at spiritually renewing himself. He thoughtlessly tosses the coin a woman gives him into the Neva, symbolic of his rejection of faith itself. Charity as an idea is used both as index of one's own willingness to help others and one's own spiritual faith.

Atheism

Dostoyevsky is seen by most critics to be a Christian writer who ultimately affirms the message that salvation and escape from the most hopeless situations can only be arrived at through embracing orthodox religion. To some extent—if one studies only the plot—the novel does affirm this message. Raskolnikov is never overtly shown to be an atheist; in fact, he refutes this notion when Porfiry Petrovich asks him directly whether he believes in God. However, his individualist, nihilist and anti-authoritarian tendencies ally him with the atheist ideas circulating in his time. The ideas he expounds in his novel are Machiavellian and Nietzschean; that is, they assume the centrality of the 'superman', the extraordinary man, whose arrogance is entirely warranted, and who is not beholden to any higher moral authority than himself, that is, God.

We must not mistake Dostoevsky for a complete fundamentalist. He offers a critique of orthodox religion through his portrayal of characters living in situations of intense and hopeless suffering. The Christian idea of a reward in the afterlife for sufferings endured in our lifetime hardly seems relevant in this novel, which stresses the necessity of correct moral choices in order to improve our living conditions within our lifetime. Although Sonya is portrayed as a very morally upright and sympathetic figure whose faith redeems Raskolnikov in the end, she is also shown to be weak and pathetic. Her situation seems to be hopeless; Dostoyevsky does not hint at any reward for her life of selfless suffering. The scenes in which Raskolnikov ridicules her faith arouse the reader's sympathy for her, and yet one can see his point in calling her a 'holy fool'. Dostoevsky paints a very complex picture of the conflict between atheism and religiousness. On the one hand, only spiritual purification through suffering and embracing religion offers salvation from the situations of despair in which the characters find themselves. On the other, these situations are painted with such grimness and truthful realism that the novel seems to be a harsh critique of the false promises of religion.

Critique of Contemporary Russian Society

After his arrest in 1849, Dostoevsky focused on the changing milieu he found himself in. He was an exponent of *pochvenichestvo* (from *pochva* meaning “[one’s native] soil”) which sought to combine growing Western thought with traditional Russian culture. The importance of one’s native culture was on the decline after the rule of Peter I. This midway between the *westernizers* and the *slavophiles* is what Dostoevsky attempts to examine in *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov and Luzhin are products of the western schools of thought that were gaining rapid significance in Russia. Despite their education, they fail to successfully combine their new found knowledge with the traditions of Russia. Raskolnikov influenced by the “one-man” theory is willing to eradicate *noisome vermin*. He sees this as the only viable option for establishing an egalitarian society. Similarly, Luzhin, a man of science advocates selfishness and pride as the tools of a successful man in today’s world. Dostoevsky is obviously pointing to a weakness in this mode of thinking. His idea of Christianity differed from the Orthodox sect, and he criticized the modern educated Russian for turning away from the Church. This is exemplified by Raskolnikov, and his inability to commit to any form of penitence—although he finally agrees to confess and gain salvation. It is of interest to the reader then that Sonya Semenovna is the “little mother”. Dostoevsky thus establishes a link between education and religion.

Revolutionary Zeal

In the 1840s, Dostoevsky was a member of the Petrashevskii circle. Through it, he was familiarized with the utopian-socialist ideas of Francois Marie Charles Fourier and his disciples. *Pocket Dictionary of Words* published in 1841 and 1846 by Butashevich-Petrashevskii described the “normal condition” as the normal development of society and mankind. Petrashevskii believed that a normal individual was one in whom all passions harmoniously developed. This “normal condition” was derived from Fourier. The Petrashevskii circle advocated the re-structuring of society so as to create harmony both in the individual and among mankind. What is to be achieved is a “reform of human nature”, as Harriet Murav says. The medical student Zametin remarks that there are not many “harmonious individuals in the world”. *Crime and Punishment* is filled with revolutionary ideas as exhibited

by Raskolnikov, Luzhin and Lebeziatnikoff. The very name Raskolnikov is indicative of a failure in achieving harmony. Dostoevsky thus traces the beliefs that characters think will change Russian society for the better, but which will only result in greater violence.

The Idea of the Double

The 'double' is a type of character who acts similarly to a foil to the protagonist, but with such startling similarities to the protagonist that he seems like an alternate self, or a doppelganger. These similarities could include character traits, physical appearance, role in the novel, and many other things. In *Crime and Punishment*, many critics have seen a double-like relationship between Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov. This is illustrated by three binding characteristics: firstly, their similar experiences and the mental torture which they are both undergoing during the course of the novel. *Crime and Punishment* could well refer to Svidrigailov as to Raskolnikov. They are both responsible for heinous crimes, although in one case, we are witness to the entire bloody affair, and in another, these crimes are only hinted at through gossip, hearsay and proved (possibly) by Svidrigailov's own reaction to the events of the novel. They are both punished in some sense, and both punish themselves since they cannot bear the mental torture which they undergo. The double is a useful character for a novelist, since the novelist can introduce an element of ambiguity or even write an alternative ending for the same character. Svidrigailov represents Raskolnikov's other possible future—one in which he slides further and further into corruption, where he cannot even be saved by Sonia's (or Dounia's) grace, and in which no redemption is possible. Dostoevsky could be making the point that Raskolnikov saves himself by embracing orthodox faith while Svidrigailov's lack of faith leads to his doom. Both of them go mad to some extent, though one could argue that Svidrigailov's brand of madness takes its form in a cold, seeming sanity.

Secondly, they are similar in personality. They are both highly intelligent men who believe in the guiding power of rationality. In the theories of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, he proposes that each person is made up of a persona and a shadow. The persona is the mask we present to the world, in which we act respectably and follow the rules of society, and the shadow represents our inner selves, our dark opposite self. Although the shadow

flouts societal rules and restrictions, and is antagonistic to our persona, it is not evil; it needs to be acknowledged and understood in order to resolve our conflict within ourselves. Svidrigailov is Raskolnikov's shadow. This is evident from the way their interactions are portrayed in the novel. They meet often by chance, and always in a dreamlike atmosphere. Even their dialogue is hazy and dreamlike, without logical connections, as if it is happening in Raskolnikov's subconscious. Raskolnikov reacts very strongly to Svidrigailov's presence at their first meeting. He feels as though he is either hallucinating or meeting a ghost. He has a premonition of the same sort just before their last meeting.

Urban Space

Crime and Punishment is a novel set in an urban space, specifically St. Petersburg. What differentiated St. Petersburg from other cities in Russia was that it was the first city where stone rather than wood was employed as a means of building. Furthermore, it was considered to be a place of great intellectual currents, but simultaneously a city of degradation. It was famous for its Crystal Palace, its taverns, its churches, and its university. The story of Raskolnikov, you will notice, is never set in a house or a bedroom. There are no traditional pictures of family seated around the fireplace or engaged in a proper dinner. There are also no scenes of courting or revelry; rather the novel is a collage of intense, thought-provoking soliloquies and dialogues that find no place in warm happy homes. Owing to the disturbing nature of this work, the only space available is the periphery. If we hear of homes, the reference is always to something destructive. The first proper apartment the reader is let into is the home of Alena Ivanovna. This no longer remains a home once Raskolnikov kills the sisters, leaving only a blood-stained apartment to be let out to any future occupants. The other house that we know of is Svidrigailov's. More than a house, it is a chamber of horrors where sexual assault, murder and suicide take place. The home of Pulkheria Alexandrovna and Dounia is not a home without a husband and a son. It is surely not a home once Marfa Petrovna sullies Dounia's reputation. This being said, it is apparent that there is no chance of having a real home in the world created by Dostoevsky. Depravity must exist, and if not in homes, then it must flourish freely in other spaces. These other spaces are staircases, landings, corridors, alleys, taverns and the streets of St. Petersburg. The

apartment that Raskolnikov stays in is barely even a room, opening out onto the staircase. The more time he spends in it, the more cramped he feels. The Marmeladov family itself resides in a corridor with no privacy from either the landlady or the other tenants. Sonya lives in a room partitioned from the Kapernasumoff family. Most importantly, all the action in the novel takes place in these spaces. Svidrigailov is listening behind a door to the exchanges between Raskolnikov and Sonya, Raskolnikov listens at Alena Ivanovna's door waiting for the mysterious man to leave so that he may himself escape, Nikola the painter bursts from behind a door during Raskolnikov's interrogation, Raskolnikov almost declares he is a murderer to Zametoff while he is at the Crystal Palace, the rendezvous between Svidrigailov and Dounia occurs in an alleyway near the Neva. The meetings that take place between people seem to occur in carnivalesque spaces, the ultimate carnivalesque space being the square where Raskolnikov comes close to a public confession. The concept of urban space is not just restricted to reality; it permeates the dream world as well. There is a tavern in Raskolnikov's dreadful horse dream, and people laughing hysterically on the staircase in his dream about the murdered old woman. Even Svidrigailov encounters the five-year-old seductress in a dark corner between a cupboard and a door in the last dream he has before he dies. The space of the novel is thus an urban one, but comprises mainly of boundaries and thresholds.

Notion of Duality

Duality denotes two opposing ideas existing together in a creative conflict, neither one neither destroying the other nor merging into one another. *Crime and Punishment*, like many other novels, is built upon the conflict of dual states. One example is the duality of freedom and confinement. The spaces through which Raskolnikov travels alternate between wide open spaces and cramped, confined spaces, and the moral action of the novel corresponds to the duality of these spaces. The most explicitly articulated theme in the novel is the contrast between dual and contrasting notions of freedom—the (paradoxical) spiritual freedom found in Orthodox Christianity in its relationship of servitude to God, which can even be obtained in prison, and the degraded and amoral form of absolute freedom which justifies murder and oppresses others.

Stop to Consider:

While we see Razoumikhin working as a translator, how effective is Raskolnikoff's university education? Keep in mind that it is Raskolnikoff's flawed intellectual ideas that make him a murderer.

Luzhin, newly exposed to revolutionary ideas, sees science as a license to be selfish. A man of education, he attempts to only worsen the condition of women in St. Petersburg, evident in his treatment of Sonya Semenovna. How do you respond to this?

Why is it that Dounia holds only a school education?

The Idea of Imprisonment

The notion of imprisonment may be applied to such characters as Raskolnikov, Katerina Ivanovna, Sonya Semenovna and Marfa Petrovna. Raskolnikov is the only one who is literally imprisoned. However, from the moment he commits murder, he undergoes a deep psychological conflict, and finds himself imprisoned in his surroundings. His tiny apartment is suffocating to say the least, and he feels as though his movements are being constantly monitored. In his situation, Raskolnikov oscillates between an egoistic celebration of his actions and the desire to purge himself. The latter creates conditions of imprisonment as Raskolnikov ('the schismatic') finds himself trapped inside his own body, losing grip over his mental state. The dire need to confess, and his inability to recognize the need for atonement, creates a spiritual prison for him.

Sonya Semenovna and Katerina Ivanovna are trapped in a system that does more harm than good. Sonya, forced into prostitution, becomes an outcast in society, fit only to be ill-treated and abused. The shame generated at the occupation she is compelled to take up prevents her from being a well-rounded human being. Sonya, therefore, considers herself not worthy of being in the company of ladies like Dounia and Pulkheria Alexandrovna. Despite her deep religiosity, Sonya does not believe that she can truly atone for her crimes, and it is her life itself that becomes an imprisonment of sorts. Katerina Ivanovna finds herself unable to provide for her family because of her drunken husband. At the time of Marmeladov's death, it is society that lets her down. This woman of a once noble background is reduced to utter

squalor. She is caught in a system where not only men, but women also malign her reputation, and force her into even more pathetic living and mental conditions. Insanity, it would seem, is Katerina's only avenue of reacting to a society that so violently rejects her.

Marfa Petrovna may be connected to the idea of imprisonment in that she is a 'kept' woman by her husband Svidrigailov. Although she is the one responsible for Svidrigailov's wealth, it is rumoured that she remains his prisoner. She does as she is instructed, and has no hand in the affairs that her husband gets involved in. She truly becomes the victim of imprisonment when she is murdered by Svidrigailov driven by his passion for Dounia.

The Question of Judgement

The term 'judgement', in *Crime and Punishment*, is a loaded term. It can refer to the judgement of society, the judgement of individuals, and the judgement of God. The first is shown as corrupt and brutal—humiliating and attacking the weak, and helping the powerful. The last, though not explicitly shown in the novel, seems to be the only true kind of judgement possible. All human beings are fallible and limited; only the omnipotence of God can deliver fair and unbiased evaluations of human action. The judgement of the individual is also important, as it is shown in the form of the conscience—an inner voice or entity which torments and punishes the individual for their crimes.

The notion of judgement is very important in Christian theology, since the end of the world is to coincide with the Last Judgement, when all human beings will be judged by God and sent to heaven or hell. However, the notion of mercy - through such notions of forgiveness and love of one's enemy - is also very important in Christianity. The balancing of these two forces - detached judgment and empathetic mercy - is the solution proposed in the novel to the legal, moral and social problems it depicts.

Rationality versus Irrationality

Crime and Punishment can be said to have an all-consuming, obsessive concern with the idea of what it means for a human being to be rational and sane in society. Common sense dictates that one achieves sanity by following social regulations and the unspoken social codes in relating to others in society. Raskolnikov's intense spiritual agony is taken to be madness by

Razumikhin and others. However, there is an element of irrationality within the structure of society, where the powerful are corrupt and exercise absolute power over marginalised groups. Basic human virtues such as compassion, sympathy and mercy are seen as irrational and unnecessary.

Dostoevsky offers a critique of instrumental rationality in his novel by suggesting that a purely materialist, rationalist and non-spiritual attitude leads to social degradation. Society is portrayed as utterly cruel and merciless towards the powerless: those trapped in poverty such as Marmeladov and his family, women such as Dounia and Sonya who have very few opportunities to advance themselves materially except marriage and subservience to the rich. Svidrigailov is an example of the rationalist, capitalist, upper class vampire who preys on the weak, yet he is portrayed as more insane than any of the less powerful characters. The orthodox Christian idea of suffering for its own sake is exalted in Raskolnikov's travails as well as in the minor character of Nikolai, who turns himself in for a crime he has not committed. This contrast between the 'rational' and the 'spiritual' is one of the central concerns of the novel, the spiritual always being elevated and shown to contain a higher, more divine reason than the merely rational.

Faith and Spiritual Regeneration

Among the numerous themes that Dostoevsky chooses to incorporate, faith and spiritual regeneration are central to the novel. The entire book moves towards the revival of Raskolnikov as the reader waits to see what lies in store for the young protagonist. Raskolnikov lives on the very edge of existence—undecided about his future, hesitant in his actions. He evinces no interest in God or faith, and the only time he makes any religious references is when he speaks of the New Jerusalem and when he asks Sonya to read the story of Lazarus. When questioned by Porfiry, Raskolnikov insists that he believes in the rising of Lazarus, yet he hardly ever demonstrates that he is a believer. Raskolnikov lives by the system of thought he has built up during his education at the University. There is not much room for spiritual faith or religion. Conversely, Sonya's entire existence is centered on her deep faith without which life would be meaningless. She urgently desires a spiritual resuscitation evident from her passionate reading of the story of Lazarus. She alone will lead Raskolnikov to a renewal.

Raskolnikov's spiritual regeneration has been questioned by many critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin who views the epilogue as a terse end to the

polyphony in *Crime and Punishment*. David Matual in “In Defense of the Epilogue in *Crime and Punishment*” believes that Raskolnikov’s conversion is justified. The Raskolnikov who performs good deeds like saving children from a fire is proof of the potential for spiritual regeneration. Furthermore, when Porfiry says God has been “waiting” for the crime, it implies that God “has both permitted the crime and beckoned the criminal to the purgatory of Siberian exile.” (p.111) Raskolnikov’s desire to suffer and be loved by Sonya is brought about by his desire to change. To quote Matual again, “Raskolnikov is psychologically capable of the metamorphosis he is destined to undergo.” (p.113)

Dostoevsky certainly makes it known that Raskolnikov wants a new life, a better life, one with Sonya in it. But the certainty of his conversion is open-ended. Firstly, Raskolnikov *still* maintains the view that his only regret was his weakness in confessing. Secondly, after asking for the Bible during his illness, Raskolnikov leaves it untouched. Thirdly, all that we know of his future aims is restricted to his thoughts on whether his faith may liken to Sonya’s some day. Lastly, Dostoevsky himself declares that the gradual regeneration of Raskolnikov and his union with Sonya is another story, the moment from which new history begins. This concept of an inconclusive conclusion is the very characteristic of a carnival world. The future (the spiritual regeneration) of Raskolnikov is severely restricted to what one as a reader might deduce through his reading of the novel. What we can conclude at the most is that Raskolnikov is perhaps ready for a renewal, but even this is not definite.

The Question of Gender

Crime and Punishment offers varied, complex portrayals of its female characters, and accurately describes the lives of women as experienced at the time of its writing. One common strand in the lives of all the women in the novel is their sense of oppression and being trapped by forces outside their control, usually embodied in one or more male characters who try to exploit them. Dounia is the most pertinent example. She has no alternative but to marry a corrupt man like Luzhin in order to survive, and she is constantly hounded by Svidrigailov, who threatens her physically and sexually. However, she is a very strong, intelligent character who defends herself against Svidrigailov’s advances, endures the infamy which Marfa Petrovna brings upon her character, and finally recognises Luzhin for what he is. She tries to be financially independent by taking on a job as a governess, rather

than marrying for money, since she realizes that she will have to be subservient to her husband. She is an educated, proud woman with great dignity, despite her poverty. By the end, she marries Razumikhin, her equal in intelligence and moral strength.

Sonya is another example, but much more extreme of female subjugation due to circumstances. She is forced into prostitution by her stepmother (though Katerina Ivanovna is also shown as a sympathetic figure) and by her family's extreme poverty, made much more intense by her father's alcoholism. She represents the weakest, most marginalised section of society, because she is both female and one of the despised classes of society due to her profession. However, even she is shown to be dignified and worthy of respect. She is almost saintly due to the sufferings she undergoes: a modern-day martyr. Her similarities to Dounia are emphasized when they are both preyed upon by the same man - Luzhin tries to malign her reputation further by falsely accusing her of being a thief.

Katerina Ivanovna, Sonya's stepmother, is an extremely pathetic figure. Stricken with consumption and extreme poverty, widowed by the middle of the novel—although her alcoholic husband was often more trouble than help—and most of all, afflicted with a deep sense of humiliation at her state of poverty, Katerina Ivanovna is nevertheless a character who evokes our sympathy and admiration. She tries to live in dignity by washing her children's clothes (mere rags) at night so they may be clean in the morning. She defends Sonya vociferously when she is falsely accused of stealing money, since she knows the goodness of Sonya's nature and the sacrifices she has made for her family. By the end, Katerina Ivanovna goes mad, and yet her madness is shown to be the only sane response to her situation of utter destitution. She goes out into the street, dragging her children with her and forcing them to sing and dance for others' entertainment. Even at this time, she is trying to do anything to find employment, and support herself and the children. She constantly remembers her background, being from a high class, and despairs at her current situation, which was brought about by her marrying Marmeladov. She is an important character to analyse the question of gender, since she represents many women who are left to fend for themselves and their children while their husbands squander their earnings. Women are the backbone of the family, while men live dissolute and directionless lives without supporting even their own children.

4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

In his study of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the concept of polyphony or "multiple voices". This narrative technique does not allow a singular interpretation to overshadow the text. Although a greater part of the novel focuses on Raskolnikov and his inner struggles, the reader is given an understanding of the events from other characters' points of view. We know that in all probability Raskolnikov is not delirious when he thinks that Porfiry is trying to trap him. We also know that Razoumikhin, somewhere deep down inside, suspects Raskolnikov of having committed murder. And the only person to know the entire truth simultaneously, along with Sonya, is Svidrigailov. Each has her/his own take as well as a solution regarding the matter. For Sonya, the solution is confession, and thereby gaining salvation, while Svidrigailov suggests a trip to America.

However, the idea of multiple voices does not simply mean different perceptions. More significantly, it means a different paradigm in an individual, distinct voice. A voice is affected by the language and speech particular to each speaker. We will see that in order for Dostoevsky's imaginative world to be peopled by multiple voices, wordplay is highly important. Polyphony, by its very nature, prevents an autonomous "monophonic" voice, or any authorial intrusions. Porfiry, for example, consistently mirrors Raskolnikov's language so as to psychologically trap him.

Stop to Consider:

In Chapter 2, Part 6: Porfiry Petrovich says: "Why am I talking this way? I came to have an explanation with you, yes; I consider it, so to speak, my sacred duty. . ."

This is a long discourse by the character. Look at the structure of the sentences which show a close resemblance with colloquial speech, with short sentences, expletives, interspersed with legal-sounding phrases. What do we get in total from this? This is not meant as a reasoned, properly-argued, "explanation". The author is giving us a "dramatic monologue" almost but the language is a mixture of the daily idiom, the partially legal, and logical reasoning. So we get echoes of Raskolnikov's own manner of theorising as well as the practical shop-talk of the trained investigator. We are therefore not allowed to get a 'purely' objective look at the question of crime and punishment.

Bakhtin talks about a type of discourse he calls *erlebte Rede* or “double discourse”, wherein one’s speech comes deceptively close to another’s. The use of the *erlebte Rede* allows for the third-person omniscient point of view where the narrator’s conscious and unconscious may be more distinctly separated. A first-person point of view blurs the boundaries between these two states of consciousness. The omniscient third-person point of view, however, effectively traces the stream of consciousness of Raskolnikov, and makes it possible for the reader to identify the wordplay and double meaning at work in Dostoevsky’s novel. M L Kovsan points out that the use of the pronoun “he” for Raskolnikov is a direct reference to his true “inner” self, while the reference to Raskolnikov by his name is used to differentiate him from other individuals. The use of *erlebte Rede* by other characters acts as an externalization of Raskolnikov’s conscience; it is this that makes their speech so threatening. Characters often do not realize they are interacting through this discourse. The man who says to Raskolnikov “thou art the murderer” later apologizes for his unusual outburst. The emphasis he places on the word ‘thou’ has nothing to do with Raskolnikov. However, this “man from the earth”, like other characters, is unaware of Raskolnikov’s “reading” of his speech. It is Raskolnikov alone who knows that the man’s accusation is not wrong.

Porfiry is the only one who deliberately uses *erlebte Rede* to draw a confession out of Raskolnikov. But the speech employed by Razoumikhin, Sonya and even Dounia is out of pure accident. A careful reading of *Crime and Punishment* will reveal the use of several italicized words and pronouns. These words often are used to refer to Raskolnikov’s crime in some way or the other. But while the characters use these words to refer to the murder in a hypothetical manner (Razoumikhin says how he does not think it is Raskolnikov who is responsible for the double murders), it is only Raskolnikov who knows that they refer to a murder committed by him:

‘If I did *that deed*, I would definitely say I saw the workers and the apartment,’ Raskolnikov replied reluctantly...

These italicized words thus strengthen his resolve to stay silent about his bloody crime.

What is interesting is that these italicized words hold different meanings for Raskolnikov and any other character. When Dounia says ‘I know

everything', she is referring simply to suspicion surrounding her brother and not the actual crime. Dostoevsky similarly makes puns on the roots of words. When Dounia says 'I haven't butchered anyone yet', Raskolnikov almost faints. These words have a negative effect on what Meerson calls Raskolnikov's "sore spot": his taboo on talking about the murder. We notice that the wordplay disappears the moment Raskolnikov confesses. This is because the taboo of "not speaking" is finally abolished, and Raskolnikov no longer requires the use of italicized pronouns.

4.6 IMAGERY/SYMBOLISM

Religious Symbolism / The Cross

Religious symbolisms recur in *Crime and Punishment* in both dreams and real life. The dream that Raskolnikov has where he witnesses the death of the horse is significant for its mirror imagery. The green cupola on the church is similar to the cupola on the cathedral, and his kissing of the ground at the grave foreshadows his bowing down in the market square. The cross bears a special importance, for the reader will remember that Raskolnikov finds two crosses made of cypress wood and copper on the body of the pawnbroker. A similar copper cross is owned by Sonya, given to her by Lizaveta. When Raskolnikov confesses all to Sonya, she offers him her cypress cross. He, however, rejects it until he is fully ready for "suffering" for his crime. The cross holds both a private and public meaning. On a personal level, it indicates a willingness to suffer, to bear the cross; whereas on the public level it is a clear indicator that Raskolnikov is willing to face the consequences of his actions. The cross becomes a covertly important symbol in the novel. Sonya turns to the cross and to the Bible in the moments she feels she is beyond redemption; Raskolnikov undergoes a deep internal conflict; the painter is an Old Believer.

The image of the cross is complete if we consider the geographical location of certain buildings.

If one were to stand on the bridge, then the cathedral would be at the top, the University would fall to the right, and the Palais de Crystal would be below. Antony Johae even includes the St. Peter and St. Paul Fortress in this geometric design, locating it on the right. The tavern or the Crystal

Palace stands as a symbol of Utilitarianism—the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It is located exactly opposite to the cathedral (the vault of heaven as Johae calls it) while the Palace is itself located in ‘the formless waters of the River Neva’. Raskolnikov has the choice to travel upwards toward salvation or move downwards in damnation. Johae traces Raskolnikov’s entire movement through these four buildings – it is ‘predestined that he will lose his faith (the Church), dream up grandiose scientific ideas (at the university), commit murder to ensure the greatest happiness of the greatest number (the Crystal Palace), and...eventually submit to punishment (the St Peter and St Paul Fortress), before his ultimate return to the faith of his childhood (the Church).’ - ‘Towards an iconography of *Crime and Punishment*’

The religious symbolism continues with names assigned to characters. Raskolnikov comes from *raskol’nik* meaning schismatic or heretic. Porfiry is derived from the word that means a highly prized purple marble. It may have also been derived from the word ‘Porphyra’, the name given to the purple cloak worn by Byzantine emperors. The symbol of the cross and the colour purple when combined represent the Passion of the Christ and the purple vestments worn in the Church during this period to commemorate his suffering. Porfiry then comes to symbolize a purger of sins; performing the role of the priest or the sage. He must guide the sinners to the path of redemption, evident in his promise to Raskolnikov that his sentence will be lessened if he confesses. Porfiry’ patronym Petrovitch also holds certain connotations, derived from *petrus* meaning stone. Petrovitch or son of a ‘rock’ maybe an allusion to the Apostle Peter who was to serve as the ‘rock’ on whom the Christian Church would be founded. Sonya derives her name from Sophia associated with the Orthodox cathedral of Constantinople. The shawl that she puts over Raskolnikov’s head is a symbol of her protective influence. Similarly, the lady with the green parasol who offers a silver coin to Raskolnikov is also offering him a chance at redemption.

St. Petersburg as a Symbol of Social Degradation

St Petersburg, the city where the novel is set in, literally means ‘St Peter’s Castle’. A distinguishing feature of this ‘castle’ is that it is a city built out of stone on marshland. In *Crime and Punishment*, St. Petersburg becomes a symbol of social degradation. This can be seen from the use of space itself. Raskolnikov lives in an apartment that is akin to a coffin. The action

that takes place outside of houses is confined to alleys and corners. Dostoevsky's utilization of dank spaces acts a metaphor for the social degradation of St. Petersburg. One has only to recall the tavern in which Raskolnikov encounters Marmeladov or even the scene where Raskolnikov blurts out his confession to Zametoff. Most of what occurs in St. Petersburg can only be termed as vile. There is hardly any room for love or familial affection. If Dostoevsky does provide a glimpse into moments of intimacy between mother and son, or man and woman, they are just as quickly withdrawn. The focus on St. Petersburg is of a city where all forms of depravity co-exist with one another—murder, deceit, robbery, paedophilia, and sexual politics. What makes things complicated are the ideas used to defend these actions. Murder or sexual advances are not poorly justified by the characters. In fact, intellectual ideas and reasoning are used as motives. Dostoevsky portrays a society that is slowly disintegrating under the strain of intellectual thoughts and their corresponding acts of crime. Social degradation, however, is not only restricted to crimes that are perpetuated, but also extends to the standard of living of the citizens in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky presents a pathetic state of affairs for the Marmeladov family. When Marmeladov dies, it is through Raskolnikov's money that Katerina is able to perform all the funeral rites. When Katerina Ivanovna reaches the brink of insanity, she takes to the streets and forces her children to sing and dance. When she dies, she is in a state of delirium, almost incapable of recognizing Sonya Semenovna. The Crystal Palace stands as the ultimate symbol of social degradation—proof of the darker side of the city in spite of it being the cultural centre of Russia. In St. Petersburg, there is an existence of opposites. If there are educated men like Raskolnikov and Razoumikhin, there are also people lacking in education like Sonya. If there is a cathedral north of the River Neva, there is the Palais de Crystal to the south. If there is a University, there are also forces running counter to it, resulting in revolutionary thoughts and actions. St. Petersburg, in the hands of Dostoevsky, becomes a potent symbol for a social degradation.

Dreams

Some of the most important imagery in *Crime and Punishment* comes in the form of dreams. Four dreams in particular are significant to the action and themes of the novel:

The first is Raskolnikov's dream about the horse, in which he dreams he is a young boy, and he is walking with his father past a tavern to a cemetery to place flowers on the graves of his grandmother and baby brother. They stop to witness a violent scene in which a crowd is gathered around an old weak mare who enrages her master by her inability to pull the enormous load on his cart. The master proceeds to beat the horse to death, egged on by the crowd. The little boy, Raskolnikov, feels immense pity and sympathy for the murdered horse—He tries to protect her with his own body and weeps for her. Antony Johae refers to W. Snodgrass's interpretations of this dream as a prophecy or prediction which mirrors the plot of the book itself: "a return to the Christian faith (symbolised by his walk to the church and cemetery with his father) is interrupted by the murder of the pawnbroker and her half-sister (represented in the dream by the killing of the mare outside the tavern)."

Relation between Dream and Death, and Christian Morality:

In the description of the context for the dream, Raskolnikov remembers his childhood and particularly the importance of the church that he is going to visit: "He loved that church with its ancient icons . . . [E]very time he visited the cemetery he used to cross himself over the grave religiously and reverently, and bow down and kiss it." Along with the dish of sweetened rice marked with a cross, the dream contains two crosses, this imagery being repeated when Raskolnikov kills the pawnbroker and finds "two crucifixes" on her body. He rejects the crosses, throwing them on the old woman's body and taking the money. Later, Sonya offers him the cross she had exchanged with Lizaveta for her own, saying that they ought to "suffer together" and "bear our cross together". When Raskolnikov goes to make his confession, he tells Sonya that he has come for the crosses, then goes to the 'cross-roads' (which symbolised the entire world) and kisses the earth.

The second is Raskolnikov's dream re-enacting the murder of the old woman. In it, he strikes her with the axes, but she does not move. When he bends down to take a closer look, he notices that "she is laughing, shaking with noiseless laughter". Every time he frenziedly strikes her with the axe, she continues laughing until he finally runs away and notices that all around him are a crowd of laughing people. Mikhail Bakhtin points out the carnivalesque

nature of this scene—the elements of crowd, laughter and chaotic disturbance of order being emphasised. Many other aspects such as sacrifice, dismemberment and carnivalesque contrasts and antitheses are present throughout the novel.

The third is a dream that occurs near the end, in which Raskolnikov dreams about a unique new plague which infects all of humanity except a chosen few. This plague represents the crux of Dostoevsky's argument—the 'new ideas' of individualism and moral relativism that are taking hold of young people. The chosen few are those who have regained or retained their faith and spiritual freedom in the face of the moral freedom which these new ideas advocate.

The fourth is a dream by Svidrigailov on the night before his suicide. He (along with the reader) confuses the dream with reality, unaware that he is dreaming until he wakes. He dreams of walking out of his room at the hotel and meeting a little girl who is cold and crying, complaining of having been beaten by her mother. Svidrigailov takes her back to his room and puts her on the bed, but is immediately horrified by the unchildlike, lascivious expression on her face. This dream represents both Svidrigailov's repressed desires arising from his id (or the instinctual side of our unconscious) as well as the anxieties about his life and actions that arise from his superego (our conscience, or the moral laws we inherit from society). Having long ignored his superego to satisfy his base and selfish desires (which oppress all those he interacts with), Svidrigailov has become a mentally ill, and perhaps psychopathic individual, who cannot separate dreams from reality. His only escape from the nightmare world which he inhabits, and which he himself created, is suicide.

It is impossible to examine dreams without referring to the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud believed that our repressed desires get articulated in our dreams in the form of symbols—often expressed as an articulation of the conflict between the id, ego and superego. Jung formulated the idea of the collective unconscious, in which many 'archetypal' images and patterns exist and work together in the dream to provide a unified, coherent vision of the world.

4.7 SUMMING UP

We have learned to understand the psychology of as complex a character as Raskolnikov. We know that Dostoevsky was familiar with the developments in psychology during his time as well as famous criminal trials like those of Lacenaire. We study the significance of the ‘little mother’ Sophia Semenovna, her status in society and her pivotal role in bringing about Raskolnikov’s repentance. We have looked at the intricacies of themes like sin and atonement, divided conscience, mental trauma, retribution, moral ambiguity and spiritual regeneration. These themes prove the split in Raskolnikov’s character. He is a man of education, but one led astray by his revolutionary beliefs—faith in the “one man” theory, utilitarianism, loopholes in the legal system for the unique, superior man, and his flawed concept of “progress”.

The reader also realizes that Raskolnikov is a man under considerable mental strain, sometimes treading the borders of insanity. Despite his crimes, he displays a tender humaneness in his dealings with Sonya and her family. At the end of the novel, we learn not only of his generosity but also of his selflessness (his short-lived engagement, the rescue of the children from the fire).

The book also deals with varied characters like Luzhin, Razoumikhin, Lebeziatnikoff and Svidrigailov, each a proponent of a certain philosophy. Dostoevsky demonstrates either the strength or weakness of these philosophies encapsulated in Unit 4 through themes like moral ambiguity, the idea of charity, Christian allegory. Unit 4 also examines how Dostoevsky utilizes space in the novel as a symbol of degradation, purity or for dream sequences. The reader is familiarized with the narrative techniques employed in this novel such as *erlebte Rede*, omniscient third person narrative and use of italicized pronouns. Specific symbols such as the Cross or the Palais de Crystal are used to indicate the extremes of austerity and depravity. St. Petersburg is filled with squalor, mire and rampant with criminal activity, in addition to being the center of learning in Russia.

This unit also contains a comparative analysis of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Outsider* and examines the existential dilemma, atheism and death.

Themes like education, social obstacles, legality allow one to examine Russian society with all its flaws in the nineteenth century. One sees the blatant discrimination against women irrespective of their class (Sonya, Katerina, Dounia).

Lastly, we learn a little about Dostoevsky's standing in Russian society, his involvement with the Petrashevskii Circle, his willingness to fuse tradition and modernity as well as imprisonment in 1849.

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Ed. Harold Bloom, *Viva Modern Critical Interpretations: Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*, Viva Books Private Ltd., New Delhi: 2007.

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Block 3

The Novel in German

Block Introduction:

This is the fourth block of paper VI. In this block you are going to read about Kafka, about German literary history in brief, about Kafka's works in brief, and also some helpful commentary on *The Trial*. You will obtain just enough knowledge to help you answer some examination-questions. It might be useful for you to be reminded here that a great novel or a really memorable piece of literary art must remain in our minds after the meager intellectual exercise of examinations is over. *The Trial* is just such an instance of what kind of an impression in the literary world a moving artistic document can make. This novel makes a wide array of verbal resonances and meanings available to us. Perhaps this is always the character of a great work of art or literature. If *The Trial* is so hard to contain within a limited commentary, it may be due to manner in which it bespeaks the kind of symbolism, and the imaginative horizons that it touches upon.

It will also help us to remember that the period when this novel emerged, the second decade of the twentieth century gave rise to some other famous works. We should recall that Kafka shared his times with Thomas Mann, Brecht, Karl Kraus, as well as others. This was the age of great turmoil and literary practices were decisively impelled to search out new values and renew their visions of human society, human ethical goals, and so on. *The Trial* should thus be seen to reverberate with these larger anxieties. Possibly therefore we can allow ourselves to be persuaded by readings of the work as William V. Spanos does in the later twentieth century (around the 1970s). Spanos believes that *The Trial* can be seen in alignment with the existentialist critique of positivism in Western thought, as it makes a distinction between "dread" or (*angst* in German) and "fear" or (*furcht* in German). Fear (*furcht*) can find an object which can be analyzed or attacked. Dread (*angst*) has no object and can thus never be solved. The Western perspective which tends to seek out solutions to problems in a "straightforward" mode is the kind of consciousness that existentialism tends to fault and to reject. Existentialist philosophy views such a consciousness as self-deceptive because it is blind to the "anxiety of contingent existence". The literary parallels of this defective consciousness which existentialism attacks lies,

according to Spanos, with the detective story where the presumption is that the acute observation and the superior analysis of the detective can solve the riddle of the crime. “Only after the existentialist philosophers revealed that the perception of the universe as well-made fiction, obsessive to the Western consciousness, is in reality a self-deceptive effort to evade the anxiety of contingent existence by objectifying and taking hold of “it”, did it become clear to the modern writer that the ending-as-solution is the literary agency of this evasive objectification.” You can see here that it was philosophically inevitable that the form of *The Trial* does not pacify us with ‘solutions’.

Proceeding with Spanos, *The Trial* belongs with the literary art that tries to demolish the grounds of such complacent positivism and thus also extends its critique to the totalitarian state. The totalitarian state, after all, worked with certainties of the kind of organization (social and political) that delivered ‘solutions’. The “antidetective” story, which we can call postmodern from this point of view, thus frustrates the possibility of ‘solutions’. Spanos remarks, “It is...no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the antidetective story (and its psychoanalytical analogue), the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to “detect” and/or to psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime”. As we know from history, the Nazi-governed totalitarian state espoused a ‘total solution’ to what it projected as the burden of about six million Jews whom it attempted eliminate. This is the pattern – of the non-viability of ‘solutions’-that runs through Kafka’s *The Trial*, T.S. Eliot’s *Sweeney Agonistes*, Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, Arthur Koestler *Arrival and Departure*, Samuel Beckett’s *Watt* and *Molloy*, Ionesco’s *Victims of Duty*, besides Robbe-Grillet’s *The Erasers*, and Nathalie Sarraute’s *Portrait of a Man Unknown*.

This was supposed to be only a ‘Block Introduction’. But we have moved to much more than the editorial piece. What you should have discovered here is that there is far more to reading literature than just worrying about examination-questions. So read on – passionately. Kafka’s *The Trial* is far greater than the many examination-answers we can reduce it to.

Contents:

Unit 1: German Novel

Unit 2 : Kafka and His Works

Unit 3 : The Trial

Unit 4 : Themes and Techniques

Unit 1

German Novel

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Major Literary Trends
 - 1.3.1 Rationalism
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 - 1.3.3 Romantic Movement
 - 1.3.4 Realism and Regionalism
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- 1.4 Cultural and Historical Context
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 - 1.5.1 Robert Musil
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 - 1.5.5 Franz Kafka
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- 1.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to the idea of German novel, from its origins to the present day. An attempt has also been made to trace the various socio-political and cultural trends that shaped German literature in general. After reading this unit you should be able to

- *appreciate* German literary history with a special reference to the German novel

- *identify* the major trends and themes of German Literature
- *find* out the important contemporary novelists in German Literature

1.2 INTRODUCTION

In order to develop an idea of the German novel, we must first try to comprehend, although briefly, the history of German literature in general. The word 'German' while applied to literature, is difficult to define. The term 'German literature' will definitely mean literature in the German language. But the 'German intelligentsia' is also a polyglot group moving in between Latin and German for at least the first thousand years of its literary history. Another interesting fact is that the German people, during the seventeenth century, had used Italian at the great courts. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had used English as the lingua franca of science and technology. But what the Germans had written is perhaps more important than what was written in German. Then another question arises regarding the identity of the Germans as we cannot simply say that the Germans are those people living within the boundaries of the German speaking world. It is because it contains French, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Hungarian, Serb, Croat, Polish, Czech and Yiddish speakers living side by side with the German speakers. In earlier times, there existed one political entity called 'The Holy Roman Empire' while in the twentieth century the world had to experience the existence of two Germanys resulting out of the Austrian and Swiss account of Germans for any kind of literary purposes. That is why perhaps, it is not so easy to write history of German literature. This goes against the efforts made in the past to find out a coherent history of German literature. Contemporary critics will make us understand that any historical narrative is by definition biased, partial and written to fulfill the ideological needs of the day. Moving a step further some even say that the writing of history is immoral in that it entails the construction of an official narrative designed to bolster the standing of those in power and to silence those of the 'wrong' social class, religious and political beliefs or gender. So, the concept of a history of German literature is a very difficult one to comprehend.

The question of the 'canon' also problematises the concept of a linear coherent and uniform literary history of Germany. The problem with the German canon, as manifested in school and university teaching programmes, not just in the English speaking world, is that it traditionally consists of an extraordinarily small section of authors and their works; a brief flowering in the middle ages, although many departments no longer teach mediaeval literature now. Most interestingly enough, the authors of this history have tried to escape from the tyranny of such a narrow canon by asking themselves what the Germans in a given period were actually reading and writing. This method of looking at readers as well as writers, reveal a kind of possibility that writing by Germans has, in all periods, been richer than it has often given credit for. So, it is against such a background that we must study the history of the German novel.

The Germans were committed to writing in the monasteries, using the Latin alphabet, and king Charlemagne, whose court provided a cultural and literary center, encouraged book writing. As regards to literature in German, the tenth century Ottonian literature is viewed as a kind of wasteland. The Latin literary tradition established in Germany under the Carolinians, however, continued vigorously under the Saxons and the Salians. But what marks out German literature of the period 1100-1450 is the emergence and establishment of an autonomous German literary culture in written form which had never existed in the earlier periods. Since the eleventh century, we can experience a relationship between German and Latin writings and between Latin literature and oral tradition. The first half of the 13th century saw a number of striking new developments in German narrative fiction. The German heroic epic is given a written form in titles like *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Klage* and later followed by *Kudrun*. Gotfried Von's *Tristan* provided a more skeptical and critical variant of the courtly romance in the form of a tragic love story based on Arthurian tradition. The *Tristan* romance, originally a reworking of the French version by Thomas of Brittany of this infamous story of adulterous love is presented by Gotfird as the authoritative version chosen from many.

SAQ:

After going through this section what idea do you have on the genealogy of the German literature? (100 words)

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Try to find out certain noticeable differences between the German literary tradition and the English? (80 words)

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1.3 MAJOR LITERARY TRENDS

Going through the history of German literature we can find that the major literary trends were established only during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, since the eighteenth century, German literature began to take its actual shape through the age of Enlightenment, Neo-classicism and the Romantic movements. Consequently, Rationalism, Neoclassicism and Romanticism became the dominant modes of representation. It is also an age in which Jonathan Wolfgang Von Goethe went beyond the enlightenment’s substitution of science for religion, and insisted upon the value of ‘feeling’ in face of the limitation of ‘reason.’

“Sturm and Drang”:

Goethe’s emphasis on the value of feeling bears tremendous significance. Impulse, instinct, emotion, fancy, and intuition acquired a quasi-religious significance as elements connecting men to divine nature. The ideal of the classical age, soon to be called *humanitat* (humanness), was that of the fully developed personality in

which intellect and feeling should be harmoniously balanced. In the evolution of this new outlook, three phases can be distinguished- Sturm and Drang, Classicism and Romanticism.

Goethe used this Sturm and Drang movement as his tool to over-throw rationalism. Its growth could be found in the rising resistance to French classical taste and in the influence of Rousseau, Young, McPherson and the recently translated Shakespeare. Nature, genius and originality were the slogans of the new movement. The cult of nature replaced orthodox religion. Individual consciousness was placed above all kinds of laws. Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg stressed personal feelings in matters of taste. Johann Georg Hamann emphasized the inspirational and symbolic function of language. His disciple Johann Gottfried von Herder further grasped the idea of historical evolution and essentialised the main current of the movement. He stressed the value of historical continuity in literature and pointed to the folk songs, ballads, and romances of the middle ages as sources of inspiration.

While the major literary trends of the 19th century can be found in the form of Realism, Regionalism and Naturalism, the 20th century literature saw the rise of Impressionism, Expressionism, Post-expressionism and Social-Realism. Hence, the literary history of Germany presents before us an interesting picture of its own developments. Following are certain references to the various trends which influenced the history of German literatures.

1.3.1 RATIONALISM

Against the dominant influence of religion on the intellectual and spiritual affairs in the seventeenth century, the enlightenment of the eighteenth century valorized reason and rationalism to achieve a proper explanation of the universe. The believers of supremacy of human reason opined that in a rational universe there was no room for mystery and predestination as the world was governed by the law of cause and effect. Evil was only a result of the irrational condition of life, and men could improve their fate by the pursuit of science and education. An optimistic belief in human perfectibility was sought to be cultivated for the betterment of human beings. The founder of rationalism in Germany is undoubtedly Leibniz who began to question the relationship between God and men. The main emphasis was laid not on conformity but on the individual's spiritual experience. Its impact on literature

can be most strikingly seen in the emergence of new ideas in German literature during that period. But its significance can be seen more through its progressive influence on English literature. Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, and Alexander Pope and later James Thomson, John Milton and Edward Young were the eighteenth century English writers who, informed by German rationalism, succeeded in regenerating literary tastes in England.

1.3.2 NEO-CLASSICISM

German neoclassicism became prominent with Johann Gottfried von Herder's attempt to reconcile intellect with feelings. By this time, "Storm and Drang" became outdated because the balance between intellect and feeling and a kind of self discipline was absent. Instead, a more positive form of moral idealism appeared in the poetry of Goethe and Schiller, as well as in the philosophy of Emanuel Kant. French revolution rendered the problem of freedom more acute. Schiller believed in the antagonism between duty and inclination which could be resolved only when morality would become 'second nature' and this could be achieved only through the contemplation and production of beauty. The notion of 'Art' thus acquired an educational function which became the major objective of neoclassicism. The supreme literary work of this period is Goethe's *Faust*. Part I (1808) sets out Faust's despair, his pact with Mephistopheles, and his love for Gretchen; part II (1832) covers the magician's life at court, the winning of Helen of Troy, and Faust's purification and salvation.

1.3.3 ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

The first phase of romanticism began less as a protest against the neoclassicism than as a radical extension of some of its beliefs and interests in Greek antiquity. The Romantic poet could even create his or her own world from reality or from fancy and could turn whatever he liked into poetry. This led to more innovations in poetic writings in terms of content and style. The new generation felt free and tried to revise all accepted values not only in art and literature but in other spheres as well. Among the topics in vogue were nature and the spirit in all their manifestations, particularly the supernatural, the subconscious, and the metaphysical. Poets like Friedrich Holderlin and Jean Paul were the two most significant writers who fell between

neoclassicism and romanticism proper. The first Romantic school developed during 1798, inspired by the subjective idealism of Schelling, whose “Natural Philosophy” asserted the unity of nature and the human spirit. After 1805, a second school of Romanticism developed in Heidelberg. Unlike the members of the earlier group, the Heidelberg writers produced historical works and also collected folk songs and popular prose romances. This period also inaugurated a scholarly study of German philology and medieval literature.

1.3.4 REALISM AND REGIONALISM

After the end of both neoclassicism and romanticism, realism inspired by regional elements, established itself as the most dominant trend in German literature. Its finest exponents were Adalbert Stifter, Gottfried Keller, and Theodoe Fontane. Poetic realism, a term coined by Otto Ludwig, aimed at portraying life as it was thought to be artistically significant and possessed intrinsic value. Focusing on social reality the realist writers discovered positive value in everyday life without reference to transcendental ideas. The various changes in the social order made the social critics question developments that accompanied the beginning of urbanization.

Stop to Consider:

In the context of German realism, reference can be made of Karl Marx’s Socialist Realism, Arthur Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy and Ludwig Feuerbach’s materialistic thought. There also developed a positivism that by way of analogy, sought to apply to the study of literature and society methods that were mistakenly believed to be those of natural science. This in turn, led to the study of sources and texts, formalized by the first important organized school of literary history in Germany.

But in course of the nineteenth century, German literature had increasingly abandoned an idealistic conception of men and instead turned to a more down-to-earth and deprecating appraisal of reality, reflecting the rise of positivist and materialist thought in science.

In fiction, writers concentrated on subjects they could accurately describe. Karl Immermann portrayed the world of peasants rooted in the work and their countryside. With the collection of lyrical poetry *Quickborn* (1853),

Klaus Groth became a prototype of the regional poet. With Gottfried Keller a pinnacle of poetic realism in prose narrative is reached. Based on his native Switzerland, his writings reveal his attempts to differentiate between those characters whose thought and conduct allow their personalities to mature and those who, ignoring the voice of nature, fail to develop their inner potentialities. Another important realist was Theodor Storm who subordinated the romantic elements to realistic description.

1.3.5 NATURALISM

Naturalism in Germany was based on a principle of scientific objectivity modeled on the works of French Emile Zola. It was Arno Holz, who christened himself as the first important poet of naturalism in Germany. Together with Johannes Schlaf, he wrote three tales entitled *Papa Hamlet* (1889) in which an attempt was made to depict the minutiae of life, even its pathological and sordid aspects.

1.3.6 IMPRESSIONISM

The social, political, and spiritual uncertainty of the surrounding in the twentieth century made the writers dissatisfied with conventional literary forms which led to various experimentations as a part of the emerging forces in modern literatures. Impressionism which was one of such experimentations evoked a mood or state of mind by emphasizing the impression made by an object on its observers. Poet Detlev von Liliencron and Richard provided an early example of this in their poetry. Writers influenced by symbolism also had elements of impressionism in their works. Poet Stephan George's solemn, carefully composed verse aimed at asserting the lofty nature of poetry. Impressionism which began with poetic writing, ultimately gained prominence through "Prague circle" which included Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Werfel, Max Brod and Gustav Meyrink. Their works inclined more towards the esoteric and was strongly influenced by Symbolism

1.3.7 SYMBOLISM

Symbolism in German poetry was introduced mainly by Rilke. Example can be cited of his book *Das Stunden-Buch* or *The Book of Hours* which described a search for spiritual health in a hostile urban civilization. Rilke's

conception of the universe, God, and death was determined by a quest for artistic fulfillment. The influence of symbolist poetry on contemporary prose writing was best reflected in Thomas Mann who used symbols and myth in narratives that started from a clinical analysis of modern man's mental and physical state. Mann's characterization was Impressionist but the impressions became a leitmotif which conveyed the power of the subconscious. His works were also influenced by the philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche but his portrayal of social change, of the impact of ideology, was an integral part of the story, and he was always pre-occupied with the status of the artist in society.

1.3.8 EXPRESSIONISM

Expressionism is perhaps the most significant and influential movement in German literature. It basically emphasized the inner significance of things and not their external forms. Anticipating a world war, expressionist writers sought to depict the disintegration of the contemporary world and proclaimed a quest for the 'New Man'.

The dramas of Frank Wedekind were the fore-runners of this style. For example, the plays constituting what is commonly known as the '*Lulu Tragedies*' had criticized bourgeois morality and had deviated from the dramatic conventions. The first full-pledged expressionist drama was Johannes Reinhard Sorge's *Bettler* (1912, *The Beggar*) in which characters appeared as abstract functions in each other's life. Expressionist poetry is also non-referential, attaining coherence through its associative power. However, the mainspring of the expressionist verse was a horror over urbane life and over the collapse of civilization. Portrayals of this apocalyptic vision inform much of Franz Kafka's writings. His parables, stories, and novels seem to epitomize the problems of modern life. With a strong sense of the nightmare, he depicted the uncertainty and horror of human existence through his creations like *The Judgment* (in which a father kills his son) *Metamorphosis* (in which a man turns into a creature), *The Trial* or *The Castle* (in which the individual is trapped in a labyrinth of anxiety and guilt and crushed by unfathomable forces). After 1918, expressionism paved the way for Socialist-realism through which the writers hoped to gain objectivity.

Check Your Progress:

1. List down the major literary trends that influenced German literature.
2. What do you mean by the idea of “Sturm and Drang”?
3. Try conceptualizing the major literary trends of the 19th century.
4. Define the major trends of the twentieth century from what you have read in this section.
5. Expressionism assigns a totally different status to German literature. Comment on that.

1.4 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The dominant literature written in Germany in the early middle age is in Latin. But only a very small amount of that has survived. However, such information does not count for the establishment of a vernacular literary tradition. The definitions of ‘German’ and of ‘Literature’ are no doubt problematic, but the more important question arises of whether German literature at this stage may be defined as literature in German. Part of this interest in the period lays in the emergence, from the eight century onwards, of a self conscious written tradition in German within a Christian–Latin literary and intellectual context. Whatever remains in pure German cannot be termed literature at all. As you have already read in the first section of this unit, most of the survivals in German before 1100 exist in unique manuscripts and were affected by the inferior position of the language. The Carolingian and Ottonian periods coincide roughly with the earliest written stage of the modern language, known as Old High German. But by this is meant a group of dialects spoken in present day Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which have certain common linguistic features. But it would be always wrong to exclude literature written in the continental Low German dialects of Old Saxon and old low Franconian. However, throughout the periods, the primary context of literature is Latin and its framework is that of the Roman church. Writing in pure German is for a very long time peripheral, while Latin texts in a range of genres bear witness to a well established literary tradition in Germany. Latin literature written in German territories, by German speakers, and often with German themes requires considerations.

The context for literary endeavour in the seventeenth century was the division between the Catholics, the Lutherans, and the Calvinists that was enshrined in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, and which eventually led to the Thirty Years War (1618-48). The war, though oriented towards religion, became more concerned with the balance of power in Europe. The only positive achievement of the war was to convince the European monarchs of the inefficacy of the war as a means to settle religious differences.

Stop to Consider:

Parallel to the religious tensions were the literary men who held steadfastly to the often-articulated concept of the Renaissance, of a nation bound together by a common language and literature in which tolerance might reign and, beyond it, of a commonwealth of letters binding all men of letters throughout the civilized world.

The first decades of the seventeenth century witnessed a series of initiatives, particularly among the Protestant intelligentsia, to advance the goals of freedom for Protestants within an empire under a Protestant monarch, a German literature standing besides other vernaculars, and the realization of a humanist ideal and mutual tolerance. All this took place against the backdrop of inner religious renewal common to both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The end of the century witnessed the increase in literacy. In 1681, for the first time the catalogues of the German book fairs show that more books were being published in German than in Latin. Literature had begun the process of secularization and the literary exploration of the inner world of emotions was well under way.

The eighteenth century represented a form of personal narrative in which subjectivity was openly constructed, interrogated, examined and presented. The novels now aimed to present the self in the context of the society. The 'gallant' novels of the earlier century were replaced by works closer to the moral education. The new epistolary novel (which also found its place in the English literary tradition) reflected the increasing involvement with the individual both as he/she could be identified and defined in relation to the social context around him/her.

Stop to Consider:

The novel is often characterized as a portrait of 'life' and society, though such representation is filtered by many influences that shape the picture that is presented. As the novel came into its own it was influenced by the revised perceptions of gender and class, as well as the changing economic circumstances of the middle-class home and family. With these changes came a new and growing reading public which consisted of a large part of middle-class women. Thus the reading market gained a huge leap and the new interests had to be met. The development of the form was a European phenomenon. From the early years of the century, English and French novels in particular enjoyed a strong popularity among the German readers: for example Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was translated in 1720. German translations of the novels of Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Laurence Sterne were eagerly waited.

The German novel from 1800 to 1848 is marked by a number of different aesthetic, poetic, and political ideologies, and resists attempts at easy classification. Towards the end of the eighteenth century after the French Revolution, a general dispute arose amongst the later Enlightenment thinkers about the function of the aesthetic realm, including literature. A broader system of social spheres combined with a much larger educated reading public led to a split between higher ('autonomous') literature and lower Trivialliteratur; this division can be seen as the result of a widespread compartmentalization of society as well as a fear of egalitarian tendencies amongst the educated classes. Classical models, many poets thought, were no longer sufficient: instead, new forms should be developed. The early Romantics called for a new mythology; the fragment, with its self-contained unity but resistance to final closure, was a favored form. The novel, often fragmentary, was hailed as the 'modern' genre, and as the Romantic Movement broadened to include the circles in Heidelberg and elsewhere, literature took on a philosophical justification: literary work was seen not as an escapist art, but as a combination of creativity and critical reflection. The problem of history was thematized by many writers, including novelists, who sought a synthesis in the future and rejected others' call for a return to the idealized harmony of the past. Kleist, in particular, problematized the construction of subjectivity, including race and gender. Hoffmann and Heine used satire and irony to retain their critical stance, but many Romantics suppressed some of the social awareness and the critical function of literature by turning to 'Nature' and the 'Volk' as the source for renewal.

By the 1830's however, at the hands of a new generation of poets and authors who were constrained by the increased conservatism and censorship reigning in Germany- new genres (cultural and travel sketches, political poetry) gained prominence, and by the Vormärz period, a radical and materialist ideology stood at odds with the conservative establishment, creating an extremely large spectrum for literary activity. Since our concern is with German novels I will shift my discussion to modern German novels which exhibit a number of peculiar characteristics which set it apart from its predecessors. Already by the late 1950's, there could be perceived a noticeable shift away from the standard 'realistic' mode, common throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, towards a more autonomous but less mimetically expressed style of writing. These modern novels, seen as they were to be categorically "new" and different, were designated accordingly: American and British critics sought to name them as 'New Fiction', while many Continental writers preferred the French 'nouveau roman' as the term to define the novels.

SAQ:

Try to find out the complexities of the cultural context of German literature?
(80 words)

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Do you think that a considerable understanding of the cultural history of Germany may help in comprehending a notion of the German novels?(80words)

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1.5 IMPORTANT NOVELISTS

In this section, I will deal with five German novelists whose literary contributions have not only enriched the world literature but also popularized German literatures to a great extent.

1.5.1 ROBERT MUSIL

The Austrian author Robert Musil was born in Klagenfurt, Carinthia (Kärnten) on November 6, 1880. He attended two elite military academies and was trained as an engineer. His doctoral work dealt with Ernst Mach. He later served in the Austrian war office but he was soon drawn to Berlin and its lively intellectual community. He published his first novel *Young Torles* in 1906. His novels are characterized by a subtle psychological element and his writing style has been compared to that of Proust. But Musil was probably influenced more by Nietzsche and his own scientific background. He later lived in Vienna (1933-38), where he began to work on his crowning achievement, *The Man without Qualities*. This vast epic novel remained incomplete at the time of his death in Geneva, Switzerland. Musil's two other better known works are *Tonke and Other Stories* I, *Three Women*.

1.5.2 FRANZ WERFEL

The expressionist novelist and poet Franz Werfel was born in Prague in 1890. Werfel's father was a wealthy merchant and factory owner. Franz grew up and was educated in Prague as a member of the city's Jewish, German-speaking community. As a young high school student, Werfel became acquainted with other German-Jewish writers in Prague, including Franz Kafka and Max Brod. In the English-speaking world, Werfel is probably best known for his novel *The Song of Bernadette* (*Das Lied von Bernadette*, 1941), which he wrote during his exile in southern California. Later a Hollywood film (1943) starring Jennifer Jones, the novel had been inspired by Werfel's experiences in France when he and his wife were fleeing Nazi-controlled Austria. The movie, with a screenplay by Walter and Jean Kerr, won four Academy Awards, including Best Actress for Jones.

Werfel published his first works of poetry in 1911. After serving his compulsory military duty from 1911-12, Werfel went to Leipzig where he

worked as an editor for the Kurt Wolff publishing house that specialized in expressionist literature. With the outbreak of the First World War, Werfel was back in the army. After 1917, he worked in the army's press office in Vienna, and following the war he remained in Austria, working as a freelance writer. Although he wrote poetry and dramas, Werfel's biggest success was with his novels and short stories. He wrote his first novella in 1920 (*Nicht der Mörder, der Ermordete ist der Schuldige*) and other fictional works followed over the years. In his literary works he often expressed his beliefs in pacifism and the brotherhood of man. In 1933, Werfel published the novel *Vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh*, recounting the struggle of the Armenians against the Turks in World War I. But after the *Anschluss* in 1938 he was forced to leave Austria, finally ending up in California. His bestselling novel *Song of Bernadette* (1941) is about Bernadette Soubirous, the Catholic saint of Lourdes. Werfel died of a heart attack in Beverly Hills on 26 August 1945.

1.5.3 GUNTER GRASS

The novelist, artist, and sculptor Günter Grass was born in Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) on October 16, 1927. Grass spent most of his service in an American POW camp, from which he was released in 1946. Shortly before the publication of his memoir *Peeling Onions/Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* in August 2006, Grass confessed that he actually had been a soldier in the notorious *Waffen-SS*, a special Nazi commando unit, when he was just 17 years old. The ensuing stir was more about the fact that Grass had kept this fact a secret than his actual military service. Grass has always presented himself as a moralist, often reprimanding his fellow Germans for not truly facing up to their World War II guilt. It also led some to call for the rejection of most of the awards and honors (including a Nobel Prize) the author has received over the years. But others pointed out that Grass is often controversial and with his confession he was helping his book become a bestseller.

From 1948 to 1956 Grass studied graphic art and sculpture in Düsseldorf and Berlin. Around the time of his first art exhibition in 1957, he began to write seriously. In 1959 Grass published his first novel, *Die Blechtrommel / The Tin Drum*, about the impact of the Nazis and World War II on post-

war Germany. It became an international bestseller and was later made into an award-winning film (1979). Grass has long been active in the left-leaning German SPD (Social Democratic) party, and he has often stirred up controversy with his political stands. For example, he was a vigorous opponent of German reunification. Most of his early novels/novellas dealt with the German Nazi past in a surreal way. Grass tried to come to terms with a part of German history that he experienced as a young man. For his literary achievements, Grass was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999.

1.5.4 THOMAS MANN

Thomas Mann was born in Lübeck, Germany and was the second son of Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann a senator and a grain merchant. Mann attended the science division of a Lübeck gymnasium, then spent time at the University of Munich and Technical University of Munich where, in preparation for a career in journalism, he studied history, economics, art history, and literature. He lived in Munich from 1891 until 1933. Thomas worked with the South German Fire Insurance Company 1894–95. His career as a writer began when he wrote for *Simplicissimus*. Mann's first short story, "Little Herr Friedemann" (*Der Kleine Herr Friedemann*), was published in 1898.

In 1930 Mann gave a public address in Berlin titled "An Appeal to Reason," in which he strongly denounced National Socialism and encouraged resistance by the working class. This was followed by numerous essays and lectures in which he attacked the Nazis. At the same time, he expressed increasing sympathy for socialist ideas. In 1933 when the Nazis came to power Mann's books were burnt publicly by Hitler's regime in May 1933, possibly since he had been the Nobel laureate in literature for 1929. Finally in 1936 the Nazi government officially revoked his German citizenship. A few months later he moved to the United States. However, Mann did not stop from expressing his views on Nazism, which corresponded to the much later novel *Doktor Faustus*. In the novel, the author refers in several places to the historical debt of the German population, leading to World War II with all its cruelty. During the war also, Mann regularly made anti-Nazi broadcasts from California.

Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929, principally in recognition of his popular achievement with the epic *Buddenbrooks* (1901), *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg* 1924), and his numerous short stories. Based on Mann's own family, *Buddenbrooks* relates the decline of a merchant family in Lübeck over the course of three generations. *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924) follows an engineering student who, planning to visit his tubercular cousin at a Swiss sanatorium for only three weeks, finds his departure from the sanatorium delayed for seven years. During that time, he confronts medicine and the way it looks at the body and encounters a variety of characters who play out ideological conflicts and discontents of contemporary European civilization. Later, other novels included *Lotte in Weimar* (1939), in which Mann returned to the world of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774); *Doktor Faustus* (1947), the story of composer Adrian Leverkühn and the corruption of German culture in the years before and during World War II; and *Confessions of Felix Krull* (*Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*, 1954), which was still unfinished at Mann's death. To his greatest works belongs the tetralogy *Joseph and His Brothers* (*Joseph und seine Brüder*, 1933–42), a richly imagined retelling of the story of Joseph related in chapters 27-50 of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible.

Mann's diaries, unsealed in 1975, are the tales of his struggles with his sexuality, which found reflection in his works, most prominently through the obsession of the elderly Aschenbach for the 14-year-old Polish boy Tadzio in the novella *Death in Venice* (*Der Tod in Venedig*, 1912). Anthony Heilbut's biography *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (1997) was widely acclaimed for uncovering the centrality of Mann's sexuality to his oeuvre.

Throughout his essay on Dostoevsky he finds parallels between the Russian and the sufferings of Frederich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's influence on Mann runs deep in his work, especially in Nietzsche's views on decay and the proposed fundamental connection between sickness and creativity. Mann held that disease is not to be regarded as wholly negative. In his essay on Dostoevsky we find: "but after all and above all it depends on who is

diseased., who mad, who epileptic or paralytic: an average dull-witted man, in whose illness any intellectual or cultural aspect is non-existent; or a Nietzsche or Dostoevsky. In their case something comes out in illness that is more important and conducive to life and growth than any medical guaranteed health or sanity... in other words: certain conquests made by the soul and the mind are impossible without disease, madness, crime of the spirit.” (“Crime and Will in Mann”). Mann firmly believed in the power of sickness and decay to destroy the ossifying effects of tradition and civilization. Hence, there is the “heightening” of which Mann speaks in his introduction to *The Magic Mountain* and the opening of new spiritual possibilities that Hans Castorp experiences in the midst of his sickness. In *Death in Venice* he makes the identification between beauty and the resistance to natural decay, embodied by Aschenbach as the metaphor for the Nazi vision of purity. He also valued the insight of other cultures, notably adapting a traditional Indian fable in *The Transposed Heads*. His work is the record of a consciousness of a life of manifold possibilities, and of the tensions inherent in the responses to those possibilities. In his own summation in Nobel Prize acceptance lecture, Mann proclaimed that the value and significance of his work for posterity may safely be left to the future; for him they are nothing but the personal traces of a life led consciously, that is, conscientiously.

Thomas Mann’s works were first translated into English by H. T. Lowe-Porter. Her translations have become classics in their own right and have contributed enormously to Mann’s popularity in the English-speaking world.

1.5.5 FRANZ KAFKA

In the next unit, you will get to read about Franz Kafka in details. Attempt has also been made to read Kafka as one of the most important German novelist who died young but who also created a novel like *The Trial* which invited meaningful critical concerns from the readers as well as the intelligentsias.

Check Your Progress:

1. From this section what idea can you have of contemporary German novelists?
2. Write down the common themes of the contemporary German writers as discussed above.
3. Try to recollect Thomas Mann's achievements in German literature.

1.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you are introduced to the idea of German novel, from its origins to the present day. An attempt has also been made to trace the various socio-political and cultural trends that shaped German literature in general. After reading this unit, now you should be able to appreciate German literary history with a special reference to the German novel and identify the major trends and themes of German Literature. Moreover, you must have identified the important contemporary novelists in German Literature and their literary contribution. The understanding of the literary trends in German literature will help you situate Kafka in his context.

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Unit 2

Kafka and His Works

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Biographical Sketch
- 2.4 The Works of Kafka
- 2.5 Placing the work
- 2.6 Summing Up

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the second unit of this block. As you have already come to know, in this block a detailed analysis of Kafka and his book *The Trial* will be made available to you. But in this unit my objectives will be only to let you know certain necessary information regarding Kafka's life and his works. However, at the end of this unit, you will be able to-

- *identify* in Kafka the upbringing of a modern writer
- *gather* a comprehensive knowledge about Kafka's works
- *place* the work in a specific socio-political and historical German background

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is one of the most powerful voices of literary modernism in the world. Although he hails from Germany, his far fletched influence on the literatures of other countries is worth noticing. Perhaps, that is best reflected through his novel *The Trial*. Very much shy and introvert by disposition, Kafka was in need of friends and after his premature death,

his friend Max Brod played the most significant role in rescuing him and establishing him as one of the modernist writers of the world. However, it is difficult to place Kafka in a literary tradition. The various influences on him include Gustave Flaubert, Heinrich von Kleist, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Especially it was Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *Brothers Karamazov* which left their marks on his *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*.

Kafka's is an interesting life- history which will be discussed in the next section. His works can be called a spiritual autobiography in a metaphoric sense. And his *The Trial* is also more autobiographical than fictional. In a diary written on 6th August 1914, Kafka noted that the sense of his "dreamlike inner life" had stunted all his other interests and talents and had become the only quality that could afford him full satisfaction. Franz Kafka's works include: *The Metamorphosis/Die Verwandlung* (1915), *The Judgment/Das Urteil* (1916), *In the Penal Colony/In der Strafkolonie* (1919), *The Country Doctor/Ein Landarzt* (1920), *The Trial/Der Prozess* (1925, posthumous), *The Castle/Das Schloss* (1926, posthumous), *Amerika / Verschollen* (1927, posthumous) and *The Diaries/Die Tagebücher 1910-23* (1951, posthumous).

2.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Franz Kafka was born on July 3, 1883. He was the first son of Herman and Julie Kafka. His mother came from a well-to-do family and his father was a prospering businessman. He was mostly brought up by governesses along with the other children. He was sent to German schools because his father thought that it would give him social privilege. This was a remarkable influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire upon the Czech elite in Prague. As a result, Kafka was equally at ease in both German and his mother tongue Czech. In 1901, he graduated and went to Charles Ferdinand University to study chemistry. Soon the subject irked and terrified him and he switched to law. The next semester he took German literature as his subject but this too exhausted him and he returned to law, his previous subject. Later he would confess that he opted for law in order not to destabilize his mental equilibrium. His relationship with Max Brod whom he

met at school deepened at this period. In June 1906, he graduated with a doctorate in law.

In 1907, he started working at an insurance company but soon left it due to the lengthy hours and intolerable conditions. In 1908, he got his job at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute where he would work most of the rest of his life. This job helped him explore his talent for writing. Although he started writing from 1898 sporadically, he destroyed his earlier works and he tried his hands at serious writing only from 1904. Max Brod persuaded him to publish some of his writings and in 1913, a collection of his short stories titled *Meditation* appeared. In that same year, he started gathering information for his novel *Amerika* or *The Man who Disappeared*.

In 1912, Kafka met Felice Bauer and this acquaintance would be crucial in shaping his personal life and literary career. He started writing long letters to her and in his first flush of love, he wrote *The Judgment*. In that same year, he wrote *The Metamorphosis* and started working at *Amerika*. The influence of women in Kafka's life is extraordinary yet paradoxical. Before meeting Felice, he had temporary affairs with many women and he visited whorehouses frequently. For him except immediate sexual gratification nothing was meaningless. Yet, most strikingly, sex was the most repulsive thing in his life. He thought it as the strongest deterrent for enjoying normal married life. He wrote in his diary, "Coitus is the punishment for the happiness of being together." This notion would ultimately damage and destroy his personal life. In 1913, he proposed to Felice Bauer and she accepted. However, that did not refrain him from falling in love with other women. Among them, Gerti Wesner and Grete Bloch were prominent.

The year 1914 was particularly a productive year for Kafka, although his personal life was not so calm. In that year, he broke off the engagement with Felice as she came to know about his affair with Grete Bloch but he continued writing to her. He started writing *The Trial* and finished it in 1916. Meanwhile some of his famous short stories including *The Judgment* and *The Metamorphosis* were published after much persuasion from Max Brod but received little attention.

His health had never been extraordinarily good and he went to a sanatorium in 1913 to improve his physical condition for a brief time. In 1917, he again proposed to Felice but in the same year he was diagnosed with tuberculosis

and this literally ended their relationship. She married another man in 1919. Kafka, soon after his diagnosis, went to stay with his sister Ottla in Jurau. There he wrote what would become *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, a collection of proverbs and sketches. In 1919, he met Milena Jesenska whose influence would be formidable in his life. They started writing long letters to each other and he discussed everything, including his fear of copulation, with her. She was very understanding and she recognized Kafka's unique talent. He started writing his monumental work *The Castle* in 1922 and she seems to have been a major inspiration, especially in the character of Frieda. However, in 1923, their relationship ended when Melina reconciled with her husband.

In the same year, he became profoundly interested in Judaism and Zionism and started learning Hebrew. For that, he met a couple of teachers before meeting Dora Diamont. They became very close and in September, he moved out of his parent's apartment and went to Berlin with Dora. This was the happiest phase in Kafka's life and he finished writing most of his stories there. However, in 1924, his physical condition deteriorated rapidly and he went to a couple of sanatoriums. In April, he went to a sanatorium in Kierling, Austria. He agreed to the publication of his some short stories including *The Hunger Artist*. He asked for Dora's hands but her father turned it down. He died in the sanatorium on June 3, 1924 with Dora at his bedside.

Kafka asked Brod to burn all his manuscripts after his death. Brod never followed his instructions and he continued editing and publishing his works. He moved to Israel with all the manuscripts in order to avoid the Nazi aggression in 1939. In the late 20s and 30s, Edward Muir translated Kafka's short stories to English and with that, his popularity soared. With the translation of his novels, he became a sort of iconic figure in the world of literature and he was compared with none other than Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Throughout his life Kafka was haunted down by his physical condition, his relationship with his father and with women and all these influenced his writings greatly. He suffered from migraines, insomnia, constipation, boils and other ailments, all usually brought on by excessive stresses and strains. He was never at ease with his father. He envied his fathers' masculinity, his success as a businessman, and his formidable influence on his mother. He

loathed his egocentricity and his dictatorial regime on his family. In 1919, he sent a confessional letter to his father which his mother never showed to him. In that letter, he cornered his father as the sole factor for losing his self-confidence. His love relationships were suffered because of his perverse attitude towards physical union as we have mentioned earlier.

Regarding religion, Kafka maintained his formal indifference towards it throughout his life. While he had formulated a sense of Jewish identity, it was complicated by his alienation from Judaism. Later, towards the end of his life, he started showing interest in Judaism but his life was too short for any further development in this matter. Kafka was such a writer who transformed his personal worries and woes into creative zeal. His life was itself a sort of metamorphosis. Kafka carved his own niche in the arena of literature against the trials and tribulations of his life.

The popular term “Kafkaesque” (*kafkaesk* in German) reflects the bizarre, nightmarish nature of most of the author’s works. In *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) Kafka’s character awakes to discover he has become a huge bug: “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.” In *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*) the anonymous Josef K suddenly finds himself under arrest and attempting to defend himself against unknown charges. Most Kafka experts attribute the tortured, ambiguous nature of his writings to his personal struggle to understand his own relationship with his domineering father.

Plagued off and on by tuberculosis from 1911 on, Kafka died of that disease in a sanatorium near Vienna (Kierling) exactly one month before his 41st birthday. His family brought him back to Prague for burial. Although he did not live long enough to witness his nightmare world come true or to suffer at the hands of the Nazis, Kafka’s three sisters perished in German concentration camps. A marble plaque at the base of the Kafka family gravestone in Prague commemorates his sisters (His beloved Berlin companion Dora Dymant lived until 1952). Most of his work was published posthumously by his friend and editor Max Brod (who ignored Kafka’s request to destroy them). Although he saved Kafka’s works from oblivion, Brod also has been criticized in recent years for altering some of Kafka’s texts in ways the author himself may not have intended.

SAQ:

How do you think Kafka's life history helps in his upbringing as a writer?
(80 words)

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What role did Max Brod play in the life of Kafka and later reviving his works after his death? (60 words)

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2.4 THE WORKS OF KAFKA

During his short lifetime, Kafka wrote three novels, all of which remained incomplete. He was also a prolific short story writer. Apart from the fictions, Kafka's letters and diaries also have great literary value. His novels were published posthumously with the help of his great friend Max Brod and instantly received wide international acclaim.

We will first deal with the novels, as we are well aware that his reputation mainly rests on these three great works.

The Trial was published in 1925. The plot revolves around Joseph K., a bank clerk who, one morning, discovers that he is arrested "without his having done anything wrong". From this onwards, the novel follows the trials and fruitless tribulations of the protagonist. It is not the protagonist's fate on which the novel is mainly focused but the proceedings of Joseph K.'s trial leading to a surrealistic death. The almost invisible court tries to tempt K. by penetrating into his conscience and at last K. gives in confessing his guilt although he never knows what his guilt is. Joseph K.'s guilt is paradoxical because from the very beginning he is conscious of it without knowing it. K.'s guilt lies in his inability and unwillingness to remember what

this guilt really is. It is also noteworthy that K. has never viewed the court as a useless and absurd institution. Yet the court is also a paradox because it has singled him out and separated him from others. This very act of separation indicates the violation of the law by the court itself and questions its neutrality. K.'s life ends abruptly and dramatically and his execution is strikingly ambiguous. "K. raised his hands and spread out his fingers." While spread-out fingers indicate an attitude of rejection, it is also a sign of worship. K. is freed from the monstrosity of the court by his death. On another level, he may have accepted the judgment of the court. *The Trial* ends abruptly and thus it opens up speculations regarding the totality of the novel. The structure of the novel is loose and it lacks cohesiveness and integrity that *The Castle* might claim. May be Kafka intended to polish and revise the manuscript but unfortunately he could not complete it. In spite of this, *The Trial* is a seminal work and has captured the readers' and the critics' attention ever since it was published.

We can now look at the various issues involving the novel. The language of the novel is lucid and there seems to be no ambiguity regarding its language. Kafka hardly uses difficult words although his sentence structure is somewhat convoluted. The problem arises in Kafka's deliberate use of language as a tool in creating a labyrinth. This labyrinth conveys utter void and disillusionment to the reader. The narrative, in this case, is unable to help because of its frequent repetitiveness, its inability to communicate sense or in the words of the novelist Andre Brink, "to establish meaning or to convey a content". This leads some critics to opine that the primary theme of the novel is its absurdity where human beings are helpless and isolated. The codes that govern the world are forever unfathomable for us. K.'s search for justice, his unjust arrest and the proceedings convey this sense of void that pervades in the atmosphere.

The Trial can also be regarded as a burlesque on bureaucracy, an attack upon the European capitalism and the dictatorial regime. The court symbolizes the terror and the silent, almost invisible torture of the state apparatus where human beings seek for justice and freedom in vain. While denoting all these, Kafka's tone is often satirical where a strong thread of dark humour is all pervading. Kafka merges the high seriousness with the comic and thus is able to give his language a profound effect. This is one of his remarkable achievements in the novel.

Stop to Consider:

Kafka's diaries, letters, and notebooks are too invaluable literary works. Dora Diamont kept some of Kafka's letters which could not be recovered. All these works serve as apparatus to look into the inner world of the literary stalwart and into his creative process.

The novel has a parable like quality. In the novel, every stroke of every hour is counted. It highlights the empty course of outward life contrasted with the court's contrary demand. The parable of the doorkeeper is particularly significant. The doorkeeper denies K. entrance. He is an intermediary between law and man but he acts as a deterrent rather than as helper. This is applicable to the character of the Chaplin, too. On another level, the doorkeeper has become a visible representative of an invisible authority. He is ambiguous just like the law in his approach towards the men who approach him. In short, the parable is concerned with the nature and the function of the doorkeeper. This can be termed as a symbolic failure of the nineteenth century positivism and reason to provide an answer to the problem of living.

The Castle is the greatest achievement by Kafka although it too remained unfinished. In the novel, the protagonist K. is a land surveyor and he has been summoned to a strange village. However, he soon feels dubious about his engagement as the land surveyor and in order to seek confirmation of his job he tries to enter the castle but his every attempt turns futile. K. never becomes successful in entering the castle. Unlike *The Trial*, the castle has a rigorous development and its structure is cohesive and well planned. It is exclusively narrated from the protagonist's point of view and is largely composed of dialogues. The apparently meaningless dialogues embody a sense of trap for K. because it leads him to nowhere. On the other hand, it becomes the attempt of a man to reach some knowledge of truth about himself. At first, K. is very much hopeful of entering the castle or symbolically, grasping the truth. He is at awe discovering the high seriousness and respect with which the villagers treat the invisible castle authorities. K.'s assistant literally scorns at his arrogance, as he is totally unfamiliar with the rules and customs of the village. As time goes by, K.'s frustration becomes palpable because each of his endeavor has been turned down. K. begins to suspect his own identity.

The theme of arrival in the village has a major symbolic connotation. It is the arrival of man into the world, his attempt to fit into the order, which remains in a way inaccessible. It is a tussle between K. and the world and the castle has become an incredible metaphor of a totalitarian world into which human beings are forever barred. The concept of sin has played a pivotal role in the novel. From the beginning, Kafka's heroes are guilty although the reasons may be unknown to them. K. is feeling guilty because he has not been able to learn the truth about himself even after his fanatic persuasion of justice. It leads him to frustration and anxiety and his defiance towards the castle authority has disappeared. This stoical resignation indicates the acceptance of his guilt. On the other hand, K.'s final resignation can also be interpreted as a bitter satire on the bureaucracy and the contemporary political scenario where human freedoms are mutilated and crushed down. The bureaucracy (the castle) claims that it is flawless but that is a lie. The flaw in the paperwork of the castle has brought K. to the village where he would be doomed in the end.

The narrator uses the characters in the novel as instruments to produce further disillusionment for K. They keep on installing and subverting their own identity. For instance, Frieda and Amelia, at first, look sympathetic towards K. Frieda is K.'s fiancée and K. believes in her. Later, it turns out that she has deceived K. and ends up in the arms of his former assistant Jeremiah.

His third and the last novel *Amerika* too remained unfinished. It was published in 1927. The novel describes the immigrant life of a 16 years old teenager Karl Ross Mann in the United States who was forced to go to New York to escape the scandal of seduction by a housemaid. In a bizarre set of events, Karl at first, makes friend with a stoker. This friendship proves fortuitous for Karl. He meets his wealthy uncle through the stoker who recognizes Karl and takes him to his home. For a couple of months, Karl enjoys the overflowing luxury at his uncle's residence. However, his uncle suddenly abandons him when he visits his uncle's friend without his approval. Wandering aimlessly, he befriends two crooks who begin to exploit him. At last, escaping from their clutch, he is able to get a job as a liftboy. However, this too ends suddenly when one of the crooks turned up getting drunk and

he is fired after that incident. He goes with Robinson, the crook and is forced by the other drifter Delamarche to become a servant of a rich lady. Karl dislikes his job and is searching for an opportunity to flee. That comes in the form of an advertisement for a theatre company. Karl gets a job there. The last chapter that remained unfinished ends with Karl looking at the vast valley of Okalahoma from the approaching train.

Kafka's *Amerika* is a harsh criticism of the so-called idealistic projection of the land as an epitome of democratic values and high standard of living. It is also a poignant portrayal of the pitiful conditions of the European immigrants. The beginning of the novel is itself indicative of the myriad social ills that the land represents. Karl witnesses that the statue of liberty holds a sword rather than a torch. Through this conscious misinterpretation/misrepresentation, Kafka tries to suggest an ominous beginning for the hero. Maybe the freedom that the land claims to offer to its people is a false apparition. That Kafka never visited America and collected his information from second hand sources enhances further the novel's surrealistic ambience. Kafka's America is a land of hotels and slums where people run after money and glamour. The streets and houses are labyrinthine in nature where outsiders lose their way. There is no hope for Karl in America as each time he attempts to climb up the social ladder the society negates him in every possible way.

Kafka also attacks American politics which promises abundant hope for the people. Karl witnesses a political rally from an apartment balcony. The supporters chant the candidate's name in unison mechanically and his enemies start hurling objects at him. This fervent idol worship and the brutal savagery shown by the people is a farcical representation of American democracy. It seems that Kafka did not believe in the American rags-to-riches stories. He actually lays bare the meritocratic façade of American society. This is apparent when Karl's socio-economic condition tumbles quickly as soon as it has improved. Karl never displays any quality why he would deserve the fortune. On the other hand, for a slight offence, Karl has been banished from his uncle's house. This banishment indicates the discrepancy in American justice. The fact that the two drifters have constantly exploited him indicates the loss and humiliation of innocence in that capitalist regime. As if, the regime worships the Darwinian notion of the survival of

the fittest making the notion of American dream an elitist concept. This novel too, remained unfinished. Whether Karl's future has any silver lining, it would remain a mystery. Until the end, Karl has gained nothing. Clearly, Kafka drifts apart from the others in his treatment of America as a glorified land.

The novella *The Metamorphosis* was published in 1915. At that time, it received little attention. Now it has become a classic. This is the story of a man who one morning discovers that he has turned into an insect. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." This famous and shocking beginning indicates a total subversion of the 19th century realism in the story. Ironically enough, Gregor's family accepts his transformation and Gregor also tries to fit into the new ambience. His sister Grete and a Charwoman look after him but his father gradually becomes frustrated and impatient. He flings a rotten fruit at Gregor which ultimately becomes the catalyst for his death.

Austin warren has pointed out- "In the metamorphosis, the unnatural thrusts itself into the orderly sequence of nature." (pg 127, Franz Kafka) This dramatic but very realistically described transformation is the chief horror of the story, as the ambience is so natural with real people around it. Kafka never gives any slightest allegorical hint. Here unnatural things are rationally worked out. For example, when the Charwoman sees Kafka for the first time, she says, "Come on over, you old dung beetle." This usual acceptance of Gregor's transformation adds to the surreal atmosphere of the story.

Kafka places the protagonist in a situation where he can either succumb to the terrible circumstances or attempt to build a life around them. Yet, Gregor's endeavor turns hopeless. He succumbs to the circumstances that befall upon him in the end. Kafka wrote almost eighty short stories. These short stories denote remarkable variation in style, theme, and technique. Some of the short stories are very short, barely a hundred words long. Nevertheless, all the short stories exemplify Kafka's mastery over the genre with his enigmatic and weird vision. Among them, the most notable are *The Hunger Artist*, *The Great Wall of China*, *The Judgment* and *The Country Doctor*.

Check Your Progress:

1. Name the major works of Kafka.
2. What role did Kafka's notebooks and diaries play in establishing his reputation as a writer?
3. What do you think to be the main theme of *The Trial*?
4. How will you explain the unnatural occurrences in Kafka's fictions, for example in *The Metamorphosis*.
5. All the three important novels of Kafka are left unfinished. What do you think to be the reason behind this?

2.5 PLACING THE WORK

It is difficult to assess or determine the nature of Kafka's works because they do not place them into any particular category because of their broad, enigmatic, and weird outlook which transcends boundaries. When Kafka started writing, he went against the traditionalist writers such as Hugo Salus, Friedrich Adler, and Camil Hoffman of Prague who were mildly influenced by modernism. Therefore, when some of Kafka's works were published in his lifetime they were so innovative in their themes and techniques that "they were virtually doomed to be derivative" (Vienna and Prague 1890-1928). The social background of the city Prague where he was born and brought up provided little support for him. The main reason behind this was the fragmentation of different ethnic groups that made the city a hothouse of communal vehemence and rivalry. Though Kafka's friend Max Brod championed for a liberal humanism in the city, Kafka completely mistrusted Prague's social and political atmosphere. He lamented in his diary in 1915, "Always this one principal anguish: what if I had gone away in 1912, in full possession of all my forces, with clear head, not eaten by the strain of keeping down living forces," He said that he lived in the borderland between fellowship and loneliness. This mental setup was a major catalyst in shaping his literary works which broke away from conventions and clichés and developed its own pattern.

We will now look at the background of the novel. Kafka's personal life, the socio-political ambience around him worked as the catalysts that stimulated him to write the novel. First, Kafka's relationship with Felice Beaur should

be taken into account. In 1914, he entered an engagement with her and soon broke it off mainly due to his psychotic fear of copulation and his reluctance in shouldering responsibility. *The Trial* parallels Kafka's engagement and his entering into serious social relations. K.'s willingness to participate in his own execution symbolizes the end of his relationship with Felice.

Kafka's Jewish identity is also an important factor. In 1900, Prague had a population of nearly six hundred thousands of which the Jew consisted approximately 20,000. A majority of them, especially the elite and the rising class spoke German owing to the power of Austro-Hungarian empire. Kafka's father especially advocated that and he sent Franz to German schools. In spite of the Jew's relentless endeavor to assimilate with the main stream, they were despised and mistrusted. Kafka's alienation and humiliation are far deeper than the rest. He wrote in German but the sense of being an outsider never left him. He was deeply interested in Judaism. Though he called himself an atheist and never believed in the religious rituals, he showed his interest in metaphysical questions of sin, truth, and reality. The ninth chapter of *The Trial* is an imitation of the discussion of the Talmudic tradition and debate which has been an integral part of Jewish intellectual life for centuries. The basis of Judaism is belief in the living God, who is transcendent and omnipotent. The God reveals himself to mankind. In *The Trial*, Kafka symbolically explores the relationship between the supreme order and humanity.

SAQ:

What is the significance of Kafka's Jewish identity that influenced *The Trial*? (100 words)

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2.6 SUMMING UP

Franz Kafka is one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. During his short lifetime, he wrote three novels and about eighty short stories but with that he left indelible marks on the world literature. He turned away from traditional clichés and 19th century realism in his writings and with his unique narrative and weird, enigmatic outlook created a distinctive style. His writings encompass various trends and stances including existentialism, absurd philosophy, magic realism, and mysticism. The use of humour, which is dark and surreal in its tone, makes his work poignantly haunting. Kafka's heroes are often portrayed lonely, perplexed, and threatened in an alien world. They are constantly seen searching for the code to decipher the systems of the world but their effort ultimately proves fruitless. His works, like any other great literary masterpiece, cannot be confined to any particular category.

—xxx—

Unit 3

The Trial

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Plot Summary
- 3.3 The Characters
- 3.4 Summing Up

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the third unit of block IV. In this unit attempts have been made to make you read and understand *The Trial* - one of the most significant and enigmatic compositions of Kafka. After reading this unit you will be able to

- *describe* the story of the novel in brief
- *identify* the main characters who contribute to the development of the plot
- *follow up* the links amongst the various chapters
- *read The Trial* in its totality

3.2 PLOT SUMMARY

You have already read a short analysis of the novel *The Trial* in section 2.5 of the previous unit. Here in this section, we will read a detailed summary of the plot of the novel. “Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning.”-Kafka begins his novel in this abrupt way. This beginning can be regarded as one of most significant and abrupt beginnings of a modern novel written over the years of 1914 and 1915. You have already come to know that Kafka never intended to get this published. Thanks to his old friend Max Brod the book saw its posthumous publication. Before discussing the story in brief, let us have a glimpse of what Kafka thought about his own

writings. Just before his death at the age of 41, he issued his last instruction to Brod—"Everything I leave behind me...is to be burned unread and to the last page." But Max Brod knew this self-canceling and self-suppressing nature of Kafka and in his own words—"In spite of these categorical instructions I refuse to commit the incendiary act demanded of me."

Stop to Consider:

Max Brod writes in his epilogue "the manuscript of this novel, *The Trial*, I took home with me in June 1920 and set in order soon after. The manuscript had no title. But in speaking of it Kafka always referred to it as *The Trial*. For the division into chapters Kafka is responsible, but for the arrangement of the chapters I have had to depend on judgment. Since, however, my friend had read me a great part of the manuscript, my judgment has been supported by actual recollection."

While lying in bed one morning in his room at a boardinghouse, Joseph K., a thirty-year-old bank clerk, wonders why the cook has not brought him breakfast at the usual time, about eight o'clock. Irritated he rings for his landlady. When the door opens, a strange man named Willem appears at the threshold. When K. says he has been expecting his breakfast, Willem repeats K's statement to another man, Franz, in an adjoining room. Franz and Willem laugh. Then they inform K. that he is under arrest. Dumbfounded, K. cannot think of a single thing he did wrong. Someone must have told lies about him. When he presses them for information, they tell him that they are not there to explain why he is to be held. After K. asks to see a warrant, all they do is tell him he must resign himself to the fact that he is under arrest.

An inspector arrives and everyone convenes in the room of another tenant, Fraülein Bürstner, a typist, who is not at home. The inspector questions him further but refuses to disclose the reason for K's arrest. Frustrated, K. paces and asks whether he may call an attorney. The inspector does not object, but says it would be senseless to do so. K. decides not to make the call. When the men leave, they surprise K. by telling him he is free to go about his daily affairs as usual, including reporting for work at his bank. Bewildered, K. thinks, being under arrest may not be such a terrible thing. Of course, there will be a trial, preceded by hearings.

In the evening when he returns from work, K. apologizes to the landlady, Frau Gruber, for being the cause of the commotion that morning. She seems unconcerned and tells K. not to take the incident seriously. When he leaves for Fraülein Bürstner's room, Frau Gruber informs him that she is still out.

K. explains that he wanted to apologize to her, too, because the morning interrogation was conducted in her room. Frau Gruber tells him he need not do so; Fraülein Bürstner's room has already been tidied up. When K. observes that the Fraülein Bürstner often stays out late, Frau Gruber gossips about her, saying she has seen her with different men in other neighborhoods. After 11:30, Fraülein Bürstner returns and K. describes the morning's events. She seems unconcerned until she complains that several photographs are out of order. When K. tells her he does not know why he is being held, she says, "Then you should not have come in here at such a late hour." But K. continues to talk about the interrogation and even demonstrates where the interrogators stood. When they hear a loud bang on a door to an adjoining room, where Frau Gruber's nephew is staying, Fraülein Bürstner worries that she and K. are causing a disturbance and tells K. to leave. In the hallway, he impulsively kisses her on the lips, face, and neck; she seems impassive and uncaring.

At work, K. receives a telephone call to report on Sunday for the first of a series of hearings. When he arrives at the address, he discovers that the building is a tenement house. Guttersnipes playing marbles on the steps block his way. One of them grabs a leg of his trousers to prevent him from continuing on until a marble reaches its destination. K. does not protest for fear of causing a scene.

Once inside, he goes from room to room to find the court. Each time a door opens to his knock, he pretends that he is looking for a carpenter while he looks inside to see whether he has discovered the court. He repeats the question again and again, mainly to housewives tending children. Sometimes the housewives repeat the question to others within. "Does a carpenter named Lanz live here?"

When he finally finds the court, the magistrate scolds him for his tardiness and wants to know whether he is a house painter. K. returns to the court the following Sunday but makes no progress. In the hallways of the building are others awaiting hearings.

On the recommendation of his uncle, K. sees an attorney, Dr. Huld, who is sick in bed but is well informed about K.'s case. The attorney's nurse, Leni, gets K.'s attention and makes a pass. After urging K. to confess to his crime, she inquires about his girlfriend, a waitress named Elsa, and asks whether she has a webbed hand like Leni. Dr. Huld, meanwhile is unable to remedy K.'s problem and, after six months, his case is where it was on the first day—nowhere. At the bank, one of his customers, a manufacturer, furtively tells K., "I heard about your trial from a painter named Titorelli." According to the manufacturer, Titorelli makes most of his income painting portraits of judges and, over time, has learned about the inner workings of the judicial system. He might be able to advise K. When K. visits him, Titorelli tells him that it is impossible to gain outright acquittal. Instead, he must prolong the case by gaining a temporary acquittal, then a new trial, then another temporary acquittal, then another new trial, and so on. In the end, Titorelli is no help at all, and K. leaves—after buying several landscape paintings that he doesn't really want.

When K. returns to see Dr. Huld, his nurse, Leni, is in the kitchen with another client, a grain merchant named Rudi Block. Apparently Leni and Block have been flirting. K. asks whether they are lovers, but Leni dodges the question and begins making soup for Dr. Huld. When K. talks with Block, Block says five lawyers have been handling his case, which is still in the courts after five years. K. goes into Huld's room to fire him, and Block and Leni follow. After K. expresses his displeasure with Huld, the lawyer tells him little progress can be expected in any court case. He tells Block his case is still at the beginning and that a judge believes the outcome will be unfavorable. However, Huld says, he will continue pressing the court on Block's behalf.

One day, the president of the bank where K. works asks him to escort an important client—an Italian business executive with an interest in art—through a local cathedral with interesting artworks. K. was chosen because of his knowledge of art and architecture. When K. arrives at the appointed time, the Italian is nowhere to be seen, and the church is empty. While K. waits for the Italian, a priest mounts a pulpit. Is there really going to be a sermon when only one person is in the pews? K. quickly walks down the central aisle, hoping to reach the exit before the sermon begins. The voice of the

priest then reverberates through the church: "Joseph K.!" Surprised, K. turns around.

"You are being held for trial."

"Yes, I have been notified." K replies.

"Good. You're the one I want."

The priest, it turns out, is a prison chaplain who arranged for K. to be in the cathedral that morning. He tells K. his trial is going poorly and that he will probably be found guilty in a lower court. When K. says he plans to get further help and seek acquittal, the priest frowns on the idea and lowers his head. The church, meanwhile, has darkened because of a storm.

"Are you angry?" K. says.

No reply.

"It wasn't my intention to insult you."

After a long silence, the priests come down from the pulpit and talk to K. After K. compliments the priest for his friendly manner, the priest says K. is deceiving himself. In a roundabout way—through a parable—he tells K. that he must accept things as they are; he cannot fight them. What is important is not whether everything the court says is true; what is important is that the court's action is necessary.

After six more months pass and K.'s case continues to stagnate, two men wearing top hats arrive at K.'s boardinghouse at 9.30 in the evening.

You're here for me? K. says.

They nod.

Outside, they take him by the arms and lead him through the streets. He stops and resists, gluing his feet to the pavement. Ahead he sees Fraülein Bürstner in the shadows—or someone who looks like her. In a moment, he decides it is futile to resist and resumes walking. Eventually, they arrive at a stone quarry outside the city. One of the men strips K. bare to the waist. When he shivers, the man pats him on the back as if to say, "It'll be all right." Next, they find a stone block, lay K. down and place his head on it, and take out a butcher knife. In the top story of a building across from the

quarry, K. sees a figure leaning out of an open window but fails to identify him/her.

One of them plunges the knife into K.'s heart and twists it and Joseph K. is finally stabbed to death.

3.3 THE CHARACTERS

The Trial has almost thirty major and minor characters. Following is a reference to some of the main characters who are related to Joseph K. one way or the other. But we will begin with Joseph K himself.

Joseph K. - Bank officer accused of an undisclosed crime. He is unmarried, childless and apparently friendless also. He has no home, no family ties, and lives in a rented room. A cabaret girl is the only woman in his life. He has no ambitions to be rich or famous. He is an ordinary man caught in the turmoil of a persecution without any obvious reason. We the readers are horrified at Joseph K.'s fate because the same can happen to us in so far as we recognize our own lack of heroism in a horrendous surrounding created by modern state or Nature herself. Although K. is presented as a defeatist and hopelessly fights against the forces, he is not at all ready to go with the absurd just because others do so. He behaves like a non-conformist by not readily accepting his fate at the hands of a system without fighting back. He is very much clear about himself. "How can I be under arrest? And particularly in such a ridiculous fashion?" Unlike Block who is afraid to have committed some awful crime without knowing it, K is very much particular about his demands for rights and innocence. He fails as the man who must fail because of the superior forces.

Fräulein Bürstner - A typist who lives near Joseph K. and his 'love interest' in the novel. She let him kiss her one night, but then rebuffed his advances. She seemed to care little for him, preferring instead to conduct little liaisons with other men. "Bürstner" is German slang with a sexual connotation. She makes a brief reappearance in the novel's final pages.

Frau Grubach - Joseph K.'s landlady who is fond of Joseph K., though she suspects that he is guilty. She holds K. in high esteem and does not readily believe in whatever is said against him. She seems to be a good and

caring lady. In her attempt to help him she ends up hurting his sensibilities because she suspects Burstner of being a girl with loose morals

Uncle Karl - K.'s impetuous uncle from the country, formerly his guardian. Karl insists that K. hire Herr Huld, the lawyer and an old school friend, to discuss the case. He chastises Joseph K for fooling around with Huld's mistress, Leni.

Herr Huld, the Lawyer-Joseph K.'s invalid lawyer. K.'s pompous and pretentious advocate who provides little in the way of action. Huld who seems to have influence at the court never seems to get anything accomplished in the case of Joseph K.. Huld impresses upon Joseph K that, as his lawyer, he has a personal commitment to the case, but that the slow nature of the proceedings cannot be helped. He uses a scene with Block to prove to Joseph K how grateful he should be for his legal assistance.

Leni - Huld's nurse and mistress who has an attraction to accused men and soon becomes Joseph K.'s lover. She shows him her webbed hand, yet another reference to the motif of the hand throughout the book. Apparently, she finds accused men extremely attractive—the fact of their indictment makes them irresistible to her. She tries to explain that Joseph K. should surrender to the court.

Rudi Block, the Merchant - A grain merchant who has hired Huld as one of his many lawyers to handle his five years old case. So, Block is another accused man and client of Huld. His case is now five years old, and he is but a shadow of the prosperous man he once was. All his time, energy, and resources are devoted to his case. Although he has hired hack lawyers on the side, referred to as shysters, he is completely and pathetically subservient to Huld. He enjoys the 'services' of Leni and acts a scene with Huld for Joseph K.'s benefit.

Titorelli, the Painter - He paints portraits of the various magistrates of the court. Titorelli inherited the position of Court Painter from his father. He knows a great deal about the proceedings of the Court's lowest level. He offers to help K., and manages to unload a few identical landscape paintings on the accused man. He explains the three options that are available to K. in his case.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do you think the characters in the novel are linked to each other?
2. Think about Joseph K.'s relation to various characters in the novel.
3. Formulate an idea of the character of Joseph K.

3.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit you must have come to know the story as well as the significant characters of the novel *The Trial*. What is so significant about this novel is the way the character of Joseph K. is presented against the background of the novel. In unit 2 of this block you have come to know about the background of the writer Kafka and his literary works. In this unit, however, you have read more specifically about the novel *The Trial* which is a prescribed text in your syllabus. I believe that a complete understanding of the story of the novel has helped you in comprehending the position of this novel in the context of literary modernism. Although originally written in German, this novel played a vital role in influencing contemporary and later literatures of the world.

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Unit 4

Themes and Techniques

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 The Title
- 4.4 Major Themes
- 4.5 Narrative Technique
- 4.6 Imagery and Symbolism
- 4.7 Summing Up
- 4.8 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This is the last unit of this block. In the previous units, you have learnt how to appreciate German Literature, how to read Kafka and his works including the novel *The Trial*. In this unit we will be more specifically dealing with the themes and techniques which contribute to the greatness of this novel. After reading this unit you will be able to

- *grasp* the significance of the text
- *list* the various literary qualities of the novel
- *explain* the various themes of the novel and situate them in kafka's own tormented life
- *read* the novel as a psychological presentation of the inner conflicts of Kafka

4.2 INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest difficulties of reading Kafka is that he never clearly says anything. However, by looking at his troubled personal life, we can try to argue for and against the various thematic elements as depicted in this novel.

The Trial was published posthumously in 1925. Kafka's friend Max Brod edited the manuscript and organized the chapters. It is still doubtful whether Brod was able to decipher Kafka's system when he was writing the book. Critics have argued that some chapters of the book should be reorganized in order to achieve Kafka's intended pattern. It would make the book more cohesive and well-organized. However, in spite of its flaws, there is no denying that *The Trial* is a colossal achievement on its own accord. Kafka, in this novel, perhaps carries forth the idea which W H Auden had built up in his poem *The Age of Anxiety* by dealing with his own sense of victimization and superfluity, oppressions and inner exile, and the power structure that had arose out of totalitarianism.

4.3 THE TITLE

The Trial first appeared in Germany in 1925. But the name Joseph K. first occurs on 29th July 1914, in a fictional diary entry. As you have already read in Unit 2, Kafka borrows much from his Jewish origin and his interest in Judaism. Such an inheritance even compelled Jean Paul Sartre to analyze *The Trial* as a symbolic exploration of Jewish identity where the Jews in an alien world try to prove their existence. This world is absurd and marked by void and here Kafka's heroes are forced to attempt rational decision-making. Even Albert Camus opined that the relationship between man and world is essentially absurd in Kafka's works. For example, Joseph K., the protagonist of *The Trial*, is concerned days and nights over what he should do regarding his case but when he fires his lawyer, it produces no obvious benefit. Surprisingly, when K. complains about the arresting officers, they are heavily punished. This seemingly innocent act leads to astonishing effect. In the words of Camus, "There is nothing they (Kafka's characters) can do to render meaning to their relationship with the world." It seems that the novel conveys both the absurdity of men's life and their existential dilemma very poignantly. This novel can be placed more accurately in the anarchic and dictatorial regime of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which seemed to have a profound impact on Kafka. The title of the novel then succeeds in symbolically portraying the violation of human rights and the brutal treatment of the citizens by the state apparatus. The utter helplessness of Joseph K. in front of an all powerful but unapproachable judiciary suggests the fate of

the people in a non-democratic system. Hence no term can be so fitting than 'the trial' for this novel by Kafka.

Franz Kafka regarded this novel as unfinished. Before the final chapter, various further stages of the mysterious trial should have been described. But since the trial, according to the author himself, was never to get as far as the highest court in a certain sense the novel was interminable: that is to say, it could be prolonged into infinity.

SAQ:

Comment on the significance of the title of the novel? (For the answer you can also read the next section) (60 words)

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4.4 MAJOR THEMES

Reading about Kafka is just like finding oneself in the web of interpretations in which each reader can make his or her associations. It may be also because of the tendency amongst the readers to receive this novel purely on its own terms, and an acknowledgement of the 'writerly' qualities and abstract modes of thought as found in the novel. Joseph K. searches continuously for a clue to his guilt for which he has been accused and executed. Kafka implicitly makes the point that there is a sense of guilt everywhere, though it is never clear to what the guilt actually refers. It infuses a sense of futility in the whole nature of things.

The themes of this novel are directly or indirectly related to the deep personal upheavals of Kafka's life and that is why, his writings too had a troubling and ironic history. Critics have actually termed such a history as 'Kafkaesque'. In the Epilogue to the novel *The Trial*, Max Brod writes, that although Kafka never wanted his books to be published, he also took pleasure in his writings although he referred to them as 'scribblings'. His unwillingness to publish what he wrote was the result of certain unhappy experiences which

led him to a kind of nihilism regarding his own works. Brod writes that Kafka often spoke of the ‘false hands that reach out to one while one is writing’ and that what he had already written led him astray in his future works. Consequently, there were many resistances to overcome before a book of his was finally published.

Max Brod’s account of Kafka’s letter

Among Franz Kafka’s papers no will was ever found. In his writing table, beneath a pile of other papers, lay a folded note written in ink and addressed to me. This is what is said:

“Dearest Max, my last request: Everything I leave behind me (that is, in the book cases, chest of drawers, writing table, both at home and in the office, or wherever anything may have got to, whatever you happen to find), in the way of note books, manuscripts, letters, my own and other people’s, sketches and so on, is to be burnt unread and to the last page, as well as all writings of mine or notes which either you may have or other people, from whom you are to beg them in my name. Letters which are not handed over to you should at least be faithfully burnt by those who have them.

Yours

Franz Kafka

(Page 252, *The Trial*)

The history of the book belongs to a bleak experience of the modern world. Kafka’s prophetic vision came true when his books were suppressed and burnt and whatever he had written were censored by the state. With the rise of Nazism, Kafka’s work was first confined only to Jewish book shops and then was suppressed and burnt. Other works of Kafka could only be published only in Prague, Kafka’s birth place. It is really ironical that even today; his works are still suppressed and forbidden in most of Eastern Europe chiefly because his imaginary creations, which according to him were the personal fantasies so closely, resembled the realities of the day to day life.

Consequently, *The Trial* became available to common readers only in 1937 through translations by Willa and Edward Muir. Because of its nearness to

actualities this book became the symbol of a new period of darkness. His existential and surreal methods and his exiled imagination came to influence a generation of writers born out of a world devastated by World Wars and Totalitarian regime.

Kafka was brought up in a new age of horror and holocaust which experienced the mass demise of almost six million Jews in the gas-chambers and the concentration camps. The victims also included three of his sisters, two of the women he had been in love with and other members of his family. After Russian invasion and the formation of the Marxist state, Prague known for its richness, cultural plurality and craftsmanship became the city of oppression and silence and in such a context, Kafka's voice was thought to be non-conformist. Although he had succeeded in capturing the modern imagination, Kafka is an example of both humanity and the insecurity of modern writers who dared to challenge the state-run power structure and the anxieties of the modern times. Towards the end of the last chapter of *The Trial*, Kafka writes, "Logic is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living." Implicit in this expression is an awareness of the sustenance of the power, history and the inevitable that have crippled the entire humanity. Some even say that his long illness was itself a sign of his character and his sense of defeat.

Malcolm Bradbury, in his book *The Modern World* writes that Kafka conceived the idea of the novel when the First World War had just started, when the great German culture and the old labyrinthine world of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which he had grown up began to collapse slowly when his personal and sexual life had fallen into disorder and when his imminent death after ten years due to tuberculosis began to show its signs. So, there is a sense of gloom that pervades the world of the novel. But the way Kafka has succeeded in handling them in the novel proves his acumen as a modern novelist. Kafka himself was unaware of the role his prophecy was going to play although he was little concerned with the contemporary politics. He was an emotionally and intellectually charged writer. Mostly, he empathized with the world of the dislocated Jewish heritage in the declining order of European affairs. And as Bradbury writes, "Like Dostoevsky, or indeed like other writers of his generation-the Austrian Robert Musil, for example who produced *The Man Without Qualities*, the Triestean writer Italo Stevo,

who wrote the *Confessions of Zeno*, or the Thomas Mann of *Death in Venice*-he wrote of a sense of superfluity, failed identity, sickness and irrelevance that deeply afflicted many of the sensitive intellectuals of a rising bourgeois and industrial age.”

It is difficult to understand Kafka’s *The Trial* without having an idea of the life-history of Kafka. The opening of the novel itself shows how the novel is going to be thematically so important. *The Trial* begins with Joseph K. in his bedroom, ‘one fine morning’ when he finds that ‘his world’ had changed. Today is his thirtieth birthday but things are surprisingly unusual for him. His breakfast does not come on time (which had never happened before), two men enter to tell him that he is under arrest although they do not claim to have known the reason. Somebody must have told a lie about him. The inspector who interviews him cannot clearly explain who has accused him or of what offence. But he can continue his regular job in the bank even after his arrest. The inspector accepts his arrest as his duty. Three of his colleagues from the bank accompany him to the offices in the taxi with Joseph K. fearing that somebody is watching him from outside, as if to be alive is to be accused of an unknown crime. Franz Kafka himself wrote in his diary-”If someone else is observing me, naturally I have to observe myself too; if none observes me, I have to observe myself all the closer... we often ask: who has been telling lies about us? Who could have told such things?” Perhaps this self-observing and self-accusing imagination is best expressed through the plight of Joseph K. in *The Trial*. The spirit of self-exile, his rootedness in a pervasive inner guilt robs men off any fixed sense of identity.

Stop to Consider:

(Try to connect Kafka’s authoritarian state with Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984*)

1984 is a classic dystopian novel written by George Orwell. Published in 1949, it is set in the eponymous year and focuses on a repressive, totalitarian regime. The narrative centers around the life of one seemingly insignificant man, Winston Smith, a civil servant assigned the task of falsifying records and political literature, thus effectively perpetuating propaganda. But he grows disillusioned with his meagre existence and begins an futile rebellion against the system. The novel became famous for its satirical portrayal of surveillance and society’s increasing encroachment on the rights of the individual in the ‘Oceanic society’ which was

actually based on Stalin's Soviet Union. Since its publication, the terms 'Big Brother Watches' became a symbol of contemporary political power-structure. (If you are interested you can also refer to Michel Foucault's 'Panoptic Vision' as a symbol of the power-structure of the world)

Kafka's contemporary writers were totally disillusioned by the socio-political happenings in the world during the world wars. The rise of totalitarianism and consequent subjugation of human right to live became one of the most dominant themes of international fictional attempts.

In order to understand Kafka's *The Trial*, it is almost mandatory to understand his strange and repressed sensibility. The filial disrespect shapes much of Kafka's moral dilemmas and his writings are haunted by an all pervasive sense of dislocation. Any attempt to reach to human warmth entails a sense of failure. The problematic relationship between the father and the son is best explained through his *Letter to His Father* which begins like this-"You asked me recently why I am afraid of you,". Although this letter was never sent to his father, it clearly symbolizes Kafka's series of writing. Perhaps this was the background from which there developed the basis of the disturbing relationship between Men and God, Man and Law, Jew and Gentile. From his early days he was to presume that everything in him was to be judged by a paternal authority. In *The Trial*, we find Joseph K. sharing a problematic relation with various father figures including his own father.

Exile:

It refers to a persistent condition of all modern writings as a revolt against 'the homely, the domestic, and the provincial'. But no modern writer is so successful as Kafka in making that element of exile so inward and so central to his writing. From his early years he recorded many things starting from the tales he heard, the glimpses of life he saw and the stories he started which clearly showed the exact sensibility of his anxiety and his inner exile, his persistent self-denigration. Dostoevsky is perhaps the first modern writer whose idea of the 'underground man' influenced both Kafka and his characters. The other writers like Gogol, Tolstoy and Strindberg, the writers of European modernism provided him with the idea of the superfluous man - the man condemned to inner exile - created by modern society and overt self awareness. Moreover, through Nietzsche and Kierkegaard he discovered the universality of the sensation he had been undergoing.

The correspondence with Felice Bower with whom Kafka was in love but did not marry, can be regarded as an way to enter into the world of self-accusation and physical anxieties, a strange confession of his impotence. Kafka was very much particular about his choices and the list of reasons he gives for and against matrimony in terms of love, attachment, marriage, fathering or even sharing of rooms are both extraordinary and contradictory. But a strong erotic charge runs through his *The trial* along with a strong sexual guilt felt by the characters. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. hopes that a woman will intercede for him, but his careless sexual activities seem to be part of his crime and instinct for self destruction. Kafka himself had affairs with whores and there are stories of even having an illegitimate son. He even felt sexual hunger for any woman who showed interest in him, and this included Felice's friend Greyte Bloch who in his own words was 'more attractive' to him.

Another important theme is the portrayal of the women in the novel. It seems that Kafka was heavily influenced by Weininger's book *Sex and Character* while he was writing. In that book Weininger opines, "I am not arguing that woman is evil and anti-moral; I state that she cannot be really evil; she is merely amoral and vulgar". Significantly, in *The Trial* too, women are used as instruments to weaken the resistance of the victims. At first, the women seem to abound with affection and compassion but in the end, they shift their positions abruptly. Kafka has never allowed his women characters to be a part of the trial that K. is undergoing. There is not a single woman among the accused. The court has ordered them to be excluded from the proceedings of the court because they are incapable of grasping the truth of law. The truth is reserved for man. Instead, most of the women characters are used to satisfy the physical needs of men. This distorted version of womanhood probably originated from Kafka's mistrust of his own identity and from his turbulent personal life. Kafka's portrayal of the women is problematic to a certain extent as it stems from his personal details. But he cannot be called a misogynist completely as in the short stories we find fully developed female characters. The world represented in the novel *The Trial* is essentially phallogocentric in nature. The court is the supreme embodiment of the invisible power of the phallus. Kafka depicted the women in the novel submitting to the all-encompassing power of the phallus and the women here can do no more than destabilizing the men by means of seduction

and game-playing. Their actions can be read as an effort to challenge representations and thereby revolt against this apparently dominant patriarchal set-up.

Two very significant events in Kafka's life over the years—one personal in terms of his breakup with his fiancée and the other historical in terms of the great war of 1914, had played the most dominant role in the making of the book *The Trial*. Kafka himself suggested that the agonies of the years had helped bring out the book. But it will be very limiting to say that these two events can only explain the extraordinary richness of this novel. Because the instances of personal defeats, repressions, sexual guilt become enormously metaphoric and mythic in the greater imaginative world of Kafka and they start informing the entire gamut of literature produced by him.

Stop to Consider: (Surrealism/Absurdism/ Existentialism)

The rise of surrealism during 1930s and 1940s is the result of a sense of the modern history as a 'terrible metaphysical fantasy'. Albert Camus and others in Post-war Paris opined that Kafka's methods resembled theirs. It was commonly said of Camus that he wrote like a 'condemned man', and so could be said of Kafka. Samuel Beckett's 'antiheroes' too owe much to Kafka. The rise of the Jewish American novel in the United States of the 1950s, produced by the 'survivors' of the Nazi persecution also came under his influence. The sense of exile, estrangement, metaphysical anguish, agonizing history and the awareness of the way in which the metaphysical world remains hidden beneath the real world, owe much to him. The writers of Eastern Europe, including Milan Kundera who are exiles from Kafka's own city of Prague, have sustained the "imaginative connection with the writer whose absence is a presence, and represents the humanity of art in an age of totalitarian politics." (Bradbury)

Of all the modern writers, Kafka has received the largest literary homage. Philip Roth in his novel *The Breast* (1972) which intertextually presents Kafka, shows his character David Kepesh turning into a female breast—a surreal transformation that owes its origin partly to Gogol's story *The Nose* and partly to Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in which the character Gregor Samsa turns overnight into an enormous insect.

Joseph K's wait before the law comes to its inevitable end with his own demise. The trial itself is a parable in which Love, Art and Religion are arrayed before the power of Law and Death. Just like the parable of the Law told to Joseph K. by the priest, (In chapter IX) the novel also presents a series of enigma to be interpreted and understood. Joseph K.'s quest presents a kind of desire for reason and intelligence and an overwhelming sense of absurdism before the unseen power structure that rules life. *The Trial* can also be placed in the great tradition of metaphysical writings as it creates both a simple story and endless possibilities of hermetic interpretations. A reading of the diaries of Kafka will show how 'the trial' relates to the inner crisis of Kafka's own mind, preoccupied with guilt, dark dreams, re-readings of the Bible, terrible imaginings and his awareness of his own futility. Kafka's work is profoundly ironic in dealing with the states of affairs which are both imaginary and surreal while yet being very real. That is why perhaps, his work seems to defy and mystify interpretations. Max Brod opines that Kafka was essentially a religious writer, "who applied the highest religious strands to all work". For the French existentialist writers like Camus and Sartre, Kafka was a philosophical writer of the absurdist spirit. The Marxist critics too have seen him as a writer who was concerned with the alienations in the modern industrial system. *The Trial* has even attracted Freudian interpretation and most often it is read as a novel of the modern anti-hero, characterless, superfluous and innocent. But Kafka did encompass the dark history that the world was going to experience after his death. Moreover, his works are not political in nature. They are fantasies or allegories of a complex modern age whose system governs human existence. The most significant thing about the novel is that it is about man and the world he lives in, though not necessarily the world of the twentieth century. But another striking thing about the novel is that its meaning can be derived in totality and not in isolation which means that its meanings cannot be separated from each other.

The parable is an important thematic element of the novel. The priest in chapter IX is trying to tell Joseph K. that he has failed to understand the implications of his situations and the function of the court. Although K. finds it very difficult to understand what the priest is saying, he has to listen to his tale pertaining to the Law which exemplifies K.'s illusion. The parable begins like this. A man desires entry to the law and is stopped by a doorkeeper.

The poor man tries to bribe him and fails and spends the whole life waiting for the restrictions to be removed. Finally he asks “How does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?” (Kafka, 237) As the man dies, the door keeper replies: “No one but you could gain admittance through the door, since the door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it.” (Kafka, 237). Such an ambiguity is typical of Kafka and through the character of Joseph K. such ambiguity is brought alive. K.’s response to it – “So, the doorkeeper deluded the man, just the way he has been being deceived. “The doorkeeper gave the message of salvation to the man only when it could no longer help him.” The priest however replies, “Don’t be too hasty” and then defends the dutifulness, integrity, and generosity of the door-keeper. What is meant is really very ‘Kafkaesque’. It is that the latter himself is responsible for what has happened. The doorkeeper was honest or even kind towards men. But it was the latter’s complete responsibility for having waited and wasted his time and life without putting his question earlier. Finally the priest concludes, “Many aver that the story confers no right on anyone to pass judgment on the door keeper. Whatever he may seem to us, he is yet a servant of the law; that is he belongs to the Law and as such is set beyond human judgment. . . . It is the Law that has placed him at his post; to doubt his integrity is to doubt the Law itself.” (Kafka, 243) Perhaps this is the repressive element of law in which K. finds himself entangled.

The striking beginning of the novel makes us really understand the impact of accusation, betrayals, arrests and the state of innocence. Empathizing with Joseph K. we too can understand our fears of being accused unjustly at any moment. The twentieth century offers another approach to the problem of injustice and persecution. The rise of bureaucracy has made us believe that errors once made mistakenly will circulate forever within the system dooming the individual concerned with undetectable and unredeemable accusations. This can be linked to the rise of totalitarianism which could condemn any innocent without a rationale. Kafka’s memory in this context proved authentic. The Jews taken to the concentration camps could not have grasped the reason for their persecution. The huge system of modern state craft, although democratic in its processes, can be so indifferent to the lives of its members that it can easily crush down a person like Joseph K. But the absurdity K. faces in his trial is not more absurd than that found in

Nazi Germany. Kafka is very competent in portraying the utter absurdity, irrationality, and despair, which surround the qualities of innocence in the face of accusation. Consequently, there is no answer to the question put by K.: “I am innocent, so why am I persecuted?”

Stop to Consider:

One of the notorious qualities of the Nazi concentration camps was their capacity, by virtue of unintelligible and inhumane procedures, to degrade their victims and render them incapable of genuine moral disapproval and opposition. Once they were arrested for unknown crime they were hunted and hounded like animals, robbed off all their possessions. The Jewish prisoners did not have any options left to retain any sense of themselves as human beings capable of action and withstanding a powerful state machine out to destroy them. Political prisoners could at least understand why they were incarcerated which justified their persecution. But an innocent person like K. could not understand what would happen to him. And his decline and resignation at the end are quite natural consequences of his persecution.

K. has broken no laws, intentionally or otherwise, or a law that anyone could have expected to know of or understand. No one even explains to him just what he is guilty of. He is innocent and condemned for some guilt which he cannot remember and understand. Lost in the cob-web of the bureaucracy, K. goes on to comprehend what is unintelligible for him. He is destroyed by a bureaucratic machine that works according to inhuman rules. K. claims that he does not know the law prompting the reply, “he admits that he doesn’t know the law and yet claims he’s innocent.” Even those condemned to sterilization by Hitler’s proclamations of law, might not have found it possible to know the law, yet were held guilty. Although nothing concrete has yet been revealed, we have seen how accusation will arouse in K. a great confusion, which will render him incapable of doing his work at the bank, bewilder him and break him down. K. explains in vain how innocent he is and tries to make them understand the irrationality and absurdity of the whole proceeding. But no one will believe in his innocence. Erotic pleasure is shown underlying the narrative of Kafka. Joseph K. finds corruption everywhere. The woman he finds in the courtroom the next week

gives herself without any hesitation to the examining magistrate. Her husband tolerates this without objection. The usher who takes him in has told him “as a rule all our cases are forgone conclusions.” K. has no strength to fight back and win. So, K. is already a broken man long before his final murder. He discovers to his utter surprise that although he is quite innocent, every thing he does to save himself rebounds to his guilt. His protest against the warders who first arrest him leads only to the accusation that he caused them to be beaten. Apparently, having no alternatives, he hires the ridiculous and useless lawyer who talks big but accomplishes nothing. Instead the lawyer makes no definite claims, talks of pleas and rejoinders which are never read and demonstrates clearly to K.’s own uselessness. The example of another man like him, Block whose life has become a vain pursuit after innocence and freedom becomes more frustrating to K.

K.’s encounter with Titorelli is very interestingly presented by Kafka. Titorelli, the painter who is also a part of the court tells K. that there is no real hope. There are only three possibilities for an accused man: definite acquittal, ostensible acquittal, and indefinite postponement. If he is innocent he will be definitely acquitted. But Titorelli has never heard of somebody being innocent. So, everything is predetermined and K. is doomed. All he can do is to find out ways within the system itself to postpone the judgment of his guilt, his fate since the beginning till the end is in the hands of the outside forces over which K. does not have any control. Eventually, he has to die, a broken man, incapable of any action and resistance, incapable even of suicide, incapable of any sort of functioning in the affairs of life.

We can opt for a totally different thematic interpretation of *The Trial* by referring to the idea of the arrest. The nature of the events and characters can be said to have been a part of a dream. Joseph K. is “arrested” on his thirtieth birthday in bed. So, we can have a possibility of saying that all the events take place in a dream, and that the incidents are happening in K.’s mind while he remains in bed. He is not really charged with anything or even taken to jail. The word ‘arrested’ can also mean ‘stopped’. Metaphorically speaking, on his thirtieth birthday, while in sleep, K. discovered that he had ceased to develop, ceased to grow and that he has become a stagnant personality. His age is an important element here. Because, his age means his thirtieth birthday makes him to look closely at himself to discover what

kind of man he is, what does he see? In another way, the title of the book *The Trial* means not only an investigation or inquiry, but a test on one's being, one's value, one's reality. Here may be K. is testing himself unconsciously whether his life is worth-living.

K's life starts with a failure and ends with a failure. He cannot choose to live or to die. He is better killed 'like a dog' for his life is no better than a dog as he has lost the ability to live like a man. If he is to exist, he must have some strength to fight against the world which oppresses him, to face his empty life. Consequently, his failure is imminent precisely because of this lack of strength.

SAQ:

Comment on the thematic significance of the title of the novel? (100 words)

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What do you mean by the adjective 'Kafkesque'? (60 words)

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Those who are more inclined towards Freudian psychoanalysis will find Kafka's writings stimulating. If we apply the Freudian concept of the tripartite division of the psyche into an utterly irrational set of desires and impulses i.e. the 'id', a principle of rationality and reality opposing those desires of the 'id' and are destructive to the person involved i.e. the 'ego', and finally a mechanism for transferring external sanctions and punishments into internal

guides to action i.e. the 'superego' to *The Trial*, it offers interesting perspectives on various themes dealt earlier. Parental disapproval, Freud says, is internalized as principles of right and wrong, utilized to control the dangerous instinct of the 'id'. Following this logic, an ordinary person is thus a composite of various elements, one of which is a repository of parental and social sanctions from which sense of guilt finds an outlet. Every man has the experience of frustrated desires and anguished hopes, and only guilt and shame can control the unintentional and relatively dangerous release of hidden passions. Thus, some amount of shame and guilt is necessary for the civilized man too. We can say that the reading *The Trial* takes us to the phenomenology of guilt and shame. It is no wonder that Joseph K. seeks in vain to understand the source of his arrest, the nature of his accusation, the right of that law to judge him. It is true that if K. is innocent he will be acquitted, for one usually feels guilt and shame only if one has indeed done something shameful. The point is that the nature of human condition is such that no one can avoid guilt entirely, and thus complete acquittal is impossible. Man is therefore eternally doomed to guilt and torment, without any real hope of peace of mind. K.'s arrest then is a universal condition which all can share. The trial, that K. experiences, is life itself - the cost of being human. K. is condemned by being what he is.

According to Kafka, "Life is hell; and guilt is its primary torture. But without guilt, life would be impossible." Underlying the novel is an interpretation of how guilt functions and the difficulties that arise. But Kafka succeeds in achieving in the novel a fusion of multiple visions of human guilt and innocence. On the one hand, guilt is a quality of life that provides strength and vitality, on the other it is a form of torment. The neurotic individual is one who experiences guilt for everything-for forsaking his parents and their values, for desiring a woman, for being guilty, or for being a failure, even for being alive. Guilt then is an extreme emotion which causes pain and suffering. In *The Trial*, K. is accused by forces completely beyond his control-his society, his God, his inner self. We take pity on him and his doom. The judgments provided by others are central to a man's appraisal of himself. Human beings grow and develop within social contexts which provide them with rational standards by which they can judge their own actions. So, K. must be wrong, perhaps insane, if everyone understands something he is quite unable to grasp. How can a man stand alone without feeling shame, and wondering if he is insane?

The Trial is a novel of mystery which touches on the inarticulate, the unintelligible, and the mysterious in life. There is also a philosophic undertone in *The Trial*, which explains Kafka's concerns and pervasiveness of his insights as having great metaphysical significance. It explores the hidden realities of human existence perhaps those upon which value and judgment rest. Human consciousness is a perpetual awareness of guilt, remorse and confrontation. And it is not the weakness within men that makes guilt so terrible: it is the nature of guilt itself. That is why perhaps, Kafka's revelation of the true nature of that self-conscious awareness is utterly the most frightening thing ever possible to understand and contemplate in Kafka. Kafka is often identified as one of the most neurotic amongst the literary artists which is exemplified by his departure from the established norms of literary imagination. But Kafka also succeeds in objectifying through imaginative means the states of the mind typical of neurosis and which also enables him to incorporate his private world into the public world we live in. And the creative writer in Kafka emerges out of such an accomplishment.

SAQ:

How do you feel that the themes of guilt and innocence are fitting references to Kafka's *The Trial*? (80 words)

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Do you think that neurosis and psychoanalysis can explain much of what is happening in Joseph K.'s inner self? (80 words)

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4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Kafka is one such writer whose narrative techniques and themes are related to each other in a very subtle manner. You are already acquainted with the story line of the novel. Now I will like you to concentrate on the various chapters and see how they are clubbed together. The text of *The Trial* has been divided into total ten chapters with an additional epilogue by Max Brod, who, in a sense, rescued Kafka from oblivion. While dealing with Kafka's narrative technique, I believe, a brief understanding of the organization of the chapters of the narrative itself will help you a lot in understanding the technique used in the novel.

1. The Arrest-Conversation with Frau Grubach then Fraulein Burstner

At the start of *The Trial*, Joseph K. awakes on the morning of his thirtieth birthday. He is greeted by two warders, Franz and Willem, who tell him he is under arrest, and introduce him to the Inspector. He refuses to tell K. why he has been arrested. Confused, K. is surprised when they let him go with orders to come back for his trial. In the evening, K. talks with his landlady, Frau Grubach, who is sympathetic to his plight. K. likes Fraülein Bürstner, whose room the Inspector had used. When she returns late at night, K. insists on talking to her about his day and then makes a grab for her.

2. First Interrogation

K. is summoned to a place. He goes to the address, only to find that it's a tenement house. A woman doing laundry directs him to the Court of Inquiry. The Court is sitting in a stuffy room, packed with bearded men in black. K. addresses the audience about the stupidity of the court. He is cut off by a man grabbing the laundry woman and shrieking.

3. In the Empty Interrogation Chamber-The Student-The Offices

K. returns to the offices the following Sunday, but no one is there except the laundry woman. She is the wife of the Usher, and explains that the man who had grabbed her was a law student, Bertold, who has been chasing her. K. examines the books left on the table, only to find that they are pornography. The Usher's wife tells him about the Examining Magistrate, but Bertold enters and carries her off. The Usher returns and complains about Bertold, and he leads K. into the labyrinthine law offices in the attic

to look for him. They pass through a hallway filled with accused men. K. feels faint and sits down. He makes his way out, carried along by a man and young woman, badly shaken.

4. Fraülein Bürstner's Friend

K. wants to talk to Bürstner again, but cannot find her. A commotion in the hall reveals that Fraülein Montag, a sickly teacher, is moving in with her. Joseph is upset, and goes to Fraülein Montag. She will not tell him why she is moving in, and says that Bürstner does not want to talk to him.

5. The Whipper

K. is walking to his office in the Bank when he hears a horrible scream. He finds the warders, Franz and Willem, being whipped in a storeroom. They plead with him to help them, but the whipper is adamant about doing his duty. K. tries to buy him off, and fails. The next week, still troubled, he goes back to look at the room, only to find the whipper and the two warders there again.

6. K.'s Uncle-Leni

K.'s uncle Karl, upset over the case, comes in from the country. They go to see one of his uncle's friends, Dr. Huld, who is very sick but knows all about K.'s predicament. K. is distracted by the Lawyer's nurse, Leni, and sneaks off to visit her in the middle of the conversation. Leni shows him her webbed fingers, and tries to seduce him, giving him a key so he can return at any time. He returns, and his uncle berates him for fooling around when he should be resolving his case.

7. Advocate-Manufacturer-Painter

K. is obsessed over the case, which has dragged on for six months now. One of his work clients, a manufacturer, knows about his situation and tells him that a painter, Titorelli, might be able to help. K. goes to see Titorelli. The painter explains that things are never as they seem and elaborates on the nature of the plea system. K., disheartened, leaves after buying three identical pictures from the painter, only to find that this building too has law offices in its attic.

8. *The Commercial Traveler- Dismissal of the Advocate*

When K. decides to dismiss Dr. Huld, he finds a half-naked man, Block, with Leni. Block describes his own case, which has been going on for five years. Block tells him that it is widely believed that K. will lose his case. K. consults Huld, who tells him that Leni sleeps with all of the accused men. Dr. Huld, to illustrate the nature of the law to K., makes Block abase himself.

9. *In the Cathedral*

K. is asked to escort a client around the cathedral. While there he meets a priest who tells him that he is the prison chaplain, and that the case is going badly. The priest relates a parable called *Before the Law*. A man from the country comes to the door seeking admittance to the Law, but the guard says he can't enter. The man sits and waits by the door for years, trying to find a way to make the guard let him in. Finally, when he is about to die, he asks why nobody else ever came to the door. The guard says that the door was meant for him, but now it will be closed. K. and the priest discuss the parable. Is the doorkeeper subservient to the man or vice versa? Did the man come of his own free will? Is he deluded? The priest says that it is not necessary to accept everything as true, only to accept it as necessary. K. counters that the world must then be based on lies.

10. *The End*

On the evening before his thirty-first birthday, two men come to Joseph's apartment and take him away. At an abandoned quarry they take off his coat and shirt and lay him down. Taking out a butcher knife, they pass it to each other over him. He is supposed to take it and plunge it into his own chest, but he doesn't, instead looking over at a house across the way. Someone is standing at the window on the top floor. Joseph wonders who it is, and where the Judge is, and the High Court. He holds out his hands and spreads his fingers. One of the men takes the knife and stabs him, twisting the knife twice. K.'s last words are, "Like a dog!"

Austin Warren in his article on Franz Kafka writes-"It is Kafka's narrative method (with occasional lapses) to write from within the mind of the hero. The introspective hero, through whose eyes we have glimpses of other persons, static figures, is man alone, man haunted, man confronted with powers which elude him and with women with whom he is never at ease,

man prosecuted and persecuted. He is the man eager to do right but perpetually baffled and thwarted and confused as to what it is to do right-the man for whom the sense of duty, of responsibility, the irreducibility of 'ought', has survived the positive and particular codes of religions and moral systems-the man in search of salvation."

Being the master of narratives, combining in his fictions the real and the unreal, extreme subjectivity of contents with forms rigorously objective, an exact portrayal of the factual world with dreamlike dissolution Kafka shines amongst his contemporary German counterparts. What Kafka could gain after unifying such contrary elements was an ability to create a new appropriation of the resources of prose medium. After reading Kafka it becomes clear to us how he so compellingly succeeds in arousing in us a sense of immediate relatedness. It is because of the profound quality of his feeling for the experience of human loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety-the various dominant markers of the modern age.

Both in his use of language and construction of events, he is compared to James Joyce, the famous Irish modern writer. Kafka sometimes enjoys a complete freedom with which he suspends various conventions of storytelling. One way to understand this is to read his story *Metamorphosis* which begins like this-"Gregor Samsa awoke one fine morning to find himself changed into a gigantic insect." We will commit a mistake if we think that by means of this bold stroke Kafka questions the laws of nature. What he questions instead, is the convention that the laws of nature at all times to be observed in fiction. *Metamorphosis* is actually a symbolic presentation of the dull, spiritless human state. Perhaps, the most interesting thing about Kafka's narrative technique is that his novels know only a single point of view, that of the protagonist. Even in his third person narratives we see the objects, scenes and persons only through the eyes of the protagonist. This contradicts the prevalent technique, adopted by the authors, of switching the point of view from one character to another and thus enabling us to enjoy a relative omniscience.

The structural principle of Kafka's novels explains its differences from the 'Stream of Consciousness' novels. The latter assumes the identity of consciousness and truth. Operating within the framework of psychology, it also assumes that to reveal the character is to reveal the truth of the narrative.

In Kafka's narrative on the contrary, consciousness hides truth. Therefore Kafka can be said to have transcended psychology. He is not concerned with the mechanism of the self, but its oral and spiritual justification. He is an expert in divulging the workings of rationalization and self deception. The end is always the revelation of the negative truth in the defeat of the self.

In the 'punitive fantasies' the repressed part of the self is identical with his childhood elements. Although there are various connotations around the theme of punishment, Josph K.'s attachment to his family can be seen contributing to his punishment. Kafka's style of writing as can be argued has a dreamlike quality. It is colorless, extremely detailed but without any validity. Most dreams actually possess such qualities. Events occur with their own logic often in great details, yet without color and vitality.

SAQ:

Arrange the various sections of the novel and try to formulate a comprehensive idea of the narrative technique used in the novel. (150 words)

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How do you find Kafka's technique different from the 'Stream of Consciousness technique'? (60 words)

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Find out the deviation Kafka makes in terms of his narrative techniques.
(80 words)

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4.6 IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

Some very radical analysts of Kafka want to use his own name and appearance as the symbol of a man who is ‘emaciated, anxious, sensitive, pallid’ and who has never been at home at anywhere. Joseph K. becomes the image of the modern European bourgeois man who is caught unaware by the destructive irrationality around him, but it is also made clear that the elements that made this possible were to be found within the bourgeois himself. According to Max Brod, the most dominant symbol in the text is K. himself because he symbolizes the Jew in his exclusion from society and his eagerness for inclusion and seeking entry into the kingdom of heaven. But K. is also the bachelor in search of marriage and companionship, and K. is also a modern everyman in respect to his final loneliness.

For Kafka an image is not just an image or a symbol is not just a symbol. For example, the central image of the novel- the court has a variety of functions and meanings.

Stop to Consider:

The relationship between the narratives and the metaphors is a peculiar characteristic of Kafka’s writings.

“His stories tend to present enactments of metaphors buried in language, not only in the German language in which he wrote but also in the universal symbolism of pre-rational thoughts. Basic metaphors by which pre-scientific language expresses experiences, attitudes, and relationships become events in Kafka’s tales. He reinstates or recreates the pictorial expressiveness that the original

metaphor now frozen in a cliché or idiom, once conveyed. Thus Kafka's writing conforms to or repeats the activity of the dreaming mind. As Sigmund Freud has shown in the *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), a work with which Kafka was familiar, dreams speak in the pictorial language that speech once was. They take literally the metaphors hidden in speech and act them out as visualized events.”
(*European Writers*, Vol-9, Page: 1157)

Arrest is the central theme and symbol in *The Trial*. The German word for 'Arrest' (verhaftung) carries meaning of entanglement and fatal attachment. So, it can be used as the symbol of the protagonist's attachment to his childhood self which has been repressed or put out of mind but the traces remain. The act of being arrested by a catastrophic event actualizes the very condition of entanglement that had persisted in him all long.

The court plays another significant role as a symbol in the novel. Except for the initial arrest it is always Joseph K. who either actively seeks or welcomes contact with the court. His longing for contact with the court emerges most clearly in the Titorelli chapter. Joseph K. rejects his suggestion for compromise solutions and insists on absolute acquittal by the highest judge. His insistence amounts to a full recognition of their supreme authority over him and also implies his wish to be accepted and approved by them.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do you think the images and symbols used in this novel produce the desired effect on the minds of the readers?
2. What significant role do the images of the court and the trial play in the novel?

4.7 SUMMING UP

Famous German critic Theodor W. Adorno wrote, "He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed has lost forever any peace with the world." Although said in negative terms, such expressions shows an understanding of Kafka as 'the most private, the most self-enclosed, indeed the most bourgeois of modern writers.' Placing Kafka in a totally different context and acknowledging his genius in expressing the modern spirit, W. H. Auden

wrote, “Had one to name the author who comes closest to bearing the same kind of relation to our age as Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe bore to theirs, Kafka is the first one would think of .” According to George Steiner Kafka’s “*The Trial* exhibits the classic model of the terror state. It prefigures that furtive sadism, the hysteria which totalitarians insinuate into private and sexual life, the faceless boredom of the killers. Since Kafka wrote, the night knock has come on innumerable doors, and the name of those dragged off to die ‘like a dog!’ is legion. Kafka prophesied which Nietzsche and Kierkegaard had seen like an uncertain blackness on the horizon.” Such critical receptions of Kafka itself narrativise the ways Kafka is sought to be interpreted, analyzed and read.

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Block 4

The Novel in French

Block Introduction

This block deals with perhaps one of the most famous novels written and published in 1942, the heart of the twentieth century. Albert Camus' *The Outsider* or *The Stranger* [*L'Etranger*] speaks in an idiom familiar to all those who recall the horrors of the twentieth century most vividly. At this very familiar level, the novel catches up within its almost austere lines the situation of existentialist apprehension of a universe hostile, indifferent, even incomprehensible in its range of possible meanings.

After reading this short, shimmering work you may even feel like reading it in its original language – French. You may even feel sad that we come to it only through the English language. But, as we have noted elsewhere, fine translations are available and some of the original flavour is gathered up for our reading. The finely worked up network of interrelated connections such as we find in Dostoevsky's works may be missing but Camus' stark narrative of the movement of Meursault from the news of his mother's death to his own at the end of the book, brings out in almost a classical manner the depth and range of meaning of what the title promises. It is not a random idea that if the 'outsider' in Meursault is always there, this is evident from the way that he seems to live only for the sensory experiences of the moment in Part One and then in the way that he seems to treasure no connections with anything or anyone – neither his mother, not even Marie. The sense of being 'outside' is hugely resonant throughout the novel.

Our students always – mistakenly, at that – worry themselves perennially that there are 'no materials' on a given text. Agreed, that you will not find 'guides' in local shops to help you read Camus' great novel. May be that will help you to savour the author's own writing and you will soon see that the language is not difficult. You will definitely not need to keep beside you a dictionary. – "The light shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead. At the same instant the sweat in my eyebrows dripped down over my eyelids all at once and covered them with a warm, thick film. My eyes were blinded behind the curtain of tears and salt." In

language as simple as this, your reading has to be fully alert. “All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear flying up from the knife in front of me. The scorching blade slashed at my eyelashes and stabbed at my stinging eyes. That’s when everything began to reel.” This is the prelude to Meursault’s shooting down of the Arab. If you look at the lines closely you can understand this is highly symbolic language at work. Indeed, in terms of the novel, this is the moment that is brought up for scrutiny in the court-room. What has really happened? This is the idiom that Ernest Hemingway had made so famous. This is the kind of expression that belongs to the period of the World War. The twentieth century gave us writing that was sparse, and symbolic.

You would realize that you will be reading our explanations of a great work which should be of some help to you for your academic work. But you will also need to read more widely and include within your scope that will set in perspective Camus’ work. Try and refer to some of his well-known essays such as “The Rebel”.

This block will have the following units:

Unit 1: The French Novel

Unit 2: Albert Camus and His Works

Unit 3: *The Outsider*

Unit 4: Themes and Techniques

Unit 1

The French Novel

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 The Eighteenth-century French Novel
- 1.4 The Nineteenth-century French Novel
- 1.5 The Twentieth-century French Novel
- 1.6 Major Novelists
- 1.7 Summing Up

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant only to introduce you to the history of the novel in France. Your reading of this unit will help you to connect Camus' *The Outsider* to the traditions within which the novel takes its shape.

Most of you may be familiar with the novel form and its variations in English but may not have any idea about this genre in other European languages. For easier comprehension and understanding of Camus's *The Outsider* we have herewith included a brief write-up about the growth and development of the French novel. Like all literatures, French literature too contains within it the historical process that shaped France as well as the social and political experiences that touched all or most of Europe. Of course, literary writers in all forms of literature, namely poetry, fiction, drama, and prose touch upon most of these developments or changes and yet the novel especially, from the eighteenth century onwards, swept the whole of Europe as a form capable of reflecting the reality and also as a structure that could critique society. Although the novel-form had its strongest moments in the English tradition, the form as a contender owes much to the early French novelists. Writers such as Balzac or Flaubert were the inspiration and motivation for several generations of writers. Flaubert, Balzac and Stendhal inspired a number of writers in the Anglo-American tradition,

namely Henry James, Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad. It is therefore important for us literary scholars to be acquainted with the literary patterns of development so that we can trace the emergence of a writer like Camus. By the end of the unit you should be able to

- *grasp* the traditions of the French Novel
- *use* this background to understand how the French novel develops
- *judge* for yourself how far Camus breaks with, or keeps to, this tradition

1.2 INTRODUCTION

French literature had its beginnings in the 10th and 11th centuries. The French language had become dominant in Europe and among the first literary works were the epic poems called the 'Chansons de Geste'. These poems celebrated the heroic deeds of the knights who fought against or for the king and these were followed by the Courtly tales known as *Romans Courtois*. These ballads were set in King Arthur's court and revolved around the regions of Brittany and Cornwall. Some of the great poems of this period are 'Lancelot', 'Perceval' and the author of these was the poet, Chrétien de Troyes. Another medieval poem of this period was the 'Roman de la Rose', a poem written in the courtly tradition by Gillaume de Lorris. Other literary developments from the 12th -15th century were the publication of fables, allegorical stories containing animal characters and other didactic stories. Another form that arose during this period was historical writing. Some of the significant works are Geoffroi de Villehardouin's *Conquest of Constantinople* (1207), Jean Froissart's *Chronicles* (Eng. trans., 1523-25) and Philippe de Commines' *Memoirs* (1489-90, 1497-98; Eng. trans., 1596).

The 16th century witnessed the beginnings of the novel form. The period saw the growth of the printed form and due to this translation paved the way for an increase in the number of writers as well as works. One of the most important writers that you may want to look up sometime is Francois Rabelais whose *Gargantua* (1534) discusses the intellectual growth in that period. Rabelais also developed the novel as a satirical, humorous, bawdy comedy. The latter half of this period witnessed the essay-form developed

by Michel de Montaigne. The poets too adapted forms from other parts of Europe leading to an expansion of the ode and sonnet forms. During Louis fourteenth's reign, French literature had its golden age. This was the period that saw the growth of the dramatists: Pierre Corneille's *The Cid* (1637), Jean Racine's *Andromache* (1667) and *Phaedra* (1677) and Moliere's farces, *Tartuffe* (1664) and *Misanthrope* (1666). Other literary forms that developed were letters penned by Madame de Sevigne and maxims written by Duc de la Rochefoucauld. In the hands of Duc de Saint-Simon, La Rochefoucauld, and Cardinal de Retz memoirs as a form of writing strengthened its position. Rene Descartes with his *Discourse on Method* (1637) established a new trend of philosophical writings. His works were followed by Blaise Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* (1656-57) and *Pensées* (1670).

SAQ

Can we talk of a very specific 'shape' when we mention 'novel'? (60 words)

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1.3 THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH NOVEL

The 18th century known as the 'Age of Enlightenment' saw the strengthening of French literature. The period evidenced the growth of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697) and Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with the publication of *Emile* (1762), opened the heated debates regarding education and educational reforms. Prior to this, the greatest literary event had been the publication of *Encyclopedie*, published in 35 volumes between 1751 and 1780. Rousseau's work *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) became a trend setting work to initiate the era of romanticism. The later part of the eighteenth century perceived the growth and development of the novel. Novels of sentiment

were authored by Alain Rene Lesage. One such is his picaresque novel, *Gil Blas*.

SAQ

In what sense is it appropriate to call the publication of the *Encyclopedie* a 'literary' event? (50 words)

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1.4 THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH NOVEL

The nineteenth century was the novel's golden era. The most famous writer to depict social life was Victor Hugo. Many scholars and critics think the period from 1830 to 1880 to be the era of the novel. Madame George Sand was a writer in the Romantic tradition. Her novel, *Leia* (1833) portrayed emotions and passion as being superior to tradition and morality. In a way, her writings were significantly part of the romantic tradition. Some of her other works are *The Country Wife* (1847) and *Fanchon the Cricket* (1848). Even though Stendhal portrayed strong romantic tendencies in his novels yet he depicted irony and satire in his novels. Two of his greatest works are *The Red and the Black* (1830) and *The Charter House of Parma* (1839). Victor Hugo, on the other hand, exemplified societal life and his *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) is a fine illustration of this. His *Les Misérables* (1862) was also significant as it pictured the marginalized section of society such as the convicts. Yet another writer who took the novel's narrative into the form of a series of adventures and interconnected it to history was Alexandre Dumas. His *Man in the Iron Mask* and *Three Musketeers* ignited the French public.

The writer who however took the novel to its greatest heights was Honoré de Balzac. His multi-volume *Human Comedy* (1842-48) contained more than 2000 characters and had depictions from all ranks of society. Balzac's portrayals being realistic and a reflection of life became the key works for

the emergence of the phase of realism in novel writing. Balzac paved the way for Gustave Flaubert whose *Madame Bovary* (1857) was the best example for the realistic novel. Madame Bovary's depiction of a young adulteress and the succeeding tragedy of the novel popularized the novel immensely. Guy de Maupassant, a disciple of Flaubert was known more for his short-story collections such as *La Maison Tellier* (1881) and *Mademoiselle Fifi* (1882).

1.5 THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH NOVEL

The twentieth century too saw a great deal of innovations in the genre of the novel. *Penguin Island* (1908) was a spoof on politics written by Anatole France, and Romain Rolland developed the cyclical novel. His ten-volume *Jean Christophe* (1904-12) and *Men of Good Will* (1932-47; 27 vols) are illustrations of this kind of form. Another significant writer who addressed the theme of morality and the individual being was Andre Gide. His *Immoralist* (1902) and *The Counterfeiters* (1926) are examples of such writing. The greatest writer of the 20th century was Marcel Proust. His *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27) was an interior monologue and influenced the stream of consciousness technique in English writing. Other writers such as Colette and François Mauriac concentrated on human relationships in their works. Among the writers after the Second World War significant novels were written by Louis Ferdinand Celine and Andre Malraux. Celine's *Journey to the End of Night* (1932) and *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) depicted cynically the effects of fascism while Malraux's *Man's Fate* (1933) and *Man's Hope* (1937) were portrayals of the political environment.

Existentialism dominated the post-war period in France and a series of novels came up in the social background of disillusionment and turmoil. Chief among these is the novel of Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) where his key idea of human freedom to choose and forego one's values was explained. His ideas were echoed by Albert Camus in *The Stranger/The Outsider* that you will be reading shortly. Camus's later work, *Plague*, too was an illustration of this cynical view of life. The period after this was the period of new novel also known as anti-novel. Some of the writers worth mentioning are Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

1.6 MAJOR NOVELISTS

Voltaire (Francois Marie Arouet, 1694 – 1778)

Voltaire was the pen name of Francois Marie Arouet. Arouet was born in Paris on November 21, 1694. He had his early education in a Jesuit college in Paris and from the age of seventeen began to associate himself with the Parisian aristocratic society. His sharp wit and humour made him a popular figure but it also led to his downfall. In 1717, he was imprisoned for eleven months in Bastille because of some remarks against the authorities. His first literary work was *Oedipe*, written while in prison under the pseudonym 'Voltaire'. He was exiled from France in 1726 due to another political skirmish and from 1726-1729 lived in England where he was fascinated by the philosophy of John Locke and the scientific principles of Newton. After a series of moves to different places, he returned to Paris at the age of eighty three. He was given a roaring welcome and yet his old age and the excitement of returning home took its toll and he died in May 30, 1778. His notable works are *Zaire* (1732), *Lettres Philosophiques sur les Anglais* (1733), *Le Mondain* (1736), *Sept Discours en Vers sur l'Homme* (1738), *Zadig* (1747), *Micromégas* (1752), *Candide* (1759), *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), *L'Ingénu* (1767), *La Princesse de Babylone* (1768), and *Épître à l'Auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs* (1770).

Jean –Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau had a hard life when he was young. He was born in Geneva, Switzerland on June 28, 1712. His mother died soon after his birth. His father in order to escape imprisonment for a petty offence went into hiding. As a result, Rousseau stayed with his aunt and uncle but at the age of sixteen left Geneva and wandered all around Europe till he arrived in Paris in 1742. He survived doing odd jobs. Rousseau in his philosophy stated that the human being is essentially good but the society is the one that corrupts humans. His *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) pointed out that art and science had not helped humans. He felt that progress of knowledge had created power politics and curbed individual growth. His most important work in this line of thinking was *The Social Contract*. Due to his views on private property, he is considered as the precursor of modern socialism and communism. His emphasis on learning and education are projected in the novel, *Emile*. His major literary works are *Dissertation*

sur la Musique Moderne (1736), *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), *Narcissus, or The Self-Admirer: A Comedy*, (1752), *Le Devin du Village: an Opera* (1752), *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1754), *Discourse on Political Economy*, (1755), *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), *Émile: or, on Education* (1762), *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right* (1762), and *Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1770, published 1782). He died on July 2, 1778

George Sand (Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin, Baronne Dudevant, 1804 –1876):

George Sand was a writer who questioned the gender disparities in society. She was born in Paris on July 1, 1804 and was raised in the country home (Nohant) of her grandmother. She married in 1822 but due to an unhappy marriage left her family in 1831 and returned to Paris. She began her writing career by writing for *Le Figaro* in 1831. She was also the co-editor of *Revue Independante* (1841). She co-authored with her lover Jules Sardeau her first novel, *Rose et Blanche*. This was published under the pseudonym Jules sand. Her second novel, *Indiana* (1832) was a great success and subsequently she wrote *Valentine* (1832) and *Lelia* (1833). When her novel was not published in *Revue des Deux Monder*, she began a new review in 1840 titled, *La Revue Independante*. She played a key role in the development of the novel form. Some of her significant writings are *La Mare au Diable* (1846), *François le Champi* (1847-48), *La Petite Fadette* (1849), *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* (1853), and *Lucrezia Floriani* (1846). She died in Nohant on June 8, 1876.

Stendhal (Marie-Henri Bayle, 1783 - 1842):

The development of the modern novel owes its existence to Stendhal. He was born in Grenoble, a district of France on January 23, 1783. His original name was Marie-Henri Bayle. Although his father was a lawyer and landowner due to his mother's death at a young age he was taken care of by an aunt. He then moved to Paris when he was sixteen and he joined Napoleon's army and served as lieutenant for 18 months. In 1814, due to the fall of the French empire Stendhal found it difficult to get jobs and moved to Italy. He returned to Paris in 1821 and in 1822 published *De L'Amour*. His first novel, *Armance* (1827) was about impotence and his next novel,

The Red and the Black examined the political and social condition of France through the eyes of Julian Sorel. Stendhal's yet another masterpiece, *The Charterhouse of Parma* was published in 1829. This work dealt with the adventures of the character, Fabrizio del. This novel is believed to have influenced writers such as Henry James, George Gissing and Joseph Conrad. He died on March 23, in 1842.

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850):

Honore de Balzac is known as a writer who concentrated on the predicament of the individual in society. He along with Flaubert is thought to have ushered in the age of realism in the French novel. He was born in Tours, France on May 20 in 1799. As he was born on Saint Honoré's day he was named as Honoré de Balzac. He had his initial education at a grammar school in Tours and later at the Collège de Vendôme. He then went to study at Sorbonne in 1816. He lived in poverty for much of his early life and wrote a number of essays on different topics. Many of his literary works were serialized. *Les Chouans* (1829) his first full-length work was based on the revolt of the French peasants. He wrote an autobiographical work titled *Louis Lambert* (1832). This was followed by his great works, *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) and *La Recherche de l'absolu* (1834). Some of his other works are *Le Lys dans La vallée* (1836), *L'Enfant maudit* (1836), *La Vieille Fille* (1836), *Les Illusions perdues* (1837), *César Birotteau* (1837), and *Une Fille d'Éve* (1838). His seminal work is thought to be *La Comédie Humaine* which is a compilation of all his works numbering around 90 novels and novellas. This literary masterpiece reflects his own life's realities and his true experiences. His writing influenced many famous authors such as Marcel Proust, Emile Zola, Charles Dickens, Jack Kerouac and Friedrich Engels. Many of his works have also been translated into the film medium. He died on August 18, 1850.

Gustave Flaubert (1821 – 1880):

Flaubert was born in Rouen on December 12, 1821. His parents hailed from families of doctors and Flaubert's father, Achille-Cléophas Flaubert was surgeon at the Rouen municipal hospital. Flaubert's writing career began in school. Being rebellious while young, he was expelled from school and had to finish his studies in private. Flaubert later went on to study law at Paris but he was unsuccessful as he failed in the exams. He then took the decision to become a writer which was supported by his father. From 1849-

1851 he traveled with the writer, Maxime du Camp in North Africa, Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. In 1851 he began work on *Madame Bovary* and published it in *Revue* in 1856. The novel was however critically denounced as being abusive and Flaubert was prosecuted. He however escaped conviction. It was later published in two volumes. *Madame Bovary* is centred around the life of Emma Bovary who is married to a physician. Emma finds that her dreams of a romantic and adventurous life are not possible as her husband does not even realize her dreams. In despair and anguish she indulges in love affairs and the secrecy and the rich lifestyle takes its toll and she finally kills herself. The other works of Flaubert are *Salammbô* (1862), *Trois Contes* (1872), *L'Éducation Sentimentale* (1869), and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (unfinished, 1874). He died on May 8, 1880.

Emile Zola (1840–1902):

Zola was born in Paris on 2 April 1840. His father was an Italian engineer who had taken up French citizenship. He spent his early childhood in Southeast France. He moved to Paris after his father's death and in Paris his friendship with the painter, Paul Cézanne inspired and motivated him to write in the romantic tradition. He failed his Baccalaureate examination and took up a job as a clerk. He also wrote some columns and reviews for Cartier de Villemessant's newspapers. His first two works were *Contes à Ninon* (1864) and an autobiographical novel, *La Confession de Claude* (1865). He later published his first major novel, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), and a serial novel in twenty volumes *Les Rougon Macquart* (1869). His significant novel however was *Germinal* (1885) which was based on the labour conditions in coal mines. In 1877 he published *L'Assommoir* (Drunkard, 1877) which was a portrayal of alcoholism. He was influenced by Claude Bernard's *Introduction à la Médecine Expérimentale* (1865) which emphasized the influences of external conditions on human individuals. He died in mysterious circumstances on 29 September 1902. His scientific ideas regarding nature and environment led to the development of naturalism and determinism and he influenced writers such as Theodore Dreiser and August Strindberg.

Andre Gide (1869-1951):

Andre Gide was born in Paris on November 22, 1869, in a middle-class Protestant family. Gide's constant bouts of illness led to an interrupted

education and he was privately educated. He led a puritanical lifestyle and during one of his bouts of sickness he began to rebel against this puritan background of his. Due to this rebelliousness he combined in his works along with strong moral codes an element of sensuousness. Illustrations of such works are *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (1897), the drama *Saul* (1903), and later *Le Retour de l'enfant Prodigue* (1907). His most daring and rebellious work was *Corydon* (privately published 1911, public version 1924), in which he explored sexuality liberally.

He was a literary critic and also a translator who translated works of Shakespeare, Whitman, and Conrad. He believed that his experimental work, *Les Faux Monnayeurs* (1926) was the only novel among his works. His later works were *Thésée* (1946) which was the reworking of an old myth. Gide's collected works have been published in fifteen volumes (1933-39). He died on February 19, 1951. He brought in symbolism into French literary circles with the publication of *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* (1891). He won the Nobel Prize in 1947.

Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

Marcel Proust was born on 10 July 1871 in Paris to Jewish parents. From his school days, Proust was interested in literature and in 1896 published his first work, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. This collection of short stories and essays was not very successful. He translated a number of works and wrote prefaces for some literary works. In 1907 he published in *Le Figaro* "Sentiments filiaux d'un parricide", which formed the base for his novel writing. He began writing a novel and in 1913 titled it as *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The first part (*Du Côté de chez Swann*) of the novel was published in November 1913 and in June 1919 he published part two (*À l'ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*). Later from 1920-1922 three more parts - *Le côté de Guermantes I*, *Le côté de Guermantes II - Sadame et Gomorrhe I*; and *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*— of the novel were published. Although he completed the remaining volumes (*La Prisonnière*, 1923, *Albertine Disparue*, 1925 and *Le Temps retrouvé*, 1927), he could not revise them due to an attack of pneumonia which subsequently led to his death on November 18, 1922. His brother posthumously had them published. Although his work was not received with great acclaim during that period, it later became the seminal work in the establishment of the

modern novel. English writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were greatly influenced by the narrative technique.

Jean –Paul Sartre (1905-1980):

Jean Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was born on June 21, 1905 in Paris. The death of his father when he was a year old resulted in his being taken care of by his grandfather, Charles Schweitzer. His grandfather being a disciplinarian, Sartre grew up in a strict environment. Sartre to escape from a monotonous life developed a passion in literature and became an avid reader and eventually also began to write. In 1911, his mother moved to Paris so that Sartre could be educated. He was enrolled in Lycee Henri IV where he developed a life long friendship with Paul Nizan. He later completed his Baccalaureat. He then took up further studies at École Normale Supérieure where he studied along with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Hippolyte, and Claude Levi-Strauss. In 1928 he met Simone de Beauvoir who became his intellectual companion and lover. After passing the agrégation in philosophy he began to teach at various institutes. He moved to Berlin in 1933 where he got a grant to study at French Institute in Berlin. He published *Transcendance de l'ego* at this time and then from 1929-1931 he enlisted in the military. He published *L'Imagination* in 1936 which was followed by his seminal work, the novel *Melancholia (La Nausée, 1938)*. He was then drafted into the French army to fight the German forces and he was captured by the Germans and imprisoned in Padoux. While in prison, he read Heidegger and wrote a play, *Bariona*. He was released in 1941 because of health reasons. He taught in Lycée Condorcet and along with Merleau-Ponty founded an intellectual Resistance group. He published *L'Être et néant* and *Les Mouchein* (a play) in 1943. In 1942 he published *Huis Clos, L'Age de Raison, and Le Sursis* and became a well known intellectual in French circles. In later years, he studied Marx and developed a dislike for all kinds of bondage and imprisonment. He became politically active, meeting in later years political figures such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Tito. Slowly, his health began to take its toll and he developed partial blindness and resorted to dictating his works. Some of his significant works are *L'Imagination* (1936), *La Transcendance de l'ego* (1937), *La Nausée* (1938), *Le Mur* (1939), *Les Mouches* (1943), *Qu'est ce que la Littérature?* (1947), *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) and the autobiographical *Les Mots* (1964). He won the Nobel Prize for literature

in 1964 but refused to accept it. His death on April 15, 1980, definitely left a huge void in French literary circles.

1.7 SUMMING UP

The novel, as already stated, began its journey in the eighteenth century. It slowly and steadily evolved into an aesthetic form. Writers such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, in this period delineated the social and moral preoccupations of the period in their works. In addition, this period saw the growth of romanticism. The later half of the eighteenth century saw a flow of different ideas and witnessed the transformation of values and ideals. This period can be considered as the time of Enlightenment. Writers of this period were Michel de Montaigne, Rene Descartes, and Montesquieu. The nineteenth century was a time that identified the individual as a focal point in the narrative. This period explained the inter-relationship between environment and the social, political and intellectual contexts. Writers of this period or phase were Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Zola. This period also witnessed the novels dealing with issues of naturalism and determinism.

The period between the two world wars was a time of great introspection for writers. The dilemmas and ideas of realism and art made great strides and great innovations happened in the phase of art, which was labelled 'surrealism'. The later nineteenth-century monologues by writers such as Proust and Gide gave rise to stream-of-consciousness novels while Celine and Malraux with their themes of turbulence and change brought in the novel of violence. The chaos and fragmented lifestyles of the period saw the growth of existentialism. Thus Sartre, and Camus became significant writers displaying the dispassionate and vulnerable lifestyles of humans. Contemporary writing depicted the various developments in structuralism and post-structuralism. The new novel in France had no hero and moved away from all patterns of convention and style associated with the novel form. Thus, the novel as a form had come to stay in France and as witnessed in our reading had influenced a great many trends in the English novel itself.

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Unit 2

Albert Camus and His Works

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Biographical Sketch of Camus
- 1.4 Camus's Literary Works
- 1.5 Summing Up

1.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, I hope to provide you with a context to understand the philosophical background of Camus's period. Many of you may have heard the term "existentialism" and may have associated it with names such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus but you may not know specifically what the term means or the greatness of these writers. I am sure once you finish reading this block, you will find the concept and the writers interesting and, maybe, even want to know more about them. Well, I hope, you are now geared up to reading the remaining story of Camus and his work, *The Outsider*.

After reading this lesson you should be able to

- *understand* the growth and development of French literature
- *trace* the philosophical theory in Camus's literary works, and
- *describe* the major features of *The Outsider*.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

I will now introduce you very briefly to the historical background of French literature. Most of you are aware that the history of any literature has a hoary past and that various social, political and economic influences change the literary trends of any nation. Similarly French literature too has a antique

past but we shall just begin in the 17th century as that is when, I think, the changes actually began. The period at the beginning of the 17th century is referred to as the ‘baroque period’ in Europe. The baroque period was different from the period of classicism as the literature displayed characteristics such as fantasy, obscurity, emotionality, diversity, vitality, and profundity. The important writers associated with this style were François de Malherbe, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, and Marquise de Sévigné.

Stop to Consider

“The first notable French novel –*The Princess of Clèves*– by Madame de La Fayette (1634-93) –shows none of the vices of the English novels of a century later; it is firmly constructed and takes character seriously, as does *Manon Lescaut* by l’Abbé Provost (1697-1763). With such works the psychological novel was established in Europe. A keen hold on reality and a concern with the problems of man as a social being animates even the fiction of the Romantic school—works like *Indiana* and *Lélia* by George Sand (1804-76) and the heavyweight romances of Victor Hugo (1802-85). But the true glories of French fiction come with reaction to romanticism and sentimentality, as exemplified in the novels of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). The great fathers of realism are Stendhal (1783-1842), Balzac (1799-1850), and Flaubert (1821-80), and their influence is still active. Émile Zola (1840-1902) moved away from the artistic detachment that Flaubert preached and practised, but, in his *Chronicles of the Rougon Macquart Family*, he tried to emulate the encyclopaedic approach to the novel of Balzac, whose *Human Comedy* is meant to be a history of society in a hundred episodes. The leader of the Naturalist school, Zola saw human character as a product of heredity and environment.

It was left to the 20th-century French novel to cast doubt on a mechanistic or deterministic view of man, to affirm the irrational element in his makeup, and to emphasize the primacy of the will. The temporal treadmill of Balzac and Zola has no place in the masterpiece of Marcel Proust (1871 -1922); *Remembrance of Things Past*, if it has a philosophy, says more about the creative élan vital of Bergson, the human essences that underlie the shifting phenomena of time and space, than the social jungle the realists had taken for reality. André Gide (1869-1951) seems to make a plea for human aloofness from environment so that the essentially human capacity for change and growth may operate. André Malraux (1901-76), the forerunner of the Existentialist novelists, demonstrated, in *Man’s Fate*, the necessity for human involvement in action as the only answer to the absurdity of

his position in a huge and indifferent or malevolent universe. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) and Albert Camus (1913-60) similarly emphasized man's freedom to choose, to say no to evil, to define himself through action." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Baroque

The word 'Baroque' refers to a period in literary history in Europe. It was a style that influenced the field of art such as music, literature, painting, architecture and performance. The emphasis in this period was on emotional involvement. The style was marked by characteristics such as fantasy, obscurity, emotionality, diversity, vitality, and profundity in literature while in painting, it meant grandeur, vivid colours, etc. and in music, vigorous orchestra and polyphony were its characteristic elements. In architecture, bold columns, domes, and grandeur and munificence were the hall-marks of works of this period.

"The effects of war on 17th century literature : A true picture of the period must also take into account the enormous effects of social and political upheavals during the early and middle parts of the century. . . In France the bitter internecine struggle of the Fronde (1648-53) similarly divided the century and preceded the possibly the greatest period of all French literature –the age of Molière, Racine, Boileau, and La Fontaine. In Germany the early part of the century was dominated by the religious and political conflicts of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and thereafter by the attempts of German princes to emulate the central power and splendour of Louis XIV's French court at Versailles. . .

The civil, political, and religious conflicts that dominated the first half of the century were in many ways also the characteristic response of the Counter-Reformation. The pattern of religious conflict was reflected in literary forms and preoccupations . One reaction to this —seen particularly in Italy, Germany, and Spain but also in France and England —was the development of a style in art and literature known as Baroque. This development manifested itself most characteristically in the works of Giambattista Marino in Italy, Luis de Góngora in Spain, and Martin Opitz in Germany. Long regarded by many critics as decadent, Baroque literature is now viewed in a more favourable light and is understood to denote a style the chief characteristics of which are elaboration and ornament, the use of allegory, rhetoric, and daring artifice.

If Baroque literature was the characteristic product of Italy and Germany in this period, Metaphysical poetry was the most outstanding feature in English verse of the first half of the century.

Perhaps the most characteristic of all the disputes of the 17th century was that in which the tendency to continue to develop the Renaissance imitation of the

classics came into conflict with the aspirations and discoveries of new thinkers in science and philosophy and new experimenters in literary forms. In France this appeared in a struggle between the Ancients and Moderns, between those who thought that literary style and subject should be modeled on classical Greek and Latin literature and supporters of native tradition. In Spain a similar conflict was expressed in a tendency toward ornament, Latinization, and the classics (*culteranismo*) and that toward a more concise, profound, and epigrammatic style (*conceptismo*). This conflict heralded through the Moderns in France and the idea of *conceptismo* in Spain a style of prose writing suitable to the new age of science and exploration. The Moderns in France were largely, therefore, followers of Descartes.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

In the latter half of the seventeenth century namely, around 1634, when Louis XIII was ruling, his prime minister, Cardinal Richelieu, wanted to bring in changes in French literature. He initiated a literary forum known as the ‘French Academy’ which set down some guidelines for literary composition. In a way, the academy began to develop the first streaks of classicism. At about the same time Descartes formulated the theory that literature should depict truth and be based on reason. While Descartes felt hopeful about human destiny, there were other writers who did not feel so hopeful. Two significant writers who displayed signs of pessimism in their works were Jean-Baptiste Racine and Moliere.

Stop to Consider:

The ‘Academie Française’ was established in 1634 and relates to the efforts of the French state, under Cardinal de Richelieu, to bring cultural activity under its patronage. One of its activities was the attempt to standardize the French language. As a result of such efforts, it brought out the *Dictionnaire* in 1694. The academy was strongly influential in the development of a systematic, rational approach to literary activity. Richelieu personally advocated the development of Classical doctrine.

Cardinal de Richelieu, or Armand-Jean du Plessis, was probably the greatest minister under the Bourbon dynasty of France. He held various positions under the rule of Louis XIII. Richelieu was perhaps the most important figure in the field of artistic and cultural activity during his years in power. As we have already seen, he helped to found the ‘Académie Française’ which succeeded in bringing

out a standard dictionary in four, large volumes in 1694. With his efforts, Richelieu helped in making the pursuit of letters more acceptable.

Encyclopedia Britannica

In the context of the history of Western literature, the 17th century brought forth an attitude of doubt and questioning, as to be seen in the *Discourse on Method* (1637) and Pascal's *Pensées* (1657-58) in France, Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) in England.

“The civil, political, and religious conflicts that dominated the first half of the century were in many ways also the characteristic response of the Counter-Reformation. The pattern of religious conflict was reflected in literary forms and preoccupations. One reaction to this –seen particularly in Italy, Germany, and Spain but also in France and England - -was the development of a style in art and literature known as Baroque.

“Perhaps the most characteristic of all the disputes of the 17th century was that in which the tendency to continue to develop the Renaissance imitation of the classics came into conflict with the aspirations and discoveries of new thinkers in science and philosophy and new experimenters with literary forms. In France this appeared in a struggle between the Ancients and Moderns, between those who thought that literary style and subject should be modelled on classical Greek and Latin literature and supporters of native tradition. In Spain a similar conflict was expressed in a tendency toward ornament, Latinization, and the classics (*culteranismo*) and that toward a more concise, profound, and epigrammatic style (*conceptismo*). This conflict heralded through the Moderns in France and the idea of *conceptismo* in Spain a style of prose writing in suitable to the new of science and exploration. The Moderns in France were largely, therefore, followers of Descartes. . .”

Encyclopedia Britannica

Around the period from 1751-1772, an intellectual group of men who came to be known as the philosophers brought out a 35-volume literary work, *The Encyclopedie*. This was seen as the trademark of the period of intellectualism and enlightenment. The encyclopedia brought forth views on philosophy, literature and the sciences. This was a time when scholars questioned authority and wanted to enquire into any matter on the basis of scientific enquiry. The short story and the prose novel became the most popular genres of the eighteenth century. Some of the key literary figures of this period were Charles de Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire

and Diderot. The 19th century was a time to reiterate the ideas of freedom and equality. Various coups and revolutions had led to this demand and the novel in this period spoke for the repressed and the marginal section of people.

Voltaire (1694 –1778): Voltaire’s *Candide*

He was born on November 21, 1694, in Paris. His actual name was Francois Marie Arouet. He was considered as a man with a great amount of wit and he is, in French intellectual circles, thought to be one of their greatest philosophers and writers. He was educated at a Jesuit college and at the age of 17 struck friendships with the aristocracy. Due to his satire on the French government, he was imprisoned for eleven months in the Bastille. While in the Bastille he wrote *Oedipe* which became greatly popular. Voltaire, due to other controversial statements that he made, was sentenced to imprisonment or exile. Opting for exile, Voltaire moved to England and was struck by the philosophical rationalism that had cropped up in England. Voltaire published a number of books, articles and essays on a wide range of subjects. He was seen as the voice of reason. He was also a severe critic of religious intolerance and any other form of oppression. He was elected to the Academie Francaise in 1746 and returned to France at the age of 83 only to die with the excitement of his visit. His best known literary novel is *Candide*.

SAQ:

What kind of changes emerged in the literary field after the publication of the *Encyclopedie*? How did the new ‘philosophie’ affect literary writing? (25 words)

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One of the key literary developments was romanticism. Romanticism negated classicism and came up with notions of emotional zeal being the main idea in literary movements. The major writers who initiated romanticism and displayed romantic trends in their writings were Madame de Staël, François-René de Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Alfred de Musset, and Alphonse de Lamartine. Some of these writers also brought in a new

genre into literary trends such as Hugo's *Les Miserables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Alexandre Dumas's *Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Three Musketeers*.

Romanticism is a movement in Europe, which was against classicism and neo-classical notions of the 18th century. Friedrich Schlegel used the term 'romantic' to describe literature that depicted emotions in an imaginative way. Victor Hugo described it as the portrayal of liberal views in literature. In English literature, Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* expounded the ideas of romanticism. Some key strains of romanticism are fantasy, fancy, imagination and emotions.

"The 19th century in Western literature . . . has special interest as the formative era from which many modern literary conditions and tendencies derived. Influences that had their origins or were in development in this period – Romanticism, Symbolism, Realism – are reflected in the current of modern literature . . .

The predominant literary movement of the early part of the 19th century was Romanticism, which in literature had its origins in the *Sturm und Drang* period in Germany. An awareness of this first phase of Romanticism is an important correction to the usual idea of romantic literature as something that began in English poetry with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Moreover, although it is true that the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution were two main political and social factors affecting the Romantic poets of early 19th-century England, many characteristics of Romanticism in literature sprang from literary or philosophical sources. A philosophical background was provided in the 18th century chiefly by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose emphasis on the individual and the power of inspiration influenced Wordsworth and also such first-phase Romantic writers as Friedrich Hölderlin and Ludwig Tieck in Germany and the French writer Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whose *Paul et Virginie* (1787) anticipated some of the sentimental excesses of 19th-century Romantic literature. Positive as it was, the influence of Rousseau must also be seen as a partly negative reaction against 18th-century rationalism with its emphasis on intellect." – *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

SAQ:

How do we compare English and French Romanticisms? What kind of differences can we name between the two? (50 + 50 words)

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What are the main differences between the 18th century and 19th century French literature? (50 words)

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I am quite sure that you have a fair grasp of literary trends in English language. French literature, if you have noticed, has similarly, its unique sequence of events. In fact, the French and English nations had a lot of political rivalry although the literature of the two countries influenced and encouraged each other greatly. Well, romanticism was, as you have guessed rightly, replaced by the idea of veracity and thus the period of realism began. One of the most significant exponents of realism in French literature was (maybe you already have an idea of) Gustave Flaubert. His novel, *Madame Bovary*, about a young woman’s romantic notions and her tragic day-to-day existence touched the hearts of many readers.

Stop To Consider:

“The label Realism came to be applied to literature by way of painting as a result of the controversy surrounding the work of Gustave Courbet in the early 1850s . . . Literary realism . . . was a much less easily definable concept. Hence the loose use of the term in the late 1850s, when it was applied to works as various as

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, and the social dramas of Alexandre Dumas. Even the members of the so-called Realist school were not entirely in agreement. Edmond Duranty, cofounder of the monthly journal *Réalisme* (1856), supported the view that novels should be written in a plain style about the ordinary lives of middle- or lower-class people, but he insisted that the Realists' main aim should be to serve a social purpose. ..[Champfleury], an art critic and novelist, stressed the need for careful research and documentation and rejected any element of moral intention. The practice of those labelled Realists was even more diverse than their theory. . .

“The problem with the Realists was that each had his own definition of reality and his own recipe for how to transcribe it. It is easy to see why Gustave Flaubert was so firm in dissociating himself from such writers as Champfleury and Duranty, given that his own work undermined all sense of stability in perceptions and values by emphasizing the idea that reality is relative to the person who perceives it. Furthermore, Flaubert rejected any idea of transposing a slice of life onto the page in everyday language. “

Realism, because of its heavy bias towards external reality, tends to decentralize emotions, a key element in Romanticism.

This novel was followed by another remarkable work, namely, Hippolyte Taine's *Classic French Philosophers of the 19th Century*. In his work, Taine felt that the formation of human character was influenced by race, milieu and the historical moment. This formed the foundation for the literary works of Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Alphonse Daudet.

Hippolyte Taine (1828-): Taine was a French critic and historian who distinguished himself as a serious scholar and academician during his graduate days. Many of his teachers and friends praised his nobility of character, his fertile intellect, his distinct style with which his work was always stamped but they also criticized his undue admiration for classicism. He had mastered Plato, Aristotle and other German philosophers and was well proficient in German and English. In 1851 he was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the college of Toulon. Due to various obstacles and considerations he struggled hard to be accepted among the French academics and also failed to obtain a doctorate degree for a long time. However, the period from 1855-56 was significant, as during this period he wrote and published a number of articles. He published, besides an article on Jean de La Bruyere,

seventeen articles in the *Revue de l'Instruction Publique*. Moreover he wrote another twenty articles on a diverse range of topics. He also published in the *Revue de l'Instruction Publique* a series of articles on the French philosophers of the 19th Century which was published later in 1857 as a single volume. In December 1863 he published his *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* which had an introduction outlining his ideas of determinism.

Taine, also in his *The Origines de la France Contemporaine*, argued that modern France had become a centralized force. He thought that here was no individual initiative in the State and power was in the hands of the Centre. This was true, according to him, even before the revolution. It was only that in modern times the revolution gave it a new meaning.

Stop to Consider:

What is determinism?

Determinism is a philosophical view that every incident/event in the universe is governed by causal laws. Therefore all events including human actions are predetermined and thus the existence of free will is ruled out. Determinism could be due to the action of natural causes or due to the action of God. In the first case it is called naturalistic determinism and in the second, theistic determinism.

The twentieth century, as you would already know, was rocked by two wars namely, World War I and II which caused great upheaval in Western society. Writers felt that human existence itself had lost meaning and one of the major writers of this period questing and seeking to understand the human psyche was Marcel Proust. His masterpiece, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1922-1931) induced many writers to rethink concepts of time. Past and present time was seen as being fluid and not having much meaning as the present was felt to be, many a time, a reshaping of the past.

Marcel Proust (1871-1922) hailed from a rich aristocratic Jewish family. From his school days he was interested in literature and in 1896 published his first book, *Les Plaisirs et Les Jours* which was a collection of poems, short stories and essays. This was not a successful venture and later he began a novel in 1895 which remained unfinished. For a few years after this he just indulged in translations and only in 1908 wrote some pieces for the

journal, *Le Figaro*. He wrote some pastiches, too, by imitating the style of Balzac, Flaubert, Michelet, etc. Later he wrote some short pieces which he decided to make into a novel. Thus in 1913 he got his *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* published.

Writers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Jean Anouilh and Albert Camus now reverted to finding value in myths and legends that had universal values and meaning. Literature after World War II was shaped by writers who believed in human equality and who, during the German occupation, had formed a resistance movement. These included Jean-Paul Sartre, Andre Malraux, Simone de Beauvoir, René Char, and Albert Camus. These writers, especially Camus began to question the idea of human existence and personal responsibility and therefore began to question the very nature of existence.

Stop to Consider:

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980): Sartre was a French novelist, playwright and philosopher who believed that one should not mourn the loss of god. He believed that the “loss of God” is not to be lamented. Man is destined to freedom, a freedom from all influences, which he may seek to dodge, deform, and refute but which he will have to confront if he is to become a moral being. According to him existence precedes essence. His philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is thought to be a significant work that inspired modern existential moment. His other major works are the novel, *Nausea* (1938), a collection of short stories, *The Wall and Other Stories* (1938), and plays such as *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1947)

Andre Georges Malraux (1901-76) : He was a French novelist, adventurer, art historian, and statesman known for his successful work, *Man’s Fate* (1933) which had the key themes of revolution, psychological anguish, and death.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86): Beauvoir is a French novelist, writer, philosopher and feminist best known for the philosophical work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) and *The Second Sex* (1949). *The Second Sex*, is a seminal work carefully chalking the historical aspect of male oppression and attributing its effects on the life of contemporary women

Now that we have placed Camus within the map of French literature it is only apt to know more about him and his philosophical background.

1.3 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CAMUS

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913. His father, who was enlisted in the army during World War I, died when he was just a year old and later Camus went to live in his maternal grandmother's place along with his mother and his elder brother, Lucien. He began his formal education in 1918 and through the influence of his teacher, Louis Germain, won a scholarship to high school in 1923. Germain, his teacher, remained for him a major influence and much later Camus paid homage to him during his Nobel prize lecture. At school, Camus excelled in sports and was especially fond of football. Unfortunately, an attack of tuberculosis cut down his physical activity and his academic pursuits. He once again enrolled himself in the University of Algiers for a course in philosophy and obtained a Diploma d'études supérieures in 1936 for a thesis on the philosophical writing of Plotinus and St. Augustus. While in the university, he was greatly influenced in his political and philosophical ideas by one of his teachers, Jean Grenier. He once again fell sick and in order to recuperate, visited the French Alps and after visiting Florence, Pisa and Genoa returned to Algeria. This was his first European visit. From 1938 to 1947, Camus immersed himself in the political turmoil of France. He became a part of the resistance movement during German occupation and was also pursuing a career in journalism writing articles for the journal, *Combat*. In 1947, he retired from active political journalism and devoted himself to literary pursuit. He received the Nobel Prize in 1957 at the age of 44 and three years later in 1960, he was killed in a car accident.

Stop to Consider:

The German Occupation and the French Resistance

German troops defeated France in 1940 following which the country was divided. This was a period of humiliation for the French. "Some writers escaped the country to spend the remaining years of the war in exile or with the Free French Forces. Others, because of political options made during the previous decade, moved directly into collaboration. And still others, because of pacifisms or a belief that

art could remain aloof from politics, tried to carry on as individuals and as writers, ignoring the taint of passive collaboration with the occupying forces . . .

“Several writers joined the military, as well as the intellectual, resistance. . . “

“ . . . The events of the 1930s and ‘40s strengthened the conviction that intellectuals could not remain politically uncommitted; the war clarified choices and made them seem crucial for the individual. After 1945, Existentialism, depicting mankind alone in a godless universe, rationalized this view of individuals as free to determine themselves through such choices.”

Encyclopedia Britannica

1.4 LITERARY WORKS

Camus began his literary career at a very young age. His first work was a collection of essays titled, *The Wrong Side and the Right Side* (1937). The essays were a reflection of his early life and his second collection of essays *Nuptials* (1938) were lyrical as well as contemplative essays on the Algerian landscape. Major influences on Camus during his university education were Andrew Gide and André Malraux. He began an active life among the French left wing intellectuals and became a part of the theater group known as *Workers Theater* whose sole aim was to address the working class people. His plays *Caligula* (1945) and *Cross Purpose* (1941) remain significant for their traits of the theater of the absurd.

Stop to Consider:

What is the Theatre of the Absurd?

This is a term put forward by the theatre critic Martin Esslin for a group of plays written in the 1950s and 1960s. The word is derived from Camus’s essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* where he writes that human existence is meaningless and absurd. Great exponents of the absurd theatre were playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. These plays generally assume that the world has no sense and humans in such a world have no purpose and meaning. They depict through the plays the confused, baffled and perplexed minds of the characters. A good example of this is Beckett’s play, *Waiting for Godot*.

Camus also adapted William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1956) and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Possessed* (1959) for the theatre. From 1940 to 1942, Camus worked as a trainee for a newspaper, *Algier-republicain*. He worked in different capacities such as editor, writer, feature writer, reviewer for this newspaper. He reviewed some works of Jean Paul Sartre and moreover, depicted the life of Muslims in the region of Kabylie. These were later published in a volume titled *Actuelles III* (1958). Camus later served as editor of the Paris daily, *Combat*, after liberation. His *L'Étranger* published in 1942 became popular as *The Outsider* in Britain. This novel (as *The Stranger* in U.S.) received rave reviews in United States and in U.K. His essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published at the same time, set people thinking with its philosophical ideas of human existence and the sense of absurdity of human life.

His second novel, *The Plague* (1947) was a story that described the setting of an epidemic and the reality of human existence amidst crisis. *The Plague* is a metaphorical representation of the disillusioned human life. Camus's philosophy of absurdness was now reshaped into notions of moral rebellion. This was portrayed in his essay, 'The Rebel' (1951). A number of scholars of the period including Sartre received this with a great deal of criticism. A later novel, *La Chute*, published in 1956, critiqued Christian symbolism and this was followed in 1957 by a collection of short stories, *Exile and the Kingdom*.

SAQ:

How would you describe the relation of Camus' novels with his philosophical or social theories? (50 words)

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1.5 SUMMING UP

Now let us just try to comprehend why Camus is considered a great literary figure. Camus gave to the distraught and disturbed world of the 1940s, a great deal of sense. His writings explained the strife and the disillusionment of the world. His faith in humanity and his attempt to help humans, not on an ideological level but at a humanitarian level, was greatly appreciated. Later, his philosophical sentiments set a new tone of intellectualism and the terms of existentialism, absurdness, alienation, etc. began to have greater depths of meaning. Camus's sense of disillusionment did not however enter into a total negative sense; he also stressed values such as truth, moderation and justice.

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Unit 3

The Outsider

Contents:

- 3.1. Objectives
- 3.2. Introduction
- 3.3. The Story-line of *The Outsider*
- 3.4. List of Characters
- 3.5. Summing Up

3.1 OBJECTIVES

My attempt in this unit will be to introduce you to the novel and to make you aware of the significance of certain ideas present in the novel. By the end of the unit, you should be able to

- *name* the characters and assess their roles in terms of the total action
- *plot* the story and summarise it
- *mark out* the themes

3.2 INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned above, Camus's novel, *The Outsider*, was published in 1942. There are many scholars who think that it is a novel of existentialism and still others who think that it is nihilistic.

Libraire Gallimard in Paris first published the novel in 1942. Stuart Gilbert translated it into English in 1946. Later, in 1982, another translation of the novel was carried out by Joseph Laredo and was published by the publishing house, Hamish Hamilton. Once again, in 1989 a translation by the American, Mathew Ward was executed but many scholars felt that Ward had changed the very first line, 'Aujourd'hui, maman est morte' as he had translated it as

‘Maman died today’. The use of ‘maman’ in English instead of the word, ‘mother’ many thought had diluted the force of the novel.

The novel’s main character, Meursault, is portrayed as being an emotionless man who has the ability to be detached and, in a way, observe life. The novel’s narrator is Meursault himself who, very dryly and laconically, narrates all that happens to him. The novel thus has a narration that overviews everything. The major theme underlying the novel is the theme of death, the death of the mother, the Arab man’s death and the execution of Meursault. The novel has two parts, a part of judgement and a part of being judged. Meursault reviews everything around him in a bored and detached way when he judges and while he is judged he is filled with some concern.

Camus has built up Meursault in such a way that his existentialist ideas are foregrounded through his character and he attempts to make Meursault visualize, the essence of life, the absurdity of human existence, and the irrationality of reality. What may set you thinking is why Meursault begins to accept this sort of meaninglessness of life. Over the next many parts let me see if I can get you to an understanding of this point.

SAQ:

How is the sense of ‘meaninglessness in life’ conveyed by the novelist?
(70 words)

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Stop to Consider:

Existentialism is a philosophical way of thinking that stresses on the uniqueness and the remoteness of the individual experience in an antagonistic universe. It also upholds the belief that human existence cannot be explained, and that man thus has to take responsibility for the consequences of his acts.

Nihilism is an extreme form of existentialism, which believes that everything is unreal and that the world has no reality. It also emphasizes a complete disregard for all authority and rules.

Camus' existentialist thoughts are also attached to a deep sense of isolation. We can see this in both *The Stranger* and *The Plague* (1948). *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Outsider* are often seen as expressing Camus' existentialism and related ideas, both having appeared around the same time. Yet another work which is related to Camus' existentialism and the connection with the theme of revolt is, *Man in Revolt* (1951)

SAQ:

Can you identify those characteristics in Camus' *The Outsider* which are derived from the French tradition ? (50 words)

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3.3 THE STORY-LINE OF *THE OUTSIDER*

The novel begins with the recollection of the main character, Meursault, who tries to remember his mother's death, which has occurred much before the beginning of the novel. He is unable to recollect any significant event or information relating to her death. Instead of displaying any emotional feelings due to the death of his mother he starts going through his life as though nothing much had happened. The only effect on his life is that he needs to attend the funeral and participate in the act of mourning. At the funeral, Meursault desires to be back in his home in Algiers and also laconically observes Monsieur Perez, who had loved his mother, carry her casket with great effort to its burial spot. One day after the funeral, Meursault goes to a beach where he meets his company's secretary, Marie Cardona. Meursault and Marie spend time together at the beach and later watch a movie together. Back in Meursault's apartment, they make love and begin to spend more time together. She wants to know if Meursault loves her but though Meursault likes her he does not feel anything special about her or any other woman. He does not feel there is anything much in a marriage. When Meursault gets back to his job, his boss chastises him for his passiveness. The story then progresses to give glimpses of Meursault's meetings with various characters.

Meursault meets his friend and colleague, Emmanuel, and then later meets his neighbour, Salamano, who has a dog. The dog, unluckily for Salamano, contracts some skin disease and infects Salamano, too, resulting in the authorities taking away the dog and leaving Salamano grief-stricken. Meursault also develops a friendship with another neighbour, Raymond Sintes, who disregards violence towards women and hits his ex-girlfriend who he suspects is unfaithful to him. Meursault discovers that Raymond too has a cold indifferent view of life.

Raymond, one day sets up a meeting in the beach with Meursault and Marie so that he can introduce his friend, Masson to them. On the beach, two Arabs follow them and attack them. The friends, after a scuffle, get back to their cottage but much later, Meursault returns to the beach with a gun and sees the Arab who had attacked him earlier. He shoots him and is arrested. As he awaits trial, he meditates on his life and his actions. Marie visits him hoping that he would marry her. When the trial begins, Meursault begins to observe every character extremely detachedly. In the court, the attorneys call on Meursault's friends to testify to his character. Although they all speak about him in good terms, Marie sketches him as a dry, emotionless man and the judge finds fault with Meursault for not having any emotions when his mother dies and for having starting a relationship immediately after the death of his mother. Everyone thinks that Meursault is a monster with no feeling and emotions. Thus, Meursault is convicted and is sentenced to death by the guillotine. As Meursault awaits his end he does not change much and when the prison chaplain wishes him to seek God, Meursault finds it annoying, attacks him, and begins to yell at him till the guards restrain him. He, at the moment of his death, realizes what his mother must have gone through before her death and is excited at the prospect of his own death. The novel ends with Meursault recognizing the universe's indifference toward humankind. The final lines echo his new realization: "As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself — so like a brother, really — I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate".

SAQ:

Do you think that a connection can be drawn between the structure of the plot and the narrator's position? (60 words)

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3.4 LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters:

Monsieur Meursault: Meursault is a young Frenchman who is on trial for the murder of an Arab man. He is portrayed as an alienated, watchful and indifferent man who watches the society around him keenly. When the novel begins his mother is dead and this death, instead of depressing him and emotionally upsetting him, makes him take life as a matter-of-fact. This point is later stressed during the trial in court. He develops a relationship with a secretary of his office, Marie Cardona. He is the character through whom Camus depicts the sense of absurdity. He revels most of the time in physical pleasurable activities such as swimming, sex and smoking. In the next part, his behaviour is depicted as being abnormal and monstrous as he does not participate in the death of his mother adequately according to society. In the second half of the novel, Meursault is judged by society and he comprehends the futility of not being part of society's norms. The farcical nature of life makes him think of a life beyond it and he accepts responsibility for his own acts.

Maman: Maman (French form of address for one's mother) is dead when the novel begins but becomes an active character as Meursault is closely associated with the death. She had earlier lived with Meursault till he found that communication between them had dried up and also he had not been able to support her. She is placed in a home where she develops a friendship with another inmate, Perez. Much later, when Meursault is awaiting death he relives some of the stories and incidents of her life.

Marie Cardona: She is Meursault's girlfriend. She was earlier employed in Meursault's office as a typist. Meursault meets her in the beach after the

death of his mother. She and Meursault become lovers but she is upset with Meursault's passive reaction to her. She hopes that he would marry her but for Meursault she is one more woman and not anyone special. Meursault likes her for her frivolousness and her physically sensual body. At about the ending of the novel Meursault wishes to see her face in prison but finds that she has severed relationships with him.

Raymond Sintes: He lives in Meursault's building and is portrayed as some type of pimp. He is instrumental in inciting Meursault's cold-blooded murder. He believes that women have to be put in place and beats his ex-girlfriend, an Arab woman. He befriends Meursault as he is ready to listen to him. His brutality towards his girlfriend leads to a group of Arab men attacking him, and his two friends, Meursault and Masson.

SAQ:

Draw up a list of descriptive words which could aptly be identified with Meursault's character. (50 words)

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Minor Characters:

Director of the home: He is in charge of the home where Meursault's mother dies. He guides Meursault through the funeral process and later at the trial testifies the cold attitude of Meursault at the funeral.

Meursault's boss: He is upset and exasperated with Meursault. He gives leave for four days so that Meursault can attend the funeral but is put off by Meursault's lack of ambition and drive when he offers him a chance to move to Paris.

Céleste: He owns a restaurant where Meursault dines regularly. Meursault has gone to horse races together. He testifies positively about Meursault at the trial and makes Meursault grateful to him.

Caretaker: He works at the home where Meursault's mother dies. He has a chat with Meursault and tells him his own past life. As they are mourning he smokes and has a coffee with Meursault.

Thomas Pérez: He is the man who develops a relationship with Meursault's mother when she was in the home. He is moved by her death and he is the only resident allowed to attend the funeral.

Nurse: She is attached to the home and she is remembered much later by Meursault for her words that there is no way out in life.

Emmanuel: He is Meursault's friend in the office and they spend off hours seeing movies which Meursault has to elucidate to him.

Salamano: He is a neighbour of Meursault and lives alone. He has a spaniel, which is his companion, and though he is abusive to the dog, he is greatly upset when the dog is taken away by the authorities as it contracts a skin disease. Meursault and Salamano develop a friendship and later at the trial he testifies positively as he understands Meursault's treatment of his mother.

Robot-like woman: She attends the trial as an observer and Meursault remembers how her strange jerky way of movement had fascinated him.

Masson: He is a friend of Raymond and owns a beach cottage. Meursault along with Raymond visits him to be introduced to him. When Raymond, Masson and Meursault are on the beach, they are attacked by a group of Arabs and fight against them. At the trial, he testifies that Meursault is a decent man.

Examining Magistrate: He is in charge of the preliminary investigation into Meursault's murder and attempts to make him repent by showing him a crucifix. He and Meursault are on cordial terms, even though his attempt to make Meursault repent fails. Meursault often looks forward to the times he, the magistrate, and his lawyer meet cordially.

Meursault's Lawyer: He does not allow Meursault talk too much knowing that Meursault's strange character may put off the judge. He is thought to be weak by Meursault although others think that his defense was good. Later when Meursault is sentenced to death he does not inform Meursault on a way to appeal.

Chaplain: He visits Meursault in his cell after he is condemned to death, and attempts to explain to him about God and confession. He enrages Meursault who attacks him and the prison guards come into separating them.

The Arab: He is a strong presence in the novel even though he is dead as Meursault stands trial for shooting him. Meursault kills him with one bullet but shoots three more times into the lifeless body. He attacks Raymond and his friends as he is the brother of the girl that Raymond had earlier beaten up.

SAQ:

Which of the major characters in the novel carry forward the theme of existentialism? (10 words)

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How would you define the role of the minor characters in Camus's *The Outsider*? (150 words)

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3.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit I have attempted to make you understand the outline of the novel and the various characters involved in the story. I hope that now your reading of the novel is easier and you have no doubts about who is who and in what way they affect the progression of the story. Before you finish the next unit,

I advise you to finish reading the novel, so that you understand how the novel can be viewed critically in different perspectives.

Check Your Progress

1. Show how the plot in the novel achieves its purpose of transcending the psychology of the transgressor to highlighting a philosophy of isolation.
2. Comment on the representative roles played by the minor characters to show the individual's transactions with Law, Religion and the Mother-figure.

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Unit 4

Themes and Techniques

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 The Title
- 4.4 Major Themes in *The Outsider*
- 4.5 Narrative Technique
- 4.6 Images & Symbols
- 4.7 Summing Up
- 4.8 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit is intended to make you aware of the deeper levels of the novel by Camus. It helps you to view the novel as a literary text, giving rise to innumerable interpretations and meanings thereby reflecting the different attitudes of society. The main objective here is to

- *introduce* you to different ways of reading the text; and
- *help* you analyze the novel through different critical approaches.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, I will try to provide some ways of reading the text. The unit, as you have seen, is titled “Themes and Techniques”, and here we shall briefly look at some major elements that make up the totality of the novel. This will involve some close examination of these elements. You should keep in mind the most notable fact that Camus was the youngest Nobel-prize laureate to have received this prize in 1957. As you would know, he died at a prematurely young age in 1960, in a tragic car-accident. The gratuitousness of human existence is, in retrospect, perhaps a strong element in the life of Camus. Philosophically, it raises profound questions of the meaning of life and

existence in the face of such randomness. As a novelist, Camus raises these issues through literary techniques such as we have detailed below. You have to apply these discussions properly to your study of the novel.

4.3 THE TITLE

The title of a novel is a strong indicator of its contents. Meursault is an ‘outsider’ as he refuses to conform to the dictates of society. He is an ‘outsider’ in the eyes of the crowd who come to watch his trial. He is condemned because he behaves in a way that is not considered ‘normal’.

The title can be seen to summarise a powerful argument against the network of interpretations which require everyone to “play the game”. In one sense the novel allegorises the heroic individual’s struggle to survive against an oppressive totality. However, Camus does not allow this position to be held so easily: Meursault is also guilty of being “cold-blooded” when he fires his extra shots into the dead Arab. To be ‘outside’ is also intricately tied up with the larger issues of social responsibility. Meursault, after all, cannot be happy in the position that he has adopted. But the yardstick which makes him an ‘outsider’, also puts him outside the ordinary run of individuals who compromise on versions of truth.

SAQ

Would you agree with the view that “stranger/outsider” also points to the themes of isolation and rebellion? (75 words)

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4.4 MAJOR THEMES IN *THE OUTSIDER*

The Outsider is still considered as a landmark novel in the elucidation of French thought just at the time of the World War. The novel abounds in

giving various meanings to the reader. Anyway, right now you should know that a 'theme' is normally the central idea in a fictional work. In this case the very title, *The Outsider* indicates the sense of the novel. The French word, "etranger", can be interpreted plurally. It means a foreigner as well as someone unfamiliar. Meursault is not an Algerian and is a Frenchman. He is also, maybe, a *pied noir*, that is, born to a family who have lived 2-3 generations in Algeria in which case he could still be seen as a stranger who does not belong there. He is an outsider as he is not like the others. It could also indicate the perspective of the narrator's 'outer' consciousness.

Stop to Consider:

"Thematic Approaches to Narrative"

Thematic approaches share the notion that theme expresses what a narrative is about, but differ in their conception of its status and functions. Many see theme as having a triple linkage with itself, with literature, and with the world. It thus has a referential function in providing an interpretation of human experience and of the world. Two broad types of approach may be distinguished. Syntagmatic study focuses on a single text or a group of closely related texts to which a structure of meaning is assigned (intrinsic interpretation). Paradigmatic study focuses on recurring content in various, ostensibly unconnected works."

Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory

The theme of 'death': The other major theme that runs through the novel is the sense of death. In fact, Sartre once stated that Meursault's *id* is one of those terrible innocents who shock society because he does not follow any conventions. The idea, many critics feel, is that Camus did not want to prove anything through his story but wanted to reveal that the being of the Outsider itself as meaningless.

You could look at the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the fifth chapter (Part TWO), and read how he approaches the question of execution. He refers to the guillotine and then works out the 'logic' of how the condemned man *must* actually depend on the proper working of the executing machine. He argues finally that "I'd end up telling myself that the most rational thing was not to hold back." That is, death should not be staved off; it is the only logic really consistent. How far does this borne out by the novel ? Attempt to

justify this by relating it to what constitutes the ‘action’ of the novel. Death also occurs gratuitously in the novel – he is not ‘responsible’ for his mother’s death, as he tells his boss. The Arab he did not kill because he *wanted* to. These elements underline the implicit statement in the novel that existence is essentially gratuitous.

SAQ:

Since existentialist thinkers highlight the difficulty of communication, (or “well-grounded inter subjective relationships” :*Encyclopaedia Britannica*), to what extent does Camus point to it in the novel ? (70 words)

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What is the thematic idea underlying the gap between the experiences of Meursault and the legal (mis-)interpretations given to them in the courtroom during the trial? (60 words)

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There is another thematic pattern that we see in the novel which often can be seen in the limited vision of Meursault. We might call this the theme of being ‘blinded by light.’ Can you trace this theme in the novel and elaborate its significance ?

4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Plot: Plot is normally a reference to the arrangement of events so that a story is formed. Plot is also the mode by which the action of a novel unfolds. Let us see the way the events are unfolded for us in the novel. In *The Outsider* the story opens with Meursault, the protagonist receiving a telegram indicating the death of his mother. Meursault is not aware as to the exact time of her death and whether the death had occurred the previous day or on that day. He takes off for two days and boards a bus to reach the home where he had kept his mother. At the home, he meets the director and the caretaker who take him to see his dead mother. Meursault, instead of seeing his mother just sits next to her, as friends come into see her. He spends the time talking to the caretaker, smoking and having coffee. During the funeral procession next day, he feels disturbed by the scorching sun rather than the death of his mother. He notices that his mother's 'fiancé', Perez, is greatly disturbed and has difficulty progressing through the funeral procession.

After the funeral, Meursault takes a bus home and thinks of sleeping for twelve hours. He then wakes up late realizing that it is a weekend and goes to the beach where he sees his office-typist to whom he had been attracted. They spend time together on the beach and later that night they go to see a movie while there Marie learns of the death of Meursault's mother and is baffled by Meursault's emotionless behaviour. They spend the night together and the next day, by the time he wakes up, she is gone and realizing that he dislikes Sundays, Meursault takes a nap, gets up makes some lunch and sits on the balcony-watching people. He then goes inside when it is cold and dark. The next working day his boss tries to sympathize with him but when he learns that Meursault's mother was sixty years old he is little relieved. During the lunch break, Meursault along with his co-worker, Emmanuel, gets into a moving fire-truck and later after lunch and a nap he returns to work. Once he returns home he meets his neighbour, Salamano and his dog, and wonders at the queerness of their relationship. Then he meets Raymond whom he invites for dinner. Raymond discusses his relations with his Arab girl-friend, her suspicious behaviour and his fight with an Arab. Raymond requests Meursault to write a letter so that he can punish her and Meursault agrees as Raymond is there. Raymond likes this acceptance and tells him that they are friends.

The next week Meursault works hard and goes twice to watch films with Emmanuel. Then during the weekend he meets Marie and goes swimming with her. They return to the apartment and spend time together and next day she asks him if he loves her. He replies negatively and at that juncture there is a commotion in Raymond's apartment and Marie and Meursault witness Raymond beating a girl. Meursault does not want to inform the police, as he dislikes them but the police do come and beat Raymond for his insolence. Marie and Meursault cook lunch but Marie is too upset to eat and leaves. Later Raymond visits Meursault and they agree that the woman deserved the punishment. They go to play pool and meet Salamano who has lost his dog and is disturbed by its loss. Meursault suggests that he should check at the dog pound to see if it has been caught but Salamano does not like the idea of paying money for the dog's release. He goes home, gets to know of the dog's death, and weeps. Meursault can hear him cry and thinking about his mother, goes to bed. The next day Raymond calls him up at the office and tells him to come to his friend's house on the beach with Marie. A moment later Meursault's boss offers him a better position and informs him that he would transfer him to Paris. Meursault angers his boss when he says he is happy in the same position and that day when he meets Marie she asks him if he will marry her. Meursault answers her that if she wants he will but Marie thinks that he does not love her. She is moreover happy at the prospect of Meursault being given a position in Paris but Meursault quashes her excitement by telling her that Paris is dirty.

At his regular dinner place, Celeste's, that night he meets a jerky robot-like woman who fascinates him. This is only a momentary attraction and he later forgets her. When Meursault goes home after dinner he meets Salamano who tells him about his dog and informs Meursault that he comprehends why Meursault had sent his mother to a home. Marie and Meursault join Raymond and his friend on the appointed day. As they are about to go to the beach they see a group of Arabs but when they board the bus to the beach they do not find them following. At the beach, they visit Raymond's friend, Masson and his wife, and Meursault gets attracted to the issue of marriage. Marie and Meursault frolic and enjoy swimming in the waters and after lunch, Meursault takes a walk with the other men. During the walk they encounter two Arabs and get into a scuffle with them. Raymond is wounded and needs to have stitches to the wound. After getting the wound

attended to Raymond again runs off in search of the Arab and Meursault follows him reluctantly. They find the Arab but Meursault persuades Raymond to give him his gun and they walk back. Meursault is exhausted by the heat and goes back to the beach for some cool air and he finds the Arab there again who shows him a knife. Meursault in a frenzied moment shoots him down with Raymond's gun and again cold-bloodedly shoots again thrice even though the Arab is dead.

The next half of the novel begins after Meursault's arrest. He is imprisoned and allocated a lawyer by the magistrate even though he does not believe there is any need for one. The interrogation room seems familiar to him from his and the whole thing appears like a game. The next day his lawyer is troubled when Meursault refuses to accept that he had repressed his feelings on the day of his mother's death. The magistrate is bothered by the fact that Meursault had paused before firing the shots. When Meursault cannot explain the reason, the magistrate attempts to get him to repent by showing him a crucifix and appealing to his sense of God. Meursault cannot understand the logic of the Magistrate and also displays that he does not believe in God. He complicates the matter further when he mentions that he is annoyed by the murderous act he has done and is not sorry about it. He feels he has a good pleasant time with the Magistrate. The eleven months of trial are spent in prison and Marie visits him but she finds that the visiting place is too crowded, noisy and hot. Meursault cannot concentrate on the talk and is caught by a wide range of Arab discourses around him. Meursault moreover is attracted to Marie's physical beauty and does not listen to her. After this visit he gets a letter from Marie telling him that she cannot visit him as she is not legally married to him. Meursault spends his free time reliving moments of swimming and gradually is accustomed to the routine. He realizes that he can get used to the monotonous life and understands that as long as he has his freedom nothing much matters. He spends time by sleeping, making catalogs, reading crime stories and in his memory finally he just has the vision of two time frames namely today and yesterday.

At the time of his trial a large crowd turns up to watch. The media has covered the story with juicy bits and pieces and people are eager to watch the murderer. Meursault feels he is being judged and during the trial he gets annoyed about questions related to his mother. The director, the caretaker and Perez testify to his laconic and emotionless behaviour at the funeral. Celeste, the restaurant owner however explains that Meursault is a decent man and that the murder was an accident. Later Marie testifies about her

meeting with Meursault, the next day after the funeral. Although Raymond and Masson portray Meursault in good light, the scenario suddenly seems to have changed as the prosecutor announces that Meursault is on trial for the criminal way he dealt with his mother's death. After the trial, Meursault walks into the summer air and reflects that his life could have gone in any possible way. The next day the lawyer appeals and Meursault finds that the speeches being too long he cannot pay attention to it. The prosecutor believes that the crime was premeditated. The way the prosecutor states the series of events Meursault realizes how the whole incident seems probable and understands the basis of the prosecutor's conclusion. Meursault wonders at the way intelligence is used to oppose him. The prosecutor believes that Meursault had treated his mother too callously and that he is nothing but a monster and his demented brain was the cause of murder. Meursault replies that he did not intend to kill the Arab and when questioned why he did it then cannot explain and states that because of the sun he had done the act. The defense lawyer even though gives a good summation does not have the conviction and force of the prosecutor and does not address the issue of his mother's funeral. Meursault feels isolated as the defense lawyer replaces Meursault's name with the first person pronoun, 'I'. Meursault is greatly agitated by the absurdity of the trial and he is made to wait in another room until the verdict is given. He is sentenced to death.

Later in the prison, the chaplain seeks his confession but Meursault denies him. He remembers his mother's story of his father's execution and understands the isolation imminent in the act. He thinks of new penal codes that could change fate. As the time for execution draws closer, he thinks of the dawn and his appeal. Though he knows that all die one day or the other he finds his end a little upsetting. He also thinks of Marie and once again, at that point the chaplain visits him. Meursault tells the chaplain that there is nothing after death and the chaplain surprised tries to explain to him the sufferer's final stances. In a moment of fury he attacks the chaplain and later the guards intervene to put off the fight. Meursault, at this moment realizes that his idea of life has been justified. He thinks that no one can affect another being and other's life or death or love did not make any difference to him. He thinks each being has a right and each one is privileged. As dawn approaches, Meursault thinks of his mother and her need to live and have a lover. He feels that no one has any right to cry at her death and thinks that the indifference of the world is comforting. He hopes that a crowd of people would greet his death.

You will find in this sequence of events that the plot is conceived in such a way that you are opened to the characters' situation and the sequence of events through Meursault's consciousness. The latter part of the novel reverts this first-person statement and gives us how others view Meursault. The turning point or the climax here is the murder. Remember that when you have to discuss plot you need to talk about action, climax, conclusion, conflict, and the arrangement of events.

Stop to Consider:

In his 'Afterword' of 1955, Camus mentions the 'heroic' stature of Meursault because he is a character who refuses to compromise with his own conception of truth. Camus makes out a case for reading the story /novel in a particular fashion: "to get a more accurate picture of his character, or rather one which conforms more closely to his author's intentions, you must ask yourself in what way Meursault doesn't play the game. The answer is simple: he refuses to lie."

The plot hinges, to a large extent, on the central consciousness of the protagonist. Would you say that this makes sympathy for the central character (as with Meursault) an important element of the plot? Do we, as readers, feel we can understand what Meursault feels through the funeral of his mother, the shooting of the Arab, and through the trial and his incarceration?

Check Your Progress:

1. Justify the view that *The Stranger* [*The Outsider*] is "a psychological study of guilt in a character who passively wishes the death of his mother, whom he does not kill, and is executed for the murder of an unknown Arab, whose death he did not wish or intend." Support your answer with textual references.
2. Comment on the view that the ambiguities surrounding the word "Outsider" [Stranger] are central to the novel.
3. Discuss the view of Meursault as the "hero-antagonist of the gods" in relation to Sisyphus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* which was published shortly after *The Stranger*. In this connection discuss the stress on the humdrum monotony of Meursault's life.

Point of View: An important aspect of a novel is the point of view. Who tells the story is very important as it may change the perspective of the story. A novel is a narrative narrated by a narrator. The narrator in this case is the protagonist Meursault. This is generally known as first-person narrative. You need to question whether he tells us the truth or hides the facts. In this case, most probably he is telling the truth, as he becomes in a way the victim of societal outlook. The other significant characteristic to be noted in the point of view is the focus of the narrator and the voice s/he adopts. Once again, a close reading will tell you the dry straight forward tone of narration and also that Meursault is more focused to merely bring you the statement of particular moments and desires for you to just pass judgments on his actions.

“Few narrative features have been discussed as extensively as point of view – the physical, psychological, and ideological position in terms of which narrated situations and events are presented. . . ., the perspective through which they are filtered – and few have been associated with as rich a terminology (from central intelligence, vision, and focalization to filter and slant).

There is general agreement that the filtering or perceiving entity, the holder of point of view, the focalizer, can be situated in the diegesis or out of it. In the former case, akin to Chatman’s ‘filter’, the point of view emanates from a character (the reflector, central intelligence, or central consciousness so valued by Henry James) or from some non-anthropomorphic existent (e.g., a camera). In the latter case, akin to Chatman’s ‘slant’, the point of view emanates from a (more or less omniscient, more or less perceptually restricted) narrator. In both cases . . .the point of views can be hypothetical rather than actual, yielding that which *might* be perceived from a certain perspective. Many narratologists take a point of view to involve a narrating agent as well as a focalizing one. More generally, though the source of point of view (‘who sees’) arguably constitutes a necessary and sufficient determinant of it, typologies often invoke factors that pertain not only to the (nature and position of the) focalize but also to the kind and quantity of information provided (‘what is seen’ and ‘how much is seen’) or, even more expansively, to the relations between the narrator and the act of narrating, the action narrated, and the narratee.” (*Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative*)

Stop to Consider:

Several questions should engage your attention:

Matthew Ward, the translator of Camus' *L'etranger* into the English *The Stranger* (*The Outsider*), has this to say: "*The Stranger* demanded of Camus the creation of a style at once literary and profoundly popular, an artistic sleight of hand that would make the complexities of a man's life appear simple. . . . Camus acknowledged employing an "American method" in writing *The Stranger*, in the first half of the book in particular: the short, precise sentences; the depiction of a character ostensibly without consciousness; and, in places, the "tough guy" tone. Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Cain, and others had pointed the way. . .

When Meursault meets old Salamano and his dog in the dark stairwell of their apartment house, Meursault observes, "Il était avec son chien". With the reflex of a well-bred Englishman, Gilbert restores the conventional relation between man and beast and gives additional adverbial information: "As usual, he had his dog with him." But I have taken Meursault at his word: "He was with his dog." – in the way one is with a spouse or a friend. A sentence as straightforward as this gives us the world through Meursault's eyes. As he says toward the end of his story, as he sees things, Salamano's dog was worth just as much as Salamano's wife. Such peculiarities of perception, such psychological increments of character *are* Meursault. It is by pursuing what is unconventional in Camus's writing that one approaches a degree of its still startling originality."

SAQ:

From a narratological point of view, what kind of a narrator is Meursault – reliable or unreliable? – considering the fact that Meursault tends to be laconic, and unexpressive? (60 words)

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How would you rate a passage like this one (Part Two, Chapter 5)

: "Then, I don't know why, but something inside me snapped. I started yelling at the top of my lungs . . . I was pouring out on him everything that was in my heart, cries of anger and cries of joy. . . . I had done this and I hadn't done that. I hadn't done this thing but I had done another. And so? It was as if I had waited all this time for this moment and for this light

of dawn to be vindicated. Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why. So did he. Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living.”(60 words)

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How is the feeling of ‘unreality’ that Meursault mentions here conveyed in the novel? How does it influence his function in the novel as the ‘focalizer’? (80 words)

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Characterization: A third characteristic of any narrative is the character delineation. This story too has a number of characters but the story seems to tell us more about Meursault rather than anyone else. In fact, most novels have distinct major and minor characters. The major characters are extremely essential for the story to proceed but once again if you carefully analyse this novel you will find that the characters are all secondary and the main character seems to be the narrator, Meursault. Camus does this, as he wants to explain the issue of indifference and meaninglessness in the world.

SAQ:

Does the novel project Meursault as a murderer? (60 words)

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In contemporary criticism, the tendency has been to view the notion of 'characterization' as a linguistic construct. Read these lines from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction*: "Character, as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits, however, may or may not appear as such in the text. How, then, is the construct arrived at? By assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring the traits from them. . . .

In principle, any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character and, conversely, character-indicators may serve other purposes as well But there are elements which are most frequently, though not exclusively, associated with characterization In the study of particular texts, it should be remembered that the same means of characterization may be used differently by different authors or in different works by the same author and sometimes even within the same work. . . .

There are two basic types of textual indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation The first type names the trait by an adjective (e.g. 'he was good-hearted'), an abstract noun or possibly some other kind of noun The second type, on the other hand, does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving to the reader the task of inferring the quality they imply."

The first kind of characterization, direct definition, sounds rational and authoritative because it is explicit and similar to conceptualization or generalization. Does Camus employ this method in relation to Meursault, or in relation to any other character in the novel?

Rimmon-Kenan further tells us about 'indirect presentation': "A presentation is indirect when rather than mentioning a trait, it displays and exemplifies it in various ways" One kind of indirect presentation is through action. She takes the example of Meursault in Camus' novel where his murder of the Arab is a "one-time (or non-routine)" action. Since this act is one which is performed, it is an act of commission. Sometimes a character commits an act of omission (something that should have been done but the character does not do). "All these kinds of action can (but need not) be endowed with a symbolic dimension." Speech is another indicator of character-traits both by content and form.

The passage above was meant to suggest to you different ways of analysing character in fiction. How is the characterization of Meursault achieved in the novel? How would you describe the relations of Meursault with his friends and associates? Does the first-person narrative help us to infer the nature of these relations?

You could even argue that Meursault is not so much a “real” character as a philosophical abstraction. Many of his actions and thoughts are left unexplained. They seem to stem from remote depths of which we are not given any inkling. For example, his relations with his neighbours appear limited to occasional exchanges, and often we are not given any description of what his general relations with his boss and fellow-employees are. So it does seem that Meursault’s unconscious is not brought to the surface.

The narratee in *The Outsider*:

Gerald Prince: “Nowadays, any student minimally versed in the narrative genre differentiates the narrator of a novel from its author and from the novelistic *alter ego* of the author and knows the difference between Marcel and Proust, Rieux and Camus, Tristram Shandy, Sterne the novelist, and Sterne the man. . .

The reader of a fiction, be it in prose or in verse, should not be mistaken for the narratee. The one is real, the other fictive. If it should occur that the reader bears an astonishing resemblance to the narratee, this is an exception and not the rule.

Neither should the narratee be confused with the virtual reader. Every author, provided he is writing for someone other than himself, develops his narrative as a function of a certain type of reader whom he bestows with certain qualities, faculties, and inclinations according to his opinion of men in general . . . This virtual reader is different from the real reader: writers frequently have a public they don’t deserve. He is also distinct from the narratee. . .

Finally, we should not confuse the narratee with the ideal reader, although a remarkable likeness can exist between the two. For a writer, an ideal reader would be one who would understand perfectly and would approve entirely the least of his words, the most subtle of his intentions. For a critic, an ideal reader would perhaps be one capable of interpreting the infinity of texts that, according to certain critics, can be found in one specific text. On the one hand, the narratees for whom the narrator multiplies his explanations and justifies the particularities of his narrative are numerous and cannot be thought of as constituting the ideal readers dreamed up by a novelist.”

Setting: Fiction of any kind is generally set in a particular culture and environment. The book uses a pre-World War II Algerian setting drawn from Camus's own upbringing. The novel makes more sense as it is placed in the period before the war when Europe was in turmoil and the future of Algeria was tied up with the French nation.

4.6 IMAGES & SYMBOLS

Symbols: Novels generally have various defined concepts that can be interpreted metaphorically. These are important for a close reading of the novels. *The Outsider* too uses the symbols of death, light and water quite constantly. Death is presented repeatedly in the novel. Death begins the novel and ends it. The conflict of the novel is the death of the Arab. Death represents the sense of absence and also the way the world utilizes the moment of death to understand a personality.

Light is a symbol of freedom and energy as well as of violence and destruction. How would you relate this to the fact of being 'blinded' when he is about to kill the Arab?

Water in the novel indicates a sense of purification and pleasure. However, in the novel it is used to convey an ambivalent feeling both positive and negative. In the first part, his affair with Marie is almost completely associated with water. This goes on till their visit to the beach. At the moment that he is about to kill the Arab, water is brought back again. At the moment that the Arab attacks him, both the light-symbol and the water (with the rocks and shade under them) are important associations. How should we understand this? Obviously, light is not helpful because it is blinding at this moment. The water is now associated with treachery (the Arab was cooling off near the spring). Symbols can carry a lot of meaning through the associations. Perhaps what Camus is suggesting is that life, with its comforts, can be treacherous and even blinding. It can conceal the real truths. This interpretation can be checked out against the manner in which death is counted upon as almost a positive certainty at the end.

SAQ:

How does death become a recurrent motif in the novel? Does it remain as a physical state or does it acquire other meanings as well? (60 + 80 words)

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William Freedman makes a distinction between ‘motif’ and ‘symbol’: “two major lines of differentiation distinguish the symbolic motif from the symbol. First, the symbol may occur singly. The motif is necessarily recurrent and its effect cumulative.

A symbol is something described; it is an event or it is a thing. A motif, on the other hand, although it may appear as something described, perhaps even more often forms part of the description. It slips, as it were, into the author’s vocabulary, into the dialogue, and into his imagery, often even at times when the symbolized referent is not immediately involved. . .

The motif, may become part of the total perspective, pervading the book’s atmosphere and becoming an important thread in the fabric of the work.”

SAQ:

Do the structure and the theme of Camus’s novel coalesce ? How would you interpret the two-part structure of the novel ?(70 words):

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Check Your Progress:

1. Comment on the nature of Meursault's transgression in connection with the line: "I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy." [Part I, chapter 6]
2. Discuss *The Outsider* against Camus' view of the 'Absurd' as something that is not intrinsic to the world but arises from the human seeking for the rational and for clarity in a world that is not in itself reasonable. ["I said the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. The world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as it does on the world."-Camus]
3. To what extent would you endorse the view (held by Camus himself) that symbols, rather than realism, is of central importance to *The Stranger*.

4.7 SUMMING UP

In this section I have tried to give you an idea about the various techniques that a novel employs and have also tried to explain that to you by rendering the plot quite comprehensively. I have also explained how symbols reflect the various characteristics of a novel and have ended the section with a concise analysis of the central theme as well as the secondary themes present in the novel. I do hope you have enjoyed analysing *The Outsider* with me. Well, hope you are persuaded by this lesson to try to read Camus's *Plague* when you are free.

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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