

## UNIT-1

---

### STEINBECK: *OF MICE AND MEN* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 John Steinbeck: A Biographical Sketch
- 1.3 *Of Mice and Men*
  - 1.3.1 Plot Summary
- 1.4 Chapterwise Summary and Analysis
  - 1.4.1 Chapter One
  - 1.4.2 Chapter Two
  - 1.4.3 Chapter Three
  - 1.4.4 Chapter Four
  - 1.4.5 Chapter Five
  - 1.4.6 Chapter Six
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Review Questions
- 1.7 Bibliography

---

#### 1.0 Objective

---

In this unit we shall study John Steinbeck's famous novella *Of Mice and Men*. We shall give you a detailed summary of the novel chapter wise and make a critical analysis of each.

---

#### 1.1 Introduction

---

*Of Mice and Men* is a novella written by Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck. Published in 1937, it tells the tragic story of George Milton and Lennie Small, two displaced migrant ranch workers during the Great Depression in California.

Based on Steinbeck's own experiences as a bindle stiff in the 1920s (before the arrival of the Okies he would vividly describe in *The Grapes of Wrath*), the title is taken from Robert Burns's poem, *To a Mouse*, which read: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley."

Required reading in many high schools, *Of Mice and Men* has been a frequent target of censors for what some consider offensive and vulgar language; consequently, it appears on the American Library

---

## 1.2 John Steinbeck: A Biographical Sketch

---

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902 of German and Irish ancestry. His father, John Steinbeck, Sr., served as the County Treasurer while his mother, Olive (Hamilton) Steinbeck, a former school teacher, fostered Steinbeck's love of reading and the written word. During summers he worked as a hired hand on nearby ranches, nourishing his impression of the California countryside and its people.

After graduating from Salinas High School in 1919, Steinbeck attended Stanford University. Originally an English major, he pursued a program of independent study and his attendance was sporadic. During this time he worked periodically at various jobs and left Stanford permanently in 1925 to pursue his writing career in New York. However, he was unsuccessful in getting any of his writings published and finally returned to California.

His first novel, *Cup of Gold* was published in 1929, but attracted little attention. His two subsequent novels, *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*, were also poorly received by the literary world.

Steinbeck married his first wife, Carol Henning in 1930. They lived in Pacific Grove where much of the material for *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* was gathered. *Tortilla Flat* (1935) marked the turning point in Steinbeck's literary career. It received the California Commonwealth Club's Gold Medal for best novel by a California author. Steinbeck continued writing, relying upon extensive research and his personal observation of the human condition for his stories. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) won the Pulitzer Prize.

During World War II, Steinbeck was a war correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune. Some of his dispatches were later collected and made into *Once There Was a War*.

John Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 "...for his realistic as well as imaginative writings, distinguished by a sympathetic humor and a keen social perception."

Throughout his life John Steinbeck remained a private person who shunned publicity. He died on December 20, 1968, in New York City and is survived by his third wife, Elaine (Scott) Steinbeck and one son, Thomas. His ashes were placed in the Garden of Memories Cemetery in Salinas.

---

## 1.3 *Of Mice and Men*

---

### 1.3.1 Plot Summary

The novel takes place in the California valley along the Salinas River. There are two settings for the action: the banks of the Salinas River and a nearby ranch. George Milton, small and smart, and his friend Lennie Small, a large man with mild retardation, are on their way to jobs at a ranch. They stop by the Salinas River to take a break from their long walk.

Lennie cannot remember where they are going, and George, annoyed, reminds him about their jobs. Lennie looks in his pocket for his work card and finds a dead mouse, which he found by the side

of the road. Lennie likes to pet soft animals, like mice and puppies, but he is very strong and often kills his delicate pets. Lennie tries to hide his mouse from George, who demands it from him and throws it across the river.

That evening, Lennie goes to find his mouse, which makes George very angry. He argues with Lennie, but soon feels bad and tries to console him. George tells Lennie how one day soon they will own a farm of their own, where they will grow their own food and have rabbits Lennie can tend.

The next morning Lennie and George arrive at the ranch. The boss is annoyed because they have arrived late. The boss' son, Curley, is a small man who hates big guys like Lennie. He and George have a small confrontation. Soon after Curley leaves his wife enters. Her provocative dress and pose make George anxious. He warns Lennie to keep away from both Curley and his wife.

Two more workers, Slim and Carlson, come into the bunkhouse. Slim's dog just had puppies, and Lennie is anxious to have something soft to pet. Carlson suggests that Candy, an old man and fellow worker, kill his old smelly sheepdog and take one of Slim's pups.

Slim gives Lennie a pup, and he spends much of the evening out in the barn petting it. George tells Slim what happened at their last job. They were run out of town after Lennie unintentionally assaulted a woman. The woman went to the police and Lennie and George had to leave town.

Candy comes in with his dog and Carlson starts pressuring him to let him kill it. The dog is old and arthritic, but Candy has had him for years. Since he is the only one who wants to keep the dog, Candy reluctantly gives in and lets Carlson shoot his old friend.

George and Lennie start talking again about the farm they hope to get, and Candy overhears and asks if he could come too. He has some money saved up, so George decides he can come. Curley comes into the bunkhouse, and when he sees a smile on Lennie's face he imagines that Lennie is laughing at him. He attacks Lennie, who doesn't want to fight. In defense, Lennie grabs Curley's hand and badly breaks it without knowing what he has done.

That evening, everyone goes into town, except for Crooks, the crippled Negro stable buck, and Candy, Lennie, and Curley's wife. Crooks lives alone in the barn because he's black. Lennie comes in looking for his puppy. He and Crooks start talking, and Crooks expresses his feelings of loneliness. Lennie tells Crooks about their farm, but Crooks is doubtful. After listening to Candy for a few minutes, Crooks changes his mind and asks if there might be a place for him on the farm.

Curley's wife comes into the barn, making all the men uncomfortable. Candy tells her to leave. She gets mad and criticizes them and their dream, making Crooks angry. She harshly reminds him he is just a worker, and a black worker at that. Crooks silently hangs his head. There is the sound of the men returning, so Curley's wife leaves. As Candy is leaving, Crooks tells him he wouldn't be interested in coming with them after all.

The next afternoon, Lennie is in the barn alone with his puppy. He accidentally killed it with his strong hands. Curley's wife comes in, and sits down next to Lennie. She tells him how she could have been in the movies, but Lennie continues rambling about the rabbits on their farm. When she finds out how much Lennie likes soft things, she offers to let him touch her hair. Lennie strokes too hard and she gets frightened. He tries to quiet her and accidentally breaks her neck. Lennie runs and hides by the

banks of the river. Candy finds Curley's wife, and goes to tell George. The other men come in and see what happened, and they get their guns. They want to find Lennie and kill him.

Lennie is sitting by the banks of the river. George shows up, and he assures Lennie he isn't mad at him. Lennie wants to hear about that piece of land they are going to get, and the rabbits for him to tend. George tells him, and when the men are nearly there, George shoots Lennie in the head. The men appear, and Curley and Carlson congratulate George. Slim understands George didn't want to shoot Lennie, and he leads him away, offering him comfort and a drink.

---

## **1.4 Chapterwise Summary and Analysis**

---

### **1.4.1 Chapter One**

George and Lennie, two migrant workers during the Great Depression, walk along a trail on the Salinas River just south of Soledad, California. They are on their way to a new ranch, where they hope to be hired to "buck barley," that is, to haul sacks full of grain. A bus driver recently let them out and told them the ranch was nearby. However, the walk is much longer than they anticipated.

George is a small, quick man with dark, suspicious eyes. Lennie is just the opposite: a naive, unintelligent mountain of a man. As they walk along, Lennie comes upon a pool of water and drinks thirstily; George warns him that the water might be bad as it has been stagnant in the sun, but Lennie pays him no heed. After Lennie drinks his fill, George quizzes him on the upcoming job. Lennie, however, fails to remember even the slightest detail of their current prospect. George reminds him that they have received work cards from Murray and Ready's.

As George pats his pocket, where the work cards are kept, he notices that Lennie has something in his pocket as well: a dead mouse. Lennie explains that he likes to pet the mouse's soft fur as he walks. George takes the mouse from Lennie and throws it into the bushes. He then admonishes Lennie for his behavior, warning him not to behave badly, as he has done so often in the past, and ordering him not to say a word when they meet the boss at the new ranch. He reminds Lennie of past misadventures, specifically an episode in the town of Weed in which Lennie assaulted a woman in a red dress because he thought her dress was pretty and wanted to feel it. The woman accused Lennie of attempting to rape her and George and Lennie had to run for their lives out of town. While recounting this incident, George complains that if he didn't have to take care of Lennie he could live a normal life: "I could live so easy and maybe have a girl."

George tells Lennie that they are going to bivouac a couple of miles away from the ranch so that they won't have to work the morning shift the next day. They set up camp and George sends Lennie off to look for firewood so that they can heat up some beans. Lennie goes off into the darkness and returns in a moment; George instantly knows from Lennie's wet feet that he has retrieved the dead mouse. He takes it from Lennie, who begins to whimper. George assures Lennie that he'll let him pet a "fresh" mouse, just not a rotten one. They recall that Lennie's Aunt Clara, whom Lennie refers to as "a lady," used to give Lennie mice to play with.

Lennie fetches some wood and George heats up their beans. Lennie complains that they don't have ketchup, which sets George off on a rant about having to care for Lennie. After this outburst, George feels ashamed. Lennie apologizes and George admits that he's "been mean". Lennie passive-

aggressively offers to go away and live in a cave so that George can have fun. George resolves this short argument by agreeing to Lennie's request to "tell about the rabbits," which is Lennie's shorthand for "talk about how things will be for us in the future." George paints a picture of the future – a picture he has obviously painted countless times before – in which he and Lennie have their own place on their own farm and "live off the fat of the land." He promises Lennie that they will have rabbit cages and that Lennie will be allowed to tend them. Lennie repeatedly interrupts George as he tells this story, but insists that George finish it to the end.

As they prepare to sleep, George reminds Lennie not to say a word during their interview with the boss the following day. He also tells Lennie that if he runs into trouble, as he has so many times before, he is to return to the place where they've camped, hide in the brush and wait for George.

### Analysis

John Steinbeck's enduring popularity is largely the result of his ability to weave a complicated fictional reality from simple elements – simple language, simple characters, simple techniques. One of the techniques he uses consistently is the juxtaposition of the human and the natural worlds. He often – as in *The Grapes of Wrath* – alternates short natural vignettes with the parallel struggles of humankind. *Of Mice and Men*, as is clear from the title alone, features this parallelism as well. It is a novel about the natural world – "of mice" – and the social world – "and men." The relationship between these two worlds is not one of conflict but of comparison; he invites us to witness the similarities between the human and animal worlds.

The title, *Of Mice and Men*, comes from an eighteenth-century poem by Robert Burns entitled "To a Mouse." This poem features a couplet that has become widely known and quoted: "The best laid schemes of mice and men / Gang oft aglay." That last phrase, written in Scottish dialect, translates as "often go wrong." As will become clear, the quotation relates directly to our two protagonists, who do indeed have a "scheme" to get out of the cycle of poverty and alienation that is the migrant worker's lot: they plan to purchase a farm of their own and work on it themselves. Lennie visualizes this future possibility as near to heaven – he can imagine nothing better than life with "the rabbits." Their action in the novel is largely motivated by a desire to achieve the independence of this farm life.

Poverty, in Burns' work as well as Steinbeck, draws the human and the natural worlds closer together. During the Great Depression, in which the novel is set, workers were thrust from relative comfort to fend for themselves in a cruel and uncaring world. They face the original challenges of nature – to feed themselves, to fight for their stake. Poverty has reduced them to animals – Lennie a ponderous, powerful, imbecilic bear; George a quiet, scheming, scrappy rodent of a man. Notice how frequently the two men, particularly Lennie, are described in animal similes: Lennie drags his feet "the way a bear drags his paws" and drinks from the pool "like a horse". Lennie even fantasizes about living in a cave like a bear.

Of course, Lennie's vision of nature is hardly realistic; he thinks of nature as full of fluffy and cute playthings. He has no notion of the darkness in the natural world, the competition and the cruelty. He wouldn't have the faintest notion how to feed himself without George. In this too the men balance each other: George sees the world through suspicious eyes. He sees only the darkness where Lennie sees only the light. George may complain about how burdensome it is to care for Lennie, but this

complaint seems to ring hollow: in truth, George needs Lennie's innocence as much as Lennie needs George's experience. They compliment each other, complete each other. Together, they are more than the solitary and miserable nobodies making their migrant wages during the Depression. Together, they have hope and solidarity.

George's complaint – "Life would be so easy without Lennie" – and Lennie's counter-complaint – "I could just live in a cave and leave George alone" – are not really sincere. They are staged, hollow threats, like the threats of parents and children ("I'll pull this car over right now, mister!"). Similarly, George's story about how "things are going to be," with rabbits and a vegetable garden and the fat of the land, also has a formulaic quality, like a child's bedtime story. Children (like Lennie) love to hear the same tale repeated countless times; even when they have the story memorized, they love to talk along, anticipating the major turns in the story and correcting their parents if they leave out any details. "The rabbits" is Lennie's bedtime story, and while George isn't exactly a parent to Lennie, he is nevertheless parental. George is Lennie's guardian – and in guarding Lennie, George is in effect guarding innocence itself.

Steinbeck's plots are as simple and finely honed as his characters. Each topic discussed - the woman who mistakenly thought that Lennie was trying to rape her, the mice that Lennie crushes with affection, George's order that Lennie return to the campsite if anything goes wrong - will come into play in the chapters to come. Keep these details in mind as we continue.

### **1.4.2 Chapter Two**

The following morning, George and Lennie reach the bunk house at the farm. Candy, the old man who shows them the bunk house, tells them that his boss was expecting them the night before and was angry when they weren't ready for work in the morning. Near his bed George finds a can of insect poison, which leads him to think that his bunk is infected, but the old man reassures him, telling him that person who had the bed before was a meticulous blacksmith named Whitey who kept the insect killer around even though there were no insects to kill.

As George prepares to meet the boss, Candy reports that he is a nice enough man although he takes his anger out on the black stable buck, Crooks. Soon enough, the boss enters and asks George and Lennie for their work slips. George attempts to speak for both Lennie and himself, but the boss notices Lennie's silence and questions him directly. Lennie attempts to speak for himself, aping phrases that George has spoken, but sounds completely ridiculous. George tells the boss that Lennie isn't bright, but that he's as strong as a bull and an incredibly hard worker.

The boss wonders why George is willing to take care of Lennie; George tells the boss that Lennie is his cousin and that he promised his mother to look after him. When the boss wonders why they left their last job, George tells him that they were digging a cesspool and completed the work. When the boss leaves, George scolds Lennie for failing to keep completely silent. George admits that he lied about Lennie being his cousin.

Candy returns with his old sheepdog, and George snaps at him for eavesdropping. Curley, a haughty young man, enters the bunk looking for the boss, who is his father. He behaves threateningly to Lennie. When he leaves, Candy explains that Curley, who is short, hates big guys like Lennie out of

jealousy. George says that however tough Curley may be, he will be sorry if he picks a fight with Lennie, who is incredibly strong. Candy notes that Curley was recently married to a local beauty and that he has become more cocky ever since. Curley wears a left glove full of Vaseline to keep the hand soft for his wife, whom the old man thinks is a tart. George warns Lennie to avoid Curley.

On cue, Curley's wife comes to the bunk house looking for her husband. She is provocatively dressed and quite flirtatious. When she leaves, George remarks that she's a tramp, while Lennie says that she's pretty. George warns him to keep away from her.

Next to enter is Slim, the widely respected jerkline skinner. Slim questions George and Lennie about what work they can do. Carlson, a large, big-stomached man, also enters the bunk house and asks Slim whether his dog had her litter last night. Slim tells him that she had nine puppies, but that he drowned four immediately since she couldn't feed so many. Carlson complains about the smell of Candy's old sheepdog and tells Slim that Candy should put it out of its misery.

Curley enters again and confronts George, asking if his wife has been around. George admits that she was at the bunk house. Curley seems eager to start a fight with anyone.

### **Analysis**

The novel as a whole, and this chapter in particular, shares many elements with stage drama. Steinbeck often uses a single room as a setting for a scene, as the bunk house is used here. This technique allows him to introduce a wide variety of characters quickly without using a narrator - the characters talk about each other, interact, and even describe each other (as when Candy talks about Curley being a "little guy"), all of which facilitates relatively rich characterization in a relatively short number of pages.

This stage technique applies to Steinbeck's descriptions as well as his dialogue. Consider the description of Candy's dog at the close of the chapter: "The dog gazed about with mild, half-blind eyes. He sniffed, and then lay down and put his head between his paws etc.." Steinbeck's language is completely shorn of emotion; he simply describes the animal's actions as a playwright might write stage directions.

This "dramatic" technique gives Steinbeck's story a portentous quality. On one level, he is simply describing an evening among itinerant workers in a realistic way; on another level, the actions and personae of these workers take on a larger, almost mythic significance. Just as in dramatic works of the same period - such as Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* - Steinbeck blends the workaday with the highly stylized, bringing out the eternal, allegorical character of everyday life. Thus Curley comes to represent all petty, embittered men; Crooks stands in for the persecution and the suffering of all African Americans; George is the eternal cynic-with-a-heart-of-gold and Lennie personifies clumsy innocence. The characters are types, or even archetypes, as much as they are individuals - a technique more popularly associated with plays and films than with literary fiction.

This stage technique also allows Steinbeck to build tension quickly without exposition. The atmosphere of Chapter Two is immediately hostile and uncomfortable: George suspects that his bed is infested, the Boss suspects that George and Lennie are trying to pull a fast one, Candy is miserable and decrepit, Curley is looking for a fight, Curley's wife is vamping around suspiciously. Lennie, in his

instinctive, animalistic way, captures the foreboding tone of the Chapter when he bursts out, "I don't like this place, George. This ain't no good place." Right away, there are several points of inevitable conflict, most of them hinging on the character of Curley, who seems to rub everyone the wrong way. The only positive character in the Chapter is Slim, who is also the character described at greatest length; but even Slim comes off as life-hardened - the first fact we learn about him is that he has drowned four out of his nine new puppies. One should immediately recognize how completely out-of-place Lennie is in this hostile, gloomy environment: he is innocent, naive, clumsy and childish in the midst of a bunch of shrewd, ugly, lonely, conniving men.

And Steinbeck's novel certainly features *men* rather than women. The only woman with any important role in the novel (aside from the memory of Lennie's Aunt Clara) is Curley's Wife, a lonely and desperate "tramp," to use Candy's word, who is every bit as meddlesome as Curley fears. Steinbeck's attitude toward her, at least at this stage in the novel, is hardly sympathetic. She doesn't even receive a name, she dresses garishly and talks provocatively. There is more than a whiff of sexism in her depiction. However, Steinbeck is careful to hint as a possible motive for her behavior even at this early stage. She is, after all, stuck with the most loathsome imaginable husband, Curley - who apparently keeps her confined in their house whenever possible, who obnoxiously brags about their sex life (exemplified by the grotesque image of the Vaseline-filled glove), and who cannot be good company. Curley married her because she was flashy, and now her flashiness causes him nothing but distress. She is stuck in a loveless - and perhaps, despite Curley's bragging to the contrary, a sexless - marriage, and can be pitied for seeking other company.

Speaking of the Vaseline-filled glove, pay attention to how often and how variedly Steinbeck references hands in this Chapter and throughout the book. On the most basic level, hands are crucial to the work of the farm - these men, after all, live by their labor. They also function metaphorically. Curley, especially, is repeatedly described as "handy," a term that Candy uses to mean "good at fighting." His hands are further connected to his sex life - his Vaseline-filled glove creates an association between his hand and his sexual organ (why else, after all, would one soften up one's hand?). This association becomes especially important as the tension established in this Chapter spills over into crisis in the pages ahead.

### 1.4.3 Chapter Three

Chapter Three opens on the next day. After working hours, as the other men play horseshoes outside, Slim and George return to the bunk house. We learn that Slim has allowed Lennie to have one of his puppies. Slim praises Lennie for his incredible work ethic, which leads George to talk about his past with Lennie. The two grew up as neighbors and George took Lennie as a travel and work companion when Lennie's Aunt Clara died. George says that when he first began traveling with Lennie he found it funny to play pranks on him. One day he ordered Lennie to jump in a river even though he couldn't swim and Lennie unthinkingly obeyed. After George fished him out, Lennie was completely grateful, having forgotten that George had ordered him into the river in the first place. After this episode, George decided against having fun at Lennie's expense.

At Slim's insistence, George tells about the episode in Weed that led them to seek work elsewhere. Lennie saw a woman in a red dress and, overcome by an urge to feel the pretty fabric, he



stupidly grabbed the woman. The woman fled and told the men of Weed that Lennie had raped her. George and Lennie were forced to hide from a lynch mob and sneak out of Weed under cover of night.

Lennie appears with his new puppy and George tells him to take the puppy back to its mother for its own safety. After Lennie leaves, the men come in from their horseshoe game, which Crooks has apparently won. Carlson begins complaining again about the smell of Candy's old dog. He goads Candy to shoot the dog, which Candy refuses to do. Carlson then offers to shoot the dog himself. After Slim speaks up in favor of shooting the dog, Candy reluctantly allows Carlson to take the dog outside with his Luger and a shovel. Candy sinks into a deep melancholy and the men try to lighten the atmosphere with talk of cards and magazine articles. Just as they begin a game of euchre, a shot rings out in the night.

Crooks enters and talks with Slim about fixing a mule's hoof. He also mentions that Lennie is playing with the pups in the barn. Slim leaves for the barn as George and Whit begin a conversation about women. Whit mentions that the men usually go to a whorehouse or two on the weekend and they welcome George to come along. Whit also laughs about Curley's trouble keeping tabs on his wife, who appears eager to spend time with every man on the ranch aside from her husband. On cue, Curley bursts in to the bunkhouse and demands to know the whereabouts of his wife and Slim. After he learns that Slim is in the barn he leaves. Lennie, at the same time, returns from the barn, having been told to stop playing with the pups for the night.

As they wind down for the evening, Lennie asks George to tell him "about the rabbits," and George launches into his monologue about their proposed self-sustaining farm - complete with rabbits, pigs, cats and a vegetable garden. Candy, who has been listening in, asks how much such a place would cost. George, though put off at first by Candy's nosiness, eventually lets on that he has a lead on a plot of land that could be bought for six hundred dollars. Candy reveals that he has a secret stash of money - three-hundred and fifty dollars - and offers to give it all to George and Lennie if they'll let him live on their farm and work as a housekeeper. After a quick calculation George figures that they could make a down payment on the property after only a month's work. The three men sit, enraptured and astounded that their dream of a self-sufficient farm life might actually become a reality.

Curley returns with Whit, Carlson and Slim. Curley has accused Slim of eying his wife, a charge which Slim and the others laugh off. Lennie, who is still dreaming about the rabbits, also smiles, which leads Curley to confront him aggressively. Curley punches Lennie in the face. Lennie does not immediately fight back, instead crying and calling to George for help. When Curley doesn't back off, George tells Lennie to "get 'em." Lennie catches Curley's next punch in his massive paw and crushes down on his hand. George tells Lennie to let go, but Lennie only grips harder out of fear. Curley flops like a fish. By the time Lennie finally relaxes his grip, Curley's hand has been ruined. Before Curley goes to the hospital, he agrees to pretend that he has caught his hand in a machine. Lennie is afraid that he has done something bad, but George reassures him that he hasn't as the chapter closes.

### **Analysis**

Once again, every visible action in this chapter takes place in the bunk house as characters make their exits and entrances. Steinbeck carefully controls the events, weaving even the smallest detail into a rich whole. The atmosphere remains gloomy as the action progresses from the account of Lennie and George's near-lynching, to the shooting of Candy's dog, to the fight between Curley and

Lennie - with one exceptional spot of light, George's monologue "about the rabbits" and Candy's offer to finance their dream.

To take these events as they occur, the near-lynching in Weed provides another instance of the danger of women. Again, Steinbeck gives voice to attitudes that are sexist at best. He already showed Curley's wife acting just as desperately vampy as her reputation; here he piles on examples of the danger and misunderstanding that comes from sex. The woman in the red dress in Weed (whose pretty dress "provokes" Lennie into action) clearly resembles Curley's garishly attired wife. And George tells of another man, Andy Cushman, who landed in the San Quentin penitentiary after succumbing to "a tart". Women equal danger in Steinbeck's masculine dramatic world.

The only good women, George suggests, are those whose sexual motives one knows - either because they are totally desexualized, like Lennie's Aunt Clara, or completely sexualized, like the whores at Susy's and Clara's. Indeed, Steinbeck's double use of the name "Clara" (which means "clear," suggesting that the social and sexual roles of these two women are transparent) links the one model of womanhood - motherliness - with its opposite - whoredom. Figures like the woman in the red dress, or Curley's wife, who seem to exist between these two extremes, at once off-limits and up-for-grabs, are presented as dangerous, especially for a man as sexually innocent yet powerful as Lennie. He is as dangerous to them as they are to him - they are like the pet mice and rabbits that Lennie loves literally to death, soft and easily crushed. (Steinbeck heightens the association between the women and the small cuddly creatures at several points, for instance when he writes that the woman in the red dress "rabbit" to the lawmen with her accusation of Lennie. Readers can certainly take issue with Steinbeck's depiction of women, but their role in the work as kindling for trouble seems quite clear.

The shooting of Candy's dog draws a parallel between the old swamper and George and Lennie. Indeed, Candy and his dog come off as an "old timer" version of the younger duo. Just as Lennie is an incredible worker, so too Candy's dog was once "the best damn sheep dog I ever saw". And just as the other men cannot understand the bond that keeps an apparently hale and clever man like George yoked to the burdensome, infantile Lennie, so too the men cannot understand Candy's sentimental companionship with his now-decrepit and stinking dog. Steinbeck strengthens their parallel bonds of companionship with continued associations of Lennie and dogs - he is absolutely attached to his puppy; he obeys George's commands unthinkingly, as a dog obeys an owner; and George's commands often directly resemble commands one gives a dog, such as when he sics George on Curley.

Candy thus emerges as the only character in the bunk house who has something approaching George and Lennie's preference for social (and perhaps socialist) companionship over isolated individualism. Their thematic link makes his eagerness to join George and Lennie in their farm life natural and understandable. Candy, unlike the others, displays an interest in others and hope for the future. His sympathetic nature comes through even in his decision to allow his dog's death. Candy only relents to their request to put the dog out of its misery when they frame the argument in terms of the dog's suffering, and even this request is not granted easily.

Yet Candy does finally relent to the men, for despite his similarities to George and Lennie, Candy is an inherently passive character. He relents to others' decisions easily, incapable of fully standing up for his own beliefs. He allows another man to shoot his dog, despite his repeated insistence that he wants to keep the old hound. (The shooting of the dog in the back of the head, a supposedly painless

maneuver, foreshadows later events in the story.)

The tragic fate of Candy's dog reminds us that the rest of the bunk house society - including even Slim - cannot understand or tolerate sentimental attachment to a weak creature. This is no world for Candy's dog, and it appears to be no world for Lennie either. Steinbeck even subtly suggests that their now-realistic dream of co-owning a plot of land might also be too dreamy for the hard truths of the world. When Candy decides to collaborate with them and the idea of owning a farm becomes tangible, none of the men know how to respond. For George and Lennie their dream serves as a diversion from the travails of everyday life and not as a realistic goal.

To turn to the final episode in the chapter, the fight between Lennie and Curley, we see first-hand that there is a deep and ruthless capacity for violence in the generally docile Lennie. This violence is sometimes casual and inadvertent - as in his accidental killing of the mice in his pockets - and sometimes an explosion of directed rage, as when he crushes Curley's hand. Lennie seems willing to kill to protect the things he loves, whether George or the rabbits or what have you. His violence is child-like - or dog-like: the sudden ferocity of an otherwise affectionate pet. His casual declaration that he will snap the necks of any cats who attempt to kill the rabbits on his fantasy farm is shocking - we know that he means exactly what he says.

When George gives him permission to fight back against Curley, Lennie cannot control his capacity for violence. He only stops crushing Curley's hand when George issues a direct order - leading one to wonder how he would behave in a similar situation if George were not there to control him. The fight between Curley and Lennie fulfills the foreshadowed confrontation between the two characters, but it does not resolve the situation. We know Curley well enough to sense that his spoken resolution to pretend the incident didn't happen - to pretend he caught his hand in "a machine" - rings hollow.

By the way, Lennie's crushing of Curley's hand - an unusual form of fighting, to say the least - is highly significant. We've already seen how Curley's hand is associated with his sexuality - he keeps one hand soft for his wife. Thus the injury he sustains resonates with his (already uneasy) sense of sexual prowess. Lennie has, metaphorically at least, crushed more than the man's hand - he has also crushed his very manhood. Lennie cannot understand the significance of this gesture, but the others - or, at least, the reader - can. Lennie has unwittingly unmanned his rival and indirectly revealed his superior physical (and sexual) prowess. Thus Steinbeck lays the foundation for a conflict that directly links Lennie, Curley, and Curley's sexual object, his wife.

#### **1.4.4 Chapter Four**

This chapter takes place the next night, while all of the men are off at the whorehouse spending their weeks' pay except for the feeble threesome of Crooks, Candy and Lennie. The setting is the "little shed that leaned off the wall of the barn" that makes up Crooks' quarters. Steinbeck gives us a glimpse at the quiet, neat, lonesome life of the black stable buck. While Crooks is belittled and ordered around in the ranch at large, in his bunk he is sovereign; none of the other workers impede upon his living space.

Lennie, however, doesn't understand the unwritten code of racial segregation. He appears in Crooks' doorway while checking on his pup in the barn. Crooks tells Lennie to go away, but the simple

big man cannot understand that he isn't wanted. Crooks at last relents and allows Lennie to sit with him and talk. Lennie tells Crooks "about the rabbits" and Crooks vents about his mistreatment as an African-American. Their conversation takes an unsettling turn as Crooks teases Lennie about his lack of self-reliance; he tauntingly asks Lennie what he would do if George were injured. Unable to think hypothetically, Lennie thinks that George is actually under threat. With some difficulty, Crooks calms Lennie down and takes on a kindlier demeanor. His sour attitude remains, however, as he tells Lennie that his dreams of owning a farm with rabbits is unlikely to amount to anything tangible.

Candy comes by looking for Lennie and Crooks is secretly pleased that after so many years of solitude he is finally part of a sort of social gathering. They continue to discuss their plan to buy a farm and Crooks begins to warm to the scheme, even offering his own money and services if they'll take him on as well.

Just as they reach the height of enthusiasm for the plan, Curley's wife enters, ostensibly looking for Curley. She insults the men, noting their feebleness. This offends the two mentally sound farmhands but Lennie finds her fascinating. She voices her frustration at having no one to talk to and launches into a speech about how she could have been a movie star if she hadn't met Curley. She clearly dislikes Curley and tells the men that she knows he was beaten in a fight - that his injured hand did not result from a machine accident. Lennie eagerly tells her "about the rabbits" and she dismisses their plan as a pipe-dream. As he talks, though, she notices the bruises on his face and deduces his role in Curley's injury. She flirtatiously congratulates Lennie on bringing Curley down a notch and Lennie grows increasingly enamored with her beauty.

Crooks sharply tells her to leave and Curley's wife turns on him viciously, reminding him that at any time she could accuse him of raping her, which would lead to his death. Crooks and Candy silently tolerate her superiority until Candy hears the sound of the men returning, which leads Curley's wife to slip away back to her house. Soon George arrives looking for Lennie; he admonishes Candy for talking about the plan to buy the farm. Crooks assures them, however, that he doesn't really want to be a part of their plan after all.

### **Analysis**

Steinbeck has already implicitly contrasted the lonesome, individualistic existence of most of the farmhands with the more collective, communal attitude of George, Lennie and Candy. In Chapter Four, this contrast becomes still more marked. Indeed, as Crooks, Candy and Lennie - the three mentally or physically impaired "outcasts" of the farm - discuss their dream of living "of the fat of the land" one can sense a strong whiff of socialism. For a moment, they imagine a life of freedom from prejudice and racism, in which each man works for "just his keep" regardless of color or disability.

It's fitting that the three virtual servants of the farm - the black man, the swamper, and the mentally disabled workhorse - collaborate in this dream. They are, metaphorically, the proletariat - the downtrodden workers of society - linking to form a socialist utopia. Or, at least, fantasizing about such a link. It's possible to go quite far with this socialist reading the more one knows about Marxist theory. One might look at Crooks' description of his past - when he had a farm of his own - as a socialist "utopian past" from which the inequalities of capitalism have torn the worker. One might even consider George a kind of middle-class revolutionary leading the proletariat from their downtrodden position to

a reunion with the natural cycles of labor. Of course, one ought to keep in mind that their revolution remains very small-scale - they desire merely to alter their own lives, not the lives of humanity at large - and nebulous. By the chapter's end, Crooks has utterly abandoned his dream of farm life.

It's also necessary to note that this fantasy farm does not seem to include women. Indeed, Curley's wife emerges in this chapter as both more complex and more loathsome than before. She is, on the one hand, much more than a one-dimensional harlot; at the same time, though, she represents a clear interruption of the socialist fantasy that the three men entertain. Indeed, she literally interrupts them at the height of their fantasizing. She is the snake - or, more to the point, the Eve - in the garden, the fact of life that makes a peaceful farm life so difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

At the same time, at least she knows herself. We are allowed a glimpse into Curley's wife's discontent, and her frustration with life in some ways mirrors that of the three enfeebled men who have been left behind. She is especially comparable to Crooks; both are obviously intelligent and perceptive of themselves as well as others, and both contain a deep bitterness stemming from their mistreatment. The one is mistreated because he is black, the other because she is a woman. Both have a bleak and accurate insight into the fundamental nastiness of people. Curley's wife understands the deep-laden competitive urge for possessing women which tears men apart, and she knows that she is cast as the villain in this eternal game of one-upmanship.

However, she is also quick to act the villainous part. She knows how to use the unfairness of life to her advantage, which becomes disturbingly clear when she dangles the threat of crying rape in front of Crooks. She knows that as a black man he would be lynched if she told the others that he'd even tried to rape her, and she wields this power to her advantage. Ultimately, though, she is revealed as frightened of her husband as she sneaks off to her house. Curley's wife has been trapped by life, and however brazen and manipulative she may be, she is ultimately one of the comparatively powerless figures in the novel. She is therefore, perhaps, an object of the reader's sympathy.

As we near the climax of the novel, note how carefully Steinbeck has continued to develop the most conflict-laden thematic threads in the action. Curley's wife - the source of so much tension on the farm - and Lennie - who is capable of unthinking and brutal (if innocent) violence - have finally come into contact. Again, their relationship is subtly sexual. Curley's wife flirtatiously refers to Lennie as "Machine" - revealing that she knows how her husband's hand was crushed and hinting that she "likes machines." Lennie is utterly incapable of dealing with this sort of flirtation. He is presented as a mere animal, drawn to Curley's wife by dumb instinct. Her effect on the horses as she exits clearly resonates with her effect on Lennie: "While she went through the barn, the halter chains rattled, and some horses snorted and some stamped their feet". Lennie, who is both gentle and terribly dangerous, is at her mercy - which means, ultimately, that she is at his, though she doesn't know it yet.

### **1.4.5 Chapter Five**

The scene shifts to Sunday afternoon as Lennie sits in the barn, contemplating a dead puppy. He has killed his pup by petting it too hard. Lennie is gripped by a growing panic that George will find the dead puppy and that now he "won't get to tend the rabbits".

Curley's wife enters in a dress decorated with red ostrich feathers. Lennie, who has been

warned to have nothing to do with her, briefly tries to resist being drawn into conversation, but she prevails, telling him that the other men are too busy with their horseshoe tournament to care whether he talks to her or not. She sees the dead puppy and consoles him, saying that no one will care about the loss of a mere mutt.

She is clearly starved for conversation and launches into a reprise of her discontented story of what might have been. She insists that she could have been an actress. Lennie fails to understand her at all, however, as he continues to return to the dilemma of the dead puppy and his anxiety over being denied the right to tend the rabbits. Curley's wife angrily asks him why he is so obsessed with rabbits, and Lennie thoughtfully replies that he likes to pet nice things.

Curley's wife observes that Lennie is "jus' like a big baby" and invites him to stroke her soft hair. Lennie begins to feel her hair and likes it very much indeed, which leads him to pet it too hard. Curley's wife begins to struggle, which sends Lennie into a panic. He grabs a hold of her hair and muffles her screams. When she continues to struggle, Lennie grows angry. He shakes her violently, telling her to keep quiet so that George doesn't hear her. Before he knows it, he has broken her neck. She lies dead on the hay. Lennie observes that he has "done a bad thing" and covers her body with hay. He then disappears from the barn with the dead puppy in hand.

Candy comes looking for Lennie in the barn and discovers the body of Curley's wife. He fetches George, who knows exactly what has happened when he sees the body. Candy warns that Curley will lynch Lennie if they don't let him get away. After a sombre exchange in which Candy and George acknowledge that their dream of a farm can't amount to reality anymore, George decides the best course of action. He tells Candy to spread the news of the death to the rest of the men and to pretend that he (George) was never present in the barn. When George leaves, Candy scolds the corpse for being a "God damn tramp".

Candy fetches the men and Curley immediately connects the killing to Lennie. He and Carlson run off to fetch guns. Meanwhile, George and Slim hypothesize that Lennie must have accidentally killed her, in the same way he got in trouble in Weed. George asks Slim whether Lennie might just be locked up and Slim replies that Curley will want to shoot him. Carlson returns and announces that his Luger has been stolen. He blames Lennie for the theft.

Curley returns with a shotgun. He tells Whit to fetch the Soledad deputy sheriff, Al Whits, and organizes a posse from the rest of the men. George asks Curley not to shoot Lennie, but Curley refuses to listen, saying that Lennie is armed with the Luger. George deliberately misleads the posse, saying that Lennie would have headed south (rather than north, the direction from which they approached the farm). Curley warns George to join the hunt for Lennie "so we don't think you had nothin' to do with this".

### **Analysis**

This chapter contains what might be analyzed as the climactic action of the novel - the event after which there is no turning back. Once again, as in the previous chapters, the action centers around a single location - very much like a stage play. It's quite a fitting structure for the death of a would-be actress.

After he finds the body of Curley's wife, George notes that though Lennie does many "bad things," he never acts out of "meanness," only out of an inability to understand the world or control himself. George's choice of words is apt. Not only does "meanness" suggest "cruelty" - as in the childhood use of the word in the common phrase, "You're mean." "Meanness" also suggests small-mindedness or pettiness. Many of the characters in the novel act out of self-interested malice. Lennie never does. He acts with the best intentions at almost every turn; indeed (and despite his name) he has a simplicity of soul that contrasts starkly with the "smallness" of others. The word also suggests another variation - "meaning." Lennie doesn't mean to do bad things - they simply happen to him. He acts badly without intending to act at all.

Indeed, Lennie's crime is a fundamental inability to understand the frailty of others. He literally loves things to death. His puppy is soft, so he pets it to death. Only George understands him fully, knows his childish mixture of innocence and dangerousness. Others, including Curley's wife, treat him as a sort of sounding board for their own complaints and fantasies. Their failure to understand the danger that goes along with Lennie's obvious innocence results in the "bad things" that Lennie does. Crooks is just barely able to defuse Lennie's capacity for violent rage in the preceding chapter. Curley's wife, in this chapter, is not so lucky.

But then, the events of the chapter ought to surprise no one, really. They certainly don't surprise George or Slim, who are instantly able to determine from a look at Curley's wife that Lennie is the culprit and that he acted out of confused panic, just as he did at Weed. Lennie, like an animal, doesn't understand his actions as morally wrong. Rather, he thinks of them simply in terms of George's approval. Like a dog who feels a mixture of fear and love for his master, Lennie is both fiercely loyal to George and terrified of upsetting his friend. He knows instinctively that he has done something wrong both in killing the puppy and in killing Curley's wife. For Lennie, however, the two actions are roughly equivalent - in both cases, he simply feels that he risks losing George's permission to tend the rabbits. The question of the intrinsic value of human life never enters his thinking.

Curley's wife, as Steinbeck depicts her, does not share Lennie's innocence. Steinbeck rests a measure of blame for the killing on the victim herself. Again and again, Lennie's intrusion in the affairs of Curley and Curley's wife have been tinged with sex, and her offer to let Lennie touch her hair may be construed as a sexual advance. She even prefaces the offer by complaining of loneliness and dissatisfaction in her marriage. However sincere and pitiable these complaints may be, she is ultimately a self-absorbed, manipulative figure in the scene. She fails to understand the danger of Lennie - despite the evidence of his violent power in her husband's mutilated hand - and instead interprets his conflict with her husband and his fear of encountering her through a prism of vanity. She assumes that Lennie is her husband's babyish rival - a harmless admirer. Thus she "leads him on," to use the age-old misogynistic excuse for rape.

The full extent of the misogyny latent in the portrayal of Curley's wife comes following her death. Steinbeck describes her as having more life and vitality as a dead than a living character. The trope of finding beauty in a young woman's corpse is a very old one in Western literature - it can be found in countless texts, such as the dead Ophelia in *Hamlet*, or the dead maidens of Edgar Allen Poe's lyric poems. The basic idea in Steinbeck's description of Curley's wife's corpse is that in death her beauty can finally be appreciated apart from her conniving, duplicitous personality. It is as though

he casts her sentence itself as her worst characteristic. In this way, she is completely objectified - reduced, in death, to the grotesque ideal of the silent and docile woman she never was in life. A modern reader has every reason to find this depiction objectionable.

Indeed, to pile indignity upon indignity, the final time we encounter her corpse occurs when Candy curses at it, calling her a tramp and a tart. Even in death she is nothing more than a scapegoat; and even her own husband fails to mourn her. Perhaps unintentionally, Steinbeck thus illustrates perfectly the horrible atmosphere of neglect and abuse that perhaps led her to act out in the first place. She was never considered as a person, only as Curley's problematic trophy.

We have seen so many threads of the story come together already, and the final plot movement of the story has a similarly inevitable trajectory. Steinbeck invites the reader to recall several additional associations in order to piece together the tragic resolution to come. We recall George's order from the beginning of the book - that if any trouble goes down, Lennie is to hide in the bushes near their original campsite. Thus we know that George has deliberately misled the posse by claiming that Lennie is likely headed south. Moreover, Carlton's missing Luger is highly significant. That was, after all, the gun that was used to shoot Candy's old sheep dog. The men assume that Lennie has stolen the weapon for his own protection - again revealing how little they understand Lennie, who is absolutely incapable of such calculation. The reader knows better, however.

### **1.4.6 Chapter Six**

The final chapter opens as Lennie waits in the bushes near the Salinas River, just as George told him to do in Chapter One. He nervously talks to himself, airing his worry that George won't let him tend the rabbits because of the bad things he did back at the ranch.

Lennie then hallucinates. He imagines the figure of his Aunt Clara - a plump, aproned woman with thick glasses - who scolds him for getting George into so much trouble. Lennie cries, begging Aunt Clara for forgiveness, and says that he will go off in the hills, where he can't bother George. Lennie then imagines a gigantic rabbit that mocks him for ever believing that he could tend the rabbits. The imaginary rabbit says that George will beat him with a stick when he arrives.

As Lennie sobs, George emerges from the brush. Lennie admits that he did a bad thing, but George appears not to care. Still upset, Lennie goads George into participating in their ritual routine of chastisement and forgiveness - he feeds George his lines about how much fun he would have if he didn't have to look after Lennie, and Lennie offers to go live in the hills and leave George alone. Lennie then requests the coup-de-grace: the story of how they're different from other workers and of how they'll have a farm together. George repeats these monologues woodenly.

He then tells Lennie to take off his hat as he continues to recount "how it will be" for them. He orders Lennie to kneel and pulls out Carlson's Luger. As the voices of the other men in the search party near their location, George tells Lennie one more time "about the rabbits," tells Lennie that they're going to get the farm right away, and shoots his companion in the back of the head.

Slim, Curley and Carlson arrive immediately after the shot is fired. Slim immediately interprets the scene accurately. Carlton and Curley, however, assume that George wrestled the Luger away from Lennie before shooting him. George, speaking in a whisper, affirms their false version of the events.



The novel closes as Slim reassures George that he “had to do it,” while Carlson and Curley look on in confusion, wondering why they are so upset.

### **Analysis**

Steinbeck’s careful control of setting in the novel is especially clear in this chapter, which finds us back at the beginning - at the brush near the Salinas River. As he did in the opening chapter, Steinbeck begins with a description of nature. Once again, this nature vignette resonates with the themes of the novel. We see the casual violence of nature - the stork devouring the water snake - and we see Lennie’s nonchalant integration into this atmosphere as he stoops and drinks with his lips like a thirsty dog.

The content of Lennie’s thoughts, and of Lennie and George’s eventual conversation, also mirrors the opening. Lennie repeats the child-like, ritualistic cycle of separation and reconciliation that has seemingly marked his relationship with George for years. Once again he hears George complain that he could live it up if not for Lennie; once again he offers to leave George and live in the hills; once again he gets George to tell him about their rabbit utopia.

However, these similarities - the setting and the content - only ultimately emphasize how much has changed since the novel’s opening. Where George was once full of life - angry and forgiving - now he is a husk of himself, bereft of emotion as he goes through his monologues. What was once a plausible - if far-fetched - fantasy has disintegrated into delusion. He knows what must happen, even as Lennie goes on believing in the rabbits. Whereas in Chapter One we see George and Lennie’s “best laid plans,” here in Chapter Six we have irrefutable evidence that, just as Robert Burns’ poem predicts, these plans have gone awry.

Emphasizing the delusional nature of Lennie’s point-of-view, Steinbeck adapts his one experimental narrative gesture in the novel, choosing to depict two hallucinations - first Aunt Clara, and then (more ludicrous still) a giant sardonic rabbit. It is unclear whether we are supposed to understand these hallucinations to be one-time phenomena or regularly recurring. (By the way, the reader may find it a bit unbelievable that this gentle giant, who everywhere else proves incapable of understanding figurative language, is able to imaginatively generate such colorful self-chastisements as “you ain’t worth a greased jack-pin to ram you into hell”.

Either way, Chapter Six represents our closest approach to Lennie’s experience - his simultaneous fear and love of authority figures, his relentless obsession with the rabbits, and his constant (if confused) regret that he never fails to act in a confused and problematic way. Lennie, social pack animal that he is, has a deep-seated need for discipline and forgiveness. His self-chastisement is quite moving, both because it reveals a degree of self-understanding in Lennie and because it suggests that he is regularly and brutally upset with himself. His remorse hardly counts as a conscience - at no point does he register that he has committed murder, only that he has done yet another inscrutable “bad thing” - but it makes a claim on the reader’s sympathy nevertheless.

George’s mercy killing of Lennie neatly parallels the events of Chapter Three, when Candy allowed Carlson to shoot his malodorous old dog. Steinbeck is even careful to involve the same Luger in each killing. Whereas the meek and passive Candy proved unable to do the job himself, George shows no such weakness. As has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt at this point, Lennie’s lethal

innocence is not compatible with the world. He cannot learn to change his ways - he cannot even understand why the “bad things” he has done are bad. The fate he would meet at Curley’s (mutilated) hands - likely a drawn-out, vengeful lynching - is enough to convince George that his only real option is to make Lennie’s death as quick and painless as possible.

At the novel’s end, a few haunting questions remain. Why, after all, is George so attached to Lennie? What did he gain from the infantile and troublesome giant’s companionship? Many theories have emerged over the years, as readers and critics have speculated that George is somehow specifically in Aunt Clara’s debt, that George and Lennie are actually related after all, or even that George and Lennie are in love - romantically, not merely as friends. However, before (or at least alongside) such speculation, it’s important to note that Steinbeck deliberately chooses to leave this central question murky. In a novel so carefully wrought in all other respects, this central motivational ambiguity stands as a deliberate and unsolvable mystery.

The simple answer may be that in the callous world of the itinerant laborer, the constant loyalty and companionship of a man like Lennie acts as an antidote to alienation. Lennie, paradoxically, represents the instinctual innocence in life. Writers as diverse as William Blake in his *Songs of Innocence* or Mark Twain in *The Mysterious Stranger* have explored the interesting ways in which innocence is not, in fact, altogether innocent. Divorced from a sense of good and evil, the truly innocent are capable of performing acts of apparent cruelty without remorse. Lennie is just such an innocent. He tempers George’s worldly weariness with the constant presence of discovery and hope even as he plagues George’s life with the threat of misunderstanding and ignorant folly. In many ways, Lennie completes George. And as his hollow despair at the close of the novel suggests, George ultimately needs Lennie’s innocence just as much as Lennie depends on George’s experience.

---

## 1.5 Let Us Sum Up

---

Thus we see that each chapter of the novel takes place in a single location, aside from a short walk at the beginning of Chapter One. Thus the novel is structured, much like a play, into “scenes.” The locations of these scenes are treated much like the space of a stage - characters enter and exit frequently, give speeches and move the plot forward. The narrator, meanwhile, is minimally intrusive. This “dramatic” form of writing allows the novel to progress rapidly and portentously, building symbolic density and narrative tension without becoming too heavy-handed. It also, by the way, allowed *Of Mice and Men* to be adapted for the stage almost immediately after its publication.

---

## 1.6 Review Questions

---

1. Comment on the poetic description of the landscape by the novelist.
2. How does the setting of *Of Mice and Men* influence the book’s thematic development?
3. How does Steinbeck portray Curley’s wife? Is he a misogynist?
4. How does Steinbeck depict the relation between man and nature?
5. Comment on the appropriateness of the title of the novel.
6. Discuss the dramatic structure of the novel

---

## 1.7 Bibliography

---

1. DeMott, Robert and Steinbeck, Elaine A., eds. John Steinbeck, Novels and Stories 1932-1937 (Library of America, 1994)
2. DeMott, Robert, ed. John Steinbeck, Novels 1942-1952 (Library of America, 2002)
3. Benson, Jackson J., ed. The Short Novels Of John Steinbeck: Critical Essays with a Checklist to Steinbeck Criticism. Durham: Duke UP, 1990. PS3537 .T3234 Z8666
4. French, Warren. John Steinbeck's Fiction Revisited. NY: Twayne, 1994.
5. Hughes, R. S. John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction. R.S. Hughes. Boston : Twayne, 1989. PS3537 .T3234 Z7147
6. Benson, Jackson J. Looking for Steinbeck's Ghost. Reno: U of Nevada P, 2002.
7. Ditsky, John. John Steinbeck and the Critics. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000.
8. Parini, Jay,. John Steinbeck: A Biography, , Holt Publishing, 1996.

## UNIT-2

---

### JOHN STEINBECK: OF MICE AND MEN (II)

---

#### Structure

- 2.0 Objective
- 2.1 Major Characters
- 2.2 Objects and Places
- 2.3 Animal Imagery
- 2.4 Dreams
- 2.5 Friendship
- 2.6 Landscape
- 2.7 Major Themes
  - 2.7.1 Loneliness of the Itinerant Worker
  - 2.7.2 The Rabbits
  - 2.7.3 Women
  - 2.7.4 Handiness in Violence and Sex
  - 2.7.5 Meanness
  - 2.7.6 Social Fitness
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Review Questions
- 2.10 Bibliography

---

#### 2.0 Objective

---

In continuation with the previous unit, we shall discuss major characters and themes dealt with by Steinbeck in his novella *Of Mice and Men*.

---

#### 2.1 Major Characters

---

**George Milton:** George is a small man, with a dark face and sharp features. Smart and quick, he often gets Lennie out of trouble. He and Lennie travel together, and George takes care of him. When Lennie kills Curley's wife, George is forced to shoot his friend.

**Lennie Small:** George's companion. Lennie is a big man with great strength; his body and features are round and undefined. He is mildly retarded, and his speech is slow and simple. He loves soft things, and this desire often gets him in trouble. This is the case when Lennie kills Curley's wife.

**Aunt Clara:** Lennie's aunt, who asked George to take care of Lennie before she died.

**Candy:** An old man who works at the ranch, who lost his hand in a farming accident. He has an old sheepdog that Carlson kills out of mercy. Candy is a friend to George and Lennie, and plans to buy the farm with them.

**Curley:** The boss' son. He is a small, belligerent man, who especially dislikes big guys like Lennie. The only married worker, he wears a glove full of Vaseline on his hand, to keep it soft for his wife. He is very suspicious of the workers, and frequently asks if any of them are sleeping with his wife. None of the workers like him, but they put up with him.

**Curley's wife:** Curley's provocative spouse. She does not like her husband, and spends much of her time hanging around the workers. She is a pretty woman, but most of the men think she's troublesome and bold. She is often sad and frustrated that her life did not turn out any better, since in her youth a man offered to put her in the movies. Lennie kills her by mistake, when feeling her soft hair.

**Slim:** A quiet man with a great presence. He is the best worker on the ranch, and very respected. Sensitive and wise, he offers advice and comfort to the men.

**Carlson:** Another worker. He kills Candy's old sheepdog and later argues that Lennie should be killed for killing Curley's wife. George steals his gun, a Luger, and uses it to shoot Lennie.

**Crooks:** The crippled Negro stable buck. He lives alone in the barn, and is not allowed to enter the other men's quarters because he's black. He almost joins Lennie, George, and Candy in their plan to buy a farm.

**boss:** The man who owns and runs the farm. He is also Curley's father.

**Whit:** Another worker.

**Bill Tenner:** A man who used to work on the ranch. He wrote a letter that got published in a rancher's magazine.

**Susy:** The woman who owns the bordello the men often visit.

**Andy Cushman:** A guy Lennie and George knew when they were little. He ended up in jail because of a seductive woman.

---

## 2.2 Objects & Places

---

**Salinas River:** The River is south of Soledad and very close to the ranch. The novel begins and ends on the banks of the river. It is also Lennie's hiding place if he gets into any trouble.

**Soledad:** The town south of the ranch, in the California valley.

**Gabilan Mountains:** The mountain range near the ranch and the river.

**Mice:** Lennie loves to pet soft things. Mice are no exception. But Lennie often kills his tiny pets accidentally, when his petting gets too rough. He and George have an argument in the first chapter when Lennie wants to keep a dead mouse and George won't let him.

**Weed:** The last town where Lennie and George had a job. They had to leave when Lennie unintentionally assaulted a woman. The woman was wearing a red dress, and Lennie tried to touch it. She got scared and started to struggle, which made Lennie confused and caused him to hold on tightly. George heard them, and he had to hit Lennie with a fence post to make him let go. The woman went to the police and told them she was raped. George and Lennie hid in irrigation ditches until night, when they left town. George is careful when he talks about Weed; he doesn't want the wrong people to know (like the boss or Curley) what happened there. George does confide the story to Slim, and shares with him his worry that something like that will happen again.

**Rabbits:** The farm the men hope to get will have rabbits for Lennie to tend (and pet). Lennie is excited at the idea of this larger pet, because he is less likely to hurt a rabbit than a tiny mouse.

**Candy's sheepdog:** Candy has had his sheepdog since it was a pup. The arthritic, half-blind dog is his only companion. When Carlson urges Candy to kill it, or to let him kill it, Candy gives in and lets Carlson shoot it. He later feels bad he didn't shoot the dog himself. Candy's relationship to his dog is very similar to George's relationship with Lennie.

**Curley's glove:** The glove is full of Vaseline, to keep his left hand soft for his wife. All the men find it disgusting.

**Pulp magazine:** A type of magazine the men read to pass the time. Bill Tenner's letter is in one.

**Puppies:** Lennie is hopeful that because a puppy is bigger than a mouse, it will be strong enough to support his petting. Slim gives him one of his dog's puppies, which Lennie plays with and pets constantly until he accidentally kills it.

**Carlson's Luger:** This is the gun Carlson uses to shoot Candy's sheepdog. George will steal it and use it to shoot Lennie.

---

## 2.3 Animal Imagery

---

**Animal 1:** The first time we see Lennie, he is immediately compared to an animal:

*"...and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws."*  
Chapter 1, pg. 2.

Throughout the novel there will be many such comparisons, and also occasional comparisons to children and the insane. But it is references to animals that occur most frequently. Such representations of Lennie as an animal color how we respond to him and how accountable we hold him for his actions. Therefore, it is significant that Steinbeck immediately mentions an animal when he first describes Lennie.

**Animal 2:** After walking into the clearing, Lennie's first action is very animal-like. He falls to his knees and slurps water from the river, just as a horse might, or a dog drinking water from a bowl. George comments:

*"You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty."* Chapter 1, pg. 3.

Here we have the image of a man who is not intelligent enough to check if the water is fresh,

but who also drinks in a very animal-like fashion. Lennie's mental retardation comes across clearly, as he is presented as almost less than human.

Lennie tries to hide his mouse from George, but it is no use. George demands the mouse. In the exchange is another animal comparison which also reveals something about George and Lennie's relationship:

*"Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again."* Chapter 1, pg. 9.

The task of caring for Lennie has fallen to George, who like a dog's "master", must watch Lennie every moment.

**Animal 3:** In the description of how he used to play tricks on Lennie, the comparison between Lennie and George as dog and master is reinforced. George tells Slim that Lennie will do anything he tells him to, even jump into the river when he doesn't know how to swim. Much like a faithful dog, Lennie's love is unconditional. He follows orders, even when he doesn't know the harm they might cause.

**Animal 4:** During the fight between Curley and Lennie, both dog and sheep are used to describe Lennie:

*"Lennie covered his face with huge paws and bleated with terror."* Chapter 3, pg. 63.

**Animal 5:** While taunting Lennie with the idea that George might not come back, Crooks predicts Lennie's fate without George:

*"Want me to tell ya what'll happen? They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog."* Chapter 4, pg. 72.

**Animal 6:** After Lennie kills Curley's wife, he attempts to hide what he has done:

*"He pawed up the hay until it partly covered her."* Chapter 5, pg. 92.

**Animal 7:** As he enters the brush, Lennie's movement is compared to that of a bear. When he gets to the river he falls to his knees and laps up the water like an animal, just as he did at the beginning of the book.

---

## 2.4 Dreams

---

**Dreams 1:** A little bit of land, their own crops and animals-this is all they want. It is a simple American dream. They want to be self-reliant:

*"Well, 'said George, 'we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof..."* Chapter 1, pg. 14-15.

Their perfect world is one of independence. Workers like Lennie and George have no family, no home, and very little control over their lives. They have to do what the boss tells them and

they have little to show for it. They only own what they can carry. Therefore, this idea of having such power over their lives is a strong motivation.

**Dreams 2:** When Whit brings in the pulp magazine with the letter written by Bill Tenner, the men are all very impressed. They are not certain that Bill wrote the letter, but Whit is convinced he did, and tries to convince the others. In the transient life of these workers, it is rare to leave any kind of permanent mark on the world. In this letter Bill Tenner has achieved some of the immortality the other men cannot imagine for themselves.

**Dreams 3:** When George goes into a full description of the farm, its Eden-like qualities become even more apparent. All the food they want will be right there, with minimal effort. As Lennie says:

*"We could live offa the fatta the lan'."* Chapter 3, pg. 57.

When George talks about their farm, he twice describes it in terms of things he loved in childhood:

*"I could build a smoke house like the one gran'pa had..."* Chapter 3, pg. 57.

*"An'we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid."* Chapter 3, pg. 58.

George yearns for his future to reflect the beauty of his childhood.

**Dreams 4:** The ideal world presented by Crooks also reflects childhood. His father had a chicken ranch full of white chickens, a berry patch, and alfalfa. He and his brothers would sit and watch the chickens. Companionship and plentiful food are both parts of Crooks' dream.

**Dreams 5:** Curley's wife has a dream that although different in detail from the other's dreams, is still very similar in its general desires. She wants companionship so much that she will try to talk to people who don't want to talk to her, like all the men on the ranch. Unsatisfied by her surly husband, she constantly lurks around the barn, trying to engage the workers in conversation.

The second part of her dream parallels the men's desire for their own land. She wanted to be an actress in Hollywood. She imagines how great it would be to stay in nice hotels, own lots of beautiful clothes, and have people want to take her photograph. Both attention and financial security would have been hers. Like the men she desires friendship, and also material comforts, though the specifics of her dream differ from theirs.

**Dreams 6:** When George tells Lennie to look across the river and imagine their farm, he lets Lennie die with the hope that they will attain their dream, and attain it soon. George, who must kill Lennie, is not allowed such comfort. He must go on living knowing the failure of their dream, as well as deal with the guilt of having killed his best friend.

---

## 2.5 Friendship

---

**Friendship 1:** Despite George's impatience and annoyance with Lennie, and his remarks about how easy his life would be without him, he still believes that:

*"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no*



*family. They don't belong no place....With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us."* Chapter 1, pg. 13-14.

And Lennie finishes:

*"An' why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why."* Chapter 1, pg. 14.

The kind of life these men lead, moving all over the country, never knowing anyone very long, and having very little to call their own, is intensely lonely. Even if Lennie is not very bright, he still listens to George, and he remains the one constant in George's transient life. For this George is grateful.

**Friendship 2:** Slim comes across very differently than the other men. Friendly and understanding, he invites George into conversation. When discussing how George and Lennie travel together, Slim remarks:

*"'Ain't many guys travel around together,' he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever 'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'"* Chapter 2, pg. 35.

Slim is much more open than most of the men on the ranch, and a marked contrast to Curley, whose can only communicate with fighting. Curley will push his wife away, choosing to go visit prostitutes rather than work on their marriage, whereas Slim attempts to construct a relationship with George the first chance he gets. The men have a deep respect for Slim, and his opinion is the final word on any subject.

**Friendship 3:** When George tells Slim how he used to play tricks on Lennie, beat him up, and generally abuse him for his own amusement, we get a very different picture of Lennie and George's friendship. George admits one reason why he behaved such:

*"Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him."* Chapter 3, pg. 40.

George takes very good care of Lennie, but he often feels anger at this burden, an anger which he takes out on Lennie. This fuels Lennie's greatest fear—that he might have to live without George.

**Friendship 4:** Candy's sheepdog is old, arthritic, and blind—his life is not a pleasant one. Carlson and Slim feel these are adequate reasons to kill the dog. Carlson tells Candy:

*"Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive."* Chapter 3, pg. 45.

And Slim responds:

*"Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I got old an' a cripple."* Chapter 3, pg. 45.

The argument the men use to convince Candy it is okay to euthanize his old friend will come up again at the end of the novel when George must kill Lennie. The dog and Lennie have parallel stories, with parallel fates, except Lennie has someone who cares enough about him to put him out of his misery, whereas Candy wouldn't get rid of his dog if he wasn't forced. Lennie has what Slim wishes for—someone who loves him enough to know when he life would be better

for him if it were over.

**Friendship 5:** Candy tells George:

*“I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn’t ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog.”* Chapter 3, pg. 61.

Candy feels that friends should look out for each other, and he knows he failed his old companion.

**Friendship 6:** Crooks is so desperate for companionship that he is appreciative of someone who cannot understand him or converse with him. He understands now that this is the reason why George keeps Lennie around him.

**Friendship 7:** Crooks reveals how easy it is to feel crazy when you are alone. With no one to confirm his reality, he begins to call it into question:

*“‘A guy needs somebody-to be near him.’ He whined, ‘A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody.’”* Chapter 4, pg. 72.

Crooks’ lonely present is very different from his childhood, when he had his two brothers to keep him company, even sleeping in the same bed.

**Friendship 8:** Curley’s wife tries repeatedly to assure Lennie that it’s okay for him to talk to her. Like most of the characters in the book, she also feels a need for companionship. Her self-centered and aggressive husband does not fill this need.

**Friendship 9:** When George suggests they find Lennie and lock him up instead of shooting him, Slim has to remind George how terrible it would be if Lennie were locked in a cage, or strapped to a bed. Like the painful life of Candy’s arthritic sheepdog, life in prison or an asylum would be no better for Lennie. Just as Candy had to realize that his sheepdog would be better off dead than alive, so must George with Lennie.

**Friendship 10:** After Lennie killed Curley’s wife, George was faced with a terrible choice-let Curley find Lennie and kill him, or kill Lennie himself. Unlike Candy, he will not let someone else shoot his best friend. He also will not subject his best friend to unnecessary pain. Slim’s sympathetic response is best:

*“‘Never you mind,’ said Slim. ‘A guy got to sometimes.’”* Chapter 6, pg. 107.

George lets Lennie die believing in their dream, though he himself must continue, knowing they will never reach it.

---

## 2.6 Landscape

---

**Landscape 1:** Before we meet any characters the narrator introduces us to the California valley, along the Salinas River, and its beautiful landscape. These descriptions of nature bookend sections of the novel. They are very poetic and stand apart from the rest of the novel, which is composed primarily of dialogue. An example:

*“Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving among the leaves. The shade*

*climbed up the hills toward the top. On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones.*” Chapter 1, pg. 2.

The description of the green river and its yellow sands is a quiet image, broken only by the entrance of George and Lennie.

**Landscape 2:** The conditions of the bunkhouse starkly contrast the lush and beautiful description of the valley’s landscape. Inside the bunkhouse it is dark and dull. Each man’s bunk is the same as the others. Each has a little shelf to put his belongings on, but that is all. The contrast between this man-made world and that of nature is described as follows:

*“At about ten o’clock in the morning the sun threw a bright dust-laden bar through one of the side windows, and in and out of the beam flies shot like rushing stars.”* Chapter 2, pg. 17 - 18.

**Landscape 3:** For the third consecutive chapter Steinbeck begins with a description of the setting. He contrasts the dark bunkhouse with the light still visible outside:

*“Although there was evening brightness showing through the windows of the bunk house, inside it was dusk.”* Chapter 3, pg. 38.

**Landscape 4:** After Lennie leaves and Curley’s wife lies dead in the hay, a strange quiet settles over the barn:

*“As happens sometimes, a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment. And sound stopped and movement stopped for much, much more than a moment.”* Chapter 5, pg. 93.

This moment lingers, then decisively ends when Candy enters the barn, looking for Lennie.

**Landscape 5:** The book ends as it began-by the banks of the Salinas River. The scene is described as tranquil and beautiful, just as in the first chapter:

*“Already the sun had left the valley to go climbing up the slopes of the Gabilan mountains, and the hilltops were rosy in the sun.”* Chapter 6, pg. 99.

The Salinas River and its creatures have not changed despite the turmoil Lennie and George have suffered.

**Landscape 6:** After the shot is fired, there is a description of how the landscape reacts to the violence:

*“The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again.”* Chapter 6, pg. 106.

---

## 2.7 Major Themes

---

### 2.7.1 Loneliness Of The Itinerant Worker

If one theme can be thought of as defining the plot and symbolism of *Of Mice and Men*, that theme is loneliness. In many ways, from the outspoken to the subtle (such as Steinbeck’s decision to set the novel near Soledad, California, a town name that means “solitude” in Spanish), the presence of loneliness defines the actions of the diverse characters in the book.

The itinerant farm worker of the Great Depression found it nearly impossible to establish a fixed home. These men were forced to wander from ranch to ranch seeking temporary employment, to live in bunk houses with strangers, and to suffer the abuses of arbitrary bosses. George sums up the misery of this situation at several points during his monologues to Lennie - "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place" (15).

Of course, as George's monologue puts it, "With [George and Lennie] it ain't like that." He and Lennie have found companionship; they watch out for one another. And beyond that, they have a dream of finding a fixed place they could call home, a farm of their own. They are doing what they can to resist sinking into miserable loneliness, which seems to be the lot of so many other itinerant workers.

This dream, of course, does not come to fruition, and indeed Steinbeck seems to have designed his bleak world to preclude the possibility of escape from the cycles of loneliness and hollow companionship (whether found in drink, in prostitutes, in gambling) that come with financial hardship and dislocation.

### **Loneliness at home**

And it's not just the workers - most of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* exhibit signs of desperate isolation, including those who can be said to have settled into a permanent situation.

Candy, the only other character (aside from Lennie and George) who has an unconditional love for a fellow creature (in Candy's case, his old and feeble dog), is left utterly bereft when Carlson takes his dog out back and shoots it. Candy's immediate attachment to George and Lennie's plan to settle on a farm of their own can be seen as a natural emotional progression following his loss - he looks for new companionship, now that he has lost his poor dog.

Of the other characters, Crooks and Curley's wife also show signs of desperate loneliness, though they respond quite differently. Each is isolated because of special mistreatment. Because Crooks is black, he is shunned by the other men; as we see at the beginning of Chapter Four, he spends his time in his room, alone and bitter. Curley's wife also spends her days hounded by her mean-spirited husband; her attempts to reach out to the other men backfire and win her the (not undeserved) reputation of a flirt.

Both characters, despite their hard and bitter shells, reveal a desire to overcome their loneliness and win friends. Their efforts hinge on Lennie, whose feeble-mindedness renders him unaware of the social stigmas attached to the two. Of course both episodes - Lennie's visit with Crooks in Chapter Four and his talk with Curley's wife in Chapter Five - end (respectively) in bitterness and tragedy. Thus Steinbeck further reinforces the bleakness of life in his fictional world. The one man who could serve as a nonjudgmental companion cannot coexist safely with others.

### **Alienation from nature**

One of the driving forces of discontent in *Of Mice and Men*, and of Lennie and George's dream of securing a farm, is the alienation of the working man from the land. Itinerant workers only fulfill one step in the long chain of tasks leading from planting to harvest - they seed the earth, or they haul in the crop, and then they move on, never establishing a connection with the cycles of the natural world.

George and Lennie's dream of "a few acres" addresses this alienation. They speak of their dream in terms of planting and gardening - they are eager to perform the tasks necessary to live off the land. Their talk about raising cows and drinking their milk, about planting and tending a vegetable garden, contrasts starkly with their actual diet - cans of beans with (if they're lucky) ketchup.

The concept of alienation from nature owes much to the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and other communist thinkers. They argued that the rise of industrial economy corresponds to a loss of contact with the natural processes of life. Where a human being was once connected, like the animal he is, to the whole of life (the production of food, shelter, clothing, etc.), in an industrialized world he is reduced to a simple role (lift this hay, sew this hem, rivet this bolt a thousand times) in a larger, bureaucratically-managed workforce. This state of alienation, according to Marx, can fuel a discontent among the workers that leads to revolution. Steinbeck allows us to glimpse at a general malaise that might lead to a "soft revolution" of sorts in Chapter Four, when the outcasts of the ranch fantasize about starting their ranch together. As with most things in this tragic novel, their dreaming comes to naught.

### **2.7.2 "The Rabbits"**

During the novel's opening and closing chapters, Steinbeck describes the activity of the natural world. These passages are rich and interpretable in many directions: it's worth singling out the first of the novel's many allusions to rabbits. Steinbeck writes that the rabbits happily "sit on the sand," and are then disturbed by the arrival of George and Lennie - they "hurry noiselessly for cover". Not until later does this little detail take on a richer significance - rabbits, we learn, represent for Lennie (and George, to a lesser extent) the dream of obtaining a farm of their own and living "off the fatta the lan". The scattering of the rabbits at the beginning suggests already that this dream will prove elusive.

Because Lennie thinks in concrete terms of his own pleasure, he equates the tending of rabbits - whose soft fur he wishes to pet - with the attainment of utter happiness. Thus he has developed a shorthand for referring to the plan George and he share to start a farm of their own - "I remember about the rabbits". Lennie takes deep pride in the notion that he would be entrusted to raise the rabbits, to protect them, to feed them out of their alfalfa patch. He places the entirety of his future happiness on this one image of caring for rabbits.

This dream of the rabbits becomes literally a dream at the end of the novel, when Lennie hallucinates a giant rabbit who tells him that he will never be allowed to tend rabbits. This highlights the extent to which Lennie bases his entire life around the goal of tending rabbits. Indeed, his only thought after doing something "bad" - whether killing a puppy or killing Curley's wife, all "bad things" seem roughly equivalent in Lennie's mind - is that George will not allow him to tend the rabbits. The manner in which he fails to see his actions in terms of good and evil, and instead views them as good or bad insofar as they are conducive to his ability to pet rabbits, reveals definitively how unfit Lennie is for society.

### **2.7.3 Women**

*Of Mice and Men* depicts very few women - which shouldn't be surprising considering the characters with whom the novel is concerned. These itinerant laborers don't have an opportunity to

settle down with women in mutually respectful relationships, it seems. Instead, they seek the company of prostitutes for “a flop” on the weekends and make due otherwise.

However their attitudes toward women may be tied to their dissatisfying life, the views expressed on the subject have every reason to give the modern reader pause. George expresses respect for only two sorts of women in the novel - on the one hand, the maternal figure represented by Aunt Clara, whose charge to take care of Lennie he has taken on as a responsibility; on the other hand, George respects prostitutes. He says, “Give me a good whore house every time”. George likes how straightforward the arrangement at a house of prostitution is.

The one major female character in the novel, who is not even given a name of her own, does not fit neatly into either category. She is a domestic figure - after all, she is married to Curley and spends most of her time at home - and, at the same time, a flirtatious, highly sexualized figure. Her status, between domesticity and prostitution, makes her extremely problematic in the novel, a source of anxiety and unrest. She leads to trouble, as George immediately observes she will.

A reader might raise an eyebrow at Steinbeck’s simple willingness to pin the role of trouble-maker on one unnamed woman. Curley’s wife is regularly used as a scapegoat in the novel. She is blamed for the lustful feelings she inspires. Even after she has been tragically killed, Candy shouts misogynist insults at her corpse. Curley’s wife’s life, clearly, is miserable, yet we are not encouraged to see things from her perspective. Even when she expresses her miserable loneliness, these episodes are followed by instances of manipulation, of threatening. Her death is hardly poignant - and indeed, her corpse is praised more in death than she was in life. The reader has every reason to question Steinbeck’s motives in giving us such an unsympathetic view of this woman - and, by association, women in general.

#### **2.7.4 “Handiness” in Violence and Sex**

One of the ways that Steinbeck creates such depth in his novels is that he associates certain images with multiple interpretive dimensions. For instance, “the rabbits” captures Lennie’s innocent love of tactile stimulation, his participation in George’s dream of establishing a farm of their own, and the threat of his daunting strength. Every cuddly thing he’s touched, after all, has died - just as the dream of the rabbits dies.

Another such image, though perhaps less obvious, is that of hands. Steinbeck speaks of hands regularly in *Of Mice and Men*, most often associating them with the common dualism of sex and violence. The image hinges on the character of Curley - a man both outspokenly pugnacious and lecherous. In the description immediately following Curley’s first entrance, he is described as “handy”. The term, in this first context, makes reference to his eagerness and ability to fight. He is handy with his fists, so to speak.

Later in the same conversation we hear of a second association with Curley’s hands. Candy says that he wears one glove “fulla vaseline” and adds, “Curley says he’s keepin’ that hand soft for his wife”. Thus Curley’s hands are tied to sex as well as violence. He fights with the one hand and keeps the other hand soft.

Thus, with this association in place, it’s clear why Curley is so humiliated following his fight with Lennie. Lennie crushes his hand, which thus symbolizes not only his loss in terms of fighting ability, but

also in terms of sexual power. Lennie proves the better man in both senses. The defeat is thus a symbolic castration of sorts. This symbolism is reinforced when Curley's wife appears to find the big man's defeat of her husband alluring - "I like machines". Of course, Lennie has no idea that he is causing such problems in the realms of sex and violence - he cannot understand these concepts himself. But this only reinforces the sense that such a dangerous, potent, unreflective man cannot continue to operate in the company of others.

### **2.7.5 Meanness**

In the action and language of the novel, Steinbeck explores some of the multiple meanings embedded in the idea of "meanness." First, the word captures the most obvious definition of the term - a "mean" person is, like Curley, petulant, nasty, bullying. Both George and Lennie express their distaste for this sort of man. George says that he "don't like mean little guys". Curley's relish for violence and his constant urge to pick fights contrasts directly with Lennie's comparatively "innocent" violence. After Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife and buries her in the hay, George notes that Lennie "never done it in meanness". Lennie kills out of cuddling, or blind panic. He loves things to death.

A second resonance in the concept of meanness has to do with Lennie and Curley's respective sizes - Curley is a "mean little guy." The word "mean" can also refer to the average, the petty, the small. Curley, in other words, is small not in size alone, but also in his petty actions. He is of average size and terribly anxious about that. Thus he, the mean one, takes out his frustrations on Lennie, who is anything but average.

Finally, the word captures a related third meaning - that of intentionality. Curley (and others) act with meaning. When Curley gets into a fight, he *means* to get into a fight. His violence is premeditated and calculating. In contrast, Lennie does not really know how to *mean* to do anything. He is, in this sense, a character without personal *meaning*. He cannot think ahead, nor can he learn from his past actions - he is stuck in a constant present (with the childish exception of the dream of the rabbits), petting pretty things as he finds them and obeying orders as he receives them. This third resonance is captured when George tells Lennie not to play with his puppy too much. Lennie replies, "I didn't mean no harm, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' wanted to pet'um a little". Lennie never means to be mean - he never means much at all. This, however, renders him all the more dangerous, given his crushing strength.

### **2.7.6 Social fitness**

One concept that Steinbeck clearly borrows from biology is that of environmental fitness. His characters can be described as fit or unfit for their social roles on the basis of their physical and intellectual abilities.

Candy, for instance, is an aged and hunchbacked man who is thus relegated to a low place in the social hierarchy - he is a swamper. (In contrast, Slim, the most respected and impressive worker on the ranch, is described as "ageless.") Similarly to Candy, Crooks - named for his crooked back - works menial tasks. The relegation of these men to such unrewarding jobs may be cruel, Steinbeck suggests, but so is life. As long as they remain isolated and individualized (rather than collective, where

they could find power in numbers), these “sub-par” people are treated disrespectfully.

The same rule applies just as mercilessly to other characters in the novel, animal and human alike. Candy’s old dog, for instance, is judged offensive by the more fit members of the bunk house society - Slim and Carlson - and so the dog is killed. Candy can do nothing to stop this; he is weak, and in this world the strong survive. The dog himself is a symbol of the cruel fate that awaits the feeble. His crime is smelling bad, and though there are other solutions to this problem - a bath, a new place to sleep - Carlson insists upon killing him.

Lennie, clearly, is not fit to live in society as it exists in *Of Mice and Men*. His intellectual weakness parallels Candy’s physical weakness. He lacks a basic sense of right and wrong, fails to control his dangerous physical power, and cannot look after himself. When, in the end, he is effectively euthanized by George, we see that even his friend and companion has accepted that Lennie, like Candy’s dog, is better off dead. Steinbeck invites the reader to have a complex emotional response to this bitter truth. After all, Lennie is quite likable and, when around George, controllable. But this doesn’t stop the inevitable, bleak truth of Steinbeck’s Darwinian social world - in which the unfit attract scorn, rather than sympathy, for their impairments.

---

## 2.8 Let Us Sum Up

---

In opening and closing his novel in nature, Steinbeck is able to connect and compare the actions of his characters with the natural world. The nature scenes comment on the events in question - George and Lennie disrupt a peaceful scene in the opening; the killing of a snake by a heron prefigures the tragedy in the final chapter. Not only does this way of structuring the novel give it a feeling of wholeness, it also reinforces Steinbeck’s central point about Lennie’s incompatibility with the social world. He doesn’t fit in the shared spaces - the bunk house, etc. - while, in contrast, he romanticizes the natural world, repeatedly promising to live “like a bear” in a cave. Of course, Lennie is not a bear, however similar he may be to one. He can’t live with men, and he can’t live without them; therefore, in the end, he can’t live at all.

---

## 2.9 Review Questions

---

1. How does Steinbeck make the character of Lennie more vivid by describing him as an animal?
2. Discuss how George and Lennie fall victim to the American Dream.
3. How is the theme of Friendship dealt with by Steinbeck in the novella?

---

## 2.10 Bibliography

---

1. DeMott, Robert and Steinbeck, Elaine A., eds. John Steinbeck, Novels and Stories 1932-1937 (Library of America, 1994)
2. DeMott, Robert, ed. John Steinbeck, Novels 1942-1952 (Library of America, 2002)
3. Benson, Jackson J., ed. The Short Novels Of John Steinbeck: Critical Essays with a Checklist to Steinbeck Criticism. Durham: Duke UP, 1990. PS3537 .T3234 Z8666



4. French, Warren. John Steinbeck's Fiction Revisited. NY: Twayne, 1994.
  5. Hughes, R. S. John Steinbeck: A Study of the Short Fiction. R.S. Hughes. Boston : Twayne, 1989. PS3537 .T3234 Z7147
  6. Benson, Jackson J. Looking for Steinbeck's Ghost. Reno: U of Nevada P, 2002.
  7. Ditsky, John. John Steinbeck and the Critics. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000.
  8. Parini, Jay,. John Steinbeck: A Biography, , Holt Publishing, 1996.
-

## UNIT-3

---

### EDGAR ALLAN POE : *THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 About the Age and the Author
- 3.2 About the Story : *The Cask of Amontillado*
  - 3.2.1 The Text : *The Cask of Amontillado*
  - 3.2.2 Glossary
- 3.3 Self Assessment Questions.
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Answers to SAQs
- 3.6 Review Questions.
- 3.5 Bibliography

---

#### 3.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at giving you details about Edgar Allan Poe, an American writer of horror and grotesque stories, effect of suspense and crime in the story.

You have been given glossary of the text of the story but you should study the analysis, use of structural devices and glossary in order to understand the story for further clarification. First you should study the story so that you may have an idea about the theme and art of story-telling. The self assessment questions and their answers are meant to help you understand the story in a better way. You must have a mind of a detective to understand it and to know the criminal mind of the narrator. Notice how suspense and doubt are created through hints and incidents. Critical material from internet and various books has been provided to you. For further study you can consult the books and articles given in the concerned section.

---

#### 3.1 About the Age and the Author

---

Poe belongs to the era of Romanticism in America. Poe, Hawthorne and Melville were more deeply affected by the pessimistic aspects of Romanticism. Their exploration of individual personality did not result in optimism like that of Emerson. In their works we can find an emphasis on morbid emotional forces, a basic contradiction between man's aspirations and his conditions and circumstances, and emphasis on man's isolation from other human beings. They had no faith in the possibilities of social reform or in man's capacity to do away with external powers. The problem of isolation became their main concern. Poe, Hawthorne and Melville presented individuals of American society in dark colours. Love, as a theme, was lacking in American fiction until near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Writers either ignored it or (like Poe & Melville) were concerned with it chiefly in its more morbid and

darker forms.

Edgar Allan Poe's early life was as strange and unhappy as some of his most famous works. When he was born in Boston in 1809, his parents were actors in traveling companies; his father died in 1810 and his mother in 1811. Edgar and his sister and brother were left penniless, and Edgar was taken in by a Virginia merchant, John Allan, whose last name Edgar took as his middle name. Poe lived with the Allans in England from 1815 to 1820 and attended school there. His relationship with Allan was strained, because Allan was rather heartless and unsympathetic to his wife and foster son. When Poe began studies at the University of Virginia, the wealthy Allan refused to support him, and Poe turned to gambling, with little success.

After a short time at the University, Poe moved to Boston and began his career as a writer. In 1827 he published his first volume of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, at his own expense, but found few readers. These early poems were heavily influenced by the Romantic poets. His first paid publication was the short story *MS. Found in a Bottle* (1833), which drew the attention of a publisher who admired his work and who got him an editorial job. He soon lost the job because of his drinking. Shortly afterwards, in 1836, he married his cousin Virginia Clemm, who was thirteen years old.

During the eleven years of his marriage to Virginia, Poe had a series of publishing successes and personal failures. He moved his family to New York and Philadelphia and back again, started editing and contributing to various magazines. He published several short horror stories and narrative poems, including *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), one of the earliest detective stories ever written, the psychological horror story *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), and the melancholy poem *The Raven* (1845), which brought him national fame. His brilliance as a writer was now firmly established. Still, he could not escape his addiction to alcohol. His critical writings include *The Philosophy of Composition*, 1846 (which includes the statement – The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.) and *The Poetic Principle*, 1850 (originally a lecture) which preaches a form of Art for Art's sake.

In 1846, after losing a series of editorships, Poe retreated with his wife to a cottage in Fordham, outside New York City, where they nearly starved. There Poe wrote *The Cask of Amontillado*, its gloomy and cynical tone echoing Poe's own feelings. The Poe biographer William Bittner claims that the two characters in the story "are two sides of the same man Edgar Poe as he saw himself while drinking." A few months later Virginia died of tuberculosis and Poe became despondent. He wrote several important pieces during this time, but though he tried again to give up drinking, he never succeeded. He died in Baltimore on October 7, 1849, at the age of forty, after an alcoholic episode.

---

### **3.2 About the Story : *The Cask of Amontillado***

---

*The Cask of Amontillado* was first published in the November 1846 issue of Godey's Lady's Book, a monthly magazine from Philadelphia that published poems and stories by some of the best American writers of the nineteenth century, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The story next appeared in the collection of Poe's Works, edited by Rufus W. Griswold, Poe's literary executor, in 1850. By the time Poe wrote this story, he was already nationally known as the author of the poem *The Raven* (1844) and of several short stories collected in a book called, simply,

*Tales* (1845). These earlier stories were widely reviewed and argued over by critics who found them brilliant and disturbing and their author perplexing and immoral. Although *The Cask of Amontillado* was not singled out for critical attention when it appeared, it did nothing to change the opinions of Poe's contemporary admirers and detractors. Like Poe's other stories, it has remained in print continuously since 1850.

The story is narrated by Montresor, who carries a grudge against Fortunato for an offense that is never explained. Montresor leads a drunken Fortunato through a series of chambers beneath his palazzo with the promise of a taste of Amontillado, a wine that Montresor has just purchased. When the two men reach the last underground chamber, Montresor chains Fortunato to the wall, builds a new wall to seal him in, and leaves him to die. Several sources for the story have been suggested in the last century and a half.

*The Cask of Amontillado* by Edgar Allan Poe is a criminal's account of a crime committed fifty years earlier. A crime for which he was never caught but now confesses.

The story begins with Montresor, the narrator of the story, explaining the reason for the crime. According to Montresor, the victim, Fortunato has committed numerous injuries against him but it wasn't until Fortunato insulted him that he vowed revenge. Montresor then makes a statement that generates much of the controversy and discussion surrounding the story. Montresor says "You, who so well know the nature of my soul." Montresor never tells us or defines the "you" to whom he is speaking and many of the interpretations of the story hinge on that one cryptic statement.

Montresor never gave any indication to Fortunato that he was angry with him or that he was seeking revenge because as Montresor states, "I must not only punish, but punish with impunity." As a result, Montresor does not let anyone including his victim realize that he is angry to the point of vengeance.

Consequently, when Montresor meets Fortunato during carnival, Fortunato has no reason not to trust the smiling Montresor. Montresor studied his enemy thoroughly and knew of his weakness for good wines. As a result, Montresor used wine to trap his victim. He mentions to Fortunato that he has acquired a cask of Amontillado but that he is unsure that it is the real deal. He bemoans the fact that he paid full Amontillado price without consulting Fortunato, thus playing on Fortunato's pride.

Montresor then mentions that he knows that Fortunato is busy and that he is on his way to ask Luchesi to taste the wine, consequently, Fortunato's competitive spirit comes to the forefront. Fortunato claims that Luchesi knows nothing and that he is the better judge of wine. Montresor protests that Fortunato is too busy for such an errand. Montresor's protest is designed to increase Fortunato's anxiety to go and taste the Amontillado.

Once Montresor feels that Fortunato is completely sold on the errand, he agrees to allow him to be the one to taste the wine. Before they move down the street, Montresor protects his identity by putting on a black mask and pulling a cloak around himself. Montresor arrived home to an empty house, just as he had planned. He had told his employees that he would be gone all night and that they were not to leave the house, thus ensuring that as soon as he was out of site, they would all leave.

They make their way into Montresor's family catacombs. The nitre lined walls cause Fortunato

to cough and Montresor encourages him to forsake the errand and go home.

Fortunato says that “I shall not die of a cough” to which Montresor replies with irony “True-true.”

As they travel deeper, they discuss Montresor’s family motto which is “Nemo me impune lacessit” which translates “No one insults me with impunity.” They drink as they go along in order to ward off the chill. The ironic name of one of the wines they imbibe is De Grave. At one point, Fortunato asks Montresor for the sign of the masons which Montresor did not understand because he is not a mason. Then he produces his trowel, waves it at Fortunato, and thus confuses him.

When they reach the depths of the catacombs, Montresor tricks Fortunato into stepping into a small recess where he chains him to two staples in the wall and begins to wall him in. At first, Fortunato does not understand what is going on. However, he soon realizes his situation and begins to moan and test the chains. Montresor stops so that he can listen more easily to Fortunato’s dismay. When Fortunato quiets, he proceeds walling up Fortunato. At one point, he raises a torch to look inside the crypt and view his handiwork.

When the light falls on him, Fortunato begins screaming. At first Montresor is alarmed, fearing that someone will hear the cries. Then he remembers the security of his position and joins Fortunato’s yells trying to yell louder than him.

Eventually, Fortunato becomes quiet and Montresor continues his task. Just as Montresor is about to complete the wall, Fortunato begins to laugh and make comments as if the situation were a simple prank. However, Montresor’s responses cause Fortunato to realize the sincerity of his actions. Fortunato begs for mercy “For the love of God!” but Montresor simply echoes the phrase and finishes the task. The last sound we hear from Fortunato is the jingling of his jester’s cap

Montresor finishes his account with the phrase “In pace requiescat” or “May he rest in peace.”

### **3.2.1 The Text : *The Cask of Amontillado***

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I have utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled – but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the ideas of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point – this Fortunato – although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ

from him materially;—I was skilful in the Italian vintage myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight – fitting parti- striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand

I said to him— “My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkable well you are looking to-day. But I have received a Pipe” of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts”.

“How?” said he. “Amontillado ? A pipe ? Impossible ! And in the middle of the carnival!”

“I have my doubts,” I replied; “And I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain.

“Amontillado!”

“I have my doubts”

“Amontillado!”

“And I must satisfy them”

“Amontillado”

“As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me.

“Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry.”

“And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own”.

“Come, let us go.”

“Whither?”

“To your vaults.”

“My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi.”

“I have no engagement;\_\_ come.”

“My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre.”

“Les us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado.”

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a *roquelaire* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time.

I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient; I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux and giving one to Foretunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms of the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe,” he said.

“It is farther on,” said I; “but observe the white web work which gleams from these cavern walls.”

He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

“Nitre?” he asked, at length.

“Nitre,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh! – ugh! ugh!! ugh ! ugh ! ugh ! ugh ! ugh ! – ugh ! ugh ! ugh !

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi—“

“Enough,” he said; “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.”

“True-true,” I replied; “and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily – but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps”

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

“Drink,” I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

“I drink,” he said, “to the buried that repose around us.”

“And I to your long life”

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

“These vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The Montresors,” I replied, “were a great and numerous family.”

“I forget your arms.”

“A huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel.”

“And the motto?”

“*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”

“Good!” he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

“The nitre!” I said; “see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river’s bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough...”

“It is nothing,” he said; “let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc.”

I broke and reached him a flacon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement- a grotesque one.

“You do not comprehend?” he said

“Not I,” I replied

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

“How?”

“You are not of the masons.”

“Yes, yes,” I said; “yes, yes.”

“You ? Impossible! A mason?”

“A mason,” I replied.

“A sign,” he said.

“It is this,” I answered producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaire*.

“You jest,” he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. “But let us proceed to the Amontillado.”

“Be it so,” I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.



At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

“Proceed,” I said; “herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi.”

“he is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The Amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied; “the Amontillado.”

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of it was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was not nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused and holding the flambeaux over the mason work, I threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained forms, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I re-approached the wall; I replied

to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said —

“Ha ! ha! ha! – he! he! he – a very god joke, indeed – an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo – he! he! he! – over our wine – he! he! he!”

“The Amontillado!” I said

“He! he ! he! – he ! he! – yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late ? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest ? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“*For the love of God, Montresor!*”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud-

“Fortunato !”

No answer. I called again –

“Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*

### 3.2.2 Glossary

Ventured – Dared to go

Impunity – Being exempted from punishment or from injury as consequence of act.

Immolation – Sacrifice, Killing

Connoisseurship – good judgment on matters in which taste is needed

Virtuoso – Skilled person

Gemmary - Pertaining to gems

Quack – Person dishonestly claiming to have knowledge or skill

Vintages – Wines of grapes of a particular year.

Motley –	of various colors
Surmounted –	Overcome with difficulty
Pipe –	a large barrel
Amontillado –	a special variation of sherry wine that takes its name from Montilla , Spain where it is produced
Sherry -	A kind of wine
Vaults -	series of arches
Nitre –	potassium or sodium nitrates
Roquelaire –	a knee – length cloak
Palazzo –	a palace, a house of a wealthy person
Sconces –	wall brackets
Flambeaux –	flaming torches
Suites –	set of rooms etc
Catacombs-	series of underground galleries with opening along the sides for the burial of the dead
Gait -	manner of walking
Rheum -	Watery discharge
Medoc -	a famous red wine from a specific region in France
Leer –	Unpleasant look that suggests evil desire or ill will
Nemo me impune lacessit –	No one attacks me with impunity
De Grave –	a mild wine produced in the region around De Grave, France
Gesticulation –	movement
Grotesque –	Strange, absurd, laughable
Masons –	the masons, or Freemasons, are an international secret society. Fortunato, a member of the society, as given the secret sign of the Masonic “brotherhood”. Montresor jestingly responds with the sign of his trowel – a tool used by Masons i.e. workers who build with stone.
Trowel –	Mason’s or bricklayers flat bladed short handled tool for spreading mortar etc.
Requelaire –	a knee length cloak
Crypt –	Underground room
Pry –	inquire too curiously

Ignoramus – Ignorant person

Staple – U-shaped piece of metal bar or wire with ends designed for fastening.

Astounded – Overcome with surprise, shock

Niche – recess in a wall

Rapier – light sword

Aperture – opening, specially one that admits light

In pace requiescat – “May he rest in peace. The inscription frequently engraved on tombstones.

---

### 3.3 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. Name the narrator of the story.

.....

.....

2. Who is the victim ?

.....

.....

3. Why did Montresor vow to avenge?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. Does Montresor tell who is this “you” when he says “you, who so well know the nature of my soul.”?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Is there any indication given by Montresor that he is angry to the point of vengeance?

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. When do Montresor and Fortunato meet ?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7. What kind of weakness is there in Fortunato?

.....

.....

.....

.....

8. Name some of the wines mentioned in the story.

.....

.....

.....

.....

9. Can Fortunato guess the trap ?

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. How does Montresor protect his identity ?

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. What is Montresor's family motto?

.....

.....

.....

12. What does Montresor do when Fortunato asks about the sign of the masons?

- .....
- .....
13. What does Montresor do when they reach the depths of Catacombs?
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
14. Having the security of his position what does Montresor do in reaction against Fortunato's yells ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
15. What is the last sound heard from Fortunato?
- .....
- .....
16. How does Montresor completes his account ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
17. Who is the narrator ?
- a. Fortunato
  - b. Montresor
  - c. De Grave
  - d. Amontillado
18. Who is killed in the end of the story ?
- a. Fortunato
  - b. Montresor
  - c. Poe
  - d. Luchesi
19. Amontillado is the name of a

- a. criminal
  - b. narrator
  - c. wine
  - d. writer
20. Fortunato goes with Montresor to
- a. taste the wine
  - b. kill him
  - c. attend Carnival
  - d. visit Montresor's family catacombs.

---

### 3.4 Let Us Sum Up

---

By now you have seen how Poe achieves a singleness of effect in his art of writing. You have studied how Poe has used names and incidents in symbolical and ironical way so as to achieve unity in the story. He is able to create an atmosphere of suspense and doubt till the end of the story. By now you must have learnt why and how the narrator commits a crime as is the motto of his house.

---

### 3.5 Answers to SAQs

---

1. Montresor
2. Fortunato
3. Because, Fortunato insulted him many times.
4. No, he never tells us or defines this 'you'.
5. No, he never indicates, not even to his enemy
6. They meet during carnival.
7. He has weakness for good wines
8. Amontillado, De Grave, Sherry
9. No, because he has no reason not to trust the smiling Montresor
10. He protects his identity by putting on a black mask and pulling a cloak around himself.
11. "Nemo me impune lacessit" which means no one insults me with impunity.
12. He produces his trowel, waves it at Fortunato, and thus confuses him.
13. Montresor tricks Fortunato into stepping into a small recess where he chains him to two staples in the wall, begins to wall him in.
14. He joins Fortunato's yells trying to yell louder than him.

15. It is the jingling of his jester's cap.
16. He finishes his account with the phrase "In pace requiescat" i.e. May he rest in peace".
17. (b) Montresor
18. (a) Fortunato
19. (c) Wine
20. (a) Taste the Wine

---

### 3.6 Review Questions

---

1. Discuss how Poe has achieved unity in the story.
2. Discuss the use of irony & symbolism as structural devices for thematic unity.
3. Describe the horror atmosphere in the story. What are the various devices to achieve the singleness of effect.
4. Draw a character sketch of Fortunato.
5. Who is the narrator of the story? Draw a character sketch of the narrator.
6. Who is the 'you' at the opening of the story?
7. Discuss what the narrator means when he says "Nature of my Soul".
8. Discuss the story as an excellent example of the singleness of effect for which Poe is famous.

---

### 3.7 Bibliography

---

1. Allen, Gay Wilson, American Prosody, Farmersville, Calif, Pacific Book Supply.
2. Allen, Hervey, Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe (Doran, 1926, 2 vols), Rinehart, 1929, rev. ed. In one vol.
3. Baudelaire, Charles, Baudelaire on Poe: Critical: paper, ed and translated by Lois B. and Francis E. Hyslop, State college, Pa., Bald Eagle Press, 1952.
4. Bittner, William, Poe: A biography, Boston, Atlantic-Little Brown, 1962.
5. Bittner, William, Poe: A Biography, Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1962.
6. Bonaparte, Marie The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe (1933) translated by John Rocker, N.Y., Hillary House.
7. Braddy, Haldeen, Glorious Incense: The Fulfillment of Edgar Allan Poe, Washington, D.C. Scarecrow Press, 1953.
8. Buranelli, Vincent, Edgar Allan Poe, Washington, D.C. Scarecrow Press, 1961. Paperback ed: C&UPS.
9. Buranelli, Vincent. Edgar Allan Poe, Boston: Twayne, 1977.



10. Campbell, Killis, The Mind of Poe and Other Studies, ( Harvard University Press, 1933). Russell & Russell, new ed., 1962.
11. Carlson, Eric W., ed. The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.
12. Davidson, Edward H. Poe.: A critical Study , Cambridge Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957.
13. Fagin, N. Bryllion ,The Histrionic Mr. Poe, Baltimore , Johns Hopkins, 1942.
14. Howarth, William L., ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Poe's Tales: A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
15. Hubbell, Jay B., "Poe," Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism, ed. Floyd Stovall, N.Y. Modern Language Association, 1956.
16. Krutch, Joseph Wood, Edger Allan Poe- A Study in Genius, N.Y., Knopf, 1926.
17. Levin, Harry, The Power of Blackness, N.Y., Knopf. 1958pp. 100-165. Paperback ed: VIN.
18. Miller, Perry The Raven and the Whale Paperback ed: Harv.
19. Ober, Warren U., and others eds. The Enigma of Poe. Paperback ed: Heath A collection of essays by various critics.
20. Poe, Allan "The Philosophy of Composition".
21. Quinn, Arthur Hobson Edger Allan Poe. A Critical Biography, (Appleton –Century, 1941), Des Moines, Iowa, Meredith Press new ed.
22. Quinn, Arthur Hobson. Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
23. Quinn, Patrick F., The French Face of Edger Allan Poe. Carbondale (.III), Southern Illinois University Press, 1957.
24. Silverman, Kenneth. Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Neverending Remembrance, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
25. Walsh, John Evangelist. Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
26. William J. Fisher (ed) American Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Eurasia Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1965
27. Winwar, Frances, The Haunted Palace, N.Y., Harper, 1959. A popular biography.

## UNIT-4

---

### EDGAR ALLAN POE : *THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Critical Analysis
- 4.2 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.3 Review Questions
- 4.4 Bibliography

---

#### 4.0 Objectives

---

This unit is in continuation of the previous unit. Here we shall have a further critical in depth study of Poe's short story *The Cask of Amontillado*.

---

#### 4.1 Critical Analysis

---

It is Edgar Allan Poe's intense use of symbolism and irony throughout *The Cask of Amontillado* that establishes the short story as an indeed interesting piece worthy of thorough analysis. The skillful use of these devices is utilized by the author to create this horror and suspense in his masterpiece.

*The Cask of Amontillado* is a horror short story, which revolves around the themes of revenge and pride. The plot involves two men: Montresor, the narrator, who is an Italian aristocrat seeking revenge against the second main character: Fortunato, a proud man that boasts about his connoisseurship of wines and who finally walks to his own death.

Irony is a manner of expression through which words or events convey a reality different from and even opposite to appearance or expectation. The use of such device in the story provides it with humour and wit, and makes the piece more sophisticated. The sustained irony is detected through style, tone and the clear use of exaggeration of Montresor, the narrator.

From the very beginning we notice the apparition of irony in the story. The very name Fortunato would clearly imply that this is a man of good fortune, when the actual case is that he is about to suffer a mostly untimely demise: the end of his life. The setting in which the story takes place again shows an ironic element. It is during Venice's Carnival that the characters meet. Carnival is supposed to be a time of celebration and happiness for everybody. However, in the tale it is a time for revenge and death. The atmosphere changes drastically when the two protagonists leave the gaiety of carnival for the gloomy and desolate catacombs beneath Montresor's palazzo. We learn from the narrator that when he first meets Fortunato the latter has apparently been drinking and is dressed in many colours, resembling a jester. His costume suggests that he will be the one playing the fool. On the other hand Montresor is dressed in a black-coloured cloak and has his face covered with a black mask. At this point one can mention the presence of symbols: the black mask and outfit might be a representation of Death or the

devil. Such figure foreshadows the events taking place later that night in the damp catacombs.

The way the narrator treats his enemy is one of the clearest examples for ironic elements. When the characters meet, Montresor realises that Fortunato is afflicted with a severe cold, nevertheless he makes a point of him looking “remarkably well”. Montresor acts in the most natural and friendly way towards the main object of his revenge, and even praises his “friend’s” knowledge in the subject of wines. Also upon their meeting, Montresor begins a psychological manipulation of Fortunato. He claims that he needs his knowledge to ascertain that the wine he has purchased is indeed Amontillado. Furthermore, he acknowledges that Fortunato is engaged in another business (i.e.: the celebration of carnival), so he would go to Luchesi, who, one is made to believe, is a competitor of Fortunato’s. To these words, Fortunato is forced by his pride to accompany Montresor to the vaults (where the Amontillado is kept), dissipate his doubts and also to prove his higher status than Luchesi as a connoisseur of wine. In fact, during their way down under in the catacombs, the twisted mind of Montresor, dares to give Fortunato the chance to go back, due to the almost unbearable dampness and foulness rampant in the vaults and Fortunato’s state of health. The narrator clearly knows about the stubborn nature of Fortunato, and is positive that his pride would not allow him to retreat. Thus, Fortunato continues his journey towards death by his own will.

“The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre.” “Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado!”

Another memorable line in the story is given by Montresor in response to Fortunato saying, “I will not die of a cough.” To what Montresor responds, “True—true...” And then also when the hypocritical narrator toasts to Fortunato’s long life, already knowing that he was taking to effect the devilish crafted plan of revenge.

Further evidence of ironic components is found with Montresor as a “Mason”. We anticipate this means he is a member of the distinguished group of men, yet he actually is a stonemason, someone whose job is to prepare and use stone for building. Montresor makes use of his skill as a mason as well as of the trowel he had shown his rival to build up the wall that will lock up unfortunate Fortunato inside the niche.

When Fortunato is trapped behind the wall his avenger built, Montresor “re-echoes” and even “surpasses” Fortunato’s yelling apparently to sympathise with the victim. He is evidently being ironic since he is actually delighted by what he has done and only stops shrieking till Fortunato is silent. The story ends with Montresor’s words “In pace requiescat!” (May he rest in peace). His words are unmistakably sarcastic: he has been the performer of the dreadful murder, then how could he pray for him to rest in peace?

The story also contains many accounts of symbolism. They can be classified as reinforcing; that is, their meaning is not apparent to the reader. It is only after several readings that the symbols begin to be clear. The first example in the story was mentioned earlier, the fact that Montresor’s costume is black would suggest beforehand that he would be playing the role of an evil being.

The coat of arms of Montresor’s family is perhaps the best example of symbolism and foreshadowing in the whole story:

“A huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are

imbedded in the heel”

It is clear that a metaphor has been constructed. In this image the foot is symbolic of Montresor and the serpent of Fortunato. Fortunato had wronged Montresor and had offended both him and his ancestors. Although Fortunato has hurt Montresor, the coat of arms suggests that Montresor will ultimately crush him. Montresor is determined to uphold his family’s motto: “Nemo me impune lacessit”, which is the Latin for “No one can injure me with impunity”. The sinister narrator seeks his vengeance in support of this principle

A further manifestation of symbolism is the vaults in the end of the catacombs piled with skeletons. The accumulations of human remains may be an implication of human destruction. The absence of light and the dank murkiness that surrounds the characters are sensory images that aids for a perfect setting of horror and makes the reader capable of getting the sensation of an impending doom.

Finally, the very title of the story: *The Cask of Amontillado*, represents the imminent ruin of Fortunato: his pursue of the cask which, in the end, will be his own casket.

*The Cask of Amontillado* is a carefully crafted short story. The originality and artistic genius of Edgar Allan Poe overflows through this “grotesque” tale. Every trait of irony and symbolism Poe uses contributes to a single and meaningful effect: Conveying his message in a creative and original manner, not allowing the reader to stop.

### Three Types of Irony

1. **Verbal irony** involves saying one thing but meaning the opposite. When a person caught in a violent rainstorm says, “Glorious weather for a stroll!” we know that he intends to convey the opposite idea about the climatic conditions.
2. **Irony of situation** occurs when events turn out the opposite of what would ordinarily be expected. It is ironic that in this story a man of misfortune should be named Fortunato.
3. **Dramatic irony** is what we feel when we as readers or viewers of a drama or motion picture know more than the characters. We are amused when we see the policeman leap into his car and roar off unaware of what we know - that the car’s rear bumper is chained to a tree.

“The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge.” The opening line of the story presents irony of situation. How often have we heard: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me?” Poe’s speaker says the opposite. He has suffered injuries without complaint, but insults he will not abide. The protagonist Montresor has a name that means “my treasure.” He declares his intention to wreak vengeance on unfortunate Fortunato, who has committed some unspecified insult to Montresor’s name and reputation.

We know that Montresor hates Fortunato, but Fortunato is unaware of this. We know that the doomed character does not know that Montresor’s friendly attitude is a fabrication of good-will, that his smile is at the thought of Fortunato’s immolation. This dramatic irony will continue until the final page when Fortunato becomes an initiate.

Ironically, the story takes place during the carnival season of madness and merrymaking. The

drunken Fortunato is wearing motley and the cap and bells of a jester, but a wise fool he is not. Montresor plays on Fortunato's pride in his wine connoisseurship, asking him to verify whether or not Montresor's recent bargain-price wine purchase is expensive *amontillado* or ordinary sherry. Fortunato agrees over Montresor's protests that it would be an imposition and a health danger, since the vaults where the wine is stored are cold, damp and "encrusted with nitre." Montresor's expressed concern for the other man's well-being is at odds with his true intentions.

How did Montresor know that no servants would be present? He had informed them that he would be gone all night and "given them explicit orders not to stir from the house." That, he knew, would be enough "to ensure their immediate disappearance" as soon as he left.

The two descend into the catacombs, Montresor repeatedly expressing worry about the nitre-covered walls and exacerbation of Fortunato's cough.

The unfortunate victim-to-be says, "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough." True.

Accepting a bottle of Medoc that Montresor has chosen from the many wines lying in the mould, Fortunato toasts "to the buried that repose around us," unaware that he will soon join them. "And I to your long life," responds Montresor.

Fortunato inquires about the Montresor coat of arms. "A huge human foot d'or, in a field of azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel." The motto is *Nemo me impune lacessit* - No one can harm me unpunished. The reader again recognizes the relationship of arms and inscription to what is happening. The unfortunate one does not.

More wine is consumed. This second bottle is a flagon of De Grave - another turn of the ironic screw. Montresor makes sure Fortunato will continue by suggesting that they instead turn back to escape the bad air, a scene worthy of vaudevillean comedy ensues as Fortunato asks whether Montresor is a member of the masons. Montresor produces a mason's trowel from under his cloak. Fortunato thinks it a joke, unaware that he is seeing a tool to be used in his entombment. The brotherhood of Free and accepted Masons is far removed from what has brought these two men together.

They proceed through the charnel house, passing the remains of generations of Montresors, to an interior recess. Finding the opening of the 4 by 3 by 6 foot chamber requires displacement of piled bones. They penetrate to a granite wall accessorized with iron staples, one holding a short chain, the other a padlock. Seconds later Montresor has his drunken dupe in chains.

Fortunato is an *ignoramus*, the term he uses to insult Luchesi, whom Montresor has several times suggested as a connoisseur who could substitute for Fortunato. Such name-calling may be the propensity for insult that has prompted Montresor's deadly revenge. Even chained to the wall, Fortunato thinks it's all a big joke and asks about the non-existent *amontillado*. Building stone and mortar readily at hand, Montresor uses his trowel and begins walling up the niche.

As the aperture closes with each row of masonry, realization begins to penetrate Fortunato's drunkenness. He screams and struggles. As the final stone is about to be inserted, Fortunato laughs again saying it's all been a joke they can share with the revelers at the palazzo.

But it's after midnight; shouldn't we call it quits? My wife will be wondering where I am. "Let

us be gone.”

When Montresor repeats that line, “be gone” has a different meaning. Fortunato has uttered his last words. Montresor hears only the jingling of the bells on his victim’s cap. “My heart grew sick,” he says. Remorse? No. Montresor blames his illness on the dampness. Shaking off his malaise, he inserts the last stone, plasters it, returns the displaced bones.

“For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them.” Montresor has been relating a grisly event of long ago. He has indeed punished with impunity, giving new meaning to the motto on his coat of arms. The final sentence echoes the Latin of the requiem mass. *In pace requiescat* May he rest in peace.

A final irony presents itself. Poe’s story *The Black Cat* is about a black cat. There is both a pit and a pendulum in *The Pit and the Pendulum*. But there never was a cask of amontillado. There is no other literary work named for a non-existent object except *The Cask of Amontillado*.

One more unexpected twist came to me dozens of years after my first boyhood reading of the tale and numerous re-readings for personal enjoyment and as a teaching material to exemplify and illustrate all varieties of irony and their interplay, I had always considered *The Cask of Amontillado* a purely fictional outgrowth of Poe’s fevered imagination. Such people as Montresor aren’t realistic. Events like this don’t happen in the world we live in.

Then, curious about the life of the most bizarre person in the pantheon of American Literature, I did some biographical research. I learned that during his ill-starred career in the army, Private Poe had been stationed at Fort Independence on an island in Boston Harbor. He became fascinated with the inscription on a gravestone just outside the fort. He learned that the entombed soldier died ten years earlier near the spot of the grave.

Knowing there had been no military combat in 1817, Poe began interviewing officers about what had happened. He learned that a popular lieutenant had been involved in a card game with captain reputed to be a bully. An accusation of cheating led to a duel and the death of the lieutenant. The captain vanished soon after and was written off as a deserter.

Friends of the fallen lieutenant had plied the captain with liquor, carried his unconscious body into a dungeon, shackled him, sealed up the vault where he lay and left him to die a horrible death.

Hearing about Poe’s investigations, the post commander summoned him and swore him to secrecy about the scandalous affair. This took place years before Poe penned his similar story set in Italy. In 1905, workers doing repairs on the old fort, came across a walled section that didn’t appear on their plans, They chiseled an opening in the wall that wasn’t supposed to be where it was and found a skeleton in fragments of an old army uniform and shackled to the floor.

In *The Cask of Amontillado*, Edgar Allan Poe uses several different artistic choices in the construction of the story. He manipulates the story to be the way he wants it to be by using the point of view of the narrator, the setting, and a common monotonous sentiment throughout. Poe is successful in maintaining a “spirit of perverseness” that is prevalent in most of his works.

The point of view plays a very important role in influencing the reader’s perception of the story. The first line of the story is a good example of how the narrator attempts to bring the reader to his side

right from the start.

“The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge”. Montresor, the narrator of the story, immediately tries to win the reader to his side by telling him that Fortunato has “ventured upon insult,” and apparently crossed over the line. This attempt is clever, but the reader never gets a sense of what Fortunato has actually done to the narrator. This fact alone raises the question in my mind as to whether Fortunato has really insulted Montresor, or whether Montresor is creating it in his own mind.

The point of view of the story can also affect the emotional attachment that the reader gets, or fails to get in this case, for a given character. When a reader is involved in a story, the point of view from where the story is being told is crucial to the feelings the reader has. In this story, Montresor dominates the progression of the story in every regard. In other words, the reader only knows what Montresor tells him, or what he can infer from the story. This being the case, it is difficult for the reader to develop any liking for another character unless Montresor describes him or her in a favorable way. Fortunato never stands a chance.

Montresor begins putting down Fortunato in the reader’s mind with the first line of the story, “when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge”. Even his most prized skill, wine tasting, is described as “a weak point.” This puts Fortunato at a major disadvantage in the fight for the reader’s liking, and ultimately the fight for his life.

As in most Poe stories, the narrator tries to steer the reader away from seeing the perverseness of his actions. In *The Cask of Amontillado*, Montresor tries to convince the reader that walling up Fortunato is his way making himself “felt as such to him who has done the wrong”. In reality, Poe tells the story from Montresor’s point of view in order to increase the astonishment and perverseness that the reader feels when reading the story.

Edgar Allan Poe uses the setting in many different ways in his various works. There are two primary settings in *The Cask of Amontillado*, the carnival and the catacombs. There are several reasons that make the carnival the ideal setting for Poe to lure Fortunato away. “It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend”. This sentence contains two important details as to why the carnival is a perfect setting for Montresor’s undertakings. The first is that it is dusk, which makes it harder for people at the carnival to notice what is happening, and also adds some gloom to the story. The second and most important detail, is that the carnival is a scene of “supreme madness.” Fortunato, along with most others at the carnival, has likely been drinking most of the day, is relaxed, and more likely to disappear with Montresor on a quest into the dark catacombs than he would be on a normal day. The “excessive warmth,” that Fortunato greets Montresor with even further proves his intoxication and relaxed state.

Poe’s descriptive setting is an asset to the appeal of the story, particularly when the story proceeds to the catacombs. “We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors”. Descriptions such as this, are a very distinct characteristic of Poe stories, and are one of his greatest strengths. His descriptions allow the reader to put themselves in the story and get the same feeling as the characters. In this example, the reader subconsciously puts himself in Fortunato’s position, walking along with a madman in the catacombs of

Montresors, not knowing your fate. The only difference in this case is that the reader has a better sense of Fortunato's fate than he does.

Besides using it as appeal to continue reading a story, Poe also uses the setting in symbolic ways as well. "The drops of moisture trickle among the bones" is symbolic of what Fortunato's bones will someday look like after he is walled up in the catacomb. Also, when the narrator walls up Fortunato with the Amontillado, it is symbolic of Fortunato's pride for his wine tasting ability that he is walled up with the wine.

The scene where Montresor walls-up Fortunato is by far the most perverse scene in the story. The scene is particularly effective in my opinion because of the cordial manner maintained by the narrator up to the point where he is nearly finished. There is no struggle or resistance put up by Fortunato: "He was much too astonished to resist". If Poe had Fortunato put up a struggle or had the narrator shown any anger, it would have destroyed the consistent mood of the story up to that point. Instead, Poe has Fortunato remain intoxicated right up until the point where it is too late for him to struggle.

The immediate sobering-up of Fortunato when he is near death also adds to the effect of the scene. "It was not the cry of a drunken man" tells the reader that Fortunato now knows fully well what is happening to him. It is followed by a yelling match and then silence, which creates such a sinister atmosphere that even Montresor is trembling and hastening to finish.

It seems as if Montresor almost has a sense of humor in his madness to punish Fortunato for his so-called wrongdoings. His constant insistence that Fortunato leave the catacomb with him provides even further 'insult to injury' for Fortunato. "Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough...". Montresor says this because he knows that Fortunato's pride in his wine tasting ability is too great for him to turn back, so he makes remarks such as this one simply for his own amusement. The comments aren't necessary in helping Montresor achieve his goal, they are said simply to raise a smile in his own mind. The fact that the narrator finds enjoyment out of killing someone, supports Poe's common theme of perverseness in his stories.

In addition to Montresor's sense of humor, Poe's uses irony in a humorous way a few times. The manner in which Poe dresses Fortunato, as a clown, is ironic because Fortunato is being virtually made a fool of by following Montresor into the catacombs. Also, when Fortunato says "I will not die of a cough," and Montresor responds "True-true," it shows a perverse sense of humor in the irony of Montresor's response.

Poe's theory of the short story is very important on influencing the way he writes *The Cask of Amontillado*. A major component of his short story theory is that the stories are brief and engaging. *The Cask of Amontillado* achieves both of these goals. Poe merely devotes three paragraphs on setting the scene before he gets right down to his endeavor to "not only punish but punish with impunity". This artistic choice is crucial to keeping the reader's interest. Poe gets right to the point, wasting no time for giving examples of Fortunato's wrongdoings or for giving any justification for the degree of punishment that Fortunato is to be submitted to. Not wasting the reader's time is very important to Poe, and that is even more obvious after reading *The Cask of Amontillado*.

The story complies with Poe's other components of a short story as well. Everything in the



story is written for a reason and leads to a final event. Poe does not add any miscellaneous details. He simply explains his intent to get revenge on Fortunato, and then shows how he gets it. Every part of the story affects the story as a whole. Finally, Poe's story leaves the reader somewhat in awe, with an undercurrent of suggestion wondering what has happened to Fortunato, after he has finished reading.

*The Cask of Amontillado* is similar to Poe's other short stories in many ways. For example, the narrator walls up Fortunato in *The Cask of Amontillado* just like the narrator walls up his wife in *The Black Cat*, and the old man in . Another parallel between *The Cask of Amontillado* and other short stories of Poe, is the basic layout of the story. First, the narrator starts off trying to justify or explain his actions. Second, the narrator tells the story, and finally there is always a twist or surprise at the end. In *The Cask of Amontillado* this twist occurs when the narrator calls Fortunato and he doesn't answer.

This is a certain uniqueness, though, that this story has that separates it from other Poe short stories. This uniqueness is, in my opinion, found at the end of the story. While other Poe short stories are narrated from a jail cell or from death row, the narrator of *The Cask of Amontillado* Montresor, tells his tale over fifty years after its occurrence. He is not in jail, and has seemingly served no time for his crime. Montresor, unlike many of his short story narrator counterparts, has apparently gotten away with his crimes. He doesn't break down and confess his actions to the authorities as Poe's narrators often do. Instead, Montresor goes on with his life and waits until he is of old age to pass on his tale. "In pace requiescat" is more than just a traditionally saying for the narrator, it is a phrase of triumph. The triumph of the narrator, and ultimately perverseness, over justice, makes *The Cask of Amontillado* one of Poe's most unique works and is an example of Poe's perversity at its best.

---

## 4.2 Let Us Sum Up

---

You have studied the critical analysis of Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* in detail. You have seen how an atmosphere of horror and suspense permeates throughout the story. The structural devices like irony, symbolism, are used to get unity in the story. The singleness of effect of the story for which the writer is famous can be seen on the basis of the Critical Analysis.

---

## 4.3 Review Questions

---

### I- Multiple Choice Questions

1. If you were to clarify this sentence by starting it with the subject, how would the sentence begin?  
Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven.
  - a) The wall thus exposed...
  - b) In depth about four feet...
  - c) We perceived a still interior crypt...
  - d) A still interior crypt or recess...
2. In which of the following passages do descriptive details create an eerie, suspenseful mood?

- a) There was then a long and obstinate silence.
  - b) The cold is merely nothing.
  - c) The wine sparkled in his eyes . . .
  - d) It was about dusk . . .
3. Which of the following excerpts contributes most to the mood of the story?
- a) We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descended again, arrived at a deep crypt . . .
  - b) “It is this,” I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my roquelaure a trowel.
  - c) It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend.
  - d) I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave.
4. Montresor vows revenge because Fortunato
- a) accosted him.
  - b) threatened him.
  - c) insulted him.
  - d) humiliated him.
5. The word that best describes the mood of “*The Cask of Amontillado*” is\_\_\_\_\_.
- a) hysterical
  - b) suspenseful
  - c) dramatic
  - d) depressing
6. The word precluded means \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) included
  - b) punished
  - c) made possible
  - d) prevented
7. Which of the following sentence parts does not give you information about the attendants in the following sentence? There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time.
- a) they had absconded
  - b) of the time

- c) no attendants at home
  - d) to make merry
8. Which aspect of the carnival season is most important to the events of the story?
- a) The damp weather at that time of year causes colds and coughs.
  - b) Hundreds of people attend the event.
  - c) It is a time of wild madness and excess.
  - d) People wear fantastic costumes in the streets.
9. Montresor seeks \_\_\_\_\_ from Fortunato for his misdeeds.
- a) termination
  - b) affliction
  - c) succession
  - d) retribution
10. The skeletons in the walls of the catacombs are the remains of
- a) Montresor's ancestors.
  - b) carnival merry-makers.
  - c) Montresor family enemies.
  - d) Montresor's disobedient servants.
11. Which phrase is most nearly the same in meaning as impunity?
- a) Lack of fear
  - b) Feelings of worthlessness
  - c) Freedom from punishment
  - d) Anger resulting from injustice
12. Read the following sentence from "*The Cask of Amontillado*." After which words would you pause in order to break it down into meaningful parts? In this respect I did not differ from him materially; I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.
- a) respect, differ, was, Italian, myself, largely, whenever
  - b) this, did, differ, him, materially, myself, whenever
  - c) respect, materially, myself
  - d) this, not, differ, materially, skillful, myself, whenever
13. How are Montresor and Fortunato alike?

- a) They both have respect for Luchesi.
  - b) They have an affection for each other.
  - c) They share an interest in fine wine.
  - d) They both have a revengeful nature.
14. Choose the sentence in which the proper nouns and common nouns are correctly capitalized or not capitalized.
- a) Edgar Allen Poe attended the University of virginia.
  - b) Edgar Allen Poe wrote the poem “Annabel Lee.”
  - c) Poe’s Wife, Virginia Clemm, died of tuberculosis.
  - d) The Short Story “The Cask OfAmontillado” may have been based on a real incident.
15. A proper noun is always
- a) italicized.
  - b) lower case.
  - c) a compound word.
  - d) capitalized.
16. Why does Montresor warn Fortunato about the air in the vaults?
- a) Montresor wants to make sure that Fortunato does not suspect his motives.
  - b) Montresor wants to warn Fortunato that death is near.
  - c) Montresor wants to avoid responsibility for Fortunato’s death.
  - d) Montresor wants to discourage Fortunato from entering the vaults.
17. When the narrator says to Fortunato, “I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter,” he is appealing to Fortunato’s \_\_\_\_.
- a) pragmatism
  - b) expertise
  - c) vanity
  - d) humility
18. Why is the narrator happy to meet Fortunato?
- a) To invite him to see the catacombs
  - b) To attend the carnival together
  - c) To invite him to share the Amontillado

- d) To put into effect his plan for revenge
- 19. Choose the item that is capitalized correctly.
  - a) Prince of Wales
  - b) The United kingdom
  - c) Whitney museum of American art
  - d) The Tell-Tale Heart (a work by Edgar Allen Poe)
- 20. Which quotation best illustrates Montresor's true character?
  - a) "A draft of this Medoc will defend us from the damp."
  - b) "I must not only punish but punish with impunity."
  - c) "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today."
  - d) "And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."
- 21. How has the narrator made sure that his servants are not at home?
  - a. He has fired them.
  - b. He has given them the evening off.
  - c. He has sent them to country home.
  - d. He has ordered to remain at his house until he returns in the morning.
- 22. What is the narrator's name ?
  - a) Medoc
  - b) Montresor
  - c) The story does not say
  - d) Luchresi
- 23. At the end of the vault, what lines the walls ?
  - a) bottles of sherry
  - b) human remains
  - c) iron bars
  - d) black silk
- 24. What does the narrator do in the small last room of the crypt
  - a) He challenges Fortunato to a duel.
  - b) He pretends that he is going to wall Fortunato up in the room

- c) He stabs Fortunato.
  - d) He chains Fortunato to the wall.
25. How much time has passed since the narrator took Fortunato to the vaults?
- a) fifty years
  - b) two days
  - c) six months
  - d) one night
26. How many injuries has the narrator 'permitted' from Fortunato?
- a) a hundred
  - b) a million
  - c) a hundred thousand
  - d) a thousand
27. Poe always liked to do things "at length". The same is true with the narrator in this story. He knows of Fortunato's weakness and uses it to his advantage. What is this weakness?
- a) his own ego
  - b) knowledge of Italy's history
  - c) knowledge of business
  - d) his wealth
28. When the narrator first saw Fortunato at the carnival, what was his condition?
- a) he had been in a fight
  - b) he was sick
  - c) he was drunk
  - d) he was upset
29. As soon as the narrator sees Fortunato, he tells him that he has received "a pipe for what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts". Who does the narrator suggest that he is going to see to find out if the wine is genuine?
- a) Locke
  - b) Medina
  - c) Montresor
  - d) Luchesi

30. The narrator's vaults were very damp due to the fact that they were encrusted with what?
- a) dew
  - b) moss
  - c) nitre
  - d) nitrate
31. What is the motto of the Montresor family?
- a) Parva leves capiunt animas
  - b) Abusis non tollit usum
  - c) Nemo me impune lacessit
  - d) Nemo liber est qui corpori servit
32. True or false: Montresor's vault was lined with human remains.
- a) True
  - b) False
33. As the two men were walking down into the vault, Montresor stated that the cask was in a cave at the end of the vault. Fortunato, we are aware, is still completely drunk. What does Montresor do to keep Fortunato in the cave of the vault?
- a) locks him in there
  - b) chains him to the wall
  - c) uses his dog as a guard
  - d) he doesn't need to lock up Fortunato, he is so drunk that he doesn't move
34. How many tiers (or rows) of stone did Montresor have to lay in order to wall Fortunato up in the cave?
- a) 11
  - b) 12
  - c) 10
  - d) 9
35. How long has it been that no one has disturbed Fortunato's bones?
- a) A century
  - b) Half a century
  - c) Half a decade
  - d) A decade

## II- Essay Type Questions

1. Discuss the use of irony and symbolism in *The Cask of Amontillado*.
2. Consider *The Cask of Amontillado* as a horror short story.
3. Discuss the narrative technique of Poe with reference of *The Cask of Amontillado*.

---

### 4.4 Bibliography

---

1. Allen, Gay Wilson, American Prosody, Farmersville, Calif, Pacific Book Supply.
2. Allen, Hervey, Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe (Doran ,1926,2 vols) , Rinehart, 1929,rev. ed. In one vol.
3. Baudelaire, Charles, Baudelaire on Poe: Critical: paper, ed and translated by Lois B. and Francis E. Hyslop, State college, Pa., Bald Eagle Press, 1952.
4. Bittner, William, Poe : A biography, Boston, Atlantic –Little Brown, 1962.
5. Bittner, William, Poe: A Biography, Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1962.
6. Bonaparte, Marie The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe (1933) translated by John Rocker, N.Y., Hillary House.
7. Braddy, Haldeen, Glorious Incense : The Fulfillment of Edgar Allan Poe, Washington, D.C. Scarecrow Press, 1953.
8. Buranelli, Vincent, Edgar Allan Poe, Washington, D.C. Scarecrow Press, 1961. Paperback ed : C&UPS.
9. Buranelli, Vincent. Edgar Allan Poe, Boston: Twayne, 1977.
10. Campbell, Killis, The Mind of Poe and Other Studies, ( Harvard University Press, 1933). Russell & Russell, new ed., 1962.
11. Carlson, Eric W., ed. The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.
12. Davidson, Edward H. Poe.:A critical Study ,Cambridge Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957.
13. Fagin, N. Bryllion ,The Histrionic Mr. Poe, Baltimore , Johns Hopkins, 1942.
14. Howarth, William L., ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Poe's Tales: A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
15. Hubbell, Jay B., "Poe," Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism, ed. Floyd Stovall, N.Y. Modern Language Association, 1956.
16. Krutch, Joseph Wood, Edger Allan Poe- A Study in Genius, N.Y., Knopf, 1926.
17. Levin, Harry, The Power of Blackness, N.Y., Knopf. 1958pp. 100-165. Paperback ed: VIN.



18. Miller, Perry The Raven and the Whale Paperback ed: Harv.
  19. Ober, Warren U., and others eds. The Enigma of Poe. Paperback ed: Heath A collection of essays by various critics.
  20. Poe, Allan "The Philosophy of Composition".
  21. Quinn, Arthur Hobson Edgar Allan Poe. A Critical Biography, (Appleton–Century, 1941), Des Moines, Iowa, Meredith Press new ed.
  22. Quinn, Arthur Hobson. Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
  23. Quinn, Patrick F., The French Face of Edgar Allan Poe. Carbondale (.III), Southern Illinois University Press, 1957.
  24. Silverman, Kenneth. Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Neverending Remembrance, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
  25. Walsh, John Evangelist. Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
  26. William J. Fisher (ed) American Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Eurasia Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1965
  27. Winwar, Frances, The Haunted Palace, N.Y., Harper, 1959. A popular biography.
-

## UNIT-5

---

### SARDAR KHUSHWANT SINGH: *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 5.0 Objective
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Chapterwise Summary of the Novel
  - 5.2.1 Dacoity at Lala Ram Lal's House
  - 5.2.2 Hukum Chand: The Magistrate
  - 5.2.3 Kalyug
  - 5.2.4 Mano Majra
  - 5.2.5 Karma
- 5.3 The Last Scene
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Glossary
- 5.6 Review Questions

---

#### 5.0 Objective

---

- To acquaint the students/readers to the historical circumstances which led to the Partition and the Two Nation Theory.
- To throw light on the communal riots that ensued across the border.
- To bring to focus India's Ganga-Jamuni culture on the eve of Partition and its dismantling soon after.
- To assert the force of genuine human passion of love and fellow-feeling.

---

#### 5.1 Introduction

---

The summer of 1947 was felt differently in India. The Partition of India was like a surgical operation leaving both Pakistan and India profusely bleeding. This began a gruesome violence at the hands of fundamentalists in Pakistan and Hindu fanatics in India. The Two-nation theory had become a reality. It was the most unfortunate diplomatic and political conspiracy by the then rulers the Congress and the Muslim League. It was a trilateral phenomenon and the darkest spot in Indian history. The aftermath of the Partition stands witness to the monstrosities, atrocities, murders, loot, incendiarism and mass exodus of millions from either side of the border. Humanity was shocked to see the blood bath. The writers wrote out of shock and trauma about the Partition and the misfortune that followed. Bhishma Sahani depicted the sinister scenario in his book *Tamas*, Yash Pal did it in *Jhutha Sach*.

Sardar Khushwant Singh came out with his novel *Train to Pakistan* in the year 1956. It is a classic. It is one of the best sellers of all novels in English. The novel has as its locale Mano Majra village which is situated on the bank of the Sutlej river and happens to be the last railway station in India as one travels to Pakistan across the Sutlej. The story of the novel is how a train of living Muslim passengers crosses the bridge over the Sutlej river to carry them into Pakistan. This was the time when blood hungry Muslims were killing the Hindus and the Sikhs in Pakistan, and a ghost train came to India in which every passenger was a corpse.

They are buried en masse in Mano Mazra. There was a railway bridge across the Sutlej river. Juggat Singh, Mali and his gang had earned the notoriety to disgrace all finer human values. Hukum Chand was sent as a magistrate to establish law and order, and apprehend the culprits and anti-social elements in the area. The story of the novel gains its momentum when a dacoity is committed at Lala Ram Lal's house one night. The whole village is crouched in fear.

One social worker, a sophisticated elite youngman, happens to visit the village. Mali is released from jail while Juggat Singh and Iqbal- the visitor- are arrested. It was rather strange that Mali, who was accused of looting the Muslims going to Pakistan, was set free. Lastly a young man saves the Muslim passengers crossing the Sutlej by train, sacrificing his life. He actually cut the cables and the network set to stop the train and kill the Muslims en masse. The novelist has divided the plot of the novel into four chapters- Dacoity, Kalyug, Mano Majra and Karma. The village- Mano Majra- remains the place of all incidents. Towards the end the novelist doesn't name the person who sacrificed his life to save the hundreds of lives of the Muslims leaving for Pakistan by hacking the rope with his kirpan on the railway bridge. The novel ends in suspense and mystery.

The main characters in the novel *Train to Pakistan* are Juggat Singh or Jugga, Bhai Meet Singh, Lambardar Banta Singh, Malli, the dacoit, social worker Iqbal. These characters have been very well portrayed. Sardar Khushwant Singh's art of characterization is remarkable as he has made them lively.

Nooran- the Muslim Imam's beautiful young daughter, the musician girl Haseena, Jugga's affectionate mother are women characters. Nooran is Jugga's flame. The characters with virtuous moral conscience are worried to realise what has been happening in the sedentary and succulent village. For centuries, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims have been living here apparently peacefully but now the winds of destruction are blowing as thieves, robbers, cut throats and murderers are at large like wolves on the prowl. The villagers deliberate that they were better off under the British. They didn't know that the conspiracy of the Partition was hatched by the outgoing British rulers and that Lord Mountbatten, the Governor General of India, was the chief architect of the Partition. Sardar Khushwant Singh has employed the language of common parlance; it is neither stilted nor unnecessarily ornate and rhetorical.

The novelist has admirably succeeded in depicting the atmosphere of terror, horror, insecurity and tension. The communal riots and nefarious acts were reported all over India and newly created Pakistan. The novel underlines how the so called peace loving Sikhs, Hindu and Muslims became blood hungry hounds and vampires overnight forgetting all cultural ties.

---

## 5.2 The Chapterwise Summary of the Novel

---

### 5.2.1 Dacoity at Lala Ram Lal's House

Mano Mazra was a village in which families of many castes lived. Lala Ram Lal was a Hindu moneylender. There were Muslim and Sikh families in equal number. There were some Christian and untouchable families too. The Hindu shrine, the Sikh Gurudwara and the mosque were situated in a triangular space with a peepal tree nearby. There were several flat-roofed mud huts with a dusty path, and a pond of water at the end of the village was surrounded by keekar trees. There was a railroad bridge near the railway station on the Sutlez river and a small colony for vendors, shopkeepers and hawkers was in sight to cater victuals in short time to the passengers of unimportant trains. In the darkness of the silent night the whistling, puffing and iron couplings of engines were heard. Aluminium lamps lighted all night. The people of Mano Mazra awoke by listening to the whistling sound of the Lahore Mail train. The Mullah said his prayer at the mosque while the temple priest lay in bed. At 10.30, the passenger train from Delhi steamed in. By this time, the villagers settled down to their routine. When the evening passenger train from Lahore came, everyone got to work again. Earthen hearths blazed and kindled for cooking. The goods train passed non-stop saying goodnight to the village folk. This was the time when the mullah said the evening prayers in the mosque.

On one fateful night in August, five robbers emerged from a keekar grove, moved silently towards the river armed with spears and carbines slung on their shoulders and flicked torch light while talking about the booty- the robbed jewelry, garments to be robbed. They had masked their faces with eyes uncovered. They happened to knock at the door of Lala Ram Lal's house shouting "Lala" and fired a gun in air. They broke the door open, threatened his family with serious consequences if they didn't part with the ornaments and precious materials. They caught hold of Lala Ram Lal crouched under one of the charpoys. Women were beaten up and Lala was ruthlessly manhandled and murdered. The women cried for help but nobody came to rescue them as the villagers were scared of their lives. The robbers went away with the rich booty laughing and shouting triumphantly and challenging the villagers. They came to a small hut, making a jubilant appeal to Jugga. Having divided the booty among themselves they went towards the river while the goods train whistled in the dark.

Juggut Singh had left his hut an hour earlier having got the signal of the whistle of the passing goods train for the rendezvous with his beloved Nooran. His mother had stopped him from going out lest he should meet the same fate as his father did: He was hanged for dacoity. Juggut Singh didn't listen to her. He snubbed her. His mother apprehended her misfortune. Jugga walked cautiously to reach the pond and reached upto the sandy bed of the river. His beloved Nooran was very much there. After nocturnal romance, the girl went back to her house where her father said prayers for her well being. When the robbers were passing flicking torch lights after the robbery, Juggat Singh and Nooran saw them. Jugga recognised Malli flicking torch light. The whole village was awake after the robbery. The dogs were barking in the streets and women stood on the roofs. Everyone talked vociferously about the robbery. Nobody tried to face or chase Malli's gang.

There was a rest house at Mano Mazra and this yielded bureaucratic importance to the village. It was a bungalow made of brick. There was a god-forsaken garden near a row of servant quarters. There were a few scraggly bushes of jasmine. Many officers used to stay there overnight. The place

became quite romantic in the rainy season as frogs dived into the flooded marshes, fireflies flitted, fishes swam in a large number. After the dacoity in Mano Mazra, the rest-house was tidied up as an important officer was coming. The floors were scrubbed, nooks and corners of the rooms were dusted. Furniture looked glossy after sprinkle wash. The verandah was swept and dusted properly and was stuffed with victuals to entertain the VIP. One sub-inspector, two constables and orderlies arrived. They were clad in white, red belts around their waists, white turbans with broad-bands; their uniforms were pinned with brass-emblems of the government of Punjab. Several villagers carried files and baggage to the rest house as the Sahab was coming on his official tour.

### **5.2.2 Hukum Chand: The Magistrate**

Hukum Chand gave patient hearing to the sub-inspector of police who briefed him about the law and order situation. Hukum Chand knew that Hindu women were being tortured assaulted and murdered in Pakistan. He wanted that the Muslims should leave the Indian soil peacefully and go to Pakistan. The sub-inspector discussed the situation in Mano Majra: Hukum Chand was told by the sub-inspector that the lambardar reported the latest situation to him regularly. No refugees had come in the village so far. Moreover, the people of Mano Majra were an ignorant lot: they had heard of Gandhi but not of Mohammad Jinnah.

Hukum Chand asked the sub-inspector if there was any bad character in the village. The sub-inspector informed him that Jugga, son of dacoit Alam Singh, was a notorious character. The magistrate was acquainted with Jaggas's affairs with Mullah Imambuksh's angelic daughter Nooran. The magistrate enjoyed his sumptuous lunch and asked the sub-inspector to make arrangement for the evening for his pleasure. The dak bungalow had already been tidied up with great fanfare to accommodate Hukum Chand's aristocratic tastes. The evening party was a grand musical performance. There were two women singers: one was a middle aged singer chewing betel leaf accompanied by his young beautiful daughter. The girl sang film-songs and Punjabi songs of Hukum Chand's choice. Hukum Chand was gulping pegs of whisky. The music and dance performance being over, Hukum Chand went to his bed room with Haseena- the young singer.

Next morning a new man came to Mono Majra. The young man looked well educated and he went straight to the village gurudwara. The youngman met Bhai Meet Singh and requested to accommodate him there for two or three days. Meet Singh cautioned him not to tamper with the sanctity of the place and allowed him to stay. The visitor felt quite relaxed in the small room which had a charpoy, some name sake furniture and the calendar with Guru's portrait and name on the wall. Meet Singh having completed the washing of clothes and his bath at the well, came to the visitor 'Iqbal' who impressed him with his gentle behaviour. The youngman was cleanshaved, He was a social worker who had come to stop bloodshed and violence which spread in the area in the wake of the Partition. Mano Majra happened to be a very sensitive place as it was situated at the border and had a bridge over the Sutlez to cross into Pakistan. Iqbal told Meet Singh that he belonged to Jhelum in Pakistan but he was a student abroad and had come back to act as a social worker. He was a bachelor still and subsisted on petty amount of money. Meet Singh heard him aptly on religious matters. He told that the people in India quarrelled over religion. Meet Singh watched him eating his tiffin and sophisticated ways. Iqbal commented on the police saying that they ill-treated people and thrived on bribe and corruption.

Meet Singh briefed him about the dacoity which had been committed last night at Lala Ram Lal's house and the police were investigating as the dacoits had taken away precious jewelry, and large cash. Iqbal as a social worker could not resist the temptation of going there as there was a murder too. But Meet Singh advised him to take rest at the gurudwara. Iqbal was rather tired as he had travelled overnight in a crowded railway compartment. Iqbal tried to sleep but he could not as there was no cross ventilation and flies were buzzing all around. He recalled to his mind the scene of the railway compartment- breast feeding children in mother's lap, passengers being seated on their luggage, bedrolls and the bare floor. The passengers had noticed that Iqbal had the book in English thinking that he must be an educated man. They asked him several questions out of curiosity and his book was circulated in the whole compartment. Meet Singh came to him talking of 'Kalyug' and utter downfall of morals. The dacoity committed at Lal Ram Lal's house last night had stimulated his moral thinking. He talked about Jugga who was a notorious criminal. Meet Singh remarked that a snake could cast off its slough but not venom. Similarly Jugga could not give up committing crimes.

Meet Singh briefed Iqbal about the police officials who had not arrested Jugga yet. Iqbal wanted to walk around the place but he was told that lambardar Banta Singh and Mullah Imambuksh were coming to see him.

Iqbal could see the gates of Lala Ram Lal's house wide open, villagers sitting there and women wailing inside. Some village folk were napping under the peepal tree, and children played in sand, while the Lahore passenger train whistled shrill and crossed the bridge. The whistle of the train was like a sigh of relief as it was out of Pakistan and had crossed into India. Iqbal tried to go to the side of the dak bungalow: a Sikh guard stared at him. He turned towards the railway line and saw that they were carrying Lala Ram Lal's corpse. Iqbal recollected the mad rush of Bombay traffic. He noticed a world of difference between the jostling and suffocating crowds of Bombay and the succulent village. In the evening he got up, brushed and arranged his clothes. It was the time of prayer in the mosque and the temple. When he went to sleep on the roof, lambardar Banta Singh and Mullah Imambuksh came to meet Iqbal. Iqbal welcomed them and talked to them on whatever was happening in the world. These innocent men were ignorant of the Partition and its consequences. Iqbal told them that the British masters were leaving India. They exchanged ideas on religion, morality, Gandhiji etc. When they had left after deliberations, Iqbal slept on the charpoy.

The very next morning, the policemen searched his room in the Gurudwara, and he was arrested while he got up rubbing eyes. Bhai Meet Singh didn't like Iqbal's arrest. Iqbal left his hold-all in care of Meet Singh. He was handcuffed. The police arrested Juggat Singh (Jugga) too. His mother tried her best to prove his innocence in the dacoity at Lala Ram Lal's house. She brought the glass bangles which the dacoits had thrown into the courtyard to insult Jugga as he was not a party to the dacoity.

Surprisingly enough, Jugga and Iqbal were imprisoned in the same room. The sub-inspector was under the impression that Iqbal was a member of the Muslim League. Iqbal threatened the sub-Inspector that if he was not released in 24 hours, he would move a *habeas corpus* petition and expose in the court that he was unnecessarily framed. The sub-inspector retorted that he should better apply to go to Pakistan but Iqbal denied because he was not a Muslim. Jugga deeply respected Iqbal as an innocent man. When the police threatened Iqbal in the murder case and use third degree methods, for

confession, Jugga appealed to the sub-inspector not to harass the innocent man.

### **5.2.3 Kalyug**

In the month of September, the goods trains became ghost trains. One day when an empty train arrived at Mano Majra, the station was full of armed policemen. Mano Majra was characterized by Imambuksh- he had lost his wife and sons rather early. He lived with his daughter Nooran and made his living as a teacher of Koran to the children. Banta Singh was the leader of the village folk. Bhai Meet Singh, lambardar Banta Singh and Imambuksh discussed “Kulyug” uttering ‘Vahe Guru’, or ‘Allah...’ Suddenly two policemen came calling for lambardar Banta Singh. There were empty trucks to be loaded with wooden bundles immediately. The villagers watched from the roof tops going to the railway station. There was a cloud of dark smoke from the railway station but the northern horizon was blood red with flames and fire and the breeze blew smelling of kerosene and human bodies. The villagers knew that a ghost train had arrived from Pakistan and the passengers were corpses.

Hukum Chand was trying to sleep but he could not. He could sense the unfortunate consequences of the monstrosity of Hindu-Muslim communalism. At night he saw nightmarish scenes of loot, murder and nefarious acts. He was scared of his life.

Next morning he woke up in fresh mood. The police sub-inspetor came to brief him about the ghost train and the disposal of the corpses. These were heaps of ashes, skulls and bones littered near the railway station. The villagers were not allowed to come to the railway station. Some refugees had come from nearby border villages of Pakistan. They were lodged in the temple of Mano Majra and the villagers were providing them with food. Overall, the law and order situation was under control. When Hukum Chand asked about Lala Ram Lal’s gruesome murder, the sub-inspetor told him that it was the act of Malli and his gang and that Jugga was not a party to them as he was busy in his rendezvous with Nooran- the bewitchingly beautiful daughter of Mullah Khudabaksh. Hukum Chand ordered the sub-inspector not to release Jugga and Iqbal and arrest Malli and his gang.

The sub-inspetor having left the dak bangalow, Hukum Chand began to think of the problems which were to follow in the near future. The girl-Haseena- was of course there.

Jugga was so deeply influenced by Iqbal’s knowledge and scholarship that he pressed and massaged his feet submissively telling him that he wanted to learn English words and that he was interested in Hindi and Gurmukhi. He told him that he was not a party to Malli’s gang and had nothing to do with Lala Ram Lal’s murder. The police arrested all the five murders including the kingpin Malli.

### **5.2.4 Mano Majra**

On a rainy day many ghost trains arrived. The corpses were summarily disposed of. There was an uneasy calm in Mano Majra: the Hindus and Sikhs were on one side, and the Muslims, on the other side. Both the groups suspected each other’s intentions. The Sikhs were infuriated with the Muslims and there could be communal riots, murders, cases of incendiarism and loot any time. Hukum Chand was sitting on a volcano which could erupt any time. All Sikhs of the village happened to meet at lambardar Banta Singh’s house. Meet Singh also attended the meeting. Bhai Meet Singh stated that Iqbal was a Sikh as he wore an iron bangle around his wrist and abstained from smoking. Moreover he had come to Mano Majra after Lala Ram Lal’s murder. Meet Singh’s statement was very well re-

ceived. Every one accepted him as a Mona Sikh whose full name was Iqbal Singh. They planned to kill Muslims as a vindictive action to counterbalance what was happening to Hindus in Pakistan. While the meeting was going on, the village Muslims came with Imam Buksh saying 'Salaam' and 'Sat Sri Akal' and asked what their decision was regarding their leaving Mano Majra. Lambardar Banta Singh advised them to go to the refugee camp for a few days and when the situation improved they could come back to live in the village. With great warmth they embraced each other with sobs and tears welling up in their eyes. Imam Buksh agreed with the decision. Lambardar Banta Singh volunteered to look after their houses and cattle. Imam Buksh and his fellow Muslims left the meeting. It was a tearful farewell.

Imam Buksh went home and awakened his daughter Nooran to pack up their belongings- clothes, utensils, etc- as they were going to leave the village. She got up most reluctantly and went to Jugga's house at midnight while all the Muslims of Mano Majra were busy packing. Nooran told Jugga's mother that she was pregnant for two months and would deliver Jugga's child when it was due. Jugga was not at home. The old woman softened as she heard these words and assured her all necessary help. Nooran went with a heavy heart thinking that she would come again in the morning to say "Sat Sri Akal" if time permitted and if she got a chance. She packed her belongings and cooked something for the next day and slept on chorpoy.

Next morning two Pathans and some Sikh officers came with a dozen trucks and police force. They ordered the Muslims, who were willing to go to Pakistan, to carry with them their luggage but not heavy articles like charpoys, large boxes, etc. They were given only ten minutes to board the trucks. It was once again a heart rending scenario as the Sikhs and Muslims wept under the grip of emotion. Their property was looted on the way by Malli's gang. Hukum Chand had ordered to set them free from prison for the vindictive action to react against what was happening to Hindus in Pakistan. The refugees and the accompanying officers were lazy lookers on lest they should be shot dead by Malli's gang.

### **5.2.5 Karma**

The monsoon clouds rained profusely. It was all muddy in Mano Majra. Malli's gangsters looted cattle, property, hens..... etc. The Sutlez was flooded. Lambardar Banta Singh and other villagers almost forgot about the misdeeds of Malli's gang and the Muslim refugees; they were preoccupied with the flood situation. Suddenly they heard the painful cries for help and rushed to the bridge. They saw in swirling water, some carcasses of cows, bundles of clothing and it appeared that some village had been swept off in the flooded river. After some time, they heard the whistle of a train in darkness and it passed the station. The train was from Pakistan.

Next morning, the sun rose in its full glory. The villagers noticed corpses of children, women's bones and skulls, dismembered limbs. Many corpses were floating on the surface. The sky was full with kites sweeping over the place. A few days later a train arrived from Pakistan during daytime with many soldiers and the police force. They ordered a bulldozer for dragging the corpses to a common burial spot. The work was in progress till sunset, and having buried the dead, they all went by train.

In the evening, Gurudwara at Mano Majra was thronged with all the villagers. They offered prayers for God's mercy. They people were scared of their lives: they slept in the Gurudwara seeing nightmares. They wept in sleep, cried and wailed. Suddenly, they were all awakened by the beep of a



jeep and they heard loud voices. The visitors were asking whether anyone lived there or all were dead. They asked lambardar Banta Singh whether it was the Sikh village. Banta Singh responded in the positive. The visitors told the dazed villagers about the ghost trains carrying the corpses of Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan. They instigated the village folk to loot the Muslims, ransack their property and houses and send one train load of dead Muslims to retaliate and avenge the atrocities and mostrosities by Muslims on Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. Bhai Meet Singh- very conscientious and God fearing Sikh- was mortified to hear a young man on the loud speaker saying the if the Sikhs of Mano Mazra had the guts, they could butcher all the Muslims going to Pakistan and a train full of them would cross the Sutlez bridge the very next day. It would be the most opportune hour to take revenge against the Pakistani boarding Muslims and their mesdeeds. None of the passengers the said train cross the Sutlez alive. Meet Singh knew that the Muslims from Mano Majra would also be boarding that train. When he remarked about the Muslims of Mano Majra travelling by that train, he was told pointblank that it was enough for them to be Muslims. Mallis and his gang volunteered to execute the nefarious plan. The young leader on the loudspeaker said “bravo” and made a ceremonial prayer in Guru’s name. The village folks were instigated to pounce upon the Muslim passengers in the train. They readied themselves with loud and collective “Sat Sri Akal” to make the venture an admirable success.

The young leader showed them the map of the bridge and located the exact spots to attack the train by stretching a rope at a particular height across the bridge so that the passenger sitting on the roofs of the bogies would fall down into the river- struck by the rope. The rest would be shot dead or butchered with swords and that Sikhs would have an extra advantage of night darkness. The Pakistani soldiers on board would also sub-inspector who inturn could brief Hukum Chand camping at the dak bangalow. The information not only fell on deaf ears, but Hukum Chand gave liberty to the sub-inspetor of Chandannagar to murder the Muslim refugees who would board the night train. The Sub-Inspector informed Hukum Chand that Muslims had left Mano Majra. Mullah Imambuksh had also left with his daughter Nooran.

Hukum Chand ordered that Malli’s gang should be released to reach Mano Majra before the night train carrying Muslim refugees left the station. The Inspector could get the hang of Hukum Chand’s strategy. Jugga and Iqbal were also released but Jagga was as angry as a lion as Nooran and Imambuksh had been forced to leave Mano Majra. Naturally they must be leaving for Pakistan by the night train.

The sub-inspector arranged a tonga for them upto the village. As the tonga reached near the Sikh temple in the village, Jugga jumped off the carriage and disappeared in pitch dark. Many villagers were staying in Gurudwara and Iqbal joined them in prayers. Meet Singh briefed on him on the latest situation. He came to know that villagers were going to kill the Muslims. The disappointed him beyond measure. When the villagers were sleeping in the big room of Gurudwara, Jugga came to see Meet Singh, listened to some holy lines of Guru Granth Sahab and left for his plan unknown to any person in Mano Majra.

---

### **5.3 The Last Scene**

---

The signal was given for the night train taking Muslim refugees to Pakistan. Many men who were in ambush close to the bridge became alert with their guns, spears and swords. They were ready to attack the train as it would be passing over the bridge. The darkness was so horrible that they were

not in a position to recognise anybody. One man climbed up on the steel span near the middle point of the rope. The gang leader thought that some body was checking the tightness of its knot. As the train approached, the gang leader shouted at the man to climb down and save himself but the man would not listen: he was hacking vigorously in the middle by his kirpan. The gangleader shot him but the bug nab had done the job. He slid off the rope as it snapped and fell down and the train passed over him, crossing the bridge and went on to Pakistan.

---

## 5.4 Let Us Sum Up

---

In the summer of 1947, the Partition of India became a reality as a result of political conspiracy hatched by the British rulers. The two-nation theory clicked. The people became refugees in their own land. About ten million were in flight, and a million of them were solvenly butchered in Hindu-Muslim communal riots. *Train to Pakistan* by Sardar Khushwant Singh deals with uneasy peace which reigns over a small border village Mano Majra situated on the bank of the Sutlez river. It is the last railway station on the Indian side. One day a “ghost train” arrives: the passengers beeing all corpses. It speaks of the atrocities, monstrosities, slovenly butchering, rapines, lootings and pillagings. In the Punjabi village of Mano-Majra, where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have lived for several generations in peaceful coexistence and Ganga-Jamuna cultural ethos, there is communal strife. *Train to Pakistan* presents a nightmarish experience of communal frenzy. There runs a parallel story of love between a Sikh young man and Muslim girl highlighting the genuine human passion of love which transcends all the barriers of cast and creed.

---

## 5.5 Glossary

---

<b>Partition-</b>	In 1947, Lord Mountbatton, the Governor General of India, executed the strategy of the Two-Nation Theory, and then, India and Pakistan came into existence. The British rulers’ policy of “divide and rule” had come full circle with the Partition.
<b>architect</b>	designer/ engineer.
<b>Carbines</b>	mousers or guns which could project a volley of bullets.
<b>rendezvous</b>	It is a French expression which means ‘amorous love affair’.
<b>aristocratic</b>	‘belonging to nobility or living in luxury’ (Magistrate Hukum Chand lives in aristocratic style)
<b>sophisticated</b>	advanced in knowledge and life style. Iqbal is a sophisticated individual.
<b>Notorious</b>	infamous. Malli is a notorious character in <i>Train to Pakistan</i> .
<b>ghost trains</b>	The trains which had corpses on board instead of living passengers.
<b>habeas corpus petition</b>	An application moved by the accused in the police custody for his physical presence in the court of law.
<b>Mona Sikh</b>	A Mona Sikh is one who neither sports a beard nor keeps long hair. He is clean shaved. He is also called a “mechanized” Sardar in common parlance.

---

## 5.6 Review Questions

---

1. Describe the social life of Mano Majra village.
2. Give a character sketch of Jugga.
3. What kind of man was Magistrate Hukum Chand. Discuss.
4. What is your impression of Iqbal- the visitor to Mano Majra.
5. Write a note on Bhai Meet Singh of the Sikh Temple (Gurudwra).
6. Narrate the incident of dacoity at Lala Ram Lal's house.
7. What was Jugga's supreme sacrifice? What motivated him to do it?

---

## UNIT-6

---

### SARDAR KHUSHWANT SINGH: *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN* (II)

---

#### Structure

- 6.0 Objective
- 6.1 Introduction
  - 6.1.1 Khushwant Singh as a Sikh Gentleman
  - 6.1.2 The Obverse Side of the Genius of Khushwant Singh
- 6.2 The Man of Ideas
- 6.3 Truth, Love and A Little Malice: An Autobiography
- 6.4 Examination Oriented Notes and Jottings on *Train to Pakistan*
  - 6.4.1 The Locale of the Novel
  - 6.4.2 Iqbal: The Visitor to Mano Majra village
  - 6.4.3 Hukum Chand: The Magistrate During the Partition Days
  - 6.4.4 Juggat Singh (Jugga)
  - 6.4.5 A Sketch of Bhai Meet Singh
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Review Questions

---

#### 6.0 Objective

---

The objectives of this unit are the following:

1. To introduce the readers to Sardar Khushwant Singh as a Sikh.
2. To introduce him as a genius in the world of letters.
3. To acquaint the readers with his hydraheaded ideas on nature, society, religion, morality etc.
4. To discuss his philosophy of sex, love, humanitarianism and evil.
5. To evaluate and appreciate *Train to Pakistan* as a classic.
6. To appreciate Khushwant Singh's art of characterization through the portraits of characters in the novel.

---

#### 6.1 Introduction

---

##### 6.1.1 Khushwant Singh as a Sikh Gentleman

Sardar Khushwant Singh is an iconoclast. He is in his mid-nineties now. He was born in the

West Punjab sometime in 1915. Hemmed in by security guards at his front door and back garden, one cannot but admire the man for his sangfroid. He is more irritated by small things like people's tardiness than by big problems. One can picture him as a grand old man settled cozily with a book or a writing pad in his sofa-chair. One cannot help feeling warmed by his resonant voice and reassuring smile. He is a versatile personality- a man of many talents and moods. He is many things to many people. Some of his work is non-seriously turned out. Many times he is in his light vein. He is something of a one man industry: writer, editor, historian, publisher, landlord, propagandist for the authorities that matter. He has had his close association with Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, and K.P.S. Gill- the super-cop of India. Rewards and honours have come his way. He was nominated member of Parliament and acquired a posse of security personnel in his own right. He is a man of strong likes and dislikes. He is straight forward and blunt. He cannot mince words. He means what he says and says what he means. There is no beating about the bush so far as his critical remarks are concerned. When his nephew Baljit Malik tried to borrow books from his stock, he was greeted with the caustic remark, "No, you cannot borrow this one, because you haven't returned the last one." If one approaches his wife, she gives one less quarter saying, "Khushwant doesn't allow his books to be borrowed." Baljit Malik says that if a relative drops in without a prior appointment, he makes him feel at home. The visitor could help himself to a cup of tea or a shot of rum or whisky. He is surrounded by young foreign scholars mostly handsome women from Lahore or Islamabad.

He has a soft corner for Pakistan's women who reciprocate his admiration in equal measure. In his family circle there is a brood of writers and journalists- his daughter- Mala, his son- Rahul, his nephew- Tejbeer Singh (Jugnoo), Malvika w/o Tejbeer Singh, Harji Malik Khushwant Singh's brother in law etc. Khushwant Singh's life has been very close to books. He is well-read in the Urdu and Panjabi literature with which he embellishes his writings effectively in English. His Kayasth son-in-law Ravi Dayal published his evergreen best-seller *Train to Pakistan*. Khushwant Singh, thus, makes a joint stock company but all the stock has emanated from his pen. It is popularly held that Sikhism is a house-holder's religion with overdue emphasis on family life. In this sense, Khushwant Singh is a good Sikh. The real Khushwant Singh is not the one scribbling chronicles in the famous bulb of *The Indian Express* column, but a conscientious family man. One can imagine him by the fireplace pouring mellow evening drink to his wife Kavalit Kaur and fussing over his pretty grand daughter Naine. He is not ritualistically religious as he doesn't pray but he is proud of being a Sikh. He sports a beard, dons his turban and wears long locks. He once remarked in one of his columns in light vein, "Guru has ordained me to be a hirsute." He got indignant and perpetually upset when his son Rahul once decided to get him clean shaved- a Mona Sikh. He has cerebrally internalised the very spirit of Sikhism through his indulgence in its ritualistic practice. His translation of "Japji" is a classic. It is an intellectual feast to read his rendering of Guru Nanak's ode to the season *Bara Mah* in impeccable English. As a self-taught historian, he has made a mark. His two-volume *History of the Sikhs* is refreshingly free from academic jargon. The two volumes are not only readable, but they also present a humane account of the special role of Sikhs and Punjab in the larger context of the story of the Indian subcontinent. Khushwant Singh has always been a bridge between the sikhs and the rest of the World. His writings have also proved to be a link between the Sikh diaspora living in Canada, USA, England and else where and their Punjabi culture and the Sikh heritage.

### 6.1.2 The Obverse Side of the Genuis of Khushwant Singh

There is an obverse side of Khushwant Singh. His liking of Sanjay Gandhi, his backing of L.K. Advani for the New Delhi parliamentary seat cannot be explained away. He supported infamous Sanjay Gandhi's programme of forcing people to become sterilised. By and large, it seems that he likes to be in the good books of those who want to stay in power. He has indulged several times in espousing the cause of power hungry politicians and bureaucrats, though he has never known to be a psychopant. He was a fan of Mrs Indira Gandhi but he was disillusioned in course of time. Like all Sikhs, he was flabbergasted by Operation Blue star and the slaughter of Sikhs that followed Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination. He returned his "Padma Shri" or whatever it was that she had conferred upon him for supporting the national emergency. He had to go into hiding to save himself from the then Congress Party goons. In the book *Tragedy of Punjab* which he coauthored with Kuldeep Nayyar, he exposed those who had financed and strengthened Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. In his descriptions of the Bluestar operation and the carnage in New Delhi, Khushwant Singh's ink has dripped with pain and anguish to capture the trauma of the Sikh community which took about two decades to shake off the sense of alienation. Khushwant Singh once politically naive, and gullible is now a profound and articulate critic of the Indian polity highlighting secularism and progressivism. He has exercised a lot to boost the image of K.P.S. Gill- the super-cop of India from his lovely gateway retreat in Kasuali.

No critic can write about Khushwant Singh without a little smattering of sex. *Train to Pakistan* has its share of love and sex. Both love and sex have enhanced the poignancy and passion in this timeless novel. He had effectively blended sex in his fiction and newspaper columns. His treatment of sex, or rather misuse of it, in the novel *Delhi* disheartened the conscientious readers. His unwarranted diversion into pornography in its several chapters marred which one thought was otherwise a brilliantly historical novel. Sex is his morbid obsession. Prof. R.K. Kaul, who had always admired Khushwant Singh as a journalist, culture critic and writer, felt morally indignant and wrote an open letter to him giving vent to his anger. Professor Kaul did acknowledge that he was one of the most widely read writers of English in India. He had created a niche for himself in modern India as a man of letters. It was on his advice that the Government of India banned the entry of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* into India. Even the B.B.C. sought his opinion on various cultural and literary matters pertaining to India. Dr. Kaul asserted his standing as largely well founded and regarded him an authority on the Sikh religion. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha because of his balanced views on terrorism in Punjab. Dr Kaul specifically mentioned that his novel *The Train to Pakistan* was one of the best sellers in India and abroad. His translation of Iqbal's poems was brilliant and he referred to his translation of the sacred poetry of the Sikhs. Prof. Kaul admired Sardar Khushwant Singh's refusal to be taken in by mumbo-jumbo. He appreciated his systematic criticism of the introduction of Astrology in the University curriculum. Kaul appreciated his columns "*With Malice Towards All*" but he accused him of being 'senile'. In his column (The Hindustan Times, April 21, 2001) Sardar Khushwant Singh tried to palm off the third rate verse of Makarnad Paranjape. The columnist gave the plea that it was intelligible unlike most modern poetry. Prof. Kaul remarked rather bluntly, "If your taste has not grown with the times, it is not the fault of the modern poets." Prof. Kaul refused to swallow his pedestrian platitudes. Sardar Khushwant Singh wrote an obituary article on the late R.K. Narayan in the weekly *Outlook* (May 28, 2001). All that he had to say was that he persuaded him to see a blue film disgusted him. Yet Khushwant Singh was surprised that R.K. Narayan sat through the entire film. Sardar Khushwant

Singh's partiality for sexy humour is well known. "But was the death of Narayan an appropriate occasion for telling this story?" Was the question asked by Prof. Kaul.

Now as he cruises into his late nineties, Sardar Khushwant Singh has been turned into a prisoner under house arrest as it were. Surrounded by a posse of security guards, he has lost his personal freedom and social mobility. Surely he doesn't deserve to be a victim of those who settle scores only with the gun. "It makes no difference whether those who wield firearms are in or out of a uniform: whether they are part of a regular or irregular force, they are undesirables, says Baljit Malik. But this the tragedy of the times we live in. Khushwant Singh as a man, therefore, can be intolerant and vicious. There are conflicting threads in the texture of his personality.

---

## 6.2 The Man of Ideas

---

The recent "*Notes on the Great Indian Circus*" by the Khushwant Singh has shown that proper study of mankind is man. He has come out with impressive portraits of Sir C.P. Brahmchari. In his *Book of Unforgettable Women*, he writes on Mother Teresa with the same ease as he writes on the bandit queen Phoolan Devi. In his *Notes on the Great Indian Circus*, Khushwant Singh regrets the deforestation of Mount Abu as the hill birds have disappeared. There is an increasing number of men on the hill station. Urbanisation of Mount Abu is an unfortunate environmental phenomenon. The bucolic serenity of the place is lost.

*Nature Watch* is a fine book by Khushwant Singh. It describes birds, trees, insects and butterflies on the traditional pattern of Indian poets. In April, the golden Aureole- an aurborial bird- arrives. May is the month of laburnum; August is the month of colourful insects- fireflies, spotted cachelles, grasshoppers, velvety lady birds, and a host of beetles. In October, flocks of teal, mallard pintail shavellers, croaking ducks, geese, silver storks and cranes descend on the swamps of the pools of water. November is the month of butterflies. Khushwant Singh has taken the help of Naresh Chaturvedi's *Illustrated Book of Butterflies* *Nature Watch* shows the fantastic range of interests of the columnist. In his *Need for a New Religion and Other Essays* he proposes a new religion for India. He disapproves of unnecessary ritualistic practices and places of worship. Khushwant Singh does not believe in the efficacy of a prayer. He remarks, "Work is worship but worship is not work." Khushwant Singh's new religion is family planning. He says, "We must also make sterilization of both parents on the birth of their second child compulsory. An understanding to do so could be made a part of the vows taken at marriage. We have no right to overload an already populated country."

In his *Big Book of Malice*, he has written ironically "Rabari Devi has borne Lalu Prasad Yadav nine children." Khushwant Singh wooed the cause of family planning as emphasized by Sanjay Gandhi.

He is against cremation: "We are destroying our forests to dispose of the dead..... The earth is in need of rejuvenation. Humans, when they die, should be returned to the earth from which..... they emanate." (*Big Book of Malice* PP. 16-17) These are some of the challenging ideas of Khushwant Singh who proposes as a revolutionary and reformer a new religion for secular India. Sex figures prominently in his fiction. Perhaps it is the last infirmity of his noble mind.

It is very shocking that his essay on Amrita Sher Gil depicts her as a nymphomaniac. In his essay

*Sex in Indian Life*, he had written anatomical details about one young married couple having sex in the train. This essay is included in his book *We the Indians*. By training, Khushwant Singh should have been a lawyer but he did not want to make brisk money out of other people's quarrels. Instead, he became press attache in London and Ottawa. He served UNESCO in Paris.

He wrote the *History of the Sikhs* in the U.S.A. He has intimate knowledge of four countries- England, Canada, U.S.A. and France. He happens to be a voracious reader and a widely travelled man. He has breath of ideas and catholicity of outlook. This makes him India's leading journalist.

---

### **6.3 Truth, Love and A Little Malice: An Autobiography**

---

Khushwant Singh's autobiography was to be published in January 1996 but Maneka Gandhi obtained an injunction from Delhi High Court restraining its publication. But the injunction was vacated by the same court. Now the book: *Truth, Love and Little Malice: An Autobiography* is readily available. Needless to say that many Indians have written autobiography but very few among them are worth reading as they hardly reveal the real personalities of their authors: It required great moral courage to make one's private life public truthfully. The two earlier autobiographies which ideally qualify the test of truthfulness and authenticity are Mahatma Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* and Nirad C. Choudhary's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Khushwant Singh's *Autobiography* is certainly equally authentic. It has been written feelingly and conscientiously. Like Nirad C. Choudhary is not so called an unknown Indian but the most well-known Indian as a journalist and columnist.

The dominant concerns of Khushwant Singh's life have been truth, love and malice as the very title of his autobiography also indicates. His pursuit of truth has been very comprehensive. He has tried his best to seek the truth about God, religion, love, human relationships and above all about himself. Whatever he has been able to realise from sharp observation, deep study and personal experience, he states lucidly, candidly, frankly and fearlessly. He is a realist and rationalist. He doesn't take the opinions of others for granted: he is never overawed by the wise saws of great men. On the contrary, he has an irresistible felish for ruining reputations and exposing the weaknesses of renowned personalities. His autobiography has several instances of this kind. He does not spare V.K. Krishna Menon who was napping during an important press conference in London in the presence of Pandit Nehru. He writes about Nehru being received by lady Mountbatten in negligee- a gown of thin fabric at midnight. He tells us about Indira Gandhi shouting furiously at Maneka Gandhi- her daughter-in-law. Thus, he is out and out an iconoclast as he brings down the mighty from their high pedestals. He is honest enough to record his own flaws and faults. He does not spare his close friends and relatives either. Since he is running in his nineties, he has come in contact with hundreds of distinguished person in India and abroad. His pen portraits of them are succinctly and scintillatingly drawn. His pen portraits display the same brilliance that R.K.Laxman did in his cartoons. Sardar Khushwant Singh disapproves of hypocrisy of morals. One of the most likeable pen portraits among the hundreds in his autobiography happens to be of his friend late Manzur Qadir- one time foreign minister of Pakistan. In this portrait, there is no iota of malice: it is the product of love and truth. In his autobiography, he refers to the original personages many characters that appear in his short stories and novels. The information and the back ground material enhance our enjoyment of his fiction. His autobiography is saturated with



apt Urdu and Persian couplets. They add to the charm of the book.

The key to his originality as a writer, journalist and man lies in his triple objectives: “inform, amuse and irritate” This syntactic string makes Sardar Khushwant Singh a Sphinx without a secret. He does irritate the sensitive readers with his obsession with sex: he crosses the limits of decency, and turns porno and obscene. This notion of morbidity on his part is rather unforgivable. I have specifically referred to late Professor R.K.Kaul’s remarks in the context in this unit.

When it comes to discussing his style, I state without any reservation that it wants sublimity and depth, it is quite earthly- down to the ground. Its chief attributes are clarity, simplicity and brevity. It is immediately intelligible. It is chatty, humorous and readable. He is read with equal interest both by his admirers and detractors. His fiction sells because he is a successful salesman. He is not Miller’s Willy Loman.

He wrote a post script to his autobiography in November 2001 when his wife was critically ill. He concluded, “I was always certain that she would outlast me by many years.” But he lost hope. He had a gut feeling that would go before him. “I will put away my pen and write no more.” His wife passed away shortly afterwards. She was cremated without any religious ceremony. He put an ad in the papers forbidding anyone to visit him to condole her death as he wished to be left alone to overpower his grief. He has not put away his pen as he thought he would. His popular column appears in many papers. His readers expect the grand old man to amuse, entertain and titillate them so long as he can hold the pen to write. His autobiography is not his swan song. His masterpiece *Train to Pakistan* will be coeternal with eternity. His book *A History of Sikhs* will always be read as an authentic chronicle of the community he belongs to.

---

## **6.4 Examination Oriented Notes and Jottings on *Train to Pakistan***

---

### **6.4.1 The Locale of the Novel: *Train to Pakistan***

Mano Majra is a small village in which there are three brick buildings- one is the mosque, another one is a Gurudwara and the third one is Lala Ram Lal’s house. Lala Ram Lal is a money lender. There are other huts of mud and clay. Mostly Sikhs and Muslims live there. The Sikhs are the owners of the agricultural soil of the village and the Muslims are the tenants on their fields. There is a pond surrounded by keekar trees at the western extremity of the village. There is three feet long slab of sandstone under a keekar tree. It is their local deity worshipped by all the villagers irrespective of caste and creed.

Mano Majra is situated half a mile away from the Sutlej river. When the river is flooded, it splits into several streams making a delta. There is a railway bridge over the river and an earthen dam extending upto the railway station. The bridge has one way track. There is a colony of shopkeepers and hawkers at the station. The station master has to sell the tickets at the window, he has to collect the tickets from the passengers, he waves the green flag for the trains. He operates the telegraph tickets himself. The A.S.M. handles the levers in the glass cabin to control signals and help in the shunting of engines. He lights lamps on the platform behind the red and green glass of signals in the evening and puts them out in the morning. Only two passenger trains stop at Mano Majra station. Many goods trains also pass from there.

One train starts towards Lahore early in the morning. As it approaches the bridge, it blows two loud and long whistles. The villagers know that it is the morning. This is the time when crows caw, bats fly to the Peepal tree, and the Mullah stands in the mosque facing the west, cupping his ears with his fingers, saying “Allah-ho-Akbar.” Then the Sikh priest takes his bath and makes his prayer till the passenger train arrives from Delhi by 10.30 in the morning. During the day, the farmers are busy in the fields, women are busy in their daily work and children take their cattle out for grazing along the bank of the river. Sparrows hop and chirp about the roofs, and dogs lie near the walls of the huts.

In the afternoon, the elders gather under the Peepal tree after the evening meals, while the boys play and women pick lice from one another’s hair. The people talk about births, marriages and deaths. When evening passenger train comes from Lahore, herd of cattle return to the village; evening meal is cooked: The village folks eat and drink. The goods train passes as usual. They say “Sat Sri Akal” to one another. The Sikh priest makes his prayer in the Gurudwara.

The village is calm and quiet at night. Only the dogs bark and the bats flit across the streets. Mano Majra is alive to the sounds of passenger trains. It is a succulent peaceful town. The arrival of trains regulates the life in the village when the morning train comes from Delhi on its way to Lahore, they know that it is day break.

Mano Majra represents the typical Punjabi village of the pre-independence period with uneventful life-style of the unsophisticated villagers.

#### **6.4.2 Iqbal: The Visitor to Mano Majra Village**

Iqbal was a visitor to Mano Majra village. He came to the village when the robbery at Lala Ram Lal’s house had been committed. Lala had been ruthlessly murdered. It was a case of gruesome murder. Iqbal was clad in kurta and pyjama and brown waist coat jacket of coarse cloth when he got off the train. He carried his hold-all himself. He was well educated and looked quite sophisticated in his appearance. He lifted his hold-all on his shoulders and enquired where the Gurudwara was in the village. He went straightway to Gurudwara and recognised it with the triangular yellow flag on the flag mast. He happened to meet Bhai Meet Singh at the Gurudwara. Meet Singh was a simple righteous man who arranged his lodgings there.

During his conversation with Bhai Meet Singh he disclosed that he had been abroad for many years. The station master and the policemen treated him with diffidence as he said “Thank You.” His politeness expressed his educated background. He called himself a social worker.

He lived in a sophisticated way and he was simply astonished at the robbery in Mano Majra. He was a man of progressive ideas. He believed that criminals were not born but they were dragged into crime by hunger, poverty and injustice. He was very well-mannered. He was for freedom of the nation. He was not a ‘comrade’ - a member of the People’s party of India to maintain peace in Mano-Majra in the wake of communalism and the partition. But he was arrested the very next morning from the Gurudwara where he had been staying.

He was a native of Jhelum from Pakistan. Bhai Meet Singh called him Iqbal Singh as the people asked about his identity. They suspected him to be Iqbal Mohammad. Moreover, he did not sport a beard: he was a ‘mechanised’ Mona Sardar.

Iqbal was surprised as he was arrested. But he was kept as 'A' class prisoner. He was given the facility of reading the newspapers. In jail, Jugga came in his contact. Jugga was deeply impressed by his ideas. Ultimately Iqbal was released from illegal detention. He was not a man of suspicious character. Bhai Meet Singh respected him as a virtuous and learned man.

### **6.4.3 Hukum Chand: The Magistrate During the Partition Days**

Hukum Chand is the Deputy Commissioner and Magistrate of the district. He is a typical administrative officer of the British Raj. He comes on a tour programme to the dak bungalow of Mano Majra. It is well tidied up before his arrival. He is by nature very greedy, unjust, alcoholic, lusty and rather manipulating. He misuses his powers and exercises his authority to amass wealth. He is a typical corrupt bureaucrat.

Though he is aged, he sleeps with a young Muslim girl (Haseena) who is like his dead daughter. He is to look after the law and order situation in the district but he takes things easy. Meet Singh tells that Hukum Chand has risen from a constable to the high post of Deputy Commissioner. He has obliged his friends and has flattered his officers. Thus, he has manipulated his promotions.

He is so greedy that he tells the sub-inspector that Muslim refugees who came to India were looted and fleeced. He instructed him that the outgoing Muslims should not be able to take away much. Thus, he wanted the booty of the loot and robbery. Therefore, Malli was released from jail to commit indiscriminate robberies and give him his share too.

Hukum Chand was fond of whiskey, brandy and beer. He believed in pomp and show. He dyed and waxed his moustache, applied skin lotions to his face and used perfumed talcum powder, and applied a swab of cotton with decolgne and musk rose perfume to his dress. He took punctilious care of his officer like appearance.

He kept Jugga and Iqbal in illegal custody though they were not a party to the robbery at Lala Ram Lal's house.

There are moments when he felt uneasy about his misdeeds. He felt guilty of his sexual transgressions with the young Muslim girl Haseena who was of the age of his daughter. He felt he was losing his grip over the law and order situation. He apprehended danger to his life.

### **6.4.4 Juggat Singh (Jugga)**

Sardar Khushwant Singh is the pastmaster of the art of characterization. Jugga is a character of unsound reputation due to his family background. He was the son of a dacoit Alam Singh who was hanged a couple of years ago. Jugga was the tallest young man in Mano Majra village. He was a notorious history sheeter.

The most romantic aspect of his life was his passionate love for Nooran who was the daughter of Imam Buksh of Mano Majra village. Nooran's father was a righteous man- Imam of the mosque. Nooran and Juggat had their tryst rendezvous clandestinely during the night hours. He was released on parole and he had been forbidden to leave the village. He told his mother a lie that he was going to the field but it was his love for Nooran that ummoned him.

Jugga was a fearless man. The people of the village talked about him with suppressed tongues but nobody condemned his love affair with Nooran. Jugga did not approve of Malli who was out and out a rogue and a notorious dacoit. Jugga was deadly against Malli, who was terribly afraid of him. He could not tolerate his presence.

He was impressed by Iqbal and told him that the government was responsible for making him a criminal.

Jugga cut the knot of the string which was fastened on the bridge to stop the train and to massacre the outgoing Muslims. He sacrificed his life and let the train pass. He had rushed to the Gurudwara to listen to the holy words from the scripture to enlighten himself before performing the heroic action.

Thus Jugga leads full blooded life. He has his passion, his desire, his ambition. He has a moral fibre inherent in his character which makes him a heroic figure. He makes supreme sacrifice for his love with Nooran who must be travelling by the train.

#### **6.4.5 A Sketch of Bhai Meet Singh**

Gurudwara or the Sikh Temple is a significant place in Mano Majra village, the locale of the novel *Train to Pakistan* by Sardar Khuswant Singh. Meet Singh is a 'Bhai' at the Gurudwara. He is the caretaker of the holy scripture- 'Gurugranth Sahib'. It is neatly placed in gaudy silken cloth. There was a well with a high parapet in the courtyard. The yellow flag fluttered on the mastpole. The flag had the symbol of the Sikh faith upon it.

Bhai Meet Singh was a righteous man. He was a man of integrity. He was devoted to his religious rituals. He called 'Iqbal' as 'Iqbal Singh' to waive the doubt in the minds of the villagers whether he was a Muslim. He was a mechanized sardar- clean shaved and short-haired. He told him to cover his head and keep his shoes off while going close to the scripture. He was asked not to smoke. Iqbal took every care to obey Bhai Meet Singh's instruction. Bhai Meet Singh had a great respect for Iqbal for his high education and vast knowledge.

Meet Singh knew how Hukum Chand had risen to the position of the Deputy Commissioner and Magistrate of the District from an ordinary constable. He kept his sahib's pleased and got promotions one after the other. He had been obliging his friends and relatives with jobs.

Bhai Meet Singh's austere and puritan life speaks volumes of his faith in God. He is shocked to learn about the robbery committed at Lala Ram Lal's house. He was under the impression that Juggat Singh was a dacoit and he was a party to the dacoity in the village and the murder of Lala. Personally he stood for Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity. He snubbed the youngman who advocated murder of outgoing Muslims from Mano Majra. He told him what fault they had that they should be butchered.

He is unassumingly simple. He likes Iqbal and accommodates him in the Gurudwara with deep cordiality and hospitality.

---

### **6.5 Let Us Sum Up**

---

*Train to Pakistan* is a famous novel by Sardar Khushwant Singh who is an extra ordinarily

intelligent journalist, writer and novelist. He is a brilliant satirist. He is a great writer who ranks with Nirad C. Choudhury, Girish Karnad, Frank Moreas, Nissim Ezekiel, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Nayantara Sehgal,.....

He edited *The Illustrated Weekly of India* for several years. He writes a column in *The Indian Express*. He has several books to his credit. His observation is very sharp. He is in his mid nineties now but he is intellectually as sharp as ever. He returned his “Padmashri” when there was ‘The Blue Star’ operation in the Golden Temple of Amritsar to defeat the forces of Bhinderawallah during the tenure of Indira Gandhi’s Prime Ministership. *Train to Pakistan* is a classic in the post-Independence fiction of India. It is like Bhishm Sahani’s *Tamas* and Yash Pal’s *Jhutha Sach*. It is authentic depiction of the inhuman and savage nature of communal violence in the wake of the Partition. It is an eye-opener and focuses on the most shocking and unfortunate event of Indian history. It is the tale of ignoble savagery documented by the novelist of integrity.

*Train to Pakistan* was written to expose the stark reality of the Partition in which the two communities living together for centuries became blood hungry and at daggers drawn. They became thieves, robbers and cut throats overnight. It was published in 1956. The locale of the novel is a village- Mano Majra- situated on the bank of the Sutlej near the Pakistan border. The novel has the touch of Punjabi culture as the author happens to be a Sikh himself.

Khushwant Singh depicts in the novel the atmosphere of horror, tension and communal hatred. The novel expresses the two nation theory based on communalism. It created millions of refugees in their own country. The British rulers are not to be fully blamed because the frenzy of communalism was fanned by the fundamentalist Hindus and Muslims of India. The outgoing British rulers took the political advantage of this situation and left the wounds green. The weeping wounds are not healed yet and anytime communal riots break out in the pockets of the nation due to local anti-social elements and communal forces.

The novel is very significant to grasp the psyche of Indian Hindus and Muslims. The Partition has been a great blunder in Indian history. It was a tripartite conspiracy: The British government in India, Indian National Congress and the Muslim League endorsed the two-nation theory on the eve of Independence.

---

## 6.5 Review Questions

---

1. Write an essay on Khushwant Singh as a Sikh. (100 Words)
2. Discuss Khushwant Singh as an articulate journalist. (100 Words)
3. What are his ideas on religion and morality? Discuss. (150 Words)
4. Write a note on his autobiography. (250 Words)
5. Describes Mano Majra village as depicted in *Train to Pakistan*.
6. What is the main theme of *Train to Pakistan*. (100 Words)
7. Write short notes on the following characters. (150 Words each)

1. Bhai Meet Singh.
  2. Iqbal- the visitor
  3. Juggat Singh (Jugga) and his supreme sacrifice.
  4. Hukum Chand
  8. Describe the end of the novel. (250 Words)
-

## UNIT-7

---

### HENRY JAMES : *THE ART OF FICTION*

---

#### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Study Guide
- 7.2 About the Age : The Edwardian Era
- 7.3 About the Author : Henry James
- 7.4 About the Text : *The Art of Fiction*
- 7.5 Critical Analysis of the Text
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions.
- 7.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.8 Answers to SAQs
- 7.9 Review Questions.
- 7.10 Bibliography

---

#### 7.0 Objective

---

This unit aims at familiarizing you with

1. Henry James and his important works.
2. *The Art of Fiction* as a literary text.
3. Various theories about the novel propounded by James in his *Art of Fiction*.
4. Application of the various critical views of James about the novel to some text as an illustration.

---

#### 7.1 Study Guide

---

This unit is primarily based on *The Art of Fiction* but without giving examples to illustrate certain points raised in *The Art of Fiction* would be absurd. Therefore examples from various novels especially from James' *Wings of the Dove* have been taken. Critical material from various sources including the internet has been provided to you. You should attempt the self assessment questions and tally your answers with those given in the unit. The Review Questions are meant for the preparation for the examination.

---

#### 7.2 About the Age : The Edwardian Era

---

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and Edward VII reigned England until 1910. The World War I

(1914-1918) caused drastic changes in the structure of the British society. The Edwardian period produced a rich harvest of novels. Conrad, F.M. Ford, Kipling, Bennett, Galsworthy, Wells and Henry James are the famous novelists of the era. Barrie, Galsworthy, Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge and G.B. Shaw caught the attention of the public in the field of drama.

This unit will present briefly Henry James and his thoughts about the art of fiction that is presented by his same titled essay.

James had read classics of English, American, French, and German literature and Russian classics in translation. His models were Dickens, Balzac, and Hawthorne. Then, there is a harness of French, British, and American culture in his works. His first novel, *Watch and Ward* (1871) was written while he was travelling through Venice and Paris. James wrote novels that portrayed Americans living abroad during his first years in Europe. He is a very important literary figure both in American and British culture. However, he loves Europe and this fact gives us a clue about his interest in different cultures that come out as American characters traveling abroad in most of his novels.

Henry James, at the other extreme, never ceased to regard America as essentially an outlying region of European, more specifically of Anglo-Saxon, civilization . . . Henry James was a patriot to his race, and his final transfer of citizenship, though immediately called forth by his sense of America's procrastination in the World War, was but the outward sign of a temperamental repatriation already complete.

In fact, the outbreak of World War I was a shock for James and in July 1915 he became a British citizen in protest against the U.S.' refusal to enter the war. He was sensitive on nationalism because "nationalism hurts James worse than internationalism: he suffers from the sensitiveness to national differences which kept him concerned too much with them and too little with the universal human likenesses which transcend nationality.

It is also significant that Henry James lived between the years 1843 and 1916 that is form the period between late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. James's "main themes were the innocence of the New World in conflict with the corruption and wisdom of the Old" (Books and Writers). We may easily view the reflections of his themes on his novels which has characteristically understanding and sensitively drawn lady portraits. Among his masterpieces is *Daisy Miller* (1879) where the young and innocent American girl finds her values in conflict with European sophistication, in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) a young headstrong American woman becomes a victim of an intrigue played upon her during her travels in Europe. *The Bostonians*, (1886) was set in the era of the rising feminist movement. *What Maisie Knew* (1897) depicts a young girl who must choose between her parents and a motherly old governess and in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) a young American girl Milly's victimization because of her heritage is told.

James' novels, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Washington Square*, and *The Wings of the Dove* were made film versions in 1997. Cathleen Myers who wrote an appreciation on "*Washington Square* and *The Wings of the Dove*" claims that James is a "subtle, ironic novelist whose wry wit is difficult to capture on screen". She significantly emphasizes his strong use of language and characters as: "The interest in James novels is almost exclusively in what the characters think and feel rather than in what they actually do and this does not translate well on screen, and the ambiguity of James' narrative rarely



translates at all”.

---

### 7.3 About the Author : Henry James

---

Henry James (1843-1916) is a famous American-born writer, gifted with talents in literature, psychology, and philosophy. James wrote 20 novels, 112 stories, 12 plays and a number of literary criticism. His models were Dickens, Balzac, and Hawthorne. James once said that he learned more of the craft of writing from Balzac “than from anyone else”.

**“A novel is in its broadest sense a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.”** (from *The Art of Fiction*, 1885)

Henry James was born in New York City into a wealthy family. His father, Henry James Sr., was one of the best-known intellectuals in mid-nineteenth-century America, whose friends included Thoreau, Emerson and Hawthorne. James made little money from his novels. Once his friend, the writer Edith Wharton, secretly arranged him a royal advance of \$8,000 for *THE IVORY TOWER* (1917), but the money actually came from Wharton’s royalty account with the publisher. When Wharton sent him a letter bemoaning her unhappy marriage, James replied: “Keep making the movements of life.”

In his youth James traveled back and forth between Europe and America. He studied with tutors in Geneva, London, Paris, Bologna and Bonn. At the age of nineteen he briefly attended Harvard Law School, but was more interested in literature than studying law. James published his first short story, ‘*A Tragedy of Errors*’ two years later, and then devoted himself to literature. In 1866-69 and 1871-72 he was contributor to the *Nation* and *Atlantic Monthly*.

From an early age James had read the classics of English, American, French and German literature, and Russian classics in translation. His first novel, *WATCH AND WARD* (1871), appeared first serially in the *Atlantic*. James wrote it while he was traveling through Venice and Paris. *Watch and Ward* tells a story of a bachelor who adopts a twelve-year-old girl and plans to marry her.

After living in Paris, where James was contributor to the *New York Tribune*, he moved to England, living first in London and then in Rye, Sussex. “It is a real stroke of luck for a particular country that the capital of the human race happens to be British. Surely every other people would have it theirs if they could. Whether the English deserve to hold it any longer might be an interesting field of inquiry; but as they have not yet let it slip the writer of these lines professes without scruple that the arrangement is to his personal taste. For after all if the sense of life is greatest there, it is a sense of the life of people of our incomparable English speech.” During his first years in Europe James wrote novels that portrayed Americans living abroad. James’s years in England were uneventful. In 1905 he visited America for the first time in twenty-five years, and wrote ‘Jolly Corner’. It was based on his observations of New York, but also a nightmare of a man, who is haunted by a *doppelgänger*.

Between 1906 and 1910 James revised many of his tales and novels for the so-called New York Edition of his complete works. It was published by Charles Scribner’s Sons. His autobiography, *A Small Boy And Others* (1913) was continued in *Notes Of A Son And Brother* (1914). The third volume, *The Middle Years*, appeared posthumously in 1917. The outbreak of World War I was a

shock for James and in 1915 he became a British citizen as a loyalty to his adopted country and in protest against the US's refusal to enter the war.

James suffered a stroke on December 2, 1915. He expected to die and exclaimed: "So this is it at last, the distinguished thing!" However, James died three months later in Rye on February 28, 1916. Two novels, *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense Of The Past* (1917), were left unfinished at his death.

Characteristic for James novels are understanding and sensitively drawn lady portraits; James himself was a homosexual, but sensitive to basic sexual differences and the fact that he was a male. His main themes were the innocence of the New World in conflict with corruption and wisdom of the Old. Among his masterpieces is *Daisy Miller* (1879), where the young and innocent American Daisy finds her values in conflict with European sophistication. In *The Portrait Of A Lady* (1881) again a young American woman is fooled during her travels in Europe. James started to write the work in Florence in 1879 and continued with it in Venice. The definitive version appeared in 1908. "I had rooms on Riva Sciaconi, at the top of a house near the passage leading off to San Zaccaria; the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to myself to have been constantly driven, in the fruitless fidget of composition, as if to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn't come into sight."

The protagonist is Isabel Archer, a penniless orphan. She goes to England to stay with her aunt and uncle, and their tubercular son, Ralph. Isabel inherits money and goes to Continent with Mrs Touchett and Madame Merle. She turns down proposals of marriage from Casper Goodwood, and marries Gilbert Osmond, a middle-aged snobbish widower with a young daughter, Pansy. "He had a light, lean, rather languid-looking figure, and was apparently neither tall nor short. He was dressed as a man who takes little other trouble about it than to have no vulgar thing." Isabel discovers that Pansy is Madame Merle's daughter, it was Madame Merle's plot to marry Isabel to Osmond so that he, and Pansy can enjoy Isabel's wealth. Caspar Goodwood makes a last attempt to gain her, but she returns to Osmond and Pansy.

*The Bostonians* (1886), set in the era of the rising feminist movement, was based on Alphonse Daudet's novel *L'Évangéliste*. *What Maisie Knew* (1897) depicted a preadolescent young girl, who must chose between her parents and a motherly old governess. In *The Wings Of The Dove* (1902) a heritage destroys the love of a young couple. James considered *The Ambassadors* (1903) his most "perfect" work of art. The novel depicts Lambert Strether's attempts to persuade Mrs Newsome's son Chad to return from Paris back to the United States. Strether's possibility to marry Mrs Newsome is dropped and he remains content in his role as a widower and observer. "The beauty that suffuses *The Ambassadors* is the reward due to a fine artist for hard work. James knew exactly what he wanted, he pursued the narrow path of aesthetic duty, and success to the full extent of his possibilities has crowned him. The pattern has woven itself, with modulation and reservations Anatole France will never attain. But at what sacrifice!" (from *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M. Forster, 1927)

Although James is best-known for his novels, his essays are now attracting audience outside scholarly connoisseurs. In his early critics James considered British and American novels dull and formless and French fiction "intolerably unclean". "M. Zola is magnificent, but he strikes an English

reader as ignorant; he has an air of working in the dark; if he had as much light as energy, his results would be of the highest value.” (from *The Art of Fiction*) In *Partial Portraits* (1888) James paid tribute to his elders, and Emerson, George Eliot, and Turgenev. His advice to aspiring writers avoided all theorizing: “Oh, do something from your point of view”. H.G. Wells used James as the model for George Boon in his *Boon* (1915). When the protagonist argued that novels should be used for propaganda, not art, James wrote to Wells: “It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process. If I were Boon I should say that any pretense of such a substitute is helpless and hopeless humbug; but I wouldn’t be Boon for the world, and am only yours faithfully, Henry James.”

James’s most famous tales include ‘*The Turn of the Screw*’, written mostly in the form of a journal, was first published serially in *Collier’s Weekly*, and then with another story in *The Two Magics* (1898). The protagonist is a governess, who works on a lonely estate in England. She tries to save her two young charges, Flora and Miles, two both innocent and corrupted children, from the demonic influence of the apparitions of two former servants in the household, steward Peter Quint and the previous governess Miss Jessel. Her employer, the children’s uncle, has given strict orders not to bother him with any of the details of their education. Although the children evade the questions about the ghosts but she certain is that the children see them. When she tries to exorcize their influence, Miles dies in her arms. The story inspired later a debate over the question of the “reality” of the ghosts, were her visions only hallucinations. In the beginning of his career James had rejected “spirit-rappings and ghost-raising”, but in the 1880s he become interested in the unconscious and the supernatural. James wrote in 1908 that “Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not “ghosts” at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft; if not, more pleasingly, fairies of the legendary order, wooing their victims forth to see them dance under the moon.” Virginia Woolf thought that Henry James’s beings have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts - “the blood-stained captains, the white horses, the headless ladies of dark lanes and windy commons.” Edmund Wilson was convinced that the story was “primarily intended as a characterization of the governess”.

---

## 7.4 About the Text : *The Art of Fiction*

---

In *The Art of Fiction* Henry James states and supports his belief that a novel is art and that it is the responsibility of the novelist to take that art form seriously. James states that writers should write realistically and avoid “make-believe” and “apologetic” forms of literature. James openly states that “fiction is one of the fine arts, deserving in its turn all the honors”. James goes on to say that the true art of writing fiction is “to catch the color of life itself”. In *The Art of Fiction* Henry James publicly discusses his own private opinion in an attempt to remind writers of their duty to create a “perfect work”.

In an essay written in response to an essay written by Walter Besant, both titled “*The Art of Fiction*”, Henry James provides both a new understanding of fiction and greater understand of his own works. James analyses, however briefly, the process of creation of a work of fiction, readers’ responses to it, and the requirements of the work and the author. James’ language within this essay may be in need of some levity, but he does occasionally break through the haze to make a very strong and effective point: “The only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of a novel is...that

it be sincere". There is point in which over-analysis takes away from the intention, the point in which talk of theory wanders away from the actual work of art. This is as true today in the critique of fiction as it was in James' time. In analysis we often place requirements of a piece of work. We state that for something to be this, it must then have that. These restrictions and guidelines can hardly be placed on fiction.

---

## 7.5 Critical Analysis of the Text

---

As soon as one reads Henry James' *The Art of Fiction*, it is significant to notice how James treats novels as directly related to life itself. Henry James thinks that novel is a history so that like historians we should look at the truth in the novel that is hand in hand with life itself. Therefore, James claims "novel" in his essay *The Art of Fiction* as:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression . . . The form it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact ; then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones.

James wants the novelist to take art seriously and he expects them to find out the best method in order to present the subject in the best way. He depicts the complexity of life without spoiling its reality. Besides, James believes that this can only be achieved by solving the technical problems. As he informs us in his essay that the form to represent reality is in the second place, since the most important thing is to represent life. The Turkish scholar states his ideas about Henry James :

. . . novel is more real than life, because life in novels comes out after being purified from the excessive details result in loss of meaning. If art provides such a purification, the importance of the form and the method that James presents in his novels are not an escape; on the contrary they aim at representing life in the most meaningful way.

James defines how the style should be in *The Art of Fiction*: "It would be absurdly simple if he could be taught that a great deal of 'description' would make them so, or that, on the contrary, the absence of description and the cultivation of dialogue, or the absence of dialogue and the multiplication of 'incident' would rescue him from his difficulties". His descriptions of places and persons cover a large space in *The Wings of the Dove*. The descriptions of both people and places present the readers a vivid sense of reality in James' novels. James describes Aunt Maud in *The Wings of the Dove* as: "Mrs. Lowder was London, was life—the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray. There were some things, after all, of which Britannia was afraid; but Aunt Maud was afraid of nothing – not even, it would appear, of arduous thought". Here is another example of a personal description about Kate:

She would have been meanwhile a wonderful lioness for a show, an extraordinary figure in cage or anywhere; majestic, magnificent, high-coloured, all brilliant gloss, perpetual satin, twinkling bugles and flashing gems, with a lustre of agate eyes, a sheen of raven hair, a polish of complexion that was like that of well-kept china and that-as if the skin were too tight-told especially at curves and corners.

On the other hand Milly is described as a dove : "Milly was indeed a dove; this was the figure, though it most applied to her spirit. . . . so far as one remembered that doves have wings and won-

drous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds”. James is very successful in describing people: Kate resembles to a lioness who acts according to her interests and gets the best as she can whereas, Milly is soft and helpless resembling especially a dove. These characters also reveal the characteristics of the society that reflect its members. James also describes Piazza San Marco : “ . . . as a great social saloon, a smooth-floored, blue-roofed chamber of amenity, favourable to talk; or rather, to be exact, not in the middle, but at the point where our pair had paused by a common impulse after leaving the great mosque-like church”. Descriptions may also reflect the psychological moods of the characters. For example, when Lord Mark comes to Venice the weather changes as if expressing Lord Mark’s bad character who is always after his interest. In this case bad event (Lord Mark’s coming) is directly related to the bad weather. James uses the rain to express Densher’s desolation when Milly shuts him out in Venice upon Lord Mark’s coming: “The vice in the air, otherwise, was too much like the breath of fate. The weather had changed, the rain was ugly, the wind wicked, the sea impossible, because of Lord Mark. It was because of him, a fortiori, that the palace was closed”.

*The Wings of the Dove* is a touching and unusual triangular love and betrayal story. It opens with Kate Croy going to live with a wealthy, cultured aunt shortly after the death of her mother. Kate’s aunt Maud Lowder has an intention to set up her niece in a socially acceptable marriage. But Kate falls in love with a penniless journalist Merton Densher who is far below her social station. Her aunt threatens to disinherit Kate if she does not break off the relationship, then Kate is faced with a moral dilemma. Milly Theale and her travelling companion, Susan Shephard Stringham come to Europe for Milly’s health reasons. Since Mrs. Stringham is a school friend of Mrs. Lowder long ago, they visit Mrs. Lowder at Lancaster Gate. Milly is a beautiful American multi-millionaire’s daughter who adores Kate and falls in love with Merton. When Kate learns that Milly is terminally ill, this seems the solution to all problems. Here, the ironic twists begin. Kate develops her plot: that Densher should marry Milly for her money, then, upon her death when he would be rich, he could marry Kate. However, things do not work out in the way Kate wishes them to be. Sir Luke Street informs Milly about Kate and Densher’s plot when he visits her in Venice. She dies helplessly leaving some amount of money for Densher. While Densher’s conscience is disturbed by betraying Milly, he tells Kate that she can have the money without him or him without the money but not both. Kate understands everything but she is unmoved by her selfishness and greed. Besides, she thinks about Densher is in love with Milly’s memory so that she says: “We shall never be again as we were” and the novel finishes at that point. We are not told whether she takes the money or not, nor is there any reason why we should be, because it only matters for Kate. She has won her game but lost her lover forever.

The novel explicitly displays the real-life elements. The writer Leon Edel in *Henry James, The Middle Years: 1882-1895* draws our attention that James’ main argument “was that the novel; far from being ‘make-believe’, actually competes with life, since it records the stuff of history . . . James criticized the factitious novel with its spurious happy ending . . .”. Henry James asserts in *The Art of Fiction* that “It matters little that, as a work of art, it should really be as little or as much concerned to supply happy endings, sympathetic characters . . .”. It is the same case in the *The Wings of the Dove*, since it is a tragedy not ending with a happy end. James deftly navigates the complexities and irony of a moral treachery in his novel. The drama unites Kate, Densher, and Milly in a drawing room of London and the piazzas of Venice. “. . . beyond the scrim of its marvelous rhetorical and psychological devices, *The Wings of the Dove* offers an unfettered vision of our civilization and its discontents. It

represents a culmination of James' art and as such, of the art of the novel itself."

James' theme turned out to be quite as much American character as European setting. He successfully describes the settings that we can see Americans abroad, or Americans at home in the light of foreign observations.

His American settings are but palely conceived; and his figure do not find the proper background to bring them out and set off their special character. But the crusading Americans — variegated types, comic and romantic — with the foreign settings in which they so perfectly find themselves, these make up a local province as distinct in colour and feature.

James was first of all possessed of as much American material as he could absorb. Besides, we should better realize that a man's country is not always the country of his birth. That is why James turns his interest to Europe and European civilization that we can exemplify this fact in *The Wings of the Dove* by the use of characters. The writer Pelham Edgar informs us about James' inclinations in *The Art of Fiction* as:

We must distinguish between our natural and our spiritual home, and every circumstance of the young James's upbringing turned his mind and inclinations Europewards. As he matured these affinities strengthened. What increasingly interested him were the developed forms of civilization, the rich accretions which time and tradition alone can give.

It is easy to sense the reflections of both American and British culture by the use of the characters. That is to say, Milly represents the innocence of the new-world faith whereas Kate represents the wisdom of the Old-world culture. It is the time when manipulation was a tool for women in the world of the aristocracy. The expectations of the society were so important that they create conflicts of interests. A man in British society was supposed to be wealthy, have good manners, position, and the unique goal of typical Aristocratic woman was to marry a wealthy and a good positioned gentleman who was a key point for her security in the society. One critic emphasizes this fact as: "In James' London of 1910, a woman needed two things: money and an acceptable husband. Kate sacrifices herself for society. Although she is in love with Densher she finds a very strange way: a plan to get married to Densher. She finds ways to be acceptable by the society." The need of being acceptable socially leads her to depravity. Kate's diabolical "plan" can be considered as morally bankrupt. Her project is justifiable not only in her particular perspective, but from her "society's" perspective as well. First, Kate would fulfill her very real financial obligation to her impoverished extended family. Secondly, more importantly, she could marry the man she loves since she would have secured the money to make the marriage permissible. However, Densher's "conscience was permanently torn between his moral vision and his formalist needs". Kate is very selfish even in a scene where dying Milly learns about Kate's plan. Kate likes to deny the truth that is informed by Lord Mark, another rival suitor for Milly:

"Wouldn't it have been possible then to deny the truth of the information? I mean of Lord Mark 's."

Densher wondered. 'Possible for whom?'

"Why for you."

“To tell her that he lied?”

“To tell her he’s mistaken.”

Densher refuses to play another role to deceive Milly once more, he feels psychologically guilty of what he has done so far. James’ destruction of Kate’s wicked plan is twofold: He reveals to the reader the indifference of the violence that grounds the social order, on the other hand, he “protects” the reader from witnessing such a destructive violence.

To us, Kate is not completely guilty since her determination is the result of a behavior she developed in order to survive and be acceptable in her society. And the reason that corrupts Kate’s personality is the existing values of the society. Ünal Aytür claims that “Kate is the representative of the materialist and selfish interest of the British society in which she lives. This society corrupts her good qualities and makes her a person who acts not by her will but by her reason”. Thus, when viewed from the realistic depiction of the characters in regard with their society, James successfully reconciles them to the aspirations and general textures of their backgrounds.

The focal center of the novel is the exposition of Milly Theale’s predicament. As Henry James states that the characters are real to life in *The Art of Fiction*: “That the novelist must write from his experience, that his characters must be real and such as that might be met with in actual life; ‘that’ a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life”. In fact, Milly is model led after James’s cousin Minny. Thus, there are two important figures in James’ life: Minny Temple, his cousin whom he admired and Miss Constance Fenimore Woolson, an American novelist who is a close and valued friend of James. Minny Temple had died on Henry James’ twenty-seventh year in 1870 where he stood on the threshold of his literary life. On the other hand, Constance Woolson had died when he was fifty-one and a famous man. In the years of Constance’s death he returned to his memories of Milly. After writing “*The Altar of the Dead*”, he took his first notes for a greater fiction that would become *The Wings of the Dove*. This novel, somehow, can be regarded as Henry’s attempt to recapture the drama of Minny’s ultimate end who died of tuberculosis. James called his heroine Milly Theale echoing Minny’s name. Her death in Venice became the death in Venice of *The Wings of the Dove*. Moreover, the deepest roots of “dove” lie not in literature but in life and death. In regard to point-of-view, under the light of this statement, it is easy to realize that Milly is to be made delicate by the novelist, because it is of the essence of the book that life shall elude her, and she is also sensitive because she must have at her command all the possibilities that life can offer. Milly was an unspotted princess so that our experiences should be to reveal her qualities. As the novel seems to turn around Milly, James’ aim is not to present Milly’s character from other characters’ point of view, but the effect of Milly on Densher and Kate. In this perspective, the consciousness of Kate and Densher function as windows that open to Milly’s personality. The novelist-narrator draws himself back entirely from the scene of the novel and hides himself in the back of different personalities whose points of view he uses. It seems that James seems as if to lose control of the narrative after creating his own imagined character of turning the story over to her/him. In order to achieve this, he presents the events from different characters’ points of view. James’ characters for example *The Ambassador*’s Strether or *The Wings of the Dove*’s Densher “. . . moves us together with himself; we behave with him together. The power of that method that James uses comes from this perspective”. Here is an example how we share the experience of Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*. His description of the psychological mood

is very significant:

Wherever he looked or sat or stood, to whatever aspect he gave for the instant the advantage, it was in view as nothing of the moment, nothing begotten of time of chance could be, or ever would; it was in view as, when the curtain has risen, the play on the stage is in view, night after night for the fiddlers. He remained thus, in his own theatre, in his single person, perpetual orchestra to the ordered drama, the confirmed 'run'; playing low and slow, moreover, in the regular way, for the situations of most importance.

In *The Art of Fiction*, James' remarks on "the story" of the novel is also significant. He thinks that the story and the novel, the idea and the form are like the needle and the thread. It is one room opening into another. James states: "'The story', if it represents anything, represents the subject, the idea, the data of the novel; and there is surely no 'school' ". How James was inspired and created such a wonderful novel is an important point to be discussed. Henry James had written tales for the *New York Sunday Sun* that the first of these was "*Georgina's Reasons*" a strange and sensational little story that is written for what newspaper readers wanted. It is based on an anecdote of some woman in society who married a naval officer in secret and gave birth to a child secretly. She goes abroad, and has her baby in Italy, and then returns to New York and remarries. Her husband, the naval officer, during travels had become interested in two young women who are sisters in Naples. They are called Kate and Mildred Theory. Mildred dies of consumption in an early age that returns to James' imagination later as Kate and Milly, the naval man later named Densher to enact the drama of *The Wings of the Dove*.

There is the same struggle in the novel as in "*The Beast in the Jungle*". As the writer Leon Edel states "and at its end the image of the dead girl dominates the living, and changes the course of their lives". It does in fact when Milly's death affects Densher deeply and he is somewhat in love with Milly's memory as Kate states in the novel. James had a dull ache that he reflected in his novel. Edel emphasizes those two women's influence on James' life as:

In *The Wings of the Dove* Henry thus incorporated the two women whose deaths he had faced at the beginning and at the end of the middle span of his life—Minny, the dancing flame, who had yielded everything and asked for nothing and whom he possessed eternally; and Fenimore, the deep and quiet and strong—willed, who had given devotion and "intensities of fidelity", but had yielded nothing and had disturbed the altar of his being.

The American novelist, Fenimore's suicidal act struck James, because in doing violence to herself, she had done violence to him as well. The title of this novel was formed in the mind of James with a psalm that had great influence upon his soul.

The Psalmist had sung. "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." In the coming months James may have read this psalm; for in it he probably found his deepest feelings of this terrible moment in his life; and in it he found the title of the novel that he would ultimately write about a death in Venice.

According to the writer Wagenknecht the basic image of the dove comes from Psalm 55 but there is something forgotten that the Psalmist "wishes to escape from a false and treacherous friend and that in Psalm 68 the dove's wings are 'covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold'. The



word “dove” defines the general qualities of Milly Theale’s character. People around her associates Milly with dove because of her softness, goodness, and generosity. Milly is enormously rich but an orphan. James describes Milly in *The Wings* as an American girl,

Slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeable angular young person . . . whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being and whose clothes were remarkably black even for robes of mourning which was the meaning they expressed.

The dove image is identified with Milly and Aytür claims that “image and simile is an effectual device in order to help James to render the invisible to be visible, and to present the vivid and interesting inner worlds of the characters whose points of view he uses”. The reader may find a way out to comprehend the difficult and complex situations by the help of this fact. James is absolutely aware of the deep complexities of life and the captivating human passions. It is easy to perceive that James’ own experiences of life inspires him in forming his art. His subjects are also representations of segmentations of life that can be reflected to his fictions.

In *The Art of Fiction* James’ ideas on corruption and moral sense is very significant. Perhaps it is a way for us to clarify Kate’s situation. Kate is afraid of her aunt because she would be disinherited if she did not accept her aunt’s ideas. James states:

To what degree a purpose in a work of art is a source of corruption I shall not attempt to inquire; the one that seems to me least dangerous is the purpose of making a perfect work. As for our novel, I may say, lastly, on this score, that as we find it in England to-day, it strikes me as addressed in a large degree to ‘young people’, and then this in itself constitutes a presumption that will be shy . . . There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer . . . no good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground..

Kate Croy is a proud but penniless girl with her high demands on life. James’ fiction provides instances of poor women launched on their precarious life of dependence on others. Kate’s well-to do aunt hopes to marry her to a nobleman. Unless Kate does not marry a nobleman, she can expect no help from her aunt. If we focus on Kate’s consciousness Mrs. Lowder affects us as she does Kate. Mrs. Lowder has become “a figure of myth, one that can stand as a symbol of the implacability and terror, of life on which Kate has embarked”. In this sense Kate’s plan looks like a plot against Mrs. Lowder rather than Milly. However, in any case, there is a corruption and the moral sense and the artistic sense go together as James emphasizes in *The Art of Fiction*. In fact, the beauty and power of truth and goodness receive a tribute which has rarely been paid them in sophisticated novels. Milly rises to meet death and the book to be the drama of her inspired resistance. James uses every resource to keep Milly from seeming a prig or a tedious saint.

As a result, James successfully achieves what he really would like to do in *The Wings of the Dove*. Although his understanding of art of fiction is ‘non-sociological’ and his fiction has little to do with ‘the political, social, economic processes of history’ or of contemporary life as Michalski declares, James positions himself and his art between American and English cultures and points us in the

direction of understanding the role of sociological dimensions of culture. As for James' use of narrative style it is the most distinguished one since it is enriched with the powerful use of shifts in point-of-view. Thus, the narrative shifts freely from the consciousness of one character to another which makes James' work of art more precious. The book is also a best example of James' theory based on the artist's good command of the material he is familiar with throughout his life.

James wrote this essay in response to a lecture on the "art of fiction" by someone relatively unknown today called Walter Besant with whose ideas he very much disagrees but is too polite to say so. As James points out later, that his own essay is targetted at the novelist, the "producer, from whose point of view . . . we are attempting to consider the art of fiction".

For a long time, he writes, it has been assumed that the English novel has lacked a "theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison". This is because, he suggests, of the allegedly pragmatic opposition to theorising peculiar to the British on the grounds that a "novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it". There are, however, "signs of returning animation" which is a good thing because art, he argues, "lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints": the "successful application of art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting" for "there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction. Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere".

James begins by rejecting the widespread assumption that prose fiction (what he calls thenceforth 'fiction') should admit in an almost "apologetic" way that it is merely "make-believe": this view leads one to "renounce the pretension of attempting really to represent life". He believes that the "tolerance granted to it on such a condition is only an attempt to stifle it, disguised in the form of generosity. The old Evangelical hostility to the novel, which was as explicit as it was narrow, and which regarded it as little less favourable to our immortal part than a stage-play, was in reality far less insulting"

James' point is that the "only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" in a way similar to the visual arts. The analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is complete. Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle) is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another. Peculiarities of manner, of execution, that correspond on either side, exist in each of them and contribute to their development. The only effectual way to lay it to rest is to emphasize the analogy to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history. That is the only general description that we may give the novel. But history also is allowed to compete with life, it is not, any more than painting, expected to apologize. The subject matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian. James takes great exception to writers of the day like Anthony Trollope conceding that the "events he narrates have not really happened" for it implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standingroom.

To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer, and the only

difference is, in proportion as he succeeds, to the honour of the novelist, consisting as it does in his having more difficulty in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary. He should be given a great character, the fact that he has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter; this double analogy is a magnificent heritage. The point of writing a novel, as of painting or writing history, James insists, is to depict life. This is something for which the novelist should not apologise. James then turns his attention to Besant's claim that fiction is "one of the fine arts": "he demands not only that it shall be reputed artistic, but that it shall be reputed very artistic indeed". He argues that many persons would resent such a view, however, because of a Christian (and Platonic) suspicion of the immorality of art: 'Art,' in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed, in certain circles, to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction. When it is embodied in the work of the painter it stands there before spectator in the honesty of pink and green and a gilt frame; you can see the worst of it at a glance, and you can be on his guard. But when it is introduced into literature it becomes more insidious-there is danger of its hurting the reader before he knows it. Some critics say that literature should be either instructive or amusing, and there is in many minds an impression that these artistic preoccupations, the search for form, contribute to neither end, interfere indeed with both. They are too frivolous to be edifying, and too serious to be diverting; and they are, moreover, priggish and paradoxical and superfluous. That, represents the manner in which the latent thought of many people who read novels as an exercise in skipping would explain itself if it were to become articulate.

James points out that all would agree that a "novel ought to be 'good'" but they would each interpret this term differently: being good means representing virtuous and aspiring characters, placed in prominent positions; another would say that it depends for a 'happy ending' on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks. Another still would say that it means being full of incident and movement, so that we shall wish to jump ahead, to see who was the mysterious stranger, and if the stolen will was ever found, and shall not be distracted from this pleasure by any tiresome analysis or 'description.' But they would all agree that the 'artistic' idea would spoil some of their fun.

As James points out, the "'ending' of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes". There are, James admits, a surfeit of novels being written. Many of them are bad.

However, he argues that there is as much difference as there ever was between a good novel and a bad one: the bad is swept, with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble, into some unvisited limbo or infinite rubbish-yard, beneath the backwindows of the world, and the good subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection.

The question arises, therefore, "what sort of an affair a good novel will be". There is no ready formula, no brief prescription for writing a novel: the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it be perfectly free. It lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom. The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without

incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting. That general responsibility rests upon it. The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result strike as innumerable and such as can only suffer from being marked out, or fenced in, by prescription. They are as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others. A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, is to be appreciated after the fact; then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones. Then, in a word, we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant—no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes. Here it is especially that he works, step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may always say that he has painted his picture in a manner best known to himself. The writing of a novel, James stresses, is neither one of the “exact sciences” nor the

“exact arts”.

James then turns his attention to a series of principles expounded by Besant with which he sympathises at the same time that, paradoxically, he finds it “difficult to positively assent to them”. Besant contends that the “laws of fiction may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion”. James, who has just argued that the rules of writing cannot be prescribed in some scientific way, is especially opposed to such positivism which smacks of Zola's attempt in France around this time to turn novel into a science that would represent life in all its specificity (a doctrine that came to be called ‘naturalism’). James lists the specific claims made by Besant as follows: That the novelist must write from his experience, that his ‘characters must be real and such as might be met with in actual life;’ that ‘a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life,’ and ‘a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to the lower middle-class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into Society;’ that one should enter one's notes in a common-place book; that one's figures should be clear in outline; that making them clear by some trick of speech or of carriage is a bad method, and ‘describing them at length’ is a worse one; that English Fiction should have a ‘conscious moral purpose;’ that ‘it is almost impossible to estimate too highly the value of careful workmanship—that is, of style;’ that ‘the most important point of all is the story,’ that ‘the story is everything.’ The “value of these different injunctions” which are, James contends, “so beautiful and so vague— is wholly in the meaning one attaches to them”, the troubling ambiguity of which he proceeds to spell out.

James focuses, firstly, on the claim that ‘characters must be real and such as might be met with in actual life.’ He responds that the “measure of reality is very difficult to fix. The reality of Don Quixote or of Mr. Micawber is a very delicate shade; it is a reality so coloured by the author's vision that, vivid as it may be, one would hesitate to propose it as a model”. It is obvious, James argues, that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe

for calling that sense into being.

Humanity is immense and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair.

The same is true of the injunction that “one should write from experience” to say that one must write from experience; to our supposititious aspirant such a declaration might savour of mockery. What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius-it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.

This is as true of an innocent young lady living in relative isolation in a village as it is of men of the world. The gift of representing reality, the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it-this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience, just as they are the very air we breathe.

James hastens to add that he does not wish to be interpreted as trying to “minimise the importance of exactness – of truth of detail” : the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel-the merit on which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here, in very truth, that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter, in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle.

This is why James agrees with Besant’s advice to the aspiring writer to ‘take notes.’ The problem is that he cannot possibly take too many, he cannot possibly take enough. All life solicits him, and to ‘render’ the simplest surface, to produce the most

momentary illusion, is a very complicated business. His case would be easier, and the rule would be more exact, if Mr. Besant had been able to tell him what notes to take. But this he can never learn in any handbook; it is the business of his life. He has to take a great many in order to select a few, he has to work them up as he can. Even the “philosophers who might have most to say to him must leave him alone when it comes to the application of precepts, as we leave the painter in communion with his palette”, James warns.

James then turns his attention to the question of form and, in particular, the question of balancing ‘description,’ ‘dialogue,’ and ‘incident’ in a novel: people often talk of these things as if they had a

kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. Composition existing in a series of blocks, cannot be imagined in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, and an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art—that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The critic who over the close texture of a finished work will pretend to trace a geography of items will mark some frontiers as artificial, as any that have been known to history.

Likewise, the distinction commonly drawn between ‘novels of character’ and ‘novels of incident,’ and between the novel and the (Medieval) Romance (first pointed out by Samuel Johnson) are pointless “clumsy separations” James argues, for the depiction of character is as bound up with the description of incidents as the romance is with the novel (the French, not insignificantly, have but one word for both romance and novel: *roman*). What differentiates these different genres is not subject matter but form, James stresses, that is, the way in which the novelist brings to artistic fruition a particular idea: Of course it is of execution that we are talking – that being the only point of a novel that is open to contention. This is perhaps too often lost sight of, only to produce interminable confusions and cross-purposes. We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, what the French call his *donnée*; our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. Naturally we may believe that of a certain idea even the most sincere novelist can make nothing at all, and the event may perfectly justify our belief; but the failure will have been a failure to execute, and it is in the execution that the fatal weakness is recorded. If we pretend to respect the artist at all we must allow him his freedom of choice, in the face, in particular cases, of innumerable presumptions that the choice will not fructify. Art derives a considerable part of its beneficial exercise from flying in the face of presumptions, and some of the most interesting experiments of which it is capable are hidden in the bosom of common things.

Criticism is still largely about “‘liking’ a work of art or not liking it”, James adds in an effort to refute any suggestion that the “idea, the subject, of a novel or a picture, does not matter”. But he does not feel that he is in a position to adjudicate between what it is good to write about and what not: if “I pretend to tell you what you must not take, you will call upon me to tell you then what you must take”. Rather, all the critic can do is to assess the degree to which a particular novelist’s execution of an idea is successful or not: “it isn’t till I have accepted your data that I can begin to measure you. I have the standard; I judge you by what you propose”.

By form, James does not mean an artificial rearrangement of elements in such away that they appear different from how they would in real life. Form derives from content, art from life: as people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it.

This closeness of relation is what we should never forget in talking of the effort of the novel. Many people speak of it as a factitious, artificial form, a product of ingenuity, the business of which is to alter and arrange the things that surround us, to translate them into conventional, traditional moulds. This, however, is a view of the matter which carries us but a very short way, condemns the art to an eternal repetition of a few familiar *clichés*, cuts short its development, and leads us straight up to a

dead wall. Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps fiction upon its feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it *with* rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention. This “matter of rearranging” is thus all important but not in the simplistic sense intended by Besant: it is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive. For many people art means rose-coloured windows, and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs. Grundy. They will tell you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the province of art and the limits of art, till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance. . . . One perceives . . . that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision. As Mr. Besant so justly intimates, it is all experience. That is a sufficient answer to those who maintain that it must not touch the painful, who stick into its divine unconscious bosom little prohibitory inscriptions on the end of sticks, such as we see in public gardens – ‘It is forbidden to walk on the grass; it is forbidden to touch the flowers; it is not allowed to introduce dogs, or to remain after dark; it is requested to keep to the right.’ The novelist is free to rearrange events but, paradoxically, must do so constrained by the demands of truth.

James then considers the distinction between “story” and “treatment”. The former “represents the subject, the idea, the *donnée*”, the “starting-point” of the novel, the latter the artistic shape, the rearrangement, that this subject is given by the novelist. There is no school of thought which suggests, James argues, that a novel “should be all treatment and no subject. There must assuredly be something to treat”. The story “cannot be spoken of as something different from its organic whole”. Rather, in proportion as the work is successful, the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression, in that proportion do we lose our sense of the story being a blade which may be drawn more or less out of its sheath. The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, no one would recommend the use of the thread without the needle or the needle without the thread.

To think of the novel in any other way is to make it perform the “hapless, little role of being an artificial ingenious thing – bring it down from its large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life”. Last but not least, James turns his attention to the novel’s “conscious moral purpose”. He admits that this “branch of the subject is of immense importance”. However, James seems to have doubts that novels do have an overt moral purpose, or at least that artists and critics can assess this sort of thing, though he realises that he has to tread carefully lest he bring down censure upon himself. Such things as morality are not, he suggests, within the purview of a literary theorist:

Vagueness, in such a discussion, is fatal, and what is the meaning of your morality and your conscious moral purpose? Will you not define your terms and explain how (a novel being a picture) a picture can be either moral or immoral? You wish to paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue; will you not tell us how you would set about it? We are discussing the Art of Fiction; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair, and will you not let us see how it is that you find it so easy to mix them up?

James accordingly sees as not an entirely bad thing the “moral timidity” of the English novelist, “with his (or with her) aversion to face the difficulties with which on every side the treatment of reality

bristles". There is a "traditional difference between . . . that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature". There are some things, James seems to say, that we are best not being preachy about. There is, however, one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that mind is rich and noble will the novel, the picture, the statue, partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground; if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of 'purpose.'

It is in this, coupled with the other virtues of the novel, that the "magnificence of the form" lies. The "other arts, in comparison, appear confined and hampered". The only condition which James attaches to the "composition of the novel" is that it be "sincere": All life belongs to you, and don't listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air and turning away her head from the truth of things. There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place.

All that it is incumbent upon the novelist to do is to "try and catch the colour of life itself" on the basis of the "taste of wide knowledge".

---

## 7.6 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. Who is the protagonist in Henry James' the *Portrait of a Lady* ?

.....

.....

2. State James' view about the importance of story in a novel.

.....

.....

.....

3. State the views of James on importance of the moral sense and the artistic sense.

.....

.....

.....

4. Who is the target in the *Art of Fiction* ?

.....

.....



- .....
5. What is the only reason for the existence of a novel ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
6. What is the difference between a good novel and a bad novel ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
7. What is a essential condition to write a good novel, according to Henry James ?
- .....
- .....
8. Why is it difficult to have a sense of reality ?
- .....
- .....
9. According to Henry James, what is the difference between novels of character, novels of incident, novel and romance ?
- .....
- .....
10. The French have one word for romance and novel. What is it ?
- .....
- .....
11. What is the difference between *story* and *treatment*?
- .....
- .....
- .....
12. What is the relation between story and the novel, the idea and the form ?
- .....
- .....
13. Name the writer who is called “the master of all” by Henry James ?
- .....

.....

14. Henry James' *The Art of Fiction* appeared in

- a) 1881                                      b) 1884
- c) 1886                                      d) 1888

15. Which is the one written by Henry James ?

- a) A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.
- b) The Portrait of a Lady.
- c) The Wings of Fire.
- d) Midnight's Children

---

## 7.7 Let Us Sum Up

---

By now you have studied the biographical details about the famous American writer Henry James. You have studied brief comments on his famous works. You have studied his views about art in general & the art of writing novel in particular. You have applied his views expressed in the *Art of Fiction* to his own novel *The Wings of the Dove* for illustration.

---

## 7.8 Answers to SAQs

---

- 1. Isabel Archer
- 2. James thinks that the story and the novel, the idea and the form are like the needle and the thread. It is one room opening into another. The story represents the subject, the idea represents the data of the novel.
- 3. The deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind.
- 4. The essay *Art of Fiction* by James is targeted at the novelist, the producer, from whose point of view the art of fiction is considered.
- 5. The only reason for the existence of a novel, according to Henry James, is that it does attempt to represent life in a way similar to the visual arts.
- 6. The bad novel is swept with all the daubed canvasses and spoiled marble into some unvisited back-windows of the world. The good novel subsists and emits its light and inspires our desire for perfection.
- 7. It is essential to possess the sense of reality in order to write a good novel.
- 8. Because humanity is immense and reality has a myriad forms.
- 9. The difference lies not in subject matter but in form.
- 10. roman

11. 'Story' represents the subject, the idea, the starting point of a novel, whereas 'treatment' means the artistic shape, the rearrangement that the subject is given by the novelist.
12. It is like the needle and the thread. One cannot exist or have importance without the other.
13. Balzac
14. (b) 1884
15. (b) The Portrait of a Lady.

---

## 7.9 Review Questions

---

1. Discuss the statement "Successful application of art is a delightful spectacle."
2. Explain the statement "As picture is reality, so the novel is history."
3. The novel ought to be good. Explain this statement considering various interpretations like virtuous characters or happy ending or full of incidents and movements.
4. What does James mean when he says that the ending of a novel is like that of a good dinner ?
5. Henry James says that the writing of a novel is neither one of the exact sciences nor the exact arts. Explain.
6. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism. Discuss.
7. A novel cannot be all treatment and no subject. Discuss the importance of story and treatment in the novel.
8. The novel must have a conscious moral purpose. Discuss.

---

## 7.10 Bibliography

---

1. Allen, Walter. The English Novel. New York: Penguin, 1954.
2. Aytür, Ünal. Henry James ve Roman Sanatı. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1977.
3. Beach, J.W. The Method of Henry James 1918;
4. Beaver, Harold. "Henry James' Moral Vision." *International Needs in the New Pelican to English Lit.* 9. 5 Nov 2001
5. Bloom, Harold. ed. Classic Horror Writers, 1994;
6. Books and Writers. "Henry James". 12 Dec 2001
7. Brooks, V.W. The Pilgrimage of Henry James 1925;
8. Dupee, F.W. Henry James 1951;
9. Edel, Leon. Henry James 1953-72, 5 vols.;
10. Edel, Leon. Henry James, The Middle Years: 1882-1895. New York: Avon, 1978.

11. Edgar, Pelham. The Art of the Novel. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966.
  12. Fogel, Daniel Mark ed. A Companion to Henry James Studies, 1993;
  13. Forster, E.M. Roman Sanatý. Trans. Ünal Aytür. Ýstanbul: Adam Yayýnlarý, 1985.
  14. Gordon, Lyndall. A Private Life of Henry James 1999
  15. Hendrickson, Robert. The Wordsworth Book of Literary Anecdote 1990;
  16. Holand, L. The Expense of Vision 1964;
  17. Introductory Notes on Henry James . 14 Dec 2001
  18. Jones, Vivien. James the Critic 1984;
  19. Leavis, F.R. The Great Tradition 1948;
  20. Lubbock, Percy The Art of Fiction 1921;
  21. Matthiessen, F.O. ed. The James Family, 1947;
  22. Michalski, Robert. "Spirit and Material Possession in the Supernatural Fiction of Henry James". 14 Dec 2001
  23. Miller, James E. Theory of Fiction 1972;
  24. Myers, Cathleen. Rev. of "Washington Square and Wings of the Dove". 7 Nov 2001
  25. Pippin, Robert B. Henry James and Modern Moral Life 2001
  26. Wagenknecht, Edward. The Novels of Henry James. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983.
  27. Wegelin, C. The Image of Europe in Henry James 1958;
  28. Wilson, Edmund. The Triple Thinkers 1948;
  29. Zervos, Kathry. "The Subtext of Violence in Henry James' The Wings of the Dove: The Sacrificial Crisis". 21 Nov 2001
-

## UNIT-8

---

### WINSTON CHURCHILL: SPEECH

---

#### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 About the Author
  - 8.2.1 Life and Personality
  - 8.2.2 Literary Background
  - 8.2.3 His works
- 8.3 About the Speech
  - 8.3.1 The Speech in detail
  - 8.3.2 Explanation of the Speech
  - 8.3.3 Glossary
- 8.4 Self Assessment Questions
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Answers to SAQs
- 8.7 Review Questions
- 8.8 Bibliography

---

#### **8.0 Objectives**

---

The objective of this unit is to familiarise you with the speeches of Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister of Great Britain. In this unit you will read about one of his famous speeches delivered to the people of England. His speeches are very inspiring.

---

#### **8.1 Introduction**

---

You will be introduced to the life and personality of Sir Winston Churchill. The literary background and his works will enable you to understand that Winston Churchill was an extremely well read man. He was forceful and very convincing in his speeches.

---

#### **8.2 About the Author**

---

##### **8.2.1 Life and Personality**

Winston Churchill was born on 30 November 1874 and he died on 24 January 1965. He was

a British politician of great merit and served as Prime Minister of England from 1940-45 and from 1951-1955. Winston Churchill was an orator, an officer in the British navy, a historian, a Nobel Prize winning writer and artist.

During his army career, Winston Churchill saw action in India, Sudan and in the second Boer war. He became famous as a war correspondent through books he wrote describing the campaigns. At the forefront of the political scene for almost fifty years, he held many important positions. On 10 May 1940, he became Prime Minister of Britain and led her to victory against the Axis powers.

Winston Churchill was also an accomplished artist and took great pleasure in painting. Art helped him to overcome spells of depression that he suffered through his life. Most of his paintings are oil-based and feature landscapes, but he also did a number of interior scenes and portraits.

Moreover, from his first book in 1878 until his second term as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill earned money by writing books and opinion pieces for newspapers and magazines. The most famous of his newspaper articles are those that appeared in the *Evening Standard* from 1936 warning of the rise of Hitler and the danger of the policy of appeasement. Winston Churchill was also a prolific writer of books, a novel, two biographies, three volumes of memoir, and several histories in addition to his many newspaper articles. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature “for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.”

### 8.2.2 Literary Background

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was the son of Lord Randolph Churchill who was a politician. Winston Churchill's mother Lady Randolph Churchill was the daughter of American millionaire Leonard Jerome. Winston Churchill had one brother who was named John Strange Spencer Churchill. Churchill was not very bright in his studies but he scored high marks in English and history and he was the fencing champion of Harrow School. He was very close to his nanny, Elizabeth Anne Everest. Churchill had speech defect problems, but he worked hard to overcome this speech impediment. Churchill got married to Clementine Hozier on 10 August 1908. They had five children, but one died at a very young age. Churchill left Harrow in 1893 and went on to join the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Queen's Own Hussars in February 1895. He did not intend to follow a conventional career of promotion through army ranks. He wanted to have all possible chances of military action and used his mother's and family influence in high society to arrange posting to active campaigns. He acted as a war reporter for several London newspapers and his writings brought him to the attention of the public.

In 1895 Winston Churchill travelled to Cuba to observe the Spanish fight the Cuban guerrillas. He had obtained a commission to write about the conflict from the newspaper *Daily Graphic*. Winston Churchill's approach to oratory and politics was much influenced by Bourke Cockran, a member of the House of Representatives of America. Winston Churchill's account of the siege of Malakand where he himself participated enables the reader to understand Winston Churchill's war like qualities. The account of this battle was published in December 1900 as *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*. He received £600 for his account.

Churchill was transferred to Egypt in 1898 and in September 1898 he took part in the battle at

Omdurman. By October 1898, he had returned to Britain and begun his two-volume work, *The River War*, an account of the reconquest of the Sudan published in 1899. He resigned from the Army in May 1899.

Churchill's parliamentary career began when he was invited by Robert Ascroft to be the second Conservative Party candidate in Ascroft's Oldham constituency. Ascroft died suddenly and even though Churchill fought the election, he lost.

In 1899 when Britain and the Boer Republics broke out into a war (Second Boer War), Churchill went to Boer as a war correspondent for the newspaper the *Morning Post*. He got captured and was imprisoned at Pretorio. He escaped from the prison with the help of an English mine manager. He did not return to Britain but went on to join the army which was on its march to capture Pretoria. He continued as a war correspondent, he gained a commission in the South African Light Horse. Finally, Pretoria was captured and Churchill returned to Britain. In 1900 he took part in the general Elections and won the parliamentary seat from Oldham. After the general election he embarked<sup>2</sup> on a speaking tour of Britain followed by tours of the U.S.A. and Canada.

During his first Parliamentary session he became associated with a faction of the Conservative party led by Lord Hugh Cecil. In 1904 Churchill became a member of the Liberal Party. In 1906 when the general elections took place he contested for the Manchester North West seat and won the election. He was invited to join the government and from then on his political career took a rise. He gave impetus<sup>3</sup> to several reform efforts including development of naval aviation and the switch from oil to coal in the Royal navy. After being with the Liberal Party for some time, Churchill rejoined the Conservative Party in 1925. He had also played a major role in the first world war. The Conservative Government was defeated in the 1929 general Election. Gradually Churchill distanced<sup>4</sup> himself from the Conservative leadership. The next few years he concentrated<sup>5</sup> on his writing.

Churchill did not wish to grant Dominion Status to India. In his speeches and press articles he vent<sup>6</sup> forth his views. He even denounced the Round Table Conference prior to the outbreak after second world war, Churchill had cautioned Britain against Germany. He was critical of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement<sup>8</sup> of Adolf Hitler. In 1940 Chamberlain resigned and advised the monarch Edward VI to appoint Churchill as the Prime Minister. It was Churchill who had recognised the threat of Adolf Hitler long before the outset of the second world war, and his warnings had gone largely unheeded. When Churchill became Prime Minister of England, he addressed the House of Commons on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1940 and told then "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

### 8.2.3 His Works

Churchill was a prolific writer. He was a war correspondent who enjoyed being at places of action. He took great pride in reporting from the warfront. The siege of Malakand was published in December 1900 as *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*. In 1899 he wrote two volumes on the recapture of Sudan, the books were titled *The River War*. His experiences in South Africa and Boer war were published as *London to Lady Smith* and *Ian Hamilton's March*. During the first world war Churchill wrote extensively to his wife and these letters have been published. Churchill wrote a biography of his ancestor John Churchill- first duke of Marlborough: it was titled *Malborough: His Life and Times*. He also wrote *A History of the English Speaking Peoples* and wrote a book about his

contemporaries: the book was named *Great Contemporaries*. Churchill published his political views in 1930 in a book titled *Parliamentary Government and The Economic Problems*. Churchill was very outspoken in his views and he was very famous for his speeches which he delivered from time of time.

---

## 8.3 About The Speech

---

On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. When he met his cabinet on May 13, he told them that “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.” He repeated that phrase later in the day when he asked the House of Commons for a vote of confidence in his new all-party government. The response of the Labour Party was heart-warming; the Conservative Party’s reaction was lukewarm. They still wanted Neville Chamberlain as the Prime Minister (he had earlier resigned and asked the monarch Edward VI to select Churchill as Prime Minister.) When Churchill became Prime Minister the people had lots of hope from him. But Churchill knew he could “give them nothing.” He commented to General Ismay: “Poor people, poor people. They trust me, and I can give them nothing but disaster for quite a long time.”

### 8.3.1 The Speech In Detail

#### **Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat**

I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the formation of a Government representing the united inflexible<sup>9</sup> resolve of the nation to prosecute the war with Germany to a victorious conclusion.

On Friday evening last I received His Majesty’s commission to form a new Administration. It is the evident wish and will of Parliament and the nation that this should be conceived on the broadest possible basis and that it should include all parties, both those who supported the late Government and also the parties of the opposition. I have completed the most important part of this task. A war Cabinet has been formed of five Members, representing, with opposition Liberals, the unity of the nation. The three party leaders have agreed to serve, either in the War Cabinet or in high executive office. The three fighting services have been filled. It was necessary that this should be done in one single day, on account of the extreme urgency and rigour of events. A number of other positions, key positions, were filled yesterday, and I am submitting a further list to his Majesty tonight. I hope to complete the appointment of the principal Ministers during tomorrow. The appointment of the other ministers usually takes a little longer, but I trust that, when Parliament meets again, this part of my task will be completed, and that the administration will be complete in all respects.

I considered it in the public interest to suggest that the house should be summoned<sup>10</sup> to meet today. Mr Speaker agreed, and took the necessary steps, in accordance with the powers conferred upon him by the resolution of the House. At the end of the proceedings today, the Adjournment of the House will be proposed until Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> May, with, of course, provision for earlier meeting, if need be. The business to be considered during that week will be notified to members at the earliest opportunity. I now invite the house, be the Motion which stands in my name, to record its approval of the steps taken and to declare its confidence in the new Government.



To form an administration of this scale and complexity is a serious undertaking in itself but it must be remembered that we are in the preliminary stage of one of the greatest battles in history, that we are in action at many other points in Norway and in Holland that we have to be prepared in the Mediterranean, that air battle is continuous and that many preparations, such as have been indicated by my hon. Friend below the Gangway<sup>11</sup>, have to be made here at home. In this crisis I hope I may be pardoned if I do not address the House at any length today. I hope that any of my friends and colleagues, or former colleagues, who are affected by the political reconstruction, will make allowance, all allowance, for any lack of ceremony with which it has been necessary to act. I would say to the house, as I said to those who have joined this government: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

We have before us an ordeal<sup>12</sup> of the most grievous<sup>13</sup> kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny,<sup>14</sup> never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue<sup>15</sup> of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realised; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal. But I take up my task with buoyancy<sup>16</sup> and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, "come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

### **8.3.2 Explanation of the Speech**

This is Churchill's first speech as Prime Minister. It was delivered to the House of Commons on 13 May 1940. As Prime Minister Churchill asked the House of Commons for a vote-of-confidence in the new government. The reader should note that the speech is in the first person singular. It is delivered in a very forthright manner. He explains to the House of Commons that his Majesty wanted him to form an all party government in order to work effectively and maintain the unity of the nation. The second world war had begun. Churchill explains to the house that because of the outbreak of the war, there was a great urgency in filling up important posts: especially the defence services. The other ministers would be appointed at the earliest.

Churchill further says that he asked that the house be summoned today so that people's faith in the government remains. (remember that the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had resigned on 10 May 1940). The speaker agreed with Churchill's views and took steps to summon the house. The house would then be adjourned till 21 May 1940, but if need be then an earlier meeting could be called. Churchill then invites the house to support the motion of confidence and record its approval of the new government.

Churchill very clearly tells the House that one of the greatest battles in history is being waged. The battle is being fought at many fronts, and the air battle is continuous. He begs pardon (he apologises) from the house for not addressing them for a great length of time. He tells the house that he has nothing to offer except "blood, toil, tears and sweat." Because of the war, Churchill says that he would work

hard and uphold peoples faith in him. It is true that due to war a lot of bloodshed would occur, but it was imperative to wage war by land, air and sea. This was necessary if one wished to stop crimes against humanity (remember Hitler had killed a large number of Jews in Germany). Churchill makes it very clear that the aim of England is to win the war at any cost. But the path to victory is long and hard and in order to survive, England must wage war and destroy tyranny. Churchill tells the House of Commons that he has taken up the challenge of forming the government with great hope and expectations. He is confident that the British Empire will not fail. He urges all members of the House of Commons to unite and move forward together.

### 8.3.3 Glossary

1.	conventional	routine, according to norms
2.	embarked	set out
3.	impetus	encouraged, momentum
4.	distanced	leave behind, become remote
5.	concentrated	focussed on, kept attention
6.	vent	express, give out
7.	cautioned	warned, advised
8.	appeasement	pacify, soothe
9.	inflexible	unbending, unyielding
10.	summoned	call together, require presence
11.	gangway	passage especially between rows of seats. Here the reference is to the members in the house.
12.	ordeal	experience that tests endurance, also extremely hard work.
13.	tyranny	oppressive, cruel exercise of power.
14.	grievous	painful, oppressive.
15.	catalogue	complete list usually in a systematic order.
16.	buoyancy	hope, expectation.

---

### 8.4 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. How did Churchill become Prime Minister of Great Britain on 10 May, 1940?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What is the name of Churchill's wife? How many children did they have?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Why did Churchill act as a war reporter?

.....

4. Where was Churchill imprisoned and how did he escape?

.....

5. What were Churchill's views regarding India?

.....

6. Why is this prescribed speech famous?

.....

7. In the above speech, what is Churchill's message?

.....

8. Why are Churchill's speeches popular?

---

## 8.5 Let Us Sum Up

---

In this unit you have been acquainted with Churchill's life and his literary background. From the speech that has been prescribed for you, you can understand that Churchill was a forceful personality. He was also a fearless fighter and participated in military campaigns. He did not hesitate to lead the nation during the second world war.

---

## 8.6 Answers to SAQs

---

1. Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain after Neville Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister. It is important to note that Chamberlain recommended Winston Churchill's name as Prime Minister to the monarch of England.
2. The name of Churchill's wife was Clementine (Clementine Churchill). They had five children, but one died at a very young age.
3. Churchill became a war reporter because he enjoyed being present at the scene of action.
4. Churchill was captured during the second Boer war and was imprisoned at Pretoria. He escaped from the prison with the help of an English mine manager.
5. Churchill did not wish to grant dominion status to India. In his speeches and press articles, he denounced the Round Table Conference. He did not have a sympathetic attitude towards India.
6. This speech which is prescribed for us is famous because Churchill in his forthright manner explains to the House of Commons, the helpless situation of Britain. Britain had a number of colonies and uprisings had begun amongst the people, and this was ruining Britain. The speech is frank and direct, Churchill does not mince words, he does not paint a rosy picture of England.
7. Churchill's message is that only hard work pays and if the people of Great Britain wish to regain pristine glory, they must all toil hard.
8. Churchill's speeches are magnetic, his world seems full of pitfalls, and therefore the speeches are written and spoken with great vehemence. The style is simple and direct and spoken with great sincerity.

---

## 8.7 Review Questions

---

1. Summarise Churchill's maiden speech as Prime Minister.
2. What rhetorical devices does Churchill use to inspire and motivate the audience?

3. Give a pen portrait of Churchill on the basis of his maiden speech.

---

## 8.8 Bibliography

---

1. Randolph Churchill. Winston S. Churchill: Young Statesman. C&T publications, 1967.
  2. Robert Rhode James. Churchill: A Study In Jailure. Polican, 1973.
  3. G.K. Lewis. "One the Character and Achievement of Sir Winston Churchill." The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science. Vol.23, No.2 May 1957:pp 173-194.
  4. Robert Rhode James, Winston S.Churchill: His complete Speeches 1897-1963. 8 Vols. London: Chelsen 1974
  5. Robert Blake & Louis William Roger, eds. Churchill: A Major New Reassessmeat of His Life in Peace and War. Oxford University Press, 1992.
-

## UNIT-9

---

### VIRGINIA WOOLF : *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Study Guide
- 9.2 About the Age : Modern Age
- 9.3 About the Author : Virginia Woolf
  - 9.4.1 About the Text : *A Room of One's Own*
  - 9.4.2 Critical Analysis
- 9.4 Self Assessment Questions.
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 Answers to SAQs
- 9.7 Review Questions
- 9.8 Bibliography

---

#### 9.0 Objectives

---

1. Familiarizing you with Virginia Woolf as a writer.
2. Giving you details about modernism and Stream of Consciousness.
3. Providing you details about themes, symbols and issues raised in her essay *A Room of One's own*.
4. Familiarizing you with various terms like feminism, feministic, feminine and androgenic texts etc.
5. The issue of sex discrimination as a writer – its causes, effects and movements against it.
6. Detailed study of *A Room of One's Own*, use of symbols, themes and issues in the text.

---

#### 9.1 Study Guide

---

We are giving you two units on Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Therefore you should study both of these units in continuation. The detailed summary and analysis of the six chapters have been given for you in the next unit. The material from various books as well as internet has been adapted and made available to you so that you may study at home without these facilities also. The life of the writer is essential to understand her work. You should study the historical background of her plea for the female writer in an appropriate context. A brief chapter-wise summary has been given in this unit so that you may understand the other unit also. After reading the detailed summary and the commentary

on the chapters you can attempt the SA Qs easily. You should tally your answers with those given in the concerned section. It is not possible to give you the complete text, therefore only the famous quotes and excerpts have been provided to you. The Review Questions are descriptive and you should prepare them for your exams.

---

## 9.2 About the Age : Modern Age

---

Virginia Woolf belongs to the modern age of post world war. The effect of the world war is reflected in the themes as well as techniques of the works of this age.

The First World War (1914-18) can be considered as a major event to initiate modernism in literature. The modernist literature is typical in its experimental quality which might be taken as a response to the conditions of human survival after the First World War. Radical technical innovations happened in the genre of novel writing. Proust, Kafka, Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner have all broken the tradition in some sense or the other, of the realist 19<sup>th</sup> century novel writing.

Modernism is an omnibus term for a number of tendencies in the arts which were prominent in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In English literature it is particularly associated with the writings of T.S.Eliot, Pound, Joyce, V.Woolf, W.B.Yeats, F.M. Ford, and Conrad. Broadly, Modernism reflects the impact upon literature of the psychology of Sir J.Frazer, as expressed in *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915). A sense of cultural relativism is pervasive in much modernist writing, as is an awareness of the irrational and the working of the unconscious mind. Technically it was marked by a persistent experimentalism; it is 'the tradition of the new', in Harold Rosenberg's phrase. It rejected the traditional (Victorian and Edwardian) frame position in poetry and prose, in favour of a stream-of-consciousness presentation of personality, a dependence on the poetic image as the essential vehicle of aesthetic communication, and upon myth as a characteristic literature of discontinuity, both historically, being based upon a sharp rejection of the procedures and values of the immediate past. Although so diverse in its manifestation, it was recognized as representing as H. Read wrote (Art Now, 1933) an abrupt break with all tradition... The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned.' Modernist works (for instance, the poetry of Eliot and Pound) may have to the unfamiliar reader a tendency to dissolve into chaos of sharp atomistic impressions, and some critics have deplored their drift towards what he describes as dehumanization', away from the 'human, all too human elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production.

Stream of Consciousness is a phrase coined by W. James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the flow of thoughts of the waking mind, but now widely used in a literary context to describe the narrative method whereby certain novelists describe the unspoken thoughts and feelings of their characters, without resorting to objective description or conventional dialogue. *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888) by the minor French novelist Edward Dujardin (1861-1949) has been credited (by Joyce, principally) as a pioneering example of the technique, and it was adapted and developed by Joyce himself, by D. Richardson, V. Woolf, Proust, and others. The ability to represent the flux of a character's thoughts, impression, emotions, or reminiscences, often without logical sequence or syntax, marked a revolution in the form of the novel, and extended passages of stream of consciousness are now so familiar that they no longer strike a reader as avant-garde. The related phrase 'interior monologue' is also used to describe the inner movement of consciousness in a character's mind: cel-

ebred examples are the opening pages of Mrs. Dalloway, and Molly Bloom's reflections in the closing pages of Ulysses.

---

### 9.3 About the Author : Virginia Woolf

---

*A Room of One's Own* is an extended essay by Virginia Woolf. First published on 24 October 1929, it was based on a series of lectures she delivered at Newnham College and Girton College, two women's colleges at Cambridge University in October 1928. While this extended essay is on women as both writers of fiction and as characters in fiction, the manuscript for the delivery of the series of lectures, titled "Women and Fiction", and hence the essay, are considered non-fiction.

Virginia Woolf, one of the founders of the movement known as Modernism, is one of the most important woman writers in English. Her "stream-of-consciousness" essays and novels provide an invaluable insight into both her own life experiences and those of women at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Adeline Virginia Woolf** (25 January 1882 – 28 March 1941) was an English novelist and essayist, regarded as one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century.

During the interwar period, Woolf was a significant figure in London literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. Her most famous works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928), and the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), with its famous dictum, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London in 1882. Her mother, a famous beauty, Julia Prinsep Stephen (born Jackson) (1846–1895), was born in India to Dr. John and Maria Pattle Jackson and later moved to England with her mother, where she served as a model for Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Edward Burne-Jones. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a notable author, critic and mountaineer. The young Virginia was educated by her parents in their literate and well-connected household at 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington. Her parents had each been married previously and been widowed, and, consequently, the household contained the children of three marriages. Julia had three children from her first husband, Herbert Duckworth: George Duckworth (1868–1934), Stella Duckworth (1869–1897), and Gerald Duckworth (1870–1937). Leslie had one daughter from his first wife, Minny Thackeray: Laura Makepeace Stephen (1870–1945), who was declared mentally disabled and lived with the family until she was institutionalised in 1891. Leslie and Julia had four children together: Vanessa Stephen (1879–1961), Thoby Stephen (1880–1906), Virginia, and Adrian Stephen (1883–1948).

Sir Leslie Stephen's eminence as an editor, critic, and biographer, and his connection to William Thackeray (he was the widower of Thackeray's youngest daughter), meant that his children were raised in an environment filled with the influences of Victorian literary society. Henry James, George Henry Lewes, Julia Margaret Cameron (an aunt of Julia Stephen), and James Russell Lowell, who was made Virginia's godfather, were among the visitors to the house. Julia Stephen was equally well connected. Descended from an attendant of Marie Antoinette, she came from a family of renowned beauties who left their mark on Victorian society as models for Pre-Raphaelite artists and early photogra-



phers. Supplementing these influences was the immense library at the Stephens' house, from which Virginia and Vanessa (unlike their brothers, who were formally educated) were taught the classics and English literature.

According to Woolf's memoirs, her most vivid childhood memories, however, were not of London but of St Ives in Cornwall, where the family spent every summer until 1895. The Stephens' summer home, Talland House, looked out over Porthminster Bay. Memories of these family holidays and impressions of the landscape, especially the Godrevy Lighthouse, informed the fiction Woolf wrote in later years, most notably *To the Lighthouse*.

The sudden death of her mother in 1895, when Virginia was 13, and that of her half sister Stella two years later, led to the first of Virginia's several nervous breakdowns. The death of her father in 1904 provoked her most alarming collapse and she was briefly institutionalised.

Her breakdowns and subsequent recurring depressive periods, modern scholars (including her nephew and biographer, Quentin Bell) have suggested, were also induced by the sexual abuse she and Vanessa were subjected to by their half-brothers George and Gerald (which Woolf recalls in her autobiographical essays *A Sketch of the Past* and *22 Hyde Park Gate*).

Throughout her life, Woolf was plagued by drastic mood swings. Though this instability greatly affected her social functioning, her literary abilities remained intact. Modern diagnostic techniques have led to a posthumous diagnosis of bipolar disorder, an illness which coloured her work, relationships, and life, and eventually led to her suicide.

After the death of their father and Virginia's second nervous breakdown, Vanessa and Adrian sold 22 Hyde Park Gate and bought a house at 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury.

Following studies at King's College, Cambridge, Woolf came to know Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Rupert Brooke, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Duncan Grant, and Leonard Woolf, who together formed the nucleus of the intellectual circle known as the Bloomsbury Group. Several members of the group attained notoriety in 1910 with the Dreadnought hoax, which Virginia participated in disguised as a male Abyssinian royal. Her complete 1940 talk on the Hoax has recently been discovered and is published in the memoirs collected in the expanded edition of *The Platform of Time* (2008).

Virginia Stephen married writer Leonard Woolf in 1912, referring to him during their engagement as a "penniless Jew." The couple shared a close bond; in 1937, Woolf wrote in her diary: "'Love-making — after 25 years can't bear to be separate ... you see it is enormous pleasure being wanted: a wife. And our marriage so complete.'" The two also collaborated professionally, in 1917 founding the Hogarth Press, which subsequently published Virginia's novels along with works by T.S. Eliot, Laurens van der Post, and others. The ethos of the Bloomsbury group discouraged sexual exclusivity, and in 1922, Virginia met the writer and gardener Vita Sackville-West, wife of Harold Nicolson. After a tentative start, they began a sexual relationship that lasted through most of the 1920s. In 1928, Woolf presented Sackville-West with *Orlando*, a fantastical biography in which the eponymous hero's life spans three centuries and both genders. It has been called by Nigel Nicolson, Vita Sackville-West's son, "the longest and most charming love letter in literature." After their affair ended, the two women remained friends until Woolf's death in 1941. Virginia Woolf also remained close to her surviving siblings, Adrian and Vanessa; Thoby had died of an illness at the age of 26.

After completing the manuscript of her last (posthumously published) novel, *Between the Acts*, Woolf fell victim to a depression similar to that which she had earlier experienced. The onset of World War II, the destruction of her London home during the Blitz, and the cool reception given to her biography of her late friend Roger Fry all worsened her condition until she was unable to work.

On 28 March 1941, Woolf committed suicide. She put on her overcoat, filled its pockets with stones, then walked into the River Ouse near her home and drowned herself. Woolf's body was not found until 18 April. Her husband buried her cremated remains under a tree in the garden of their house in Rodmell, Sussex.

**In her last note to her husband she wrote:**

I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier 'til this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that — everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

Woolf began writing professionally in 1905, initially for the *Times Literary Supplement* with a journalistic piece about Haworth, home of the Brontë family. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915 by her half-brother's imprint, Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd.

This novel was originally entitled *Melymbrosia*, but Woolf repeatedly changed the draft. An earlier version of *The Voyage Out* has been reconstructed by Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo and is now available to the public under the intended title. DeSalvo argues that many of the changes Woolf made in the text were in response to changes in her own life.

Lytton Strachey and **Virginia Woolf** at Garsington, 1923.

Woolf went on to publish novels and essays as a public intellectual to both critical and popular success. Much of her work was self-published through the Hogarth Press. She has been hailed as one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century and one of the foremost modernists, though she disdained some artists in this category.

Woolf is considered one of the greatest innovators in the English language. In her works she experimented with stream-of-consciousness and the underlying psychological as well as emotional motives of characters. Woolf's reputation declined sharply after World War II, but her eminence was re-established with the surge of Feminist criticism in the 1970s. After a few more ideologically based altercations, not least caused by claims that Woolf was anti-Semitic and a snob, it seems that a critical consensus has been reached regarding her stature as a novelist.

Her work was criticised for epitomizing the narrow world of the upper-middle class English intelligentsia. Some critics judged it to be lacking in universality and depth, without the power to

communicate anything of emotional or ethical relevance to the disillusioned common reader, weary of the 1920s *aesthetes*. She was also criticized by some as an anti-Semite, despite her marriage to a Jewish man. She wrote in her diary, “I do not like the Jewish voice; I do not like the Jewish laugh.” However, in a 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth quoted in Nigel Nicolson’s biography, *Virginia Woolf*, she recollects her boasts of Leonard’s Jewishness confirming her snobbish tendencies, “How I hated marrying a Jew- What a snob I was, for they have immense vitality.”

Virginia Woolf’s peculiarities as a fiction writer have tended to obscure her central strength: Woolf is arguably the major lyrical novelist in the English language. Her novels are highly experimental: a narrative, frequently uneventful and commonplace, is refracted—and sometimes almost dissolved—in the characters’ receptive consciousness. Intense lyricism and stylistic virtuosity fuse to create a world overabundant with auditory and visual impressions.

The intensity of Virginia Woolf’s poetic vision elevates the ordinary, sometimes banal settings - often wartime environments - of most of her novels. For example, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) centres on the efforts of Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged society woman, to organize a party, even as her life is paralleled with that of Septimus Warren Smith, a working-class veteran who has returned from the First World War bearing deep psychological scars.

*To the Lighthouse* (1927) is set on two days ten years apart. The plot centers around the Ramsay family’s anticipation of and reflection upon a visit to a lighthouse and the connected familial tensions. One of the primary themes of the novel is the struggle in the creative process that beset painter Lily Briscoe while she struggles to paint in the midst of the family drama. The novel is also a meditation upon the lives of a nation’s inhabitants in the midst of war, and of the people left behind. It also explores the passage of time, and how women are forced by society to allow men to take emotional strength from them.

*The Waves* (1931) presents a group of six friends whose reflections, which are closer to recitatives than to interior monologues proper, create a wave-like atmosphere that is more akin to a prose poem than to a plot-centered novel.

Her last work, *Between the Acts* (1941) sums up and magnifies Woolf’s chief preoccupations: the transformation of life through art, sexual ambivalence, and meditation on the themes of flux of time and life, presented simultaneously as corrosion and rejuvenation—all set in a highly imaginative and symbolic narrative encompassing almost all of English history.

While nowhere near a simple recapitulation of the coterie’s ideals, Woolf’s work can be understood as consistently in dialogue with Bloomsbury, particularly its tendency (informed by G.E. Moore, among others) towards doctrinaire rationalism.

Her works have been translated into over 50 languages, by writers of the calibre of Jorge Luis Borges and Marguerite Yourcenar.

Recently, studies of Virginia Woolf have focused on feminist and lesbian themes in her work, such as in the 1997 collection of critical essays, *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, edited by Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer. Louise A. DeSalvo offers treatment of the incestuous sexual abuse Woolf experienced as a young woman in her book *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual*

### *Abuse on her Life and Work.*

Woolf's fiction is also studied for its insight into shell shock, war, class, and modern British society. Her best-known nonfiction works, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), examine the difficulties female writers and intellectuals face because men hold disproportionate legal and economic power, and the future of women in education and society.

Irene Coates's book *Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf: A Case for the Sanity of Virginia Woolf* takes the position that Leonard Woolf's treatment of his wife encouraged her ill health and ultimately was responsible for her death. The position, which is not accepted by Leonard's family, is extensively researched and fills in some of the gaps in the traditional account of Virginia Woolf's life. In contrast, Victoria Glendinning's book *Leonard Woolf: A Biography*, which is even more extensively researched and supported by contemporaneous writings, argues that Leonard Woolf was not only very supportive of his wife, but enabled her to live as long as she did by providing her with the life and atmosphere she needed to live and write. Accounts of Virginia's supposed anti-semitism (Leonard was a secular Jew) are not only taken out of historical context but greatly exaggerated. Virginia's own diaries support this view of the Woolfs' marriage.<sup>[13]</sup>

The first biography of Virginia Woolf was published in 1972 by her nephew, Quentin Bell.

In 1989 Louise DeSalvo published the book *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*.

In 1992, Thomas Caramagno published the book *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness*. ”

Hermione Lee's 1996 biography *Virginia Woolf* provides a thorough and authoritative examination of Woolf's life and work.

In 2001 Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska edited *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf*. Julia Briggs's *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, published in 2005, is the most recent examination of Woolf's life. It focuses on Woolf's writing, including her novels and her commentary on the creative process, to illuminate her life. Thomas Szasz's book *My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf* (ISBN 0-7658-0321-6) was published in 2006.

Rita Martin's play *Flores no me pongan* (2006) considers Woolf's last minutes of life in order to debate polemical issues such as bisexuality, Jewishness, and war. Written in Spanish, the play was performed in Miami under the direction of actress Miriam Bermudez.

### **Novels**

- *The Voyage Out* (1915)
- *Night and Day* (1919)
- *Jacob's Room* (1922)
- *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)
- *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

- *Orlando* (1928)
- *The Waves* (1931)
- *The Years* (1937)
- *Between the Acts* (1941)

### **Short story collections**

- *Monday or Tuesday* (1921)
- *The New Dress* (1924)
- *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1944)
- *Mrs. Dalloway's Party* (1973)
- *The Complete Shorter Fiction* (1985)

### **“Biographies”**

Virginia Woolf published three books to which she gave the subtitle “A Biography”:

- *Orlando: A Biography* (1928, usually characterised *Novel*, inspired by the life of Vita Sackville-West)
- *Flush: A Biography* (1933, more explicitly cross-genre: *fiction* as “stream of consciousness” tale by Flush, a dog; *non-fiction* in the sense of telling the story of the owner of the dog, Elizabeth Barrett Browning)
- *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940, usually characterised *non-fiction*, however: “[Woolf’s] novelistic skills worked against her talent as a biographer, for her impressionistic observations jostled uncomfortably with the simultaneous need to marshal a multitude of facts.”<sup>[14]</sup>)

### **Non-fiction books**

- *Modern Fiction* (1919)
- *The Common Reader* (1925)
- *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)
- *On Being Ill* (1930)
- *The London Scene* (1931)
- *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932)
- *Three Guineas* (1938)
- *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942)
- *The Moment and Other Essays* (1947)
- *The Captain’s Death Bed And Other Essays* (1950)
- *Granite and Rainbow* (1958)

- *Books and Portraits* (1978)
- *Women And Writing* (1979)
- *Collected Essays* (four volumes)

### **Drama**

- *Freshwater: A Comedy* (performed in 1923, revised in 1935, and published in 1976)

### **Autobiographical writings and diaries**

- *A Writer's Diary* (1953) - Extracts from the complete diary
- *Moments of Being* (1976)
- *A Moment's Liberty: the shorter diary* (1990)
- *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (five volumes) - Diary of Virginia Woolf from 1915 to 1941
- *Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897-1909* (1990)
- *Travels With Virginia Woolf* (1993) - Greek travel diary of Virginia Woolf, edited by Jan Morris
- *The Platform of Time: Memoirs of Family and Friends*, Expanded Edition, edited by S. P. Rosenbaum (London, Hesperus, 2008)

### **Letters**

- *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters* (1993)
- *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888-1941* (six volumes, 1975-1980)
- *Paper Darts: The Illustrated Letters of Virginia Woolf* (1991)

### **Prefaces, contributions**

- *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative from the Works of George Gissing* ed. Alfred C. Gissing, with an introduction by Virginia Woolf (London & New York, 1929)

### **Works by Virginia Woolf at a Glance**

#### **Novels:**

*The Voyage Out* · *Night and Day* · *Jacob's Room* · *Mrs Dalloway* · *To the Lighthouse* · *Orlando: A Biography* · *The Waves* · *The Years* · *Between the Acts*

#### **Short stories:**

*A Haunted House* · *A Society* · *Monday or Tuesday* · *An Unwritten Novel* · *The String Quartet* · *Blue & Green* · *Kew Gardens* · *The Mark on the Wall* · *The New Dress* · *The Duchess and the Jeweller*

## Biographies:

*Flush: A Biography* · *Roger Fry: A Biography*

## Non-fiction:

*Modern Fiction* · *The Common Reader* · *A Room of One's Own* · *On Being Ill* · *The London Scene* · *The Second Common Reader* · *Three Guineas* · *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* · *The Moment and Other Essays* · *Women and Writing*

### 9.3.1 About the Text : *A Room of One's Own*

The title comes from Woolf's conception that, 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. It also refers to any author's need for poetic license and the personal liberty to create art.

The essay examines whether women were capable of producing work of the quality of William Shakespeare, amongst other topics. In one section, Woolf invented a fictional character Judith "Shakespeare's sister", to illustrate that a woman with Shakespeare's gifts would have been denied the same opportunities to develop them because of the doors that were closed to women. Woolf also examines the careers of several female authors, including Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters and George Eliot. The author subtly refers to several of the most prominent intellectuals of the time, and her hybrid name for the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge—Oxbridge—has become a well-known term, although she was not the first to use it.

*A Room of One's Own* is an extended essay, based on Woolf's lectures at a women's college at Cambridge University in 1928. In it, Woolf addresses her thoughts on "the question of women and fiction," interpreted by Woolf as many questions. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf ponders the significant question of whether or not a woman could produce art of the high quality of Shakespeare. In doing so, she examines women's historical experience as well as the distinctive struggle of the woman artist.

It was adapted as a play by Patrick Garland who also directed Eileen Atkins in its stage performance. Their television adaptation was broadcast on PBS *Masterpiece Theatre* in 1991.

Woolf announces the thesis ("an opinion based upon one minor point"): "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" and proposed a novelistic approach to defending it, using a narrator, here called "Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please" but in Chapter 6 referred to as Mary Beton. Metaphor of thinking as fishing; beadle warns the narrator off the turf and a librarian bars her from a "famous library." There is elegant lunch at a men's college; she sees cat without tail contrasts pre-war to post-war life, glimpses "bent figure" of "J—H—" (later identified as Greek scholar Jane Harrison). She contrasts poor dinner at "Fernham" to the riches of the men's colleges; her host "Mary Seton" traces history of the women's colleges; the narrator links their poverty to the status of women.

The narrator goes to the British Museum to find out "Why did men drink wine and women water? . . . What effect has poverty on fiction?" and, after seeing the card catalogue on "Women," "Why are women . . . so much more interesting to men than men are to women" She constructs picture

of Professor Von X, representing scholars who write on “W” and analyzes the anger she and they feel on the subject from all of which she extracts “the one fact of anger” Refers to her aunt “Mary Beton” leaving the narrator a legacy of 500 pounds a year ( Woolf’s own legacy from her aunt Caroline Emilia Stephen was capital of 2500 pounds, or about \$185,000 in today’s U.S. dollars (115,000 in today’s pounds)).

This section concludes with observations about women’s advancement and speculation on loss of protected status.

Professor Trevelyan’s *History of England* is used to look up information about women in England in the Renaissance to learn why women were not writing then as men were. Woolf contrasts women depicted in fiction (“of the utmost importance”) with women in history books (“all but absent”). She imagines story of Shakespeare’s “sister,” Judith Shakespeare, and speculates about lost women writers, “some mute and inglorious Jane Austen” or that “Anon . . . was often a woman”. She characterizes the situation of gifted Elizabethan women as unhappy, “a woman at strife against herself” facing not only the world’s indifference but hostility, as expressed in the words of Mr. Oscar Brown-ing [an actual person, a fellow at Cambridge]: “the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man”

Woolf surveys writings of aristocratic writers Lady Winchelsea (Anne Finch, a countess,) and Margaret of Newcastle (a duchess, ) and argues that their talent is distorted by anger and bitterness because of the “sneers and laughter” of male contemporaries. She presumes that only childless aristocrats with understanding husbands would be able to write literature at that time. She praises the letters of a middle class woman, Dorothy Osborne . She acknowledges the accomplishments of Aphra Behn from whom she dates the “freedom of the mind” that writers need, but who also “proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities”. She speculates about why four major 19th century women writers wrote novels, not poetry (Austen, the Brontes, George Eliot), relating this to the circumstances of their writing in “the common sitting room”. She links Jane Austen to Shakespeare as a literary genius in contrast to Charlotte Bronte, who “had more genius in her than Jane Austen,” but whose rage makes her books “deformed and twisted”. She contrasts male and female values, whereby books on war are judged “important,” while books on “the feelings of women in a drawing room” are insignificant . Only Jane Austen maintains the artistic integrity to “write as women write, not as men write”.

Woolf calls for a women’s sentence, which Austen created and which made her a better writer (though a lesser genius) than Charlotte Bronte. She suggests that genres also are gendered, and that the novel alone was young enough to be adapted by women writers.

She continues survey of library bookshelves, now in the 20th century, when “almost as many books [are] written by women . . . as by men” and not only novels. She writes book review of imaginary novelist “Mary Carmichael,” in whose first novel *Life’s Adventures* “Chloe liked Olivia,” thus breaking not only the sentence but the expected sequence. [The lesbian idea here is indicated in the reference to Sir Chartres Biron, the presiding magistrate at the Radclyffe Hall obscenity trial going on at the time of the original Cambridge lectures.] She praises Mary Carmichael for writing “as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman” .



The last chapter opens with the story of a man and a woman meeting on the street and getting into a taxicab, all observed from the narrator's window and interpreted as an image of the meeting of male and female in the quest for "the unity of the mind". Woolf cites Coleridge on the androgyny of great minds, which she regards as the fusion of the male and female parts of the mind. She critiques imaginary novelist, "Mr. A," who writes with the confidence and freedom of a man, but with a shadow across the page "shaped something like the letter 'I'" Mr. A. stands for men who are "now writing only with the male side of their brains" (mentions Galsworthy and Kipling). Critic "Mr. B." misses "the secret of perpetual life" because "his mind seemed separated into different chambers". "Mary Beton ceases to speak" and the narrator changes to "my own person." She closes with a peroration on women's progress and opportunities, and a call to let Shakespeare's sister "live in you and in me, and in many women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up dishes and putting the children to bed".

### 9.3.2 Critical Analysis

The dramatic setting of *A Room of One's Own* is that Woolf has been invited to lecture on the topic of Women and Fiction. She advances the thesis that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Her essay is constructed as a partly-fictionalized narrative of the thinking that led her to adopt this thesis. She dramatizes that mental process in the character of an imaginary narrator ("call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance") who is in her same position, wrestling with the same topic.

The narrator begins her investigation at Oxbridge College, where she reflects on the different educational experiences available to men and women as well as on more material differences in their lives. She then spends a day in the British Library perusing the scholarship on women, all of which has been written by men and all of which has been written in anger. Turning to history, she finds so little data about the everyday lives of women that she decides to reconstruct their existence imaginatively. The figure of Judith Shakespeare is generated as an example of the tragic fate a highly intelligent woman would have met with under those circumstances. In light of this background, she considers the achievements of the major women novelists of the nineteenth century and reflects on the importance of tradition to an aspiring writer. A survey of the current state of literature follows, conducted through a reading of the first novel of one of the narrator's contemporaries. Woolf closes the essay with an exhortation to her audience of women to take up the tradition that has been so hardly bequeathed to them, and to increase the endowment for their own daughters.

#### Themes

For the narrator of *A Room of One's Own*, money is the primary element that prevents women from having a room of their own, and thus, having money is of the utmost importance. Because women do not have power, their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout the ages. The narrator writes, "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time . . ." She uses this quotation to explain why so few women have written successful poetry. She believes that the writing of novels lends itself more easily to frequent starts and stops, so women are more likely to write novels than poetry: women must contend with frequent interruptions because they are so often

deprived of a room of their own in which to write. Without money, the narrator implies, women will remain in second place to their creative male counterparts. The financial discrepancy between men and women at the time of Woolf's writing perpetuated the myth that women were less successful writers.

In *A Room of One's Own*, the narrator argues that even history is subjective. What she seeks is nothing less than "the essential oil of truth," but this eludes her, and she eventually concludes that no such thing exists. The narrator later writes, "When a subject is highly controversial, one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold." To demonstrate the idea that opinion is the only thing that a person can actually "prove," she fictionalizes her lecture, claiming, "Fiction is likely to contain more truth than fact." Reality is not objective: rather, it is contingent upon the circumstances of one's world. This argument complicates her narrative: Woolf forces her reader to question the veracity of everything she has presented as truth so far, and yet she also tells them that the fictional parts of any story contain more essential truth than the factual parts. With this observation she recasts the accepted truths and opinions of countless literary works.

When the narrator is interrupted in *A Room of One's Own*, she generally fails to regain her original concentration, suggesting that women without private spaces of their own, free of interruptions, are doomed to difficulty and even failure in their work. While the narrator is describing Oxbridge University in chapter one, her attention is drawn to a cat without a tail. The narrator finds this cat to be out of place, and she uses the sight of this cat to take her text in a different direction. The oddly jarring and incongruous sight of a cat without a tail—which causes the narrator to completely lose her train of thought—is an exercise in allowing the reader to experience what it might feel like to be a woman writer. Although the narrator goes on to make an interesting and valuable point about the atmosphere at her luncheon, she has lost her original point. This shift underscores her claim that women, who so often lack a room of their own and the time to write, cannot compete against the men who are not forced to struggle for such basic necessities.

Throughout *A Room of One's Own*, the narrator emphasizes the fact that women are treated unequally in her society and that this is why they have produced less impressive works of writing than men. To illustrate her point, the narrator creates a woman named Judith Shakespeare, the imaginary twin sister of William Shakespeare. The narrator uses Judith to show how society systematically discriminates against women. Judith is just as talented as her brother William, but while his talents are recognized and encouraged by their family and the rest of their society, Judith's are underestimated and explicitly deemphasized. Judith writes, but she is secretive and ashamed of it. She is engaged at a fairly young age; when she begs not to have to marry, her beloved father beats her. She eventually commits suicide. The narrator invents the tragic figure of Judith to prove that a woman as talented as Shakespeare could never have achieved such success. Talent is an essential component of Shakespeare's success, but because women are treated so differently, a female Shakespeare would have fared quite differently even if she'd had as much talent as Shakespeare did.

The central point of *A Room of One's Own* is that every woman needs a room of her own—something men are able to enjoy without question. A room of her own would provide a woman with the time and the space to engage in uninterrupted writing time. During Woolf's time, women rarely enjoyed these luxuries. They remained elusive to women, and, as a result, their art suffered. But Woolf is concerned with more than just the room itself. She uses the room as a symbol for many larger issues,

such as privacy, leisure time, and financial independence, each of which is an essential component of the countless inequalities between men and women. Woolf predicts that until these inequalities are rectified, women will remain second-class citizens and their literary achievements will also be branded as such.

---

## 9.4 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. What is the dramatic setting of the essay ?

.....

.....

.....

2. Her thesis has

- a) No scope
- b) Unlimited scope
- c) Limited Scope

.....

.....

.....

3. What is Oxbridge ?

.....

.....

.....

4. Who is the Beadle ?

.....

.....

.....

5. What is the rule for women for visiting the library?

.....

.....

.....

6. What is the drastic change that has taken place in the field of poetry ?

.....

.....

.....

7. What does Fernham represent ?

.....

.....

8. Name the Narrator's friend.

.....

9. What are the reflections at the end of the first chapter?

.....

10. Who is Judith Shakespeare?

.....

11. What does Judith Shakespeare represent ?

.....

12. Name some of the female writers.

.....

13. Why one cannot hope to tell the truth?

.....

14. Name the writer whose book on history is used to seek information about women (Chapter 3)

- .....
- .....
- .....
15. What happens with Judith Shakespeare in the end ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
16. Name the two aristocratic female writers whose writings are surveyed ? (Chapter 4)
- .....
- .....
- .....
17. Why is their talent distorted ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
18. Name the middle class woman writer whose letters are praised ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
19. Whose books are deformed and twisted ?
- a) Charlotte Bronte's
- b) J. Austen's
- c) Shakespeare's
- d) G. Eliot's
20. Who maintains the artistic integrity to "write as women write, not as men write."?
- a) Jane Austen
- b) G. Eliot
- c) T.S. Eliot
- d) E. Bronte
21. "The freedom of mind" dates from

- a) Aphra Behn
  - b) G. Eliot
  - c) T.S. Eliot
  - d) J. Austen
22. Who is famous for “Women’s sentence”?
- a) Shakespeare
  - b) E. Bronte
  - c) J. Austen
  - d) Dorothy Osborne
23. Who is praised for writing “As a Woman who has forgotten that she is a woman”?
- a) E. Bronte
  - b) Judith Shakespeare
  - c) Jane Austen
  - d) Mary Carmichael
24. Why is woman barred from library ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
25. The dinner at the Women’s College is not good. Why ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
26. Where do Chloe and Olivia work ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
27. Why does Marry Carmichael not represent the Culmination of literary development ?
- .....
- .....
- .....

28. What does Marry need to be a poet ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
29. What does it mean “There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can setup on the freedom of the mind”?  
.....  
.....  
.....
30. Why have so many women written under assumed – male – names ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
31. What image is interpreted as the “the unity of mind”?  
.....  
.....  
.....
32. Who is cited on androgyny ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
33. What does Woolf mean by androgyny ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
34. What does Mr. A stand for?  
.....  
.....  
.....
35. Name famous two Novels of Woolf.  
.....

.....  
.....  
36. Who is the writer of *Life's Adventure* ?

- a) V. Woolf.
- b) Tolstoy
- c) Mary Carmichael
- d) J. Austen

37. How did Woolf end her life ?

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

38. Name some of the themes of the essay.

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

39. Explain the symbol of “room”.

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

40. Explain the title.

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

---

## 9.5 Let Us Sum Up

---

By now you have gone through the life and works of Virginia Woolf. You have studied the gist, summary and the commentary upon the essay *A Room of One's Own*. You have seen how Woolf



advocates the point of view of a female writer, enumerating the causes and effects of discrimination against them. Woolf has shown us the way how a free mind cannot be imprisoned within walls.

---

## 9.6 Answers to SAQs

---

1. The dramatic settings of the essay is that Woolf has been invited to deliver a lecture on the topic of women and fiction.
2. (c) limited scope
3. A fictional university meant to suggest Oxford and Cambridge.
4. A University security guard who enforces the rule by which women are not allowed to walk onto the grass.
5. Women are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction.
6. The new poetry, the postwar poetry, is full of difficulty coming out of disillusionment. It has not the familiarity and comfortable recognition. Thoughts and emotions of the new poetry are very hard and tough.
7. It represents the relatively new institution of the women's college. Every thing looks here slightly less hopeful.
8. Mary Seton.
9. The first chapter ends with the reflection on the urbanity, the geniality and the dignity which come out of luxury, privacy and space.
10. William Shakespeare's sister, a fictional character invented by Woolf.
11. She is an example of a female writer with Shakespeare's gifts but would have been denied the opportunities to develop them.
12. Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, The Bronte Sisters & George Eliot
13. Because the subject becomes controversial and one can only show how one came to hold a particular opinion.
14. G.M. Trevelyan.
15. By committing suicide, she ends her life.
16. Lady Winchelsea and Margaret of New castle.
17. It is distorted by anger and bitterness arising because of the sneer and laughter of male contemporaries.
18. Dorothy Osborne
19. (a) Charlotte Bronte's

20. (a) Jane Austen
21. (a) Aphra Behn
22. (c) Jane Austen
23. (d) Mary Carmichael
24. A women is barred from University Library because of gender discrimination, She is thought to be less intelligent, less artistic and less innovative.
25. Because women are considered inferior to men and there are less donations for women's college.
26. They work together in a laboratory.
27. Because she will be full of self-consciousness which will keep her in the realm of the "nature novelist" rather than the contemplative artist.
28. She needs five hundred pounds and a room of her own.
29. It means there cannot be any restriction for a creative mind.
30. Because they considered good writers. They have been discriminated & the public opinion has been against them. It has been a disguised work.
31. A man and woman meeting on the street and getting into a taxi.
32. Coleridge.
33. She regards as the fusion to the male and female parts of the mind.
34. "A" stands for men who are "now writing only with the male side of their brains".
35. *Mrs. Dalloway, To the Light House.*
36. (c) Mary Carmichael
37. She put on her overcoat, filled its pockets with stones, walked into the river near her home and downed herself. She committed suicide.
38. Some of the themes of the essay are the important money, the subjectivity of truth and gender inequality.
39. Woolf uses the symbol 'room' for privacy, leisure time, financial independence, poetic license & liberty of expression.
40. Woolf thought that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. It also refers to any writer's need for poetic license and the personal liberty to create art. The privacy is one's own so as not to be affected or influenced by the other factor.

---

## 9.7 Review Questions

---

(A)

1. How does the Beadle force the narrator back onto the public path at Oxbridge?

- (A) He issues her a citation
  - (B) He gives her a stern warning
  - (C) He points to the sign saying “Fellows and Scholars only”
  - (D) He walks toward her, making gestures and looking angry
2. What is required for an unaccompanied woman to be admitted to the library at Oxbridge?
- (A) Aristocratic parentage
  - (B) A letter of introduction
  - (C) Graduate-student status
  - (D) A room of her own and 500 pounds a year
3. What is so remarkable about the cat that appears in Chapter 1?
- (A) It eats the narrator’s fish
  - (B) It is allowed into the library
  - (C) It has no tail
  - (D) It never leaves the house
4. In what year, according to Mary Seton, was Fernham created?
- (A) 1860
  - (B) 1890
  - (C) 1910
  - (D) 1950
5. What does the domed ceiling of the British Library remind the narrator of?
- (A) The paths of planetary motion
  - (B) An empty box
  - (C) Shakespeare’s Globe Theater
  - (D) A huge head
6. Which gender has been more extensively researched, according to the catalogue of the British Library?
- (A) Male
  - (B) Female
7. What caused the death of the narrator’s aunt and benefactor?
- (A) She fell from a horse

- (B) Her ship to India sank in a storm
  - (C) She died of consumption
  - (D) She died in childbirth
8. What other important event happened at the same time that the narrator learned of her inheritance?
    - (A) Her first child was born
    - (B) The First World War began
    - (C) Women were given the right to vote
    - (D) The first women's college opened
  9. What name does the narrator give to Shakespeare's sister?
    - (A) Clarissa
    - (B) Ann
    - (C) Mary
    - (D) Judith
  10. Which of the following writers were women?
    - (A) Currer Bell
    - (B) George Sand
    - (C) "Anonymous"
    - (D) All of the above

**(B)**

1. What is the meaning of the title of this piece?
2. When asked to speak of women and fiction, Woolf replies with a discussion of why it is important for women writers to have their independence. According to Woolf, what is the relationship or connection between rooms of one's own and "women and fiction"?
3. Woolf defines the question of women and fiction as being three inextricable questions: women and what they are like; women and the fiction they write; and women and what is written about them. What answers does she provide for each of these questions? What are women like, according to Woolf? What kinds of fiction do (or, as of 1928, did) women write? What is (or, as of 1928, was) written about women?
4. Why does Woolf say she is disappointed in herself for being unable to come to a conclusion that students can write in their notebooks and take away from them? Why would this be so important as a part of a lecture? Why would it be so important to Woolf to be able to do so?
5. Woolf writes, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is going to write."

What does this mean to Woolf?

6. Why does it matter so much when Woolf walks on the turf at Cambridge University, and what does she make of this event? Why is a woman barred from admission to the University's library? Why does her exclusion make her so angry that she vows never to ask for "such hospitality" again?
7. What importance is it that the dinner at the women's college is "not good"? How does this lead to an exploration of the founding of the women's college? What is Woolf's broader conclusion about women and their cultural poverty that this incident leads to?
8. What does Cambridge University represent for Woolf, a Modernist? How is it a symbol of Victorianism?
9. Why are men so rich and women so poor, according to Woolf? What are the historical roots for women's poverty? What explains the startling contrast between women's estate in fiction (as "shining beacons" and as symbols of humanity) and in history (as slaves)?
10. What is the significance of the list of references to women she discovers in the course of her reading? What sorts of arguments about women does Woolf find in English writing prior to 1928?
11. Why has the woman artist, according to Woolf, led a life of such "disorder" and struggle? How does Woolf argue against the assumption that "no woman can write the plays of Shakespeare"?
12. What does Woolf mean by the statement, "Who can measure the heat and passion of a poet's heart when it is caught and tangled in a woman's body"?
13. Why, according to Woolf, have so many women written under assumed—male—names?
14. What history of women's writing does Woolf identify in *A Room of One's Own*?
15. Woolf discusses the ways in which limits of propriety blighted Jane Austen and Emily Brontë's writing, but she also argues that they both wrote "as women write." What does Woolf mean by this? What does her identification of this quality in Austen's and Brontë's writing say about Woolf's view of women's cultures?
16. What does Woolf mean when she says, "There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of the mind"?
17. In this highly materialist argument, to what degree does Woolf leave open the possibility that an individual genius may rise above such limiting circumstances as poverty or lack of education?
18. How would you describe the form of this essay? Is it an argument? If so, how does it differ from more conventional forms of argumentation, and to what effect?

---

## 9.8 Bibliography

---

### *Biographies*

1. Virginia Woolf by Nigel Nicolson. New York, Penguin Group. 2000

2. Virginia Woolf: A Biography by Quentin Bell. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972; Revised editions 1990, 1996
3. “Vanessa and Virginia” by Susan Sellers (Two Ravens, 2008; Harcourt 2009) [Fictional biography of Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell]
4. The Unknown Virginia Woolf by Roger Poole. Cambridge UP, 1978.
5. The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship by Ellen Bayuk Rosenman. Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
6. Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work by Louise DeSalvo. Boston: Little Brown, 1989
7. A Virginia Woolf Chronology by Edward Bishop. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989.
8. A Very Close Conspiracy: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf by Jane Dunn. Boston: Little, Brown, 1990
9. Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life by Lyndall Gordon. New York: Norton, 1984; 1991.
10. The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf’s Art and Manic-Depressive Illness by Thomas D. Caramago. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992
11. Virginia Woolf by James King. NY: W.W. Norton, 1994.
12. Art and Affection: A Life of Virginia Woolf by Panthea Reid. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
13. Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee. New York: Knopf, 1997.
14. Granite and Rainbow: The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf by Mitchell Leaska. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.
15. Virginia Woolf: The Will to Create as a Woman by Ruth Gruber. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005
16. My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf by Thomas Szasz, 2006
17. The Bedside, Bathtub and Armchair Companion to Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury by Sarah M. Hall, Continuum Publishing, 2007
18. A Life of One’s Own: A Guide to Better Living through the Work and Wisdom of Virginia Woolf by Ilana Simons, New York: Penguin Press, 2007

#### **Related works and cultural references**

19. Michael Cunningham’s 1998 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Hours*, focused on three generations of women affected by Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In 2002, a film version of the novel was released starring Nicole Kidman as Woolf, a role for which she won the 2002 Academy Award for Best Actress. The film also starred Julianne Moore and Meryl Streep.
20. Edward Albee’s play, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, premiered in 1963 and was later adapted into a film version in 1966. The play/film utilizes Woolf’s name as a musical punch-line

for a joke that replaces “the big bad wolf” in the song “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” with “Virginia Woolf”. The play and film have nothing to do with the author or her life.

21. Indigo Girls include the song, “Virginia Woolf,” written by Emily Saliers, on their 1992 album, Rites of Passage (*Indigo Girls album*). On a live version of the song from their *1200 Curfews* compilation, Emily humorously remarks: “I wrote papers about her Woolf in college, but I didn’t know what I was talking about.”
  22. Jack Feldstein, stream-of-consciousness neon animation filmmaker, created an homage to Virginia Woolf in his The Adventures of Virginia Woolf (2007)
-

## UNIT-10

---

### VIRGINIA WOOLF : *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN* (II)

---

#### Structure

#### 10.0 Objectives

#### 10.1 The Text : Famous Quotes and Excerpts from *A Room of One's Own*

#### 10.2 Critical Analysis

#### 10.3 Let Us Sum Up

#### 10.4 Review Questions.

#### 10.5 Bibliography

---

### 10.0 Objectives

---

This unit is in continuation with the previous one. Here we propose to give an in depth critical analysis with commentary on the various chapters.

---

### 10.1 The Text : Famous Quotes and Excerpts from *A Room of One's Own*

---

1. Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name you please—it is not a matter of importance.
2. A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.
3. One must strain off what was personal and accidental in all these impressions and so reach the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth.
4. It would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare.
5. Life for both sexes—and I look at them, shouldering their way along the pavement—is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion that we are, it calls for confidence in oneself as it is.”

It would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare.

Let me imagine, since the facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably - his mother was an heiress - to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin - Ovid, Virgil and Horace - and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighborhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at



the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practicing his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen.

Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter - indeed, more likely than not she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighboring wool-stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. He would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said; and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart? The force of her own gift alone drove her to it. She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen. The birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him, she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager - a fat, loose-lipped man - guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting - no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted - you can imagine what. She could get no training in her craft. Could she even seek her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight? Yet her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways. At last - for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face, with the same grey eyes and rounded brows - at last Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so - who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body? - killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.

That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius.

But for my part, I agree with the deceased bishop, if such he was - it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born today among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women whose work began, according to Professor Trevelyan, almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom? Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes. Now and again an Emily Bronte or a Robert Burns blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and

inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, on the length of the winter's night. This may be true or it may be false - who can say? - but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. No girl could have walked to London and stood at a stage door and forced her way into the presence of actor-managers without doing herself a violence and suffering an anguish which may have been irrational - for chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons - but were none the less inevitable. Chastity has then, it has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest. To have lived a free life in London in the sixteenth century would have meant for a woman who was a poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might well have killed her. Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned. That refuge she would have sought certainly. It was the relic of the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to women even so late as the nineteenth century. Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand, all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man. Thus they did homage to the convention, which if not implanted by the other sex was liberally encouraged by them, that publicity in women is detestable. Anonymity runs in their blood....

---

## 10.2 Critical Analysis

---

### Part 1

Woolf has been asked to speak on the topic of Women and Fiction. Her thesis is that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." This thesis has a limited scope, she admits—one that "leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved." Yet she extends the hope that her reflections may shed at least some light on those questions as well. The essay is designed as an explanation of how Woolf arrived at her thesis. To present this argument, she says, she must take a detour through fiction: "I propose making use of all the liberties and licenses of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here—how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life." With this introduction, the narrative portion of the essay begins.

The narrator sits on the banks of a river at "Oxbridge" (a fictional university meant to suggest

Oxford and Cambridge) pondering the question of women and fiction. She represents her musings metaphorically in terms of fishing: “thought... had let its line down into the stream” of the mind, where it drifts in the current and waits for the tug of an idea. As soon as she gets a bite, however, she is interrupted by the approach of the Beadle, a university security guard who enforces the rule by which women are not allowed to walk onto the grass. She scurries back to her proper place on the gravel path, remarking that while “no very great harm” had been done, she had lost her “little fish” of an idea.

As she revels in the tranquility and beauty of her surroundings, the narrator remembers an essay by Charles Lamb about revisiting Oxbridge. She is inspired to view the manuscript in the library, only to be told that “ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction.” The library is fortress-like—impermeable and indifferent—in stark contrast to the narrator’s own vulnerability. “Never will I ask for that hospitality again,” she vows in anger. Distracted by the sound of organ music, she watches as a cross-section of the university population assembles for a service in the chapel. She is struck by the insularity of the academic setting, seeing the university as a kind of laboratory or museum and its inhabitants as odd specimens who have no place in regular life. Soon they have all gone inside, however, and she remains outside, weighed down with the feeling her own exclusion.

The narrator then reflects on the history of the university, thinking in particular of the materials, labor, and money upon which it was founded and maintained. The clock strikes, interrupting this train of thought. She describes the elaborate lunch that was served at the college, where the flood of wine and the dessert and the wealth of good company create an overwhelming sense of abundance and optimism. “And thus by degrees was lit, half-way down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, ...the profound, subtle, and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational conversation.”

Her attention is then distracted by the sight of “a cat without a tail,” which looks odd and out of place in these opulent surroundings. The sight of “that abrupt and truncated animal” prompts her to as sense that something is lacking in the lunchtime atmosphere and conversation. To answer the question of that lack, the narrator shifts the scene to a similar luncheon party, before the war, in similar rooms—”but different.” She speculates about the change in the kind of conversations people had before World War I, and the kind of poetry they wrote, and observes that a drastic change has taken place. The romantic views of a Tennyson or a Rossetti no longer seem possible in the post-war era; the difference being that that earlier poetry “celebrates some feeling that one used to have (at luncheon parties before the war perhaps).” The new poetry, however, expresses thoughts and emotions so gut- wrenchingly new that readers cannot respond to them with the same familiarity or comfortable recognition. “Hence the difficulty of modern poetry,” which comes as a kind of disillusionment. While thinking through this problem, the narrator misses her turn to “Fernham,” which represents the relatively new institution of the women’s college.

The narrator describes a meal at Fernham, which compares but poorly with the grand luncheon earlier in the day. “The lamp in the spine,” she writes, “does not light on beef and prunes.” Everything looks slightly less hopeful from this perspective, and we see that with reduced privilege comes a corresponding atrophy of one’s sense of power and possibility—that is the dubious and qualifying state of mind that beef and prunes at the end of the day’s work breed between them.” Conversation is gossip rather than profound, and the narrator retires to the room of her friend Mary Seton with a

vague feeling of discontent. They discuss the founding of the women's college, which involved a arduous and often discouraging effort to raise sufficient financial and political support. The picture contrasts sharply with the history of male universities, which have been continually and generously supported for centuries.

Why have women have always been so poor, the narrator wonders, thinking about how different things would have been "if only Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money" for the education of their daughters. She is forced to concede, however, that a great sacrifice would have been required: "There would have been—that was the snag in the argument—no Mary." Plus, law and custom conspired to prevent those women from having any legal property rights at all; they were themselves considered property. The chapter's closing reflections are on "the urbanity, the geniality, and the dignity which are the offspring of luxury and privacy and space," the effect of poverty on the mind, and particularly "the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer."

Woolf elects *not* to respond to the problem of "women and fiction" by delivering pat remarks on famous women writers, hoping instead to explore the issue in deeper ways. She recognizes that her chosen approach is such that she might "never be able to come to a conclusion" or distill "a nugget of pure truth" for her listeners to carry home. "When a subject is highly controversial," she explains, "one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold." By choosing fiction as the medium for her argument, Woolf continues to thematize the complex network of relationships between truth and fiction, facts and lies, and opinions and emotions. "Fiction is likely to contain more truth than fact," she explains. "Lies will flow from my lips, but there may be some truth mixed up with them."

The "I" who narrates the story is not Woolf—it matters little what name we give her, Woolf insists—and yet her experiences and thoughts are to provide the background and argument for Woolf's thesis. Already, the narrative situation illustrates one of Woolf's fundamental aesthetic principles: Art should have a kind of "incandescence" in which everything that is purely personal burns away, leaving something like the "nugget of pure truth" to which Woolf has referred. The imagery of light and fire that is already accumulating in this chapter are meant to suggest this kind of aesthetic purification. Woolf's aesthetic argument will be developed more fully as the essay continues.

The orientation here, however, is materialist and social, and Woolf's thesis—that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"—announces that focus in no uncertain terms. What are the basic material and social conditions in which aesthetic achievement becomes a realistic possibility? By addressing this question, she hopes to situate the problem of women and fiction in an objective and historicized framework—in rejection of a theoretical tradition founded on the assumption that women are naturally inferior to men. Woolf's argument constantly returns to the concrete material details of the situations she describes: the food that was eaten, the money that was spent, the comfort of the accommodations, and the demands on people's time. Her strategy is designed to convince the reader of the deep relevance of these physical conditions for the possibility of intellectual and creative activity.

As Woolf describes her narrator's thoughts on women and fiction, she emphasizes the role of interruptions in the reflective process. By dramatizing the effects of these interruptions, Woolf bolsters

her argument that a private room is a basic requirement for creative work. The fact that women have not historically been granted space or leisure for uninterrupted thinking is, in Woolf's view, a determining factor in the history of their literary achievements. Intelligence, at least in the model of Charles Lamb, works by "wild flash[es] of imagination" or the "lightning crack of genius"—insights which nevertheless take time to gestate. Yet time and time again, just as our narrator seems to be on the verge of an insight of this sort, her thinking is cut off—usually by an authority figure trying to keep her in her place. Where a man would have been given free rein, the narrator is restricted to a narrow path on the Oxbridge campus. Nor is she permitted to enter the college library. These obstacles symbolize the effects of an educational culture that radically restricts the scope of a woman's intellectual exposure. Woolf identifies the fact of being denied access—whether to buildings or ideas—as another type of infringement on the freedom of the female mind. This exclusion is a more radical kind of interruption, one that disturbs not just a single thought or reverie, but the life-long developmental of an individual or the historical development of an intellectual tradition.

## Part 2

The scene changes from Oxbridge to London, where the narrator sits in a room attempting to write about Women and Fiction. She reviews the questions raised during the previous day at Oxbridge ("Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?") and then resolves upon a trip to the British Museum in order to "strain off what was personal and accidental in all these impressions and so reach the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth." She looks in the catalogue in the British Library for books about women and marvels at how many have been written, and under the rubrics of how many different disciplines. Checking the "M" listings, she finds that no such archive exists on the topic of males.

Arbitrarily selecting a few of these books, she finds a great array of opinions and topics and finally pauses resentfully with one professor's statement of "the mental, moral, and physical inferiority of women." She decides that these studies, whatever their differences, had all "been written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth." They betray an underlying anger that prevents them from approaching their subject objectively. "Why are they angry?" the narrator asks herself as she breaks for lunch. She concludes that if the author of the study on the inferiority of women had argued dispassionately, she would not have become incensed herself: "I had been angry because he was angry." The narrator intuits a depth of motivation and response underlying this issue, and she decides that male scholars have been less interested in the inferiority of women than in preserving and authenticating their sense of male superiority. Women have served as mirrors to men, in this sense, for centuries.

Here, the narrator is interrupted by the necessity of paying the bill. She takes the opportunity, while on the subject of her own finances, to inform us that she was left a legacy of five hundred pounds a year by her aunt, Mary Beton. She remembers getting the letter at the same time that women were granted the vote, and observes that the inheritance was more important in securing her freedom. It relieved her not only of the obligation to work for a living, but also of hatred and bitterness of temperament. It allowed her to forgive men for their collective injustices toward women, and to see males too as victims in some ways of their education and culture. Ultimately, the financial freedom gave her the "freedom to think of things in themselves."

Returning home, the narrator finds herself entering into a strikingly domestic setting. She thinks to herself that it is nearly impossible to say whether the kinds of labor that have traditionally been performed by women are more or less valuable than the (usually more quantifiable) work done by men. The question is unanswerable: not only does domestic labor fall outside of any economic indexes of value, but its cultural value also changes “from decade to decade.” She envisions a future in which there will be no gender-based division of labor. “But what bearing has all this upon the subject of my paper, *Women and Fiction*?” she wonders as she enters the house.

The narrator’s first naive belief in the British Museum as a bastion of unadulterated truth is an ironic swipe on Woolf’s part, and she quickly disabuses her protagonist of this error. Woolf herself does not hope to uncover any trans-historical truth about women, in part because her project is to show that the status of women (and literary achievement in general) is context-bound and historically relative. She does leave room, however, for a certain kind of objectivity in one’s approach to the question. The work that has been done by men was written in anger, she is sure: “When I read what he wrote about women I thought, not of what he was saying, but of himself. When an author argues dispassionately he thinks only of the argument; and the reader cannot help thinking of the argument too.” She advocates for a disinterested approach, which means that she must purge herself of her own anger at the kinds of analyses she has been reading. Her goal is to place herself above the fray of the war between the sexes, where the air is clearer and one is more likely to arrive at some kind of truth. The fictionalization of the essay is one of Woolf’s strategies for removing the argument from her own personal injuries and resentments.

Woolf is careful not to blame men for the unequal treatment of women over the centuries. Or, inasmuch as she does blame them, she attributes the violences of patriarchy to universal human foibles. “Life for both sexes—and I look at them, shouldering their way along the pavement—is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion that we are, it calls for confidence in oneself.” For men, over the ages, women have served as an instrument for reinforcing that necessary self-confidence. Women have been the mirrors in which man wished to see only the reflection of his own grandeur. If this has been detrimental to women, it is nevertheless true, the narrators surmises, that “mirrors are essential”—to “heroic action” as well as to violence. Yet in spite of her unwillingness to pass judgment in a personal or resentful way, she takes a stand against this sexist mode of operation from a cultural point of view, invoking fascist and dictatorial political regimes as the extreme models of this kind of thinking.

The narrator’s ability to consider the subject of gender inequality with disinterestedness stems in large part from her financial independence. She has five hundred pounds a year, and the effect of that income is to dissolve the frustration and vulnerability that would color her thinking and writing in a negative way. It is for this same reason that the writer of literature, in Woolf’s view, must enjoy the luxury of financial freedom. Artistic production, even more perhaps than rational argumentation, requires that all traces of the particular self be distilled in the “white light of truth.”

### **Part 3**

The narrator returns home disappointed at not having rounded up some useful tidbit of truth from her researches at the British Library. She turns at this point to history, which, she conjectures, “records not opinions but facts.” As her starting point, she chooses to look into the lives of English

women during the Elizabethan period—an era of surpassing literary accomplishment, but only among men. It is a virtue of Shakespeare's plays, she observes, that they seem, like enchanted spider-webs, "to hang there complete by themselves." In reality, however, even his works "are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the real work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in."

History turns up little except a few terse statements about the legal rights of women in the early modern period (which were virtually non-existent). This reticence on the topic of women, and the fact of her utter powerlessness, strikes discordantly with the prevalence in literature of complex and strong female characters from ancient times to the present. "A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. ...Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband." In light of this paradox, the solution to the problem of trying to conceptualize the Elizabethan woman seems to be to pool the resources of history and fiction.

"It would have been impossible," the narrator concludes from this thought-experiment, "completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare." To illustrate this conclusion, she conjures the imaginary character of Judith Shakespeare. Judith is as gifted perhaps as her brother, but receives no education except that which she can create for herself in what free time she has. Although she is "the apple of her father's eye," her family expects her to conform to a social role that leaves no room for the development of her talent. She writes some, in secret, but hides or burns her work for fear of reprisal. She becomes engaged at a young age. When she begs to be allowed not to marry, she is chastised and beaten by her father. After this she runs away, driven by "the force of her own gift alone." She wants to go into acting, but meets with rejection and ridicule. She is finally taken up by a theater-manager, becomes pregnant by him, and commits suicide.

This is how the life of a woman with Shakespeare's genius might have looked at that time, the narrator argues. But she goes on to assert that "it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius" - or no more than the first germ of genius, and certainly not the kind that would ever have translated itself into brilliant writing. "For genius is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people," except with the rarest exceptions—and even then, that social condition glares through as a limitation of the art. In that age, genius engendered witches and lunatics among women, and "Anonymous," she argues, was most likely a woman as well.

Having explored the deep inner conflicts that a gifted woman must have felt during the Renaissance, the narrator goes on to ask, "What is the state of mind that is most propitious to the act of creation?" She marvels at the "prodigious difficulty" of producing a work of genius, and observes that circumstances generally conspire against it. She cites as obstacles the indifference of most of the world, the profusion of distractions, and the heaping up of various forms of discouragement. This is true for all artists, but how much more so for women! A woman would not even have a room of her own, unless her parents were exceptionally wealthy, and in her spending money and discretionary time she would be totally at the mercy of others. Being regularly told of female ineptitude, women would surely have internalized that belief; the absence of any tradition of female intellectuals would have made such arguments all the more viable. Though we like to think of genius as transcendent, the narrator

holds that the mind of the artist is actually particularly susceptible to discouragement and vulnerable to the opinion of others. The mind of the artist, she says, “must be incandescent. ... There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed.”

In this chapter, the narrator turns to history to look for “facts” about the relationship between women and literature. Relevant facts, however, prove to be few and far between. Once again, fiction is enlisted to help complete the history—and to expose, along the way, the biases and omissions of canonical knowledge. The absence of objective historical facts is a real obstacle for the person attempting to reconstruct the experience of 16th century women: “Here am I asking why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age, and I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night.” In spite of this gap in the historical record, however, the narrator provides an astute analysis of the conflicting values and impulses to which such a woman would have been susceptible. She points out that sexist assumptions would have been internalized, showing how oppression of this kind comes from within as well as from without. The touching portrait of Judith Shakespeare takes us beyond mere facts, touching the tragedy and anguish that would have been at the heart of an intelligent woman’s experience at that time. Even while bemoaning the missing history, the author is aware that a purely objective view would not do justice to this subjective experience in the way the portrait of Judith Shakespeare might hope to. “Objectivity,” in this instance, must take the form not of scientific detachment, but rather of imaginative engagement.

The narrator elaborates more fully the point from the first chapter that genius depends on certain conditions—and that these conditions, at the most basic level, are material and social. Because Shakespeare is so often sanctified as the pure genius who transcends all conditions of circumstance and surroundings, his era and his sister provide apt templates for Woolf’s argument. There are two important ideas in play here. The first is that all art, even Shakespeare’s, *is* in fact enabled by a historical, social, and economic reality, whether or not that reality finds articulation in the art itself. The different outcomes of William and Judith Shakespeare serve to dramatize this point, and also to account for the fact that women simply were not writing literature at that time. The second point is an aesthetic one: that good art in fact *should not* betray the personal circumstances surrounding its production. In order to achieve “incandescence,” the intensity of the art must burn away “all desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship of grievance.” It is in their incandescence that Shakespeare’s plays achieve their greatness. But that characteristic is itself a luxury, and a product of social and material privilege (in much the same way that the narrator’s five hundred pounds a year allows her to think about her controversial topic with charity and equanimity). The very fact that we know so little about Shakespeare as a person testifies to the greatness of his art.

#### **Part 4**

Incandescence, the narrator reiterates, is a state of mind that simply would have been impossible for a woman in the sixteenth century. She continues her history by tracing the gradual emergence of women writers out of that blank past. The first would have been aristocrats, women of “comparative freedom and comfort” who had the resources not only to spend their time writing, but also to brave public disapproval. This is how the narrator accounts for the poetry of Lady Winchilsea around the



turn of the eighteenth century. Her work, however, is far from incandescent: “one has only to open her poetry to find her bursting out in indignation against the position of women.” She then turns to the writings of Margaret of Newcastle, who might have been a poet or a scientist but instead “frittered her time away scribbling nonsense.” Like Lady Winchilsea, she was an aristocrat, had no children, and was married to the right kind of man. The letters of Dorothy Osborne, next off the shelf, indicate a disdain for women who write, and at the same time betray a remarkable verbal gift in their own right. With Aphra Behn, the narrator identifies a turning point: a middle class woman making a living by her writing, in defiance of conventions of chastity. The later eighteenth century saw droves of women following her example, and these paved the way for the likes of Jane Austen and George Eliot. “All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn ...for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.”

Why were all these women writers novelists? The major nineteenth-century figures, except for the fact that all were childless, seem to have had very little in common. The narrator offers several reasons why they all might have been attracted to the novel form. For one thing, these women wrote in the shared space of the sitting-room; perhaps the novel proved a hardier form than poetry in this climate of distraction. Secondly, without any formal literary training, the education nineteenth century women received in reading character and behavior would have been their main literary asset—one most applicable to the novel. Emily Bronte might have made a better dramatic poet; Eliot was by disposition a historian or biographer. Yet these women wrote novels (though Bronte also wrote lyric poems), and the novels were good ones. Jane Austen was known to hide her work when someone entered the room, yet her novels are written “without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching.” Like Shakespeare, the narrator thinks, Austen wrote in such a way that her art “consumed all impediments.” Charlotte Bronte does not write with that same incandescence; Bronte may have had more genius than Austen, but her writing bears the scars of her personal wounds.

Integrity, in the novelist, “is the conviction that he gives one that this is the truth.” It is what holds novels together and makes them exciting to read. This is a simple principle, but how difficult to achieve! “For the most part,” we are told, “novels do come to grief somewhere.” The narrator wonders how the sex of the novelist affects the possibility of achieving this artistic integrity. For Bronte it certainly did: “She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance. She remembered that she had been starved of her proper due of experience. ...Her imagination swerved from indignation and we felt it swerve.” Not only anger, but ignorance, fear, and pain are the residue of gender in Bronte’s case, nor is Bronte alone in this: “One has only to skim those old forgotten novels and listen to the tone of voice in which they are written to divine that the writer was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation. ...She was thinking of something other than the thing itself.” Only Jane Austen and Emily Bronte manage to eradicate that central flaw, to maintain integrity in the face of criticism, opposition, and misunderstanding. Their achievement, under the circumstances, is miraculous.

The lack of an existing literary tradition is, in the narrator’s opinion, the greatest obstacle for these heroic nineteenth-century writers. The writings of the greatest literary men were no help to the female author against the problem “that there was no common sentence ready for her use.” The masculine sentence of a Johnson, say, would not do, and these motherless women had a great work before them.

This may be another explanation for the turn to the novel, which form “alone was young enough to be soft in her hands.” But women may not always choose to write novels, the narrator predicts. They have poetry in them still unexpressed. This does not necessarily mean that they will write poems, however, but that they may channel that poetry into some new form, as yet unconceived.

The narrator begins to outline (with great reverence) the women’s literary tradition to which she herself is heir, and which was so conspicuously absent for those first women writers. Even the “innumerable bad novels” that women produced in the years after Behn made writing into an industry are a salient piece in this tradition. The fact that writing could generate income was foundational for all that came later; “money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for.”

Woolf has returned, in this fourth chapter of her essay, to the point from which she refused to begin it: a discussion of prominent women writers. After all that has been discussed about the conditions for genius and its expression, the careers of the canonical literary women appear in a fresh light. We are asked to consider what they did and did not achieve in terms of the incandescence and integrity of their work. This aesthetic standard itself is a luxury hard-won; Woolf wants us to see that it could not have been applied a generation earlier, and that its very relevance measures the leaps these women have made. Charlotte Brontë had axes to grind; the fact that they show up in her work is a failing, but it doesn’t make her grievances any less legitimate or make her any less important in the history Woolf is outlining. The fact the Austen wrote as purely as she did appears, in light of the total absence of tradition or precedent, as a near miracle.

The form of Woolf’s essay enacts the changes it describes. The narrative details with which the first chapters were littered begin to fall away as the speaker enters into full engagement with her ideas. The daily comings and goings of the fictional narrator recede into the background, and the argument—the ideas themselves—comes to the fore. It took some uphill work to get to this point however. Even though that lead-up and preparation may not be evident in the flush of the argument, they are its invisible foundation. Like the five hundred pounds, or those first, bad novels by women, these foundations disappear in the bright light of what they enable. It is this bedrock which Woolf, for the purposes of this essay, has wanted us to see; yet it is precisely what a work of art ought not to exhibit.

The statement that there is a uniquely female way of writing—a woman’s sentence—is one of Woolf’s most provocative claims. She argues that women see and feel and value differently than men, and that because of this they must also write differently if they are to be true to themselves and their experience. She praises Jane Austen, who had “devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it.”

## Part 5

Moving on to “the shelves which hold books by the living,” the narrator finds that women are currently writing nearly as many books as men, and that they are not only novels. “There are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman could have touched.” In assessing the change has occurred in women’s writing in her own generation, the narrator pulls down a novel called *Life’s Adventure* by Mary Carmichael. It is her first novel. Looking to see what this young writer has inherited from women of the past—both writers and non-writers, both “their characteristics and restrictions”—she first decides that the prose is not as good as Jane Austen’s. “The smooth gliding of sentence after

sentence was interrupted. Something tore, something scratched.” She soon revises her opinion, however, noting that Miss Carmichael’s writing actually has nothing in common with Austen’s; it is attempting something completely different. “First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating.”

The decisive moment in Mary Carmichael’s innovation comes with the words, “Chloe liked Olivia.” The narrator stands slackjawed. How rarely, she realizes, has literature presented real, amicable relationships between women! Women were always, at least until the nineteenth century, considered in their relationship to men, and this has resulted in a huge and grave omission from literary history, and all history. “Hence, perhaps, the peculiar nature of woman in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror; her alternations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity—for so a lover would see her as his love rose or sank, was prosperous or unhappy.” Women also, in Carmichael’s book, have interests and pursuits outside the home. Chloe and Olivia work together in a laboratory, a fact which greatly changes the kind of friends they can be. The narrator begins to think that an importance transition has occurred, “for if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been.” The real, unrecorded experience of women in solitude has been so little handled that its expression will stretch the existing resources of the English language.

Mary Carmichael will have her work cut out for her, the narrator fondly acknowledges. She does not represent the culmination of the literary development Woolf has in mind, “for she will still be encumbered with that self-consciousness” that keeps her in the realm of “the nature-novelist” rather than the contemplative artist. She will have to learn not only to tell the truth about women, but also to tell, gently and without rancor, that bit of truth about men that has gone untold because it is what they cannot see in themselves. But if Miss Carmichael does not have the genius of Austen or Eliot, the narrator observes, she has certain advantages—not just as a person but also as a writer—unknown to them. Her writing shows no rancor against men, and no resentment against her situation in life. “Fear and hatred were almost gone, or traces of them showed only in a slight exaggeration of the joy of freedom.” In another hundred years, the author concludes, and with five hundred pounds and a room of her own, this Mary Carmichael will be a poet.

Mary Carmichael is the literary heir not only to the great women writers discussed in the previous chapter, but also “the descendent of all those other women whose circumstances I have been glancing at.” Yet she takes on something very different than they would have attempted. Woolf gives us a little lesson in reading experimental writing (like Woolf’s own), reminding us that “she has every right” to attempt new forms and styles, as long as she is creating something new rather than merely destroying what has gone before. Carmichael represents Woolf’s take on the state of women’s fiction in her own historical moment. She sees the female literary tradition as being poised on the verge of something unprecedented and exciting, and she takes the opportunity to point out its current shortcomings and to articulate a direction for the future.

“The natural simplicity, the epic age of women’s writing may have gone,” remarks the narrator, in reviewing the range of subjects upon which women in her own time have made themselves authors. This is the next logical step from Woolf’s historical identification of “a woman’s sentence.” Although

she draws attention to the idea that there is a natural way for women to write, a distinctive “woman’s sentence,” for example, she is also open to the idea that even that naturalness may be historically contingent. As women change, and as their social roles and circumstantial realities evolve, what is “natural” to them will presumably change as well. Such a change will indeed be for the better: “She may begin to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression.” When this happens, will there still be such a thing as a “woman’s sentence”? Woolf imagines so, for she wants to preserve the richness of difference between men and women. But it must be as flexible and evolving as women themselves.

Women have a creative power that differs substantially from that of men, one that has found expression, even in bygone ages, in non-literary ways. Education, she argues, should bring out those differences rather than enforcing similarity, and so acknowledge and enhance the richness and variety of human culture. “For we have too much likeness.” “A Room of One’s Own” was published in 1929 by Virginia Woolf. It started off as a speech, and the work is one of Woolf’s most well-known works.

A Room of One’s Own, by Virginia Woolf, is a mighty proposition for women’s independence in creative endeavors. While the innovation and courage found in the writing may be lost on today’s readers, the profundity of her work is best seen through the cultural and historical lens of 1929. At that time, women were not allowed into particular universities and libraries—let alone given the opportunity to express themselves creatively.

“A Room of One’s Own” is one of Virginia Woolf’s most famous works. Some of her most well-known sayings and phrases come from this short work. Here are a few quotes from Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own.”

“A Room of One’s Own” gave voice to what Woolf saw as a painful predicament for women writers.

## **Part 6**

The next morning, the narrator awakes and looks out over a London utterly indifferent to “the future of fiction, the death of poetry, or the development by the average woman of a prose style completely expressive of her mind.” The sight of two people meeting, getting in a cab, and being swept off into the flow of the city gives her an intuition of unity and rhythm that had been absent from her strained thinking over the last two days. There are certain states of mind that “seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others. In order to keep oneself continuing in them one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort.” Emerging from her unnatural essayistic mode, the narrator begins to toy with a theory of the unification of the sexes—one, akin to Coleridge’s theory of the androgynous mind, in which each mind has male and female elements. The harmonious balance of these elements is the hallmark of genius. This theory refers to no special sympathy with or the opposite sex, she clarifies, but with the nature of the mind’s very working. Such a mind, she imagines, would be “naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided”—like Shakespeare’s.

In contrast to this ideal, she sees her own age as more explicitly sex-conscious than any other in history. This fact has, she speculates, “roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion,” as exemplified in the novel of Mr. A. “Virility has become self-conscious,” she notes, in part as a result of the burgeoning (and threatening) self-consciousness of women. This is the dominant characteristic of

fascism as well, yet neither sex is to blame. The narrator returns to her writing-table and looks at the page titled “Women and Fiction. “It is fatal,” she concludes, “for anyone who writes to think of their sex.”

Virginia Woolf takes over for her narrator at this point, and begins to anticipate the objections her audience may raise to the character’s “failings and foibles.” She has not, for one thing, offered any comments about the relative merits of the two sexes as writers. This jostling for status, she explains, is precisely what the artist must avoid. One might object, she also admits, “that I have made too much of the importance of material things,” when we expect great minds and great art to rise above their circumstances. Yet the facts, she asserts, show incontrovertibly that the odds are against any would-be poet who has not money or education. She sums up her argument: “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. . . . Women, then, have not had a dog’s chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own.” Good writing is good for society, Woolf asserts. She urges her audience to write—not only fiction, but books of all kinds, “for books have a way of influencing each other.” She urges them to remember their current advantages as well as the contours of their unwritten history, and to see their own work not only as worthwhile in itself, but as part of the crucial preparation for women writers to come.

Woolf discusses the strained state of mind in which this essay was written—a mode of thought that, while important and useful, is not restful to the mind and certainly not conducive to fiction. This unmitigated focus to sex is too self-conscious to be part of “the art of creation,” yet an artistic unconsciousness of sex is the luxury of independence and freedom. “The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace. Not a wheel must grate, not a light glimmer.”

Woolf closes the door on her fictional narrator with the essay on “Women and Fiction” still unwritten; the point has been to show the thought process behind her theory that fiction writing requires a private income and a private room, and the process has become the substance of the essay itself. It is a story that promises to continue.

Adrienne Rich, in her essay “*Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity*”, writes about her experiences growing up in a predominately gentile society as a half-Jewish, half-Gentile being. She illuminates the ideas that there are certain assemblages of people in the world that are forced to veil their true identity in order to be accepted in the social order. She engages in enlightening the reader about the different methods that some undergo to suppress who they really are, through faith, race, and social attributes, and also about the harms and persecutions these people endure. In this piece though it is portrayed that perhaps her most predominate theme is that a person becomes an element of his/her society and that people, no matter what their faith, race, or social standing, should begin applying new standards toward acceptance. Rich writes, “‘Common’ white people might speak of ‘niggers’ - we said ‘Negroes’” (Rich pg. 310). In this statement she refers to, from a sou

---

### 10.3 Let Us Sum Up

---

You have studied the detailed summary and critical analysis of *A Room of One’s Own*. You have seen how Woolf protects the rights of female writers who had been ignored for a long time. Now

time has come, they should be given the necessary facilities to become good writers.

---

## 10.4 Review Questions

---

(A)

1. Which of the following best describes Woolf's principle of "incandescence" in art?
  - (A) Transparency in the presentation of characters
  - (B) The consumption of all foreign matter, impediments and personal grievances
  - (C) The ability to dwell in doubts and mysteries without any irritability reaching after fact and reason
  - (D) The spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquillity
2. Who, in the narrator's estimation, compares to Shakespeare in incandescence?
  - (A) Aphra Behn
  - (B) George Eliot
  - (C) Marcel Proust
  - (D) Jane Austen
3. What two elements are in conflict in the novel, according to the narrator?
  - (A) The male principle and the female principle
  - (B) Life and something that is not life
  - (C) History and science
  - (D) Ideas and emotions
4. What two narrative elements of the novel did Mary Carmichael "break"?
  - (A) The structure and the form
  - (B) The beginning and the end
  - (C) The sentence and the sequence
  - (D) Persona and perspective
5. What relationship do Chloe and Olivia have in Mary Carmichael's novel?
  - (A) They work together and like each other
  - (B) They are sisters and compete for their father's attention
  - (C) They are lovers and meet secretly at night
  - (D) They are neighbors, and their children play together
6. What, according to the narrator, should be the effect of education on the differences between

men and women?

- (A) It should seek to eliminate gender differences
  - (B) It should promote the classification and cataloguing of gender differences
  - (C) It should bring out and fortify gender differences
  - (D) It should ignore gender differences
7. What must a Mary Carmichael disclose about men if she is to fulfill her office as a writer?
- (A) Men's anger
  - (B) The spot on the back of men's heads
  - (C) The conventional nature of men's writing
  - (D) The untold relationships existing between men
8. In the last chapter, what is the city of London's feeling to the current state of fiction?
- (A) Indignation
  - (B) Indifference
  - (C) Disbelief
  - (D) Despair
9. When was the essay written?
- (A) August, 1860
  - (B) September, 1919
  - (C) October, 1928
  - (D) November, 1945
10. Which novelist writing in her own day does Woolf say is "wholly androgynous, if not perhaps a little too much of a woman"?
- (A) D. H. Lawrence
  - (B) Marcel Proust
  - (C) E. M. Forster
  - (D) John Steinbeck

**( B )**

- 1. Woolf claims that the particular social realities in which women live create distinctively female values and outlooks. Does she think this is a good thing or a bad thing?
- 2. What is the role of tradition in the experience of a women writer?
- 3. What does Woolf say about the creativity that women have always expressed in non-artistic

ways? (You may refer to her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse*, especially in the section “The Window,” Chapters 17-19.)

4. What predictions does Woolf make for women’s writing in the future? How do they look from our current vantage point?
5. Does Woolf think poems are superior to novels? Explain.
6. Why, in Woolf’s view, did Elizabethan women not write poetry?
7. How does Woolf treat the question of the female body? What does she mean when she says at the end of Chapter 4 that “the book has somehow to be adapted to the body”?
8. Woolf is careful to acknowledge the unmeasured and immeasurable value of the labor women have traditionally done. Yet she also projects a future in which women will have access to all kinds of careers. Does Woolf come down in favor of one or the other of these lifestyles? What does she take to be the pros and cons of each?
9. Discuss this essay as a feministic text.
10. How do you justify Woolf’s view about male chauvinism ?
11. Discuss Woolf’s remark “The epic age of Women’s writing may have gone”.

---

## 10.5 Bibliography

---

1. Virginia Woolf by Nigel Nicolson. New York, Penguin Group. 2000
2. Virginia Woolf: A Biography by Quentin Bell. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972; Revised editions 1990, 1996
3. “Vanessa and Virginia” by Susan Sellers (Two Ravens, 2008; Harcourt 2009) [Fictional biography of Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell]
4. The Unknown Virginia Woolf by Roger Poole. Cambridge UP, 1978.
5. The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship by Ellen Bayuk Rosenman. Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
6. Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work by Louise DeSalvo. Boston: Little Brown, 1989
7. A Virginia Woolf Chronology by Edward Bishop. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989.
8. A Very Close Conspiracy: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf by Jane Dunn. Boston: Little, Brown, 1990
9. Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life by Lyndall Gordon. New York: Norton, 1984; 1991.
10. The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf’s Art and Manic-Depressive Illness by Thomas D. Caramago. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992
11. Virginia Woolf by James King. NY: W.W. Norton, 1994.



12. Art and Affection: A Life of Virginia Woolf by Panthea Reid. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
  13. Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee. New York: Knopf, 1997.
  14. Granite and Rainbow: The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf by Mitchell Leaska. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.
  15. Virginia Woolf: The Will to Create as a Woman by Ruth Gruber. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005
  16. My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf by Thomas Szasz, 2006
  17. The Bedside, Bathtub and Armchair Companion to Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury by Sarah M. Hall, Continuum Publishing, 2007
  18. A Life of One's Own: A Guide to Better Living through the Work and Wisdom of Virginia Woolf by Ilana Simons, New York: Penguin Press, 2007
  19. Michael Cunningham's 1998 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Hours*, focused on three generations of women affected by Woolf's novel. In 2002, a film version of the novel was released starring Nicole Kidman as Woolf, a role for which she won the 2002 Academy Award for Best Actress. The film also starred Julianne Moore and Meryl Streep.
  20. Edward Albee's play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, premiered in 1963 and was later adapted into a film version in 1966. The play/film utilizes Woolf's name as a musical punch-line for a joke that replaces "the big bad wolf" in the song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" with "Virginia Woolf". The play and film have nothing to do with the author or her life.
  21. Indigo Girls include the song, "Virginia Woolf," written by Emily Saliers, on their 1992 album, Rites of Passage (*Indigo Girls album*). On a live version of the song from their *1200 Curfews* compilation, Emily humorously remarks: "I wrote papers about her Woolf in college, but I didn't know what I was talking about."
  22. Jack Feldstein, stream-of-consciousness neon animation filmmaker, created an homage to Virginia Woolf in his The Adventures of Virginia Woolf (2007)
-

## UNIT-11

---

### RICHARD WRIGHT : *NATIVE SON (I)*

---

#### Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Study Guide
- 11.2 About the Age : Modern Age
- 11.3 About the Author : Richard Wright
- 11.4 About the Text : *Native Son*
  - 11.4.1 Summary
  - 11.4.2 Characters in brief.
  - 11.4.3 Critical Analysis
- 11.5 Self Assessment Questions.
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 Answers to SAQs
- 11.8 Review Questions.
- 11.9 Bibliography

---

#### 11.0 Objectives

---

In this Unit we aim at familiarising you with the modern writer Richard Nathan Wright and his famous novel *Native Son*. By the end of this unit you will be able to know:

1. Richard Wright and his works in general.
2. *My Native Son*, his famous novel.
3. About Apartheid, racial discrimination
4. The black fiction rising out of the anguish.
5. The black protagonist's struggle against the injustice done.
6. The summary and critical analysis of the events of the novel.
7. Important characters of the novel in brief.

---

#### 11.1 Study Guide

---

There are two units based on the novel *Native Son*. You should study this Unit first as a background of the other unit. As many of you may not have access to the internet and criticism available,

you have been provided extracts from the critical opinion available from various sources. You have been given Self Assessment Questions and Answers so that you may understand the theme and the issues of the text. An exercise at the end of the Unit has been provided from the examination point of view. You should study this Unit in the context of racial discrimination about the blacks & the anguish in the mind of the blacks.

---

## **11.2 About the Age : Modern Age**

---

Richard Wright belongs to the first half of the twentieth century when the problem of racial discrimination was rampant in Africa, Europe and America. Tragedies in the life of black victims of poverty & politics forced the UNO to act against such heinous crimes and nations had to enact laws for the rights of the blacks. It was the age of agitations, resistance and issue of civil rights for the blacks for which Martin Luther King, Jr. Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi worked. The contemporary literature also reflects this issue of racial discrimination.

---

## **11.3 About the Author : Richard Wright**

---

Wright, the grandson of former slaves, was born on the Rucker plantation in Roxie, Mississippi Franklin County, Mississippi, just outside of Natchez.

His family soon moved to Memphis, Tennessee. While in Memphis, his father Nathaniel, a former sharecropper, abandoned the family because of a hard time finding a job. His mother, a schoolteacher, had to support herself and her children. In 1914 Ella Wright became ill, and the two brothers were sent to Settlement House, a Methodist orphanage. The mother then moved with her children to Jackson, Mississippi, to live with relatives. In Jackson, Wright grew up and attended public high school. In 1916, Wright, his brother, and their mother returned to Mississippi, moving in with Margaret Wilson, Wright's grandmother.

Later, the family moved in with Wright's aunt and uncle in Elaine, Arkansas, but left when the whites murdered Wright's uncle Silas Hoskins in 1916. The family fled to West Helena, Arkansas, where they lived in fear in rented rooms for several weeks. Mrs. Wright took the boys to Jackson, Mississippi, for several months in 1917, but they returned to West Helena by the winter of 1918. Further family disintegration occurred after Mrs. Wright suffered a stroke in 1919. Wright reluctantly chose to live with Uncle Clark and Aunt Jody in Greenwood, Mississippi, where he could be near his mother, but restrictions placed on him by his aunt and uncle made him an emotional wreck. On the verge of a nervous breakdown, he was permitted to return to Jackson, where he lived with Grandmother Wilson from early 1920 until late 1925. Wright felt stifled by his aunt and his maternal grandmother, who tried to force him to pray that he might find God. He later threatened to leave home because Grandmother Wilson refused to permit him to work on Saturdays, the Adventist Sabbath. Early strife with his aunt and grandmother left him with a permanent, uncompromising hostility toward religious solutions to mundane problems.

At the age of fifteen, Wright penned his first story, "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre". It was published in *Southern Register*, a local black newspaper. In 1923, Wright was made class valedictorian. Determined not to be called an Uncle Tom, he refused to deliver the assistant principal's carefully prepared valedictory address that would not offend the white school officials and finally convinced the

black administrators to let him read essentially what he had written. In September of the same year Wright registered for mathematics, English, and history courses at the new Lanier High School in Jackson but had to stop attending classes after a few weeks of irregular attendance because he needed to earn money for family expenses. In Mississippi he formed some lasting impressions of American racism before moving back to Memphis in 1925.

Wright moved to Chicago in 1927. After finally securing employment as a postal clerk, he read other writers and studied their styles during his time off. When his job at the post office was eliminated by the Great Depression, he was forced to go on relief in 1931. In 1932 he began attending meetings of the John Reed Club. As the club was dominated by the Communist Party, Wright established a relationship with a number of party members. Especially interested in the literary contacts made at the meetings, Wright formally joined the Communist Party in late 1933 and as a revolutionary poet wrote numerous proletarian poems ("I Have Seen Black Hands," "We of the Streets," "Red Leaves of Red Books," for example) for *The New Masses* and other left-wing periodicals.

A power struggle within the Chicago chapter of the John Reed Club led to the dissolution of the club's leadership; Wright was told he had the support of the club's party members if he was willing to join the party.

By 1935, Wright had completed his first novel, *Cesspool*, published as *Lawd Today* (1963), and in January 1936 his story "Big Boy Leaves Home" was accepted for publication in *New Caravan*. In February, Wright began working with the National Negro Congress, and in April he chaired the South Side Writers' Group, whose membership included Arna Bontemps and Margaret Walker. Wright submitted some of his critical essays and poetry to the group for criticism and read aloud some of his short stories. In 1936, he was also revising "Cesspool".

Through the club, Wright edited *Left Front*, a magazine that the Communist Party shut down in 1937, despite Wright's repeated protests. Throughout this period, Wright also contributed to the *New Masses* magazine.

While Wright was at first pleased by positive relations with white Communists in Chicago, he was later humiliated in New York City by some who rescinded an offer to find housing for Wright because of his race. To make matters worse, some black Communists denounced the articulate, polished Wright as a bourgeoisie intellectual, assuming he was well educated and overly assimilated into white society. However, he was largely autodidactic after having been forced to end his public education after the completion of grammar school.

Wright's insistence that young communist writers must be given space to cultivate their talents and his working relationship with a black nationalist communist led to a public falling out with the party and the leading African-American communist Buddy Nealon. Wright was threatened at knife point by fellow-traveler coworkers, denounced as a Trotskyite in the street by strikers and physically assaulted by former comrades when he tried to join them during the 1936 May Day march.

In 1937, Richard Wright moved to New York, where he forged new ties with Communist Party members there after getting established. He worked on the WPA Writers' Project guidebook to the city, *New York Panorama* (1938), and wrote the book's essay on Harlem. Wright became the Harlem editor of the *Daily Worker*. He was happy that during his first year in New York all of his

activities involved writing of some kind. In the summer and fall he wrote over two hundred articles for the *Daily Worker* and helped edit a short-lived literary magazine *New Challenge*. The year was also a landmark for Wright because he met and developed a friendship with Ralph Ellison that would last for years, and he learned that he would receive the Story magazine first prize of five hundred dollars for his short story "Fire and Cloud."

After Wright received the *Story* magazine prize in early 1938, he shelved his manuscript of *Lawd Today* and dismissed his literary agent, John Troustine. He hired Paul Reynolds, the well-known agent of Paul Laurence Dunbar, to represent him. Meanwhile, the Story Press offered Harper all of Wright's prize-entry stories for a book, and Harper agreed to publish them.

Wright gained national attention for the collection of four short stories titled *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938). He based some stories on lynching in the Deep South. The publication and favorable reception of *Uncle Tom's Children* improved Wright's status with the Communist party and enabled him to establish a reasonable degree of financial stability. He was appointed to the editorial board of *New Masses*, and Granville Hicks, prominent literary critic and Communist sympathizer, introduced him at leftist teas in Boston. By May 6, 1938 excellent sales had provided him with enough money to move to Harlem, where he began writing *Native Son* (1940).

The collection also earned him a Guggenheim Fellowship, which allowed him to complete his first novel *Native Son* (1940). *Native Son* was selected by the Book of the Month Club as its first book by an African-American author. The protagonist, Bigger Thomas, represented limitations that society placed on African Americans. He could only gain his own agency and self-knowledge by committing heinous acts.

Wright was criticized for his works' concentration on violence. In the case of *Native Son*, people complained that he portrayed a black man in ways that seemed to confirm whites' worst fears. The period following publication of *Native Son* was a busy time for Wright. In July 1940 he went to Chicago to do research for the text for a folk history of blacks to accompany photographs selected by Edwin Rosskam. While in Chicago he visited the American Negro Exhibition with Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Claude McKay.

He then went to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he and Paul Green collaborated on a dramatic version of *Native Son*. In January 1941 Wright received the prestigious Spingarn Medal for noteworthy achievement by a black. *Native Son* opened on Broadway, with Orson Welles as director, to generally favourable reviews in March 1941. A volume of photographs almost completely drawn from the files of the Farm Security Administration, with text by Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* was published in October 1941 to wide critical acclaim.

Wright's autobiographical *Black Boy* (1945) described his early life from Roxie through his move to Chicago, his clashes with his Seventh-day Adventist family, his troubles with white employers and social isolation. *American Hunger*, published posthumously in 1977, was originally intended as the second volume of *Black Boy*. The Library of America edition restored it to that form.

This book detailed Wright's involvement with the John Reed Clubs and the Communist Party, which he left in 1942. The book implied he left earlier, but his withdrawal was not publicized until

1944. In the volumes' restored form, the structure compared the certainties and intolerance of organized communism, the "bourgeois" books and condemned members, with similar qualities in fundamentalist organized religion. Wright disapproved of the purges in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Wright continued to believe in far-left democratic solutions to political problems.

Wright moved to Paris in 1946, and became a permanent American expatriate. In Paris, he became friends with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. His Existentialist phase was depicted in his second novel, *The Outsider* (1953), which described an African-American character's involvement with the Communist Party in New York. In the book considered the first American existential novel, Wright warned that the black man had awakened in a disintegrating society not ready to include him. In 1954 he published a minor novel, *Savage Holiday*. After becoming a French citizen in 1947, Wright continued to travel through Europe, Asia, and Africa. These experiences were the basis of numerous nonfiction works. One was *Black Power* (1954), a commentary on the emerging nations of Africa.

In 1949, Wright contributed to the anti-communist anthology *The God That Failed*; his essay had been published in the *Atlantic Monthly* three years earlier and was derived from the unpublished portion of *Black Boy*. He was invited to join the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which he rejected, correctly suspecting that it had connections with the CIA. The CIA and FBI had Wright under surveillance starting in 1943. Due to McCarthyism, Wright was blacklisted by the Hollywood movie studio executives in the 1950s, but he starred as teenager Bigger Thomas in an Argentinian film version of *Native Son* in 1950.

In 1955, Wright visited Indonesia for the Bandung Conference and recorded his observations in *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. Wright was upbeat about the possibilities posed by this meeting between recently oppressed nations.

Other works by Richard Wright included *White Man, Listen!* (1957); a novel *The Long Dream* in 1958; as well as a collection of short stories *Eight Men*, published after his death in 1961. His works primarily dealt with the poverty, anger, and protests of northern and southern urban black Americans.

His agent, Paul Reynolds sent overwhelmingly negative criticism of Wright's four-hundred page "Island of Hallucinations" manuscript in February 1959. Despite that, in March Wright outlined a novel in which Fish was to be liberated from his racial conditioning and become a dominating character. By May 1959, Wright wanted to leave Paris and live in London. He felt French politics had become increasingly submissive to American pressure. The peaceful Parisian atmosphere he had enjoyed had been shattered by quarrels and attacks instigated by enemies of the expatriate black writers.

On June 26, 1959, after a party marking the French publication of *White Man, Listen!* Wright became ill, victim of a virulent attack of amoebic dysentery probably contracted during his stay on the Gold Coast. By November 1959 his wife had found a London apartment, but Wright's illness and "four hassles in twelve days" with British immigration officials ended his desire to live in England.

On February 19, 1960 Wright learned from Reynolds that the New York premiere of the stage adaptation of *The Long Dream* received such bad reviews that the adapter, Ketti Frings, had decided to cancel other performances. Meanwhile, Wright was running into additional problems trying to get *The Long Dream* published in France. These setbacks prevented his finishing revisions of *Island of*

*Hallucinations*, which he needed to get a commitment from Doubleday.

In June 1960, Wright recorded a series of discussions for French radio dealing primarily with his books and literary career. He also covered the racial situation in the United States and the world, and specifically denounced American policy in Africa. In late September, to cover extra expenses for his daughter Julia's move from London to Paris to attend the Sorbonne, Wright wrote blurbs for record jackets for Nicole Barclay, director of the largest record company in Paris.

In spite of his financial straits, Wright refused to compromise his principles. He declined to participate in a series of programs for Canadian radio because he suspected American control over the programs. For the same reason, Wright rejected an invitation from the Congress for Cultural Freedom to go to India to speak at a conference in memory of Leo Tolstoy. Still interested in literature, Wright helped Kyle Onstott get *Mandingo* (1957) published in France. His last display of explosive energy occurred on November 8, 1960 in his polemical lecture, "The Situation of the Black Artist and Intellectual in the United States," delivered to students and members of the American Church in Paris. Wright argued that American society reduced the most militant members of the black community to slaves whenever they wanted to question the racial status quo. He offered as proof the subversive attacks of the Communists against *Native Son* and the quarrels which James Baldwin and other authors sought with him.

On November 26, 1960 Wright talked enthusiastically about *Daddy Goodness* with Langston Hughes and gave him the manuscript. Wright contracted Amoebic dysentery on a visit to Africa in 1957, and despite various treatments, his health deteriorated over the next three years. He died in Paris of a heart attack at the age of 52. He was interred in Le Père Lachaise Cemetery. However, Wright's daughter Julia claimed that her father was murdered.

A number of Wright's works have been published posthumously. Some of Wright's more shocking passages dealing with race, sex, and politics were cut or omitted before original publication. In 1991, unexpurgated versions of *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, and his other works were published. In addition, his novella *Rite of Passage* was published in 1994 for the first time.

In the last years of his life, Richard Wright became enamored with the Japanese poetry form haiku and he wrote over 4,000. In 1998 a book was published ("*Haiku: This Other World*" ISBN 0-385-72024-6) with 817 haiku which he preferred.

A collection of Wright's travel writings, edited by Virginia Whatley Smith, was published by the Mississippi University Press in 2001. At his death, Wright left an unfinished book, *A Father's Law*. It dealt with a black policeman and the son he suspected of murder. Wright's daughter Julia Wright published *A Father's Law* in January 2008. Julia also wished to give his political nonfiction to the public and HarperCollins worked in agreement by issuing an omnibus containing all three works under the title *Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* The omnibus was published in February 2008.

Wright discusses a number of authors whose works influenced his own in *Black Boy*, including H.L. Mencken, Gertrude Stein, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Sinclair Lewis, Marcel Proust, and Edgar Lee Masters.

Richard Wright received several different literary awards during his lifetime including the Spingarn

Medal in 1941, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Story Magazine Award.

Wright's stories published during the 1950s disappointed some critics, who said that his move to Europe alienated him from American blacks and separated him from his emotional and psychological roots. Many of Wright's works failed to satisfy the rigid standards of New Criticism. During the 1950s Wright grew more internationalist in outlook. While he accomplished much as an important public literary and political figure with a worldwide reputation, his very creative work did decline.

Wright's influence was revived in the 1960s. With the growth of the militant black consciousness movement, there came a resurgence of interest in Wright's work. It is generally agreed that Wright's influence in *Native Son* is not a matter of literary style or technique. His impact, rather, has been on ideas and attitudes, and his work has been a force in the social and intellectual history of the United States in the last half of the twentieth century. "Wright was one of the people who made me conscious of the need to struggle," said writer Amiri Baraka.

During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars published critical essays about Wright in prestigious journals. Richard Wright conferences were held on university campuses from Mississippi to New Jersey. A new film version of *Native Son*, with a screenplay by Richard Wesley, was released in December 1986. Certain Wright novels became required reading in a number of American universities and colleges.

"Recent critics have called for a reassessment of Wright's later work in view of his philosophical project. Notably, Paul Gilroy has argued that 'the depth of his philosophical interests has been either overlooked or misconceived by the almost exclusively literary enquiries that have dominated analysis of his writing. "His most significant contribution, however, was his desire to accurately portray blacks to white readers, thereby destroying the white myth of the patient, humorous, subservient black man". While some of his work was weak and unsuccessful especially that completed within the last three years of his life—his best work will continue to attract readers. His three masterpieces *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, and *Black Boy*—are a crowning achievement for him and for American literature.

- Richard Wright: *Early Works* (Arnold Rampersad, ed.) (Library of America, 1991) ISBN 978-0-94045066-6
- Richard Wright: *Later Works* (Arnold Rampersad, ed.) (Library of America, 1991) ISBN 978-0-94045067-7

### **Drama**

- *Native Son: The Biography of a Young American* with Paul Green (New York: Harper, 1941)

### **Fiction**

- *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper, 1938)
- *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940)
- *The Outsider* (New York: Harper, 1953)
- *Savage Holiday* (New York: Avon, 1954)



- *The Long Dream* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958)
- *Eight Men* (Cleveland and New York: World, 1961)
- *Lawd Today* (New York: Walker, 1963)
- *Rite of Passage* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994)
- *A Father's Law* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008)

### Non-fiction

- *How "Bigger" Was Born; Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940)
- *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (New York: Viking, 1941)
- *Black Boy* (New York: Harper, 1945)
- *Black Power* (New York: Harper, 1954)
- *The Color Curtain* (Cleveland and New York: World, 1956)
- *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper, 1957)
- *Letters to Joe C. Brown* (Kent State University Libraries, 1968)
- *American Hunger* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975)
- *Big Boy Leaves Home* (2007)

### Essays

- *The Ethics Of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch* (1937)
- *Introduction to Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945)
- *I Choose Exile* (1951)
- *White Man, Listen!* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957)
- *The Man Who Lived Underground*

### Poetry

- *Haiku: This Other World.* (Eds. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener. Arcade, 1998)

---

## 11.4 About the Text : *Native Son*

---

### *Important facts at a glance*

full title ·	<i>Native Son</i>
author ·	Richard Wright
type of work ·	Novel
genre ·	Urban naturalism; novel of social protest

<b>language</b> ·	English
<b>time and place written</b> ·	1938–1939, Brooklyn, New York
<b>date of first publication</b> ·	1940
<b>publisher</b> ·	Harper and Brothers
<b>narrator</b> ·	The story is narrated in a limited third-person voice that focuses on Bigger Thomas's thoughts and feelings.
<b>point of view</b> ·	The story is told almost exclusively from Bigger's perspective.
<b>tone</b> ·	The narrator's attitude toward his subject is one of absorption. The narrator is preoccupied with bringing us into Bigger's mind and situation, using short, evocative sentences to tell the story. Though the narrator is clearly opposed to the destructive racism that the novel chronicles, there is very little narrative editorializing, though some characters, such as Max, make statements that evoke a secondary tone of social protest in the final part of the novel.
<b>tense</b> ·	Past
<b>setting (time)</b> ·	1930s
<b>setting (place)</b> ·	Chicago
<b>protagonist</b> ·	Bigger Thomas
<b>major conflict</b> ·	The fear, hatred, and anger that racism has impressed upon Bigger Thomas ravages his individuality so severely that his only means of self-expression is violence. After killing Mary Dalton, Bigger must contend with the law, the hatred of society, and his own destructive inner feelings.
<b>rising action</b> ·	The planned robbery of Blum's deli; Bigger's trip to the movies; Bigger's night with Mary and Jan
<b>climax</b> ·	Each of the three books of the novel has its own climax: Book One climaxes with the murder of Mary, Book Two with the discovery of Mary's remains in the furnace, and Book Three with the culmination of Bigger's trial in the death sentence.
<b>falling action</b> ·	Bigger's trial and his relationship with Boris A. Max
<b>themes</b> ·	The effect of racism on the oppressed; the effect of racism on the oppressor; the hypocrisy of justice
<b>motifs</b> ·	Popular culture; religion; communism
<b>symbols</b> ·	Mrs. Dalton's blindness; the cross; snow
<b>foreshadowing</b> ·	Buckley's campaign poster; Bigger's occasional premonitions that he will do something violent and impulsive

*Native Son* (1940) is a novel by American author Richard Wright. The novel tells the story of

20-year old Bigger Thomas, an African American living in utter poverty. Bigger lived in Chicago's South Side ghetto in the 1930s. Bigger was always getting into trouble as a youth, but upon receiving a job at the home of the Daltons, a rich, white family, he experienced a realization of his identity. He accidentally kills a white woman, runs from the police, rapes and kills his girlfriend and is then caught and tried. "I didn't want to kill", Bigger shouted. "But what I killed for, I *am*! It must've been pretty deep in me to make me kill."

Wright gets inside the head of "brute Negro" Bigger, revealing his feelings, thoughts and point of view as he commits crimes and is confronted with racism, violence and debasement. The novel's treatment of Bigger and his motivations conforms to the conventions of literary naturalism.

While not apologizing for Bigger's crimes, Wright is sympathetic to the systemic inevitability behind them. The novel is a powerful statement about racial inequality and social injustices so deep that it becomes nearly impossible to determine where societal expectations/conditioning end and free will begins. As Bigger's lawyer points out, there is no escape from this destiny for his client or any other black American, since they are the necessary product of the society that formed them and told them since birth who exactly they were supposed to be. "No American Negro exists," Wright once wrote "who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in his skull." Frantz Fanon discusses this feeling in his 1952 essay *L'Experience Vecue du Noir*, or "The Fact of Blackness". "In the end," writes Fanon, "Bigger Thomas acts. To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world's anticipation."

### 11.4.1 Summary

Bigger Thomas wakes up in a dark, small room at the sound of the alarm clock. He lives in one room with his brother, Buddy, his sister, Vera, and their mother. Suddenly, a rat appears. The room turns into a maelstrom and, after a violent chase, Bigger kills the animal with an iron skillet and terrorizes Vera with the dark body. Vera faints and the mother scolds Bigger, who hates his family because they suffer and he cannot do anything about it.

That evening, Bigger has to see Mr. Dalton for a new job. Bigger's family depends on him. He would like to leave his responsibilities forever but when he thinks of what to do, he only sees a blank wall. He walks to the poolroom and meets his friend Gus. Bigger tells him that every time he thinks about whites, he feels something terrible will happen to him. They meet other friends, G. H. and Jack, and plan a robbery. They are all afraid of attacking and stealing from a white man, but none of them wants to admit their concerns. Before the robbery, Bigger and Jack go to the movies. They are attracted to the world of wealthy whites in the newsreel and feel strangely moved by the tom-toms and the primitive black people in the film, but they also feel that they do not belong to either of those worlds. After the cinema, Bigger returns to the poolroom and attacks Gus violently. The fight ends any chance of the robbery occurring; Bigger is obscurely conscious that he has done this intentionally.

When he finally gets the job, Bigger does not know how to behave in the large and luxurious house. Mr. Dalton and his blind wife use strange words. They try to be kind to Bigger, but they actually make him very uncomfortable; Bigger does not know what they expect out of him. Then their daughter, Mary, enters the room, asks Bigger why he does not belong to a union, and calls her father a "capitalist." Bigger does not know that word and is even more confused and afraid to lose the job. After the conversation, Peggy, the Irish cook, takes Bigger to his room and tells him that the Daltons are a nice

family but that he must avoid Mary's communist friends. Bigger has never had a room for himself before.

That night, he drives Mary around and meets her Communist boyfriend, Jan. Throughout the evening, Jan and Mary talk to Bigger, oblige him to take them to the dinner where his friends are, invite him to sit at their table, and tell him to call them by their first names. Bigger does not know how to respond to their requests and becomes very frustrated, as he is simply their chauffeur for the night. At the diner they buy a bottle of rum. Bigger drives throughout the park, and Jan and Mary drink the rum and joke around in the back seat. Jan and Mary part, but Mary is so drunk that Bigger has to carry her to her bedroom when they arrive home. He is terrified someone will see him with her in his arms; however, he cannot resist the temptation of the forbidden, and he kisses her.

Just then, the bedroom door opens, and Mrs. Dalton enters. Bigger knows she is blind but is terrified she will sense him there. He silences Mary by pressing a pillow into her face. Mrs. Dalton approaches the bed, smells whiskey in the air, scolds her daughter, and leaves. Mary claws at Bigger's hands while Mrs. Dalton is in the room, trying to alert Bigger that she cannot breathe. As Bigger removes the pillow, he realizes that she has suffocated. Bigger starts thinking frantically, and decides he will tell everyone that Jan, her Communist boyfriend, took Mary into the house that night. Thinking it will be better if Mary disappears and everyone thinks she has gone for a visit, he decides in desperation to burn her body in the house's furnace. Her body would not originally fit through the furnace opening, but, after decapitating her with a nearby hatchet, Bigger finally manages to put the body inside. He adds extra coal to the furnace, leaves the corpse there to burn, and goes home.

When Bigger talks with his family and meets his friends, he feels different now. The crime gives meaning to his life. When he goes back to the big house, Mrs. Dalton notices her daughter's disappearance and asks Bigger about the night before. Bigger tries to point suspicion toward Jan. Mrs. Dalton sends Bigger home for the day, and Bigger decides to visit his girlfriend, Bessie. Bessie complains, claiming that he did not love her, and he gives her some money to assure her of his affection. Bessie mentions a famous case in which the kidnappers of a child first killed him and then asked for ransom money. Bigger decides to do the same. He tells Bessie that he knows Mary has disappeared and will use that knowledge to get money from the Daltons, but in the conversation he realizes Bessie suspects him of having done something to Mary. Bigger goes back to work. Mr. Dalton has called a private detective, Mr. Britten, and this time, sensing Britten's racism, Bigger accuses Jan on the grounds of his race (he is Jewish), his political beliefs (Communist), and his friendly attitude towards black people. When Britten finds Jan, he puts the boy and Bigger in the same room and confronts them with their conflicting stories. Jan is surprised by Bigger's story but offers him help.

Bigger storms away from the Dalton's. He decides to write the false kidnap note when he discovers that the owner of the rat-infested flat his family rents is Mr. Dalton. Bigger slips the note under the Dalton's front door and then returns to his room. When the Daltons receive the note, they contact the police, who take over the investigation from Britten, and journalists soon arrive at the house. Bigger is afraid, but he does not want to leave. In the afternoon, he is ordered to take the ashes out of the furnace and make a new fire. He is terrified and starts poking the ashes with the shovel until the whole room is full of smoke. Furious, one of the journalists takes the shovel and pushes Bigger aside. He immediately finds the remains of Mary's bones and an earring in the furnace, and Bigger flees.

Bigger goes directly to Bessie and tells her the whole story. Bessie realizes that white people will think he raped the girl before killing her. They leave together, but Bigger has to drag Bessie around because she is paralyzed by fear. When they lie down together in an abandoned building, Bigger rapes Bessie, and decides that he will have to kill her. He hits Bessie's head with a brick several times before throwing her through a window and into an air shaft. He quickly realized that the only money he had was in her pocket.

Bigger runs through the city. He sees newspaper headlines concerning the crime and overhears different conversations about it. Whites call him "ape." Blacks hate him because he has given the whites an excuse for racism. But now he is someone; he feels he has an identity. He will not say the crime was an accident. After a wild chase over the rooftops of the city, the police catch him.

During his first few days in prison, Bigger does not eat, drink, or talk to anyone. Then Jan comes to see him. He says Bigger has taught him a lot about black-white relationships and offers him the help of a communist lawyer, Max. In the long hours Max and Bigger pass together, Max learns about the sufferings and feelings of black people and Bigger learns about himself. He starts understanding his relationships with his family and with the world. He acknowledges his fury, his need for a future, and his wish for a meaningful life. He reconsiders his attitudes about white people, whether they are prejudiced, like Britten, or accepting, like Jan.

At Bigger's trial, Max tells the judge that Bigger killed because he was cornered by society from the moment he was born. He tells them that a way to cut the evil sequence of abuse and murder is to sentence Bigger to life in prison and not to death. But the judge apparently does not sympathize and sentences Bigger to the electric chair. In the last scene, while he waits for death, Bigger tells Max, "I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em." Bigger then tells him to say "hello" to Jan. For the first time, he calls him "Jan", not "Mister", just as Jan had wanted. This signifies that he finally sees whites as individuals, rather than a looming force. During their final moments of discussion, while Bigger is on death row, Max tries to summarize how white society has conditioned great anger and effeteness into Bigger and other oppressed impoverished people, but Bigger somewhat misinterprets this and twists it into a different message in order to comfort himself. He claims that "What I killed for must've been good!" and thus exemplifies what Max has just tried to explain to him—that white corporate society is keeping the poor people angry, and ignorant as to why they are angry. Bigger, however, does not comprehend this for exactly those same reasons, and Max becomes quite shaken and teary-eyed before the two shake hands and Max leaves, and Bigger is alone.

#### 11.4.2 Characters in brief

**Mary Dalton:** The only child, Mary is a very rich white girl who has far leftist leanings. She is a Communist sympathizer recently understood to be frolicking with Jan, a known Communist party organizer. Consequently, she is trying to abide, for a time, by her parents' wishes and go to Detroit. She is to leave the morning after Bigger is hired as the family chauffeur. Under the ruse of a University meeting, she has Bigger take her to meet Jan. When they return to the house, she is too drunk to make it to her room unassisted and thus, Bigger helps her. Mrs. Dalton comes upon them in the room and Bigger smothers her for fear that Mrs. Dalton will

discover him. Mary, as a symbol of white America, is destroyed by Bigger, who symbolizes what America hates and fears.

**Henry Dalton:** Father of Mary, he owns a controlling amount of stock in a real estate firm which maintains the black ghetto. Blacks in the ghetto pay too much for rat-infested flats. As Max points out at the inquest, Mr. Dalton refuses to rent flats to black people outside of the designated ghetto area. He does this while donating money to the NAACP, buying ping-pong tables for the local black youth outreach program, and giving people like Bigger a chance at employment. Mr. Dalton's philanthropy, however, only shows off his wealth while backing up the business practices which contain an already oppressed people. That is, rather than alter the real estate business which he controls, he gives the unemployed youths ping-pong tables to play with. Mr. Dalton is blind to the real plight of blacks in the ghetto, a plight that he maintains.

**Mrs. Dalton:** Mary Dalton's mother. Her blindness serves to accentuate the motif of racial blindness throughout the story. Both Bigger and Max comment on how people are blind to the reality of race in America. Mrs. Dalton betrays her metaphorical blindness when she meets Mrs. Thomas. Mrs. Dalton hides behind her philanthropy and claims there is nothing she can do for Bigger. She cannot prevent his death nor can she admit to her family's direct involvement in the creation of the ghetto that created him.

**Jan Erlone:** Jan is a member of the Communist Party as well as the boyfriend of the very rich Mary Dalton. Bigger attempts to frame him for the murder of Mary. Jan, because he has been well versed in material dialecticism (Marxism), takes the event of the murder as an opportunity to face racism. Jan had already been seeking for a way to understand the 'negro' so as to organize them along communist lines against the monied people like Mr. Dalton. He is not able to fully do so, but he is able to put aside his personal trauma and persuade Max to help Bigger. He represents the idealistic young Marxist who hopes to save the world through revolution. However, before he can do that, he must understand the 'negro' much more than he thinks he does.

**Gus:** Gus is another member of Bigger's gang, but he has an uneasy relationship with Bigger. Both are aware of the other's nervous anxiety concerning whites. Consequently, Bigger would rather fight Gus than shoot a white man.

**Jack Harding:** Jack is a member of Bigger's group of pals and the one Bigger comes closest to viewing as a true friend.

**G.H.:** G.H. is another member of Bigger's gang. He is the neutral member of the gang who will do what the gang does, but will not be too closely attached to any one member of the gang.

**Mr. Boris Max:** A lawyer from the Communist Party who represents Bigger against the State's prosecuting attorney. As a Jewish American, he is in a better position to understand Bigger. It is through his speech during the trial that Wright reveals the greater moral and political implications of Bigger Thomas's life. Even though Mr. Max is the only one who understands Bigger, Bigger still horrifies him by displaying just how damaged white society has made him. When Mr. Max finally leaves Bigger he is aghast at the extent of the brutality of racism in America.

**Bessie Mears:** She is Bigger's casual sex partner. She drinks often, saying she is trying to forget her

hard life. At the end of Book 2, Bigger has sex with Bessie against her will for the first time in her life. Bigger then proceeds to kill her in haste, having now committed two murders.

**Peggy:** Peggy is the Irish-American housekeeper for the Daltons and, like Max, can empathize with Bigger's status as an "outsider." However, she is more typical of poor whites who are sure to invest in racism if only to keep someone below themselves. Like everyone in the Dalton family, Peggy hides her dislike for blacks and treats Bigger nicely.

**Bigger Thomas:** The protagonist of the novel, Bigger commits two ghastly murders and is put on trial for his life. He is convicted and sentenced to the electric chair. His acts give the novel action but the real plot involves Bigger's reactions to his environment and his crime. Through it all, Bigger struggles to discuss his feelings, but he can neither find the words to fully express himself nor does he have the time to say them. However, as they have been related through the narration, Bigger—typical of the "outsider" archetype—has finally discovered the only important and real thing: his life. Though too late, his realization that he is alive—and able to choose to befriend Mr. Max—creates some hope that men like him might be reached earlier.

Debatable as the final scene is, in which for the first time Bigger calls a white man by his first name, Bigger is never anything but a failed human. He represents the black man conscious of a system of racial oppression that leaves him no opportunity to exist but through crime. As he says to Gus, "They don't let us do nothing... and I can't get used to it." He even admits to wanting to be an aviator and later, to Max, he admits to wanting to be a great number of things. He can do nothing but be one of many blacks in the ghetto and maybe get a job serving whites; crime seems preferable. Not surprisingly, then, he already has a criminal history, and he has even been to reform school. Ultimately, the greatest thing he can do is transgress the boundary the white world has set for him. He can violate what those who oppress him hold sacred and thereby meet the challenge they set in establishing their boundaries.

**Buddy Thomas:** Buddy, Bigger's younger brother, idolizes Bigger as a male role model. He defends him to the rest of the family and consistently asks if he can help Bigger.

**Mrs. Thomas:** Bigger's mother. She struggles to keep her family alive on the meager wages earned by taking in other people's laundry. She is a religious woman who believes she will be rewarded in an "afterlife," but as a black woman accepts that nothing can be done to improve her people's situation. Additionally, she knows that Bigger will end up hanging from the "gallows" for his crime, but this is just another fact of life.

**Vera Thomas:** She is Bigger's sister and in her Bigger sees his mother. Bigger knows that she will inevitably have the same tired look in her eyes and bear the continual strain of a family. The other option for Vera is to become like Bessie—a drunkard.

**Buckley:** The state prosecutor.

**Britten:** The investigator.

### 11.4.3 Critical Analysis

In his best work, Wright gives American literature its strongest statement of the existential

theme of alienated people defining themselves. Wright's use of the black American as archetypal outsider gives his work a double edge. On the one hand, no American writer so carefully illuminates the black experience in America: The ambivalence of black feeling, the hypocrisies of the dominant culture, and the tension between them find concrete and original manifestation in Wright's work, a manifestation at once revealing and terrifying.

It is not only in his revelation of black life, however, that Wright's power lies, for as much as his writing is social and political, it is also personal and philosophical. The story of alienated people is a universal one; because the concrete experiences of the outsider are so vividly rendered in Wright's fiction, his books have an immediate accessibility. Because they also reveal deeper patterns, they have further claims to attention. Much of Wright's later fiction seems self-conscious and studied, but it cannot diminish the greatness of his finest work.

Richard Wright's best work is always the story of one man's struggle to define himself and by so doing make himself free and responsible, fully human, a character worthy not of pity but of admiration and horror simultaneously. Typically, the character is an outsider, and Wright uses blackness as a representation of that alienation, though his characters are never as interested in defining their blackness as in defining their humanity. Although many characters in Wright's works are outsiders without being aware of their condition, Wright is never interested in them except as foils. Many of them avoid confronting themselves by fleeing to dreams; religion and liquor are two avoidance mechanisms for Wright's characters, narcotics that blind them to their surrounding world, to what they are and what they might be.

Even Wright's main characters must not think about that world too often: To let it touch them is to risk insanity or violence, and so his characters strive to keep the fire within in check, to keep the physical hunger satisfied. Thus, all of Wright's protagonists are initially trapped by desire and by fear—fear of what might happen to them, what they may do, if they risk venturing outside the confines of black life in America—and the desire to do so. The life outside may be glimpsed in films; Bigger Thomas, for example, goes to a film and watches contrasting and artificial views of black and white society. Yet as untruthful as both views are, they remind Bigger of a reality beyond his present situation. Desire is often symbolized by flight; Bigger, like other Wright characters, dreams of flying above the world, unchained from its limitations.

Most of Wright's stories and novels examine what happens when the protagonist's fear is mastered for a moment when desires are met. The manifestation of desire in Wright is almost always through violence (and it is here, perhaps, that he is most pessimistic, for other, more positive, manifestations of desire, such as love, can come only later, after the protagonists have violently acted out their longings). Violence is central to Wright's fiction, for as important as sex may be to his characters, power is much more so, and power is often achieved through violence; in Wright's world, beatings and murders are frequent acts—central and occasionally creative.

Once the character has acted, he finds himself trapped again in a new set of oppositions, for in acting, he has left the old sureties behind, has made himself free, and has begun to define and create himself. With that new freedom comes a new awareness of responsibility. He is without excuses, and that awareness is as terrifying as—though more liberating than—the fears he has previously known. Although Wright does not always elaborate on what may follow, the characters open up new possibilities



for themselves. If one may create one's self by violence, perhaps, Wright sometimes suggests, there are other, less destructive ways as well.

Some of Wright's novels end on this note of optimism, the characters tragically happy: tragic because they have committed violent and repulsive acts, but happy because for the first time they have *chosen* to commit them; they have freed themselves from their constraints, and the future, however short it may be, lies open. Others end simply with tragedy, the destruction achieving no purpose, the characters attaining no illumination.

Along with *Black Boy*, *Native Son* is one of Wright's finest achievements: a brilliant portrayal of, as Wright put it, the way the environment provides the instrumentalities through which one expresses oneself and the way that self becomes whole despite the environment's conspiring to keep it divided.

The book parallels Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925): Both are three-part novels in which there is a murder, in part accidental, in part willed; an attempted flight; and a long concluding trial, in both cases somewhat anticlimactic. Both novels are concerned with the interplay of environment and heredity, of fate and accident, and both have protagonists who rebel against the world which would hold them back.

In the first part of *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas is a black man cut off from family and peers. Superficially like his friends, he is in fact possessed of a different consciousness. To think about that consciousness is for him to risk insanity or violence, so Bigger endeavors to keep his fears and uncertainty at a preconscious level. On the day of the first section, however, he is required by the welfare agency to apply for a job as a menial at the home of the rich Dalton family. Mr. Dalton is a ghetto landlord who soothes his conscience by donating sums of money for recreational purposes. That it is a minuscule part of the money he is deriving from blacks is an irony he overlooks. Mrs. Dalton is blind, a fact that is necessary to the plot as well as being symbolic. Their daughter, Mary, is a member of the Communist Party, and from the moment she sees Bigger, who wants nothing more than to be left alone, she begins to enlist his support.

The first evening, Bigger is to drive Mary to a university class. In reality, she is going with Jan Erlone, her Communist boyfriend, to a party meeting. Afterward, they insist that Bigger take them to a bar in the black part of town. Jan and Mary are at this point satirized, for their attitudes toward blacks are as limited and stereotyped as any in the novel. Bigger does not want to be seen by his friends with whites, but that fact does not occur to Mary. After much drinking, Bigger must carry the drunken Mary to her bedroom. He puts her to bed, stands over her, attracted to the woman he sees. The door opens and Mrs. Dalton enters. When Mary makes drunken noises, Bigger becomes frightened that Mrs. Dalton will come close enough to discover him, so he puts a pillow over Mary's face to quiet her. By the time Mrs. Dalton leaves, Mary is dead.

Wright wanted to make Bigger a character it would be impossible to pity, and what follows is extremely grisly. Bigger tries to put Mary's body in the furnace and saws off her head to make her fit. However accidental Mary's death may appear to the reader, Bigger himself does not regard it as such. He has, he thinks, many times wanted to kill whites without ever having the opportunity to do so. This time there was the act without the desire, but rather than seeing himself as the victim of a chance occurrence, Bigger prefers to unite the earlier desire with the present act, to make himself whole by accepting responsibility for the killing. Indeed, he not only accepts the act but also determines to

capitalize on it by sending a ransom note. Later, accused of raping Mary as well, an act he considered but did not commit, he reverses the process, accepting responsibility for this, too, even though here there was desire but no act. His only sign of conscience is that he cannot bring himself to shake the ashes in the furnace; this guilt is not redemptive, but his undoing, for, in an implausible scene in the Dalton basement, the room fills with smoke, the murder is revealed to newspaper reporters gathered there, and Bigger is forced to flee.

He runs with his girlfriend, Bessie Mears. She, like Bigger, has a hunger for sensation, which has initially attracted him to her. Now, however, as they flee together, she becomes a threat and a burden; huddled with her in an abandoned tenement, Bigger wants only to be rid of her. He picks up a brick and smashes her face, dumping her body down an airshaft. His only regret is not that he has killed her, but that he has forgotten to remove their money from her body.

The rest of the plot moves quickly: Bigger is soon arrested, the trial is turned into a political farce, and Bigger is convicted and sentenced to death. In the last part of the novel, after Bigger's arrest, the implications of the action are developed, largely through Bigger's relations to other characters. Some of the characters are worthy only of contempt, particularly the district attorney, who, in an attempt at reelection, is turning the trial into political capital. Bigger's mother relies on religion. In a scene in the jail cell, she falls on her knees in apology before Mrs. Dalton and urges Bigger to pray, but toughness is Bigger's code. He is embarrassed by his mother's self-abasement, and although he agrees to pray simply to end his discomfort, his attitude toward religion is shown when he throws away a cross a minister has given him and throws a cup of coffee in a priest's face. In his view, they want only to avoid the world and to force him to accept guilt without responsibility.

Bigger learns from two characters. The first is Boris Max, the lawyer the Communist Party provides. Max listens to Bigger, and for the first time in his life, Bigger exposes his ideas and feelings to another human. Max's plea to the court is that, just as Bigger must accept responsibility for what he has done, so must the society around him understand its responsibility for what Bigger has become and, if the court chooses to execute Bigger, understand the consequences that must flow from that action. He does not argue—nor does Wright believe—that Bigger is a victim of injustice. There is no injustice, because that would presume a world in which Bigger could hope for justice, and such a world does not exist; more important, Bigger is not a victim, for he has chosen his own fate. Max argues rather that all men are entitled to happiness. Like all of Wright's protagonists, Bigger has earlier been torn between the poles of dread and ecstasy. His ecstasy, his happiness, comes from the meaningfulness he creates in his existence, a product of self-realization. Unhappily for Bigger, he realizes himself through murder: It was, he feels, his highest creative act.

If Max articulates the intellectual presentation of Wright's beliefs about Bigger, it is Jan, Mary's lover, who is its dramatic representation. He visits Bigger in his cell and, having at last understood the futility and paucity of his own stereotypes, admits to Bigger that he too shares in the responsibility for what has happened. He, too, addresses Bigger as a human being, but from the unique position of being the one who is alive to remind Bigger of the consequences of his actions, for Bigger learns that Jan has suffered loss through what he has done and that, while Bigger has created himself, he has also destroyed another.

*Native Son* ends with the failure of Max's appeals on Bigger's behalf. He comes to the cell to

confront Bigger before his execution, and the novel closes with Bigger Thomas smiling at Max as the prison door clangs shut. He will die happy because he will die fulfilled, having, however terribly, created a self. *Native Son* is Wright's most powerful work, because his theme, universal in nature, is given its fullest and most evocative embodiment. In the characterization of Bigger, alienated man at his least abstract and most genuine, of Bigger's exactly rendered mind and milieu, and of Bigger's working out of his destiny, *Native Son* is Wright's masterpiece.

Wright's protest novel was an immediate best-seller, selling 250,000 hardcover copies within three weeks of its publication by the Book-of-the-Month Club on March 1, 1940. It was one of the earliest successful attempts to explain the racial divide in America in terms of the social conditions imposed on African-Americans by the dominant white society. It also made Wright the wealthiest black writer of his time and established him as a spokesperson for African-American issues, and the "father of Black American literature". As Irving Howe said in his 1963 essay "Black Boys and Native Sons," "The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies . . . [and] brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture."

However, the book was criticized by some of Wright's fellow African-American writers. James Baldwin's 1948 essay *Everybody's Protest Novel* dismissed *Native Son* as protest fiction, and therefore limited in its understanding of human character and its artistic value. The essay was collected with nine others in Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* (1955).

In 1991 the novel was for the first time published in its entirety by the Library of America, together with an introduction, a chronology and notes by Arnold Rampersad, a well-regarded scholar of African-American literary works. This edition also contains Richard Wright's 1940 essay *How 'Bigger' Was Born*.

The book is number 71 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1900-2000. The Modern Library placed it number 20 on its list of the 100 best novels of the 20th Century. Time Magazine also included the novel in its *TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005*.

A line from the trial speech by Bigger Thomas' lawyer, Boris Max, is woven into the plot of *The Penultimate Peril*, a 2005 book by Lemony Snicket. "Richard Wright, an American novelist of the realist school, asks a famous unfathomable question ... 'Who knows when some slight shock,' he asks, 'disturbing the delicate balance between social order and thirsty aspiration, shall send the skyscrapers in our cities toppling?' ... So when Mr. Wright asks his question, he might be wondering if a small event, such as a stone dropping into a pond, can cause ripples in the system of the world, and tremble the things that people want, until all this rippling and trembling brings down something enormous..."

*Native Son* is mentioned in Edward Bunker's 1981 novel *Little Boy Blue* as being read by the main character, Alex Hammond, as he is in solitary confinement, and is said to be greatly fascinated by it.

A large section of Percival Everett's *Erasure* (1999) contains a parody, entitled "Fuck," of *Native Son*.

*Native Son* is mentioned in a flashback in the film *American History X*, when Derek's father criticizes Derek's teacher's Black Literature lessons and affirmative action.

Bigger Thomas is mentioned in one of the lyrical hooks of "The Ritual" in Saul Williams's *The Inevitable Rise and Liberation of NiggyTardust!*

In the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episode, "Far Beyond the Stars", Benny Russell cites *Native Son* as an example of a significant work of African-American literature.

An allusion to the story is presented in part 1 of *The Second Renaissance*, a short anime film from The Animatrix collection. In this film, a domestic robot named "B1-66ER" is placed on trial for murder. The name is created using Leet Speak.

"Native Son" is mentioned in Chapter 22 of Ralph Ellison's masterpiece novel "Invisible Man" published in 1952.

It was adapted for the stage by Wright and Paul Green, with some conflict between the authors affecting the project. The initial production, directed by Orson Welles and with Canada Lee as Bigger opened at the St. James Theatre on March 24, 1941.

The book was newly adapted and directed again by Kent Gash (in conjunction with the Paul Green Foundation) for Intiman Theatre in Seattle, WA in 2006. The production, featuring Ato Essandoh as Bigger Thomas, was a more literal translation of the book than the 1941 version and was a critical success.

*Native Son* has been filmed twice; once in 1951 and again in 1986. Neither version is considered to have been an artistic success, despite, or perhaps because of, Wright's involvement in the earlier version. The first version was made in Argentina; the novel's relatively sympathetic portrayal of the communist characters would have made an American production difficult during the hyper-sensitive cold war era of the 1950's. Wright, aged 42, played the protagonist despite being twice the age of 20-year-old Bigger Thomas. The film was not well received, with Wright's performance being a particular target of critics.

---

## 11.5 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. Who is the protagonist in *Native Son*?

.....  
.....

2. What is Mary Dalton's father ?

.....  
.....

3. Who is Buddy ?

.....  
.....

4. Who is Vera ?  
.....  
.....
5. Who is Gus ?  
.....  
.....
6. How does Bigger Thomas feel when he is thinking about the Whites?  
.....  
.....
7. Where does Bigger dispose of the knife & purse?  
.....  
.....
8. Why does Bigger hate those who believe in God?  
.....  
.....
9. What will be the result if Bigger does not get a job?  
.....  
.....
10. What is the effect of the movies on Bigger?  
.....  
.....
11. What does Jan give Bigger?  
.....  
.....
12. After the murder what is done to Mary Dalton's body?  
.....  
.....
13. Why does Bigger kill Mary Dalton?  
.....  
.....

14. Who is the housekeeper of the Daltons?  
.....  
.....
15. Who is Bessie Mears?  
.....  
.....
16. Who is Britten?  
.....  
.....
17. What does a reporter find when he clears the furnace of ashes?  
.....  
.....
18. Who is Boris Max ?  
.....  
.....
19. Can Bigger see Max's point when he tries to make Bigger see the context of his murders ?  
.....  
.....

---

## 11.6 Let Us Sum Up

---

You have studied the biographical details of the author Richard Wright and the general background to his works. By now you have got an idea about black fiction and the problem of apartheid. You have gone through the brief character-sketches. You have learnt summary, critical analysis of *Native Son* and its impact in the field of literature, media & society.

---

## 11.7 Answers to SAQs

---

1. Bigger Thomas.
2. He owns a good amount of stock in a real estate firm which maintains the black ghetto.
3. Bigger Thomas's sister,
4. Bigger Thomas's friend.
5. He feels something terrible will happen to him.
6. He disposes them in a garbage can.

7. He hates them for their weakness and lack of vision.
8. The family's government relief will be cut off.
9. He feels that he needs a job and he dreads planning the robbery.
10. He gives Bigger a number of communist party pamphlets on the relations between the blacks and the whites.
11. Bigger puts her in her half filled trunk, carries her to the basement and stuffs her body in the heating furnace.
12. He kills her out of fear inadvertently.
13. Peggy
14. She is Bigger's girlfriend.
15. He is a private investigator hired by Mr. Dalton to find his daughter.
16. He finds bits of bones and earring (belonging to Mary Dalton)
17. He is a lawyer brought to Jan to defend Bigger in his trial.
18. No, Bigger misses Max's point and thinks that he was justified in committing the murders.

---

## 11.8 Review Questions

---

### (A)

1. Why does Bigger attack Gus when they meet up to rob Blum's delicatessen?  
(A) Gus does not want to rob Blum's delicatessen anymore  
(B) Gus insults Bigger  
(C) Bigger wants to sabotage the robbery  
(D) Gus has forgotten to bring his gun
2. Why does Bigger hate his family?  
(A) They refuse to work and he has to support them  
(B) They threaten to turn him in to the police  
(C) They criticize his friends  
(D) They are miserable and he is unable to help them
3. Who hires Bigger as a chauffeur?  
(A) Mr. Dalton  
(B) Buckley  
(C) Boris A. Max

- (D) Jan Erlone
4. Why does Bigger kill Mary?
- (A) She attacks him
  - (B) He is terrified of being found alone in her bedroom with her
  - (C) He wants to steal the money in her purse
  - (D) He wants to collect ransom from her parents
5. Who is Mr. Dalton?
- (A) The State's Attorney
  - (B) A politician
  - (C) A doctor
  - (D) A real estate baron
6. Why does Bigger kill Bessie?
- (A) He knows that her complaining and her alcoholism will slow him down in his flight from the police
  - (B) He does not want her to turn him in to the police for raping her
  - (C) She has spent some of his money
  - (D) She threatens to turn him in for killing Mary
7. Why do Mary's parents disapprove of her relationship with Jan?
- (A) Jan does not come from a wealthy background
  - (B) Jan gets Mary drunk too often
  - (C) Jan is a communist
  - (D) Jan believes in racial equality
8. Who is Britten?
- (A) A policeman
  - (B) A private investigator
  - (C) A reporter
  - (D) Mary's uncle
9. From what handicap does Mrs. Dalton suffer?
- (A) Blindness
  - (B) Paralysis



- (C) Deafness
- (D) Muteness
- 10. Which of the following describes Max?
  - (A) He is an attorney for the Labor Defenders
  - (B) He is Jewish
  - (C) He is Bigger's lawyer
  - (D) All of the above
- 11. Who is Buckley?
  - (A) A policeman
  - (B) The judge who presides over Bigger's trial
  - (C) A private investigator
  - (D) The State's Attorney
- 12. How does Bigger react to Mary's unreserved behavior toward him?
  - (A) He is angry
  - (B) He is afraid
  - (C) He is ashamed
  - (D) All of the above
- 13. Why is Bigger alone with Mary in her bedroom the night he kills her?
  - (A) He has to help her to her bedroom, as she is too drunk to get up the stairs herself
  - (B) He wants to get her drunk so he will not have to take her to the station in the morning
  - (C) She wants to read some communist pamphlets with him
  - (D) She wants him to help her pack for her trip to Detroit in the morning
- 14. Why does Buckley rush Bigger's trial?
  - (A) Bigger has already confessed to his crimes, so the trial is irrelevant at this point
  - (B) He is afraid a riot will break out if he does not conclude the trial quickly
  - (C) The case against Bigger is so strong that the outcome is inevitable
  - (D) The trial will give him a political advantage in his upcoming campaign for reelection
- 15. How does Bigger's mother cope with her misery?
  - (A) She drinks
  - (B) She is devoutly religious

- (C) She abuses her children
  - (D) She goes to the movies
16. What is the first violent act Bigger commits during the novel?
- (A) He attacks Gus without provocation or warning
  - (B) He robs Blum's delicatessen at gunpoint
  - (C) He kills a rat in his family's apartment
  - (D) He kills Mary Dalton
17. What does Buddy think about Bigger's job with the Daltons?
- (A) Buddy envies Bigger's job
  - (B) Buddy thinks Bigger's job is degrading and menial
  - (C) Buddy thinks Bigger's job is boring
  - (D) Buddy does not think Bigger's job pays enough
18. What does Bigger do with Mary's body?
- (A) He hides it in Mary's trunk
  - (B) He throws it down an airshaft in an empty building on the South Side
  - (C) He buries it
  - (D) He burns it in the Daltons' furnace
19. Where does Bigger first see Mary Dalton?
- (A) At his job interview
  - (B) In a newsreel at a movie theater
  - (C) At Ernie's Kitchen Shack on the South Side
  - (D) At Blum's delicatessen
20. Why does Bigger not flee Chicago after Mary's bones are discovered?
- (A) The police block every road in and out of the city
  - (B) He decides it is better just to give up
  - (C) A snowstorm blocks all roads in and out of the city
  - (D) Bigger does not want to leave his family
21. What happened to Bigger's father?
- (A) He abandoned the family when Bigger was ten years old
  - (B) He was killed in a riot in the South

- (C) He was arrested, convicted, and executed for murder
  - (D) He committed suicide
22. What famous court cases parallel Bigger's trial?
- (A) The Lindbergh kidnapping and murder case
  - (B) The Scopes trial and the Brown v. Board of Education case
  - (C) The Dred Scott case and the Loeb-Leopold kidnapping and murder trial
  - (D) The Nixon case and the Loeb-Leopold kidnapping and murder trial
23. To which literary genre does *Native Son* belong?
- (A) Urban naturalism
  - (B) Romanticism
  - (C) Transcendentalism
  - (D) All of the above
24. Why are rents on the South Side higher than in other Chicago neighborhoods?
- (A) It is an upscale neighborhood with nice apartments
  - (B) The rents on the South Side include all utility bills
  - (C) The rents are not higher on the South Side than in other neighborhoods
  - (D) Racist rental policies have created an artificial housing shortage on the South Side
25. Who is the author of *Native Son*?
- (A) James Baldwin
  - (B) Richard Wright
  - (C) Ralph Ellison
  - (D) Langston Hughes

**(B)**

1. What is the significance of Mrs. Dalton's blindness? Why is it important both as a symbol and as a plot device?
2. Why does Bigger not want to take Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone to black bars?
3. Why is it ironic that Mr. Dalton gives money to charity?
4. Why does Bigger have no qualms about lying, stealing, and killing?
5. Is all of the violence in this story necessary? What would the novel lose if the violence were eliminated?

6. Why doesn't Bigger accept Max's point of view about murders ?
7. How does popular culture serve as a form of indoctrination throughout *Native Son*?

---

## 11.9 Bibliography

---

1. Addison Gayle, Richard Wright : Ordeal of a Native Son ( 1980)
2. Chinua Achebe : Why I write in English.
3. Constance Webb, Richard Wright: A Biography ( 1968)
4. Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, Cambridge, 1954.
5. Harold Bloom (ed.), Richard Wright : Modern Critical Views (1987)
6. Henry Louis Gates. Jr., and K.A. Appiah (eds.), Richard Wright : Critical perspectives Past and Present (1993)
7. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in Partisan Review, Vol. XVIII, 1955, pp. 665-80.
8. James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, Dell, 1961.
9. John A. Williams, The Most Native of Sons : A Biography of Richard Wright (1970)
10. Keneth Kinnamon (ed.), New Essays on Native Son (1990)
11. Keneth Kinnamon, The Emergence of Richard Wright : A Study of Literature and Society (1972)
12. Margaret Walker, Richard Wright : Daemonic Genius (1988)
13. Michel Fabre, The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright, trans. from French, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1993)
14. Michel Fabre, The World of Richard Wright (1985)
15. Richard Abcarian, Negro American Literature, Wadworth, California, 1970.
16. Richard Macksey and Frank E. Moorer (eds.) Richard Wright : A Collection of Critical Essays (1984)
17. Robert Butler (ed). The Critical Response to Richard Wright (1995)
18. Robert Butler , Native Son : The Emergence of a New Black Hero (1991)
19. Russel Carl Brignans, "Richard Wright: An Introduction to The Man and His Works."

## UNIT-12

---

### RICHARD WRIGHT : *NATIVE SON* (II)

---

#### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Richard Wright : *Native Son*
  - 12.1.1 Chapter-wise Summary and Analysis
  - 12.1.2 Critical Analysis
  - 12.1.3 Analysis of Major Characters
  - 12.1.4 Thematic Analysis
  - 12.1.5 Use of Symbols
- 12.2 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.3 Review Questions.
- 12.4 Bibliography

---

#### 12.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at providing you more detailed summary of the text and the chapter-wise more detailed analysis than given in the previous unit. The character analysis given here in this unit is longer and more detailed than given in the previous unit. Further you will be able to write thematic analysis of the novel and comment on the use of symbols and motifs.

---

#### 12.1 Richard Wright : *Native Son*

---

##### 12.1.1 Chapter Wise Summary and Analysis

#### Bk I (Part I)

Bigger Thomas wakes up in a dark, small room at the sound of the alarm clock. He lives in one room with his brother, Buddy, his sister, Vera, and their mother. Suddenly, a rat appears. The room turns into a maelstrom and, after a violent chase, Bigger kills the animal with an iron skillet and terrorizes Vera with the dark body. Vera faints and the mother scolds Bigger, who hates his family because they suffer and he cannot do anything about it.

#### Analysis

We are introduced to the protagonist of the novel Bigger Thomas at the very outset of the novel. His family and the atmosphere around him, the locality and his residence are a suitable background to the psychological insight into the growth of the character. Bigger's killing of the rat and terrorizing of Vera are clear indications about the violence to be followed in the rest of the novel. The

sufferings of the blacks are represented through the difficulties of Bigger's family.

## **Bk I (Part II)**

### **Summary**

Stepping into the car, Mary informs Bigger that she is not going to the university, but instead has other plans that she does not want to reveal to her parents. Bigger agrees to keep Mary's activities a secret and guesses correctly that she plans to meet with some communists. Bigger grows increasingly anxious. He senses that Mary speaks to him as a human, an attitude he has never before encountered from a white person. Despite the freedom he feels with her, Bigger cannot forget that she is part of the world of people who tell him what he can and cannot do.

Mary introduces Bigger to her friend and lover, Jan Erlone, whom Bigger also recognizes from the newsreel. Jan confounds Bigger by shaking his hand and insisting that Bigger call him by his first name. Bigger thinks Mary and Jan are secretly making fun of him. He becomes infuriated because Mary and Jan make him intensely aware of his black skin—something he feels is a “badge of shame.” Their attention makes him feel naked and ashamed, and he feels a “dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate” for them.

Jan insists on driving. Mary squeezes into the front seat beside Bigger, who feels surrounded by “two vast white looming walls.” Bigger also intensely feels his physical proximity to a rich white girl, the smell of her hair, and the pressure of her thigh against his. Jan looks out at the city skyline and declares that “we” will own everything one day and that eventually there will be no black or white. Mary and Jan insist on eating at a black restaurant on the South Side. When pressed for a suggestion, Bigger offers Ernie's Kitchen Shack. As they drive to the restaurant, Mary looks at the apartment buildings in the black district and wistfully tells Bigger that she wants to know how black people live. She has never been inside a black household, but thinks their lives must not be so different—after all, “[t]hey're *human*. . . . They live in our country . . . [i]n the same city with us. . . .”

Mary and Jan insist that Bigger eat with them—a gesture that horrifies Bigger. They persist, however, so he angrily agrees. Mary begins to cry, sensing that she and Jan have made Bigger feel bad. Bigger feels trapped. He tries to think of what he would say to Mr. Dalton or the welfare agency if he were to walk off the job, but knows he cannot explain it. Jan comforts Mary and her tears are quickly forgotten as they go into the restaurant. Inside, Bigger encounters his girlfriend, Bessie, and his friend, Jack. When Bessie tries to talk to him, Bigger responds gruffly.

Jan, Mary, and Bigger eat dinner and then drink rum together. After a few drinks, Jan and Mary question Bigger about his history. He tells them that he grew up in Mississippi and that his father died in a riot. When Jan asks how he feels about his father's death, Bigger tells him that he does not know. Jan tells Bigger that the communists are fighting against this kind of injustice. Mary insists that she and Jan want to be Bigger's friends, and that he will get used to them. Bigger does not reply. Before they leave the restaurant, Mary tells Bigger she is going to Detroit at nine o'clock the next morning and that he should bring her small trunk to the station at eight-thirty.

Bigger drives Jan and Mary around the park while they make out in the back seat. The two have become thoroughly drunk by the time Bigger drops Jan off. Before he leaves, Jan gives Bigger

some communist pamphlets to read. Mary, riding in the front seat next to Bigger, tries to engage in a conversation with him. She leans her head on his shoulder and asks him if he does not mind. She laughs, and again Bigger feels she is making fun of him. He again feels overcome by fear and hatred.

When Mary and Bigger arrive back at the Daltons', Mary is too drunk to walk unaided. Terrified, Bigger helps her into the house and up the stairs to her bedroom, leaving the car in the driveway. In the bedroom, Bigger becomes sexually aroused and kisses Mary. He lays Mary down on the bed and is groping her breasts when Mrs. Dalton suddenly enters the room. Bigger is seized by hysterical terror. He knows that Mrs. Dalton is blind, but he worries that Mary may say something that unwittingly reveals his presence. Mary starts to rise in response to her mother's voice, so Bigger places a pillow over Mary's face to prevent her from speaking. In his panic, he accidentally smothers Mary to death. Mrs. Dalton kneels by the bed and smells the alcohol on her daughter. She prays and returns to her bedroom.

Bigger realizes that Mary is dead and tries frantically to devise a plan. He stuffs her body into her trunk and carries it down to the basement. He stops in front of the furnace and decides to burn the body. He forces her body through the door, but her head will not fit, so he cuts it off with a hatchet and stuffs the rest of her remains into the furnace. Bigger decides that he will act as though nothing has happened and that he will take Mary's trunk to the station in the morning. When the Daltons realize their daughter is missing, Bigger will tell them that he accompanied her and Jan to her room to get her trunk. Bigger knows that the Daltons see Jan as a dangerous communist, and hopes that they will thus hold him responsible for Mary's disappearance. Bigger takes Mary's purse, which contains a wad of money, and hurries to his family's apartment on the South Side.

### **Analysis**

In this section we see that Mary Dalton is dangerously oblivious to the social codes that draw a strict boundary between white women and black men. She behaves as if social codes are merely silly prejudices to ignore, and does not realize that her actions could have serious consequences for Bigger. Jan likewise ignores these social codes, and inadvertently provokes terror, anger, and shame in Bigger. On the whole, Mary and Jan's attempts to treat Bigger as an equal only make him more conscious and ashamed of his black skin. Although Mary and Jan have good intentions in ignoring rules of conduct that they see as racist, Bigger nonetheless has good reason to fear and distrust their gestures. Though Jan requests that Bigger shake his hand and call him by his first name, Bigger knows that such actions would anger most white people, who would see them as disrespectful. Likewise, he knows that most other white people would be furious to see Bigger sitting in the front seat with Mary. Thus, as Mary and Jan treat Bigger as an equal, they confuse him and unconsciously expose him to a frenzy.

Mary uses the same language as Peggy to describe black Americans. When talking to Bigger, she uses the phrase "your people." She refers to black Americans as "they" and "them," implying that blacks constitute a separate, essentially different class of human beings. Her phrase "our country" indicates that she views America as a nation dominated by white people. When Mary exclaims, "They're human," she implies that a psychological division exists between white and black Americans. She does not have the sensitivity to say "we're human" because she cannot include blacks and whites in the same collective. To her, the idea of being "human" means living like the white "us." We see, then, that though Mary has the best intentions and considers herself socially progressive, on an unconscious level she still

sees blacks as separate or different.

Indeed, we see that Mary and Jan prove just as condescending as Mr. and Mrs. Dalton, even though they ascribe to radical political and social views and make a genuine effort to understand racial problems in America. Mary and Jan enjoy an odd yet titillating satisfaction from the act of eating at a black restaurant with Bigger. We get the sense that breaking social barriers is a sort of game to them. Though Mary and Jan want to experience black life, they do not even come close to an understanding of its most horrific aspects—the frustration and hopelessness Bigger feels every day. Like the Daltons, Mary and Jan remain blind to the social reality of what it means to be black. For a moment, it seems that Mary may recognize her blindness to Bigger’s feelings. She weeps because she is ashamed that she has pushed Bigger against his will. Jan, however, lacks the sensitivity to recognize that he and Mary have placed Bigger in an awkward position, so this small window of understanding is quickly closed.

When Bigger finds himself in Mary’s room, he knows he has breached the most explosive racial rule—the sexual separation between black men and white women. As Bigger puts Mary to bed, he becomes excited and aroused. This excitement comes not so much from the fact that Mary is physically attractive, but from his knowledge that she is forbidden to him. When Bigger feels Mrs. Dalton’s ghostly presence in the room, he is reminded of the whiteness that controls his life, and is overcome by the magnitude of his transgression. Should Mrs. Dalton discover him, the horrible fate he has always expected for himself would surely be sealed forever. Bigger once again finds his skin color trapping him in a situation in which the only option proves to be fatal.

Bigger’s disposal of Mary’s body is brutal, and Wright spares none of the gruesome details. Wright does not want Bigger to be seen as a traditional hero, but instead wants to emphasize the extreme pain and rage Bigger feels, which make him capable of such a terrible act. By explicitly describing Bigger’s act of decapitating Mary’s body, Wright shows that his protagonist is not a moral innocent. Racism has destroyed Bigger’s innocence, awakening within him the capability to murder.

## **Bk I (Part III)**

### **Summary**

Bigger watches the sunset from his apartment window as he waits for his appointment with Mr. Dalton. He feels his gun inside his shirt and considers leaving it at the apartment, but ultimately decides to bring it with him. Bigger does not fear the Daltons, but he knows that blacks are often harassed in white neighborhoods and believes the gun will help make him equal to the whites.

Upon arriving at the Daltons’, Bigger is unsure whether he should enter at the front or the back of the house. He stands outside the imposing iron fence of the Daltons’ mansion and is filled with a mixture of fear and hate, feeling foolish for having thought he might like this job. He summons the courage to go to the front door, which the Daltons’ white maid, Peggy, answers. Though Peggy is polite to Bigger, he senses that she is looking down on him even though she, like him, is only hired help. While Bigger waits for Mr. Dalton, he gawks at the splendor of the home, with its elegant furnishings and paintings. He feels intimidated by the vast difference between this world and his own. Assailed by insecurity, tension, and fear, he becomes awkward and clumsy.

Mr. Dalton, a tall, white-haired man, appears and leads Bigger toward his office. Mr. Dalton is the owner of the real estate company that owns the building in which Bigger and his family live. In a



hallway, they pass Mrs. Dalton, whose face and hair are so white she seems like a ghost to Bigger. From the way Mrs. Dalton touches the walls as she passes, Bigger can see that she is blind. Once inside the office, Mr. Dalton interviews Bigger. Bigger answers the questions timidly, with few words apart from “yessuh” and “nawsuh.” He hates himself for acting in such a subservient manner, but he cannot control himself and becomes extremely uncomfortable.

As Mr. Dalton continues to question Bigger, Mary Dalton—Mr. Dalton’s daughter and the girl from the newsreel—breezes into the room. The two are introduced, and Mary immediately asks Bigger if he belongs to a union. Bigger knows nothing about unions except that they are supposed to be bad, and he begins to hate Mary for endangering his chance at the job. Mary asks Mr. Dalton if she can be driven to the university for a lecture that evening. She then leaves the room. Despite Bigger’s worries, Mr. Dalton hires him as a chauffeur. Mr. Dalton tells Bigger that he is a great supporter of the NAACP—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—and that he is hiring Bigger because of this support for blacks. Bigger’s first assignment, Mr. Dalton says, is to drive Mary to the university that evening.

Peggy cooks dinner for Bigger, but he is suspicious of her kindness and thinks she may be trying to pass off some of her work onto him. Peggy tells Bigger how nice the Daltons are and how much they do for “your people,” meaning blacks. Peggy also tells Bigger that the last chauffeur, a black man named Green, was with the Daltons for ten years. Green attended night school at Mrs. Dalton’s urging and went on to a government job. After Bigger finishes dinner, Peggy instructs him in the operation of the furnace, then shows him to his room. Bigger excitedly contemplates the luxuries he will enjoy with the Daltons. Nonetheless, Mary still worries him. Every rich white woman he has met in the past has treated him in a cold and reserved manner, but Mary does not. Bigger therefore does not know what to make of her.

Before driving Mary out to the university, Bigger enters the kitchen and finds Mrs. Dalton sitting there alone. She asks him several questions about his education. Bigger feels that Mrs. Dalton judges him in the same way his mother does. However, Bigger does note a difference between the manners in which the two women treat him: whereas Bigger’s mother tries to impose her own desires on him, Mrs. Dalton wants him to do “the things she felt that *he* should have wanted to do.” Bigger thinks to himself that he does not want to go to school. He feels he has “other plans,” but he is unable to articulate them, even to himself. He pulls the Daltons’ car out of the garage and picks Mary up at the side door.

### **Analysis**

In Bigger’s first visit to the Daltons’, we see the extreme discomfort he experiences when he is surrounded by white society. Bigger sees white people not as individuals, but rather as an undifferentiated “whiteness,” a powerful, threatening, and hateful authority that denies him control over his own life and identity. The structure of American society and Bigger’s own limited, restricted experiences prevent him from relating to white people in any other way. Though Bigger feels that wrong is being done to him, he has so deeply internalized the rules of race relations that he finds himself acting out the role he has always seen blacks assume around rich, powerful whites.

The Daltons demonstrate similarly conflicting racial attitudes. As a real estate baron, Mr.

Dalton is a major player in the production of the “whiteness” that terrifies, oppresses, and enrages Bigger. Despite Bigger’s criminal record, Mr. Dalton gives him a job because he thinks that blacks deserve a chance. Nonetheless, there is condescension in Mr. Dalton’s manner and charity. He simultaneously profits from keeping blacks like Bigger’s family in terrible housing, and expresses alleged benevolence by giving Bigger a menial job. We sense similar condescension in Mrs. Dalton’s charity as well. Her charity is not unconditional, as she wants Bigger to do what *she* thinks he should want to do. The Daltons may give money to black schools, but they do not acknowledge that Bigger ultimately should have the freedom and opportunity to determine the course of his own life, without their interference.

Mrs. Dalton’s blindness is important symbolically. Like Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, *Native Son* includes many metaphors for race relations that relate to the concepts of vision and sight. Mrs. Dalton is literally blind, but also metaphorically blind: she and her husband are blind to Bigger’s social reality. Bigger himself is similarly blinded by his hatred and fear. This blindness erects a dense wall of racial stereotypes between Bigger and the Daltons that prevents them from seeing each other as individual human beings. In Bigger’s eyes, the Daltons represent “whiteness”—the overwhelming, hostile, and controlling force that imprisons him in a world of few choices, none of which appeals to him. To the Daltons, Bigger represents the mass of needy black Americans who can be exploited but can also be used as convenient targets of charitable giving. Though Mr. Dalton effectively robs Bigger and his family through artificially high rents, he alleviates any conscious or unconscious guilt about such robbery by making charitable donations toward black causes.

Indeed, the social divisions in *Native Son* are more clearly delineated along such lines of race than along lines of class. Though Peggy is a servant—and thus ostensibly Bigger’s equal in terms of social class—she is just as patronizing to him as the Daltons are. Peggy’s remark about “your people” demonstrates her belief that black Americans are foreigners or outsiders of some sort. Conversely, when Peggy refers to the Dalton household, she says “us.” Though she is of a lower class than the Daltons, she clearly includes herself as one of “us,” whereas she does not include Bigger and the previous black chauffeur. Although Peggy seems kind, she still considers herself superior to Bigger because she is white.

Bigger feels extremely uncomfortable when racial boundaries are crossed, as such situations represent unfamiliar territory. He reacts to Mary with hostility because she crosses the tense social boundary between white women and black men. In Bigger’s limited experience, white women speak to him only from afar, with coldness and reserve. Mary, however, speaks to Bigger directly, which greatly confuses him. He thinks perhaps Mary might be trying to keep him from getting the job with the Daltons, as he is unable to comprehend the possibility that she might genuinely be interested in what he has to say. Complicating the situation is the fact that white women are utterly forbidden to black men. Though Mary is reaching out to Bigger, and not vice versa, Bigger knows that he would be the one to bear the blame should something go wrong. Mary thus terrifies and shames Bigger on many levels. He does not know how to behave in her presence because she breaks the only social rules he knows.

## **Bk II (Part I)**

### **Summary**

Bigger wakes up earlier than the rest of his family, and he is in a panic. He realizes he must get

rid of Mary's purse as well as his own knife, which still has blood on the blade. Bigger finds the communist pamphlets Jan gave him and plans to use them as evidence against Jan if the police come around asking questions. When his mother wakes and asks why he did not get home until four o'clock in the morning, Bigger insists that he returned at two, because that time fits better with the story he has constructed. Bigger stares silently around him, infuriated and bewildered that his family has to live in such griminess. Vera accuses Bigger of staring at her and begins to sob as he tries to keep his composure.

Bigger contemplates his crime and becomes filled with a sense of invincibility. In murdering Mary, he feels he has created a new life for himself. He convinces himself that Mary's death is not accidental, but is actually something to which his whole life has been leading. Bigger feels a kind of pride in thinking that one day he will publicly accept what he has done. He decides that Jan, Mary, and the Daltons are blind, and, staring at his family, he realizes that they too are blind. Buddy longs to have a job like Bigger's, and Vera already shows the beginnings of the same weariness that marks his mother's face, exhibiting a profound fear of life in her every gesture.

As Bigger bounds down the stairs, Buddy calls after him, handing him a large wad of bills that has fallen out of Bigger's pocket. Bigger tells Buddy not to tell anyone about the money. Bigger then showily purchases cigarettes for Jack, G. H., and Gus before getting on a streetcar to go to the Daltons' home. Bigger begins to see that the white people around him are all blind. They see him as one who might steal, get drunk, or even rape, but they would never guess that he could be capable of murdering a white girl. Bigger marvels that he can act just as others expect him to, yet still do what he wants.

Bigger thinks of Mary and begins to believe that her murder is justified by the shame and fear that whites have caused him. White people, he thinks, are not really people, but a "great natural force." He wishes he could have a sense of solidarity with other black people to battle against this white force, but he knows such solidarity would only be achieved if blacks were forced into it out of desperation. Bigger thinks of Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, and wishes for some black leader to come along and whip black people into a group that would act together to "end fear and shame."

Bigger arrives at the Daltons' and finds Peggy peering into the furnace. For a moment he fears he may have to kill her, as the furnace is where he hid the body, but she sees nothing suspicious. Bigger adds coal to the furnace and leaves the unread communist pamphlets that Jan gave him in his room. Peggy sees that the car has been left outside all night, and Bigger tells her that Mary instructed him to leave it in the driveway. Peggy is skeptical, but Bigger mentions that a "gentleman" came to the Daltons' house the night before, and Peggy does not question him further. Bigger feigns surprise when Mary does not come down from her room, and Peggy suggests that perhaps Mary has already gone to the train station. Bigger delivers Mary's trunk to the station at 8:30. When Bigger returns, Jan calls looking for Mary.

Bigger is eager to watch the drama unfold. He eavesdrops on Peggy and Mrs. Dalton's worried conversation. Peggy mentions that Jan called to speak to Mary, and believes that Mary might have asked Jan to make the call in an attempt to cover something up. Mrs. Dalton becomes worried when Peggy says that it looks like Mary did not pack all her things. Bigger realizes that he did not think of this detail, and for the first time he feels nervous. Mrs. Dalton questions him, and he repeats his story, adding that Jan accompanied him to Mary's room. Mrs. Dalton gives Bigger the rest of the day off.

Bigger berates himself for somehow failing to acquire more money during the murder and cover-up, feeling that he should have planned things more carefully. He visits Bessie and shows her the money. Bessie tells Bigger that his employers live in the same section of town as the Loeb family. They discuss a recent case in which Richard Loeb and his friend Nathan Leopold kidnapped a neighborhood boy, killed him, and tried to collect ransom money from the family. Bigger remembers the case and begins to concoct his own ransom plan.

Bigger sees that Bessie is as blind as his family, as she uses liquor to blot out the pain of her life. He struggles over whether or not to trust her, but tells her that he has a big plan to obtain more money. Bigger tells Bessie that the Daltons' daughter ran away with a "Red," and that he took the money from Mary's room after she disappeared. He says he wants to write a ransom note and collect more. He assures Bessie that Mary has disappeared for good, but Bessie is suspicious of how he knows for certain. When Bessie asks Bigger if he is involved with Mary's disappearance, he threatens to beat her. He tells Bessie to retrieve the ransom money at a planned drop-off site, assuring her that he will be able to warn her if the money is marked or if the police are watching, as he works for the Daltons and will be privy to their plans. Bessie hesitantly agrees to help, so he gives her Mary's money for safekeeping.

### Analysis

Structurally, the opening of Book Two inaugurates a new phase of *Native Son* that corresponds with a turn in the novel's events. Mary's death represents a key turning point in the plot, both in terms of the narrative and in terms of Bigger's development as a character. In Book One, "Fear," Bigger is unable to analyze his behavior, aside from a few instances when he rationalizes his actions enough to forget them. In Book Two, "Flight," he begins to actively contemplate his identity and consciousness. At the beginning of the novel, Bigger writhes under the yoke of white authority, resentful of the line drawn between himself and white America. However, he does not cross this line until terror drives him to kill Mary by accident. Though this action threatens Bigger's life, it also, ironically, gives him a tangible goal: to get away with the murder. Bigger now feels the sense of clear purpose he lacks prior to killing Mary.

Bigger clearly still suffers from self-deception. Mary's death is an accident, but he convinces himself that it was a deliberate action on his part. To Bigger, the deliberate murder of a white woman represents the ultimate rebellion against the crushing authority of "whiteness." While he has in fact killed a white girl, Bigger convinces himself that he did not do so accidentally, but rather he consciously challenged and defeated the unfair social order imposed upon him. Given that Bigger does not have the ability to determine life and death, he feels that he now possesses a power that white America has used against him since his birth. In Bigger's fantasy, his alleged victory is an act of creation: he believes that killing Mary gives him a new life, one that he himself controls. Bigger sees framing Jan as merely the first step in constructing and protecting his new life. Through these actions, Bigger claims equality with whites on his own terms, and feels that he has become more human because his life now holds purpose. A bitter irony pervades this entire idea of life-affirming transformation, as the transformation occurs only after a brutal, irrational act of violence.

Bigger believes that blacks who simply accept the social order defined by white America are blinding themselves to the truth. His mother is blind because she depends on religion to cope with her disadvantaged position in life, and because she accepts the role she has been assigned despite the

suffering it causes. Buddy views Bigger's menial job as an honorable position. In Bigger's eyes, Buddy's attitude means that Buddy accepts the subservient role white America has assigned him. Vera spends every minute of her life in fear, but accepts this fear as an inevitable part of her existence as a poor black girl. Additionally, Bigger sees Mary, Jan, and the Daltons as blind because he senses that they arrogantly assume that their knowledge of "blackness" can protect them.

Bigger's longing for a leader who can bring solidarity to the black community represents a warning on Wright's part. When Bigger looks to the fascist leaders of Italy and Germany, he finds much that he admires. He does not care whether these leaders are morally right or wrong, but only that they point to a possible avenue of escape from the white force that oppresses Bigger and the black community. Through the character of Bigger, Wright shows us that the conditions in 1930s America are ripe for fascism to flourish and that millions of oppressed people are waiting to unite behind a powerful and charismatic leader, regardless of that leader's moral character.

To disguise his identity as an unrepentant black murderer of a white woman, Bigger plays the expected role of the humble, ignorant, subservient black boy. In this sense, he is beginning to manipulate his identity to his advantage. The Daltons' racism blinds them to Bigger's role in Mary's death, as they are unable to imagine Bigger taking any action beyond the role that they have already assigned him. Bigger thus subverts racial stereotypes, using them as a form of resistance and protection against white authority.

Now that Bigger has broken the ultimate social barrier by killing a white woman, he no longer feels afraid to commit robbery against whites. Bigger's plan to collect a ransom from the Daltons is inspired by the real-life Leopold and Loeb case. In the 1920s, two bored, wealthy students from prominent Chicago families decided to commit what they considered the perfect crime. For months, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb planned to kidnap the child of a wealthy family. They killed the child to cover up their crime, and then planned to collect \$10,000 in ransom money from the family. Leopold, however, accidentally dropped his glasses when disposing of the child's body, and this evidence led to his and Loeb's arrests, trials, convictions, and sentences to life imprisonment. Clarence Darrow, the defending attorney in the famous Scopes monkey trial, defended Leopold and Loeb. He argued that World War I had led to a cheapening of human life and that his clients had grown up in a world that learned to glorify violence. Darrow thus argued that Leopold and Loeb's environment had influenced their callous attitude toward human life. In legal terms, Leopold and Loeb's crime is more serious than Bigger's, as it was completely premeditated rather than accidental. However, Wright reminds us that it is unlikely that anyone in the 1930s would accept the possibility that a black man such as Bigger accidentally killed a white woman such as Mary.

## **Bk II (part II)**

### **Summary**

As Bigger leaves Bessie, he feels confident because he has taken his life into his own hands for once. His secret knowledge that he murdered Mary wipes out his fear and relieves him from the invisible force that has been burdening him. Upon reaching the Daltons' home, Bigger checks the furnace. Seeing nothing of Mary's body, he adds more coal to the fire. Peggy informs him that Mr. Dalton wants him to pick up Mary's trunk at the station because she has not claimed it. The Daltons

have also discovered that Mary has not arrived in Detroit. Mr. and Mrs. Dalton question Bigger again and he repeats his story.

When Bigger returns from the station, the Daltons introduce him to Britten, a private investigator they have hired. Britten doggedly questions Bigger, who remains timid and subservient and sticks to his story. Bigger is excited that, for the first time, he is in control, getting to “draw the picture for them” in the same manner that white people have always defined the situation for him.

Bigger tells Britten that he had not driven Mary to the university. He says that he performed the job Mary instructed him to do and that he kept it a secret because Mary told him to do so. Continuing in this self-deprecating vein, Bigger describes the events at the restaurant. When Britten asks whether Jan discussed communism at dinner, Bigger plays the role of the befuddled, simpleminded black boy. Bigger says that Jan, not Mary, told him to take the trunk downstairs and leave the car in the driveway. Again, Bigger says that he has not mentioned this detail before because Mary had instructed him to keep the events a secret.

Britten produces the pamphlets Bigger left in his room and accuses him of being a communist. Bigger is surprised that he, as a black man, would be accused of being Jan’s partner. He convinces Mr. Dalton that he took the pamphlets because Jan, a white man, had insisted that he take them. Mr. Dalton tells Britten that they cannot hold Bigger responsible for Mary’s disappearance. Britten is not so sure, and Bigger can see that the investigator thinks he must be guilty simply because he is black. Bigger offers to leave his job, but Mr. Dalton apologizes and asks him to stay on. Bigger goes to his room and eavesdrops on Mr. Dalton and Britten as they discuss him. Mr. Dalton says that Bigger is not a bad boy, but Britten claims that “a nigger’s a nigger” and that they are all trouble. Bigger feels he has seen a thousand people just like Britten and believes that he knows how to deal with him.

Dalton and Britten bring Jan to the house for questioning, and he denies seeing Mary the night before. He changes his story when Britten confronts him with the pamphlets he gave Bigger. When Mr. Dalton offers him money to reveal Mary’s whereabouts, Jan stalks out of the house. Bigger checks the furnace again and then hurries to tell Bessie about the new developments. Jan confronts him in the street, but Bigger pulls out his gun and chases Jan off. Jan’s innocence fills Bigger with terrible anger, and it takes a few minutes for him to regain his composure.

Bigger chooses a building managed by Mr. Dalton’s company as the drop-off site for the ransom money. At Bessie’s, he writes a ransom note demanding \$10,000. He signs it “Red” and includes a drawing of a hammer and sickle. Bessie no longer wants to assist Bigger. She accuses Bigger of killing Mary, and Bigger admits it, saying it is okay because “[t]hey done killed plenty of us.” Bessie is terrified and begs Bigger not to involve her. Bigger tells her menacingly that he will not leave her behind and allow her to turn him in. Bessie then feels resigned to her fate. Bigger shows her the drop-off site and instructs her to return to the site at midnight the following night.

Bigger slips the ransom note under the Daltons’ front door and checks the furnace again. Mr. Dalton reads the letter and calls Britten. Bigger eavesdrops while Peggy assures Britten that Bigger acts just like most “colored boys.” Britten questions Bigger again, asking questions about his feelings for white women. Bigger is careful to continue his timid and ignorant act.

The press arrives at the Daltons’. The newspapers have already printed a story about Jan’s

arrest in connection with Mary's disappearance, and the reporters snap photographs as Mr. Dalton explains that he has received a ransom note for \$10,000. Mr. Dalton orders Jan to be released, but admits to the press that the ransom note is signed "Red" and that it contains the emblem of the Communist Party. Jan, meanwhile, refuses to leave jail and declares that he has witnesses to contradict Bigger's story, so the reporters take an even greater interest in Bigger. They appear delighted to hear that Bigger did not want to eat with Jan and Mary at Ernie's. They want to print an article using Bigger to "prove" that the "primitive Negro" does not want to be "disturbed by white civilization."

### **Analysis**

Bigger's calculated manipulation of the prejudices of others reveals his cleverness and allows him a new opportunity to create something of his own. Thinking that racist whites would never consider a black man bold and intelligent enough to commit such a crime, he deliberately plays into these racial stereotypes to keep them off his tracks. The ease with which Bigger accomplishes this goal implies the severity of racial prejudices in America at the time. By merely playing the role of the ignorant black servant to a tee, Bigger fools Mr. Dalton, Britten, and even the reporters. He carefully directs suspicion at Jan by manipulating the wealthy whites' anticommunist prejudices as well. Bigger relishes the chance to control the narrative for the whites, shaping their reality as he wants, just as they have shaped it for him all of his life.

Though the blindness of the white characters is again evident in this section, we also begin to see more clearly that Bigger is largely blind as well. While Britten clearly stereotypes Bigger, Bigger also stereotypes Britten as merely one of thousands of white authority figures he has seen in his life. Indeed, Bigger is clearly still prone to self-deception. Just as he earlier hides behind his "wall" to endure fear and shame, he now does the same to avoid his guilt. Bigger attempts to blame Mary for bringing about her own death. When he finally does admit the murder to Bessie, he tries to convince himself that the murder is justified because whites have killed so many blacks in the past. When Jan confronts him, Bigger is overwhelmed by such guilt that he nearly shoots Jan and falls into a stupor for a few minutes before getting a hold of himself.

As Bigger's plan unfolds, morality becomes increasingly ambiguous and complex. Wright's depiction of Bigger's scheme suggests that, in a world complicated by racial hatred, it is not simple to identify right and wrong, even in the case of murder. Though Bigger kills Mary and then criminally plots against her family, it can be argued that neither of these events represents a moral action, as Bigger's accidental homicide is prompted by his fear that the Daltons' prejudice would lead them to assume that he intends to rape Mary. Considering the Daltons' reactions to Bigger's scheming following the murder, he may well have been right. Though Bigger has clearly committed a crime, Wright implies that he is not fully to blame for his actions following the murder. Bigger makes a conscious choice to lie and plots to injure the Daltons, but the mindset in which he makes those choices has been shaped by the social structure the Daltons and other whites help to perpetuate.

### ***Bk II (part III)***

#### **Summary**

As the reporters stand around in the basement discussing the story, Peggy asks Bigger to clean the ashes out of the furnace. Bigger sifts some of the ashes into the lower bin and adds more coal,

hoping that he will not have to take the ashes out until the reporters leave. However, the ashes still block the airflow, causing thick smoke to fill the basement. A reporter grabs a shovel and clears the ashes. When the smoke dissipates, several pieces of bone and an earring are visible on the floor. As Bigger looks at these remnants of his gruesome killing, all of his old feelings return: he is black and he has done wrong. He once again longs for a weapon so he can strike out at someone. While the reporters marvel over the glowing hatchet head in the furnace, Bigger sneaks up to his room and jumps out the window. It is snowing heavily and he lands hard, the snow filling his mouth, eyes, and ears.

Bigger rushes to Bessie's house to keep her from going to the drop-off site for the money. When Bigger explains that he accidentally killed Mary, Bessie tells him the authorities will think he has raped Mary and has murdered her to cover up the evidence. Bigger thinks back to the shame, anger, and hatred he felt that night. He thinks that he has committed rape, but to him, "rape" means feeling as if his back is against a wall and being forced to strike out to protect himself, whether he wants to or not. Bigger thinks that he commits a form of "rape" every time he looks at a white face.

Bessie packs some clothes and blankets before she and Bigger flee to an empty building to hide. She tells Bigger that she sees her life clearly and resents how much trouble he has caused her. After they make a bed out of the blankets, Bigger rapes Bessie. He realizes he cannot take her with him but cannot leave her behind either. After she falls asleep, he kneels over her with a brick. He hesitates for a moment, but, seeing images of Mrs. Dalton, of Mary burning, of Britten, and of the law chasing him, he brings the brick down on Bessie's skull. He realizes that Bessie, with her crying and her insistence for liquor, would only slow him down in his flight. Bigger then dumps her body down an airshaft, realizing too late that he has forgotten to remove the big wad of money from her clothing.

Bigger sleeps uneasily during the night. Though he senses his impending doom, he still feels powerful. Like Mary's death, Bessie's death gives Bigger a newfound vigor, and he feels a sense of wholeness he has never felt before. In the morning, he awakes to a city covered in snow. He slips out to a street corner to steal a newspaper and reads the front-page news about his escape. The press reports that Bigger probably sexually assaulted Mary before killing her. The authorities have a warrant to search any and every building on the South Side, including private homes. Not believing that a black man could have formulated such a complex plan, they are also searching for a communist accomplice. White anger is turning on blacks and there are reports of smashed windows and beatings throughout the city.

Fighting hunger and cold, Bigger looks for a vacant apartment in which to hide. Due to the overcrowding caused by an alleged housing shortage on the South Side, he has to search for a long while before he finally finds a suitable place. From a window, Bigger marvels at the dilapidated buildings where black tenants live. He thinks back on his own life as he sees three naked black children watching their parents have sex in a bed nearby. He remembers how his family was once driven out of an apartment just two days before the building collapsed. Next door, Bigger hears two people debating his situation. One man declares that he would turn Bigger in to the police, while the other argues that Bigger may not be guilty, since whites automatically view all black men with suspicion when a white girl is killed. Still, the first man blames people like Bigger for bringing white wrath down on the whole black community.

The next morning, Bigger uses his last few pennies to purchase a newspaper. The police have



searched over 1,000 black homes. Only a tiny square on the map—the place Bigger is hiding—remains untouched. The police have questioned or arrested numerous communists. A siren shrieks as the police arrive. Bigger escapes to the roof just as they burst into the building. A dramatic shoot-out ensues and the authorities finally capture Bigger, who is half-frozen from the cold and snow. The men carry Bigger down as a crowd of furious whites demands that they kill “that black ape.”

Never in all his life, with this black skin of his, had the two worlds, thought and feeling, will and mind, aspiration and satisfaction, been together. . . .

### **Analysis**

As Bigger goes on the run, fear and guilt continue to torment him. Though Mary’s murder is an accident, Bessie’s is not. Bigger is tormented by his consciousness of how wrong this second killing is, even at the moment he is committing it. In order to go through with the terrible act, he has to imagine the white blur he feels hovering near him on the night he kills Mary. Bigger forces himself to remember the horror of Mary’s burning corpse, Britten’s racist hatred, and the police who are closing in on him. While Bigger has already allowed his previously repressed fear and anger to come to the surface, he now must contend with his repressed feelings of guilt. He cannot bear to look at Bessie’s face, fearing that she will look at him accusingly even in death, just as Jan does when confronting Bigger in the street. Bigger fears the onslaught of an unstoppable feeling of guilt that would destroy him just as fear and anger have threatened to in the past. Bigger feels such a great need to repress his guilt that he prefers to leave all his money with Bessie’s body rather than face her again.

To some degree, Bigger is able to distract himself from his guilt by concentrating on the new sense of power he feels after doing something significant for the first time in his life. The murders give Bigger a chance to “live out the consequences of his actions,” freeing him from the image of blackness that white America has imposed upon him and giving him a chance to control his own fate. Ironically, Bigger has had to murder in order to gain that control, and he only feels freedom at a time when he is trapped in the city with the police closing in on him.

Bigger’s flight from the police during the blizzard can be interpreted as a metaphor for his entire life. He is literally corralled by the relentless manhunt, as the forces of “whiteness” pursue him in an intense building-by-building search of the entire South Side. Like a cornered rat, Bigger is trapped within the ever shrinking square of space that the police have not yet searched. The snowstorm is a literal symbol of the metaphorical “whiteness” that Bigger fears. The snow encompasses and impedes Bigger, shutting down the city and preventing his escape from the white manhunt. Like the waves of white men searching for him, the snow falls relentlessly around Bigger, locking him in place. Literally and symbolically, “whiteness” falls on Bigger’s head with the power of a natural disaster.

During his flight into the black South Side, Bigger takes time to look at the conditions in which he has lived, and realizations dawn on him as if he is seeing these conditions for the first time. The image of the naked children watching as their parents have sex is a reminder of the shame Bigger felt growing up. He sees that real estate owners like Mr. Dalton have forced black tenants to crowd into one small section of the city, creating an artificial housing shortage that drives rents up. Though Bigger’s social consciousness has clearly grown throughout the novel, he is only beginning to understand the broader picture of the complex racial conflict in American society.

### ***Bk III (Part I)***

#### **Summary**

In jail, Bigger lives in a world with no day, no night, and no fear or hatred, as such emotions are useless to him now. He feels gripped by a deep resolution to react to nothing, and he says and eats nothing. He longs for death, but as a black man he does not want to die “unequal, and despised.” Bigger wonders if perhaps the whites are right that being black is the same as being an animal of some sort. Nonetheless, the hope that another way of life exists, one in which he would be able to forget his racial differences, keeps coming back to him.

The authorities drag Bigger to an inquest at the morgue. He senses from the white people around him that they plan not only to put him to death, but also to make him a symbol to terrorize and control the black community. A feeling of rebellion rises in him and he begins to come out of his stupor. In the morgue, Bigger sees Jan and the Daltons. As he gradually begins to snap out of his psychological stupor, he faints, overcome by hunger and exhaustion. When Bigger awakens in his cell, he believes he has “come out into the world again” in order to save his pride and keep the authorities from “making sport of him.”

Bigger asks to see a newspaper. The headline reads, “Negro Rapist Faints at Inquest.” The story compares Bigger to a “jungle beast” who lacks the harmless charm of the “grinning southern darky.” Edward Robertson, editor of the *Jackson Daily Star*, advises total segregation and a curtailment of the education of the black population, which he claims will prevent men like Bigger from developing. Bigger contemplates returning to his protective stupor, but is not sure if he is still able to do so.

Reverend Hammond, the pastor of Mrs. Thomas’s church, visits Bigger in his cell. The Reverend talks to him about hope and love beyond life. Bigger feels a terrible guilt for having killed within himself the kind of world the preacher describes. He compares the murder of his faith to his murder of Mary. Hammond places a cross around Bigger’s neck just as Jan enters the cell. Jan says that he is not angry and that he wants to help Bigger. Jan says he was foolish to assume that Bigger could have related to him in a different way than he relates to other white men. Jan says that he loved Mary, but he also realizes that black families loved all the black men who have been sold into slavery or lynched by whites. As Jan speaks, Bigger notes that this moment is the first time in his life that he has seen a white person as an individual human being, rather than merely a part of the larger oppressive force of whiteness. This feeling deepens Bigger’s guilt, as he knows he has killed the woman Jan loved. Jan introduces Bigger to Boris A. Max, a lawyer for the Labor Defenders. Max wants to defend Bigger free of charge.

Buckley, the State’s Attorney, suddenly enters Bigger’s cell. Though Max argues that white power is responsible for Bigger’s actions, Bigger feels his burgeoning friendship with Max and Jan quickly evaporate when he sees the self-assured Buckley. Mr. and Mrs. Dalton enter the cell and ask that Bigger cooperate with Buckley and reveal the name of his accomplice. In response, Max asks that they not sentence Bigger to death. Dalton says that despite the crime he is not angry with all black Americans. He announces that he has even sent some Ping-Pong tables to the South Side Boys’ Club earlier in the day. Doubtful, Max questions whether Ping-Pong will prevent murder.

Bigger's family and his friends Jack, G. H., and Gus enter the now crowded cell. Bigger looks at them and thinks they should be glad that he has "taken fully upon himself the crime of being black," and thus washed away their shame. He knows, however, that they still feel shame, and he asks his mother to forget him. Mrs. Thomas tearfully begs the Daltons to have mercy, but they only reply that they have no control over the matter. Mrs. Thomas also tells Mr. Dalton that his real estate company has been trying to evict her family, and he promises they will not be evicted.

All the visitors leave the cell except Buckley, who warns Bigger not to gamble with his life by trusting Max and Jan. Buckley shows Bigger the mob gathered outside, which is screaming for his blood and urging him to sign a confession that also implicates Jan. Adding that the authorities know Bigger raped and killed Bessie too, Buckley pressures him to confess to other unsolved rapes and murders. Bigger realizes he could never explain why he killed Mary and Bessie because it would mean explaining his whole life. Bigger confesses to the murders but writes nothing to explain them. He signs his confession, feeling that there is no alternative. As soon as Bigger signs, Buckley starts to brag about how easy it was to extract a confession from a "scared colored boy from Mississippi." After Buckley leaves, Bigger, feeling empty and beaten, falls to the floor and sobs.

### Analysis

As Bigger retreats into himself, the white authorities and press take control over his identity once again, redefining him as a bestial Negro rapist and murderer. Wright's influence for this treatment of Bigger's character may have come from actual events. While writing the novel, Wright studied newspaper clippings from the 1938 Chicago murder trial of Robert Nixon, a young black man who killed a white woman with a brick during a robbery. Wright used many details from those articles, especially the descriptions of Nixon as an animal, in his writing of *Native Son*.

The whites attempt to reshape Bigger's identity with these additional gruesome details not only to demonize Bigger, but also to whip up white violence and terrorize the black community into submission. Edward Robertson's newspaper editorial blames northern whites for giving blacks too many opportunities, but also implicitly warns the black community to behave or risk a return to the kind of oppression many of them have left behind in the South. This awareness that whites are attempting to use him as a lesson to the black world angers Bigger and prevents him from staying in his insulated, catatonic state. Sensing that his back is once again up against the wall, he feels a renewed sense of rebellion and comes to be ready—though, as always, not completely willing—to fight.

In jail, we see Bigger grapple with conflicting and often unwanted visions of hope. Alone in his cell, he has visions of a new identification with the world, a way to merge with men and women around him and become part of a community. He tries to shake this image from his mind because, given his current situation, hope only makes him feel worse. Reverend Hammond confronts Bigger with another kind of hope, the same spiritual hope that his mother's religion promises. The reverend tells Bigger tales of the world beyond life, but Bigger knows he has killed this faith in himself long ago. He does, however, take the cross to wear and seems to take some solace in the reverend's words. He even thinks of himself as Christlike in the presence of his family and friends. Just as Christian tradition maintains that Jesus died to wash away the sins of the world, Bigger has "taken fully upon himself the crime of being black" and will die to wash away the shame blacks have experienced.

Jan's arrival in the cell marks an important moment in the novel. In his initial encounter with Jan, on the night of Mary's murder, Bigger senses that Jan and Mary are trying to speak to him as a man. Nonetheless, their blindness to Bigger's feelings makes any connection between them impossible. Now, however, Jan understands what Bigger felt the night he murdered Mary. Jan tells Bigger that he realizes he acted blindly toward Bigger that night, and thus in a way is somewhat responsible for Mary's murder. The terrible act has allowed Jan, just like Bigger, to see things more clearly. Jan becomes the first white man Bigger sees as an individual, rather than merely a representation of the whiteness that Bigger has felt pressing down on him.

The crowd that gathers in the jail cell requires us to suspend our disbelief. It seems unlikely that so many people would be allowed, let alone actually fit, inside an accused murderer's cell. Wright tried to deflect this criticism by explaining that he was more interested in the emotional truth of the scene than he was in its physical reality. The crowd of individual visitors represents the collective voice of society as it reacts to and judges Bigger's case. Mrs. Thomas's voice cries for mercy, while Buddy is ready to take revenge. The Daltons speak with the voice of condescending liberalism, intent on revenge but unable to acknowledge the role they have played in creating Bigger's frame of mind. Finally, Buckley represents the voice of white power and racism, convinced Bigger is less than human and eager to make him a symbol for other blacks who might dare to cross the line Bigger has crossed.

### **Bk III (Part II)**

#### **Summary**

The authorities lead Bigger to the courtroom for the inquest. Mrs. Dalton testifies that the earring found in her furnace is a family heirloom that she had given to Mary. She states that she and her husband have donated millions of dollars to black schools. Jan follows Mrs. Dalton to the stand. During questioning, the coroner insinuates that Jan promised Bigger sex with white women if Bigger joined the Communist Party. Max argues that these kinds of questions are sensational and designed only to inflame public opinion, but his objections are overruled.

Mr. Dalton takes the stand and Max is permitted to question him. As Max knows that Mr. Dalton owns a controlling share in the company that manages the building where Bigger's family lives, he asks Dalton why black tenants pay higher rents than whites for the same kinds of apartments. Dalton replies that there is a housing shortage on the South Side. Max retorts that there are areas of the city without housing shortages, and Dalton replies that he thought black tenants preferred living together on the South Side. Max then succeeds in making Dalton admit that he refuses to rent to black tenants in other neighborhoods. He accuses Dalton of giving some of the real estate profits to black schools merely to alleviate his guilty conscience. Before dismissing Mr. Dalton, Max asks him if the living conditions of Bigger's family might have contributed to the death of his daughter. Dalton cannot comprehend the question.

The coroner exhibits Bessie's body to the jurors. Bigger knows that the authorities are using Bessie only to ensure that he will get the death penalty for killing Mary. Bigger becomes angry that they are using Bessie in death just as Bessie's white employer used her while she was alive. He feels that the whites are using both him and Bessie as if they were mere property.

Bigger is indicted for rape and murder. When the police take him to the Dalton home and ask

him to reenact the crime, he backs himself against the wall and refuses. Outside, a mob screams for his death. Bigger sees a burning cross across the street. He feels that Hammond, in giving him the cross to wear, has betrayed him: the preacher has made him feel a kind of hope, but the burning cross leaves him hopeless once again. Back in his jail cell, Bigger rips off the cross and flings it away. When Hammond tries to visit him again, Bigger furiously refuses him. He vows never to trust anyone again.

Bigger asks to see a newspaper, which reports that he is certain to receive the death penalty. A hysterical black prisoner is brought to Bigger's cell, demanding the return of his papers. Another prisoner tells Bigger that this hysterical prisoner went crazy from studying too much at a university. The man had been trying to understand why blacks were treated so badly and had been picked up at the post office, where he was waiting to speak to the president. His screaming disturbs other prisoners, and he is taken away on a stretcher.

Max visits Bigger in his cell. Hopeless, Bigger tells Max that none of his efforts will be of use. Bigger feels destined to die to appease the public, and, therefore, has no possibility of winning the trial. Max tries to get Bigger to trust him. Despite his best efforts to avoid opening up and trusting anyone, Bigger does end up trusting Max, but still believes Max's efforts will prove futile. Max then asks Bigger why he killed Mary. Excited at the prospect of finally feeling understood, Bigger tells Max that he did not rape Mary and hints that he killed her by accident. When Max presses him further about his feelings, Bigger states that Mary's unorthodox behavior frightened and shamed him. When Max points out that Bigger could have avoided the murder by trying to explain himself to Mrs. Dalton, Bigger explains that he could not help himself and that it was as if someone else had stepped inside him and acted for him.

Bigger explains to Max that there has always been a line drawn in the world separating him from the people on the other side of the line, who do not care about his poverty and shame. He says that whites do not let black people do what they want, and admits that he himself does not even know what he wants. Bigger simply feels that he is forbidden from anything he might actually want. All his life, he has felt that whites were after him. Thus, even his feelings were not wholly his own, as he could only feel what whites were doing to him. Bigger once wanted to be an aviator, but he knew that black men were not allowed to go to aviation schools. He wanted to join the army, but it proved to be segregated and based upon racist laws. He saw the white boys from his school go on to college or the military when he could not. Having lost hope, he began living from day to day. Bigger says that after he killed Mary and Bessie, he ceased to be afraid for a brief while.

Bigger snorts at the idea that the Daltons think they have changed something by donating Ping-Pong tables to the South Side Boys' Club, as he and his friends planned most of their robberies while hanging around the Club. Bigger says the church did not help him either, as it preached happiness only in the afterlife while he longed for happiness in this world. He also believes that once he is executed, there will be no afterlife. Bigger tells Max that he took a chance and lost, but that it is over now and he does not want anyone to feel sorry for him. Max decides to enter a plea of "not guilty" to buy some time to plead Bigger's case.

### **Analysis**

The brief appearance of a crazed inmate in Bigger's cell gives us another example of the

narrow range of choices with which Bigger has grown up. We have seen some of these limited choices already: Bigger's mother attempts to get by with religion and the hope for a better life beyond this world; Bessie relies on alcohol and dancing to ease her pain; and Bigger retreats behind his wall, lashing out violently when pushed too far. With the mad inmate, Wright shows us the danger of another option: attempting to tackle the problems of race relations using pure reason. The former student is driven mad by looking at the race problem closely and trying to understand the situation of blacks in America. Wright implies that approaching the situation rationally is as dangerous as lashing out with a gun—and, in some ways, less effective.

Though Bigger feels the injustice of his situation intensely, he is uneducated and inarticulate, and therefore sometimes unable to convey his feelings adequately. Although his understanding becomes clearer as the novel moves on, he still struggles—even within his own thoughts—for a way to describe his world. Wright sidesteps these limitations of Bigger's character by creating the character of the mad student, who is intelligent enough to be able to voice his own philosophical perspectives on Bigger and the world that has created him. Furthermore, at the inquest, Max is able to make explicit the hypocrisy of the Daltons and their charity, something Bigger has sensed but has not expressed outright. As a white man, Max is also able to attack Dalton directly, something a black man in Wright's Chicago would not have done. Max mocks Dalton's pathetic gesture of benevolence—his gift of Ping-Pong tables to the Boys' Club—and makes clear that Dalton is a major part of a system that corrals black tenants into the ghetto, creating the social conditions that have produced Bigger. Dalton is blind to these allegations, just as he is to Max's assertion that his role in creating these conditions makes him complicit in Mary's murder.

It is clear that the authorities do not consider Bessie's rape and murder to be as important as the murder of Mary Dalton. They use Bessie's battered body merely as evidence to establish the larger crime, which, in the eyes of the public, is the outrageousness of Bigger's act against white society. We get the impression that Bigger's trial is only a sensational spectacle for the public, and not an attempt to serve justice. The authorities' attempts to force Bigger to reenact his crime in Mary's bedroom reinforce this interpretation of the trial. We see that such ostensible evidence gathering is largely pointless, as Bigger's guilt has been decided before he is ever arrested. Instead, the reenactment serves only to provide sensational photographs to print in the next racist news article about the trial.

Max's acknowledgement of Bigger as a human being allows Bigger to talk—and even think—about himself in ways he never has before. Throughout *Native Son*, Wright focuses on this idea that physical oppression leads to psychological repression. Bigger has spent his entire life trying to hide behind a wall, attempting to shut out the realities of life and his feelings about these grim realities. Such repression has left him with violence as his only outlet. Max, however, by simply recognizing Bigger's life and feelings, allows Bigger to shed this burden of repression that he has carried for so long. Bigger can now, at least tentatively, emerge from behind his wall and start to examine his world for what it really is.

### **Bk III (Part III)**

#### **Summary**

Bigger is seized with nervous energy, filled with both hope and doubt. Max's questions have

made Bigger feel that Max acknowledges his life and feelings. Bigger wonders if people on the other side of the “line” suffer from the same hatred and fear that have gripped him all of his life. He realizes that individual people, just like himself and Jan, comprise both sides of the color line. Bigger suddenly wishes to know more about life. He wants to touch the hands of people locked in other cells, both in prison and out in the world. He wants to feel the pain of others who suffer like him.

However, Bigger knows that he faces the death penalty, and therefore believes that it is too late to learn the meaning of his existence. He wishes he could retreat back into his mental stupor. He has a newfound feeling of hope for a new world and a new way of viewing himself in relation to other people, but this hope is tantalizing and torments him with uncertainty. Bigger wonders if perhaps his blind hatred is the better option anyway, since hope anguishes him more than it comforts him. The voice of hatred he has read in the newspapers seems so much louder and stronger than the voice of understanding he has heard in Max and Jan. Bigger despairs that this hatred will endure long after he is dead.

Bigger’s family, friends, and teachers are in the courtroom for the trial. He wonders why the authorities do not just shoot him instead of forcing him to go through this long, public process. Max enters a guilty plea and explains that the law allows him to enter mitigating evidence for his defendant. Buckley claims that Max wants to plead guilty and then try to prove that Bigger is insane, which is not allowed under the law. Max denies this claim and says that he merely wants to demonstrate why Bigger has committed murder. Max accuses Buckley of rushing the trial to gain political advantage for the upcoming elections and claims that Buckley is merely a stooge who is doing the bidding of the mob that has gathered outside the courtroom. Max claims that Buckley wants to avoid the matter of motive because it would mitigate Bigger’s punishment. The judge allows Max to do as he has planned, and the sentencing hearing begins.

Buckley calls Mr. and Mrs. Dalton, Peggy, and Britten to testify that Bigger behaved like a sane man. Next on the stand are the reporters who discovered Mary’s bones in the furnace, followed by a parade of people who knew Bigger in the South Side. The theater manager testifies that Bigger and other boys had masturbated in the theater. Buckley even brings the Daltons’ furnace into the courtroom. He presents his case over the course of two days.

### **Analysis**

*Native Son* is filled with dramatic action—there are two murders, a police chase, a shoot-out, and a murder trial—yet the most dramatic turmoil occurs inside Bigger’s mind. In perhaps the most important moment in the novel, Bigger is suddenly able to see himself in relation to other people. Thanks to his discussion with Max, he now feels free from the tensions of his life. He no longer sees whites as just a “looming mountain of hate,” but rather as individuals. Bigger has already seen Jan in this manner, but he now reaches the important realization that even those whites who hate him are human. In fact, if Bigger were in their place, he realizes he would likely hate in the same way that they do. This revelation has required Bigger to accept two important things: not only must he realize that whites are human beings, but he must also recognize that he himself is their equal. Previously, Bigger has been afraid even to think of himself in these terms. Now, however, the burdens of fear, hate, and shame have been lifted from him, and he is able to see that the problems of his life are not his alone. He imagines everyone—white and black, rich and poor—trapped alone in his or her own jail cell, longing for

connection.

Bigger finally begins to realize that he has been just as blind as everyone else. Just as racist whites are blind to his humanity, he has been blind to the fact that Jan and Mary are human beings as well. He makes the crucial realization that the hatred and fear that drive people on the other side of the “line” to make a spectacle of him and wish him dead are the same kind of hatred and fear that he has felt himself. Bigger longs to overcome his alienation and become involved in the lives of others.

Bigger’s awakening to the possibility of a connection with others represents a new source of hope. He has left religion behind because it only offers hope in the afterlife, but now he has found beliefs that enable him to see hope in this world. He imagines being able to reach out and touch the hearts of others around him. He feels that in his recognition of others, and their recognition of him, he can gain the identity and wholeness for which he has longed. Earlier, Bigger thinks that he has found this identity in his new status as a murderer, but that status leaves him tormented by guilt. This new identity brings Bigger an image of himself standing in a crowd of men in a blinding sun that has burned away all differences—not only differences of race, but of class as well.

Bigger struggles with the inner conflict produced by this new hope, and knows he must reconcile his new hope with the certainty that he will be sentenced to death. In the face of death, such hope is a torment. Bigger now longs for more time to examine and understand his relation to others. His new fear is that he will die before he has time to reach this understanding fully. He also feels defenseless in the face of ongoing hatred, despairing that the voices of hate will drown everything else out and continue long after he is dead. The mobs and the newspapers continue to call Bigger a monster, and he wonders if it is not better to hide again behind his wall of hate. Fighting this battle within himself, he realizes that to win the battle for his life on the outside he must first win it on the inside. This realization represents the end of the split consciousness from which Bigger has suffered throughout the novel. His newfound wholeness, although something he only barely understands, gives him the power to achieve victory in a sense, regardless of the outcome of his trial.

### **Bk III (Part IV)**

#### **Summary**

In the courtroom, Max presents his case. He argues that Bigger is a “test symbol” who embodies and exposes the ills of American society. Max explains that his intent is not to argue whether an injustice has been committed, but to make the court understand Bigger and the conditions that have created him. Max points out that the authorities have deliberately inflamed public opinion against Bigger, using his case as an excuse to terrorize the black community, labor groups, and the Communist Party into submission.

Max goes on to say that the rage directed at Bigger stems from a mix of guilt and fear. Those who clamor for Bigger’s swift execution secretly know that their own privileges have been gained through historical wrongs committed against people like Bigger, and that their wealth has been accumulated through the oppression of others. Bigger’s options have been so limited, and his life so controlled, that he has been unable to do anything but hate those who have profited from his misery. Stunted and deformed by this oppression, Bigger was unable to view Mary and Jan as human beings. Max argues that the Daltons, despite their philanthropy, are blind to the world that has created Bigger



and have themselves created the conditions that led to their daughter's murder.

Max warns that killing Bigger quickly will not restrain others like him. Rather, these other blacks will only become angrier that the powerful, rich, white majority limits their opportunities. Popular culture dangles happiness and wealth before the oppressed, but such goals are always kept out of reach in reality. Max argues that this smoldering anger born out of restricted opportunities—though now tempered by the effects of religion, alcohol, and sex—will eventually burst forth and destroy all law and order in American society. By limiting the education of blacks, segregating them, and oppressing them, white society itself is implicated in Mary's murder. Max claims that white society "planned the murder of Mary Dalton" but now denies it. He says that his job is to show how foolish it is to try to seek revenge on Bigger.

Max argues that Bigger murdered Mary accidentally, without a plan, but that he accepted his crime, which gave him the opportunities of choice and action, and the sense that his actions finally meant something. Bigger's killing was thus not an act against an individual, but a defense against the world in which Bigger has lived. Mary died because she did not understand that she alone could not undo hundreds of years of oppression. Max points to the gallery, where blacks and whites are seated in separate sections. Blacks, he says, live in a separate "captive" nation within America, unable to determine the course of their own lives. He argues that such a lack of self-realization is just as smothering and stunting as physical starvation. Bigger sought a new life, Max says, and found it accidentally when he murdered Mary. Max argues that Bigger had no motive for the crimes and that the murders were "as instinctive and inevitable as breathing or blinking one's eyes." The hate and fear society has bred into Bigger are an inextricable part of his personality, and essentially his only way of living.

Max says that there are millions more like Bigger and that, if change does not come, these conditions could lead to another civil war. He says he knows the court does not have the power to rectify hundreds of years of wrongs in one day, but that it can at least show that it recognizes that there is a problem. Prison, he says, would be a step up for Bigger. Though Bigger would be known only as a number in prison, he would at least have an identity there. Finally, Max argues that the court cannot kill Bigger because it has never actually recognized that he exists. He urges the court to give Bigger life. Bigger does not entirely understand Max's speech, but is proud that Max has worked so hard to save him.

After Max's arguments, Buckley declares that Bigger does in fact have a motive for Mary's murder. Buckley claims that since Bigger and Jack masturbated while watching a newsreel about Mary the same day she was killed, Bigger must have been sexually interested in her. Buckley tells the courtroom that Bigger was a "maddened ape" who raped Mary, killed her, and burned her body to hide the evidence. Buckley concludes his argument by saying that Bigger was sullen and resentful from the start, not even grateful when he was referred to Mr. Dalton for a job. Buckley calls Bigger a "demented savage" who deserves to die, and whose execution will prove that "jungle law" does not prevail in Chicago. The court adjourns. After a brief deliberation, the judge returns and sentences Bigger to death.

Max visits Bigger again after a failed attempt to obtain a pardon from the governor. Bigger tries to explain how much Max's questions about his life meant to him, as these questions acknowledged Bigger's existence as a human being, even as a murderer. Max tries to comfort Bigger, but Bigger

wants understanding, not pity. He continues, saying that sometimes he wishes Max had not asked the questions, because they have made him think and this thinking has scared him. The questions have made Bigger consider himself and other people in a new way, and have caused him to realize that his motivation for hurting people was simply that they were always crowding him. He did not mean to hurt others, but it just happened. When Bigger committed the murders, he was not trying to kill anyone, but rather to make his life mean something that he could claim for himself. Bigger asks Max if this sense of meaning is the same reason that the authorities want to kill him. Max urges his client to die free, believing in himself. He tells Bigger that only his own mind stands in the way of believing in himself. The rich majority dehumanizes people like Bigger for the same reason Bigger could not see the majority as human—they each just want to justify their own lives.

Bigger tells Max he does believe in himself. He did not want to kill, but there was something in him that has made him kill and that something must be good. He tells Max that he feels all right when he looks at it this way. Max is horrified at Bigger's words, but Bigger assures him that he is all right. Max bids him good-bye and as he leaves, Bigger asks him, "Tell . . . Tell Mister . . . Tell Jan hello."

### **Analysis**

In his long courtroom speech, Max articulates much of what Bigger has already seen and felt throughout the novel. He reiterates the Daltons' blindness and Bigger's blindness toward Mary and Jan. He tells the court how the murders gave Bigger the identity he lacked and how the hate and fear that Bigger's living conditions bred into him made the murders almost inevitable. While much of Max's speech simply restates what we have seen before, it does clarify the warning Wright implies with the ringing of the alarm clock at the novel's opening. Max worries that the same doom Bigger dreads in Book One is the fate of the entire country. Max appeals to the court—as Wright appeals to his readers in 1930s America—to recognize Bigger Thomas, to understand the conditions that have created him, and to comprehend the disastrous consequences of allowing these conditions to continue.

Many critics have argued that Wright uses Max's speech merely to expose his own communist propaganda. Others, however, have pointed out that Max, though a lawyer for the Communist Party, is never identified as a member of the Party himself. Also, Max's argument does not follow the party line exactly. Max does make clear that blacks have been oppressed for hundreds of years, and details the conditions under which they are forced to live in 1930s Chicago. His argument does not, however, appear to be a call for revolution or an attack on capitalism. Instead, Max makes an appeal to the rich and powerful simply to understand that they are sowing the seeds for a new civil war in continuing their oppression of blacks. In the end, Max, as a representative of the Communist Party, cannot save Bigger. Bigger learns that salvation can come only from within, through his own effort.

In a novel filled with characters who are blind both literally and metaphorically, Max sees the most clearly. He is able to understand and articulate much of Bigger's life after only one long conversation with him. Max sees that Bigger views whites not as individuals, but as a great natural force. He understands Bigger's split consciousness and sees how Bigger was forced to retreat from reality. He also understands how Mary's murder gave Bigger the chance to control his own life for the first time. For all his perceptiveness, however, Max is still unable to see Bigger completely. At the trial, he refers to Bigger as a symbol and talks of the millions more who are like him. In this statement, we see that Max understands Bigger, but that he cannot see Bigger beyond his own conception of who Bigger

must be. When Bigger tells Max that he is pleased with what he has done, Max is unable to accept this assertion and gropes for his hat “like a blind man.” Even Max is unable, ultimately, to see Bigger fully for the individual he is.

Critics, such as James Baldwin in *Everybody's Protest Novel*, have argued that Bigger goes to his death fearful and desperate, just like the rat in the first pages of the novel. Others contend that Bigger finally gives himself over to hatred. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Bigger does change in jail, accepting that the acts he has committed are part of who he is, but also that hate for one's oppressors is a natural feeling. It is the repression of these feelings—a repression Bigger has forced upon himself in order to survive—that leads to his violent acts. By the end of the novel, he has shed his hate and fear, and longs only to understand his place in the world and his relation to other people. Bigger tells Max again and again that he is all right. Finally, as Max is leaving, Bigger asks him to “[t]ell Jan hello.” As Jan requests in the beginning of the novel, Bigger finally calls him by his first name, signifying that he finally sees whites as individuals, rather than a looming force. Even more important, Bigger sees himself as the whites' equal. Max exhorts Bigger to believe in himself, and we have every indication at this point to believe that he already does.

### 12.1.2 Critical Analysis

Bigger Thomas, a poor, uneducated, twenty-year-old black man in 1930s Chicago, wakes up one morning in his family's cramped apartment on the South Side of the city. He sees a huge rat scamper across the room, which he corners and kills with a skillet. Having grown up under the climate of harsh racial prejudice in 1930s America, Bigger is burdened with a powerful conviction that he has no control over his life and that he cannot aspire to anything other than menial, low-wage labor. His mother pesters him to take a job with a rich white man named Mr. Dalton, but Bigger instead chooses to meet up with his friends to plan the robbery of a white man's store.

Anger, fear, and frustration define Bigger's daily existence, as he is forced to hide behind a façade of toughness or risk succumbing to despair. While Bigger and his gang have robbed many black-owned businesses, they have never attempted to rob a white man. Bigger sees whites not as individuals, but as a natural, oppressive force—a great looming “whiteness” pressing down upon him. Bigger's fear of confronting this force overwhelms him, but rather than admit his fear, he violently attacks a member of his gang to sabotage the robbery. Left with no other options, Bigger takes a job as a chauffeur for the Daltons.

Coincidentally, Mr. Dalton is also Bigger's landlord, as he owns a controlling share of the company that manages the apartment building where Bigger's family lives. Mr. Dalton and other wealthy real estate barons are effectively robbing the poor, black tenants on Chicago's South Side—they refuse to allow blacks to rent apartments in predominantly white neighborhoods, thus leading to overpopulation and artificially high rents in the predominantly black South Side. Mr. Dalton sees himself as a benevolent philanthropist, however, as he donates money to black schools and offers jobs to “poor, timid black boys” like Bigger. However, Mr. Dalton practices this token philanthropy mainly to alleviate his guilty conscience for exploiting poor blacks.

Mary, Mr. Dalton's daughter, frightens and angers Bigger by ignoring the social taboos that govern the relations between white women and black men. On his first day of work, Bigger drives

Mary to meet her communist boyfriend, Jan. Eager to prove their progressive ideals and racial tolerance, Mary and Jan force Bigger to take them to a restaurant in the South Side. Despite Bigger's embarrassment, they order drinks, and as the evening passes, all three of them get drunk. Bigger then drives around the city while Mary and Jan make out in the back seat. Afterward, Mary is too drunk to make it to her bedroom on her own, so Bigger helps her up the stairs. Drunk and aroused by his unprecedented proximity to a young white woman, Bigger begins to kiss Mary.

Just as Bigger places Mary on her bed, Mary's blind mother, Mrs. Dalton, enters the bedroom. Though Mrs. Dalton cannot see him, her ghostlike presence terrifies him. Bigger worries that Mary, in her drunken condition, will reveal his presence. He covers her face with a pillow and accidentally smothers her to death. Unaware that Mary has been killed, Mrs. Dalton prays over her daughter and returns to bed. Bigger tries to conceal his crime by burning Mary's body in the Daltons' furnace. He decides to try to use the Daltons' prejudice against communists to frame Jan for Mary's disappearance. Bigger believes that the Daltons will assume Jan is dangerous and that he may have kidnapped their daughter for political purposes. Additionally, Bigger takes advantage of the Daltons' racial prejudices to avoid suspicion, continuing to play the role of a timid, ignorant black servant who would be unable to commit such an act.

Mary's murder gives Bigger a sense of power and identity he has never known. Bigger's girlfriend, Bessie, makes an offhand comment that inspires him to try to collect ransom money from the Daltons. They know only that Mary has vanished, not that she is dead. Bigger writes a ransom letter, playing upon the Daltons' hatred of communists by signing his name "Red." He then bullies Bessie to take part in the ransom scheme. However, Mary's bones are found in the furnace, and Bigger flees with Bessie to an empty building. Bigger rapes Bessie and, frightened that she will give him away, bludgeons her to death with a brick after she falls asleep.

Bigger eludes the massive manhunt for as long as he can, but he is eventually captured after a dramatic shoot-out. The press and the public determine his guilt and his punishment before his trial even begins. The furious populace assumes that he raped Mary before killing her and burned her body to hide the evidence of the rape. Moreover, the white authorities and the white mob use Bigger's crime as an excuse to terrorize the entire South Side.

Jan visits Bigger in jail. He says that he understands how he terrified, angered, and shamed Bigger through his violation of the social taboos that govern tense race relations. Jan enlists his friend, Boris A. Max, to defend Bigger free of charge. Jan and Max speak with Bigger as a human being, and Bigger begins to see whites as individuals and himself as their equal.

Max tries to save Bigger from the death penalty, arguing that while his client is responsible for his crime, it is vital to recognize that he is a product of his environment. Part of the blame for Bigger's crimes belongs to the fearful, hopeless existence that he has experienced in a racist society since birth. Max warns that there will be more men like Bigger if America does not put an end to the vicious cycle of hatred and vengeance. Despite Max's arguments, Bigger is sentenced to death.

Bigger is not a traditional hero by any means. However, Wright forces us to enter into Bigger's mind and to understand the devastating effects of the social conditions in which he was raised. Bigger was not born a violent criminal. He is a "native son": a product of American culture and the violence

and racism that suffuse it.

### 12.1.3 Analysis of Major Characters

#### Bigger Thomas

As the protagonist and main character of *Native Son*, Bigger is the focus of the novel and the embodiment of its main theme—the effect of racism on the psychological state of its black victims. As a twenty-year-old black man cramped in a South Side apartment with his family, Bigger has lived a life defined by the fear and anger he feels toward whites for as long as he can remember. Bigger is limited by the fact that he has only completed the eighth grade, and by the racist real estate practices that force him to live in poverty. Furthermore, he is subjected to endless bombardment from a popular culture that portrays whites as sophisticated and blacks as either subservient or savage. Indeed, racism has severely curtailed Bigger's prospects in life and even his very conception of himself. He is ashamed of his family's poverty and afraid of the whites who control his life—feelings he works hard to keep hidden, even from himself. When these feelings overwhelm him, he reacts with violence. Bigger commits crimes with his friends—though only against other blacks, as the group is too frightened to rob a white man—but his own violence is often directed at these friends as well.

Bigger feels little guilt after he accidentally kills Mary. In fact, he feels for the first time as though his life actually has meaning. Mary's murder makes him believe that he has the power to assert himself against whites. Wright goes out of his way to emphasize that Bigger is not a conventional hero, as his brutality and capacity for violence are extremely disturbing, especially in graphic scenes such as the one in which he decapitates Mary's corpse in order to stuff it into the furnace. Wright does not present Bigger as a hero to admire, but as a frightening and upsetting figure created by racism. Indeed, Wright's point is that Bigger becomes a brutal killer precisely because the dominant white culture fears that he will become a brutal killer. By confirming whites' fears, Bigger contributes to the cycle of racism in America. Only after he meets Max and learns to talk through his problems does Bigger begin to redeem himself, recognizing whites as individuals for the first time and realizing the extent to which he has been stunted by racism. Bigger's progress is cut short, however, by his execution.

Critics of *Native Son* are divided over the effectiveness of Bigger as a character. Though many have found him a powerful and disturbing symbol of black rage, others, including the eminent writer James Baldwin, have considered him too narrow to represent the full scope of black experience in America. One area of fascination has been Bigger's name, which seems to combine the words "big" and "nigger," suggesting the aggressive racial stereotype he comes to embody. As Max indicates, however, Bigger does not have a great deal of choice. The title of the novel implies that Bigger's descent into criminality and violence is an inherently American story. Bigger is not alien to or outside of American culture—on the contrary, he is a "native son."

#### Mary Dalton

Mary's importance to the novel stems not only from her death, which represents the clear turning point in Bigger's life, but from her insidious form of racism, which is among Wright's subtlest criticisms of white psychology. Mary self-consciously identifies herself as a progressive: she defies her parents by dating a communist, cares about social issues, and is politically and personally interested in

improving the lives of blacks in America. Though Mary's intentions are essentially good, yet, she is too young and immature either to commit fully to her chosen causes or to attain a sophisticated understanding of those people she seeks to help.

Mary attempts to treat Bigger as a human being, but gives no thought to the fact that Bigger might be surprised and confused by such unprecedented treatment from the wealthy white daughter of his employer. Mary simply assumes that Bigger will embrace her friendship, as she supports the political cause that she believes he represents. She does not even think to wonder about any of his personal qualities, thoughts, or feelings, but merely seeks to befriend him automatically, because he is black. For a tragically brief moment, Mary seems to recognize Bigger's discomfort, a sign that perhaps one day she could be capable of greater understanding. Ultimately, however, Mary never gets the chance to perceive Bigger as an individual.

Though Mary has the best of intentions, she treats Bigger with a thoughtless racism that is just as destructive as the more overt hypocrisy of her parents. Interacting with the Daltons, Bigger at least knows where he stands. Mary's behavior, however, is disorienting and upsetting to him. Ultimately, Mary's thoughtlessness actually ends up placing Bigger in serious danger, while the only risk she herself runs is mild punishment or disapproval from her parents for her disobedience. She does not stop to think that Bigger could easily lose his job—or worse—if he upsets her parents. Mary unthinkingly puts Bigger in the position of being alone with her in her bedroom, and her inability to understand him and the terror he feels at the prospect of being discovered in her room proves fatal.

### **Boris A. Max**

The lawyer who defends Bigger at his trial, Max is a member of the Labor Defenders, a legal organization affiliated with the Communist Party. While it would seem natural for Max himself to be a communist, his party affiliation is never made explicitly clear in the novel. Max is certainly sympathetic to the communist cause, but, unlike Jan, never identifies himself as a member of the Party.

Of all the white characters in the novel, Max is able to see and understand Bigger most clearly. He speaks to Bigger as a human being, rather than simply as a black man or a murderer, which gives Bigger the chance to tell his own story for the first time in his life. Max's recognition of Bigger's humanity allows Bigger to understand for the first time that a sympathetic relationship between a white man and a black man is possible. Still, Max is unable to avoid viewing Bigger as a symbol of racial oppression—one of millions of black men just like him—and therefore is never able to understand him fully.

Critics have argued that Max is never fully defined as a character and is simply a spokesman for Wright. It is clear that Max does, in some respects, serve as a mouthpiece for the novel's sociological analysis of Bigger's condition. Though Bigger feels what is happening to him throughout the novel, he is often unable, sometimes intentionally, to grasp it consciously. Max, in his courtroom speech, is able to articulate many of these unexpressed perceptions that Bigger has felt. Max does not argue Bigger's innocence: his impassioned speech is a plea for the court to recognize Bigger for who he is and to understand the conditions that have created him. In this regard, Max serves as a voice for Wright's warning to America about the consequences of continued racial oppression.

### 12.1.4 Thematic Analysis

Wright's exploration of Bigger's psychological corruption gives us a new perspective on the oppressive effect racism had on the black population in 1930s America. Bigger's psychological damage results from the constant barrage of racist propaganda and racial oppression he faces while growing up. The movies he sees depict whites as wealthy sophisticates and blacks as jungle savages. He and his family live in cramped and squalid conditions, enduring socially enforced poverty and having little opportunity for education. Bigger's resulting attitude toward whites is a volatile combination of powerful anger and powerful fear. He conceives of "whiteness" as an overpowering and hostile force that is set against him in life. Just as whites fail to conceive of Bigger as an individual, he does not really distinguish between individual whites—to him, they are all the same, frightening and untrustworthy. As a result of his hatred and fear, Bigger's accidental killing of Mary Dalton does not fill him with guilt. Instead, he feels an odd jubilation because, for the first time, he has asserted his own individuality against the white forces that have conspired to destroy it. Throughout the novel, Wright illustrates the ways in which white racism forces blacks into a pressured—and therefore dangerous—state of mind. Blacks are beset with the hardship of economic oppression and forced to act subserviently before their oppressors, while the media consistently portrays them as animalistic brutes. Given such conditions, as Max argues, it becomes inevitable that blacks such as Bigger will react with violence and hatred. However, Wright emphasizes the vicious double-edged effect of racism: though Bigger's violence stems from racial hatred, it only increases the racism in American society, as it confirms racist whites' basic fears about blacks. In Wright's portrayal, whites effectively transform blacks into their own negative stereotypes of "blackness." Only when Bigger meets Max and begins to perceive whites as individuals does Wright offer any hope for a means of breaking this circle of racism. Only when sympathetic understanding exists between blacks and whites will they be able to perceive each other as individuals, not merely as stereotypes.

The deleterious effect of racism extends to the white population, in that it prevents whites from realizing the true humanity inherent in groups that they oppress. Indeed, one of the great strengths of *Native Son* as a chronicle of the effects of oppression is Wright's extraordinary ability to explore the psychology not only of the oppressed but of the oppressors as well. Wright illustrates that racism is destructive to both groups, though for very different reasons. Many whites in the novel, such as Britten and Peggy, fall victim to the obvious pitfall of racism among whites: the unthinking sense of superiority that deceives them into seeing blacks as less than human. Wright shows that this sense of superiority is a weakness, as Bigger is able to manipulate it in his cover-up of Mary's murder. Bigger realizes that a man with Britten's prejudices would never believe a black man could be capable of what Bigger has done. Indeed, for a time, Bigger manages to escape suspicion.

Other white characters in the novel—particularly those with a self-consciously progressive attitude toward race relations—are affected by racism in subtler and more complex ways. Though the Daltons, for instance, have made a fortune out of exploiting blacks, they aggressively present themselves as philanthropists committed to the black American cause. We sense that they maintain this pretense in an effort to avoid confronting their guilt, and we realize that they may even be unaware of their own deep-seated racial prejudices. Mary and Jan represent an even subtler form of racism, as they consciously seek to befriend blacks and treat them as equals, but ultimately fail to understand

them as individuals. This failure has disastrous results. Mary and Jan's simple assumption that Bigger will welcome their friendship deludes them into overlooking the possibility that he will react with suspicion and fear—a natural reaction considering that Bigger has never experienced such friendly treatment from whites. In this regard, Mary and Jan are deceived by their failure to recognize Bigger's individuality just as much as an overt racist such as Britten is deceived by a failure to recognize Bigger's humanity. Ultimately, Wright portrays the vicious circle of racism from the white perspective as well as from the black one, emphasizing that even well-meaning whites exhibit prejudices that feed into the same black behavior that confirms the racist whites' sense of superiority.

An important idea that emerges from Wright's treatment of racism is the terrible inequity of the American criminal justice system of Wright's time. Drawing inspiration from actual court cases of the 1930s—especially the 1938–39 case of Robert Nixon, a young black man charged with murdering a white woman during a robbery—Wright portrays the American judiciary as an ineffectual pawn caught between the lurid interests of the media and the driving ambition of politicians. The outcome of Bigger's case is decided before it ever goes to court: in the vicious cycle of racism, a black man who kills a white woman is guilty regardless of the factual circumstances of the killing.

It is important, of course, that Bigger is indeed guilty of Mary's murder, as well as Bessie's. Nonetheless, the justice system still fails him, as he receives neither a fair trial nor an opportunity to defend himself. With the newspapers presenting him as a murderous animal and Buckley using the case to further his own political career, anything said in Bigger's defense falls on deaf ears. Even Max's impassioned defense is largely a wasted effort. The motto of the American justice system is "equal justice under law," but Wright depicts a judiciary so undermined by racial prejudice and corruption that the concept of equality holds little meaning.

Throughout *Native Son*, Wright depicts popular culture—as conveyed through films, magazines, and newspapers—as a major force in American racism, constantly bombarding citizens with images and ideas that reinforce the nation's oppressive racial hierarchy. In films such as the one Bigger attends in Book One, whites are depicted as glamorous, attractive, and cultured, while blacks are portrayed as jungle savages or servants. Wright emphasizes that this portrayal is not unique to the film Bigger sees, but is replicated in nearly every film and every magazine. Not surprisingly, then, both blacks and whites see blacks as inferior brutes—a view that has crippling effects on whites and absolutely devastating effects for blacks. Bigger is so influenced by this media saturation that, upon meeting the Daltons, he is completely unable to be himself. All he can do is act out the role of the subservient black man that he has seen in countless popular culture representations. Later, Wright portrays the media as one of the forces that leads to Bigger's execution, as the sensationalist press stirs up a furor over his case in order to sell newspapers. The attention prompts Buckley, the State's Attorney, to hurry Bigger's case along and seek the death penalty. Wright scatters images of popular culture throughout *Native Son*, constantly reminding us of the extremely influential role the media plays in hardening already destructive racial stereotypes.

Religion appears in *Native Son* mostly in relation to Bigger's mother and Reverend Hammond. Bigger's mother relies on her religion as a source of comfort in the face of the crushing realities of life on the South Side. Bigger, however, compares his mother's religion with Bessie's whiskey drinking—an escapist pastime with no inherent value. At times, Bigger wishes he were able to enjoy the comfort



religion brings his mother, but he cannot shake his longing for a life in this world. When Reverend Hammond gives Bigger a cross to wear while he is in prison, Bigger equates the cross with the crosses that are burned during racist rituals. In making this comparison, Wright suggests that even the moral province of Christianity has been corrupted by racism in America.

Wright's portrayal of communism throughout *Native Son*, especially in the figures of Jan and Max, is one of the novel's most controversial aspects. Wright was still a member of the Communist Party at the time he wrote this novel, and many critics have argued that Max's long courtroom speech is merely an attempt on Wright's part to spread communist propaganda. While Wright uses communist characters and imagery in *Native Son* generally to evoke a positive, supportive tone for the movement, he does not depict the Party and its efforts as universally benevolent. Jan, the only character who explicitly identifies himself as a member of the Party, is almost comically blind to Bigger's feelings during Book One. Likewise, Max, who represents the Party as its lawyer, is unable to understand Bigger completely. In the end, Bigger's salvation comes not from the Communist Party, but from his own realization that he must win the battle that rages within himself before he can fight any battles in the outside world. The changes that Wright identifies must come not from social change, but from individual effort.

### **12.1.5 Use of Symbols**

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

#### **Mrs. Dalton's Blindness**

Mrs. Dalton's blindness plays a crucial role in the circumstances of Bigger's murder of Mary, as it gives Bigger the escape route of smothering Mary to keep her from revealing his presence in her bedroom. On a symbolic level, this set of circumstances serves as a metaphor for the vicious circle of racism in American society: Mrs. Dalton's inability to see Bigger causes him to turn to violence, just as the inability of whites to see blacks as individuals causes blacks to live their lives in fear and hatred. Mrs. Dalton's blindness represents the inability of white Americans as a whole to see black Americans as anything other than the embodiment of their media-enforced -stereotypes. Wright echoes Mrs. Dalton's literal blindness throughout the novel in his descriptions of other characters who are figuratively blind for one reason or another. Indeed, Bigger later realizes that, in a sense, even he has been blind, unable to see whites as individuals rather than a single oppressive mass.

#### **The Cross**

The Christian cross traditionally symbolizes compassion and sacrifice for a greater good, and indeed Reverend Hammond intends as much when he gives Bigger a cross while he is in jail. Bigger even begins to think of himself as Christlike, imagining that he is sacrificing himself in order to wash away the shame of being black, just as Christ died to wash away the world's sins. Later, however, after Bigger sees the image of a burning cross, he can only associate crosses with the hatred and racism that have crippled him throughout his life. As such, the cross in *Native Son* comes to symbolize the opposite of what it usually signifies in a Christian context.

## **Snow**

A light snow begins falling at the start of Book Two, and this snow eventually turns into a blizzard that aids in Bigger's capture. Throughout the novel, Bigger thinks of whites not as individuals, but as a looming white mountain or a great natural force pressing down upon him. The blizzard is raging as Bigger jumps from his window to escape after Mary's bones are found in the furnace. When he falls to the ground, the snow fills his mouth, ears, and eyes—all his senses are overwhelmed with a literal whiteness, representing the metaphorical "whiteness" he feels has been controlling him his whole life. Bigger tries to flee, but the snow has sealed off all avenues of escape, allowing the white police to surround and capture him.

---

### **12.2 Let Us Sum Up**

---

By now you have studied the chapter-wise summary and chapter-wise analysis of the text. You have studied some of the characters in detail. You have studied the thematic analysis and the use of important symbols and motifs of the text.

---

### **12.3 Review Questions.**

---

1. Discuss the appropriateness of the title of the novel.
2. Do you justify the violence and the murders as depicted in the novel? Write your point of view keeping in mind Bigger Thomas and the consciousness of the blacks.
3. Draw a character sketch of Bigger Thomas.
4. Draw a character sketch of Mary Dalton.
5. What do you mean by stream of consciousness? Do you think the writer has depicted events through this technique in this novel?
6. Discuss the use of motifs and symbols in the novel.
7. Discuss the major issues raised in the novel namely the oppressed, the oppression and the hypocrisy of justice.
8. Read *The Street* by Anne Petry. Compare the climactic death in that novel to the crimes of Bigger Thomas.

---

### **12.5 Bibliography**

---

1. Addison Gayle, Richard Wright : Ordeal of a Native Son ( 1980)
2. Chinua Achebe : Why I write in English.
3. Constance Webb, Richard Wright: A Biography ( 1968)
4. Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, Cambridge, 1954.
5. Harold Bloom (ed.), Richard Wright : Modern Critical Views (1987)
6. Henry Louis Gates. Jr., and K.A. Appiah (eds.), Richard Wright : Critical perspectives Past

and Present (1993)

7. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in Partisan Review, Vol. XVIII, 1955, pp. 665-80.
  8. James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, Dell, 1961.
  9. John A. Williams, The Most Native of Sons : A Biography of Richard Wright (1970)
  10. *Keneth Kinnamon (ed.), New Essays on Native Son (1990)*
  11. Keneth Kinnamon, The Emergence of Richard Wright : A Study of Literature and Society (1972)
  12. Margaret Walker, Richard Wright : Daemonic Genius (1988)
  13. Michel Fabre, The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright, trans. from French, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1993)
  14. Michel Fabre, The World of Richard Wright (1985)
  15. Richard Abcarian, Negro American Literature, Wadworth, California, 1970.
  16. Richard Macksey and Frank E. Moorer (eds.) Richard Wright : A Collection of Critical Essays (1984)
  17. Robert Butler (ed). The Critical Response to Richard Wright (1995)
  18. Robert Butler , Native Son : The Emergence of a New Black Hero (1991)
  19. Russel Carl Brignans, "Richard Wright: An Introduction to The Man and His Works."
-

## UNIT-13

---

### CHINUA ACHEBE : *WHY I WRITE IN ENGLISH*

---

#### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Study Guide
- 13.2 About the Age : Postcolonial Age
- 13.3 About the Author : Chinua Achebe
- 13.4 About the Text : *Why I Write In English*
  - 13.4.1 Analysis of the Text
  - 13.4.2 Some of the Famous Quotes
- 13.5 Self Assessment Questions.
- 13.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.7 Answers to SAQs
- 13.8 Review Questions.
- 13.9 Bibliography

---

#### 13.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at teaching you

1. Biographical details about the Author Chinua Achebe
2. Achebe's major works and their concerns, themes and Igbo culture.
3. Achebe as an African writer writing about the problems of the blacks and the black writers.
4. His argument why he has chosen English language to express his ideas and not his native language like some of the important African writers.
5. His views about culture and imperialism, masculinity and feminism.
6. The effects of Western customs and values of traditional African / Nigerian Society.

---

#### 13.1 Study Guide

---

You should study this unit as the views of an African writer (the oppressed) defending the English language (the language of the oppressor). The same views we can apply to the debate of use of English, Hindi or vernacular languages in India. You should notice how the writer has depicted African themes, problems of the blacks through a foreign media and why he does it in that manner. You should study the self-assessment questions and the answers given in the unit and attempt the questions given in

the end of the unit. You have been given study-material from various sources including internet.

---

## 13.2 About the Age-Postcolonial Age

---

Achebe belongs to the postcolonial age when most of the nations of the world are free, having their own governments and authorities to decide the national issues. English language is passing through the language of the whites (the oppressors). On one side writers like the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo pleaded for the use of African languages to depict colonized people and cultured, on the other side writers like Achebe pleaded for using English as a language with which to talk to one another, having national and multinational currency as the one central language.

---

## 13.3 About the Author : Chinua Achebe

---

Chinua Achebe was born on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1930 in Ogidi, Nigeria, the son of a teacher in a missionary school. His parents, though they installed in him many of the values of their traditional Igbo culture, were devout evangelical Protestants and christened him Albert after Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. In 1944 Achebe attended Government College in Umuahia. Like other major Nigerian writers including Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, John Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, and Cole Omoso, he was also educated at the University College of Ibadan, where he studied English, history and theology. At the university Achebe rejected his British name and took his indigenous name Chinua. In 1953 he graduated with a BA. Before joining the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos in 1954 he travelled in Africa and America, and worked for a short time as a teacher. In the 1960s he was the director of External Services in charge of the Voice of Nigeria.

During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) Achebe was in the Biafran government service, and then taught at US and Nigerian universities. Achebe's writings from this period reflect his deep personal disappointment with what Nigeria became since independence.

In 1967 Achebe cofounded a publishing company at Enugu with his friend, the poet Christopher Okigbo, who was killed during the Nigerian Civil War. Achebe was appointed research fellow at the University of Nigeria, and after serving as professor of English, he retired in 1981. Since 1985, Achebe has been a professor emeritus. From 1971 he has edited *Okike*, the leading journal of Nigerian new writing. He has also held the post of Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. There he met James Baldwin, also a faculty member, who was Professor of African studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, and Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Council at Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu. In the 1990s Achebe was a faculty member at Bard College, a liberal arts school, where he has taught literature to undergraduates. An automobile accident on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in 1990 left Achebe confined to a wheelchair, permanently.

Achebe's first novel, *THINGS FALL APART*, appeared in 1958. The story of a traditional village "big man" Okonkwo, and his downfall has been translated into some 50 languages. It was followed two years later by *NO LONGER AT EASE*, and *ARROW OF GOD* (1964), which concerned traditional Igbo life as it clashed with colonial powers in the form of missionaries and colonial government. Among Achebe's later works is *ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH* (1987), a polyvocal story with multiple narrators. Set in an imaginary West African state, its central character is Sam, a Sandhurst-trained military officer, who has become President. Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi, his friends,

die when resisting brutal abuse of power. A military coup eliminates Sam. Beatrice Okah - Chris's London-educated girl friend - is entrusted with her community of women to return the political sanity.

*Things Fall Apart* (1958), an unsentimental novel, depicts the life of Okonkwo, ambitious and powerful leader of an Igbo community, who counts on physical strength and courage. Okonkwo's life is good: his compound is large, he has no troubles with his wives, his garden grows yams, and he is respected by his fellow villagers. When Okonkwo accidentally kills a clansman, he is banished from the village for seven years. But the vehicle for his downfall is his blindness to circumstances and the missionary church, which brings with it the new authority of the British District Commissioner. The story is set in the 1890s, when missionaries and colonial government made its intrusion into Igbo society. In this process Okonkwo is destroyed, because his unwillingness to change set him apart from the community and he is fighting alone against colonialism. Achebe took the title of the book from William Butler Yeats's *The Second Coming* - "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

*A Man of the People* (1966) is a satire of corruption, and power struggles in an African state in the 1960s. The central characters are the Minister of Culture, Nanga, the man of the people, and teacher Odili, an African Lucky Jim, who tells the story. Odili stands against the government, but not because of ideological reasons. He has personal interests: Nanga has seduced his girl friend. Their political confrontation becomes violent, Nanga's thugs inflict havoc and chaos, and the army responds by staging a coup.

Achebe has also written collections of short stories, poetry, and several books for juvenile readers. His essays include BEWARE, SOUL BROTHER (1971), about his experiences during the Civil War. He has received a Margaret Wrong Prize, the New Statesman Jock Campbell Prize, the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, and the 2007 Man Booker International award. In 1983, upon the death of Mallan Aminu Kano, Achebe was elected deputy national president of the People's Redemption Party. As the director of Heineman Educational Books in Nigeria, he has encouraged and published the work of dozens of African writers. He founded in 1984 the bilingual magazine *Uwa ndi Igbo*, a valuable source for Igbo studies.

Achebe's own literary language is standard English blended with pidgin, Igbo vocabulary, proverbs, images and speech patterns. Achebe shows his skills as a storyteller in 'The Madman' in which the social customs of the Ibo-speaking people are strongly present. In the richly layered narrative a nameless madman gets his revenge. Nwibe, an honored member of a distant town Ogbu, plans to go to the market. There in the market he had once chased a madman out of his hut and sent his children to throw stones at him. As he washes by the river, the madman takes his cloth. Nwibe runs naked after him, shouting 'Stop the madman.' The thief with the cloth disappears in the crowd, and Nwibe is taken to a medicine-man, but he has lost his social position. "For how could a man be the same again of whom witnesses from all the lands of Olu and Igbo have once reported that they saw today a fine, hefty man in his prime, stark naked, tearing through the crowds to answer the call of the market-place. Such a man is marked forever."

As an essayist Achebe has gained fame with his collections MORNING YET ON CREATION DAY (1975), HOPES AND IMPEDIMENTS (1988) and his long essay THE TROUBLE WITH NIGERIA (1983). In 'An Image of Africa' (1975) Achebe criticizes Conrad's racism in *Heart of Darkness*. He has defended the use of the English language in the production of African fiction,

insisting that the African novelist has an obligation to educate, and has attacked European critics who have failed to understand African literature on its own terms. Achebe has defined himself as a cultural nationalist with a revolutionary mission “to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.” But Achebe has not stopped criticizing postcolonial African leaders who have pillaged economies. During the military dictatorship of Gen. Sani Abacha he left Nigeria several times. When the 70th birthday of the patriarch of the modern African novel was celebrated at Bard College, on November 2000, Wole Soyinka said: “Achebe never hesitates to lay blame for the woes of the African continent squarely where it belongs.”

*Arrow of God* (1994) is set in the 1920s. The central character is Ezeulu, priest, who sends one of his sons to missionary school and gains in some respect the approval of the English district superintendent. However, Ezeulu is doomed, because when defending the traditions of his people he is unyielding, unable to reach a compromise, and afraid of losing his authority.

Chinua Achebe is considered a prominent Igbo (Ibo) writer, famous for his novels describing the effects of Western customs and values on traditional African society. Achebe’s satire and his keen ear for spoken language have made him one of the most highly esteemed African writers in English. In 1990 Achebe was paralyzed from the waist down in a serious car accident.

**“I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them”** (from *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975)

Achebe’s novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He has also published a number of short stories, children’s books, and essay collections. He is currently the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, United States.

The style of Achebe’s fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories, illuminating community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo’s dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beatings from his father by pretending to dislike such “women’s stories”.

Another hallmark of Achebe’s style is the use of proverbs, which often illustrate the values of the rural Igbo tradition. He sprinkles them throughout the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *Arrow of God* “serves to create through an echo effect the judgement of a community upon an individual violation.” The use of such repetition in Achebe’s urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, is less pronounced.

For Achebe, however, proverbs and folk stories are not the sum total of the oral Igbo tradition. In combining philosophical thought and public performance into the use of oratory (“Okwu Oka” – “speech artistry” – in the Igbo phrase), his characters exhibit what he called “a matter of individual

excellence ... part of Igbo culture.” In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s friend Obierika voices the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village. Nwaka in *Arrow of God* also exhibits a mastery of oratory, albeit for malicious ends.

Achebe frequently includes folk songs and descriptions of dancing in his work. Obi, the protagonist of *No Longer At Ease*, is at one point met by women singing a “Song of the Heart”, which Achebe gives in both Igbo and English: “Is everyone here? / (Hele ee he ee he)” In *Things Fall Apart*, ceremonial dancing and the singing of folk songs reflect the realities of Igbo tradition. The elderly Uchendu, attempting to shake Okonkwo out of his self-pity, refers to a song sung after the death of a woman: “For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well.” This song contrasts with the “gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism” sung later by the white missionaries.

Achebe’s short stories are not as widely studied as his novels, and Achebe himself does not consider them a major part of his work. In the preface for *Girls at War and Other Stories*, he writes: “A dozen pieces in twenty years must be accounted a pretty lean harvest by any reckoning.” Like his novels, the short stories are heavily influenced by the oral tradition. And like the folktales they follow, the stories often have morals emphasising the importance of cultural traditions.

Achebe has been called “the father of modern African writing”, and many books and essays have been written about his work over the past fifty years. In 1992, he became the first living author to be represented in the Everyman’s Library collection published by Alfred A. Knopf. His 60th birthday was celebrated at the University of Nigeria by “an international Who’s Who in African Literature”. One observer noted: “Nothing like it had ever happened before in African literature anywhere on the continent.”

Many writers of succeeding generations view his work as having paved the way for their efforts. In 1982 he was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Kent. At the ceremony, professor Robert Gibson said that the Nigerian author “is now revered as Master by the younger generation of African writers and it is to him they regularly turn for counsel and inspiration.” Even outside of Africa, his impact resonates strongly in literary circles. Novelist Margaret Atwood called him “a magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century”. Poet Maya Angelou lauded *Things Fall Apart* as a book wherein “all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends and themselves along Nigerian roads”. Nelson Mandela, recalling his time as a political prisoner, once referred to Achebe as a writer “in whose company the prison walls fell down.”

Achebe is the recipient of over 30 honorary degrees from universities in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard, and Brown University. He has been awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, an Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Nigerian National Order of Merit (Nigeria’s highest honour for academic work), Italy’s prestigious International Nonino Prize and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. In 2007, he won the prestigious Man Booker International Prize. He also serves on the contributing editorial board of the literary journal *Conjunctions*.

Some scholars have suggested that Achebe has been shunned by intellectual society for criticising Conrad and traditions of racism in the West. Despite his scholarly achievements and the global importance of his work, Achebe has never received a Nobel Prize, which some observers view as unjust.



The Nobel Committee has been criticised in the past for overlooking other important writers, such as Marcel Proust, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov and Leo Tolstoy.

When Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, Achebe joined the rest of Nigeria in celebrating the first African ever to win the prize. He lauded Soyinka's "stupendous display of energy and vitality", and said he was "most eminently deserving of any prize". In 1988 Achebe was asked by a reporter for *Quality Weekly* how he felt about never winning a Nobel Prize; he replied: "My position is that the Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It's not an African prize ... Literature is not a heavyweight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been knocked out. It's nothing to do with that". In 2007 Achebe received the Man Booker International Prize (Oxford, UK) and the National Art Club's Medal of Honor for Literature (New York, USA).

In 2008 *Things Fall Apart* reached the fiftieth anniversary of its first publication, and several conferences and events were held across the globe in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia to celebrate the author and his canonical first novel. Coinciding with this milestone was the publication of Achebe's new book of autobiographical essays called *Education of A British Protected Child*.

In March 2009, Chinua Achebe, visited the Indiana campus of the University of Notre Dame, to deliver the *2009 Blessed Pope John XXIII Lecture Series in Theology and Culture*. The three part lectures was on "The Igbo and their Perception of God, Human Beings and Creation," and will be published later this year by the University of Notre Dame Press.

- *Things Fall Apart*, (1958)
- *No Longer at Ease*, (1960)
- *Arrow of God*, (1964)
- *A Man of the People*, (1966)
- *Anthills of the Savannah*, (1987)

### **Short Stories**

- "Marriage Is A Private Affair", (1952)
- "Dead Men's Path", (1953)
- *The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories*, (1953)
- "Civil Peace", (1971)
- *Girls at War and Other Stories*, (1973)
- *African Short Stories* (editor, with C.L. Innes), (1985)
- *Heinemann Book of Contemporary African Short Stories* (editor, with C.L. Innes), (1992)
- *The Voter*

### **Poetry**

- *Beware, Soul-Brother, and Other Poems*, (1971) (published in the US as *Christmas at Biafra, and Other Poems*, 1973)

- *Don't let him die: An anthology of memorial poems for Christopher Okigbo* (editor, with Dubem Okafor), (1978)
- *Another Africa*, (1998)
- *Collected Poems*, Carcanet Press (2005)
- *Refugee Mother And Child*
- *Vultures*, which is used GCSE English as a 'Different Cultures' poem

### **Essays, Criticism and Political Commentary**

- *The Novelist as Teacher*, (1965)
- *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*, (1975)
- *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, (1975)
- *The Trouble With Nigeria*, (1984)
- *Hopes and Impediments*, (1988)
- *Home and Exile*, (2000)
- *Education of a British protected Child (2008) (Forthcoming)*
- "The Igbo and their Perception of God, Human Beings and Creation," 2009 Blessed Pope John XXIII Lecture Series in Theology and Culture University of Notre Dame Press (Forthcoming)

### **Children's Books**

- *Chike and the River*, (1966)
- *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with John Iroaganachi), (1972)
- *The Flute*, (1975)
- *The Drum*, (1978)

---

## **13.4 About the Text : *Why I Write In English***

---

"*Why I Write in English*" is Achebe's well-known argument expressing his views about the use of English language to depict African culture. He does not lack any kind of patriotism or African Identity. Rather this defense of English in the production of African fiction is obligatory on the part of the writer. He can educate and depict about African culture in a better way. Achebe has a revolutionary mission and he considers himself a cultural nationalist. Years of denigration and self-abasement of African society can be removed by using this European language. Achebe's literary language is standard English mixed with Pidgin, Igbo vocabulary, proverbs and images.

### **13.4.1 Analysis of the Text**

While studying English literature at the University of Ibadan, Chinua Achebe was appalled by

the “superficial picture” of Nigeria that he found in many novels and resolved to write something that viewed his country “from the inside.” The stunning result was *Things Fall Apart*, a novel that demonstrates the linguistic and social sophistication of precolonial African societies.

First published in 1958, the book’s account of the gradual destruction of a traditional Igbo village brings to mind Yeats’s lines, “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” Employing such anomalous traditions as African proverbs and Greek dramatic structure, Achebe lyrically portrays the destruction wrought by the complex intermingling of Westernization, colonization, Christianization, indigenous beliefs and tribalism.

Over 3 million copies of *Things Fall Apart* have been sold, and it is frequently studied in university, college and high school literature courses. Achebe, who has written four other novels, numerous short stories and two influential books of criticism, is commonly acclaimed as “the father of African literature.”

The 65-year old Achebe lives and teaches in New York; like so many African intellectuals, he is an exile because of the political unrest in his homeland. Five years ago, when he was in Nigeria to celebrate his birthday, Achebe barely survived an automobile accident on one of West Africa’s notoriously dangerous roads. The accident left him a paraplegic, and he now negotiates life in a wheelchair. At a recent literary conference held at West Chester University, just outside Philadelphia, Achebe spoke to a crowd of several hundred, who listened intently to the frail gentleman dashingy clad in a black and white dashiki, a brilliant red beret and stylish leather bicycle gloves.

Achebe’s books both celebrate the richness of traditional Igbo culture and acknowledge its limitations; they both criticize the excesses and abuses of Westernization and acknowledge its positive contributions.

A similar alternation between tolerance and criticism emerged in his talk. His topic was language. In response to the now infamous declaration of Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o that African writers should write in African languages, Achebe commented: “The British did not push language into my face while I was growing up.” He chose to learn English and eventually to write in English as a means of “infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within.”

Since one of Achebe’s intentions in writing *Things Fall Apart* was to demonstrate to European readers and writers their own incomplete and distorted view of African culture, he needed to write in English. English also enabled him to address a Nigerian audience, Achebe said, for he needed to use a lingua franca, not a tribal language such as Igbo. (Other prominent Nigerian tongues include Yoruba — Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka’s mother tongue — and Hausa.)

“It doesn’t matter what language you write in, as long as what you write is good,” Achebe stated. No pseudo-essentialism or romantic nativism for him. Yet Achebe fully recognizes that English is symbolically and politically connected with the despoiler of traditional culture and with intolerance and bigotry. “Language is a weapon, and we use it,” he argued. “There’s no point in fighting a language.”

A lengthy question-and-answer period included the customary inquiries about what Achebe was currently working on, about the Nigerian political situation (terrible, the worst it’s been in years), and about his views of language. Achebe graciously replied to every question in a way that honored the

questioner without repeating the obvious. He transformed even foolish questions into occasions for learning.

When someone asked if *Things Fall Apart* had ever been translated into Igbo, Achebe's mother tongue, he shook his head and explained that Igbo exists in numerous dialects, differing from village to village. Formal, standardized, written Igbo — like many other African languages — came into being as a result of the Christian missionaries' desire to translate the Bible into indigenous tongues. Unfortunately, when the Christian Missionary Society tackled Igbo, they employed a curiously democratic process: they brought together six Igbo converts, each from a different location, each speaking a different dialect. Working their way through a particular biblical book or passage, each in turn would provide a translation.

As one might expect, the resulting compilation bore no resemblance to any one of the six dialects. Yet this "Union Igbo," as it was called, authorized by repeated editions of the Bible, became the official written form of the language, a strange hodge-podge with no linguistic elegance, natural rhythm or oral authenticity.

Achebe grew up in a Christian family. His grandfather was one of the first converts in Nigeria, and his father worked as an evangelist, teacher and catechist for the Church Missionary Society. "My father loved Union Igbo," Achebe recalled. "He considered it a work of the Holy Spirit." But as a vehicle for literature, the novelist continued, the hybrid form was "a nonstarter." "There is not one great book written in that dialect to this day," he concluded. All of Achebe's writing testifies to his ability to work with the poetic and rhetorical resources of language, so it is not surprising that he would not consent to have *Things Fall Apart* appear in a linguistic travesty.

Consequently, one of the world's great novels, which has been translated into more than 30 languages, is unable to appear in the language of the very culture that it celebrates and mourns. This irony seems an apt symbol for the complex ways Western Christianity has both blessed and marred the cultures of Africa.

As the decolonization process unfolded in the 1950s, a debate about choice of language erupted and pursued authors around the world; Achebe was no exception. Indeed, because of his subject matter and insistence on a non-colonial narrative, he found his novels and decisions interrogated with extreme scrutiny — particularly with regard to his use of English. One school of thought, championed by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, urged the use of indigenous African languages. English and other European languages, he said in 1986, were "part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas".

Achebe chose to write in English. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language", he discusses how the process of colonialism — for all its ills — provided colonised people from varying linguistic backgrounds "a language with which to talk to one another". As his purpose is to communicate with readers across Nigeria, he uses "the one central language enjoying nationwide currency". Using English also allowed his books to be read in the colonial ruling nations.

Still, Achebe recognises the shortcomings of what Audre Lorde called "the master's tools". In another essay he notes:

For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself

describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas ... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence.

In another essay, he refers to James Baldwin's struggle to use the English language to accurately represent his experience, and his realization that he needed to take control of the language and expand it. Nigerian poet and novelist Gabriel Okara likens the process of language-expansion to the evolution of jazz music in the United States.

Achebe's novels laid a formidable groundwork for this process. By altering syntax, usage, and idiom, he transforms the language into a distinctly African style. In some spots this takes the form of repetition of an Igbo idea in standard English parlance; elsewhere it appears as narrative asides integrated into descriptive sentences.

Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yousaf highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a precolonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Eurocentrically constructed imperial 'reality' ". Certain elements of Achebe's depiction of Igbo life in *Things Fall Apart* match those in Oluudah Equiano's autobiographical *Narrative*. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Ibo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Nigeria".

A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition (particularly Igbo varieties) and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, is violently shaken with internal divisions when the white Christian missionaries arrive. Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Achebe later embodied this tension between African tradition and Western influence in the figure of Sam Okoli, the president of Kangan in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Distanced from the myths and tales of the community by his Westernised education, he does not have the capacity for reconnection shown by the character Beatrice.

The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often effected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city; the temptations of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courts and the position of District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* likewise clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structures of decision-making.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, by synecdoche, the downfall of the community. Odili's descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in *A Man of the People*, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere. Even with the emphasis on colonialism, however, Achebe's tragic endings embody the traditional confluence of fate,

individual and society, as represented by Sophocles and Shakespeare.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability. In 1972, he said: "I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Ibo world view. No single man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct." His perspective is reflected in the words of Ikem, a character in *Anthills of the Savannah*: "whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism." And in a 1996 interview, Achebe said: "Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy is too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness on the other hand is often tainted with selfishness." The same ideas are equally applicable to the use of English language.

The gender roles of men and women, as well as societies' conceptions of the associated concepts, are frequent themes in Achebe's writing. He has been criticised as a sexist author, in response to what many call the uncritical depiction of traditionally patriarchal Igbo society, where the most masculine men take numerous wives, and women are beaten regularly. Others suggest that Achebe is merely representing the limited gendered vision of the characters, and they note that in his later works, he tries to demonstrate the inherent dangers of excluding women from society.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's furious manhood overpowers everything feminine in his life, including his own conscience. For example, when he feels bad after killing his adopted son, he asks himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?" He views all things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his father's laziness and cowardice. The women in the novel, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of authority—despite the fact that Igbo women were traditionally involved in village leadership. Nevertheless, the need for feminine balance is highlighted by Ani, the earth goddess, and the extended discussion of "Nneka" ("Mother is supreme") in chapter fourteen. Okonkwo's defeat is seen by some as a vindication of the need for a balancing feminine ethos. Achebe has expressed frustration at frequently being misunderstood on this point, saying that "I want to sort of scream that *Things Fall Apart* is on the side of women... And that Okonkwo is paying the penalty for his treatment of women; that all his problems, all the things he did wrong, can be seen as offenses against the feminine."

Achebe's first central female character in a novel is Beatrice Nwanyibuife in *Anthills of the Savannah*. As an independent woman in the city, Beatrice strives for the balance that Okonkwo lacked so severely. She refutes the notion that she needs a man, and slowly learns about Idemili, a goddess balancing the aggression of male power. Although the final stages of the novel show her functioning in a nurturing mother-type role, Beatrice remains firm in her conviction that women should not be limited to such capacities.

Language is power, the "power to name" and therefore to construct the lens through which understanding takes place. As the "most potent instrument of culture control," the language of the colonial power therefore played an essential role in the process of colonization. Because the literature of former imperial colonies decentralizes language control, to a certain extent it decolonizes by its very nature. The "bilingual intelligentsia" of postcolonial writers must negotiate the power dynamics regarding such tensions as colonized-colonizer and indigenous-alien. postcolonial literature itself is a battle

ground in which the active pursuit of decolonization continues to be played out. Armed with their pens, the said authors address “the dominance of imperial language” as it relates to educational systems, to economic structures, and perhaps more importantly to the medium through which anti-imperial ideas are cast. The postcolonial voice can decide to resist imperial linguistic domination in two ways — by rejecting the language of the colonizer or by subverting the empire by writing back in a European language.

Frantz Fanon describes the dialectic of language between the colonized and the colonizer bleakly. According to him, “the colonized is raised above jungle status [in the eyes of the colonizer] in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards.” Fanon, who rejects the codified colonizer-colonized relationship, advocates total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. Fanon believes that “a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language”. Fanon reasons that he who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and therefore the standards of the colonizer.

Following Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiongo also proposes a program of radical decolonization in his collection of essays **Decolonising the Mind**, which points out specific ways that the language of African literature manifests the dominance of the empire. He builds an powerful argument for African writers to write in traditional languages of Africa rather than in the European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizer, he claims, means that many of one’s own people — meaning those people with whom a postcolonial writer identifies by nativity — are not able to read one’s original work. About African literature written in European language Ngugi writes, “its greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in the audience — the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language”. According to him, literature written in a European language cannot claim to be African literature, and therefore he classifies the works by Soyinka, Achebe, and Okara as Afro-European literature.

The strategies used to demarginalize the postcolonial experience, such as those used by Achebe in **Anthills of the Savannah**, Saro-Wiwa in **A Forest of Flowers**, and Soyinka in **Aké**, contribute to the creation of what Brathwaite calls a “nation language.” Brathwaite focuses on the context of Caribbean English Literature, but his model applies to trends of language use throughout the postcolonial period. Nation language resembles closely the imposed language system, but it is “influenced strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World / Caribbean heritage [or the living traditional model or aspect of any postcolonial location”.

A nation language decentralizes the control over the imposed language system — specifically European languages — in the postcolonial era. Brathwaite uses this term “in contrast to dialect.” since **dialect** tends to carry “pejorative connotations,” perhaps suggesting that those designated by it speak an inferior version of the imposed language system. Brathwaite’s nation language describes a creative system that infuses the imposed language with the attributes of the suppressed system. Underground language codes live within the dominant code. The written English vernacular codes of American and Irish writers are two of the best examples of established nation languages.

Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe and Ken Sara-wiwa have developed their own written English vernacular codes. In Soyinka’s **Aké**, Achebe’s **Anthills of the Savannah**, and Sara-wiwa’s **A Forest of Flowers**, these writers Nigerianize the texts using pidgin English in their dialogue.

This dialogue, which reflects the way English is actually used by some Nigerians, includes words that only Nigerians use and word morphologies specific to Nigeria.

#### Summary of *Why I Write in English*

1. To demonstrate to European readers and writers their own incomplete knowledge about Africa.
2. To correct the distorted image of Africa among Europe.
3. No romantic nativism.
4. No pseudo essentialism.
5. Not against English but against the people who used it as a weapon to despoil the African culture / colony culture.
6. Not consented to have his work in a linguistic travesty.
7. Central language having nation-wide currency.
8. Communicate with readers across the world.
9. Extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought- patterns.
10. Applying war metaphor against the Europeans he defended the use of English as a means of *Infiltrating the Ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within.*

#### 13.4.2 Some of the Famous Quotes

1. "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (from *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975)  

..... Achebe
2. "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement."  

..... Achebe
3. "Achebe never hesitates to lay blame for the woes of the African continent squarely where it belongs."  

.... Wole Soyinka
4. "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."  

..... W.B. Yeats
5. "The British did not push language into my face while I was growing up."  

..... Achebe



6. He chose to learn English and eventually to write in English as a means of “infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within.”  
..... Achebe
7. “It doesn’t matter what language you write in, as long as what you write is good,”  
..... Achebe
8. “Language is a weapon, and we use it,” he argued. “There’s no point in fighting a language.”  
... Achebe
9. called “a matter of individual excellence ... part of Igbo culture.”  
..... Achebe
10. “For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well.”  
..... Achebe
11. English and other European languages, he said in 1986, were “part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas”.  
..... Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o
12. English is “the one central language enjoying nationwide currency”.  
..... Achebe
13. “I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Ibo world view. No single man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct.”  
..... Achebe
14. “whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism.”  
..... Achebe
15. “Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy is too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness on the other hand is often tainted with selfishness.”  
..... Achebe
16. “a magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century”.  
..... Novelist Margaret Atwood
17. “all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends and themselves along Nigerian roads”.

.....Poet Maya Angelou

18. Achebe as a writer “in whose company the prison walls fell down.”

..... Nelson Mandela

19. “My position is that the Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It’s not an African prize ... Literature is not a heavyweight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been knocked out. It’s nothing to do with that”.

..... Achebe

20. Joseph Conrad is a thoroughgoing racist

..... Achebe

---

### 13.5 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. To which country does Achebe belong ?

.....

2. When did the Nigerian civil war happen ?

.....

3. What was Achebe’s first novel and when did it appear ?

.....

4. Who is the hero in *Things Fall Apart* ?

.....

5. Achebe has taken the title of his novel *Things Fall Apart* from some European poet’s poem. Name the poet and the poem.

.....

6. How does Achebe defend the use of the English language ?

.....

.....

.....

7. “Achebe never hesitates to lay blame for the work of the African continent squarely where it belongs”. Who said it ?

.....

.....

8. What is the theme of *Things Fall Apart* ?

.....

- .....
- .....
9. Who favoured the argument that the African writer should write in African languages ?
- .....
10. The British did not push language into my face while I was growing up”. Who said it ?
- .....
- .....
11. “Language is a weapon, and we use it. There is no point in fighting a language”. Who said it ?
- .....
12. Name the one central language enjoying native currency” according to Achebe.
- .....
13. Who among the following has won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986.
- a) Chinua Achebe
  - b) Wole Soyinka
  - c) Marcel Proust
  - d) Leo Tolstoy
14. Who said, “Literature is not a heavy weight championship”?
- a) Chinua Achebe
  - b) Wole Soyinka
  - c) Marcel Proust
  - d) Leo Tolstoy
15. It does not matter what language you write in, as long as what you write is good. Who said it ?
- a) Chinua Achebe
  - b) Wole Soyinka
  - c) Marcel Proust
  - d) Leo Tolstoy
16. Name the works included in “The African Trilogy”
- .....
17. Why & Who is called “a thoroughgoing racist” by Achebe ?

---

---

---

---

### 13.6 Let Us Sum Up

---

By now you must have studied the views of Achebe in defense of English as the link-languages at national and multinational level. You have seen how some of the writers want to use African languages as a symbol of patriotism and as reaction against the oppressors. Achebe has his own vision to use European language to depict African culture so that maximum number of people can understand African culture and their problem.

---

### 13.7 Answers to SAQs

---

1. Nigeria
2. It happened from 1967 to 1970
3. Things Fall Apart, 1958.
4. Igbo leader, Okonkwo.
5. W.B. Yeats, *The Second Coming* (“Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold”)
6. He defends the use of the English language to depict African society, insisting that the African writers can educate the world about their society & problem in a better way through this link-language.
7. Wole Soyinka.
8. It depicts the linguistic and social sophistication of pre-colonial African societies, the destruction caused by the complex intermingling of Westernization, Colonization, Christianization, indigenous beliefs and tribalism.
9. Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo.
10. Chinua Achebe
11. Chinua Achebe
12. English
13. (b) Wole Soyinka
14. (a) Chinua Achebe
15. (a) Chinua Achebe
16. *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God.*
17. Joseph Conrad is called a thoroughgoing racist because of his views expressed in his work *Heart of Darkness*.

---

### 13.8 Review Questions

---

1. Discuss the logic in defense of English as the language of expression used by Achebe.
2. Do you consider the same logic is valid for use of English by the Indian writers?
3. “It does not matter that language you write in, as long as what you write is good.” Discuss.
4. “Literature is not a heavy weight championship” Discuss this statement keeping in view the award of the Nobel Prize for literature.
5. Express your ideas about the use of English as a symbol European colonialism in Asian & African countries.
6. Write an essay on Chinua Achebe as an African writer.

---

### 13.9 Bibliography

---

1. Carroll, David. Chinua Achebe (1990);
2. Ehling, Holger. ed. Critical Approaches to Anthills of the Savannah, (1991);
3. Gikandi, Simon. Reading Chinua Achebe (1991);
4. Gleen, Ian. Achebe and the Dilemma of Nigerian Intellectual (1983);
5. Innes, I.L. Chinua Achebe (1990);
6. Killam, G.D. The Writings of Chinua Achebe (1977);
7. Ohaeton, Ezenwa. Chinua Achebe: A Biography (1997)
8. Ojinmah, Umelo. Chinua Achebe (1991);
9. Peterson, Kirsten Holt and Rutheford, Anna. Ed. Chinua Achebe: A Celebration, (1991);
10. Turkington, Kate. Chinua Achebe Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart (1977);
11. Ugah, Ada. In the Beginning: Chinua Achebe at Work (1990);
12. Wren, Robert. Achebe's World (1980);

## UNIT-14

---

### PT. JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU: *A TRYST WITH DESTINY* (I)

---

#### Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Study Guide
- 14.2 About the Age : Modern Age
- 14.3 About the Author : Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru
- 14.4 About the Text : *A Tryst with Destiny*
  - 14.4.1 The Text : *A Tryst with Destiny*
  - 14.4.2 Glossary
  - 14.4.3 Critical Analysis
- 14.5 Self Assessment Questions.
- 14.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.7 Answers to SAQs
- 14.8 Review Questions.
- 14.9 Bibliography

---

#### 14.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at giving you details about Pt. Nehru and the speech he made on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947. This will enable you to know

1. Nehru as a leader and writer.
2. His speech about freedom of India.
3. What Indian people had suffered for freedom.
4. Role of Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of the Nation.
5. Future of India and what is required from her people to make her a strong nation.
6. The difference between destiny, fate, chance, freewill, randomness, accident, deeds and how they are responsible for our progress.

---

#### 14.1 Study Guide

---

In this unit you have been given details about the author Pt. Nehru and his speech. Before studying the text of the speech you should go through the major events of his age so that you may grasp the ideas of his speech in a proper context. The glossary part of this unit is a small one as most of the

words are common and known to you. Critical analysis of the text is intended to make the text clear to you and to make you understand the text and certain terms in the right prospective. The SAQs will help you and test your knowledge. You should tally your answers with those given in the concerned part of the Unit. The Review Questions are meant for exercise. Unit matter has been adapted from various sources including internet so has to suit you.

---

## **14.2 About the Age: Modern Age**

---

Nehru belongs to the modern era of India when the nation struggled under the British rule. We through various agitations, picketing, non-cooperation movements made an effort to gain freedom for India. Congress was divided into two ideologies- the moderates led by Gandhi & Nehru and the extremists by Subhash Chandra Bose and his followers. It was a very difficult period in the history of India to carry on the struggle against the British, taking into confidence the Muslim League also. In the end the British had to go and grant independence to India but the division into India & Pakistan led to mass migration and violence.

The Nehrus changed according to Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. Jawaharlal and Motilal Nehru abandoned western clothes and tastes for expensive possessions and pastimes. They now wore a Khadi Kurta and Gandhi cap. Jawaharlal Nehru took active part in the Non- Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) and was arrested for the first time during the movement. He was released after a few months.

Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President of the Allahabad Municipal Corporation in 1924, and served for two years as the city's chief executive. This proved to be a valuable administrative experience. He used his tenure to expand public education, health care and sanitation. He resigned in 1926 citing lack of cooperation from civil servants and obstruction from British authorities.

From 1926 to 1928, Jawaharlal served as the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. In 1928-29, the Congress's annual session under President Motilal Nehru was held. During that session Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose backed a call for full political independence, while Motilal Nehru and others wanted dominion status within the British Empire. To resolve the point, Gandhi said that the British would be given two years to grant India dominion status. If they did not, the Congress would launch a national struggle for full, political independence. Nehru and Bose reduced the time of opportunity to one year. The British did not respond.

In December 1929, Congress's annual session was held in Lahore and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as the President of the Congress Party. During that session a resolution demanding India's independence was passed and on January 26, 1930 in Lahore, Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled free India's flag. Gandhiji gave a call for Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. The movement was a great success and forced British Government to acknowledge the need for major political reforms.

When the British promulgated the Government of India Act 1935, the Congress Party decided to contest elections. Nehru stayed out of the elections, but campaigned vigorously nationwide for the party. The Congress formed governments in almost every province, and won the largest number of seats in the Central Assembly. Nehru was elected to the Congress presidency in 1936, 1937, and 1946, and came to occupy a position in the nationalist movement second only to that of Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested in 1942 during Quit India Movement. Released in 1945, he took a

leading part in the negotiations that culminated in the emergence of the dominions of India and Pakistan in August 1947.

However, this period was marked with intense communal violence. This violence swept across the Punjab region, Delhi, Bengal and other parts of India. Nehru conducted joint tours with Pakistani leaders to encourage peace and calm among angry and disillusioned refugees. Nehru would work with Maulana Azad and other Muslim leaders to safeguard and encourage Muslims to remain in India. The violence of the time deeply affected Nehru, who called for a ceasefire and UN intervention to stop the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947. Fearing communal reprisals, Nehru also hesitated in supporting the annexation of the Hyderabad State.

---

### **14.3 About the Author**

---

On 14<sup>th</sup> November 1889 was born the eldest child of Swarup Rani and the wealthy barrister Motilal Nehru in the city of Allahabad, now in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The Nehru family came of Kashmiri Brahmin stock. Motilal had moved to Allahabad many years before and developed a successful legal practice. He was also an active member of the fledgling Indian national movement led by the Indian National Congress. Nehru and his two sisters—Vijaya Lakshmi and Krishna—were brought up in a large mansion, Anand Bhavan, and were raised predominantly in the English custom, then thought necessary by the Indian elite. They were also taught Hindi, Sanskrit and given a grounding in the Indian classics.

Motilal Nehru wished his son to qualify for the Indian Civil Service, and duly sent young Jawaharlal to Harrow in England. Jawaharlal apparently did not enjoy his schooling at Harrow, finding the school syllabus stifling and the residency conditions far removed from home and quite unbearable. Nevertheless, after completing school, Nehru took the Cambridge entrance examinations in 1907 and went up to Trinity College, to study natural sciences. Jawaharlal stood second in his Tripos and graduated in 1910. The famous liberal atmosphere of the University also encouraged him to participate in a host of extra-curricular activities and has been noted as having been a key influence on his general outlook. He then enrolled at the Inner Temple for his legal studies in October 1910. This decision, as with studying at Harrow and Cambridge, was not apparently taken due to any fascination with the law on the part of Jawaharlal, but apparently at the behest of his father. Jawaharlal Nehru passed the final examination in 1912 and was called to the Bar later that year at the Inner Temple. He returned to India soon after to set up a legal practice.

He was married to Kamala Kaul, also a Kashmiri brahmin, on February 8, 1916. They had one daughter, Indira Priyadarshini, later Indira Gandhi. Kamala Nehru was also an active participant in the Independence movement but died in 1936 of tuberculosis. Nehru remained single for the rest of his life. Rumours however, later linked him to Edwina Mountbatten, Vicerine of India from 1946. In later life he depended greatly on his daughter and sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

The son of a wealthy Indian barrister and politician, Motilal Nehru, Jawahar became a leader of the left wing of the Indian National Congress when still fairly young. Rising to become Congress President, under the mentorship of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru was a charismatic and radical leader, advocating complete independence from the British Empire. In the long struggle for Indian independence, in which he was a key player, Nehru was eventually recognized as Gandhi's political heir. A life-



long liberal, Nehru was also an advocate for Fabian socialism and the public sector as the means by which long-standing challenges of economic development could be addressed by poorer nations.

To Nehru was given the singular honour of raising the flag of independent India in New Delhi on 15 August 1947, when India gained Independence. Nehru's appreciation of the virtues of parliamentary democracy, secularism and liberalism coupled with concerns for the poor and underprivileged are recognised to have guided him in formulating policies that influence India to this day. They also reflect the socialist origins of his worldview. As prime minister and as Congress leader Nehru pushed through India's Parliament, which was dominated by members of his own party, a series of legal reforms intended to emancipate Hindu women and bring equality. These reforms included raising the minimum marriageable age from twelve to fifteen, empowering women to divorce their husbands and inherit property, and declaring illegal the ruinous dowry system. His long tenure was instrumental in shaping the traditions and structures of independent India. He is sometimes referred to as the 'Architect of Modern India'. His daughter, Indira Gandhi, and grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, also served as Prime Ministers of India.

However, politics soon occupied him, particularly the Congress-led struggle for Indian independence. After the British massacre of protesters in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar in 1919, an outraged Nehru devoted all his energies to the freedom movement. Although initially sceptical of his son's political views, Motilal Nehru too joined the latest Congress efforts in pursuit of Indian independence. Nehru rapidly rose to become Gandhi's trusted lieutenant. His protests, though strictly non-violent, would land him in jail for a total of nine years over the course of his life. During his time in prison Nehru wrote "*Glimpses of World History*" (1934), his "*Autobiography*" (1936), and "*The Discovery of India*" (1946). These works earned him some distinction as a writer, in addition to his growing reputation in the Indian independence movement. Under Gandhi's direction, Nehru led the Indian National Congress for the first time in 1929, at the Lahore session. He was again elected to the Congress presidency in 1936, 1937, and finally in 1946, at which point his political prestige in the independence movement may have been regarded as second to none but Gandhi.

Nehru and his colleagues had been released as the British Cabinet Mission arrived to propose plans for transfer of power.

Once elected, Nehru headed an interim government, which was impaired by outbreaks of communal violence and political disorder, and the opposition of the Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who were demanding a separate Muslim state of Pakistan. After failed bids to form coalitions, Nehru reluctantly supported the partition of India, according to a plan released by the British on 3 June 1947. He took office as the Prime Minister of India on 15 August, and delivered his inaugural address titled "*A Tryst With Destiny*":

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."

In the years following independence, Nehru frequently turned to his daughter Indira to look

after him and manage his personal affairs. Under his leadership, the Congress won an overwhelming majority in the elections of 1952. Indira moved into Nehru's official residence to attend to him. Indira would virtually become Nehru's chief of staff and constant companion in his travels across India and the world.

Nehru had led the Congress to a major victory in the 1957 elections, but his government was facing rising problems and criticism. Disillusioned by intra-party corruption and bickering, Nehru contemplated resigning but continued to serve. The election of his daughter Indira as Congress President in 1959 aroused criticism for alleged nepotism, although Nehru disapproved of her election, partly because he considered it smacked of "dynastism"; he said, indeed it was "wholly undemocratic and an undesirable thing", and refused her a position in his cabinet. Indira herself was at loggerheads with her father over policy; most notably, she used his oft-stated personal deference to the Congress Working Committee to push through the dismissal of the Communist Party of India government in the state of Kerala, over his own objections. Nehru began to be frequently embarrassed by her ruthlessness and disregard for parliamentary tradition, and was "hurt" by what he saw as an assertiveness with no purpose other than to stake out an identity independent of her father.

### **Nehru - Economic policies**

Nehru presided over the introduction of a modified, Indian version of state planning and control over the economy. Creating the Planning commission of India, Nehru drew up the first Five-Year Plan in 1951, which charted the government's investments in industries and agriculture. Increasing business and income taxes, Nehru envisaged a mixed economy in which the government would manage strategic industries such as mining, electricity and heavy industries, serving public interest and a check to private enterprise. Nehru pursued land redistribution and launched programmes to build irrigation canals, dams and spread the use of fertilizers to increase agricultural production. He also pioneered a series of *community development programs* aimed at spreading diverse cottage industries and increasing efficiency into rural India. While encouraging the construction of large dams (which Nehru called the 'new temples of India'), irrigation works and the generation of hydroelectricity, Nehru also launched India's programme to harness nuclear energy.

For most of Nehru's term as prime minister, India would continue to face serious food shortages despite progress and increases in agricultural production. Nehru's industrial policies, summarised in the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, encouraged the growth of diverse manufacturing and heavy industries, yet state planning, controls and regulations began to impair productivity, quality and profitability. Although the Indian economy enjoyed a steady rate of growth, chronic unemployment amidst widespread poverty continued to plague the population. Nehru's popularity remained unaffected, and his government succeeded to an extent in extending water and electricity supply, health care, roads and infrastructure for India's vast rural population.

### **Nehru - Education and social reform**

Jawaharlal Nehru was a passionate advocate of education for India's children and youth, believing it essential for India's future progress. His government oversaw the establishment of many institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management. Nehru also outlined a commitment in his five-year plans to guarantee free and compulsory primary education to all of India's children. For this

purpose, Nehru oversaw the creation of mass village enrollment programmes and the construction of thousands of schools. Nehru also launched initiatives such as the provision of free milk and meals to children in order to fight malnutrition. Adult education centres, vocational and technical schools were also organised for adults, especially in the rural areas.

Under Nehru, the Indian Parliament enacted many changes to Hindu law to criminalize caste discrimination and increase the legal rights and social freedoms of women. A system of reservations in government services and educational institutions was created to eradicate the social inequalities and disadvantages faced by peoples of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Nehru also championed secularism and religious harmony, increasing the representation of minorities in government.

### **Nehru - National security and foreign policy**

Nehru led newly independent India from 1947 to 1964, during its first years of freedom from British rule. Both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R competed to make India an ally throughout the cold war.

Although having promised in 1948 to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir under the auspices of the U.N., Nehru grew increasingly wary of the U.N. and declined to hold a plebiscite in 1953. He ordered the arrest of the Kashmiri politician Sheikh Abdullah, whom he had previously supported but now suspected of harbouring separatist ambitions; Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad replaced him. On the international scene, Nehru was a champion of pacifism and a strong supporter of the United Nations. He pioneered the policy of non-alignment and co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement of nations professing neutrality between the rival blocs of nations led by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Recognising the People's Republic of China soon after its founding (while most of the Western bloc continued relations with the Republic of China), Nehru argued for its inclusion in the United Nations and refused to brand the Chinese as the aggressors in their conflict with Korea. He sought to establish warm and friendly relations with it despite the invasion of Tibet in 1950, and hoped to act as an intermediary to bridge the gulf and tensions between the communist states and the Western bloc. This policy of pacifism and appeasement with respect to China soon came unraveled when China annexed Aksai Chin, the region of Kashmir adjoining Tibet in 1962 that led to the Sino-Indian war.

Jawaharlal Nehru talks to Pakistan prime minister Muhammad Ali Bogra during his 1953 visit to Karachi.

Nehru was hailed by many for working to defuse global tensions and the threat of nuclear weapons. He commissioned the first study of the human effects of nuclear explosions, and campaigned ceaselessly for the abolition of what he called "these frightful engines of destruction." He also had pragmatic reasons for promoting de-nuclearisation, fearing that a nuclear arms race would lead to over-militarisation that would be unaffordable for developing countries such as his own.

In 1956 he had criticised the joint invasion of the Suez Canal by the British, French and Israelis. Suspicion and distrust cooled relations between India and the U.S., which suspected Nehru of tacitly supporting the Soviet Union. Accepting the arbitration of the UK and World Bank, Nehru signed the Indus Water Treaty in 1960 with Pakistani ruler Ayub Khan to resolve long-standing disputes about sharing the resources of the major rivers of the Punjab region.

Although the Pancha Sila (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) was the basis of the 1954 Sino-Indian treaty over Tibet, in later years, Nehru's foreign policy suffered through increasing Chinese

antagonism over border disputes and Nehru's decision to grant asylum to the Dalai Lama. After years of failed negotiations, Nehru authorized the Indian Army to annex Goa from Portugal in 1961. See liberation of Goa. While increasing his popularity, Nehru received criticism for opting for military action.

In the 1962 elections, Nehru led the Congress to victory yet with a diminished majority. Opposition parties ranging from the right-wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party, socialists and the Communist Party of India performed well.

In a few months, the border disputes with China turned into open conflict. Nehru assumed that as former victims of imperialism (India being a colony itself) they shared a sense of solidarity, as expressed in the phrase "Hindi-Chini bhai bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers). He was dedicated to the ideals of brotherhood and solidarity among developing nations. Nehru, naively, did not believe that one fellow Socialist country would attack another; and in any event, he felt secure behind the impregnable wall of ice that is the Himalayas. Both proved to be severe miscalculations of China's intentions and military capabilities. Following reports of his intention to confront Chinese occupation of the disputed areas—summarised in a memorable statement that he had asked the Army to "throw them (Chinese) out" - China launched a pre-emptive attack.

In a few of days, the Chinese invasion of northeastern India exposed the weaknesses of India's military as Chinese forces came as far as Assam. Widely criticised for his government's insufficient attention to defence, Nehru was forced to sack the defence minister Krishna Menon and seek U.S. military aid. Nehru's health began declining steadily, and he was forced to spend months recuperating in Kashmir through 1963. Some historians attribute this dramatic decline to his surprise and chagrin over the invasion of India by the Chinese, which he perceived as a betrayal of trust. Upon his return from Kashmir in May 1964, Nehru suffered a stroke and later a heart attack. He died in the early hours of 27 May 1964. Nehru was cremated in accordance with Hindu rites at the Shantivana on the banks of the Yamuna River, witnessed by hundreds of thousands of mourners who had flocked into the streets of Delhi and the cremation grounds.

**Jawaharlal Nehru** was the first, and has been the longest-serving prime minister of India so far, having served from 1947 to 1964. A leading figure in the Indian independence movement, Nehru was elected by the Congress party to assume office as independent India's first Prime Minister, and later when the Congress won India's first general election in 1952. As one of the founders of the Non-aligned Movement, he was also an important figure in the international politics of the post-war era. He is referred to as **Pandit Nehru**.

### ***Nehru – A Legacy***

As India's first Prime minister and external affairs minister, Jawaharlal Nehru played a major role in shaping modern India's government and political culture along with sound foreign policy. He is praised for creating a system providing universal primary education, reaching children in the farthest corners of rural India. Nehru's education policy is also credited for the development of world-class educational institutions such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Indian Institutes of Technology, and the Indian Institutes of Management.

Nehru is credited for establishing a widespread system of affirmative action to provide equal

opportunities and rights for India's ethnic groups, minorities, women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Nehru's passion for egalitarianism meant that he put the state to work to try and end widespread practices of discrimination against women and depressed classes, though with limited success in his lifetime.

Nevertheless, Nehru's stance as a unfailing nationalist led him to also implement policies which stressed commonality among Indians while still appreciating regional diversities. This proved particularly important as post-Independence differences surfaced since British withdrawal from the subcontinent prompted regional leaders to no longer relate to one another as allies against a common adversary. While differences of culture and, especially, language threatened the unity of the new nation, Nehru established programs such as the National Book Trust and the National Literary Academy which promoted the translation of regional literatures between languages and also organized the transfer of materials between regions. In pursuit of a single, unified India, Nehru warned, "Integrate or perish."

### **Commemoration**

In his lifetime, Jawaharlal Nehru enjoyed an iconic status in India and was widely admired across the world for his idealism and statesmanship. His birthday, 14 November, is celebrated in India as *Children's Day* in recognition of his lifelong passion and work for the welfare, education and development of children and young people. Children across India remember him as *Chacha Nehru* (Uncle Nehru). Nehru remains a popular symbol of the Congress party which frequently celebrates his memory. Congress leaders and activists often emulate his style of clothing, especially the *Gandhi cap*, and his mannerisms. Nehru's ideals and policies continue to shape the Congress party's manifesto and core political philosophy. An emotional attachment to his legacy was instrumental in the rise of his daughter Indira to leadership of the Congress party and the national government.

Many documentaries about Nehru's life have been produced. He has also been portrayed in fictionalised films. The canonical performance is probably that of Roshan Seth, who played him three times: in Richard Attenborough's 1982 film *Gandhi*, Shyam Benegal's 1988 television series *Bharat Ek Khoj*, based on Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, and in a 2007 TV film entitled *The Last Days of the Raj*. In Ketan Mehta's film *Sardar*, Nehru was portrayed by Benjamin Gilani. Nehru's personal preference for the sherwani ensured that it continues to be considered formal wear in North India today; aside from lending his name to a kind of cap, the Nehru jacket is named in his honour due to his preference for that style.

Numerous public institutions and memorials across India are dedicated to Nehru's memory. The Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi is among the most prestigious universities in India. The Jawaharlal Nehru Port near the city of Mumbai is a modern port and dock designed to handle a huge cargo and traffic load. Nehru's residence in Delhi is preserved as the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The Nehru family homes at Anand Bhavan and Swaraj Bhavan are also preserved to commemorate Nehru and his family's legacy. In 1951, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).

---

## **14.4 About the Text : *A Tryst With Destiny***

---

**Tryst with Destiny** was a speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of

independent India. The speech was made to the Indian Constituent Assembly, on the eve of India's independence, towards midnight on August 14, 1947. It focuses on the aspects that transcend India's history. It is considered in modern India to be a landmark oration that captures the essence of the triumphant culmination of the hundred-year Indian freedom struggle against the British Empire in India.

The text featured is in the form of extracts, passages or lines from the Nehru Speech - *Tryst With Destiny*, an example of a great speaker. This famous Nehru Speech is a great example of a clear address using excellent text to persuade and inspire the audience, a natural leader, speaker and motivator. Use this famous transcript of the Nehru Speech - *Tryst With Destiny* as an example of a great speaker, oration and clear dialogue. This famous transcript of the Nehru Speech originated from a historical manuscript. A Quote or extract from the Nehru Speech, provides an illustration of, or allusion to, the famous events the era and the work of a great speaker. This famous Nehru Speech is famed for its great powers of verbal communication making good use of the words and language to illustrate the subject all critical requirements of a great speaker. Whether this address can be described in the category of powerful, persuasive, motivational or inspirational the excellent powers of oration which are used make it one of the most famous speeches from a great speaker.

The speech is referenced in the 1998 Hindi film *Earth* directed by Deepa Mehta. The film portrays the main characters listening to the speech on radio, against the backdrop of the Hindu-Muslim riots following the Partition of India. This provides an interesting juxtaposition between the realities of Partition and the optimism that followed Independence.

#### **14.4.1 The Text : *A Tryst With Destiny***

##### **Speech On the Granting of Indian Independence, August 14, 1947**

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?

Freedom and power bring responsibility. The responsibility rests upon this Assembly, a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless, the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.

That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the

millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

And so we have to labour and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart. Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.

To the people of India, whose representatives we are, we make an appeal to join us with faith and confidence in this great adventure. This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.

The appointed day has come-the day appointed by destiny-and India stands forth again, after long slumber and struggle, awake, vital, free and independent. The past clings on to us still in some measure and we have to do much before we redeem the pledges we have so often taken. Yet the turning-point is past, and history begins anew for us, the history which we shall live and act and others will write about.

It is a fateful moment for us in India, for all Asia and for the world. A new star rises, the star of freedom in the East, a new hope comes into being, a vision long cherished materializes. May the star never set and that hope never be betrayed!

We rejoice in that freedom, even though clouds surround us, and many of our people are sorrowstricken and difficult problems encompass us. But freedom brings responsibilities and burdens and we have to face them in the spirit of a free and disciplined people.

On this day our first thoughts go to the architect of this freedom, the Father of our Nation [Gandhi], who, embodying the old spirit of India, held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surrounded us. We have often been unworthy followers of his and have strayed from his message, but not only we but succeeding generations will remember this message and bear the imprint in their hearts of this great son of India, magnificent in his faith and strength and courage and humility. We shall never allow that torch of freedom to be blown out, however high the wind or stormy the tempest.

Our next thoughts must be of the unknown volunteers and soldiers of freedom who, without praise or reward, have served India even unto death.

We think also of our brothers and sisters who have been cut off from us by political boundaries and who unhappily cannot share at present in the freedom that has come. They are of us and will remain of us whatever may happen, and we shall be sharers in their good [or] ill fortune alike.

The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every

man and woman.

We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be. We are citizens of a great country on the verge of bold advance, and we have to live up to that high standard. All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action.

To the nations and peoples of the world we send greetings and pledge ourselves to cooperate with them in furthering peace, freedom and democracy.

And to India, our much-loved motherland, the ancient, the eternal and the ever-new, we pay our reverent homage and we bind ourselves afresh to her service.

JAI HIND.

### **14.4.2 Glossary (In Alphabetical Order)**

Aloft	:	high
Beckons	:	hails by gestures, summons , calls by hints
Endured	:	Suffered something unpleasant / difficult for a long period
Fragments	:	pieces / parts
Grandeur	:	Splendour
Incessant		continuous
Isolated	:	Separated
Mansion	:	large house, palace
Pledge	:	Vow, Promise
Quest	:	Search
Redeem	:	Fulfill
Reverent	:	respectful
Striving	:	making effort
Substantially	:	Largely, Having sufficient amount
Tryst	:	Appointment
Utterance	:	Voice

### **14.4.3 Critical Analysis**

The title includes the word ‘Destiny’ which can be ambiguous. Different people may connote different interpretations of the word and the speech thereon.



About destiny it is usually asked “Is Destiny a matter of Choice or a matter of Chance?” This is, strictly speaking, self contradictory. The questioner believes that there is destiny; and that one can attain it through choices, or chance occurrences determine it; his enquiry is to determine whether it is a matter of chance or choice. To understand the contradiction and to go deeper into the subject, the terms must be defined.

Destiny is something to which a person or thing is destined i.e. the course of events in our life is predetermined to reach a preordained destination. Destiny implies that there is some Power which decrees or determines the course of events beforehand. It may be God, gods, Super-power, Nature, deities. In this view there is no chance or choice left. However people use it in different senses than permitted by dictionaries. Some maintain that destiny is ultimately what you arrive at in your life. And for those who believe in destiny, fate is the principle or determining cause by which things in general are believed to come to as they are or events to happen as they do. Fate and destiny are therefore related causally; therefore one who believes in destiny has to believe in fate.

Choice, or free will, needs availability of alternatives for any thought, speech and/ or action from which one can choose.

Chance occurrence of an event is one in which no cause can be identified. It is also known as a random event. Dictionary defines it as, chance is something that happens unpredictably without discernable human intention or observable cause; it also means the probability of an indicated outcome in an uncertain situation.

In destiny there is nothing random, there is no chance, nor there is any choice because, by definition, it is all preordained. If destiny rules then either there are no choices and chances or even the choices and chances are dictated by the destiny. Can one call a choice a real choice if it is predetermined by destiny! A predetermined choice is no choice! The word ‘destiny’ implies a purposeful relationship also between a cause and its effect on a human being, in addition to physical cause and effect.

But nobody knows destiny before hand, the foreknowledge of an event does not exist; astrologers etc. only predict possibilities. One only explains an event by destiny, especially if he cannot find an obvious purposeful explanation for that. For example there is a railway or an aeroplane or road ‘accident’ in which almost all passengers die and very few survive with no serious injuries. Persons believing in destiny would claim that destiny of survivors has saved them. And the relations of the deceased may console themselves by attributing the death to their destiny. If a passenger who was supposed to have traveled but due to some reason could not travel, his survival may again be claimed as a result of his destiny. Similarly if some person was not expected to travel but did so due to some inexplicable cause his death may again be claimed as a result of his destiny. As per scientific analysis, apart from randomness nothing else can explain the cause of the accident. Therefore destiny is not a matter of choice and chance but it is a matter of faith. Some experiences, like the one quoted above, do appear inexplicable. Most of them can be explained rationally but may not be explained teleologically; e.g. in the above quoted accident, it could come out that the accident took place because of a fire in the engine of the aeroplane or failure of the signal on the railway track. This is enough explanation for a rational person, but not for a believer in destiny. Such an accident does not logically prove existence of destiny.

The discussion on the subject gets confused because of the incorrect use of the word 'destiny', even by learned persons. An example from a speech by Jawahar Lal Nehru on 15th August 1947, the first independence day of India may be cited for elucidation. He declared it as our 'tryst with destiny'. He certainly did not mean that we had secured the hard fought freedom because it was preordained by some Supreme Power, or it was our fate or fortune. He meant that we had earned our freedom by great sacrifices and suffering chosen by us. Therefore he did not use the word 'destiny' in the defined (in a dictionary) sense of the word. He certainly used it in the sense of destiny that is carved out by immense human efforts. If we agree that this is the definition of 'destiny' and not those that are given in dictionaries, then destiny depends upon both choices and chances; of course assuming that we work and toil on our choices. Differences in opinions on the subject occur because of use of different meanings of the word 'destiny'. Strictly speaking, the words 'choice', chance and 'destiny' are antipodes of each other. It may be said that it is not destiny but choice and chance that determine the course and achievements of life, just as securing of our freedom was not our destiny but an outcome of chances, our choice and trials and tribulations. It may be admitted that the existence of 'destiny' in a scientific sense; we can say with confidence that 'eclipses' are destined. Similarly, the universe of planets, suns, stars and galaxies is destined to ultimately vanish into space. This is ordained by the laws of physics known today. The universe is not only expanding but expanding inexorably with acceleration as modern astrophysicists have shown.

'Life is but a stage on which we play our role, as melancholy Jaques says in *As you Like It* by Shakespeare. This metaphor is quoted by believers in destiny, but even this gives some choice if we think deeper in to its meaning. Different actors may act differently not only because of their different abilities to enact the role, but because they interpret the role of the script differently. This is in addition to their ability to enact the role. They interpret the role they are playing differently depending upon their experiences and education.

Some believers in destiny say that, 'My role in life is already given, my job is to enact it to the best of my capabilities. And some believers in destiny maintain that not even a leaf can move without the will of the God, implying that there is no freedom at all. Some believe that it is '*Sanchit Karmas*' and '*praarabdha*' that determine our present life. '*Sanchit Karmas*' are the karmas or actions that have collected during our past lives and whose effects have not been exercised yet. '*Praarabdha*' is the result of actions in the previous births that have not been exhausted, and as per the strict laws of 'Kaarmic Theory' those causes have to unfold as results in this or future births. Such People also believe that they are somewhat free to act in this birth. Therefore whether one believes in rebirths or not, one can say that destiny is a matter of chance and choice both but constrained by certain forces from the past (lives). So, there are different meanings of the word destiny in which freedom is also included along with predetermined path of events. The problem in accepting 'destiny' as true is that it remains a faith, it cannot be proven, because destiny cannot be foretold. Astrologers claim to predict the future. Most often their predictions are wrong or they are so wonderfully worded that they can be interpreted to suit the final event. The astrologer and the faith in destiny are both socially very useful for believers, especially during difficult periods in life.

Talking about choice, things are not straight forward here also. However a man may think that he is totally free in making his choice, whereas in real life he is not. A man's choice is always restricted by so many factors. Some of these are listed below.

1. His biology, e.g. he cannot fly like a bird.
2. His genes, e.g. color of his eyes, hair, height etc. Certain of his characteristics e.g. ability to take risk or being introvert etc are also determined by his genes, but influence of upbringing, nutrition, history of sickness etc may modify some of these characteristics.
3. His environment, e.g. one born in a poor family cannot be brought up like a prince except in exceptional circumstances.
4. His upbringing and education, e.g. one brought up in an environment in which physical aspect of life is always dominant would find it extremely difficult to lead an intellectual life or vice versa.
5. An addict like an alcoholic when given a choice between an alcoholic drink and non-alcoholic drink, at a particular time, would inevitably choose alcohol regardless of its consequences on his health.
6. Emotional characteristics of a person like fear, deep seated desires, greed, anger, obsession, pride and jealousy etc. modify his choices, even against his good sense, may be to his detriment.
7. Knowledge about the subject of action, e.g. choice of a path among many for a particular destination.
8. Demands of his mind, body or intellect, e.g. choice of movie, food, book etc.
9. His mental make up, mind set and experiences etc.
10. Under orders or wishes of superiors.
11. His company as the proverb goes “Birds of a feather flock together”
12. His profession by which he earns his bread.
13. His geographical condition against which he has to live.
14. Opportunities available or given to him.
15. His chronological era of the history when he is born.
16. Many other causes that cannot be mentioned here for lack of time or space, e.g. his subconscious or unconscious mind’s structure.

Above mentioned factors, most of the time operating as a community, do restrict and control the choices, yet it can be reasonably concluded that in most of the cases one can exercise ones choices, however restricted. One is aware of ones characteristics to a significant extent and to that extent he certainly makes a choice. At times one acts against ones known values in which case most of the time his unconscious or subconscious mind may be responsible. Result of one’s choice may be either beneficial or harmful.

To make a choice from among ‘destiny’, chance and ‘choice’ has important ramifications, e.g. is a murderer responsible for his act if the murder was destined? Is one responsible for ones actions or

not, is the most important question, answer to which would affect our lives seriously. Can we imagine, e.g., a murderer being allowed to go scot free because the judge believes in destiny that is ordained?

In *Mahabharata* which is a famous Indian epic. there is a story in which a young boy dies because he was bitten by a snake. The mother wanted to kill the snake for it had bit an innocent boy for no fault of his. Ultimately the snake proves that he had bit the boy because the boy was destined to die. And the snake was pardoned. Of course in the *Mahabharata* there are many stories including *Shri Madbhagwat-Geeta* which discuss these matters deeply. One need not conclude that Maharshi Vyaas wanted us to believe in destiny in this sense, otherwise Lord Krishna would not have exhorted Arjuna to fight the big war. Therefore the subject ought to be explored carefully.

We should assess the ideas of our great bhaktas and rishis on the subject. Bhaktas always desire love of God and they dedicate their actions to God. Therefore they are exercising their choice. It is a truism that mostly desires lead to actions. Our rishis have laid great stress on control of desires for a happy life. Obviously, desires can be controlled, but only if choice or free will exists. Further, for guidance of the life, they have laid four *Purushaarthas* : *Dharma, Artha, Kaama and Moksha*. These four ‘Purushaarthas can be exercised or practiced only if there is freedom of choice. The 14th shloka of 18th chapter of *Shrimadbhagavat Geeta*, in which Krishna establishes a relationship between choice and chance are worth perusal in this regard

The most appropriate interpretation of the word “destiny” in the context of the subject matter is that Nehru means Indian people have struggled hard to make their destiny by immense human effort. Now that time has come to meet the fruits of our hard work and make further efforts to make India a developed nation.

---

## 14.5 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. What does the service of India mean?

.....

.....

.....

2. What has been the ambition of the greatest man of our generation?

.....

.....

.....

3. Why are the dreams for India also for the world?

.....

.....

.....

4. What brings responsibility?

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

5. How can we realize to our dreams?

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

6. Find examples of metaphors in the speech.

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

7. Why should we not encourage communalism and narrow – mindedness?

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

8. About whom does Nehru think on the occasion?

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

9. What was the tryst with destiny?

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

10. What is the solemn moment?

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

11. Describe the vow taken at the ‘solemn moment’

.....

12. When was the tryst with destiny made?

.....

.....

.....

13. What is the achievement as referred to by Nehru?

.....

.....

.....

14. What happened with us before freedom?

.....

.....

.....

15. What are the main challenges after freedom ?

.....

.....

.....

16. What cannot be split into isolated parts ?

.....

.....

.....

17. Explain “the noble mansion”

.....

.....

18. Who is the speaker ?

- a) Gandhi
- b) Nehru
- c) Tilak
- d) Destiny

19. Who are being addressed ?

- a) The British
  - b) The French
  - c) People of India
  - d) People of Pakistan
20. What is indivisible ?
- a) Peace
  - b) Freedom
  - c) Prosperity
  - d) Disaster
  - e) All the above
21. Opposite of “dawn” is
- a) dust
  - b) dusk
  - c) desk
  - d) down

---

## 14.6 Let us Sum Up

---

Thus you have studied in this unit how powerful writer, speaker & orator Pt. Nehru is. He exhorted the people of Indian on the eve of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to develop this nation by forgetting petty differences. We have studied how he discards our inglorious past. You have seen how he refers to Gandhiji as the architect of India’s freedom. You have seen that Nehru has used the word destiny not in the strictest sense of the dictionary meaning but in a different context.

---

## 14.7 Answers to SAQs

---

- 1. It means that service of the millions who suffer , the ending of poverty & ignorance & disease and inequality of opportunity.
- 2. It has been to wipe every tear from every eye.
- 3. Because all the nations of the world are turned into one place. The fate of one nation affects the whole world.
- 4. Freedom and Power
- 5. By working hard for the masses.
- 6. Mansion, slumber, star, architect, torch, Darkness, wind , tempest.
- 7. Because the Indians cannot achieve greatness by that way.

8. Gandhi as the architect of this freedom, unknown volunteers & soldiers of freedom, brothers & sisters who have been cut off from us by political boundaries.
9. It was the struggle of Indian people against the British to gain freedom for themselves.
10. It is the moment when we step out from the old to the new; when the nation awakes for its freedom & rights.
11. It refers to the dedication to the service of India, her people and the larger cause of humanity.
12. Long years ago.
13. The period of misfortunes is over. It is a big step, a great opportunity towards the greater victory and further achievements.
14. We had to bear all the pains and sorrows of labour. Today also our hearts become heavy with the memory of those sorrows. For centuries the foreigners ruled over us cruelly
15. Continuous struggle to remove poverty, ignorance, disease and grief, inequality of opportunities.
16. Peace, freedom, prosperity, disaster all these cannot be split into parts and fragments.
17. It means a very big house which can accommodate the total Indians family members, living under one roof unitedly. It is a metaphor for the free country living prosperously & peacefully.
18. b) Nehru
19. c) People of India
20. e) all the above
21. dusk

---

## 14.8 Review Questions

---

1. Describe the circumstances when this speech was made.
2. On the basis of this speech, write a character sketch of Nehru.
3. Summarize what Nehru expects for bright future of India.
4. What are the views expressed by Nehru in “A Tryst with Destiny”.
5. Comment on the rhetorical devices used by Nehru.

---

## 14.9 Bibliography

---

1. Nehru: Autobiography, 1936. Letters from a Father to his Daughter.
2. Nehru : The Discovery of India, 1946.
3. Nehru : Glimpses of World History, 1939.



4. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride towards Freedom*, 1958.  
Why We Cannot Wait?, 1964.  
Where do we go from here? 1968.
5. Stanley Wolpert Nehru, A Tryst with Destiny.
6. A Tryst With Destiny historic speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru on 14 August 1947
7. Nehru: The Invention of India by Shashi Tharoor (November 2003) Arcade Books ISBN 1-55970-697-X
8. Jawaharlal Nehru (Edited by S. Gopal and Uma Iyengar) (July 2003) The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru Oxford University Press ISBN 0195653246
9. Autobiography: Toward freedom, Oxford University Press
10. Jawaharlal Nehru: Life and work by M. Chalapathi Rau, National Book Club (1 January 1966)
11. Jawaharlal Nehru by M. Chalapathi Rau. [New Delhi] Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India [1973]
12. Letters from a father to his daughter by Jawaharlal Nehru, Children's Book Trust
13. *Nehru: A Political Biography* by Michael Brecher (1959). London: Oxford University Press.
14. After Nehru, Who by Welles Hangen (1963). London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
15. Nehru: The Years of Power by Geoffrey Tyson (1966). London: Pall Mall Press.
16. Independence and After: A collection of the more important speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru from September 1946 to May 1949 (1949). Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India.
17. Commanding Heights. by Joseph Stanislaw and Daniel A. Yergin. (Simon & Schuster, Inc: New York), 1998.
18. "The Challenge to Indian Nationalism." by Selig S. Harrison Foreign Affairs vol. 34, no. 2 (1956): 620-636.
19. "Nehru, Jawaharlal." by Ainslie T. Embree, ed., and the Asia Society. Encyclopedia of Asian History. Vol. 3. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. (1988): 98-100.
20. "Nehru: The Great Awakening." by Robert Sherrod. Saturday Evening Post vol. 236, no. 2 (19 January 1963): 60-67.
21. Frank Moraes, Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography (1956).
22. Michael Brecher, Nehru: A Political Biography (1959)

## UNIT-15

---

### PT. JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU: A TRYST WITH DESTINY (II)

---

#### Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 The Freedom Movement
- 15.3 Check Your Progress
- 15.4 Life of Jawahar Lal Nehru
- 15.5 Check Your Progress
- 15.6 A Tryst With Destiny- An Analysis
  - 15.6.1 Introduction
  - 15.6.2 Analysis of the Speech
  - 15.6.3 Check Your Progress
- 15.7 Critical Evaluation
- 15.8 Check Your Progress
- 15.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.10 Review Questions
- 15.11 Bibliography

---

#### 15.0 Objectives

---

You have read the text of Nehru's Speech in the previous unit. The objective of this unit is to help you to understand the text of Nehru's Speech in a critical manner. After reading this unit you will be able to-

- a) comprehend the text.
- b) learn about the historical incidents that led up to the event mentioned in the text.
- c) learn about the author, his background his role in the national context.
- d) evaluate the speech from the point of view of the Art of Oratory.

---

#### 15.1 Introduction

---

The speech *A Tryst with Destiny* was made on the historic occasion of the independence of India. In order to understand the significance of the event it is necessary to trace the events that led up to the triumph of freedom. Hence a discussion of the historical events starting from the entry of the

English as traders, leading up to their becoming our masters, the struggle to free the country and the final resolution have been dealt with. Before analysing the speech, the speaker's status and background has been traced to give you a better understanding of the man who delivered the speech.

A full analysis of the speech and the ideas contained in it have been discussed in a simple language. Lastly the speech has been discussed as a piece of great oratory pointing out its effect on the audience.

---

## **15.2 The Freedom Movement**

---

### **Understand the Past**

The opening of sea route in May 1498 when Vasco de Gama arrived on the shores of India had a far reaching repercussions on both the Western and Eastern worlds. The Dutch, the Portuguese, the English and the French came to trade with India, but the English stayed on till fortune favored them to become rulers of the land. In 1600 a group of English traders obtained a permit from Queen Elizabeth to trade with India. "East India company" was formed and by 1639 they had constructed their business house in North and South India.

Unfortunately, this was the time of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the country was in a state of anarchy. The English took advantage of this situation. First they acted as interceders between two warring camps and succeeded in getting huge parts of land and finances as reward from the winning party. Later they actively participated in warring activities and gradually took over the whole of India. Now they became prosecutors, judge and jury for the Indians. But the British were too small in number to govern such a big country like India. Their rule was characterized by suppression, exploitation, misrule and force. They destroyed the very fabric of India's ancient culture, drained it of its national resources, impoverished the people and turned India into a subject colony of the British Empire.

### **Rise of Nationalism**

As the greed, misrule and repression of the British rule grew intolerable, the revolutionary activities of the Indians grew proportionately. The Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 was the first message of the people's temper to throw out the Imperial Union Jack. It was act of rebellion by the patriotic military forces of India. It was repressed by force for a time but Phoenix like rose from the ashes again until independence was gained after almost a century.

The feeling of nationalism was spreading fast in the masses. However, it got an added impetus by the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 with a clear objective of freeing the country from foreign rule. It generated Indian patriotic expectation.

### **The Moderates**

The Congress started on a moderate platform by asking for home-rule, but with the passage of time the apathetic attitude of the British government resulted in stiffening of national sentiment. Freedom fighters became more restless and attacks on the British Raj increased.

By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian National Congress lost faith in the British government. There were many extremists among the Congress who criticised the moderate policies of the Organization. This resulted in more violent attacks on the British power. The British on their part played their trump card of divide and rule policy which led to the rise of the Muslim League. With the help of the Muslim League, the British tried to stall the demands of the Congress. But in 1916 both Congress and the Muslim League united in their demand for Home Rule under the British Empire. But Britain disappointed India. By the 20s the national Movement became more aggressive.

### **Inhumanity of the British**

Some unfortunate happenings were portentous: The horror of the Martial Law and the notorious Jallia Wala Bagh Massacre in 1919 was the last nail of the coffin. This massacre was a calculated piece of inhumanity towards utterly innocent, unarmed people. A public meeting had been organized in Amritsar's Jallian Wala Bagh to protest against government repression. Twenty thousand people had gathered in the enclosed garden. Gen. Dyer had by proclamation banned all meetings in the city. When the people held the meeting in defiance of his orders, he sent two armed cars and a battalion of soldiers to fire at the innocent people, who were taken unawares trapped in the park.

### **Gandhi and Quit India Movement**

The cruel massacre, repressive legislation and an immoral military in the Punjab produced in the Indians a bitter sense of loss of dignity and self-respect. They were filled with a passionate anger as the British mercilessly crushed them by continuous process of exploitation which resulted in abject poverty.

This was the time when Gandhi entered Indian politics, and gave a new direction to the Indian National Movement. With his philosophy of truth and non-violence, he launched a series of non-cooperation movements which were followed by the civil disobedience movement. This novel strategy unsettled the British government and questioned their moral right to govern an unwilling people of a foreign land. Many British Parliamentarians and intellectuals openly supported Indian National aspirations. Apart from the Congress, which was in the forefront of the freedom struggle, there were numerous other organizations and individuals who played a seminal role in achieving this goal. Many activists and freedom fighters lost their lives in the process, others suffered great losses in their endeavour. This struggle continued but the real momentum came after the second World War in which the Congress co-operated with the British in the hope of gaining their freedom. When the real intentions of the British became clear after the War, Gandhi launched the "Quit India" movement in 1942. With radical changes all over the world after the war, the British were compelled to realize that their days in India were over and they reluctantly decided to leave. But not before they instigated the Muslim League to demand a separate Pakistan. In 1945-46 elections, Jinnah's Muslim League won all the thirty seats reserved for Muslims in the Central Legislative Assembly.

### **Efforts for Unity**

Efforts were being made by the Congress till the last to remain united but the last and final effort of March 1947 where the Gandhi-Jinnah talks came to a naught sealed the fate of the country. Mountbatten came to India to resolve the issue with his two-nation theory. In the face of a civil war Gandhi, who was opposed to the idea of partition of the country, asked Mountbatten to offer Jinnah

the leadership of a United India, but Jinnah refused. Moreover many Congressmen were opposed to the idea. Finally in July 1947 the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act in which 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> August were set for Partition of India. Thus came into existence two independent nations- India and Pakistan. This was the occasion of Nehru's speech *A Tryst with Destiny* which he delivered as the first Prime Minister of India.

---

### 15.3 Check Your Progress

---

1. Why did the British come to India?  
.....  
.....
2. How did they become rulers of India ?  
.....  
.....
3. What was the condition of the people under the British rule ?  
.....  
.....
4. What did India lose under British rule ?  
.....  
.....
5. What efforts did the Indians make to rid the country of foreign rule?  
.....  
.....
6. How long did it take to free their motherland?  
.....  
.....
7. At what cost did India get its freedom ?  
.....  
.....

---

### 15.4 Life of Jawahar Lal Nehru

---

#### Introduction

As the first Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru was at the helm of affairs for 17 years.

Democracy, secularism, non-alignment and Planning were the hallmarks of his stewardship of the Indian Nation. He understood the plurality of Indian society and the suitability of liberal democracy for its sustenance. Secularism was a matter of faith with him. Through the policy of non-alignment Nehru was not only able to keep away India from the cold war power politics but was also able to contain it from spreading to those countries of Asia and Africa which had just attained freedom from colonial rule.

## **Nehru's Lineage and Social Background**

There is a general impression that Nehru was an extremely westernised person. This is not a very correct impression: His roots were deeply Indian. His forefathers came from Kashmir early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were employed in the service of the decaying Mughal polity, with its headquarters in Delhi. But the Kashmiri Community to which he belonged, largely went into the liberal professions and into bureaucratic services in the Princely courts of North India. The principles of statecraft which were a part of genetic inheritance of Jawahar Lal Nehru came mainly from this course.

## **Birth and Childhood**

He was born in an affluent family of Allahabad on 14<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1889. His father, Pandit Motilal Nehru was a leading advocate and a social activist who played a leading role, along with Gandhiji, in the early days of the freedom movement. Being the only son, Jawahar Lal Nehru was a pampered child as his two sisters were born not before he was eleven years old. His father carefully planned his education through carefully chosen governesses and tutors at home. He was given lessons in Indian History and tradition, and was made aware of the plural religious background of India. First rate tutors, like Ferdinand T. Brooks, were engaged to teach him theosophy and science. His father even created a science laboratory for his son in his house, where he spent many hours in his early days.

His father's house used to be a centre of political activity. Nehru remembers meeting many important personalities like Annie Besant, Gandhiji etc and used to be excited by their talk. As a child, nationalistic ideas filled his mind. He dreamed of brave deeds, sword in hand, how he would fight for India and help in freeing her. He did not know childish dreams would one day come true.

## **Education**

When Jawahar Lal Nehru was fifteen, his father sent him to England to complete his education. He went to the best of public schools of those times- Harrow, and later to Trinity College, Cambridge to do his graduation. He followed in his father's footsteps by pursuing legal studies in England after his graduation. After completing his studies, he returned to India in 1912 after a stay of over seven years in England.

The formative years that Jawahar Lal Nehru spent in England gave him a clear understanding of Western intellectual traditions. At the same time he was deeply imbued with a deep knowledge of Indian history and culture. He was therefore, not swept off his feet by modern Europe. That explains the manner in which he could address himself to both the European world and the world in which he was born

## **Involvement in the National Movement**

Jawahar Lal Nehru had maintained his interest in Indian Politics when he was in England. In his Cambridge days he was impressed by the ideas of Lokmanya Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh in Bengal. On his return he found that Tilak was in jail. He came in contact with Ghokhale's Servants of Indian society, but finally he was drawn into the National Congress and Gandhiji became his master and mentor. He helped shape his personality into a happy blend of the values of the spiritual East and the scientific West.

He was married in 1916 to Kamla Nehru and two years later his daughter Indira was born. But due to his political involvement in the freedom struggle and constant imprisonment, he could not enjoy a stable family life.

His marital life was disturbed by frequent separations. His father's death, his wife Kamla's illness and later death had a heavy toll on him as a person. But he immersed himself in the political struggle to escape loneliness. He was a close associate of Gandhiji and participated in all the events of non-co-operation and Satyagraha. He admired the moral and ethical aspects of Satyagraha. The spiritualization of politics, not in the narrow religious sense, seemed to him a unique idea. The non-co-operation movement offered him an opportunity to strive towards realizing his goal of national freedom and the ending of exploitation of the poor.

He became wholly absorbed in the movement, went to distant villages and addressed peasant meetings, jostled in the crowds and felt quite at home in the dust and discomfort, the pushing and jostling of large gatherings. He took to the crowd and the crowds took to him. He was able to convey his ideas with ease and establish a rapport with them.

## **Imprisonment**

Right through the year 1921 individual Congress workers were being arrested. The boycott of the visit of Prince of Wales triggered mass arrests, and Jawahar Lal Nehru was one of them. Between 1921-1945 he spent almost nine years in various jails. Instead of being distressed, he spent his time constructively during his imprisonment. Early in life he had cultivated a disciplined reading habit, which stood him in good stead in the jail. He started writing. He wrote his autobiography while in jail and wrote regular letters to his daughter teaching her history and culture of India. The other books that he wrote while in prison were *Glimpses of World History* (1939). His *Discovery of India* (1946) is another masterpiece. Had Nehru not joined politics, he would have become an excellent writer.

## **Realisation of the Goal**

Meanwhile the freedom movement became more aggressive. Gandhiji's non-violent marches and dharnas sometimes became violent, the cruelty of the British government became intolerable with incidents like Jalliwala Bagh massacre. After the Second World War, when the intentions of the British became evident, Gandhiji launched the Quit India movement in 1942. The British soon realized that their days in India were numbered. They cleverly played the communal card and divided the peoples of India. The Muslim League's demand for a separate nation became more shrill. Finally, the decision to divide India was taken on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1947. The dream of a free, independent India was fulfilled.

on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, but at a great cost. Jawahar Lal Nehru became the first Prime Minister.

Nehru delivered his speech *A Tryst With Destiny* to the Constituent Assembly towards mid-night of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947 wherein he unfolded his vision of creating a modern India based on the principles of democracy, secularism, and peace. Secularism was a matter of faith with him. He understood the plurality of India society and was convinced of the suitability of liberal democracy in India for its sustenance. He remained the Prime Minister of India for 17 years- till his death in 1964. During his stewardship India made great progress economically. He gave the right direction to a balanced progress for India. The unfortunate Chinese attack on India broke his heart and he died of the shock of the Indian defeat in the Indo-China war.

---

## 15.4 Check Your Progress

---

1. Where did Nehru's ancestors come from ?  
.....
2. What sort of education did Nehru get before he went to England ?  
.....
3. Did Nehru become westernised after his education in England ?  
.....
4. How does it show that Nehru had a sound knowledge of Indian History and culture?  
.....
5. Did Nehru have a happy and stable family life ?  
.....
6. Did Nehru love India ? What was his dream ?  
.....
7. How did Nehru keep himself busy in jail ?  
.....
8. Did Nehru have the qualities if leadership ?  
.....
9. What was Nehru's role in the freedom movement ?  
.....

---

## 15.5 A Tryst With Destiny- An Analysis

---

### 15.5.1 Introduction

August 15, 1947 wa a historic day. After a long tortuous struggle, India at last succeeded in



overthrowing the British rule and emerge as a free nation. Jawahar Lal Nehru was sworn in as the first Prime Minister of India. *A Tryst With Destiny* was the speech he made at the constitutional Assembly towards the midnight of 14<sup>th</sup> August. It is one of the most famous speeches of the century, that vividly captures the culmination of the triumphant moment and the euphoria that swept all over India. It is a speech that touches the mind and the heart of the audience.

### **15.5.2 Analysis of the Speech**

#### **1. An appeal-**

He begins by taking us back to our past when India lost its sovereignty to a despotic alien power. At that time, we had taken an oath that we shall not rest till we wrest our motherland from the clutches of foreign rulers and restore its old glory. Once known as the Golden Bird of the East, India had been ravished by the foreign rulers its- wealth, stolen, its culture destroyed, its people enslaved, it had been reached to an impoverished sick state. Now at the dawn of freedom, Nehru hopes that India will be able to regain its old glory to a great extent: he points out that it is a rare situation when a nation steps out of an old regime, to begin breathing again after long years of suppression. At such a juncture in history he exhorts the Assembly to take an oath to dedicate its services not only to India and Indians, but to serve the cause of whole humanity. This shows that Nehru is not a narrow minded nationalist, but a citizen of the world, and a humanitarian.

#### **2. India's Historical Past-**

The past centuries are filled with a glorious record of India's incessant quest. Despite many ups and downs of fortune, India never lost sight of her goal and the ideals that gave her strength. Today, at the end of a long period of misfortune. India is standing at the threshold of discovering herself once again: He reminds the people of India that the achievement that they are celebrating, viz the regaining of their independence, is only the first step. Greater achievements and triumphs await us in the future. He questions his countrymen if they have the courage and the wisdom to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future.

#### **3. Freedom Entails Great Responsibility:**

Nehru rejoices with the people the freedom won by India. At the same time he exhorts the constituent Assembly, which is a sovereign body representing democratic free India, to take the responsibility of freedom seriously. Freedom and power brings responsibility, he warns.

#### **4. Problems Facing India-**

The achievement of freedom is not the end but just the beginning of a long march to redress the wrongs of the past. We must pledge ourselves to relieve the sufferings of millions of Indians due to poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity. This is the ambition of the greatest man of India, Gandhiji to relieve the suffering of every Indian. He thinks it is too ambitious a task, but till it is achieved the work must go on.

#### **5. Internationalism-**

He tells the Assembly to work hard in order to realize our dreams, for those dreams are not

only for India but for the whole world. Today all the countries of the world are linked together. No nation can be an island to itself. Peace, prosperity and disaster as well cannot be split into isolated fragments. The world has become one global village today. The destinies of all the nations are linked to each other.

**6. Call For Unity**

Nehru gives a call for unity in his speech. He tells the Indian people that in this hour of crisis, they should not indulge in destructive criticism, petty rivalries or blame games. Faith and confidence are required in this great adventure of building a free India where everyone can live with dignity and equality.

**7. A New Beginning-**

He boosts the confidence of the people by telling them that bad period for India has come to an end; destiny is beckoning India to come out of its slumber, awaken and stand tall and free. Although we still live in the shadow of the past, we must work hard to fulfil our pledge. We must break with the past and begin anew- a new chapter in the history of our nation which we shall act and live. This is the appointed time for a new beginning- our tryst with destiny. It is a fateful moment not only for India but for all Asia and the world. The whole world is gazing at the new star of freedom rising in the East. A new vision will be materialised. He prays for the new star never ever to set again, or hope be ever betrayed.

**8. No Happiness without Sorrow-**

There is cause to rejoice in our new found freedom, but there are lots of problems facing us. Many of our brethren are suffering sorrow. (Probably he is referring to the tragic events caused by the Partition of our country.) He exhorts his countryman to face those difficult problems in the spirit of a free, disciplined people.

**9. Homage to Gandhi and the Martyrs-**

On the occasion he aptly acknowledges the contribution of 'the architect of this freedom, Gandhiji, under whose guidance India was able to achieve its aim of 'Poorna Swaraj'. He regrets the occasions when his followers strayed from his principle of non-violence. He hopes that succeeding generations will remember his message. He will be remembered as a great son of India, "magnificent in his faith, strength, and courage and humanity," He pledges to keep the torch of freedom always glowing, against all odds.

Next he pays homage to all those volunteers, freedom fighters who selflessly served the cause of freedom and many of whom laid down their lives for their motherland. He does not forget those of our countrymen who had to leave India due to Partition and all those who share our happiness. We can only pledge our solidarity to them.

**10. Future Goals-**

For the reconstruction of India, Nehru feels the urgency of fixing clear goals for the future. He lists them as follows-

1. To make available the fruits of freedom and equal opportunity to the common man, peasants

and workers.

2. To alleviate poverty, ignorance and disease.
3. To build a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation.
4. To create institutions- social, economic and political, which will answer universal justice.

#### 11. **Blue Print of Modern India-**

In order to achieve the aim of social reconstruction, and to fulfil the promise made to our country, continuous hard work will be required. He motivates his colleagues to work tirelessly till the pledge is fulfilled. As a good leader, he makes the people of India take pride in their country. India is a great country, ready to take a big leap. People must live up to the expectations of belonging to such a great country. He advises them to eschew the forces of communalism and narrow mindedness. People of all religions have equal rights, privileges and obligations in independent India. Bigotry and narrow mindedness does not become a people of a great country.

#### 12. **Message to the World-**

Nehru concludes his speech by sending out greetings to all the nations of the world and pledging India's commitment to peace, freedom and democracy. He finally pays a reverent homage to his motherland and makes a solemn promise of dedicated service.

---

### 15.6 Check Your Progress

---

1. What were the circumstances in which India got its freedom from the British rule ?  
.....  
.....
2. To whom was the speech '*A Tryst with Destiny*' addressed ?  
.....
3. Had India always been a subject nation ?  
.....
4. What does Nehru mean when he says 'freedom and power bring responsibility ?'  
.....  
.....
5. What according to Nehru are the immediate problems facing India ?  
.....  
.....
6. Can India live in isolation from the whole world ? Why?

.....  
.....  
7. What is the pledge India took many centuries ago ?  
.....  
.....

8. How are we going to redeem that pledge ?  
.....  
.....

9. How does Nehru think Gandhiji will be remembered by succeeding generations ?  
.....  
.....

10. What are the future goals that Nehru sets out for the country ?  
.....  
.....

---

## 15.7 Critical Evaluation

---

Oratory is an art. Not everyone is a good public speaker. Public speaking is a form of communication. Hence it includes all the principles of good communication and much more. First of all a speaker must have a good command of the language. He should choose appropriate words and use a simple style. A good speaker always keeps his audience in mind and speaks to them at their level.

Jawahar Lal Nehru was a good orator and a practiced speaker. During the non-co-operation movement and as president of the National Congress, he had great opportunities of speaking to large crowds as well as addressing legislative assemblies. He was a very powerful orator. He not only had the intellectual acumen, an analytical mind but also a capacity to move people emotionally and intellectually. Dr. Rafiq Zakaria recalls his impassioned speech at the historic A.I.C.C. Session of 1942 in Bombay which heralded the Quit-India Movement. “Every fibre within him revolted against the unreality of the situation and cried out for India’s freedom...”, he remarks. The speech made such an impact on Zakaria and his young college friends that they defied the police and were as a result, sent to jail. This is the power of a good orator- to move people to action.

*A Tryst with Destiny* was a powerful speech that Nehru made at the historical occasion of India’s independence, when the emotions of all the countrymen were running high. He chose impassioned words befitting the occasion and the mood of the people. His imaginative use of words and presentation of ideas brings out the poet in him.

He opens his address by transcending human effort and emphasizing the inevitability of Fate- many centuries ago India had made a tryst with destiny, a secret appointment with Fate to regain its lost glory at an appropriate time. His choice of words and subtle expression of ideas is superb. He talks of

the suppressed soul of the nation finding utterance, and gives a call for dedicated service to our motherland. His words and ideas are befitting to the solemnity of the occasion.

His speech shows that he is a well informed man, who has a clear understanding of India's past and a well thought out plan for tackling the insurmountable problems. By appealing to the patriotic feelings of the people, he asks them to accept the challenge of building a strong new India, and be ready to work tirelessly and with commitment to realize their goal. He is a good psychologist: He first rewards his audience by praise and then demands an unequivocal dedication to communal harmony, eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease. Nehru is a visionary: he has a clear vision of a free, secular, democratic India, where everyone enjoys equality, freedom and opportunity for growth.

From his speech Nehru emerges as a humanitarian and internationalist: His patriotism is not limited to his own country only but he is concerned about the whole humanity. He understands that the whole world has shrunk and is inextricably linked with each other. The fortunes and disaster of one nation will affect the whole world. Hence he pledges India's commitment to peace and democracy for the whole world. He makes his countrymen aware of a new, broad world-view.

In his speech attempts to restore the lost pride of the Indians, fills them with confidence and gives them a new hope for the future. He greets the whole world, thanks all the freedom fighters, pays homage to the martyrs and acknowledges the invaluable contribution of Gandhiji, the father of the nation. Following the spirit of Indian tradition he does not forget to pay reverence to the motherland in poetic terms and promise eternal service with dedication.

Nehru speech is a well crafted address which reaches out to all sections of the people, national and international. It has succeeded in sending out a message of friendship to the whole world, and pledged its support to countries who are still struggling to get freedom. It is a speech that touches one's lead and heart.

---

## 15.8 Check Your Progress

---

1. On your first reading on *A Tryst With Destiny* what was your reaction? Did it make any impact on you?  
.....
2. What you impressed you most?
  - a. Language
  - b. Thought
  - c. Expression
  - d. Patriotism
3. Do you agree with Nahru's opinions expressed is his speech?  
.....  
.....
4. Does Nehru show concern for the problems of the common man?  
.....

- .....
5. Do you think he is sincere in what he says?
- .....
- .....
6. In his speech was Nehru able to touch an emotional chord?
- .....
- .....
7. Are his ideas clear, logical and practical?
- .....
- .....
8. Is Nehru concerned more about India or is he concerned about the world at large?
- .....
- .....

---

## 15.9 Let Us Sum Up

---

Thus we have a glimpse of the oratorical skills of Pandit Nehru through his famous speech *A Tryst With Destiny* delivered on the eve of India's independence on 14 August 1947. We see how he remembers the past and suggests ways to build the future. He asks the nation to not only serve India but also all humanity with dedication.

---

## 15.10 Review Questions

---

1. Summarize Nehru's views expressed in *A Tryst With Destiny*.
2. Comment on the oratorical skills of Nehru.
3. Have we come up to Nehru's expectations as expressed in his speech? Discuss.

---

## 15.11 Bibliography

---

1. Nehru: Autobiography, 1936. Letters from a Father to his Daughter.
2. Nehru : The Discovery of India, 1946.
3. Nehru : Glimpses of World History, 1939.
4. Martin Luther King, Jr. Stride towards Freedom, 1958.  
Why We Cannot Wait?, 1964.  
Where do we go from here? 1968.
5. Stanley Wolpert Nehru, A Tryst with Destiny.

6. A Tryst With Destiny historic speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru on 14 August 1947
7. Nehru: The Invention of India by Shashi Tharoor (November 2003) Arcade Books ISBN 1-55970-697-X
8. Jawaharlal Nehru (Edited by S. Gopal and Uma Iyengar) (July 2003) The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru Oxford University Press ISBN 0195653246
9. Autobiography: Toward freedom, Oxford University Press
10. Jawaharlal Nehru: Life and work by M. Chalapathi Rau, National Book Club (1 January 1966)
11. Jawaharlal Nehru by M. Chalapathi Rau. [New Delhi] Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India [1973]
12. Letters from a father to his daughter by Jawaharlal Nehru, Children's Book Trust
13. *Nehru: A Political Biography* by Michael Brecher (1959). London: Oxford University Press.
14. After Nehru, Who by Welles Hangen (1963). London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
15. Nehru: The Years of Power by Geoffrey Tyson (1966). London: Pall Mall Press.
16. Independence and After: A collection of the more important speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru from September 1946 to May 1949 (1949). Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India.
17. Commanding Heights. by Joseph Stanislaw and Daniel A. Yergin. (Simon & Schuster, Inc: New York), 1998.
18. "The Challenge to Indian Nationalism." by Selig S. Harrison Foreign Affairs vol. 34, no. 2 (1956): 620-636.
19. "Nehru, Jawaharlal." by Ainslie T. Embree, ed., and the Asia Society. Encyclopedia of Asian History. Vol. 3. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. (1988): 98-100.
20. "Nehru: The Great Awakening." by Robert Sherrod. Saturday Evening Post vol. 236, no. 2 (19 January 1963): 60-67.
21. Frank Moraes, Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography (1956).
22. Michael Brecher, Nehru: A Political Biography (1959)

## UNIT-16

---

### A.P.J.ABDUL KALAM:VISION FOR 2020

---

#### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 About the Author
- 16.3 Essay : Vision for 2020 (TEXT)
- 16.4 Self Assessment Questions
- 16.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.6 Answers
- 16.7 Review Questions
- 16.8 Bibliography

---

#### 16.0 Objectives

---

After reading this essay you will be able to:

- understand the background of the essayist and his creativity
- know about a literary prose piece of study
- develop a skill to analyse a prose (essay) and the central idea of the writer.
- use the word as referred to in the context of the study.

---

#### 16.1 Introduction

---

In this unit you are going to study about the essay and the essayist along with the age that he belongs to. In a way, you will reinforce your study of prose evaluation. Various meanings and lines have been made simple to enhance your knowledge and understanding. Also remember to make use of dictionary so as to understand the words and their meanings according to the context.

---

#### 16.2 About the Author

---

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was born in 1931. He specialized in Aeronautical Engineering from Madras Institute of Technology. After working for two decades in ISRO and mastering launch vehicle technologies. Dr. Kalam took up the responsibility of developing Indigenous Guided Missiles at the Defence Research and Development Programme. He was responsible for building indigenous capability and critical technologies through networking of multiple institutions, development and operationalization of Prithvi and Agni missiles. from July 1992 to December 1999, Pokhran II nuclear tests which made India a nuclear weapon state was carried under him. He took up academics as a Professor of Technology



and Societal Transformation in Anna University, Chennai in 2001. He has won many awards including the Padma Bhushan (1981), the Padma Vibhushan (1990) and the Bharat Ratna (1997). He became the eleventh President of India on 25 July 2002.

In ‘Vision for 2020’, he focuses on transforming India into a developed nation by 2020.

---

### **16.3 Essay: Vision for 2020**

---

When the India Today Conclave posed the question ‘India Tomorrow: “Global Giant or Pygmy?” I recalled an event that occurred while meeting students in Nagaland during my recent visit there. A Class V student asked me, “I would like to live in a happy, prosperous, peaceful and safe India. Tell me, what will you do Mr. President. Also, tell me what I should do for that”. During my interactions with schoolchildren of 17 states and three Union territories which I have visited, a series of similar questions was raised.

Sometimes, I feel, a nation of billion people think like a nation of million people. Why is it so? I consider no other nation has got a civilisational heritage like India to live a near-peaceful life. Indian minds were capable of absorbing the best of cultures from successive invasions. Now we should not allow any religion or any individual fanaticism to endanger our nation. Because, the nation is more important compared to any individual or party or religion.

Even the rich and developed nations, in spite of their wealth and military strength, are afraid of virtual enemies and they live with the fear complex. Economic prosperity and military strength alone do not bring peace to any nation, as we see from the dynamics of the world. In such a situation it is also very important to transform our religious forces into spiritual forces. Evolution of spiritual forces in addition to economic prosperity and military strength will bring happiness, peace and prosperity.

We got freedom in 1947 as a result of what I call the first vision for the nation. This vision created the best of leaders in many fields like politics, philosophy, judiciary, science and technology and industry. Improvements took place in many aspects of life, in literacy, agricultural products, strategic areas, certain small and large-scale industries. Now more than 50 years have gone by and we are called as one among the hundreds of developing countries and in a distinct way a separation from G-8 countries. We have many challenges, Nearly 260 million people who are below the poverty line have to join the mainstream of a good life. Hundred per cent literacy, health for all, multiple industrial and agricultural productivity and a lifestyle with a value system have to emerge. Hence, we need the second vision for the nation to become developed.

After Independence, India looked forward to development through Five Year Plans. The Green Revolution and technological growth enabled India to prosper with self-sufficiency in food, and achievements in many technological frontiers, particularly in the past two decades. A major transformation came during the information age when India established its position with its strong core competence in information technology. Today, India is in the knowledge age which provides an opportunity to become a developed nation with a strong economy.

In the twenty-first century, a new society is emerging where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital and labour. People’s lives will be enriched by IT-driven knowledge products and systems, biotechnology and space technology. As a future revolution, it is predicted that humanity

will see human habitat in one of the planets and space solar power radiating to earth for electric power. Human life will be further extended for research outcomes. Nano technology will enter into human usage like the control systems of various transportation systems, medical-technology equipment and aerospace systems.

In most developed nations, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector directly contributes 7-8 per cent to their GDP. It is expected that by 2010 in these countries, ICT will account for 25 per cent of the GDP either directly (by way of sale of hardware and software) or indirectly (by being an integral part of e-governance, connectivity for improved productivity, industries and even in daily life for improved efficiency and transparency). In India, ICT today accounts for nearly 2 per cent of GDP. To be a developed nation, we should enhance this significantly.

Our core competencies that can be exploited in addition to what has been planned in 1998 include information security, scientific software development and e-governance that can spearhead a strong domestic market, entertainment, education, hardware and chip design and wireless. If we exploit these areas of our core competency, we can create Indian MNCs and aim at a target of \$150 billion by 2010.

Another core competence we should develop is in biotechnology. India is rich in herbs, germplasm and microorganisms. Industrially developed countries are importing these bio-resources in raw forms, adding value to them and exporting them as special seeds and biomaterials to developing countries including India. They also own fully protected patents of these products. Instead of allowing export of such resources and importing value-added products at high cost, India must add its own technology for conversion of such resources to value-added products for use in domestic requirement as well as for export of the global herbal product market of \$61 billion. China has a share of around \$3 billion whereas India's share is not even \$100 million. Hence, there is tremendous opportunity for a higher market share. India has similar potential for promoting floriculture and aquaculture in a big way.

Our Prime Minister, in his Independence Day address from the Red Fort on August 15, 2002, declared that India would become a developed nation by 2020. India has entered the 10th Five Year Plan with a focus on all round development. The 10th Plan is a very vital period as it has to lay the foundation for this journey of transformation by initiating mission projects that will bring economic strength of the nation. In order to realise a developed India by 2020, five key areas have been identified for an integrated action :

- Agriculture and food processing, with a target of 360 million tonnes of food and agricultural products in a year. Other areas of agriculture and agro-food processing will bring food security and prosperity to rural people and speed up economic growth;
- Infrastructure development, including reliable and quality electric power for all parts of the country, which is vital for all core sectors;
- Information and communication technology - this is one of our core competencies, promoting education in remote areas and creating massive employment and national wealth through export earning; and
- Critical technologies and strategic industries - the progress in nuclear, space and defence

technologies will provide sustained growth and self reliance for the nation.

These five areas are closely interrelated and will lead to national, food and economic security. A strong partnership among the R & D, academia, industry, business and the community as a whole with government departments and agencies will be essential to accomplish the vision. Apart from the plan to network the major rivers, a scheme called Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) can help create rural wealth and prosperity. The model envisages a habitat designed to improve the quality of life in rural places and makes special suggestions to remove urban congestion too. As against a conventional city, say, rectangular in shape and measuring approximately 10 km. by 6 km., the model considers a ring-shaped town integrating a minimum of 8 to 10 villages in the same area. This model provides easy access to villages, saves transportation time, cuts costs substantially and is more convenient for general public. Such a model of establishing a circular connectivity of rural village complexes will accelerate rural development process by empowerment.

The nation's strengths predominantly reside in its natural and human resources which we should leverage. Human resources, particularly with large young population, is the unique core strength of the nation. There are 700 million people below 35 years of age in the population of a billion people. The nation needs young leaders who can command the change for transformation of India into a developed nation embedded with a knowledge society from now to 20 years. Quality leaders are like magnets that will attract the best persons to build a team for the organisation and give inspiring leadership even during failure of missions as they are not afraid of risks. The creators of vision ignite the young mind in particular.

What are the qualities of such a creative leaders. He or she exercises changes in the traditional role from commanded to coach, from manager to mentor, from director to delegator and from one who demands respect to one who facilitates self-respect. The higher the proportion of creative leaders in a nation, the higher the potential of success of visions like 'developed India'.

With the vision and characteristics of a creative leader defined, what can be the tasks of various people. The student community can remove the illiteracy of a certain number of people in their area where their schools or houses are situated. Only a burning candle can light another. Teachers and parents can assist them in this task. The Government and R & D labs can provide technological upgradation to small-scale industries so that production can be increased and they become competitive. The large-scale industries have to increase their productivity and quality so that the market share can be increased for economic growth and GDP. They can aim to become multinational companies and global leaders. The farming community has to increase its productivity with the help of new and available scientific methods particularly for dry land cultivation.

The information technology and knowledge workers have a tremendous responsibility to contribute in the areas of tele-medicine, tele-education and e-governance for rural areas apart from their business role. PURA has to be a business proposition, economically viable and managed by entrepreneurs and small-scale industrialists with government participation, as it involves education, healthcare, power-generation, transport and management. In this vision period, the government has to build a name for itself, by quick decision-making and transparent administration. The media has to become a partner and a positive critic in national development. Our musicians, poets, artisans and artists should nurture the glory of our great civilization and sing the song of developed India. This type

of motivated environment will indeed lay a great foundation for our vision of transforming India into a ‘ developed nation’.

---

## 16.4 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. Write a brief introduction of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.  
.....  
.....
2. What does the title Vision 2020 mean?  
.....  
.....
3. What was the question that India Today Conclave posed?  
.....  
.....
4. What according to A.P.J. Abdul Kalam brings peace to any Nation?  
.....  
.....
5. What was the first Vision for the Nation?  
.....  
.....
6. What is the second Vision?  
.....  
.....
7. “A.P.J. Abdul Kalam believed in education as a source of development.” How?  
.....  
.....
8. What are the five key areas identified for integrated action in order to develop?  
.....  
.....
9. What does Kalam mean by Human resources?  
.....  
.....

10. What are the qualities of a creative leader?  
.....  
.....
11. Besides leader who are the others responsible for transforming India into a developed nation?  
How?  
.....  
.....
12. Summarize “Vision for 2020” in your own words.  
.....  
.....
1. Fill in the blanks:-
  - (a) The nation’s strengths predominantly resides in its \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ resources.
  - (b) \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ strength alone do not bring peace to any nation.
  - (c) The second Vision for the nation to become developed is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (d) India is rich in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (e) India has entered the \_\_\_\_\_ five year plan.

---

## 16.5 Let Us Sum Up

---

- By now you must have understood the essay and the essayist’s intention of his creative effort.
  - Modern essay with the global thoughts of the essayist.
  - Talks about the modern age and its advancement though knowledge etc.
- 

## 16.6 Answers ro SAQs

---

1. A.P.J.Abdul Kalam was born in 1931. He is an intelligent personality and had specialized in Aeronautical Engineering from Madras. He became famous because of his efficient technological study and had won a number of prestigious awards in India. He became the 11<sup>th</sup> President of India on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2002.
2. The title Vision for 2020 focused on transforming India into a developed nation by 2020 as dreamed by A.P.J.Abdul Kalam .
3. India Today Conclave posed the question: India Tomorrow: Global Gaint or Pygmy?
4. Evolution of spiritual force in addition to economic prosperity and military strength will bring happens, peace and prosperity.

5. Freedom was the first Vision for the nation.
6. Development in Agriculture, economics, literacy and multiple industries is the second Vision of the nation.
7. Kalam believed that knowledge can bring a great change in men's life. Specially, he believed in the study of science and technology.
8.
  - i) Agriculture and the food processing .
  - ii) Education and Healthcare
  - iii) Infrastructure development.
  - iv) Information and Communication.
  - v) Critical Technologies and Industries
9. Human resources means large young people below 35 years of age who can work as quality leaders.
10. He or she exercises changes in the traditional role from commander to coach, from manager to mentor, from director to delegator and one who respects.
11. Media, musicians, poets, artisans and artists along with the efficient government.
12. Do it your self.
13.
  - (a) natural and human
  - (b) Economic prosperity and military.
  - (c) Education
  - (d) herbs, germplasm and micro organism
  - (e) 10<sup>th</sup> five year plan

---

## 16.7 Review Questions

---

1. How does Kalam visualize India in 2020?
2. What are the chief attributes of Indian culture?
3. Why do you think India will have to choose its own path of development different from those of the other developed nations?

---

## 16.8 Bibliography

---

1. Essential Language skills : Macmillan India Ltd, pub, 2007

## UNIT-17

---

### GITHA HARIHARAN: *THE GHOSTS OF VASU MASTER*

---

#### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 About the Author
- 17.3 About the Age
- 17.4 Introduction to the Text
- 17.5 Summary of the Text
- 17.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.7 Review Questions

---

#### 17.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at studying Githa Hariharan's novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) as a text exploring alternative learning and knowledge systems. It also deals with alternative healing systems. Therefore it challenges stereotypes- in education, in teaching methodology in teacher-taught interaction, in family teaching techniques, the school regimes, its petty meanness, its cruelties. We shall also see how the indifferent, often callous manner in which both the teacher and the class mates treat a child/student with special needs. In that sense the novel aims to sensitise students, schools, family and society to the needs of a differently abled child.

In a special way the novel also turns our attention to the situation of the teacher: his plight in struggling with his chronic ailments and his efforts to teach and keep the class in discipline. The struggles and the experiments of the master are presented in a unique way. The reader's attention is also drawn to the ailments in society and the nation, in this way each individual is linked to the motherland. The well being of an individual assumes the well being of the nation.

The edition of text used and you could preferably read is *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Penguin India, 1994.

---

#### 17.1 Introduction

---

*The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is narrated in short chapters with different heading: 48 chapters in all with titles like "Tenants of an Empty Room," the first chapter. Other headings like 'A Healer in Search of Shakespeare', 'A Belated Gift', Navigator Gopu, 'Mangal's Journey', and the last one 'Terminal Examination.'

The narrative structure moves from the past to the present, in a circle. It appears to be seamless as the time flows through the life gone by into the present and points to a future. In this scheme

memories are revived as stories laced with the times and experiences of Vasu. There is philosophy culled from his life. The pace is rapid and the reader's interest is always captivated by the turn of events.

The events, the different situations in the narrative structure, compel the reader to pause and reflect. It puts things in perspective, is a teacher an object of pity or parody, or do we also understand him/her as a human being? Is he/she stereotyped as a red wielding martinet struggling to control his/her class? On the other hand, why does the whole educational and social set-up expect a student to have a certain level of intelligence. There is a complete rejection of failure, of any incapability or weakness that the student may be suffering from.

Compassion is a very important issue that the novel emphasises: compassion, or kindness and understanding on the part of the teacher as well as the class-mates. You would have observed that the attitude and behaviour of school, society, teachers and parents is callous towards children with different abilities. Sometimes families with the best intentions also fail to help such a child. In which case the role of the teacher, as a mentor becomes important. The film '*Taare Zameen Par*' is a case in point. Another film which highlights the salutary role of the teacher and also the teacher's ailment- alzheimer- is '*Black*'. Alzheimer's is a disease where the patient fails to connect with the reality around him and there is loss of memory as well. It is considered incurable and occurs mainly in the middle age and leads to total disintegration of the personality. The German neurologist Alois Alzheimer (1864-1915) first identified it and hence the name.

The novel as you will see, has an important sub text. There may be methods of teaching, also of healing the body, the wants can be various, but the end result should be the growth of the person. Physical or mental growth, which is possible with love and compassion. Neither the teacher nor the taught can be perfect, both can evolve, both can grow with committed efforts.

The issue of education is very important. How do we define education? Can it be received only in a controlled environment, like the class-rooms? Is it something more than just a school system, disciplined and indifferent? Is education about subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry or are subjects like fine arts, literature, music and dance also important. Is rote learning the only way to acquire learning or must we emphasise the importance of ideas and creativity as well?

As students are under constant pressure to perform well, get good grades, the novel raises the issue of the challenged student. How is she/he expected to do 'well', get good grades, under constant peer pressure, teacher's and parents expectation? What do the school mates expect, when they bully a child with special needs?

The novel raises some of the most pertinent questions.

---

## 17.2 About the Author

---

Githa Hariharan (born 1954) is an Indian writer and editor based in New Delhi. She was born in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and she grew up in Bombay (Mumbai) and Manila. Her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Nights* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1993. In her personal life, she won the case in the Supreme Court which gave her the right as a mother, to be the natural guardian to her children.



Hariharan is the author of the following novels: *The Winning Team* (2004), *In Tuens of Siege* (2003), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *The Art of Dying* (1993), *The Thousand Faces of Nights* (1992), Her latest novel is *Fugitive Histories* (2009).

She is the editor of *Southern Harvest* and *Sorry Best Friend*. Githa Hariharan was educated in Mumbai and Manila and later in the U.S. She worked as a staff writer in the Public Broadcasting System in New York and from 1979, she has been working as an editor in a publishing house. She has been a free lancer in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi. Her works have been translated into various languages- French, Dutch, Greek, Urdu and Malyalam. Her works are included in several anthologies.

The novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is full of philosophy culled from the life of the master. It is narrated in short chapters with different headings, the chapters weave through the past and link to the present. The author brings in her own experience, her sensitivity to social issues to the fore in her writings. Mani the challenged student is the only person present in Vasu Master's life, the other characters are all absent figures, but constantly present as memories.

---

### 17.3 About the Age

---

The novel is located in the age of Postmodernism. It may not be an easy thing to define. In literary criticism postmodernism deals not just with the literary artefact, but also with language, identity, representation, origin and truth. Jean- Francois Lyotard is an important postmodern critic. His work *The Postmodern condition* (1984) is considered an important text. The work explains the term postmodern. Postmodernism dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century, critics like Perry Anderson and Fredric Jameson discuss postmodernism in their work. Jean-Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism as marked by a suspicion of grand narratives. The advent of postmodernism is also marked by tele-technologies, with the emergence of globalization and post-industrial society. Tele-technology refers to all electronic media such as the internet, video, e-mail, television and telephones systems through which images, messages, signals and signs, discourses, etc are transmitted and circulated. Frederik Janeson further sees postmodernism as the conspicuous display of a formal self-consciousness, there is a borrowing from other texts and styles across genres in a way that distinctions between high and low culture, western and other cultures, or differences between past and present are broken. The narrative style uses pastiche, parody, sampling and inter-textuality. With the breaking down of distinctions in the past and the present, postmodernism becomes playful and allusive, we get inter-textual metafiction or even meta-architecture or meta-film using a bank of past texts and various cultural forms made available through new media technologies and the computer in a seemingly 'perpetual present.' Lyotard describes the experience of living what he calls this 'degree zero of contemporary general culture.' One listens to reggie, watches a western movie, eats Mcdonald's burger for lunch and local food for dinner, wears a French perfume and a Kanjivaram saree.

Postmodernism raises a lot of questions and a lot of doubts. There is sense of loss of originality, identity, history, past values and standards in arts and morality. Some critics deplore it as recycled emptiness and superficiality. Other critics see it as liberating, a freedom from elitist hierarchies and from constraints and assumptions.

For Lyotard the grand narratives of human progress and liberation, rooted in Enlightenment

thought, have lost credibility, because they were based on the foundations of totalitarian regimes and the arrogance of an assumed universal knowledge. In the Postmodern condition (1984) he concludes: 'Let us make over on totality:' Jean Baudrillard in *Selected Writings* (1988) ed. and introduced by Mark Porter, writes about the crises of legitimacy and representation. Baudrillard describes this double crisis in postmodernism as one that lacks legitimacy as there is an absence of founding principles and the crisis of representation, as there is no reality for an image to represent.

In other words postmodernism rejects master narratives, hierarchies and the division between high and low culture. It lays stress on the margins, the minorities and those who are not represented. It rejects mainstream culture.

Vasu Master critiques the accepted or 'standard notion of education, the system etc.' He looks for alternate ways of teaching, of interacting, of discipline and learning. The master is not outside nor removed from the pupil, in fact he takes step to be in line with his pupil. He crosses the borders of acceptability, intelligence, students brilliant response, conventional behaviour etc.

Postmodernism also raises the issue of globalisation. Such as issue of western capitalism, economy and the important debate of global and local. The novel in a postmodern mode emphasizes the significance of the local, the indigenous. It affirms traditional knowledge, traditional medicinal cures, the guru-shishya tradition. It strengthens the teacher and the taught bond, its symbiotic (give and take approach). The teacher not just imparts knowledge, he also learns. He also grows in the process of learning and teaching. He debates, he meditates and questions his own teaching approach. He assesses the learning/teaching systems in educational institutions. He re-thinks and he re-works. The teacher admits and accepts his own short-comings and in the process enlarges the scope of the teacher and becomes a nurturer.

The Postmodern age is also the age of innovation, of new technique and new ways and norms. The hierarchies, the authorities of the past are questioned and reworked. There is a vigour and experimentation.

---

## 17.4 Introduction to the Text

---

The novel is in the first person narrative. The 'I' in the novel is Vasu Master. He is the person who narrates, who perceives. At the same time the novel relates to multiple narratives and multiple voices. As you read you will observe that there are fables- stories about animals with a moral tucked in them, then there are grandmother's and mother's stories. There are speeches by Vasu's father who is an Ayurved healer, he gives medicines to the villagers and also lectures them. He plays a larger role as a village elder, all the other people of the village community respect him. They come to listen to his speeches. Vasu's father is a multi-faceted person. He is an Ayurvedic doctor, well versed in the Vedas and the shlokas and also the plays of Shakespeare. He quotes extensively from the Vedas and Shakespeare which leads to a very enriching experience of Vasu.

Postmodernism which we discussed earlier is also about pluralism, the multiplicity of cultures, of languages. India is a land of diversity and diverse challenges. The author celebrates India's diversity, its pluralism, its humanism and liberal approach. In that way the novel explores multiple truth, multiple traditions and processes. It rejects a moribund (dead) monolithic approach. It questions authority and

rigidity.

The text is an exploration of the very important relationship of the teacher and the taught. It is a journey from ignorance to self awareness, from vacuum to meaning. It unfolds the story of Mani- the boy rejected by school and friends. The boy who is very slow is grasping the texts, in adjusting to the school environment, in short Mani is socially unacceptable. The school is not prepared to make way for him, the teachers are too impatient to accept a slow learner. His class mates find him different and enjoy humiliating him. The retired school teacher of the village in Tamil Nadu accepts him. Then begin the journey of learning, of understanding and bonding. The task is not simple, Vasu Master has never faced such a situation in his class, nor has he seen such a situation in the school in his entire forty years career.

Vasu Master is alone, his wife has died, his two sons live away from him. After the hectic years of activity in school, he is isolated. He follows the daily routine of his retired life mechanically. Then he meets or rather finds himself facing Mani in his room. Mani has no attention span, he barely focuses on what is said to him. He never speaks. For four decades, the seasoned Master had struggled to keep his class 6 B quiet.

The new challenge for the experienced school master is the silence, as Mani who does not speak is a difficult situation for Vasu. At the time of his retirement, as a farewell speech to his eleven year olds in class 6 B, P.G. Boy's school, Elipettai, he tells them that all of them are pupils and teachers as long as there is life in each of them, they learn and they teach.

Perhaps in this learning and teaching process, Vasu starts writing in the notebook, his precious farewell gift from all his students. The act of writing is special, because in the act of writing, Vasu records all his past memories from his childhood to adulthood and right up to his life after school. The notebook entries are very interesting; there is philosophy in it, "Who is this creature called Teacher ? And how does this custodian deliver a child to adult life ?" A relatively simple question, but for Vasu it becomes a point from where his inward and outward journey starts. Inward- he reflects, he ponders, asks questions, outward- he responds to the needs of his special pupil Mani.

The narrative technique uses notebook entries, folk tales narrated by Vasu's grandmother and mother, fables and parables. These techniques are significantly used as teaching tools, to break Mani's silence. Stories are timeless strategies of creating kinship among communities, oral tradition is a special part of our heritage. Folk tales are sung about Mars, warriors, they are also narrated or sung on festivals, birth and naming ceremonies, engagements and weddings. There is a tradition in some communities of Rudali- the singer who mourns for the departed.

The novel will answer this very important question, whether Vasu succeeds and break the walls of silence surrounding Mani.

There is a very significant dimension of absent figures in the novel. Vasu is alone, but he is surrounded by memories, his ghosts are his memories. Through his memories all the past and present absent figures come alive, they mark their presence through him. His father, his neighbours, his grandmother and mother, later his wife and sons, the school principal, his colleagues and people of his community. Out of all his class 6 B students, there is Srinivas, a very special student. Srinivas was polite, ready to learn, very disciplined and sensitive. The teacher recognised him as his best student

and Vasu was confident that such a good student would go far in life.

After superannuation (retirement) he starts a school, much like the one described in the Rigveda, the Gurukul, the school in the teachers house, where the students live and learn from the master, where students struggled in solitude, in meditation to grasp the truth and the meaning of texts. The struggle would end for the student only after an understanding of the text. Mere cramming or rote learning was considered meaningless and futile like dry wood, such logs would never blaze with the fire of knowledge.

Dreams are another form of the narrative. Dreams not only bring in the past, they also open the world of fantasy, of fables, where animals, birds and bees converse. There is a thread of continuity in the main narrative the story of Vasu and Mani and the secondary or sub narrative, the fables. The progress of one narrative is linked to the progress in the other. The interest of the reader is always sustained. The different narrative strategies bring a freshness to the novel.

The novel unfolds the layers of teaching and learning methodologies. As the narrative flows it raises the question of student's intelligence, his receptiveness, the quality of the human brain. All these connect with the fundamental role of the teacher, as mentor, guide and nurturer of values.

Can family and society abjure all responsibility towards a child with special needs ? Or do they need to be more understanding and patient? In an ideal situation, family, school and friends should contribute to the needs and to the nurture of the differently abled. While the harsh reality is that such children are ignored at home and rejected in most schools.

The novel sensitizes us on a lot of issues. The teacher is also a person with human frailties, the teacher is not a superman/ superwoman. Ordinary people become extraordinary with their kindness, patience and determination. Vasu Master has a holistic approach to teaching, he aims to nourish both the body and the mind. It is not easy for him, not always rewarding, but like a true Gandhian he persists. He does not give up on any one of his students, definitely not Mani.

In this way the novel talks about hope, about faith, about the power of love in its healing both the mind and the body and strengthening the soul in its resolve to goodness.

The title of the novel- *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is very important. Vasu's many ailments, his fears, his doubts, his past and all his memories are his ghosts. From his ghosts he learns to move ahead, nor to lose courage. He is able to overcome his ghosts- his fears his loneliness with his own agency- his own efforts.

We can see the working of the Gandhian ideal of education in the novel. The ideal that education must reach each and every one, it must be in the language of the people, not just the rich and the elite, not just is English or foreign language. It must strike a chord with every one.

---

## 17.5 Summary of the Text

---

*Ghosts of Vasu Master* is about the life of Vasu Master and all the people, all the memories, his ailments that are the ghosts. There is no bitterness or anger in Vasu, only a lot of compassion for all his experiences. He is left all alone after his retirement from his school job. In his life of solitude, his student Mani enters. In the process of teaching Mani, Vasu goes over his own life and views it with a

degree of objectivity.

Vasu tells his story in the first person. He uses the notebook his students had given him as a farewell gift. He notes down not only his past, but all his present in it. His experience with Mani and all the changes that happen later.

The novel moves ahead through stories that Vasu tells Mani, through letters that he receives from his two sons- Vishnu and Veru, through memories of his wife Mangla. Their rare trips to the Marina beach outside Madras, his simple life in the village Elipettak. The trip infuses a new joy in their mundane lives. The waves, the beach seem to liberate all of them from their monotonous lives.

Vasu remembers all the strict lessons of his father and the food cooked by his grandmother. His father believed in healing with Ayurveda, his grandmother aimed at curing the young Vasu with her woking. Vasu had weak stomach and digestion from childhood. All through his life he suffers on that account and tries all cures to heal himself.

Vasu Master remembers his students of 6 B with fondness. They were a noisy group but he had tried his best to discipline them and instill some basic values in them. Vasu also writes in his notebook about the education system, the meanness and partiality in school. The different types of punishments for the rich and the poor students. Many other writers have also written about this disparity in school education. The rich students are let off lightly while the poor and underprivileged have to face corporeal punishment.

Vasu records his dreams which many times relate to the problems of his life. His struggle to arouse Mani's interest to make him understand and to utter a simple word. The many chapters in the novel tell a special story, the Blue Bottle fly is of great interest. It connects with Mani and his struggle to free himself from all his past injuries and his struggle to come to an understanding of himself and all that his patient teacher tries to tell him.

His father would buy vegetables and cook for him, at the same time lecture him on the importance of shlokas and Shakespeare. In that manner Vasu has an eclectic childhood, full of varied enriching experiences. His grandmother, who knew only one word is English, nuisance and that is the nickname she used for Vasu. She would pull his ears and later as compensation for her harsh behaviour tell him a story.

He remembers the pranks, the juvenile tricks of his students in school. His wife Mangla, who would also tell a story rarely, now she had been dead twenty years. His two sons lived away, Vasu would have tough time remembering the names of his grandchildren.

He takes the questions of Mani's education from all directions. He becomes more patient than he had ever been, he changes his teaching techniques and looks forward each day to a glimmer of hope in Mani's eyes for some recognition on Mani's part. Gradually he is happy to see a change in Mani, who concentrates on the words of his master. Vasu lovingly cooks for him, hugs the deprived child and showers love on him. Vasu fervently hopes to hear his name from his students lip but is happy nevertheless when Mani speaks his own name. Mani's body language changes it becomes poised and confident.

Mani draws with bold, confident strokes. All Vasu's stories take their colour in Mani's draw-

ing. The Master succeeds in igniting Mani's mind and soul. Mani learns to express through creative drawing. The master feels that it is his best reward Love, compassion and hard work pays. Old habits and methods are reworked and modified. Mani fulfills Vasu's life in a very special way. Both the teacher and the student in this journey of learning, give strength to each other.

---

## 17.6 Let Us Sum Up

---

Thus we see that *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is a deeply moving tale of a small town school teacher and his young pupil. Using fantasy, fable and a host of wonderfully imagined characters- and the gentle, humane and philosophic voice of Vasu Master- Githa Hariharan creates a richly textured and complex work that eloquently explores the human condition, and the underlying principles of all human action. It has a refreshingly simple and humorous style despite its serious subject.

---

## 17.7 Review Questions

---

1. Discuss the significance of the title, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*.
2. What kind of relationship does Vasu Master have with his students?
3. In what way is Mani special for Vasu Master?
4. What is the significance of stories and fables in the novel?
5. What concept of education does the author promote? What is the role of education in a person's life?
6. Describe some narrative strategies used in the novel. Give some examples.

## UNIT-18

---

### THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

---

#### Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Autobiography as a Literary Form
- 18.3 Autobiographical Literature
  - 18.3.1 Diary Journal
  - 18.3.2 Memoir and Reminiscence
  - 18.3.3 Letters
- 18.4 Definition of Autobiography
- 18.5 Form and Structure of Autobiography
  - 18.5.1 Selection of Facts
  - 18.5.2 The Nature of Truth
  - 18.5.3 Tone or Point of Views
  - 18.5.4 Autobiographical Strategies
- 18.6 Check Your Progress
- 18.7 A Note on the Blacks in America
- 18.8 Check Your Progress
- 18.9 Analysis of the Autobiography of Malcom X
- 18.10 Check Your Progress
- 18.11 Some Interpretation of the Autobiography of Malcom X
- 18.12 Autobiography as a Political Testament
- 18.13 Check Your Progress
- 18.14 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.15 Review Questions

---

#### 18.0 Objectives

---

The objective of this unit is to help you study the text of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in a critical manner. After reading this unit will be able to-

1. comprehend the text as a literary artifact

2. learn about the art of the autobiographical genre to be better able to evaluate the text.
3. critically analyse the text
4. know about the social, political and cultural issues of the Afro-Americans

---

## **18.1 Introduction**

---

In this unit we shall discuss autobiography as a literary form. We shall see how it is different from other autobiographical forms. A successful autobiography has to be reflexive and must reflect upon its own process and organization: The autobiography is in search of an evolving mixture of pattern and situation- pattern discerned in the life recovered, patterns discovered or articulated in the self or ‘versions of the self’ that emerge in the recovery, and pattern in the recovery process. It is the total emergent reciprocity of situation, activity and pattern that the autobiographer seeks to identify.

---

## **18.2 Autobiography as a Literary Form**

---

It is an incontrovertible fact that autobiography became the most flourishing genre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still attracting the attention of a large number of literary critics. Yet there has been an utter failure on the part of the critics to evolve a comprehensive, coherent theory of autobiography. The reason lies partly in the interdisciplinary nature of the genre. The social scientists have sought to interpret it as a cultural document providing unique insights into history and social change; the psychologists claim it to be a study in personality, and the literary critics foresee the imagination potential of autobiography.

### **Etymological meaning of Autobiography:**

The word ‘autobiography’ is framed from three words: ‘autos’, ‘bios’ and ‘graphia’. Autos- ‘the self’, bios- ‘life’ and graphia- ‘to write’. The complexity arises because of their being put together as one word and a single sense. ‘Bios’ for example, could be the historic past from the beginning of memory up to the present, or a piece of that part, it could also be the writer’s present- his/her psychic configuration as he/she writes; it could be life, not as individual property or possession, but life as the mythic history of a whole people, a community, a group. It could signify one’s memories, dreams and reflections, or perhaps it can be a confession of one’s psychic development. Yet again it can be a justification or an apology of one’s acts. The magnitude of implications of the act of autobiography is as heterogeneous as the dimensions of the act are.

---

## **18.3 Autobiographical Literature**

---

Every age has produced some form of autobiographical literature, which is generally confused with the distinctive form of autobiography. Diaries, journals, memoir, reminiscences and letters, are all manifestations of the writer’s self. But each has a different perspective.

### **18.3.1 Diary Journal**

A diary deals with the day to day record of a person’s life. The advantage of this characteristic is that nothing gets left out. The disadvantage lies in the over abundance of such jottings and their lack



of arrangement. The diary is characterized by uncertainty, false starts and momentariness. The reader can gauge the tastes, aptitudes and sensitivity of the author, but there has been no conscious attempt at coherent shaping of his life. The diary and journal retain the freshness of feeling and emotion of a particular moment, but unlike the autobiography it lacks the long-range perspective which only time can bring. The diarist simply records particular events, whereas the autobiographer seeks a pattern which drives him in the direction of generalization.

### **18.3.2 Memoir and Reminiscence**

Memoirs and reminiscences are so closely related to autobiography that sometimes it is difficult to draw a line of separation. There is a very slender line dividing the two. Both are based on personal experience, but there is a difference in emphasis. The memoirist concentrates on recording public events and lays little stress on the self. Basically the memoir arises from personal experiences and follows a chronological order in recording of events. It often tends to become reflective, where in the writer's attitudes and feeling are revealed but his search light is meant to penetrate his public life, not his private self.

If the memoirist concentrates attention on public events, the writer of the reminiscences penetrates personal relationships. There is a slight shift of emphasis: the focus is still on the outside world, not the inner self. It is an account of action and reaction of human relationships.

The essential difference between the two genres lies in the amount of external life that is described: the memoirist and reminiscence writer make it their intent and purpose. The autobiographer uses descriptions of external life to illumine his inner self. A happy balance between the outside world and the inner life distinguished the autobiography from the memoir.

### **18.3.3 Letters**

The preservation and publication of the letters of great men is a practice that goes back to antiquity. It is a very informal, intimate and spontaneous form of writing. We get to see the author in his undisguised, natural self, for in correspondence with a friend, doubt and distrust have no place. The reader is immediately admitted to the writer's confidence and the rapport of intimacy is immediately established.

Although letters reveal a great deal of the author's personality, they are different from pure autobiography. There is no attempt at conscious, retrospective recollection and an ordered narration of the author's life, which is the main feature of the autobiographical genre. What is common in letters and autobiography is that both keep a delicate image of the writer alive and present a subtle likeness of the authors.

---

## **18.4 Definition of Autobiography**

---

Many critics have tried to define autobiography. Broadly speaking, most agree that it is retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focussing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality. However some critics remain dissatisfied with this definition as it does not provide a sufficient boundary between autobiography and the

adjacent biography and fiction. Hence one condition for autobiography must be absolute: there must be identity between author, narrator and the protagonist.

Autobiography is inspired by a search of identity. According to Karl Weintraub, man's task is like autobiography, to arrive at some form of self realization: "We are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self." (Weintraub, 1978:xiii). Autobiography exemplifies the vital impulse to order which has always underlain creativity. Autobiography, as an art form, requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself, and form a particular standpoint to impose an order and unity on the chaotic experiences of his life. He must tell the truth or nothing but the truth, which clearly distinguishes autobiography from fiction. Roy Pascal believes that since the autobiographer has all the facts of his life with him, he can see the end in his beginning and must evolve a scheme for his narration by the reconsideration of his past.

---

## 18.5 Form and Structure of Autobiography

---

Autobiographies which fill the book stores today mark a departure from the classical autobiographic literary tradition. A serious metaphysical or self-reflexive quality is simply missing from these works. Dull public confessions of statesmen only seek to repeat in an attractive context the accomplishments of the author. There is a special vanity to these books. A successful autobiography needs to be more reflexive- able to reflect upon its own process and organization.

Life writing is an act of literary creativity. The art of autobiography lies in the conscious shaping of the past. The writer is faced with three formal aspects of the genre.

### 18.5.1 Selection of Facts

Unlike the sculptor, the autobiographer is not free to choose his material. The novelist and the painter have much more freedom in this respect; hence there is a greatest inventive element in their work. The autobiographer on the other hand, may never invent or falsify his facts for a fictional purpose without giving up his claim to the name of autobiography. Since the autobiographer has all the facts of his life with him, he can see the end in his beginning. He should therefore, evolve a scheme for his narration by the reconsideration of his past. The discovery of the 'structure' for his 'life' is the creative act of the autobiographer, for the past is reactivated in the present. If he is to achieve coherence, the autobiographer must take a stand point, and that stand point will naturally be of the moment at which he reviews and interprets his life. It is from this position that he can see a unity which can be reduced to order.

#### The Organising Principle:-

How does the writer organise the material of his life into a coherent narrative ? This is the initial challenge faced by the autobiographer. The critic Borret Mandel suggests that the motivation of the autobiographer determines his self-view that emerges in the work. Hence the writers purpose becomes 'organising principle' of the work. The decision to write an autobiography for a certain purpose makes it inevitable for the artist to conceive of a *form* for his work. The form is a conception of the life which directs the shaping of the material in a particular way. Mandel uses *form* to mean *mythos* in the

Aristotelian sense a conception of wholeness and inherent order.

### 18.5.2 The Nature of Truth

Truth in autobiography is a very complex question. Most critics concede that ‘truth’ established in an autobiography is not one that is objectively verifiable for the autobiographer. Hence it is more subjective than objective. The story structure of autobiography is its mode of presenting truth- truth as process, drama, image, symbolic form: truth in an autobiography is not merely fidelity to facts or, conformity to ‘likeness’, to the way one appear to others, but rather the projection of a story of successive self-images and recognitions or distortions of these self-images by the world and it is the story of identity as the tension between self-image and social recognitions. In autobiography we are more concerned with truthful portrayal of the autobiographer’s relation to himself and to other people- the truth of belief, the truth of his outlook and the truth of his inner personality.

### 18.5.3 Tone or Point of Views

The autobiographer must choose a tone, a point of view for his narrative voice. Of course he is looking at the past from his present stance and the location is his mind. He highly relies on his memory to restructure his material. A lot of intentions enter his mind- confessional, apologetic and memoiristic. As these intentions interact and fluctuate they give rise to a form which functions both as control and revelation. A variety of forms are generated by this experimental activity: Some of these are manifest experimentally in the emergent *narrative* patterns of the recovered life. Others appear in the *dramatic* patterns of the evolving act of recovery- the autobiographical situation in which the autobiographer recognizes, inter relates and attempts to manipulate toward some truth of integrity in his relationship with his recoverable past and with his rhetorical and psychological intentions.

### 18.5.4 Autobiographical Strategies

There are various narrative strategies used by autobiographers to order their chaotic experiences of life. Apart from interweaving of dramatic presentation and reflection, they use the art of compression and clarification. Years can be compressed in a day, similar experience can be generalised. Writers use turning points to explain major changes in their lives, and to reconcile disparate ideas. The use of self images to capture the various versions of the self are a very important strategy. The individual keeps growing and changing. These self images try to capture the protean self and become a record of continuity. Autobiography is primarily an art of juxtaposed perspectives of past and present. The autobiographer must know when to dramatise and when to summarise. Sometimes memory fails to retain certain events. The autobiographer is free to use entries from letters, diary or journal. This lends a touch of authenticity to the narrative. Within his scope the autobiographer realizes immense possibilities or ordering his material imaginatively.

---

## 18.6 Check Your Progress

---

1. What is the meaning of autobiography?

.....  
.....

2. How is autobiography different from-
- A. Memoir
- .....
- B. novel
- .....
- C. biography
- .....
- D. diary
- .....
3. How does the autobiographer decide to select some incidents of his life and delete others. Would the deleted incidents of his life change the image that has emerged from his autobiography ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
4. Man's opinions and ideas keep changing in life. How does the autobiographer reconcile his disparate images in his autobiography?
- .....
- .....
- .....
5. How can we verify 'truth' in autobiography? Is truth important?
- .....
- .....
6. An autobiographer is largely dependent on his memory to recover his life from the past. Is memory reliable?
- .....
- .....

---

## 18.7 A Note on the Blacks in America

---

The United States of America is a country of multi-cultural ethnic groups. It attracted immigrants from all over the world to seek their fortunes. But living in a pluralistic, multicultural society can be very frustrating with double standards of living, marginalization, exploitation- racial, gender, religious- are some of the noticeable causes of dissatisfaction of ethnic and minority groups.

The English were the first settlers of America who were compelled to flee their homeland to escape religious rection. They were followed by people from all over the continent. The case of the Afro-Americans, however was very different. They were neither willing immigrants nor were they in search of making a fortune in the U.S. They were poor shipped, unfortunate people bought as slaves in Africa and Africans were brought to the U.S. to be used as indentured labor. The first ship carrying African slaves arrived in James Town, Virginia in 1619. As English settlers died from harsh conditions of the land more and more work as laborers. They were made to work in adverse conditions on the plantations, with scant food, clothing or shelter. Treated worse than animals, they were exploited, humiliated, beaten and segregated. Unlike other minority groups, they were systematically denied the natural process of becoming American. Their culture was suppressed, then history blotted out, they were made to believe that black is bad and evil, white is good and pure.

By 1700s the popular concept of a race based slave system was fully developed in America. In order to keep the Blacks under control, the Whites invented theories that proved their superiority over the blacks. The pigment of their skin became the symbol of their inferior status. Thus their peculiar predicament alienated them not only from their natal group but also from the group that took advantage of their labor.

By 1775 African-Americans made up 20% of the population in the American colonies, which made them the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest ethnic group after the English. The number rapidly increased due to the Atlantic slave trade. Prolonged economic exploitation and social suppression gave rise to protest and rebellion and resulted in civil war. In a country that professed to be the largest democracy, the Blacks demanded justice and equality. Finally in 1863, during the American civil war, Abraham Lincoln signed the emancipation proclamation, declaring all slaves to be freed. This was a great step forward. While post war re-construction was initially a time of progress for Afro-Americans there was a bolt from the blue. In the late 1890s the southern states enacted regressive Jim Crow Laws, which enforced racial segregation and disenanchisement.

For the sake of self-preservation, most Afro-Americans followed the Jim Crow Laws as a mask of campliance to prevent becoming victims of racial violence. To maintain self-esteem and dignity, they built their own schools, churches, banks, social clubs and other businesses. In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century these racial discriminatory acts were upheld by the U.S. Supreme court design in Plesy v/s Ferguson (1896)- denial of economic opportunity and resources nation wide, voter suppression; private acts of violence and mass racial violence against Afro-Americans unhindered by government authority became widely practiced.

The unjust, highly exploitative condition of the Afro-Americans in the South sparked the Great Migration of the Blacks to the North in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a unified effort of the African American intellectuals and the cultural elites Northern United States to lead a movement to fight violence and discrimination. The Civil Rights Movement between 1954-1968 was directed at abolishing racial discrimination against Afro-Americans, particulating in the Southern States. The march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the conditions which bought it into being were credited to putting pressure on President John F. Kennedy and later on Lyndon B. Johnson. The Civil Rights Act of 1969 banned discrimination in Public accommodation, employment and labor unions. The Voting Rights (1965) expanded the rights of the Blacks, ensuring their participation in politics. This was accom-

plished due to Black consciousness. These were the circumstances under which Molcolm X made his appearance to participate in the struggle of the Blacks.

---

## 18.8 Check Your Progress

---

1. Where did the Blacks come from?  
.....  
.....
2. Why were the Negroes discriminated against other immigrants?  
.....  
.....
3. What was the status of Negroes in America?  
.....  
.....
4. Why were the Negroes hated by the white American?  
.....  
.....
5. What is Black consciousness?  
.....  
.....
6. How did the Blacks protest against racial discrimination? What were their demands?  
.....  
.....
7. When did they finally get their civilian rights in America?  
.....  
.....

---

## 18.9 Analysis of the Autobiography of Malcom X

---

Malcolm X did not write his autobiography himself but told to Alex Haley, a Negro, a retired twenty year man of the Coast Guard turned journalist. From 1963 (The time he started on the *Autobiography*) to the assasination in Feb. 1965, Haley saw Malcolm for almost daily sessions. He even accompanied him an his trips. Haley's account of this period of how he slowly gained Malcolm's confidence and how Malcolm discovered himself, discovered the need to tell his story is faithfully recorded in an Epilogue, which is an integral part of the book. But the main narrative has the advantage

of Malcolm's voice and tone, his characteristic movement of mind and his wit- Haley has admirably succeeded in capturing these qualities. Before setting out to dictate his life story Malcolm made an agreement with Haley- "Nothing can be in this books's manuscript that I did not say and nothing can be left out that I want in it." The authenticity of the autobiographer's voice was thereby ensured.

Malcolm chose the traditional, chronological episodic form for his *Autobiography*. He starts from the beginning before he was even born. When his mother was pregnant with him, she told him later, hooded Ku Klux Klansmen, a terrorist group, surrounded the houses brandishing their rifles and shotguns, calling for the father to come out. The mother faced them bravely and told them that her husband was not home. His mother was a West Indian who looked white, but was ashamed of his white blood. The father, the Reverend Earl Little, was a Baptist minister, a dedicated follower of Marcus Garvey preaching Black nationalism and giving a call to the Black of "Back to Africa". This was to lead to another attack on the little home four years later by another group- the Black Legion. The four year old Malcolm Little, the seventh child of Rev. Earl Little remembers vividly the picture of his house being burnt down while the police and the fireman looked on. The childhood memory along with what his father told him about his two brothers he had seen killed by white men and a third lynched, was found one night on the railway track with skull crushed and body cut almost across. Malcolm as his father did too, always believed that he too would meet a violent death.

Malcolm's father believed with Marcus Garvey that freedom and self respect could never be achieved by the Blacks in America. Hence they should leave America to the white race and return to their native land, Africa. Earl Little had risked his life to help spread this philosophy among his people as he had seen four of his six brothers die by violence, and he knew that the remaining three including himself would meet the same fate, sooner or later. His intuition came true. When Malcolm was not yet six, one day his mother had a vision of his father's end. That night his father was attacked by the whites, his skull was broken and his body was cut into half.

After his father's death, the family experienced acute poverty lived on social welfare and charity. His mother started working in adverse conditions, he and his brothers were discriminated against at school. Poverty and hunger made him steal food at times, his mother broke down and was sent to mental hospital, whereas the children were sent to the state home. The family was thus destroyed by a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to support themselves. Malcolm X describes the first major turning point in his life at the end of chapter two, his realization that in white society he was not free to become what he wanted to be. The shock to the eighth-grade boy was profound, for despite his traumatic childhood memories of the destruction of his family by white society, Malcolm had embraced the white success ethic by the time he was in junior high school: "I was trying so hard to be white." What follows in chapters 3 through 9, is Malcolms account of his life as a ghetto hustler, pimp dope-addict, dope-pusher burglar and by his own account, generally degraded and vice ridden creature known as "Satan" for his anti religious attitude.

He confesses as that he had sunk to the very bottom of the American Whiteman's society when in 1946, not yet twenty one years old, he was caught by the police, tried in court on fourteen counts of crime and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment.

During the first year in prison he indulged in drugs and raged in his solitary cage, viciously cursing God and the Bible. Eventually he calmed down and on the suggestion of his sister Hilda,

resumed his studies in the prison by taking correspondence courses. He made steady progress learning English and Latin. In 1948, when he was transferred to Concord prison, he received a letter from his brother, Philbert telling him how he had discovered the 'natural religions for the black man'. He introduced him to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam which completely transformed his life. The philosophy of the nation of Islam enabled him to diagnose his own plight. To be black, metaphorically or literally, meant to wear a badge of shame which was so mystically and deeply accepted that all the practical injustices the white world might visit upon the black would seem only a kind of inverted justice, necessary in the very nature of things, the working out of a curse. The black man had no history, no country, no identity. He was alienated in time and place. He lived in self hate and was therefore willing to accept random violence as his fate.

This was the diagnosis. As for the cure, his answer was in the doctrine of the Black Muslims. This involved a history of creation, and a metaphysics which made the black man central and dominant and a secular history of kingly achievement in Africa. The divine and secular histories provided a justification of the black 'self'. In addition the doctrine provided an understanding of inequality of the white man which accounted for the present condition of the black man and justified an unquenchable hate against him. Total withdrawal from the white man and all his works was a virtue. The black man was presented with a program for life till he was relieved from the white man's presence: thrift, education cleanliness, diet (no pork) abstemiousness (no alcohol, no tobacco), manners and courtesy, puritanical morality and reverence for the home and Muslim womanhood- a general program of "wake up, clean up and stand up."

After his conversion to the Nation of Islam, Malcolm Little found a new identity- Malcolm X. While still in prison, he gave up pork and tobacco and undertook a program of reading in the library there available. He read Plato, Aristotle and all the oriental philosophy. He read and re-read the Bible. He memorised Grimm's law, read Will Durant's *Story of Civilization*, H.G.Wells *Outline of History*, Herodotus, Gandhi, pamphlets of the Abolitionist Anti-Slavery." He was trying to find the Black man's place in history.

When Malcolm Little came out of prison after seven years, he was Malcolm X. The X according to the practice of the Black Muslims, stands for the true name lost long ago in Africa to take the place of the false name thrust on him by the whites. He had been reborn and now entered upon his mission. Soon he was an accredited minister of Muhammad, the official defender of the faith and the intellectual spokesman of the movement.

**Malcolm role in Raising Black consciousness:** Certain changes that took place during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century forced the black Americans to crystallize their issues. Intellectuals, writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance posed vital questions about their past, their race, their present situation and their future in America. The process of crystallization of Black consciousness gained strength in Black Nationalism as preached by Marcus Garvey though Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was given a new direction by writers like Alain Locke, W.E.B. Dubois and Richard Wright. Between 1940 and 1955 Black intellectuals were mainly interested in integration and the chief spokesman of this group was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Whose slogans, "We shall overcome" and "Black-White together" dominated the mood of the period. Malcolm X appeared on the national scene by criticizing the movement headed by Dr. King and asserting Black Consciousness



in the slogan “Liberation by any means necessary” Malcolm X extolled everything that belonged to the blacks- black skin, black history, black- culture. He forced the white man to listen to the black man’s demands for human rights without which civil rights had no meaning. This affirmation of blackness distinguished him from others. By exhorting his people to take pride in themselves and whatever belonged to them, he isolated the white man. He squarely put the blame on the whiteman’s door for racism which was deeply rooted in the white people collectively.

According to Malcolm X, Negro was a false identity foisted on the blacks by the white civilization to justify the various myths that go to the making of white collective consciousness. So when he addressed his people, “my *beautiful* black brothers and sisters”, he was not only eulogising the black race but everything that is not white. More than anything, Malcolm X was responsible for the growing consciousness and new militancy of the black people. He said aloud those things which blacks had been saying among themselves. He spoke directly and eloquently to black men, analysing their situation, their predicament, events as they happened, explaining what it all meant for a black man in America. During the time Malcolm X was working with Elijah Muhammad, his talk of black independence was based on a demand for a separate land for the blacks. He was not in favour of integration. His success and specially the fact that he was invited to colleges, where Muhammad would never be invited, led to jealousy and as Malcolm reports in his autobiography, contributed to his silencing as soon as good justification appeared. “I learned from the former secretary of Muhammad that while he was praising me to my face, he was tearing me apart behind my back.” Orders for Malcolm’s death were issued from Mosque seven where he used to preach. An assistant was asked to wire his car to explode when the ignition key was turned, but the assistant was so impressed by Malcolm’s loyalty to the Nation of Islam that instead of carrying out order warned him and saved his life.

The estrangement with Elijah Muhammad and the revelation that he was a false prophet shattered the world of Malcolm X and the shape of the life he had been living for twelve years. “I felt as though something in nature had failed, like the sun or stars. It was that incredible a phenomenon to me- something too stupendous to conceive”, he writes . He finally arrived at a psychological divorce from the Nation of Islam.

He had lots of opportunities to plan and build an organization from the ghetto masses who has already interested him with his image of leadership among them, that could help cure the black man in North America of the sickness which had enslaved him. Instead he took a decision which was once again to change his life: He decided to go for a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The illumination at Mecca made Malcolm X feel like a complete human being for the first time, and he assumed a new name to symbolize the new sense of identity El-Hajj-Malik El-Shabazz. During his Hajj, Malcolm met people of various shades and nationalities who were all united in one brotherhood. In America, ‘white man’ had meant specific attitudes and actions towards black man. But here, in the Muslim world, he saw that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else. That day was the start of a ‘radical alteration in his whole outlook about ‘white’ men. He realized he was a ‘racist’ . The white men he met in Mecca acted as if they were his brothers. The whole Hajj experience was so ennobling that it transformed him from within and made him a peaceful soul. When someone asked him what about the Hajj had impressed him, he replied “The brother hood ! The people of all races, colors from all over the world coming together as one ! It has proved to me

the power of the One God.” With a new insight into the true religion of Islam, he has acquired a better understanding of America’s entire racial dilemma.

From Jeda Malcolm flew to Bierut, the seaport capital of Lebanon, and from there to Nigeria and then to Ghana. In Africa he spoke at many Universities and interacted with various organizations, making Nigerian radio and Television programme appearances. He spoke at jam packed press club conferences and sought support and mutual communication between Africans and Afro-Americans whose struggles were interlocked. In Ghana he was pleasantly surprised to discover that his name was a household name. They were ingratiated by his visit to Africa “Malcolm X is the first Afro-American leader of national standing to make an independent trip to Africa since Dr. Dubois came to Ghana”, they remarked Malcolm was stunned by the hospitality and public reception that he received from the officials of the press in Ghana. They had even arranged to pay for his hotel expenses. In his speeches he envisaged a Pan-African unity which would also include Afro-Americans. He met Ambassadors and diplomats, heads of state like Nkrumah etc and exchanged his views with them. “They welcomed him, heard him and gave him the same importance as they would to any international leader”.

Back home, as he landed at the Kennedy Airport, he had to face one of the biggest press conferences where he was pounded with questions about his attitude to American “Racism”, his experiences of the Hajj. He answered each question with his modified beliefs and a new found conviction of ‘brotherhood of man’. He placed the Afro-American problem of racism in a broader context of Human rights violation and suggested taking it to the United Nations. His pilgrimage had broadened his scope and had given a new insight. He envisaged all ‘races’ all ‘colors’ living as one, worshipping as one. He condemned the divisive politics of some of the whites which had caused problems in many countries. From being a separatist, Malcolm X had become a conditional integrationist and believed in the philosophy of humanity- “I am a human being first and foremost and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.” But before he could develop these ideas further and implement them, he met a violent end which left his work incomplete. Thus ended the life of Malcolm X.

---

### 18.10 Check Your Progress

---

1. Alex Haley wrote the autobiography of Malcolm X can it therefore be called an autobiography?

.....  
.....

2. How can the Epilogue in Autobiography of Malcolm X be considered an integral part of the autobiography?

.....  
.....

3. Did Malcolm X have a normal childhood?

.....  
.....

4. What was family life of the blacks like, as protruded by Malcolm X?  
.....  
.....
5. What circumstances compelled Malcolm to become a part of the underworld? Was there a way out for him?  
.....  
.....
6. How did Malcolm spend time in the prison? Was he an evil man?  
.....  
.....
7. What effect did the conversion to the nation of Islam have on Malcolm X.  
.....  
.....
8. How did he became so popular?  
.....  
.....
9. What effect did the second conversion have on him?  
.....  
.....

---

### 18.11 Some Interpretation of the Autobiography of Malcom X

---

When a complex and controversial figure writes a book that has achieved the distinction and popularity of Malcolm X, it is inevitable that efforts will be made to place his work in the perspective of literary tradition. We shall briefly state here the positions taken on the autobiography of Malcolm X by some of the major critics.

Barret John Mandel has identified in Malcolm X's story a paradigm of the traditional conversion narrative. Other critics like Warner Berthoff, Carol Ohmann and Louis E. Lomex have pointed out a strange resemblance of the *Autobiography* to the traditional conventional narrative.

The original dedication of the autobiography, which Malcolm X gave to Haley before he even started dictating his story, places the work firmly in the ancient tradition of conversion, the generic tradition of an exemplary life.

This book I dedicate to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, who found me here in America in the muck and mire of the filthiest civilization and society on this earth and

pulled me out, cleaned me up, and stood me on my feet, and made me the man that I am today.

This dedication (later cancelled) motivates more than half the *Autobiography*. The book would be the story of a conversion and Malcolm X's statement summarises in capsule form the essential pattern of such narratives: in the moment of conversion a new identity is discovered. Further, this turning point sharply divides the text into two parts- *before* and *after* time scheme for the narrative; the movement of the self from 'lost' to 'found' constitutes the plot And finally, the very nature of the experience supplies an evangelical motive for autobiography. From chapter I to XVI we have a story that falls neatly into two sections, roughly equal in length, devoted to his former life as a sinner (chapter 3-9) and to his present life as one of Elijah Muhammads ministers (chapter 10-15). This two part structure is punctuated by two decisive experiences. His repudiation of the white world of his youth in Michigan and his conversion to Islam in prison at Norfolk, Massachussetts.

But the autobiography does not end here. Twelve years after his conversion Malcolm was to experience two events that destroyed the very premise of the autobiography he had set out to write in 1963. First came his break with Elijah Muhammad (chapter 16, "out") and then he made a pilgrimage to Mecca (chapter 17) where he underwent a second conversion to what he now regarded as the true religion of Islam. The illumination at Mecca made Malcolm "feel" like a complete human being' for the first time and he assumed a new name to symbolize his new identity, El-Hajj Malik-El-Shabazz. In chapter 18 and 19 we see Malcolm X discarding the old 'hate and violence' image of the militant preacher of Elijah Muhammads Nation of Islam and setting out to create a design for his new self, but before he could do that he was gunned down brutally on Feb,21, 1965.

Malcolm X has been identified as the St. Paul of the Black Muslim movement, others liken his Autobiography to *The Confessions of St. Augustine (AD 398-400)* and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (1660)* which are considered the classics of Western spiritual Autobiography.

The image that appears from Malcolm's *Autobiography* is not of a narrow and fanatic preacher as the books symmetrical structure finally emphasizes personal growth and intellectual receptivity more than it does doctrine. The structure of the double conversion, of course, itself emphasizes the expanding dynamic quality of Malcolms' personality. And further emphasis is given to this effect by the fact that the second conversion is not narrow and sectarian creed but to a worldwide religions and political perspective.

The apparent climax to Malcolm's book is in two seminal chapters, the journey to Mecca and Africa which encapsule the twin religious and political thrusts of Malcolm's career. The last chapter, titled "1965" tends to be anticlimactic. It gives the impression that Malcoms does not quite know how or where to move next. Haley's epilogue, which is integral to completing the chronology of Malcolm's life, emphasizes the false starts, the indecisions, the gropings of Malcolm's last days. In one sense the ending of the *Autobiography* is weak. The book does not end- as a didactic spiritual autobiography might end- at symbolic point. But again, the variation from neat structure actually has a positive effect. The ending enforces the questioning nature of Malcolm's personality, making it seem to be too big to be stemmed up. Malcolm's growth has not stopped with Mecca and Africa but is on the threshold of another expanding cycle.

---

## 18.12 Autobiography as a Political Testament

---

Readers have responded variously to the reading of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Some read it as a historical document of Black resistance in America, while others interpret the narrative as an expression of a complete self. This pose of Malcolm X as an experienced man is effective for one who is to tell us what he discovered. Warner Berthoff has admirably defined Malcolm X's 'extraordinary power to change and be changed' as the distinctive rule of his life. This sense of the completed self locates the *Autobiography* in the literary tradition of the political testament in which a ruler or statesman sets down for the particular benefit of his people a summary of his own experience and wisdom. The rhetorical posture of Malcolm X in the last chapter would seem to confirm this interpretation, for it is indeed that of the elder statesman summing up his completed life, a life that has, as it were, already ended.

---

## 18.13 Check Your Progress

---

1. What is the organising principle of Malcolm X's autobiography?  
.....  
.....
2. Do you think Malcolm's hatred for the White man justified?  
.....  
.....
3. Do you think after Malcolm X enters public life his autobiography reads like a memoir?  
.....  
.....
4. What was Malcolm's intention of writing his autobiography?  
.....  
.....
5. Would you consider the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* a historical record of the Blacks in America or a personal record of a black martyr?  
.....  
.....
6. Why do we like to read autobiographies?  
.....  
.....
7. What are the strategies used in this autobiography to show drastic changes in Malcolm's character?

- .....
- .....
8. What classical mode of Autobiography does Malcolm's narrative resemble?
- .....
- .....

---

### 18.14 Let Us Some Up

---

Thus we see that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* serves at once as a religious and political cause, the cause of the religion of Islam and the cause of Black freedom. In the latter chapters, specially, more and more of the text is devoted to explanations of essential doctrine and to social and political commentary and analysis.

---

### 18.15 Review Questions

---

1. How will you define an autobiography? Compare and contrast autobiography with other autobiographical literature.
2. Discuss the various autobiographical strategies used by the writers giving references from *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.
3. Discuss *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as a historical document.

## UNIT-19

---

### ADRIENNE RICH: *SPLIT AT THE ROOT*

---

#### Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Study Guide
- 19.2 About the Age : Post Modernism
- 19.3 About the Author : Adrienne Rich
- 19.4 About the Text : *Split at the Root*
  - 19.4.1 The Text : Famous Quotes and Excerpts
  - 19.4.2 Critical Analysis
  - 19.4.3 Glossary
- 19.5 Self Assessment Questions.
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Answers to SAQs
- 19.8 Review Questions.
- 19.9 Bibliography

---

#### 19.0 Objectives

---

This unit aims at teaching you

1. Adrienne Rich as a writer in general and details about her life and works.
2. *Split at the Root* as an Essay on Jewish Identity.
3. The injustice, the racial discrimination suffered by various sects of the Jews.
4. The struggle of the Blacks and the Jews against the oppressors.
5. Rich's divided personality due to split at the very origin – the white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle class feminist, exmatriate southern. Her conflicting roles and ambitions reflected in the essay.
6. History and art of fiction in this essay (an imaginative transformation of reality which is no way passive.)

---

#### 19.1 Study Guide

---

You should study this essay as a psychological development of Rich's personality, her anguish against the injustice met by the Jews, her zeal for freedom from various shackles. The Blacks as well as

the Jews suffered at the hands of the oppressors. You can trace the three big movements of the era in this essay- the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Liberation Movement and the lesbian movement. The SAQs and their answers will help you understand the essay. For difficult terms you should consult the glossary for clarification. You should prepare the essay type questions given at the end of the unit for your examination. Material has been collected for you from various sources including Britannica and Encyclopedia.

---

### 19.2.1 About the Age : Post Modernism

---

Adrienne Rich belongs to the era of Post World War II which represents violence, injustice, revolt and revolution against slavery, against apartheid, against repression of woman. The three major movements namely the Civil Rights movements, the Women's liberation movement, the lesbian or gay movement, the demand for more freedom in various fields – political, social or religious are reflected in the literature of the era. Taking the issues to the extreme or breaking the taboos or boundaries is the key factor in the literature of the age. As a result the Black literature, the feminist texts, the lesbian texts became more and more popular. A 'room' of one's own, personal freedom to do, to express, to react, to anguish was in demand. To whom injustice was done, they tried to do injustice in return or at least had a suppressed feeling of injustice done and to return too. Ann Frank, Beverly Smith, Simone de Beauvoir, James Baldwin, Angela Y. Davis, Lucy S. Davidowitz are some of the leading writers of the age.

The poems and essays from this period contributed greatly to contemporary understanding of the social construction of gender; they also generated controversy. Critics objected to the didacticism in Rich's poetry and considered her feminist/lesbian vision too narrow. Rich's strategies are more usefully seen as a counterpoint to the pervasiveness of patriarchal culture, which harms men as well as women. While Rich may claim, for example, that women together create "a whole new poetry" in poems such as "Transcendental Etude," her ultimate vision is broader. The "lost brother" Rich describes in "Natural Resources" "was never the rapist," but rather "a fellow creature / with natural resources equal to our own" (*The Dream of a Common Language*).

Rich sees undercurrents of violence in the materialism of the 1980s and 1990s that neither poets nor individuals can afford to ignore. These themes, as well as the role of poetry in political and social life, are also explored in her book of essays *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993).

To a significant extent, all poets are concerned with transformation. The very making of a poem involves a transformation from perceived reality or experience into a verbal utterance shaped by the poet's imagination and craft. For Adrienne Rich, however, transformation goes beyond the act of writing; it extends to the culture at large through the poem's ability to challenge given assumptions and offer new visions. Rich delineated her poetics relatively early in her career in a 1971 essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision":

For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive... Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to



the very life you are living at that moment.

Transformation is thus private as well as public, and Rich's poetry and essays have explored the space where these realms intersect, incorporating feminist, lesbian, historical, non-capitalist, humanitarian, multi-racial, and multi-cultural points of view. The form of her poems has evolved with her content, moving from tight formalist lyrics to more experimental poems using a combination of techniques: long lines, gaps in the line, interjections of prose, juxtaposition of voices and motifs, didacticism, and informal expression. Indeed, no poet's career reflects the cultural and poetic transformations undergone in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> century better than that of Adrienne Rich.

---

### 19.3 About the Author : Adrienne Rich

---

**Adrienne Cecile Rich** is an American poet, essayist and feminist. She has been called "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century".

Adrienne Cecile Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 16, 1929. Her father, Arnold Rice Rich, was a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins Medical School. Her mother, Helen Jones Rich, studied musical composition and was a concert pianist but after becoming a wife and mother, she focused her life entirely on her husband and two daughters. Adrienne Rich's early poetic influence stemmed from her father who encouraged her to not only read but also to write her own poetry. Her interest in literature was sparked within her father's library where she read the work of writers such as Matthew Arnold, William Blake, Thomas Carlyle, John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Adrienne Rich and her younger sister were taught at home by their mother until Adrienne joined a school in the fourth grade.

Rich attended Radcliffe College. During her college education she focused primarily on poetry, which was taught to her by male professors. In 1951, her last year at Radcliffe College, Rich's first collection of poetry, *A Change of World*, was selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. The contest judge for that year, the poet W. H. Auden, wrote an introduction to this volume. Her collection was highly influenced by the works of male poets whom she studied. Adrienne Rich was well respected as a rising poet and was acknowledged for her modesty and respect of elders. Following her graduation, Rich travelled across Europe, including England between 1952-1953.

In 1953 at the age of twenty-four, Adrienne Rich married Alfred Haskell Conrad, a professor at Harvard University. Three years later, she published her second volume, *The Diamond Cutters*. Yet, it was not until her third volume, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, which appeared in 1963, that she gained national prominence. Rich and her husband lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1953 to 1966, and had three sons. David, their first son was born in 1955, followed by Paul in 1957, and Jacob in 1959. With three young children and a husband, Rich poured her energy into the role of wife and mother leading her writing to become less of a priority. These conflicting roles and ambitions left her unfulfilled, which she expressed later in her works. Adrienne Rich's travels continued during 1961-1962 in the Netherlands on behalf of a second Guggenheim Fellowship.

In 1966, Rich moved with her family, which then included three sons, to New York City and became increasingly involved in the sociopolitical activism of the day. Her husband took a teaching position at City College of New York where, in 1968, she joined the staff as a writing instructor. Here,

Rich also began her work with disadvantaged students. During these years Rich held positions of lecturer and adjunct professor at both Swarthmore College and Columbia University School of the Arts. Trouble began arising in Adrienne and Alfred's marriage during the early 1960's causing them to separate. Soon following their separation, Alfred Conrad committed suicide in 1970.

Adrienne Rich's activism began in the 1960's with involvement in the student and anti-war movements. In the 1960's and 1970's, her commitment to the women's movement grew and was demonstrated through her poetry and writings. In 1964, Rich joined the New Left, which spurred a period of both political and personal growth. After Rich moved to New York, she became a civil rights and anti-war activist, as well as a radical feminist active in the women's rights movement.

Rich's works which included, *Necessities of Life* (1966), *Leaflets* (1969), and *Will to Change* (1971), reflect an evolving, expanding sense of poetic form and social engagement. Rich became active in the women's liberation movement from this point forward. In 1974, her collection *Diving Into the Wreck* received the National Book Award for Poetry; Rich, however, refused the award individually, instead joining with two other female poets (Alice Walker and Audre Lorde) to accept it on behalf of all silenced women.

Rich's poetry of the 1980s and 1990s cast a broader net, once again exploring the themes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but with greater acuteness and range<sup>1</sup>. The award-winning volume *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991) and *Dark Fields of the Republic* (1995) in particular map out discursive spaces engaging private and public histories. During the 1990's Rich became an active member of numerous advisory boards such as the Boston Woman's Fund, National Writers Union, Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa, and New Jewish Agenda.

Adrienne Rich has received numerous awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the inaugural Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize (1986), the Brandeis Creative Arts Medal, the Common Wealth Award, the William Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement, and the National Poetry Association Award for Distinguished Service to the Art of Poetry. She has also been awarded a MacArthur Fellowship (1994), an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, a Lifetime Achievement Award (1999), the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize (1992), the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the Shelley Memorial Award (1970), the National Book Award for Poetry (1974) for *Diving into the Wreck*, the Wallace Stevens Award (1996), the Poets' Prize (1992) for *Atlas of the Difficult World*, and the Frost Medal (1992).

In 1997, Adrienne Rich refused the National Medal of Arts, stating that "I could not accept such an award from President Clinton or this White House because the very meaning of art, as I understand it, is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration." Another quote from the same speech outlines her view of poetry: "Art means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of the power which holds it hostage."

Rich demonstrated talent early in life, writing poems under her father's tutelage as a child. By the time she graduated from Radcliffe College her first book, *A Change of World* (1951), had been selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets Prize. This and her second book, *The Diamond Cutters* (1955), capture alienation and loss through the distancing devices of Modernist formalism, but both the books contain poems that hint at her future thematic concerns. "Storm Warnings," from *A*

*Change of World*, speaks of people “Who live in troubled regions” and foreshadows unspecified but disturbing change:

Weather abroad and weather in the heart alike come on  
Regardless of prediction.

“Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” offers an image of power revealed and restrained by domestic arts. Three poems in *The Diamond Cutters* - “Picture by Vuillard,” “Love in the Museum” and “Ideal Landscape” - question the version of reality offered by art, while “Living in Sin” depicts a woman’s growing dissatisfaction with her lover and living situation.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963), which reflects the tensions she experienced as a wife and mother in the 1950s, marks a substantial change in Rich’s style and subject matter. “The experience of motherhood,” Rich wrote in “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity” (1982), “was eventually to radicalize me.” Part of that radicalizing process involved Rich’s relationship to both poetry and history. In 1956 she began dating her poems by year:

I did this because I was finished with the idea of a poem as a single, encapsulated event, a work of art complete in itself; I knew my life was changing, my work was changing, and I needed to indicate to readers my sense of being engaged in a long, continuous process.

The act of dating her poems amounted to a rejection of New Critical values that placed the poem outside of its cultural and historical contexts. Informed by a feminist sensibility, many of the poems in *Snapshots* use free verse and a more personal voice to express anger, to acknowledge a need for change, and to address or recover other women writers. The book’s title piece, a ten-poem sequence written in free verse, creates an album of women’s lives under male domination. The sequence moves back and forth in time and content, generalizing about the domestic repression of contemporary women and referring to female historical figures.

To many critics “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*” presented a radical and problematic departure from Rich’s earlier formalism, but in “When We Dead Awaken” Rich rejected the poem as “too literary, too dependent on allusion” and male literary authorities. Nevertheless, Rich’s later poetry would rely heavily on allusions to literary, historical and contemporary events and persons.

Rich’s next three books - *Necessities of Life* (1966), *Leaflets* (1969), and *The Will to Change* (1971) - reflect the social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Like other poets of her generation, such as Denise Levertov, Robert Bly and W. S. Merwin, she wrote poems protesting the Vietnam War, particularly in *Leaflets*. Images of death pervade *Necessities of Life* as the poet struggled to create a life no longer shaped by the predetermined rituals and social roles. Emily Dickinson the American poet became a recurring figure in her poems, foreshadowing her influential essay, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson” (1975). Rich’s poems also became increasingly experimental, employing longer, contrapuntal lines. She adapted the ghazal, a Persian form traditionally used for expressions of love, to convey social and political comment. At the same time, Rich began to distrust her medium because of its close ties to patriarchal culture. “This is the oppressor’s language // yet I need it to talk to you,” she writes in “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children,” a five-poem sequence with prose segments in *The Will to Change*.

Informed more distinctly by a feminist analysis of history and culture, *Diving into the Wreck*

(1973) marks another turning point in Rich's career. In it she expresses her anger regarding women's position in Western culture more directly and alludes to problematic dualities or images of Otherness. Language, too, remains on trial for its duplicitous nature. The book's title poem, one of the 20th century's most significant poems, uses an androgynous diver to examine a culture wrecked by its limited view of history and myth. As with *Leaflets* and *The Will to Change*, this book's tone ranges from critical to accusatory. When *Diving into the Wreck* was awarded the National Book Award in 1974, Rich rejected the prize as an individual but accepted it, with a statement co-authored by Audre Lorde and Alice Walker, on behalf of all unknown women writers.

Rich's essays and poetry from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s have been considered her most radical, in part because in them she rejects her earlier use of androgyny and seems to make a case for feminist separatism. "There are words I cannot choose again: 'humanism androgyny,'" she writes in "Natural Resources," in which a female miner replaces the androgynous diver of "Diving into the Wreck." Rich defines and addresses her villain more clearly: a patriarchal culture that inherently devalues anything female or feminine. The impulse behind the search, however, remains the same: finding a way to "reconstitute the world" (*The Dream of a Common Language*, 1978). Rich advocates a woman-centered vision of creative energies that she aligns with lesbianism in her essays "'It is the Lesbian in Us'" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, 1979) and "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" (*Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 1986). She also criticizes the impact of patriarchal culture on motherhood in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). Other essays as well as poems in *The Dream of a Common Language* and *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981) offer important new readings of female literary and historical figures. Rich's lesbian love sequence, "Twenty-One Love Poems," also dates from this time and is as striking for its sensuousness as it is for its philosophical probing.

Rich's books published in the mid- to late 1980s, *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986) and *Time's Power* (1989), examine her relationship to her Jewish origins and to the men in her life, as well as what it means to be a feminist in the Reagan era. Her landscapes include not only Southern California, to which she moved in 1984, but also South Africa, Lebanon, Poland and Nicaragua. She addresses a public "you" held accountable for her quality of life: her parents, her former husband, her current lover, and a self wrecked with arthritic and psychic pain. What remains consistent is Rich's insistence that poetry remain linked to a political and social context. "Poetry never stood a chance/ of standing outside history," she writes in the second poem of her sequence "North American Time" (1986). "Living Memory" in *Time's Power* is a transitional piece, recalling the poet's past explorations in "Diving into the Wreck" and looking ahead to her future work. The poem instructs:

Open the book of tales you knew by heart, begin driving the old roads again, repeating the old sentences, which have changed minutely from the wordings you remembered.

Rich follows her instructions in *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991), one of her most accomplished books of poetry. The title piece, a 13-poem sequence, invites comparison with other long poems of the American experience by Walt Whitman, Muriel Rukeyser, Allen Ginsberg and Robert Pinsky. Its general theme of knowing one's country, however painful and disappointing, continues in *Dark Fields of the Republic* (1995), in which the poet's examination of America's problems uses the phrase "not somewhere else, but here" from *The Dream of a Common Language*. In 1995 she

increases the load this phrase must bear, claiming in “What Kind of Times Are These” that “the edge of dread” along which she walks is not somewhere else, but here, our country moving closer to its own truth and dread, its own ways of making people disappear.

In her latest book of poems, *Midnight Salvage* (1999), Rich continues this discussion from the perspective of an aging activist poet looking back on her life. She alludes to several of her previous poems and books, and poses several questions: Has anything useful been salvaged from the wreck of culture Rich has been exploring for more than 30 years? Have art and language served society and the poet well? Does material comforts blind Americans to the lessons of the past? Her questions are not casually answered, and the book’s tone borders on despair. “I wanted to go somewhere / the brain had not yet gone,” she writes in “Letters to a Young Poet,” “I wanted not to be / there so alone.” The “wild patience” that helped Rich to survive into the late 1970s and early 1980s has become the “horrible patience” the poet needs to find language she can use effectively. Images of windows appear throughout the book as if the poet, enclosed and cut off from the world, were struggling to see it clearly. In the book’s closing sequence, “A Long Conversation,” Rich wonders if it is the “charred, crumpled, ever-changing human language” that “sways and presses against the pane,” blocking her view.

Rich is best known as a key figure in feminist poetry. Her dream of a better language and a better world, however, aligns her with the visionary poetess of Shelley and Whitman, and with American transcendentalists such as Emerson. The documentary nature of her work - her poetry of witness and protest - is in keeping with the work of poets such as Carl Sandburg, Robert Hayden, Muriel Rukeyser, Gwendolyn Brooks, Carolyn Forché, and the lesser-known 19th-century poets in England and the United States who wrote about social and domestic injustice. Rich’s exploration of the points where private lives and public acts intersect, as well as the confessional mode her poems sometimes employ suggests the work of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. Her frank discussion and celebration of lesbian sexuality have contributed to a more open discussion of homosexuality today, not only within the walls of the academy but in the culture at large: it is difficult to imagine the work of Marilyn Hacker or Minnie Bruce Pratt without Rich as a precursor. Finally, her insistence in the 1980s that feminism move beyond the white middle class and be more sensitive to the needs of women of colour and of varying economic classes aligns her with a number of poets: Audre Lord, June Jordan, Joy Harjo, Judy Grahn, and Irish poet Eavan Boland. This is a **short** list of links and influences, suggesting the complex and generative quality a poetics of transformation can possess. Her uses of anger, domestic imagery, and the poetic sequence or long poem suggest other possibilities.

### **Works by Adrienne Rich**

#### **Non fiction**

- *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 1976
- *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose*, 1966-1978, 1979
- *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose*, 1979-1985, 1986 (Includes the noted essay: Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence)
- *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, 1993
- *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations*, 2001

- *Poetry and Commitment: An Essay*, 2007
- *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society*, 1997-2008, 2009
- Poetry**
- *A Change of World*, 1951
- *The Diamond Cutters, and Other Poems*, 1955
- *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, 1963
- *Necessities of Life*, 1966
- *Selected Poems*, 1967
- *Leaflets*, 1969
- *The Will to Change*, 1971
- *Diving into the Wreck*, 1973
- *Poems: Selected and New*, 1950-1974, 1975
- *Twenty-one Love Poems*, 1976
- *The Dream of a Common Language*, 1978
- *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems* 1978-1981, 1981
- *Sources*, 1983
- *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New*, 1950-1984, 1984
- *Your Native Land, Your Life*, 1986
- *Time's Power: Poems*, 1985-1988, 1989
- *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems*, 1988-1991, 1991
- *Collected Early Poems*, 1950-1970, 1993
- *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems*, 1991-1995, 1995
- *Selected Poems*, 1950-1995, 1996
- *Midnight Salvage: Poems*, 1995-1998, 1999
- *Fox: Poems*, 1998-2000, 2001
- *The School Among the Ruins: Poems*, 2000-2004, 2004
- *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth: Poems*, 2004-2006, 2007

---

#### **19.4 About the Text : *Split at the Root***

---

This essay titled “Split at the Root : An Essay on Jewish Identity” was written by Adrienne Rich in 1928 for Evelyn Torton Beck’s *Nice Jewish Girls : A Lesbian Anthology*. Later it was reprinted in

*Fathers*, an anthology edited by Ursula Owen for Virago Ltd. in London, and published in the United States by Pantheon. The essay is full of autobiographical details about the Riches and her in-laws. It discusses various issues like the controversy between the gentile and the Jews, anti-Semitism, the various religious traditions of the Hebrews, the Jews, the Holocaust, the injustice met by the Jews as well as the Blacks at the hands of the Whites. The writer herself as a post modernist personality suffers to find originated had disconnected from various angles namely the white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle class, feminist, exmatriate, southern- split at the root itself. If she looks at one reality, the other disappears. The various movements of the era namely the Civil Rights movements, the Women's Liberation and the Lesbian movement are reflected in the essay as the writer has been an active advocate of freedom from oppression. Rich has expressed her ideas as a radical visionary and activist for Jewish social identity.

Adrienne Rich, in her essay "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity", writes about her experiences growing up in a predominately gentile society as a half-Jewish, half-Gentile being. She illuminates the ideas that there are certain assemblages of people in the world that are forced to veil their true identity in order to be accepted in the social order. She engages in enlightening the reader about the different methods that some undergo to suppress who they really are, through faith, race, and social attributes, and also about the harms and persecutions these people endure. In this piece though it is portrayed that perhaps her most predominate theme is that a person becomes an element of his/her society and that people, no matter what their faith, race, or social standing, should begin applying new standards toward acceptance.

---

#### 19.4.1 The Text : Famous Quotes and Excerpts

---

In a long poem written in 1960, when I was thirty one years, old, I described myself as "Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew, / Yankee nor Rebel." I was still trying to have it both ways : to be neither / nor, trying to live ( with my Jewish husband and three children more Jewish in ancestry than I) in the predominantly gentile Yankee academic world of Cambridge, Massachuset.

\*\*\*

It was only in college, when I read a poem by Karl Shapiro beginning "To hate the Negro and avoid the Jew / in the curriculum" that it flashed on me that there was an untold side to my father's story of his student years. He looked recognizably Jewish, was short and slender in build with dark wiry hair and deep-set eyes, high forehead and curved nose.

My mother is a gentile. In Jewish law I cannot count myself a Jew. If it is true that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Virginia Woolf) – and I myself have affirmed this – then even according to lesbian theory, I cannot ( or need not?) count myself a Jew.

\*\*\*

According to Nazi logic, my two Jewish grandparents would have made me a

Mischling, first-degree- nonexempt from the Final Solution.

\*\*\*

Two memories : I am in the play reading at school of the *Merchant of Venice*. Whatever Jewish law says, I am quite sure I was seen as Jewish ( with a reassuringly gentile mother) in that double vision that bigotry allows. I am the only Jewish girl in the class, and I am playing Portia. As always, I read my part aloud for my father the night before, and he tells me to convey, with my voice, more scorn and contempt with the word “Jew”: “Therefore, Jew....” I have to say the word out, and say it loudly. I was encouraged to pretend to be a non Jewish child acting a non Jewish character who has to speak the word. “Jew” emphatically. Such a child would not have had trouble with the part. But I must have had trouble with the part, if only because the word itself was really taboo, I can see that there was a kind of terrible, bitter bravado about my father’s way of handling this. And who would not dissociate from Shylock in order to identify with Portia ? As a Jewish child who was also a female, I loved Portia – and, like every other Shakespearean heroine, she proved a treacherous role model.

A year or so later I am in another play, *The School for Scandal*, in which a notorious spendthrift is described as having “many excellent friends.... among the Jews.” In neither case was anything explained, either to me or to the class at large, about this scorn for Jews and the disgust surroundings Jews and money. Money, when Jews wanted it, had it, or lent it to others, seemed to take on a peculiar nastiness; Jews and money had some peculiar and unspeakable relation.

At this same school – in which we had Episcopalian hymns and prayers, and read aloud through the Bible morning after morning – I gained the impression that Jews were in the Bible and mentioned in English literature, that they had been persecuted centuries ago by the worked Inquisition, but that they seemed not to exist in everyday life. These were the 1940s, and we were told a great deal about the battle of Britain, the noble French Resistance fighters, the brave, starving Dutch – but I did not learn to the resistance of the Warsaw ghetto until I left home.

\*\*\*

But it was white social Christianity, rather than any particular Christian sect, that the world was founded on. The very word Christian was used as a synonym for virtuous, just, peace loving, generous, etc., etc. The norm was Christian: “religion: none” was indeed not acceptable. Anti Semitism was so intrinsic as not to have a name. I don’t recall exactly being taught that the Jews killed Jesus – “Christ Killer” seems too strong a term for the bland Episcopal vocabulary – but certainly we got the impression that the Jews had been caught out in a terrible mistake, failing to recognize the true Messiah, and were thereby less advanced in moral and spiritual sensibility. The Jews had actually allowed money lenders in the Temple ( again, the unexplained obsession with Jews and money). They were of the past, archaic, primitive, as older ( and darker) cultures are supposed to be primitive; Christianity was lightness, fairness, peace on



each, and combined the feminine appeal of “The meek shall inherit the earth” with the masculine stride of “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

\*\*\*

Anne Frank’s diary and many other personal narratives of the Holocaust were still unknown or unwritten. But it came to me that every one of those piles of corpses, mountains of shoes and clothing had contained, simply, individuals, who had believed, as I now believed of myself, that they were intended to live out of a life of some kind of meaning, that the world possessed some kind of sense and order; yet this had happened to them. And I, who believed my life was intended to be so interesting and meaningful, was connected to those dead by something – not just mortality but a taboo name, a hated identity. Or was I – did I really have to be? Writing this not, I feel belated rage that I was so impoverished by the family and social worlds I lived in, that I had to try to figure out by myself what this did indeed mean for me. That I had never been taught about resistance, only about passing. That I had no language for anti-Semitism itself.

\*\*\*

To be able to ask even the child’s astonished question Why do they hate us so? means knowing how to say “we.” the guilt of not knowing the guilty of perhaps having betrayed my parents or even those victims, those survivors, through mere curiosity – these also froze in me for years the impulse to find out more about the Holocaust.

\*\*\*

I challenge my father: “Why haven’t you told me that I am Jewish? Why do you never talk about being a Jew?” He answers measuredly, “You know that I have never denied that I am a Jew. But it’s not important to me. I am a scientist, a deist. I have no use for organized religion. I choose to live in a world of many kinds of people. There are Jews I admire and others whom I despise. I am a person, not simply a Jew.” The words are as I remember them, not perhaps exactly as spoken. But that was the message. And it contained enough truth as all denial drugs itself on partial truth – so that I remained for the time being unanswerable, leaving me high and dry, split at the root, gasping for clarity, for air.

\*\*\*

Easy to call that intensity Jewish; and I have no doubt that passion is one of the qualities required for survival over generations of persecution. But what happens when passion is rent from its original base, when the white gentile world is softly saying “Be more like us and you can be almost one of us”? What happens when survival seems to mean closing off one emotionally artery after another? His forebears in Europe had been forbidden to travel or expelled from county after another, had special taxes levied on them if they left the city walls, had been forced to wear special clothes and badges, restricted to the poorest neighborhoods. He had wanted to be a “free spirit,” to travel widely, among “all kinds of people.” yet in his prime of life he lived in an

increasingly withdrawn world, in his house up on a hill in a neighborhood where Jews were not supposed to be able to buy property, depending almost exclusively on interactions with his wife and daughters to provide emotional connectedness. In his home, he created a private defense system so elaborate that even as he was dying, my mother felt unable to take freely with his colleagues or others who might have helped her. Of course, she acquiesced in this.

\*\*\*

I had three sons before I was thirty, and during those years I often felt that to be a Jewish woman, a Jewish mother, was to be perceived in the Jewish family as an entirely physical being, a producer and nourisher of children. The experience of motherhood was eventually to radicalize me. But before that, I was encountering the institution of motherhood most directly in a Jewish cultural version; and I felt rebellious, moody, defensive, unable to sort out what was Jewish from what was simply motherhood or female destiny. (I lived in Cambridge, not Brooklyn; but there, too, restless, educated women sat on benches with baby strollers, half stunned, not by Jewish cultural expectations, but by the middle class American social expectations of the 1950s.

\*\*\*

In the permissive liberalism of academic Cambridge, you could raise your children to be as vaguely or distinctly Jewish sons grew up knowing far more about the existence and concrete meaning of Jewish culture than I had. But I don't recall sitting down with them and telling them that millions of people like themselves, many of them children, had been rounded up and murdered in Europe in their parents' lifetime. Nor was I able to tell them that they came in part out of the rich, thousand year old Ashkenazic culture of eastern Europe, which the Holocaust destroyed; or that they came from a people whose traditions, religious and secular, included a hatred of oppression and an imperative to pursue justice and care for the stranger – an anti racist, a socialist, and even sometimes a feminist vision.

\*\*\*

Sometimes I feel I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate southerner, split at the root, - that I will never bring them whole.

\*\*\*

If you really look at the one reality, the other will waver and disperse.

---

### 19.4.2 Critical Analysis

---

At the very beginning of her essay Adrienne Rich expresses her own ambivalence about certain ideas which have hampered her expression. She begins the essay with the split of her mind from the side of her parents. The question of Jewish Identity has been floating around her ungraspably. She has been trying to have it both ways as she expression in her poem *Readings of History*

Split at the root, neither Gentile not Jew,

Yankee or Rebel

She further provides us details of her father and grandfather and their souvenirs. As Rich belongs to a well educated family, her father was sent to become an exception, & to enter the professional class by his parents. As Adrienne's mother happened to be a gentile, she does not count herself a Jew. A. Rich explains how her gentile grandmother and mother were frustrated artists and intellectuals. Time and again Rich feels that she is a woman, a lesbian but how can she do away with the Jewish or gentile. All around her she finds the social world full of Christian imagery, music, language, symbols, assumptions everywhere. She finds people in her social life naming the hated identity – the Negroes / Niggers and the Jewish. She narrates the incident of her school days of acting the role of Portia (a true Christian) speaking against Shylock (a true Jew) in Shakespeare's romantic comedy *The Merchant of Venice*. She is encouraged to pretend to be a non-Jewish child acting a non-Jewish character who has to speak the word 'Jew' with emphasis. Similarly at another occasion she played a role in the play *The School for Scandal*. She like many other students is not explained the meaning of the relation between Jews and money. Rich explains how she is sent to the Episcopal Church, baptized and confirmed. She feels that religion has little to do with belief or commitment. What matters is liturgy, most spiritual passion. She explains why her father never enters any church either for marriage or funeral. To have a balanced view of things her father encourages her to read Thomas Paine's book *The Age of Reason* which is against institutional religion.

Rich feels that the world is founded on white social Christianity. The word Christian is considered equal to virtuous, just, peace loving, generous etc. It is considered that the Jews are less advanced in moral and spiritual sensibility because the Jews are thought to be archaic, primitive, older darker cultured in comparison to the Christians who are light, fair and peaceful.

Rich described the feelings after watching the news reels, the films of the Allied liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. Anne Frank's diary and many other personal narratives of the Holocaust also relate the same story i.e. the injustice done to the Jews who could have led a life of sense and order on this earth. The writer feels sorry for such happenings. Watching such films or listening to such narratives is just like sniffing around death for the thrill of it. At Cambridge, the writer comes to know about certain Jews girls who proudly stick to being Jewish, expect to marry a Jew, have children, keep the holidays and thus carry on the Jewish culture. Rich narrates her meeting with a Jewish seamstress in a small shop whom she praises for her courage, foresight and resistance.

Rich asks her father "why haven't you told me that I am Jewish? Why do you never talk about being a Jew?". To the writer, her father's answers lack clarity and leave her high and dry. "I am a scientist ... a deist – I am a person, simply a Jew". Arnold Rich, as the writer says, could not get the appointment on time as the professor of pathology at Johns Hopkins medical school as no Jew ever held a professional chair there i.e. due to racial discrimination.

Rich describes the expectations from the female members of her family to appear the Jewish. She gets the message that they are superior – as her father has a good collection of books, knows many languages, reads poetry, is an amateur musician, adores encyclopedic knowledge. It is expected from the Riches to be very careful, to be of more impeccable behaviour, not to trust strangers, not even friends, family issues not to go beyond the family. The writer regrets some of the restrictions

imposed upon her family – a withdrawn world.

Rich describes the anguish of her parents at her marriage. (As she married a Jew of the ‘wrong kind’ from an orthodox eastern European background). The writer opines that she married a read Jew who was equally divided between a troubled yet ingrained Jewish identity. The writer praises the affection and kindness of her husband’s parents. Her father’s personality haunts her and they are reconciled later. She feels her father demands absolute loyalty and absolute submission to his will and in this way she learns a great deal about patriarchy.

Towards the end of the essay the writer narrates how three movements – the civil rights movement, the Women’s Liberation movement and the lesbian moment – intensify political and social awareness for freedom for her. These movements follow the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, & the Columbia strike. Rich becomes a critic of the patriarchal & misogynist elements of Judaism while presenting papers on feminist Jewish Identity. She sees Judaism simply as another strand of patriarchy. The last part of the essay depicts her split at the root (the title is explained). She fails to put together the elements of her divided, split personality at the root itself. She explicitly says that she has failed to put together the meanings of anti-Semitism and racism. She opines that if she really looks at the one reality, the other will waver and disperse. She finds it inadequate to describe her from many disconnected angles: the white, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once married, lesbian, middle class, feminist, exmatriate southerner- split at the root-never to bring them together.

Thus we see that this essay on the Jewish identity depicts certain historical facts in the life of the writer in chronological way. She has time and again given autobiographical details of her life, her parents, her in laws and the various encounters with people of various Jewish identity. Various movements of the era helped her to grow into a liberated feminist lesbian which she advocates through her works. She pleads the case of more freedom and rights for the Blacks, for the Jewish, for the women, for the lesbian and finds herself split at the root. Sometimes one can feel that the essay is a historical chapter mentioning dates and years but has got fictional value and is a part of a fine post modern literature.

---

### 19.4.3 Glossary

---

**Gentile :** Not Jewish

**Jew :** Any person whose religion is Judaism. In a wider sense the term refers to any member of a worldwide ethnic and cultural group descended from the ancient Hebrews who traditionally practiced the Jewish religion. The Hebrew term Yahudi and Jew in English originally referred to a member of the tribe of Judah. In Jewish tradition, any child born of a Jewish mother is considered a Jew.

**Judaism :** Religious beliefs and practices of the Jews. One of the three great monotheistic world religions, Judaism began as the faith of the ancient Hebrews, and its sacred text is the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Torah. Fundamental to Judaism is the belief that the people of Israel are God’s chosen people, who must serve as a light for other nations. Rabbinic Judaism emerged to replace the temple cult at Jerusalem, as the Jews carried on their culture and religion through a tradition of scholarship and strict observance.

The religion was maintained despite several persecutions in many nations. European Judaism suffered terribly during the Holocaust, when millions were put to death by the Nazis and the rising flow of Jewish emigrants to Palestine led to declaration of the state Israel in 1948.

**Holocaust :** systematic State-sponsored killing of Jewish men, women and children and others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War-II. The Nazis made no secret of their anti-Semitism before coming to power in 1933. Once they gained control of the government, their distaste for the Jews, whom they considered subhuman, led them to adopt increasingly barbaric methods in expanding their regime. The Holocaust climaxed in the Final Solution, the attempted extermination of European Jewry. Adolf Hitler's persecution of Jews in Germany began soon after he became chancellor. Jews were imprisoned in Concentration Camps or forced into ghettos. By the end of the war, an estimated six million Jews and millions of others had been killed by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.

**Inquisition :** In Middle Ages, a Judicial procedure that was used to combat heresy. An investigation or inquest for punishing.

**Protestant Ethic :** Value attached to hard work, thrift, and self discipline under certain Protestant doctrines.

**Protestantism :** One of the three major branches of Christianity, originating in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation. The term applies to beliefs of Christians who do not adhere to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. A variety of Protestant denominations grew out of the Reformation.

**Presbyterianism :** Form of Church government based on rule by the elders, or presbyters. The term Presbyterianism also refers to a denomination, the Presbyterian Church. The Modern Presbyterian churches trace their origins to the Calvinist Churches of the British Isles.

**Yankee :** Native of New England (US), in the American Civil War, native of any of the Northern States.

**Nigger :** Impolite and offensive word, a pejorative term for Negroes, member of one of the black – skinned African peoples.

**Lesbian :** A homosexual woman. Lesbianism is also called sapphism. It is the quality or state of intense emotional and usually erotic attraction of a woman to another woman. First used in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the word 'lesbian' referred to the Greek island of Lesbos. The connotation of female homosexuality was edit in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when an association was made with the poetry of Lesbian poet Sappho. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, issues of concern to lesbians in Europe and North America included legal recognition for the same sex, child rearing rights, women's health care, taxes, inheritance and the sharing of medical benefits with a partner.

**Synagogue :** In Judaism, a community house of worship that also serves as a place for assembly and study. Synagogues took an even greater importance as the unchallenged focal

point of Jewish life. There is no standard synagogue architecture. A typical synagogue contains an ark, 'an eternal light' burning before the ark, two candelabra, pews and sometimes a ritual bath.

***The School for Scandal*** : A Comedy by R.B.Sheridan, produced in 1777. In this play, generally considered to be one of the most masterly of English comedies, the author contrasts two brothers : Joseph Surface, the sanctimonious hypocrite, and Charles , the good natured, reckless spendthrift.

**Semite** : Person speaking one of a group of related languages, presumably derived from a common language, Semitic. This includes Hebrews. The Hebrews settled at last with other Semites in Palestine.

**Anti-Semitism** : Hostility towards or discrimination against Jews as religious groups or race. it is regarded by some as a misnomer, implying discrimination against all Semites, including Arabs and other peoples. Hostility against the Jews emerged due to religious differences, due to competition with Christianity. Jews were denied citizenship and its rights in much of Europe in the Middle Ages and were forced to wear distinctive clothing, and there were forced expulsions of Jews from several regions in that period. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution also did not reduced anti-Semitism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century violent discrimination emerged due to scientific racism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the economic political dislocations intensified anti-Semitism. Racist anti-Semitism flourished in Nazi Germany. Nazi persecution of the Jews led to the Holocaust in which an estimated six million Jews were exterminated. Despite the defeat of the Nazis in World War II, anti-Semitism remained a problem in many parts of the World into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

***The Merchant of Venice*** : A famous Elizabethan romantic comedy by Shakespeare in which the Jew Shylock and his love of money are made fun of, and he is punished for hatching hatred and deceit towards the Christians. It is a fine example of anti-Semitism in literature.

**Portia** : In *The Merchant of Venice* she is the female protagonist. She is a Christian and marries Bassanio, saves the life of Antonio, a Christian merchant having rivalry with the Jew Shylock.

**Shylock** : He is the Jew who is depicted as the villain for his love of money & conspiracy against the Christians in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.

---

## 19.5 Self Assessment Questions

---

1. In order to write an essay on Jewish Identity what has the writer to do ?

.....

.....

.....

2. How does Rich describe herself in the long poem "Reading History" written in 1960?

.....  
.....  
.....  
3. What is specific about the hospital in the Black ghetto in Baltimore?

.....  
.....  
.....  
4. Name the only souvenirs of Samuel Rich, the author's grandfather?

.....  
.....  
.....  
5. What did the writer find in the prayer book?

.....  
.....  
.....  
6. For what did Arnold Rich's parents send him into dominant WASP culture?

.....  
.....  
.....  
7. Did Arnold ever speak of having suffered ?

.....  
.....  
.....  
8. What is the theme of Karl Shapiro' poem ?

.....  
.....  
.....  
9. Describe Arnold Rich's physical structure ?

.....

10. Why can the writer not consider herself a Jew ?

.....

.....

.....

11. Describe the social world of Rich's childhood?

.....

.....

.....

12. What was the mental framework in the 1930s and 1940s of the writer?

.....

.....

.....

13. What is the theme of *The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine?

.....

.....

.....

14. What are the considered synonyms of the word *Christian*?

.....

.....

.....

15. What was the general impression got about the mistake done by the Jews?

.....

.....

.....

16. Why did Arnold Rich never talk about his being a Jew ?

.....

.....

.....

17. Why was Arnold's appointment to the professorship at John Hopkins medical school de-



layed for years?

.....

.....

.....

18. What was Arnold's best claim for professorship ?

.....

.....

.....

19. Who is Portia ?

.....

.....

.....

20. What was constantly urged to the author, her sister and her mother ?

.....

.....

.....

21. What were the Riches proud of?

.....

.....

.....

22. Why did the author's parent refuse to attend her marriage ?

.....

.....

.....

23. What happened in 1968 in the history of America and in A Rich's life?

.....

.....

.....

24. What is the expected role of a Jewish woman, a Jewish mother?

.....

.....  
.....  
25. Why could the writer not tell certain things done to the Jew to her children?

.....  
.....  
26. How does the writer criticize the permissive liberalism of Cambridge?

.....  
.....  
27. What was the effect of the Civil Rights movement on the writer?

.....  
.....  
28. Name the two writers who influenced A. Rich the most.

.....  
.....  
29. Name the three famous movements of the sixties.

.....  
.....  
30. What do you mean by the Holocaust?

---

## 19.4 Let Us Sum Up

---

By now in this unit you have studied the autobiographical details about the writer Adrienne Rich. You have seen how she is in favour of freedom for development of a human being. How various disconnections lead to a divided personality due to split at the very root. You have seen how emphatically she advocates for the cause of the oppressed-whether the Blacks or the Jews or the females.

---

## 19.5 Answers to SAQs

---

1. She has to claim her father as she has got her Jewishness from him. She has to break his silence, his taboos. She has to face the sources and the presence of her own ambivalence as a Jew.
2. She describes herself as the following :  
Split at the root, neither gentile nor Jew  
Yankee nor Rebel.
3. Its lobby contained an immense white marble statue of Christ.
4. The only souvenirs of Samuel Rich were the ivory flute, his thin gold pocket watch and his Hebrew Prayer book.
5. She found a newspaper clipping of her grand parents wedding, which took place in a synagogue.
6. They sent him to prove himself an exception to enter the professional class.
7. No, never. He never complained of loneliness, cultural alienation, or outsider hood.
8. Shapiro's poem is based on Apartheid and anti-Jew feelings. Its theme is racial discrimination.
9. He looked Jewish, was short and thin with dark wiry hair and deep set eyes, high torched and curved nose.
10. She cannot consider herself a Jew according to the ideas of Virginia Woolf and Lesbian theory.
11. It was full of Christian imagery, music, language, symbols, assumptions everywhere. It was a genteel, white, middle class world.
12. The mental framework of that period did not allow naming the hated identity – a Negro or a Jew.
13. It is against institutional religion.
14. Virtuous, just , peace-loving, generous etc.
15. They failed to recognize the true Messiah, Christ. That is why they were less advanced in moral and spiritual sensibility.
16. As he was a scientist and a deist, it was not important for him to be a Jew. He considered himself ' a person', not simply a Jew.
17. Because he was a Jew and there was no Jew ever having held a professional chair in that medical school.
18. He believed in the redeeming power of excellence, brilliance and inspiration.
19. She is the female protagonist of Shakespeare's romantic comedy *The Merchant of Venice*.
20. They were urged to speak quietly in public, to dress without show off, to repress vividness to

assimilate with a world which might see them as too flamboyant.

21. They were proud of their knowledge, books, travel, languages known, culture, music, poetry, intellect and talent.
22. Because she was marrying a Jew of the “wrong kind” from an Orthodox Eastern European background.
23. The author’s father died, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, the Columbia strike happened.
24. She was to be perceived in the Jewish family as an entirely physical being, a producer and nourisher of children.
25. Because these things were too indistinct in her own mind.
26. She criticizes how Christian Myth and Calendar organize the year at Cambridge.
27. It removed a sense of personal frustration and hopelessness. The effect the racism in the form of the silences, negations, cruelties, fears, superstitions was removed. The political & social freedom of the Blacks inspired the writer, too.
28. James Baldwin & Simon de Beauvoir.
29. a) Civil Rights Movement b) Women’s Liberation c) Lesbian Movement (A movement within a movement)
30. Systematic state sponsored killing of Jewish men, women and children and others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. The Nazi’s made no secret of their anti-Semitism before coming to power in 1933. (See further details in Glossary of this unit)

---

## 19.6 Review Questions

---

1. With her poet’s attentiveness to language Adrienne Rich reminds us that “beautiful language can lie;” further, she begins to unveil the pregnant meanings that can underlie such words as “we,” “us,” “them,” “common,” “civilized,” “normal,” and so on. Explore what these seemingly benign words signify for you; what are some of the possible ethical ramifications that can result from these dichotomies? What do you mean when you say “us” as opposed to “them;” when you say “we” who might you mean?
2. Rich tells us that her essay “has no conclusions” and that “there is no purity.” What does she mean here and elsewhere when she talks about being “split at the root”? Do you think this feeling of cultural / identity fracture and internal conflict is more applicable to those who experience “outsider hood” than those who do not? Be honest, don’t write what you think we want to hear, write what you truly feel.
3. Is this essay an example of advocacy? If so, what is Rich advocating and how does she go about this? Is there an argument implicit here? If so, what position is she taking and what are the ethical underpinnings of that position?
4. Discuss *Split at the Root* as an autobiographical essay.

5. Draw a character sketch of Adrienne Rich on the basis of the essay *Split at the Root*.
6. Discuss the appropriateness of the title of the essay *Split at the Root*.
7. What is the cause of hatred between the Jews and the Christians ? Give examples from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *Split at the Root* and other literary texts you have read.
8. Discuss this essay as an essay on Jewish identity.
9. What are the salient features of a Jew ? What is he usually blamed of?
10. Discuss the essay as a part of history or a work of art.

---

## 19.7 Bibliography

---

1. Cooper, Jane Roberta, editor, Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81 , Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984
  2. Diaz-Diocaretz, Myriam, The Transforming Power of Language: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich , Utrecht: HES, 1984
  3. Diaz-Diocaretz, Myriam, Translating Poetic Discourse: Questions of Feminist Strategy in Adrienne Rich, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1985
  4. Farwell, Marilyn R., "Adrienne Rich and an Organic Feminist Criticism," College English 39 (October 1977): 191-203
  5. Flowers, Betty S., "The 'I' in Adrienne Rich: Individuation and the Androgyne Archetype," in Theory and Practice of Feminist Literary Criticism , edited by Gabriela Mora and Karen S. Van Hooft , Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press, 1982: 14-35
  6. Griffin, Susan, and Beverly Dahlen, Skirting the Subject: Pursuing Language in the Works of Adrienne Rich , Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1993
  7. Keyes, Claire, The Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich , Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986
  8. Ratcliffe, Krista, Anglo-American Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich , Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996
  9. Templeton, Alice, The Dream and the Dialogue: Adrienne Rich's Feminist Poetics , Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994
-