

Block-1

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Unit 1: British Fiction Down the Ages: The Eighteenth Century

Unit Structure:

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1.1 Objectives:

In Eighteenth-century, the novel became established as a popular literary form all over Europe. In England, it proved to be a fertile land with the writings of several novelists like Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Lawrence Sterne. After going through this unit the learner will be able to –

- *gain* an idea of the origin of the novel form
- *identify* and *learn about* the major novelists of the 18th century
- *gain* an understanding of the 18th century English fiction

1.2 A Brief Introduction to Novel:

The term novel derives from the Italian word ‘novella’ meaning tale, piece of news, and now applied to a wide variety of writings. It is a long fictional narrative that describes intimate human experiences. To have a complete account of the modern novel, we must go back to the stories of the Middle Ages. The writings of that period were in general of two kinds, adapted to two types of audiences: the nobles and the people. The first class were the romances dealing with knightly adventure, mystical religious experiences, and courtly love. The ‘Morte de Arthur’ of Sir Thomas Malory is the most comprehensive example of this class. The narrative fiction of the common people on the other hand was more realistic. Most of them were moral tales called ‘Exempla’. Besides, an idea of the range of medieval fiction can also be gained from Geoffrey Chaucer’s ‘The Canterbury Tales’ or the stories of Boccaccio in ‘Decameron’.

In England, at the end of the sixteenth-century, the novel was in its infancy. During that time only two important works were published. They are Lyly’s ‘Euphues’ (1578-80) and Sir Philip Sidney’s pastoral romance ‘Arcadia’ (1590). English fiction during that period largely influenced by Italian and Spanish fiction. The Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes, author of ‘Don Quixote’ (1605) is often considered as the first European novelist. Following the path of Cervantes, the English novel blooms primarily in the Eighteenth-century.

In the seventeenth-century there is still no more major advance in writing in the form of the novel. Fiction for English readers was chiefly supplied from France where there had ascended a school of writers who told their tales with much sentiment and imaginative embroidery, the stories of Grand Cyrus and

other historical heroes. However, during this period, breaking the cultural barriers, one woman writer named Aphra Behn served as a literary role model for later generations of women writers.

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1.3 Major Novelists of Eighteenth Century:

The rise of English novel followed mainly in the Eighteenth century. However, we cannot draw a strict line of demarcation between 17th and 18th century novels as the tradition of writing novel has not started all of sudden. A large number of novelists wrote beautiful novels during this period. A brief introduction of these novelists are given below.

1.3.1 Aphra Behn :

Born on July 10, 1640, at Canterbury, United Kingdom, Aphra Behn was one of the most popular woman writers of the seventeenth century. Unlike the other women writers of her time, Aphra Behn did not belong to the elite class and as a result, she had to earn her living by her writings. She spent her early years in the West Indies and is said to have been involved in a slave rebellion. In 1664 she turned back to England and got married. However, her married life was not happy as she was widowed a year later. Meanwhile, she came to the notice of Charles-II, who employed her as a spy in Antwerp. Upon her return to London and a probable brief stay in debtor's prison she took up the profession of writing.

Her first play 'The Forced Marriage' (1670) saw the start of a successful career as a dramatist. Her most successful play 'The Rover' was published in two parts (1677, 1681) and it deals with the adventures of a small party of English Cavaliers in Madrid and Naples during the reigns of Charles -II. Aphra Behn had written several plays but her trajectory as a writer is not confined to plays alone. As a composer of poetry and novel, she had earned great repute. Her reputation as a novelist rests primarily upon her novel *Oroonoko* (1688). The novel is about an African prince, Oroonoko, who falls in love with a young woman Imoinda. Imoinda is sold into slavery to Suriname just after her love is revealed. In the meantime, Oroonoko who is a slave owner himself is one day lured by the captain of an English ship. Later he was taken into Guiana as a slave, where he is

united with his beloved. He tries to achieve freedom but is caught and badly tortured. Realizing no hope in life he kills his beloved Imoinda and kills himself. *Oroonoko* is Aphra Behn's groundbreaking narrative, a romance that achieved remarkable public success as it tackles some of the most controversial of the emerging political, social, and economic issues of the late 17th century. The novel has wonderfully focussed on the injustice and cruelties of the transatlantic slave trade in English colonial settlement.

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Consider Aphra Behn as the first professional woman writer. (50 words)

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1.3.2 John Bunyan :

Meanwhile, John Bunyan (1628-88) wrote his famous work *The Pilgrims Progress* (1678). Bunyan was a preacher. However, because of illegal preaching, he was imprisoned. It was during this time in prison that Bunyan wrote this famous novel *The Pilgrims Progress*. This was an allegorical novel that traced the life and journey of Christian from the City of Destruction to Salvation.

1.3.3 William Congreve :

In the early part of the Eighteenth-century William Congreve published *Incognita* or *Love and Duty Reconciled* (1713). He called it a novel and in his preface gives us his conception of what a novel is. Congreve believes that Romances give more wonder while Novels more delight.

1.3.4 Daniel Defoe :

Soon after this in 1719 Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*. Born in London in 1660, Defoe is one of the most popular English novelists of the Seventeenth-century. His most popular novel include

Robinson Crusoe (1719), *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), *Captain Jack* (1722), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724).

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The novel *Robinson Crusoe* is based on the true story of a shipwrecked seaman named Alexander Selkirk. Here, Robinson Crusoe is a young and self-sufficient Englishman after several adventures is cast away on an almost uninhabited island. Crusoe is shocked one day when he discovered the footprints of a man on the beach. The footprint belongs to one of the cannibals living in that region. One of the victims of these cannibals, waiting to be slaughtered, breaks free and runs towards Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe saves his life and names him Friday. Soon Friday becomes Crusoe's obedient slave. At the end of the novel Crusoe along with Friday is rescued and taken back to England. *Robinson Crusoe* is often considered a picaresque novel.

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Discuss the condition of working classes as depicted in the novels of Daniel Defoe: (200 words)

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1.3.5 Jonathan Swift :

Soon after the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) has caught the attention of most of the readers of England. Born in 1667 in Dublin, Swift was a prominent author, clergyman, and satirist. Swift's first political pamphlet was titled 'A Discourse on the Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome'. This was followed by his satirical works, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* (1740). His *Gulliver's Travels* is a social and political satire. Here in this novel, Captain Lemuel Gulliver, the protagonist directly addresses the readers. The whole book is divided into four distinct journeys (i) To Lilliput, (ii) Brobdingnag, (iii) Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrib, and Japan (iv) To the country of the Houyhnhms. The Lilliputians are small but full of self-

importance while Brobdingnagians are larger but they are less threatening. Swift's other satirical work *A Modest Proposal* was published in 1729. In this work, Swift satirises the English landlords with outrageous humour.

1.3.6 Samuel Richardson :

Though Defoe and Swift wrote novels they lack one major element in their novels and that is a well-knitted plot. The first great success in constructing a story having a single motive: the love of one person for another was Richardson's *Pamela*. Samuel Richardson was born in a very poor family in 1689 in Derbyshire England. Richardson started his career as a writer through his book *The Apprentice Made Mecum* (1733). *Pamela* was published in 1740. *Pamela* is an epistolary novel that narrates the story of the 15-year-old servant girl Pamela Andrews who defends her chastity against the attacks of her master. Master -B continually tries to woo and seduce her, and finally impressed by Pamela's fidelity, he agrees to marry her. The success of *Pamela* encouraged Richardson to write another beautiful novel, *Clarissa* (1748) which appeared in eight volumes. His third novel *Sir Charles Grandison* was published in 1754.

It was in reaction against Richardson's high moral design of *Pamela* that led to Henry Fielding to start his career as a novelist. His first writing *Shamela* (1741) is a parody while in *Joseph Andrews*, Joseph is portrayed as the brother of Richardson's heroine, Pamela.

Like Pamela, Joseph resists; but unlike her, he is turned out of doors and is left to make his way back to his home to have a happy ending. His next novel *Jonathan Wild* (1743) was a loose narrative on the life of a London underworld boss named Jonathan. On the other hand, *Tom Jones* is Fielding's masterpiece. It is also considered as a first great comic novel. The full title of this novel is *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*. *Tom Jones* narrates the story of Tom from his infancy through his marriage to a beautiful and virtuous lady named Sophia Western. Tom in the course of the novel encounters a series of adventures and at the end, he happily united with Sophia. Fielding's last novel *Amelia* was published in 1751.

1.3.7 Tobias Smollett :

Tobias Smollett (1721-71) was a Scottish novelist and poet. He was best known for three of his novels: *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and *Humphry Clinker* (1771). *Roderick Random*, his first notable fiction, is a picaresque novel. Much of this novel is autobiographical, constructed on his own experiences as a naval surgeon. It presents an absurd exaggeration of the violence and brutality of life at sea.

1.3.8 Laurence Sterne :

Laurence Sterne (1713-68) was an Irish-born English novelist. He wrote two novels, *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). Both these novels are highly unconventional and experimental in terms of narrative technique. His 'Tristram Shandy' is widely recognised as a reflexive novel i.e. a novel that constantly draws attention to its existence as a novel. In this novel, Tristram attempts to write an autobiography but hardly makes any progress. The novel includes endless trouble of all the features of a novel. Laurence wrote this novel to draw attention to the gap between life and attempting to reproduce life in a work of art.

However, there are three more novels of the Eighteenth-century that can be ranked beside the novels that we have already discussed. These are Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*.

1.3.9 Samuel Johnson :

Samuel Johnson's (1709-1784) *Rasselas* is a philosophical novel. The novel is in reality several disquisitions on Rasselas, a son of the emperor of Abyssinia. The whole novel is confined to Rasselas along with the other members of the royal family in a private paradise surrounded by mountains. Tired of the joys and pleasures of the royal family the prince one day escapes to Egypt along with his sister and Imlac, the old philosopher, to study the life of other people. However, he is disappointed looking at the plight of the people. In 'Rasselas' Johnson colored a melancholic milieu to spread an ecclesiastical moral: 'human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed'.

1.3.10 Oliver Goldsmith's :

Oliver Goldsmith's (1730-1774) *Vicar of Wakefield* is a flawless expression of homely English sentiment. Dr. Charles Primrose, the vicar, who is a kind and honest man, lives a contented life along with his wife Deborah and six children. However, the Vicar's life is not smooth; he faces misfortunes and is thrown into poverty. His daughter Olivia is lured away by an unworthy lover. But through all these troubles, the Vicar's love for his family and his self-confidence in life allows the novel to have a happy ending.

1.3.11 Fanny Burney :

Fanny Burney's *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* appeared in 1778. It is the story of a young girl's introduction to a prodigious world. Her path is tormented by rival suitors and made doubtful by a mystery about her birth, but her course is guided steadily by conscience and propriety. In the course of the novel, Evelina navigates the complex layers of Eighteenth-century society.

The novels of the Eighteenth century from Defoe to Miss Fanny Burney are, on the whole, steeped in realism. Most of the novelists of that time tried to deal with the things as they were, though a few of them made it more romantic.

1.3.12 Horace Walpole :

The long list of Gothic romances starts with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Gothic romances are devoted to stories of fear, horror, and the supernatural. The Gothic romances were written primarily to create excitement and entertainment. Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* tries to paint the domestic life and manners of the feudal period as agitated by the action of supernatural machinery. In short *The Castle of Otranto* is a terror novel in which one can see the walking skeletons, pictures that move out of the frames, and other terrible incidents.

1.3.13 Mrs. Anne Radcliffe :

The most successful producer of Gothic romance was Mrs. Anne Radcliffe (1764-1823). Mrs. Radcliffe wrote five elaborate romances,

of which the most famous is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). The novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was the tale of a robber baron's castle on the Rhine and dark deeds that hunted it. The *Italian* was her last published book.

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1.3.14 Miss Clara Reeve :

Horace Walpole was followed by another novelist Miss Clara Reeve (1729-1807). In the course of her long life, she wrote several novels out of which *The Old English Baron* is the most prominent. In writing this novel she made a beautiful blending of ancient romance with modern novels. However, her novels cannot be placed on the same pedestal as those of Smollett and Richardson as she lacked vivid imagination and artistic craftsmanship.

1.3.15 Mary Shelley :

Mary Shelley (1797-1851) is another prominent Gothic novelist best known as the author of *Frankenstein' or 'The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The Preface of the novel was written by the great Romantic poet P.B. Shelley. The novel begins with a series of letters sent to Margaret Saville by her explorer brother Robert Walton. It is Robert Walton who finds Victor Frankenstein near death, listens to his story, and records in the form of letters. Victor Frankenstein, the protagonist of the novel creates an intelligent but grotesque monster, from whom he recoils in horror. At the end of the novel, the monster disappears in the surfs and darkness. Marry Shelley also wrote several other novels, including *Valperga* (1823), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Ladore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837).

1.3.16 Mathew Gregory Lewis :

Mathew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818) was another Gothic novelist. Influenced by Ann Redcliff and also by contemporary German Gothic literature, Mathew Gregory Lewis wrote his most popular Gothic novel *The Monk* which was published in 1796. The novel narrated the story of a Monk who fall away into the world of degradation. Ambrosio, the Monk of Madrid is initiated into the life of wickedness by Matilda, a woman who has disguised herself as a

man. She is an emissary of Satan sent to entangle with the Monk and destroy his body and soul. Ambrosio eventually falls under the trap of Matilda and sells his soul to avoid being tortured but the devil throws him from a cliff to his death on the rocks underneath.

In the later part of the Eighteenth-Century, several novels written by a group of English radical writers who supported the ideals of the French Revolution were labelled as Jacobin novels. The term 'Jacobin' was coined by literary critic Gary Kelly in *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (1976). The chief objective of the Jacobin novel was to make revolutionary thought more entertaining and easier to comprehend for the lower class people. It was concerned with social and political reform. The Jacobin novel, most characteristically embodied in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria' or 'The Wrongs of Woman* (1792), Holcroft's *Anna St Ives* (1792), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Mary Hay's *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and Robert Bage's *Hermisprong or Man As He Is Not*.

1.3.17 Mary Wollstonecraft :

Mary Wollstonecraft, the English feminist writer was born in Spitalfields, London in 1759. Since her childhood, Mary experienced the bitterness of life. Her father was a tyrannical man who used to torture her mother. After her mother's death, she left home in search of livelihood. In 1790 she published *Vindication of the Rights of Man* which was the first response to Edmund Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution in France*. Here she strongly argues that both men and women should equally be treated as rational beings. Her novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* was left unfinished at the time of her death in 1797 and published posthumously by her husband William Godwin in 1798. The story of the novel is based on an upper-class woman, named Maria who was imprisoned by her husband. During her imprisonment, she heard the painful stories of Jemima and Henry Darnford. In the whole novel, Mary Wollstonecraft strongly criticizes the legal system that protected marriage in the Eighteenth-century.

1.3.18 Thomas Holcroft :

Thomas Holcroft was born in London in 1745. During his youth, he read the Bible and many sensational novels. After completion of

his education, he first joined as a teacher. He later left the job and joined the theatre. During that period, he wrote a large number of plays. In 1792 he published his most popular novel *Anna St Ives*. This novel presents utopian notions of social justice through two leading characters named Anna and Frank Henley. Anna, a member of the wealthy elite supports social reform and equality and Frank Henley is her beloved. Holcroft in all his writings proposes a society based on justice and equality.

1.3.19 Mary Hays :

Mary Hays was born in Southwark near London in 1759. Her first novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* was published in 1796. It was purely an autobiographical novel based on her own life, love, and pursuit of happiness.

1.3.20 William Godwin :

Of all these novelists, William Godwin was the most effective and exceptional one. His plot was neatly arranged and the characters were stunningly drawn to expose a social evil or to show its remedy. Godwin's *Caleb Williams* was published in 1794. In the preface to the novel, Godwin explained the main objective of writing this novel. Here Caleb William the protagonist is a deeply honourable man who is cast into a theatre of calamity by unexpected circumstances. The novel describes the downfall of Ferdinando Falkland, a British squire, and his attempts to destroy the life of Caleb Williams, a poor but ambitious young man whom Falkland hires as his personal secretary. William Godwin gives a powerful account of how rich people like Ferdinando Falkland can use the forces of society and law against an individual of a lower class like Caleb Williams. The novel visibly exposes the class distinctions and the misuse of power by the ruling upper classes. It is a thought-provoking example of the novel of propaganda where revolutionary ideas are perfectly disseminated.

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Write a note on the major novelists in the eighteenth century. (200 words)

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1.4 Summing Up:

In this unit an attempt has been made to give the learner a brief idea on the prominent novels and novelists of Eighteenth-century England. It may help the learner in understanding these prominent Eighteenth century novelists and their outstanding contributions. The eighteenth century is more than two literary periods: the Augustan Age (from 1700 to 1745), Age of Sensibility (1744 to 1785) and the early Romantic Period. The eighteenth century, therefore, saw the production and consumption of a variety, such as the realistic novels of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, satire of Jonathan Swift, Sentimental novel of Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, and so on. It is variety of form and sensibility of novels in the eighteenth century that presents an area for you to explore.

1.5 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 2 : British Fiction down the ages: The Nineteenth Century and After

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Social Background
- 2.4 Representative writers and their works
- 2.5 Popular forms of Fiction during 19th century
- 2.6 Emergence of the Modern novel
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

This unit is an attempt to familiarize you with the socio-political scenario and representative writers of 19th century fiction as well as the emergence of the modern novel. After going through the unit you will be able to-

- *understand* the events and the ideologies of the period that shaped the literature of the time
- *know* the representative novelists of the period
- *know* the forms of fiction popular in 19th century
- *analyze* the common themes and motifs in the novels
- *gain* an idea of novel in the twentieth century

2.2 Introduction

19th century fiction would include the works of novelists of the Romantic age and those of the Victorian age. Even though the genre of novel emerged and developed in the 18th century, it grew into new sub-genres and became more didactic in the 19th century. The Romantic age introduced new forms of fiction like epistolary, gothic, romance etc. The period saw the works of different writers but amongst them the two most eminent personalities are Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Romantic age was a reaction against the classical

and neo-classical tradition of the Augusten age. Literatures of this period were modeled after the characteristic of the imaginative, subjective and emotional in a jargon free spontaneous language. This spirit had a long time effect on the literature of Victorian age. The larger part of 19th century fiction comprises of the works of the Victorian writers. Victorian age in English literature can be specified as the period between 1837 to 1901 that saw the emergence of diverse ideas in the field of science, capitalist society, gender relations etc. In other words, it was an age of revolution. The socio-cultural events of the age got reflected in the fictional works of writers like Charles Dickens, Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde etc. The political, religious and social chaos resulted in a state of uncertainty and pessimism. However the late Victorian age saw England at its prosperity with imperialist expeditions around the world. All these impetus provided raw materials to the creative writers of the age. Along with the socio-political events, the other prominent event that revolutionized the fictional works was the feminist movement as well as discourses on the woman question. It not only introduced new ways of representing women characters but also saw the emergence of women as prolific novelists. Women novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell, Bronte sisters and George Eliot are exemplary figures in this regard. The earlier notion of ‘angel in the house’ was replaced by the image of the ‘new woman’/’fallen woman’ in Hardy’s novel. In other words, the novel reached its peak during the Victorian age with its wide range of themes and sub-genres.

2.3 Social Background

England in 19th century witnessed a host of socio-cultural events that directly impacted the literature of the day. It was an age of revolutions and reformations that gave birth to a wide variety of fictional works that reflected the transitions taking place. The following are some of the crucial events that took place during 19th century that impacted the lives of its people and influenced the novels of the period.

2.3.1 Industrial Revolution and the working class

Industrial Revolution began first in England because the situation there was conducive to its growth. For example- There was the availability of labours, better working condition, good market structure; British govt encouraged capitalist growth etc. Besides that the rapid expansion of the British Empire also encouraged the people to take

money-making as a socially sanctioned pursuit. Industrial Revolution also meant climbing up the social ladder for people of lower class which made it all the more tempting. However, the rate of industrial growth was not the same all over England. For instance, the north of England became the industrial hub while other regions took time because the transition from home-based industries to machine-based industries couldn't be achieved instantly. Similarly, the lives of the working class also didn't improve immediately. The initial years of Industrial Revolution were not much fruitful for the working class who also had to deal with their lack of rights. Even though various Acts and systems came into force, they could not improve the condition of the working class. It was only in second half of the 19th century that some visible improvement could be seen and by the end of the century considerable developments were made in the condition of the working class. The most significant development in the consolidation of the working class was the recognition given to the trade unions followed by the passing of the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and the Factory Act of 1901.

Industrial Revolution gave birth to urbanization. People began to move to the cities in search of job that resulted in restructuring of the industrial areas into bustling urban centers. As a result industrial growth directly impacted the lifestyles of the people of England that brought into effect a new urban culture. The first two cities that became the centre of urbanization were Manchester and Liverpool which also saw the construction of the first modern railway line. The cities also produced locomotives, machine tools, armaments, a newspaper titled *The Manchester Guardian*, music schools and parks besides a profitable business environment like the Liverpool Triangle. However, urbanization also had its own share of difficulties for the newly arrived city dwellers. Issues of shelter, sanitation and food were serious concerns for the overcrowded cities. Their problems were multiplied by the noise, dirt, chimney smoke from industries as well as the poor working conditions in many places which also gave birth to a sub-genre of 19th century fiction i.e., 'Condition of England' novel and Charles Dickens happens to be the best exponent of this category of fiction. In short, Industrial England was a mixture of benefits and difficulties that not only impacted the lives of the people but also introduced a whole new range of fictional works.

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2.3.2 Darwinism

Darwin's theory of evolution was published in his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 that impacted the field of literature and religion diversely. The churchmen were the first to oppose as the theory encouraged people to 'doubt' and questioned the basis of their existence. This also impacted the religious life of Victorian England (will be discussed later in details). However, by the end of the century his ideas found gradual acceptance. His ideas of evolution also influenced social science research and culminated into the concept of social Darwinism. As defined by Bibhash Choudhury:

Social Darwinism refers to the attempt to use the ideas of evolutionary biology to explain social behavior; it is the theory that tries to argue that conflicts between persons, classes, countries, communities, or groups are necessary for the sake of progress and social growth. It also suggests that competition is a natural phenomenon rather than a cultural development (210).

In other words, the evolutionary concept of 'survival of the fittest' also applies to the struggles in social life that looks at social inequality as similar to biological evolution. As already mentioned, the theories of Darwin also influenced the literary writings of Victorian England especially the work of the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. For example, Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* represents the subject of 'survival of the fittest' through the struggling and tragic life of Tess who finally succumbs to her fate. In this way Darwinism continued to influence the Victorian sensibility and eventually in the later 19th century it was widely accepted in social and literary circles.

2.3.3 Consolidation of the British Empire

The explorations and expansions of the British Empire had begun as early as in 17th century but the consolidation of the Empire took place in the 19th century. British colonialism had spread to different parts of the world like India, America, West Indies, South Africa and so on. These expeditions began as part of trade practices but soon culminated into political domination over the natives. This shift from colonialism to imperialism led to chaos and revolts as natives were

being exploited for their benefit. Each colony had its own share of difficulties and its own way of dealing with it. For instance, even though British Govt. was in charge of the administration of India in the 19th century, they faced the first revolt in the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 followed by many other upsurges until India won its independence in 1947. The impact of the imperialist enterprise could be found in the novels of Jane Austen, Bronte sisters and Charles Dickens. It introduced altogether a new literary discourse reflecting issues of ‘othering’, identity, slavery, quest narratives and civilizational schemes associated with the imperialistic design.

2.3.4 Religious life in Victorian England

Religious life in Victorian England can be characterized by three main events- Evangelicalism, Darwinism and the Oxford Movement. Church going was an important aspect of Victorian life, especially the observance of Sunday, initiated by the strict moral codes of Evangelicalism. Even if the traditional religious orientation was contested, religion remained an important influence in their lives. For example, some of the characters in Hardy’s novel reflect their adherence to traditional beliefs despite the contestation. Nevertheless, towards the end of the age the science-religion debate took a serious turn bringing upon significant changes that was also manifested in the literatures of the period. As mentioned before, Darwinism threatened the foundation of religion and as a result was opposed by the members of the church. However, the Church of England, the main religious institution in Victorian England, was challenged by the development at Oxford known as the Oxford Movement. It questioned the religious doctrines of the Church of England in favour of Roman Catholic practices. Their argument against the Protestant Church came out in the form of tracts which gave the movement its other name Tractarian Movement. This movement led by Henry Newman, Richard Hurrell Froude, Edward Pusey and John Keble reformed the Protestant Church of England into the Anglo-Catholic Church of England.

2.3.5 Women in 19th century England

Another significant aspect of the nineteenth century life in England is associated with the condition of women. Feminism, though began in late 19th century, flourished more in 20th century that reshaped the

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identity of woman in society and literature. However, the restricted lives of woman in Victorian society reflect some of the important issues related to the status of woman that was also represented in the novels. Women faced challenges in literary as well as social field. Women writers like George Eliot and the Bronte sisters are examples in themselves about the limitations brought in by the law, education system and the culture of the period. The superiority of the male identity gets manifested in their adoption of male pseudonyms. Public space was not much open to women and the only profession allowed to them was of teachers or governesses. This image of women as governess has been represented in the novels of Austen, Brontes as well as Eliot. However, with Hardy we see women as factory workers or domestic help who were often exploited. He introduced the concept of the fallen women as his heroines were seduced and exploited by the evil minded male characters. Nevertheless his heroines also put up a brave fight against the injustices done to them. Thus with the concept of the ‘angel in the house’, a new concept of the ‘fallen woman’ was introduced in Victorian fiction that brought in questions of chastity and purity of the female characters. In other words, the experiences and problems of women in their professional and domestic life began to dominate the larger part of late 19th century fiction.

Check Your Progress

Comment on the changing image of women in Victorian society. (50 words)

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Discuss the impact of Industrial Revolution with reference to the works of Dickens and Hardy. (80 words)

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2.4 Representative writers and their works

Space for Learner

As now you are familiar with the socio-cultural background of 19th century England, so let us move on towards the representative writers of the age and some of their works. Actually nineteenth century fiction encompasses within its purview a host of prolific writers whose works define the literary standard of the age. However, in this section we will discuss some of the more popular and representative writers like Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Bronte Sisters, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde.

2.4.1 Walter Scott

Born in 1771, Walter Scott started his career first as a poet and then as a novelist with the publication of *Waverly* in 1814. This was followed by other remarkable novels namely *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *Ivanhoe* (1819) and many more. As an inventor of historical fiction, his novels (until 1819) dealt with transition especially with “how the presence of the English has forced changes in the traditional, clan-based fighting life of the Scots” (Peck and Coyle 147). Therefore he wished to leave back a faithful image of the Scottish society through his novels and in the process incorporated characters from all classes of society. His novels represented 17th and 18th century Scotland caught up in its religious, class and power struggles. He adopted the medieval romance tradition of chivalric narratives to represent these issues. With *Ivanhoe* his focus shifted on medieval England and its issues. However, his biggest contribution was to bring Scottish history before the English people to reflect the importance of history and socio-political changes associated with it. He was well known for developing the genre of historical fiction and interlinking it with the conflicts of the society as a whole. His influence could be felt throughout the Victorian age but unfortunately critics in the modern age opine that “he was no artist as a novelist, and as a historian, he chose idealization over accuracy” (217 Chowdhury and Goswami). Nevertheless, he remains one of the greatest novelists of his time and a representative writer of the historical fiction.

2.4.2 Jane Austen

Transitions were part of Jane Austen's life as well, for she lived during the time of French and Romantic Revolution as well as the Napoleonic wars. However, she chose to write not on the political changes but on the transitions in social formation that would highlight the other relevant issues of her time. Her novels might appear to be feminine and romantic as they primarily deal with the theme of love and marriage but within that trivial-looking institution of marriage is imbued a wide range of socially relevant issues that questions the social structure of the age.

Born in 1775, Austen began her career at the age of fifteen with *Love and Friendship* followed by her most famous novels namely *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818). She could be called a great satirist and comic ironist of her times. Her novels are filled with characters of all classes to represent the issue of 'class consciousness' that dictated the social hierarchy of her time. Marriage becomes a tool to represent this division of class that affects the lives of the lovers in her novels. At the same time marriage also functions as a social ladder for the people of middle and lower class. Her novels are social novels that fall under the category of 'comedy of manners'. Her novels represent the society by ridiculing the manners of the age in a humorous and witty language that makes it very enjoyable to read. Her novels also represent the issues of women like women's right to inherit property, women's only profession as governess or teacher, women's education and most importantly the centrality given to the feelings of her female protagonists. She represented woman as 'rational creatures'. Especially the witty conversation between Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* throws light on the subject of female education and what are the qualities required to be considered as being accomplished. Through this discussion, Austen critiques the limited scope of women in the public sphere as the required skills are domestic in nature like the "knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages... something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice... improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (39). On the other hand Lady Catherine's criticism of the

Bennet sisters for not being brought up by a governess indicates further on the importance of social manners and the role of women as governess in imparting education (the above mentioned skills) to women in 18th and 19th century England. Some of her novels are also autobiographical as the heroines represent some of her own restricted experiences in life. On the whole, Austen strengthened the major model of romantic fiction which is the “Cinderella narrative in which the worthy but disadvantaged heroine wins the noblest hero, with wit, irony, psychological depth, and a hard-nosed interest in property” (856 Birch). Her outspoken and placid heroines are mostly products of the society who also attempt to break boundaries within the scope available to them.

2.4.3 Charles Dickens

Born in 1812, Dickens had a childhood full of suffering that left a deep mark in his mind which found expression in the life experiences of the characters in his novels. After his father was imprisoned for debt, Dickens came face to face with the difficulties and humiliations faced by a child labour in London when he worked in a blackening factory. This personal experience and the sympathy for the deprived became the source of most of his novels. For example, *Oliver Twist* narrates the life of a penniless orphan and criticises the working culture of Victorian society that exposed many homeless children to terrible exploitation. Characters like Bumble or the pickpocket Artful Dodger exposed the criminal minded people of Victorian England to represent the sordid reality of London life. Similarly *Nicholas Nickleby* also expresses Dickens' hatred against the exploitation and oppression of children. These major developments connected with industrial England and his personal experience with the legal system also featured in his novels like *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*. His awareness of the unstable state of England and France during the French Revolution gets manifested in the opening lines of his historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, ... (Dickens 1)

This novel also falls in the category of ‘Condition of England’ novel developed by Dickens, after Carlyle, that represents the exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich and the subsequent rebellion rising out of that. Dickens also experimented with the bildungsroman, a form of novel that traces the life of the protagonist from childhood to maturity to mark the development of character through experiences of life. Along with *David Copperfield*, the other famous novel of Dickens *Great Expectations* also falls in the bildungsroman category. *Great Expectations* deals with the life of a young boy Pip tracing his journey from childhood hopes to adulthood knowledge. The characters here are moved by desires only to learn their lesson in the hard way. Pip abandons his benefactor Joe Gregery after moving to an elevated lifestyle created out of the wealth he received from an unknown source. Misfortunes befall him and his great expectations fade away when he learns that the source of money was a runaway convict named Abel Magwitch whom he had helped once. He becomes penniless and returns to Gregery to earn honestly. Having learnt his lesson he develops as a character from ignorance to knowledge and finally unites with his love Estella. The cultural and psychological conflicts of the novel make it one of the finest works of Dickens. Dickens was one of the most popular novelists of his time whose fictional works would be published in installments as series that captivated its audience’s imagination. He has earned a good reputation for creating life like characters by capturing the idiosyncrasies of speech and manners. Despite a few merry making episodes, his novels were mostly a voice against social injustice and criminality born, at times, out of the chaotic socio-political milieu.

Stop to Consider

Bildungsroman novel

It is the German term for an ‘education-novel’ meaning a novel of self-formation or personal development. It is a popular sub-genre of fiction that relates the experiences of a youthful protagonist in meeting the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood. It focuses on the psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood in which the growth of the protagonist’s character is important. These novels are also referred

to as ‘coming-of-age’ novels that are built on the themes of innocence, self-knowledge, self-discovery and vocation. Until 20th century, this sub-genre was not widely accepted in English criticism. Practiced by novelists like Dickens, Flaubert or Henry James in 19th century, this sub-genre developed further in the 20th century through the works of D.H. Lawrence, Kipling, Joyce and many more.

Space for Learner

2.4.4 Bronte Sisters

The Bronte sisters- Charlotte, Emily and Anne- lived a life of seclusion and were educated primarily at home. Their father Patrick Bronte was the parish priest of Haworth, Yorkshire. The Bronte sisters and their brother Branwell spent their life in the Yorkshire moors which later became the central location in Emily Bronte’s only and most famous novel *Wuthering Heights*. Their confined lives made them more imaginative and they explored the realm of fantasy by inventing stories. They would make stories on their imaginary kingdoms of Angria and Gondol and would often write stories and poems. They read and were influenced by the Bible, the works of Homer, Vigil, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and Walter Scott. These and the folk tales shared by their family servant also added to their imagination. Each of the Bronte sisters published their works under a male pseudonym- Currer Bell (Charlotte), Ellis Bell (Emily) and Acton Bell (Anne). The reason for this was the limited scope open to women in the public sphere and the even more limited opportunity to get their works published. Charlotte’s first novel *Jane Eyre* was published in October 1847 after many refusals but her real identity was revealed to the publisher only in July 1848. While curiosities increased about the authorship, the sisters continued to use their male pseudonyms. *Jane Eyre* was successful for many reasons like breaking the conventional code in favour of female desire, employing first person narrative and a romantic heroine. According to Chowdhury and Goswami, “it was *Jane Eyre* which led to the feminist concept of the ‘madwoman in the attic’, developed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in the 1980s” (237). Her other novel *Villette* appeared in 1853 reflecting her memories of Brussels, the place where she studied for a year and later worked as

teacher. Their writings that emerged out of their confined life caught the attention of modern feminist writers as expression of unheard and misrepresented feminine voices. Unlike Charlotte, Anne could not claim much to fame and published two novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) on her experiences as governess and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). However, Emily's only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) won wide acclamation as a masterpiece though only after her death. As already mentioned, this path-breaking novel used the moorland as an inseparable entity in the lives of the characters as if bearing witness to their experiences. The novel is about the unfulfilled love story between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff that brings forth a tale of passions, class struggle, violence and mysticism. The other specialty of the novel is its dual narrative style narrated first by Lockwood, a visitor to the Yorkshire moors and then by Mrs Nellie Dean, the servant to the Earnshaw family. It is regarded as one of the most popular Victorian novels for its judicious balance of gothic and romantic elements as well as the unusual style of narration. As mentioned before, Emily didn't earn this fame during her short lifetime and so Charlotte was the only sibling to achieve recognition during her lifetime. She had a tragic life as she survived to meet the death of all her siblings and bear the burden of loneliness. Her experience as a writer and as a woman was manifested in her biography written by Elizabeth Gaskell that also represents the struggles of Victorian women writers. The works of Bronte Sisters introduced new ways of representing female characters, among other aspects, which was developed further by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

2.4.5 George Eliot

Born in 1819, George Eliot is the pen name of Mary Ann Evans who adopted this male pseudonym to publish her novels without scruples. Like the Bronte sisters, George Eliot also exemplifies the struggle of women writers in Victorian period. However, George Eliot was much different than the Bronte sisters in that she was bold enough to break strict Victorian moral and religious codes to live openly with a married man. As a result she drew criticism from the society and had to live as a social outcaste. She established herself as a novelist in 1859 with the publication of *Adam Bede*. This was followed by her

most appealing novel *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860 that builds on the theme of love and duty as the unifying element in family. The background was everyday provincial life occupied by realistic and compelling characters. Her other popular works include *Silas Marner* in 1861, *Romola* in 1863, *Middlemarch* in 1872 and *Daniel Deronda* in 1876 each with a unique taste of fiction. *Middlemarch* won her the greatest recognition for its wide-ranging and complex narrative depicting the social, intellectual and political upheaval of the period. She was regarded as the greatest living English novelist by readers as diverse as Turgenev, Henry James and Queen Victoria. During her lifetime she was criticized by male readers for investing her intellectual perceptions into the ‘so-called’ male areas like science. However, today her works are important subjects of critical feminist analysis to understand her role in opening up new forays for the portrayal of women in fiction. As in her personal life and her characters in fiction, she broke away with stereotypes to unleash new directions in society. After her death her reputation began to decline but her lost dignity was restored first by Virginia Woolf in her 1919 essay and then by F.R Leavis by including her in his volume *The Great Tradition* in 1948. Leavis praised her by saying that “George Eliot, of course, is not as transcendently great as Tolstoy, but she is great, and great in the same way” (136).

2.4.6 Thomas Hardy

Born in 1840, Thomas Hardy was a novelist, poet and architect who lived in Dorchester, a town that later became the center of his fictitious place Wessex. Hardy published many novels since 1871 but his first great novel was *Far from the Madding Crowd* published in 1874 that had the capricious Bathsheba Everdene as the central character who was loved by three men. It dealt with the themes of love, honour and betrayal set against the realities of a farming community in Victorian England. This was followed by *The Hand of Ethelberta* in 1876 and *The Return of the Native* in 1878. The latter represented Hardy’s preoccupation with the relationship of character with nature. His next major work was *The Mayor of Casterbridge* published in 1886 that very well upheld Darwinian principle of the ‘survival of the fittest’. This is the story of a country

labourer Michael Henchard who gets drunk at a fair and sells his wife and child to a sailor. The reformed Henchard becomes the Mayor of Casterbridge but the past begins to haunt him when his wife returns. At the end he loses everything and leaves Casterbridge as a poor man. Hardy's most famous novel was perhaps *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* (1891) that reflected the experience of woman in a rural countryside. The novel is about the life of its heroine Tess, the daughter of a poor west-country peasant. The story evolves from her tragic fate as her life gets caught between her seducer Alec d'Urberville and her puritanical husband Angel Clare. However, the most important aspect of the novel is the representation of the concept of the 'fallen woman', a recurrent theme in his novels. Tess is represented as a victim of fate and she suffers because of the hypocritical sexual morality of the time but she is also represented as a fighter as she avenges herself by murdering Alec. The novel also develops on the transition from the agricultural to the industrial. In this Tess can be seen as nature destroyed by the intrusion of the machine-culture represented by Alec. Like *Tess*, the underlying theme in most of the novels of Hardy is man's futile struggle against the relentless forces that govern our lives. His novels dealt with hypocrisy, defunct social codes, class barriers, flawed characters, rural life, hostile nature and unstable faith. The rural landscape played a significant role in the lives of his characters as the story unfolded against the rustic background. In fact modern critics see his novels as a documentation of the ancient rural ways of life lost in the hustle bustle of modern urban life.

2.4.7 Oscar Wilde

Born in 1854, Oscar Wilde was a novelist, poet, essayist, and a playwright who wrote only one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890. The novel highlighted the decadent life of late Victorian society. Like Faustus, Dorian also sells his soul and he does so to keep his youth and beauty intact. Lord Henry Wotton appears as his tempter, luring him to believe that beauty is the ultimate object to be pursued in life and makes him indulge in sensuality. Upon knowing the vicious path taken by Dorian, Basil (his portrait painter who can be considered as his conscience) beseeches him to pray for salvation but Dorian

stabs him in anger. Although he repents in the end but it is too late and he dies as an old withered man while his picture restores back to his youthful image. Initially when the novel appeared in serial form in *Lippincott's Magazine*, it aroused scandalized protest but it also brought out his epigrammatic style before a wide public. In response Wilde wrote a preface when the story was published in book form and claimed, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." (5). Thus the preface upheld his belief in the concept of 'art for art's sake' and also presented a defense of his novel.

Space for Learner

SAQ

Discuss the social issues represented in the novels of Jane Austen. How does she portray 19th century England in her novels? (100 words)

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How do the Bronte sisters deal with the women question in their novels? Is it different than the portrayal made by George Eliot? If so, how? (100 words)

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2.5 Popular forms of Fiction during 19th century

Now that you are familiar with the social background as well as the important writers of 19th century fiction, it is time that you acquaint yourself with some of the popular forms of fictional sub-genres that emerged or developed during the time. Although there are many forms that flourished during the period, as you can understand from the abundance of fiction writers, we will take a closer look at some of the more significant forms for a focused study. Let us then consider discussing the sub-genres of gothic fiction, historical fiction, romantic novels and condition of England novel.

2.5.1 Gothic novel

It is a form of narrative fiction dealing with supernatural or horrifying events and generally possessed of a claustrophobic air of oppression or evil. Its characteristic theme is the strangeness of the past upon the present or the influence of the dark ages of oppression upon the enlightened modern era. In gothic romances or tales the story uses castles, convents or gloomy mansions as the haunted setting. Gothic novel appeared in the 18th century with the works of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. They were succeeded by Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) and James Hogg (*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) in the 19th century. The principle motif in these novels is the evocation of psychological torment, guilt, divided self and paranoid delusion. In the Victorian period, the Gothic influence could be found in the novels of the Bronte sisters as well as in some of the novels of Charles Dickens. For example, Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Dickens' *Bleak House* reflect some of the characteristics of gothic fiction. However, a curious revival of the Gothic can be found in the last decades of the Victorian period in the works of Irish and Scottish born authors in which the haunted house is replaced with the possessed body like Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Stoker's famous vampire tale *Dracula* (1897). Thus this genre inaugurated by Walpole was successfully succeeded by Bronte sisters and Dickens in the 19th century and Faulker in the 20th century.

2.5.2 Historical fiction

Historical novels can be said to have been inaugurated by Horace Walpole's gothic-historical novel *The Castle of Otranto* but it was established as a dominant form of fiction by Walter Scott's 25 Waverly novels. As already mentioned, Scott's range of historical settings is wide starting from Scottish novels to the Roman Empire. In the Victorian age, the genre of historical fiction flourished a great deal. Influenced by Scott, many other novelists tried their hands at the form. For example, W. M Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and George

Eliot's *Romola* (1863). Towards the end of 19th century, the romantic potential of the genre was explored by writers like R.L Stevenson with his adventure tales like *Kidnapped* (1886) and dark studies in psychology such as *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889). Henry Rider Haggard's adventurous novels like *Eric Brighteyes* (1890) on the subject of Viking raids or *Montezuma's Daughter* (1893) on the issue of the last years of Aztec Empire also included historical settings. The historical fiction continued to have its popularity in the 20th century and holds a special interest for present day readers as well.

2.5.3 Romantic fiction

Romantic fiction can be the category of story where the trials and subsequent triumphs of heterosexual love constitute the centre of narrative interest. Writers in 18th century had experimented with the genre but unease began in early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft when it primarily became a genre of female readership that would perhaps leave them astray by the unrealistic fantasy fiction. However, in early 19th century Jane Austen mocked the potential errors of female reading of romances and strengthened the major model of romantic fiction, the Cinderella narrative. In the Victorian age, Bronte sisters also developed the form. For example, the romance of doomed love in *Wuthering Heights* and the romance of a young woman's journey towards moral independence in *Jane Eyre*. These models were followed by the much castigations of sensation novelists of the end of the century.

2.5.4 Condition of England novel

'Condition of England novel' refers to those novels of 1840s and 50s that had for its subject matter the impact of industrialization on man and society. These were also known as 'social problem novels' or 'industrial novels'. Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* (1848) can be said to be the first in this category. The story is about the life of Bartons, a working class family and the crisis arising out of the involvement of John Barton in a murder that is motivated by class difference. On the top of that, the location of the novel is in Manchester, one of the centres of industrial growth (as discussed before). The novel rightfully depicts the dehumanization caused by industrialization

and the problems of workers living in slums. This could be seen as the negative impact of urbanisation as well and in such cases the actions (like the murder) of the working class is a result of the difficulties and despair associated with their life. After *Mary Barton*, Gaskell wrote another novel titled *North and South* (1855) exploring the difference between industrial north and leisured south. The other novelist who mastered this subject in his novels was Charles Dickens. As already mentioned, Dickens was sensitive towards the difficulties faced by the working class and children. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, we see the outburst of the weaker section and the under privileged in the form of French Revolution but the novel also highlighted the demerits of industrialization as not every section of society could benefit from this. It gave rise to highway men and other such criminals which the novel depicts justifiably. In *Hard Times*, he caricatures the mechanical and utilitarian way of life in the industrial mill-town of Coketown. Critics have also marked out Dickens' depiction of the treatment of trade unions and the division between capitalist mill owners and the underprivileged workers of the Victorian era. Other novels of this genre include Benjamin Disareli's *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil* (1845), Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850), George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) and Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* (1849).

These are only a handful of categories but there exists many novels that cannot be categorized within these sub-genres. Therefore you will have to adopt a broader perspective in understanding the characteristics of 19th century fiction to include other categories of novel like the Newgate novel, the silver fork novel, detective novel, the provincial novel, the pastoral and the sensation novels

Check Your Progress

Discuss the contribution of Walter Scott to the fictional sub-genre of historical novel. (100 words)

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How does Dickens depict the impact of industrialization and urbanization in his 'condition of England' novels?

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2.6 Emergence of the Modern Novel

Space for Learner

Some of the traits of modern novels have been discussed in previous study materials pertaining to the area “Literature and social History”. What follows is largely an excerpt from a unit titled “Modernist Movements in the Arts”. It is important, by the way, to see the rise of modern novel in the overall context of the various movements of modernism that started from the late nineteenth century.

Novel in the twentieth century marks a break with the classic realism of the nineteenth century fiction. Flaubert and Zola appropriated the mode of Naturalism while Dostoyevsky, attempted to create a “higher realism” that would embrace not only material but spiritual truth as well. Henry James, in his novels such as *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Europeans* (1879) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), used “point of view” in order to lay bare the psychological landscape of his characters’ minds as well as to provide multiple perspectives to the story.

Similarly, “stream of consciousness” technique was developed in the fiction of James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. Stream of consciousness denotes “the continuity of impressions and thoughts in the human mind, or a special literary method for representing this psychological principle in unpunctuated or fragmentary forms of interior monologue” (Drabble, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*: page 975). The term was initially coined by William James (Henry James’s elder brother) in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). This idea also resonates with Henri Bergson’s notion of time as relative according to the individual who perceives it, in contradistinction to linear or chronological time. The phrase ‘stream of consciousness’ in its literary sense, was used by May Sinclair in a review to describe some early volumes of Dorothy Richardson’s novel sequence *Pilgrimage* (1915-38).

James Joyce, who started out as a naturalistic writer in *Dubliners* (1914) under the influence of Flaubert, also appropriated the more demanding and potential stream-of-consciousness technique for his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (where it is more radical than ever). The form, on the other hand, in the work of Virginia Woolf, combined with a more visionary symbolist and surrealist quality in an effort to render with sincerity and candour, the unique experience of a woman, and therefore, particularly feminine conflicts and desires, as seen,

for example, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931). The idea behind this form is to enable a faithful record of the fluidity and randomness of human thought as represented through the characters, and, towards this end, exploit in full measure the vast possibilities of language that can be achieved through irregular or even absent punctuation, broken syntax, absence of grammar and so on.

In a different way, Joseph Conrad approaches the question of subjectivity and meaning especially in the context of race and colonialism, in his novels such as *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and *The Shadow Line* (1917). Conrad relied extensively on the technique of Impressionism, establishing a network of impression gathered at different points of time at different points of the text and retrospectively linking up to produce a greater realization, the process facilitated by the use of time shifts, flashbacks and juxtaposition of events so that the narrators, the listener(s) as well as the reader(s), are compelled to retrace the entire chain of events and thus the significance of the accumulated impressions is reinforced in the mind. At the same time, the process is problematised by withholding the idea of authority from the narrator himself (the narrator being, in every Conrad novel, male). This method also enables the author as well as the reader to enrich the multiple psychological perspectives associated with the novel and its characters and incidents. Such a conception of the novelist's purpose tallies closely with the significant statement made by Virginia Woolf in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919):

"Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?" (*Modernism*, by Peter Childs)

D. H. Lawrence is an important figure in modernist fiction. Lawrence he did not make such dynamic experimentations as Joyce and Richardson did, but nevertheless becomes important in that he actively challenged the existence of the "old stable ego" and voiced the need to explore living human relationships (particularly between man and woman) with a perfect sincerity and candor. It was important since, for him, it was these relationships which would enable the individual to live 'Life' and fulfill one's "Being" as the innermost core of the

self that one wants to “be”. The novel, according to him, by exploring the “subtle interrelatedness” inherent in relationships and therefore in “Life”, is the perfect medium to this end. While Lawrence is not concerned with the conventional sense or meaning of morality, he is concerned with a morality that would transcend its more material and conventional variety, a morality that would have both man and woman (at least initially in his theory) realize their manhood and womanhood and thereby to realize the value of ‘Life’. The medium that Lawrence chose to explore this aspect was the medium of emotional and physical relationships of the characters in his novels such as *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), *Aaron’s Rod* (1922), and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

Check Your Progress

Mention two important features of modern novel. (50 words)

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2.7 Summing Up

Through the above discussion an attempt has been made to familiarize you with the representative writers of 19th century fiction and the events that influenced their work. As you will notice, 19th century has been a very dynamic period in terms of the variety of novels that emerged during the time as well as the socio-political events that took place. The most determining events that also provided raw materials for the novels were the industrial revolution, religion and science debate, and the changing image of women in society. This in turn gave rise to a number of sub-genres of fiction that also influenced the writers of 20th century. Feminism as a movement may have developed in the 20th century but the seeds were sown much before in 18th century and made available for discussion in the 19th century. It was also a period of transition and therefore many unconventional writings also emerged that tried to break away with the decadent social order and brought innovations in writing style as well. On the whole, 19th century fiction can be said to have held up a mirror to society depicting the myriad aspects of the society in transition.

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Unit 3 : Charles Dickens : *Oliver Twist* (Background)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Biographical Sketch
- 3.4 Placing the Text
- 3.5 Summing Up
- 3.6 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to help you in

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

3.2 Introduction

Hard Times was published in book form in 1854 but before the reader could lay hands on it as a single work, it had already been released in serial form. Serial publication was a uniquely Victorian phenomenon and this mode of publication is now extinct. In the Victorian period there were many literary and cultural magazines such as Dickens' own *Household Words* and *Master Humphrey's Clock*. These magazines catered to a varied range of interests of a growing number of literate and curious readers. These magazines or periodicals contained stories, sketches, satirical commentaries on life and other miscellany. Novels also made their appearance in these magazines, normally in the form of "monthly numbers." Afterwards these numbers would be collected and published in a single volume or in two or three volumes. The nature of serial publication had significant implications. The most important

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perhaps was the establishment of an intimate bond between writers and readers. In the case of an immensely popular writer such as Dickens, you could actually substitute the word “reader” with the word “audience” as the later term more effectively conveys the sense of a writer engaged in a public ceremony, conscious of the needs, desires and tastes of a large group of people at the same time. As these novels appeared in periodicals, which contained other matters of general social interest, there was a compulsion for a novelist to be “social” as well, to be treating concerns, which everyone shared, in a manner that would be lucid and enjoyable. If a novelist could get the formula right he could be assured of great and immediate popularity. The formula was often simple. In the words of the novelist Willkie Collins, Dickens’ friend and occasional collaborator or co-author, ‘make ’em laugh, make ’em cry make ’em wait.’ To give one example to clarify this point by making his readers laugh a bit first, and then by introducing pathos and suspense Dickens managed to rouse the intense concern of his readers for the young female protagonist of his novel the old curiosity shop Little Nell to such an extent that the sales figure of his periodical Household Words rose to 100,000 copies! As you perhaps know, today we associate such huge readership figures with popular magazines, and occasionally, with best-selling crime novels. Serious writing does not normally command a wide readership. But the wonderful thing about Victorian novels was that they could deal with serious themes in a serious way and yet be assured of striking popularity. Now *Hard Times* is a more serious work than most of the other works by Dickens, and was consequently not as popular.

SAQ:

What are the ‘Victorian’ elements of Dickens’ writing? (60 words)

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How far can we ‘ignore’ such Victorian elements? (50 words)

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The nature of serial publication or publication of a novel in numbers also had implications for the plot. Most of the Victorian novels are heavily plotted. This is because in order to sustain the interest of the readers, to keep

alive their curiosity or eagerness, a writer would often end a particular number in an intriguing way. If a narrative is packed with moments of surprise and suspense, has lots of twists and turns, it's inevitable that 'plot' - an indication of arrangements of incidents (you will learn more about plot later) - would be emphasized. The challenge of course is to see that 'plot' does not dictate everything.

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

SAQ:

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

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

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3.3 Biographical Sketch

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

career, and he has remained one ever since” “We, in India” have also imbibed Dickens from our childhood. His popular works such as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* somehow find their way into even school syllabuses, albeit in greatly abridged versions or untranslated forms. Then there are the film versions such as the evergreen musical *Oliver!* and others, all testifying to the writer’s universal popularity. If you have seen any of these movies, think of the qualities, which might have struck a sympathetic chord with you. The movies would of course highlight qualities or aspects, which every Englishman could identify with, and which would be of a spectacular, eye-catching nature. Nowadays many of Dickens’ movies are on offer as television serials as well. This underscores the fact that Dickens had a very visual imagination, and also had a great sense of drama. Certain aspects of Dickens’ life are again part of common knowledge and have actually acquired a mythic or folkloric aura. Dickens’ childhood has especially come under scrutiny by biographers. The writer himself has also used his childhood to make memorable observations on the joys and difficulties of growing up. Doesn’t it seem wonderful to you that a writer who is one of the most important and highly regarded in the world has written so much about children? Charles Dickens was born on 7 February 1812, at Landsport near Portsmouth to John and Elizabeth Dickens. John Dickens, the father, was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The father’s job was a reasonably respectable one, and should have assured the family of a life without any great hardships. However, John Dickens was a somewhat imprudent man and thus got into debt-related difficulties. As a result of this, he found himself in the debtors’ prison called The Marshalsea in London in 1824. This proved to be a traumatic event for young Charles. Biographical critics have never wearied of harping on this event for its importance in molding Dickens’ character and career. Of course, they have been given the opportunity to do so by Dickens himself. The novelist has incorporated this miserable episode of his life into the narratives of *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*. In the later novel, there is a haunting portrait of the debtors’ prison, The Marshalsea- It becomes a symbol of human degradation, misery and parasitism (the main character William Dorrit, perhaps modeled partly on John Dickens, becomes indolent and dependent on his younger daughter for having a good and comfortable time). *David Copperfield*, which is even more autobiographical, reflects the event that was a consequence of John Dickens’ imprisonment - the young Dickens’ stint in a shoe-blackening factory. While his father was released from prison after only three months, the family continued to be poor. As a result, Charles was monetarily deprived of education and the normal joys of childhood and sent to the blackening factory mentioned above. This experience is rendered in artistic form in *David Copperfield*.

Stop to Consider

Let me tell you a word or two about biographical criticism here. Very often you will see that a great writer will ‘sublimate’ a painful real experience through the medium of art. That is, they come to terms with that experience by ‘re-visioning’ it through artistic treatment, which would obviously mean re-creation, not just bare repetition. As you can see, Dickens does it in his novels. Another Victorian novelist, Charlotte Bronte, does something similar in her celebrated autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre*. In this novel you can see the depiction of a school called Lowood, a place of suffering and deprivation for young girls. The novelist has obviously drawn on her memories of the school at Cowan Bridge where she received her early education, and whose harsh and severe routine apparently took the lives of her two elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth. Many more such examples can be found in the annals of literary history. While the ‘re-presentation’ of biographical events may not always be as direct and obvious as in the case of Dickens and Bronte, we may be surprised to find the extent to which novelists have fashioned capacious, panoramic and enduring visions of life in novel form based on their own necessarily limited experiences. But there are also dangers of pursuing biographical criticism beyond a certain point. After all, life is not art, and vice versa. Then again, one can get into difficulties by trying to demarcate life/biography from art/novel. Where does life end and art begin? Recent criticism has also exposed many fallacies about art or narrative being simply a reflection or imitation of social life in general and the life of the writer in particular. You can read path-breaking essays such as “The Death of the Author” by Roland Barthes to appreciate the limitations of an author-centric approach to literature, the most extreme manifestation of which would be biographical criticism.

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Anyway, let’s go on and see what the noteworthy events of Dickens’ life are. While it may be unrewarding to mechanically relate a majority of events in a Dickens novel to real events in his life, there is no harm in being familiar with that life.

Fortunately, Dickens did not have to spend a very long time in the factory. He went back to school and afterwards launched his working career through occupations such as being a clerk in a solicitor’s office and then

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parliamentary and newspaperreporter. He would use these experiences in a creative fashion in many of his novels, ranging from the light and buoyant *Pickwick Papers* to the solemn and disturbing *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. An early exposure to governmental inaction and injustices of various kinds gave a strongly reformist orientation to Dickens' writing from the beginning. *Hard Times*, for instance, is certainly one that is essentially about injustice, although the nature of proposed reform is open to question. The element of joy and entertainment that is present together with a searching social critique in *Hard Times* and other works is also traceable to facts of Dickens' life. (Once again please note that I am not making out a case for an out-and-out biographical approach to Dickens' works - it's just that it's useful to mine information that is available, and not approach a literary work as an isolated artifact as the New Critics did.) After trying his hand at other forms of journalism, Dickens became a full-time novelist with the publication of *The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club* (1837). With financial success greeting him with each successive work after this, Dickens became free to indulge his passions. This included publishing his own literary and miscellaneous journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and becoming involved with the theatre as writer, actor and director. In 1857 he would stage his best-known play *The Frozen Deep*. Dickens also read his novels aloud to large audiences, an activity which could also be called a theatrical performance.

SAQ

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Placing the Text

I have always believed that when we read the works of an author, it is as if we go on to know the writer through his/her books, it can be seen as a journey of recognition of the writer in new ways with the reading of each of his book. When *Pickwick Papers* came with the lively atmosphere of the club people the readers could taste a whole world of human beings with as many different characters as we may meet in our own lives. The elements of a good fictional works were all discernible in this first book itself. When Dickens was stirred by the adoption of the Poor law in 1834, he started to write about *Oliver Twist* in serialized form. It was in 1837 that *Oliver Twist* appeared in the book form. The popularity and stardom of Dickens as a stalwart of English fiction was all set to gallop with this second book of his. This work received

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immediate reactions from the government bodies because of the uncensored presentation of crimes like murder, deceit and theft. Such unveiled depiction of the conditions of the government workhouses left the common people to halt and think of these harsh realities of their age and spontaneously shower their love and admiration towards the author. What was unnerving is the extreme level of severity and inhuman attitude of each and every member of the workhouse authorities. None of these people could be found to show any sign of sensitivity or kindness towards the poor children who lived there. Rather, these little ones were kept half fed and were made to overwork with such scanty food.

Stop to Consider

Although the workhouses had been set up to provide for look after the poor and the destitute, the reality was far from this. It was thought by the workhouse administration that if the poor got everything for free, they would become idle and thus become burden on the authorities. Hence, the Board of Trustees built up such an atmosphere that there were no amenities or good stuff available there. Rather the inmates of these workhouses must know well that they would not get anything but they would have to earn their living with their hard work and capacity to work while living there.

Around the time of his ninth birthday Oliver was brought back to the workhouse from the branch-workhouse where he had been sent in his sickly condition in infancy to be placed under the supervision of an experienced lady Mrs. Mann. Now that he has grown up, Mr. Bumble, a Beadle from the parish authorities has come to take him back to the workhouse. The period of stay at that place was horrible for all the children staying there. Mrs. Mann received a good amount from the parish authorities as stipend to take care of the children who lived there, but she kept half the money to herself while allowing the children to starve and work under tedious situations. Her rugged character has been highlighted by Dickens in the following words:

“The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself.”

.. On this note we tend to remember another novel of Dickens, *Great Expectations* in which we can read the story of another child character Pip who survives in the world with a lot of suspense and questions. This novel has an attempt to portray the illusions shrouded by which we often live in this difficult world. The role of memory has been imbibed in the story and character of Pip. Certain facts are kept veiled by the author seeking some inquisitiveness from the readers. His character is so strong and grasping that the criticism of the novel being loose in plot proves simply overruled.

In our present discussion Oliver remains oppressed and tortured till the moment he gets his identity and parentage. From his birth to the life with all sorts of callous people indulging in so many criminal activities he had to go through tremendous struggle which should never be the due to any child. His character aroused the national consciousness of the English people and made the author a household name who could present his contemporary society in such an honest way.

3.5 Summing Up

Dickens' description of the conditions of the workhouses and the authority people who devastated the childhood of poor children is touching and thought provoking. As a social critic and social reformer he boldly came forward to raise his voice against the corruption and exploitation that was going on in the superficially prosperous Victorian age. The depiction and treatment of the conditions of poor people by Charles Dickens can be placed under the category of the Social Realism. Although a few other novelists like Charlotte Bronte, George Elliot and Thomas Hardy wrote some stuff in this genre, it was Dickens who received unprecedented and immense popularity in portraying the poor common man trying hard and suffering miserably to gain upward mobility in the society. This is because Dickens never refrained from portraying the actual picture of his society; he never allowed any bias or prejudice to hinder him from presenting the struggles and turmoil of the weak in his works in whatever dark forms they were perceived by him. All ranks of people and all levels of human qualities can be equally found to be read about in his captivating novels. It is not for nothing that he can be considered the representative novelist of the golden age of this literary genre.

In this unit I have acquainted you with the main events of Dickens' life apart from telling you about phenomena such as 'serial publication' and its

implications for the relationship between writer and reader. I also gave you some introductory ideas about *Oliver Twist* in the expanded context of his corpus, that is, his works as a whole.

3.6 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 4 : Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

Introducing the novel

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 What happens in *Oliver Twist*
- 4.4 The Characters
- 4.5 Minor characters
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives

This unit will introduce the readers to the novel *Oliver Twist*. The discussion should begin by familiarizing you with some points of view to be kept in mind while reading any piece of fiction. After this general approach we shall move on to the text here.

This unit has been prepared to

- *assist* you in reading the novel
- *make* you acknowledge the novel in its totality of plot, character and structure
- *enable* you to assess all the characters in relation to the proceeding of the events, and
- *make* you recognize those characteristics in the novel which make Dickens so remarkable in his writing.

4.2 Introduction

Preparing to read about any of Dickens' novels is a pleasure in itself. It will definitely bring in that enthusiasm and vigour that we go on to think of all the myriad shades found in his characterization and unique narratives. Dickens

is full not only in quantity but definitely also in quality. Each of his novels presents a specific world of the English life during the Victorian era. As Dickens was conversant with the nooks and corners of the London city, he was able to know most of the trades and the types of people associated with such varied occupations and their kinds of life.

Dear learners, can you imagine what kind of sensibilities will grow in a child who had to suddenly dump himself in such unparalleled horror of life? Will every such child sustain his or her mental abilities and human sensibilities and regular rational existence? We shall surely let us to know after reading this novel.

When Dickens was forced to replace his schooling by becoming a factory worker and experience a temporary phase of orphanhood he gracefully digested everything that came to him from life. He was bullied by elder paupers while working in the factory; he had to skip meals, face indignation, hostility and suffer hardships which were all imposed in abundance. His entire life was haunted by the memories of these tedious moments. The initial chapters of *Oliver Twist* narrate the horrific atmosphere of the workhouses and the parish. Now when his parents were released from the debtors' prison Dickens could return to his formal schooling, although he did not pursue much of higher education, he learnt shorthand that helped him a lot in collecting enormous information and materials for his future novels. At a very young age he took up the work as a law clerk which eventually also forwarded him towards becoming a journalist. His foray into journalism helped him to keep track of the various crimes and other anti social happenings in the city of London which had been turning into a highly commercial hub for industrial upgradation. The London society was profuse with diversity and abundance of raw materials for Dickens to create his characters and plots.

If we look at the Victorian England of the time, it was in a position where literature was waving at writers from all genres to exemplify their talents and art in all possible ways. At the level of poetry Tennyson, Arnold, the Brownings were representing the age in their voices with the depiction of both the matters of celebration as well as those of condemnation. Poems like "*Ulysses*" and "*Dover Beach*" expressed the true spirit of the age. In prose authors like Ruskin, Arnold and Newman were busy writing realistically about the philosophical foundations of the time. It must not be overlooked that although the Queen had been valorizing the obvious developments in the society and the progress in the quality of human life, underneath were many such

observations which were not brought to the fore by all writers in the true form. While the preceding Romantic age was full of imagination and lyricism presenting the lighter side of human life, the Victorian age could not be available in the same spirit of solitude and fanciful ideas. The Victorian age was one of deep thought, compromise and struggle to survive; it was devoid of the spirit of escape which was comfortably made vibrant by the literature of the preceding age. Darwin's book *The Origin of Species* is a prominent specimen of the scenario of that age. The complexities that were thrust upon the people by the Industrial Revolution, the widening social marginalization and the advent of various rights and laws led to the awareness of the common man about everything around them. The development of various writings like periodicals, journals and magazines discussed the new facts and information of the scientific line of thought began to shake the Church's position and make the public more and more informed about their lives and rights. The growth of literacy led to the unprecedented rise in readership which eventually turned out to be the factor behind the success of writers. Hidden under the shining walls of the palace and the decorative churches were the poor and needy people who were let down by the so called developmental ventures. The capitalist systems left nothing for them and they were left on the streets starving and at the mercy of the systems like the workhouse. Besides this, there were many social evils in which women were made victims to suffer in the name of morality and family bindings. In short, the Victorian age was not only prosperous but also full of problems which were discussed by the writers of all genres, especially the novels.

As far as Dickens is concerned, his manner of introducing us to the subject matter of the novel is unique; he does not use the name of any city or location to begin the story, he merely lets us know that a child was born in a workhouse followed by the demise of the mother the next moment. The poignant point to note here is the indication as to what notoriety this orphan might have to face in its life to come, the hard fact being that it was left in a workhouse- a kind of curse to the poor and the homeless. Besides, Dickens' use of language must be applauded when he satirizes such charitable establishments in a stark grim language wrapped in his wit. The children in the workhouses lived so miserably that they were not even taught the basic etiquettes of Christianity, let alone other good ways of becoming a better civilian of the nation. When Oliver was asked by the board members whether he prayed at night like a good Christian and thanked the people who took care of him, the child stammered to say "yes, sir". Dickens narrated the scene sarcastically so:

“The gentleman who spoke last was unconsciously right. It would have been *very* like a Christian, and a marvelously good Christian too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of *him*. But he hadn't, because nobody had taught him.”

The idea of taking care and allowing anything

The way in which he describes the feeling of the events and especially the detailed appearances of the characters is simply commendable.

4.3 What happens in *Oliver Twist*

The birth of the child without any solid knowledge about his fatherhood (or parenthood, so to say) and his mother's death in no time imposes upon it a life of punishment and forced labour combined with a half fed stomach. Dickens almost directly points towards the negativity and doomed life of the children in the workhouses during the Victorian England. The child was born too feeble in a pitiable circumstance as the mother was so sick that she succumbed to death immediately after its birth. The newborn was in such a condition that its survival seemed doubtful to the surgeon and the old lady attending on her. Dickens describes its condition as such: “..he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance decidedly in favour of the latter”. The beadle Mr. Bumble gave him the name Oliver Twist based on a peculiar alphabetical formula of naming orphans born in that workhouse, the christening based on chance. The manner of beginning the account of this boy's life lends an ominous sense of future that is going to be imposed upon its very existence. The children survived by consuming some gruel.

The next nine years Oliver spent in utter malnutrition and utter lack of humanity under the care of an elderly lady Mrs. Mann who was adept in the wrong use of the fund allotted to her by the parish authorities for taking care of the orphans. She used the fund received from the parish authorities to fulfill her ends allowing the children to remain undernourished and unhealthy.

One day Mr. Bumble come to Mrs. Mann's place to take Oliver with him as he has already completed nine years and now too old to be in that place now. Besides, no information of his parents could be found till then by the higher authorities which is why he is to return to the house where he was born. The shrewd lady pretends to be just the opposite of what she had been all these years to the little child. Although Oliver is faintly relieved to get rid of

Mrs. Mann, he unknowingly feels some pain to leave behind all his inmates who were his only source of recognition and sustenance. Dickens feels the loneliness of Oliver in the following words:

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“Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child’s heart for the first time.”

Now comes the hardest part of Oliver’s life. Where he has landed upon would now be a nightmarish experience to him. Food, was denied most cruelly by the master of the workhouse kitchen. The children were so ill fed that they grew slightly rebellious and they plan to ask for more food. The plan sportingly follows so that the turn falls on Oliver to ask for more. And this such an incident that the entire workhouse is shaken by the request for a second serving. Oliver’s words “please sir, I want some more” disturbs everyone as though more than an earthquake has destroyed the establishment or killed some people rightaway. Dickens amuses us with his description of the horrible situation thus created by Oliver that rendered the fat healthy master pale and clueless: “the assistants were paralysed with wonder, the boys with fear.” It didn’t take much time for the beadle to inform the matter to the higher authorities and next for Oliver to be imprisoned in a solitary room. As advertised about the availability of Oliver for apprenticeship, a chimney sweep namely Mr. Gamfield comes to get him as a sweeper. Oliver is summoned from his confinement by Mr. Bumble and taken to the magistrate for approval of the deal. Owing to his rough behavior Gamfield is not much approved of by the old gentlemen, especially after they closely notice the terrified pale face of the child. The magistrates order the beadle to show kindness to the boy which he is badly in want of.

SAQ

Q1. Write a note on the never ending hardships of Oliver Twist. (50 words)

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Q2. What idea do you form of the people he was surrounded by? (50 words)

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The people of the workhouse want to get rid of Oliver now, also because he has been a cause of trouble for them asking for more food or crying about his turmoil staying there. Now they are trying to send him to the sea on some trading vessel so that he may eventually die of cold or hunger or torture. But in the meantime, Mr. Bumble happens to meet an undertaker Mr. Sowerberry and bargains with him on the price of taking in Oliver as an apprentice. Sowerberry tries to show as if he is all in trouble as he does not have much to provide for his family because he is not making much profit in his trade. Finally Oliver is brought to be sent with this coffin maker. While bringing him to his new destination, Mr. Bumble taunts him bitterly, calling him the most ungratefulest and the worst disposed boy ever. Pained by everything he pleaded to be good and cried bitterly saying, "So lonely, sir! So very lonely. Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't pray be cross to me." Oliver was received by Mr. Sowerberry and then handed over to Mrs Sowerberry. She calls Oliver very small to which Bumble said that he would grow up. The cranky lady is not at all fond of children, her opinion is that parish boys are more costly to keep than their worth. Oliver offered some food discarded by the dog, but there is some trace of meat in it, the ever starving child desperately devour upon it. At this point Dickens has deliberately tried to show the bare faced living conditions in which the poor people were made to live while working in factories or other establishments. Poverty, ill sleeping arrangements, hunger were the only things one could think of in these places. But at the same time, the character of Oliver has been hardened enough to bear all the trouble and disgust silently; once he is inside Mrs. Sowerberry's place, he puts up a brave face to go through everything to come.

Owing to his melancholy appearance, Oliver is appointed by the Sowerberrys as a hired mourner at the funerals. In this task he could witness the extremities of human materialism, vices and hypocrisy. But he does his work diligently and earns his master's liking. This, in turn, makes him enemies of Noah- a senior apprentice and also Mrs. Sowerberry. One day Noah, Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry instigates Oliver that he has to resort to aggressive behavior. When Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry were called, the latter mercilessly beat Oliver and he is punished without any fault of his. Next morning Oliver walks out and leaves the place for good; he does not know his destination but heads towards the city.

SAQ

Q1. Describe briefly Oliver’s turmoil while he is apprenticed with the Sowerberrys? (75 words)

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Q2. Sketch the character of Mrs. Sowerberry. (40 words)

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Q3. Why is Noah jealous of Oliver? How does he take revenge upon the latter? (20+30=50 words)

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Space for Learner

With a penny in his pocket, a clean shirt and two pairs of stockings with him Oliver walks more than a hundred miles to reach near London and he hopes nobody would be able to find him out in his new destination. He suffers extreme levels of hardship for seven days without food and money until he meets a queerest looking boy name artful Dodger who treats Oliver with food and drink and promised to take him to a gentleman who would offer free food and lodging to the homeless. At nightfall the two boys head towards London and eventually enter a filthy and noisy street to go and meet the red haired repulsive Jew Fagin. A few small boys are mysteriously smoking like elders. After having some food and hot drink, Oliver falls fast asleep. While waking up, Oliver sees Fagin with some valuables in a box. He is then threatened to remain silent about this. In the next few days that Oliver stays in Fagin’s place, he is trained by the gang how to pick pockets but he did not know he too would have to do that.

One fine day Oliver is sent to a street where the Dodger picks the pocket of an old gentleman and hands over to Bates. Oliver is so puzzled and terrified that he simply starts running too. The mob takes Oliver to the police and then to a courtroom where the old gentleman whose pocket was picked comes. The moment he looks at Oliver, he starts to think about someone’s strange

resemblance to Oliver's face, but he can not recall. On the other hand, Oliver is set free when the bookstall owner comes running to say that he is innocent.

Stop to Consider

Dickens presents before our eyes a concrete picture of the criminal attitude of the gang members and the ferocious manner in which the mob chased the little boy. Dodger and Bates are so adept in the trade that they successfully could divert the public towards Oliver amidst all the hue and cry. The details provided to us are a special mastery of Dickens that we get the exact idea of the criminals' demeanour and their depth of anti- social activities.

Oliver is so shocked by the sudden events that he can not move and Mrs. Brownlow then takes him to his house and his attendant Mrs. Bedwin takes care of the boy for several days. Finally Oliver gets well and feels happy to be safe. Mr. Brownlow comes to the conclusion that the portrait hung on his home wall was a carbon copy to the countenance of Oliver.

Stop to Consider

While depicting the torments of the poor people we can also read the narrative accounts by Mark Twain- a towering figure in the world of literature. There is a famous quote by Twain revealing his sarcastic attitude towards the evils of the society:

"When the rich rob the poor; it's called business. When the poor fight back, it's called violence"

- The Apocryphal Twain

Inside Fagin's gang, there is going on disturbing arguments about the incident when arrives Bill Sikes- a well built rowdy youth with fearful appearance. They decide to find out what happens to Oliver after the incident. Nancy and Bet are sent to the police as relatives of the boy and finally they find out the address of Mr. Brownlow. At Brownlow's place, again, Oliver is happy to get the care, love and new clothes to wear. In the meantime, Brownlow's friend Mr. Grimwig visits the latter and tries to stain the impression about Oliver. Although Brownlow is unshaken about the innocence of Oliver, he consents to test the boy and sends him to the bookstall with some valuable

books. It is again so unfortunate with this miserable child that he is caught by Fagin's gang while he is making his way to the stall. He is tortured by Fagin when Nancy comes to rescue and support for her. Dickens has drawn these incidents to bring out a picture of the London at that time and the evidence of the terror stricken criminal world which was so deep rooted that it seemed really difficult to identify and uproot them. It is also interesting to note that the thieves in such groups do not seem to enjoy their bold adventure, but they seem to remain threatened by the fear of the police and law. This is evident when no one from Fagin's group is ready to visit the police to seek information about Oliver.

In a transitional chapter 17 is found little Dick on the verge of death from malnutrition who wants to bless his loved mate Oliver. Mr. Bumble gets an advertisement in the newspaper about a reward of five guineas to anyone who would provide any information about Oliver and his history. He immediately lands at Brownlow's house and gives such a demolishing impression of Oliver as a malicious and harmful creature that whatever kind feelings were in Brownlow towards the child is vanish in a moment. It is Mrs. Bedwin who still didn't believe that Oliver is treacherous.

While in Fagin's gang, all are trying to convince Oliver about the charms of the criminal life. They all try to engage him in at least in one criminal act so that after it he would continue in the fear of being caught by the police, this time Nancy too is with them. Finally with the help of a villain Sikes and a Toby, Fagin decides to send little Oliver to a robbery where only a little child was required to enter the house. It must be noted here that although Nancy wanted to help Oliver, she is terribly afraid of her masters. This is the reason why she consents to bring Oliver to William Sikes.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Oliver is repeatedly being torn apart by the evil and immoral people in the novel. He neither gets the opportunity to set himself free from such clutches nor is he mature enough to show more courage. What can be said about such groups where naïve and innocent children were 'trained' to become thieves or pickpockets? Consider the following.

Another horrible journey starts for Oliver with Sikes, they go on walking long distances through streets and localities, some parts are travelled on cart.

Space for Learner

Oliver is dismayed by dejection and also by the fear of being murdered this time. They eventually reach an old house which is Toby Chitling's lodging. Oliver is forced to drink and to fall asleep. At midnight they wake him up and begin their expedition, only when they reach the destination and climb up a house that Oliver understands what is actually going on. He cries out helplessly to let him go but they threaten to kill him. Next moment they pull him up and send him in through a window to the hall of the house so that he can open the main door for them to enter. But the naïve child steps on the floor to only wake up the people of the house. One of the servants fires at Oliver and injures him. At this, the two criminals run away carrying Oliver but later they leave the wounded boy in a ditch.

The next scene shifts to the workhouse where Mr. Bumble is flirting with the ageing Mrs. Corney, the matron, over a cup of tea. Suddenly an old lady informs that Old Sally, a pauper at the place now but once was a nurse, is extremely sick and wants to say something before dying. Mrs. Corney runs to Old Sally complaining about the cold on her way. Sally is near death but somehow requests for privacy and then tells Corney that ten years back a woman came there and gave birth to a boy and died immediately. Before dying she had handed over a gold neckpiece to Old Sally so that her child would be taken care of with that price. But Sally had stolen that gold ornament. The dying woman discloses that the boy is named Oliver, but she fails to give the whereabouts of the gold and passes away.

Fagin is seen to be immensely interested in Oliver as he thinks the boy can help him make progress in his trade. He is horrified to learn about the failure of the robbery and most worried about losing Oliver. He sets out to the streets to search for the boy and see if he is alive.

Stop to Consider

The London city is described with details of the different types of shops in several lanes and streets with their deceitful looks. The extended size of this city copes with the endless prospects of crimes and the authority's deaf ear to such common incidents as the one that took place with Oliver. There were pubs and such recurring hubs where criminals could meet and execute their actions, in one of these spots could be now found Monks- another villain of the novel who wants to convert Oliver into a criminal so that the family estate could be his alone. It becomes confusing

for the readers at this point as to what is actual intention of not killing Oliver but only turning him into a criminal.

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Oliver wakes up on a wet morning to find himself in pain with the wounded arm. With some effort he gets up and starts walking only to find out that the direction is towards the house where they had gone to rob. But he is so weak that he can manage to go nowhere for his life. When the servants scream that the robber had returned, the ladies Rose and her aunt Mrs. Maylie take him in to be taken care of. The mature lady is not assured of the boy's innocence but her niece feels the goodness and helplessness of Oliver.

SAQ

Q1. Comment on the crime scenario of London city presented through the gang of Fagin. (50 words)

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Q2. Describe the psychological condition of Oliver after he was forced to the robbery and then left in the ditch with a bullet wound. (40 words)

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It seems that Dickens has, by this time, decided to put aside the miseries of Oliver and turned the events to show a striking reverse of the boy's fortune from the ditch to the Maylies' humane concern and care from many more people including the doctor. Rose opines that such a small child can never be a robber as he is so miserable and fragile, and looks being denied of a decent family life to support him. Dr. Losberne says that often thieves scare such helpless children to be used in their wrong acts. In the mean time, police officers come to investigate the burglary but the ladies and Dr. Losberne succeed in making the officers believe in the innocence of Oliver in the failed robbery. Thus, Oliver's luck seems to favour him this time leaving him in a good living condition never experienced before.

In these happy circumstances Oliver narrates everything about his life to the ladies and the doctor. Next they together leave to meet Mr. Brownlow at his London residence, but they are utterly disappointed to learn that Brownlow had left for West Indies after selling everything in London. Oliver feels absolutely distraught not to have found Brownlow to tell him the truth as to why he cannot return from the book stall and how he is caught by the thieves. Sadly they come back to the countryside where Oliver begins to live happily with the two ladies. These happy moments are disrupted by a sudden illness of Rose but she recovers soon. A new character Harry comes to Mrs. Maylie's house and we learn that he is Mrs. Maylie's son. He soon falls in love with Rose and conveys to his mother his desire to marry her. His mother is not eager to support him and tells him to reconsider his wish because the doubtful circumstances linked to Rose's birth may later create obstacles in this relationship. There is a romantic consideration at this point amidst the excessive tension which is recurrent in the novel. Harry is madly in love with Rose and cannot express it to his mother pathetically: "I have considered! Mother, I have considered, years and years. I have considered, ever since I have been capable of serious reflection. My feelings remain unchanged, as they ever will; and why should I suffer the pain of a delay in giving them vent,..." Meanwhile, Oliver is again frightened by two men near the window of his table when he is only at a short distance from being caught by the Jew and a second one. He is aghast with fear and cries for help, he is saved though by the kind inmates whom he had been living with.

Back in the workhouse where Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney are now married, they quarrel and eventually the wife forcefully drags Bumble out of the house. While walking in the streets, he encounters Monks, the strange character who demanded some information about Oliver's history. Bumble takes him to Corney (now Mrs. Bumble) where everything is revealed that Old Sally stole the ornament from Oliver's mother but mortgaged it to a shop in need of money. Later, Mrs. Bumble finishes the receipt from Sally and collects the ornament from the shop after paying the due amount. Monks threatens the couple and takes the ornament and throws it in the running water and leaves the spot.

A sick Sikes is visited by Fagin to give him some drink, but Monk angrily demands money which Fagin didn't have at that time. Fagin says he would go to his lodging and send some money in Nancy's hand. At his lodging suddenly appears Monks and demanded to tell some secret to Fagin. While these two

are discussing the secret about Oliver's parentage and their plan to harm him, Nancy overhears them. She resolves to do something to thwart the evil intentions of monks and save Oliver. She gives the money to Sikes and waits till he is asleep. The next moment she is crazily running on the streets to meet Rose Maylie to inform her about the evil plans of her gang members. She somehow meets and everything to her and promises to meet at the London Bridge at a particular time. Rose is overwhelmed to see the goodness in Nancy and promises to help her if needed. Just then, Oliver comes running to Rose and tells her that he saw Mr. Brownlow in a carriage and entering a particular establishment the address of which he has noted down. The two hurriedly go to meet Brownlow and narrate everything to the kind hearted man. Oliver is extremely glad to have revealed his truth to the man who once took such good care of him. Rose and Brownlow also discuss the impending danger to Oliver's life. All the well wishers get together to help Oliver out of the danger and to hand over the criminals to police. Brownlow adds that that they need to be careful because they must first get to know the secret about Oliver's parentage so that he can inherit his father's property. Besides, Nancy's name should not be revealed as she might be in danger too.

The next scene shows Noah and Charlotte running away to London after stealing money from their masters- the Sowerberrys. While staying in a public house for safety, they meet Fagin and are tempted to join his gang. On the other side, Dodger has been caught by the police and now he faces a trial in the court and is given imprisonment. Fagin comments at this point that in their trade they must save themselves. When Nancy tries to go out to meet Rose and Brownlow, Sikes asks her repeatedly where she is going. Nancy replies she is simply going out. Fagin too is there. Sikes and Fagin suspect Nancy of something. Sikes then beats her mercilessly for being adamant.

Noah's first task for Fagin is to keep a strict watch on Nancy. Henceforth, he begins to follow her everywhere. Nancy meets Rose and Brownlow and they have an important conversation. Everything is overheard by Noah who then goes to report it to his master. At his lodging, Fagin is in a strange mood lying beside Noah. Just then Sikes arrives aggressively to handover some papers. He is irritated to see Fagin so grim. Then Fagin wakes up Noah to narrate everything about Nancy. After hearing of Nancy's meeting with the people, Sikes gets infuriated and misunderstands that Nancy has betrayed him. While Fagin advises him to handle the situation with care and not harm the girl, Sikes seems out of control and he goes straight to Nancy. She is

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sleeping when Sikes wakes her up and dreadfully catches her on the neck and accuses her of being a betrayer. Nancy tries to explain that she has exposed nothing about him, but he is so outraged that he hit her on her head and kills her instantly. The reader is surely not ready for such a sudden and horrific development. It is only after the murder took that Sikes begins to get terrified about his consequence. He locks the door with the dead body and starts to wander aimlessly on the streets. He also hears from people on the streets about the murder. When he returns to London exhausted and tormented, he finds himself so full of agony that he becomes sick. While he crosses a village with a fire incident, he tries to abscond but accidentally hangs himself in front of the public while escaping with a rope.

SAQ

Q1. Describe the horrific murder of Nancy and the circumstances around this incident. (75 words)

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Q2. Write a note on the life of Edwin Leeford, Oliver’s father in terms of what we get to learn from Monks. (40 words)

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When the actual identity of Oliver is about to be revealed, Mr Brownlow threatens Monks with police. Oliver’s father had married Monks’ mother only to satisfy his father, so later on he fell in love with Agnes, Oliver’s mother. Both were passionately together and Agnes became pregnant. Meanwhile, Edwin had to leave when he was called to Rome to inherit a huge property from his relative. His wife too went with him. In the course of events, both Edwin and his wife died. But Before dying Edward left a will leaving his property to his wife and to also transfer some amount to Agnes who was about to give birth to a child. But Monks’ mother destroyed the will leaving everything solely to her son. Next, Monks also discloses to Brownlow his intention of removing Oliver from his way of inheriting the property of their father. At this point Brownlow again blackmails Monks and makes him share his property with Oliver. Monks had no option as his criminal activities would not allow him to stay peacefully otherwise.

In the following concluding chapters, Noah and Fagin are arrested and tried. Whereas Fagin is sentenced to death, Noah is forgiven for becoming the informer and supplying with the information of many such criminals. Fagin dies of mental agony again making the readers believe in the concept of divine justice. We also learn about the tragic death of little Dick who was the true companion of Oliver in the workhouse. Mr. Bumble is punished for all of his corruption and he is reduced to be a pauper himself in the workhouse where he was once an administrator. Monks takes his share of property and left for America where he resumes his crimes and eventually gets imprisoned. Some other members of the criminal gang realize the futility of such a filthy life and change themselves.

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On a happy note, Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son to light up his barren life. Earlier, he had lost his love and had remained unmarried till now. Harry is married to his long awaited love, Rose. Mrs. Maylie is very happy with her son and his wife. Thus comes to an end the story of Oliver Twist whose life began and continued to be overfed by miseries, misfortunes and troubles but he keeps his goodness intact and finally with the help of some good and kind people he succeeds to overcome every odd and get settled in a happy and well-to-do life.

SAQ

Q1. Analyze how Dickens tries to delve deep into the cause of Child abuse through the use of biting satire. (50 words)

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Q2. What do you know about divine justice? How is the concept of divine justice exemplified by Dickens in this novel? (60 words)

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Q3. How far can Charles Dickens be called a social reformer and a social critic? Explain after your reading of this strong novel. (50 words)

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4.4 Major Characters

Oliver Twist

He is the central character of the novel that was named by the beadle in the workhouse where he was born. He was the illegitimate child born from the uncertified relationship between his parents- Edwin Leeford and Agnes. He is extremely innocent and this trait of him leads him to be the prey of endless troubles, punishment and tortures wherever he went to live, right from his early years in the workhouse to the apprenticed place to Fagin's deceitful gang. After being born in the workhouse he is sent to Mrs. Mann to be looked after by her. He is brought back to the original place again when he is nine years old.

Agnes Fleming

She is the mother of Oliver who gives birth to him in a workhouse and dies the next moment. She is in a love relationship with Edwin Leeford and becomes pregnant. Since she is an unwed mother and a question for the society, she accept the hardships of the toughest life in order to save her family from social condemnation. Subsequently she goes through tremendous turmoil and hardship before the child's birth.

Edwin Leeford

He is the father of Oliver Twist who does not appear in the novel in physical appearance. He is a wealthy person who is involved in the affair outside his marriage and his beloved gives birth to Oliver although this information is not revealed until Oliver is ten years old and distraught with so many tough conditions in his life. Later on his son keeps on chasing Oliver to turn him into a criminal so as to make him ineligible to inherit the father's estates. But these evil plans could be successful.

Mr. Bumble

He is the beadle of the workhouse where Oliver was born. He constantly shows his unlimited repulsion towards Oliver whenever he gets an opportunity. When Oliver was brought to the board of trustees and when the apprenticeship was tried, on both occasions Bumble rebuked him and called him the most ungrateful and 'bare-facedest'. His reprimanding attitude went so far that the old magistrate had to warn him not to torture the child but to keep him and treat with kindness as the child is pale with fear. He even went to the extent of demolishing the character of Oliver in front of Mr. Brownlow only to get the

reward advertised in newspaper. Mr. Bumble is one of the instruments through which Dickens has directly brought to exposure the sickly conditions of the English workhouses and the callousness of the inhuman officials who were engaged in looking after the orphans.

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Mrs. Mann

She is in charge of the branch workhouse in which Oliver stayed for the initial nine years of his orphaned life. She is a selfish lady with no concern for anyone and only her own benefit in mind. She takes most of the fund for herself which is paid to her for the care of the orphans in the branch workhouse. She pretends to be kind to Oliver at the time of his farewell from her place.

Artful Dodger

His actual name is Jack Dawkins who found Oliver on the streets of London and takes him to Fagin with the false promise of helping him. He is one of the most active figures of Fagin's group along with Bates. He is hardly seen in a merry mood. He is greatly responsible for the troubles which Oliver faces in London initially and even later on.

Charley Bates

He is another gang member of Fagin. He is an expert in the trade of picking pockets who is entitled to even train newcomers like Oliver. Although he is a serious contributor to the crime, his cheerful and merry character often removes gloom from the criminals' den. He is transformed towards the end of the novel.

Fagin

He is the foremost villainous character in the novel who gains the hatred from all the readers owing to his consistent negativity of action and character. He collects small children and trains them as pickpockets thus building up a small empire of debauchery and crime. Even after several instances of failure, he does not leave hope of making little Oliver a thief to promote his criminal business. Interestingly though, he is afraid of Sikes and is obliged to obey the dictates of the cruel monster.

Nancy

She is an active female member of Fagin's gang who was previously a child pickpocket and now the mistress of the Jew. She showed mixed colours in her character. Once she saves Oliver from the fury of Fagin. Although she

continues to work for the gang, she subsequently risks and ends her life while saving Oliver and bringing him to safety. She ultimately proves herself one of the most pious hearts among the others in the novel. It is ironical that she loves Sikes and never discloses any detail about him; he brutally kills her with the doubt that he is exposed by her.

4.5 Minor Characters

William Sikes

He was a bigger criminal than that of Fagin in terms of his vigour and dynamic dealings. He is characterized as the ultimate devil that had no trace of anything near humanity or kindness. Even Fagin damps himself when Sikes enters with his well built physical severity. He can be regarded as the most dangerous character in the entire novel.

Mr. Brownlow

He is the gentleman whose pocket is picked by the gang members of Fagin leaving Oliver in the hands of the angry mob.

Mrs. Maylie

The kind lady in whose house the robbery is attempted and Oliver is left wounded by a bullet. Later they keep the young boy in her house and take good care of him when he is mostly in need of the same.

Rose Maylie

The young niece of Mrs. Mayle who is very kind and soft hearted who is the one who understood the innocence and helplessness of poor Oliver and also entreats her aunt to be kind. She gets married to Harry.

Monks

He is the mysterious character who keeps appearing in the novel with some puzzled actions and it remains difficult to understand his identity and his motive of chasing Oliver. He confronts Mr. Bumble and then reached Mrs. Bumble to get hold of the articles including the ornament of Oliver's mother. He then strangely throws the articles into the running water to erase any clue to Oliver's parentage. He is revealed to be the half brother of Oliver who is trying to harm Oliver all the while to inherit their father's property alone.

Mrs. Corney (Mrs. Bumble)

She is the matron of the workhouse and equally greedy and corrupt like all the other malicious members of the workhouse authorities. She is the one to whom Old Sally revealed the truth about Oliver and the gold ornament of his mother. Instead of helping the child with his lost identity and the ornament, she keeps the latter with herself. It is Monks who throws it in water to erase any clue to Oliver's parentage. She later marries Mr. Bumble.

Dr. Losberne

He is the kind hearted doctor who comes to Mrs. Maylie's house to take care of Oliver's injury during the failed robbery. After that he has also assisted to prove Oliver innocent in the crime thereby saving him from the fury of the police. He is seen with the family and during Oliver's remaining difficult days.

Noah

He is the senior apprentice at Mrs. Sowerberry. He is responsible for getting Oliver mercifully out of the apprenticeship. Later, he comes to London and joins Fagin.

Dick

He is an inmate of Oliver in the workhouse who blesses him on his dark journey towards London. While dying, Dick remembers Oliver with affection.

Harry Malie

He is the son of Mrs. Maylie who falls in love with Rose and finally marries her. He is kind and helpful to Oliver.

4.6. Summing Up

This unit was my effort to make you acquainted with this beautiful novel the plot of which is founded on the eventful life of an innocent little boy who suffers in the workhouse right from his birth. My attempt has been also to bring to light the use of realistic mode of writing by Dickens who has left no opportunity to portray and criticize the evils of the London society of his time and the vanity of the Victorian people who thought charity through the workhouses could improve or help the poor from suffering. The Poor Law of 1834 rather brought tremendous miseries to the poor never to end. Dickens' plunge into portraying the dirty side of the government establishments and the

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realistic picture of the prostitutes and different types of criminals made tell us about his originality and courage as a responsible author of the society. I would suggest you to read at least a few of his other novels to enter into the world of Dickens' vivid characterization and diverse facets of the city life showcased in his masterpieces.

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Unit 5 : Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*

(Themes and Techniques)

Unit Structure

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 The themes of *Oliver Twist*
- 5.4 Symbols
- 5.5 Characterization
- 5.6 Point of View and Narrative structure
- 5.7 The Social Concern in the Novel
- 5.8 Summing Up
- 5.9 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to encourage you to

- *evaluate* the novel in terms of its themes,
- *learn* about the techniques employed by Dickens in *Oliver Twist* and
- *analyse* how these techniques work to make the novel complete and effective.

5.2 Introduction

The reading of a fictional narrative is easier than to adequately appreciate its technical aspects and the author's emotions engrained in the text about the particular aspects of life. To me, if we can fall for a good novelist, the novelist definitely pours out his heart to create that world in his fiction that grasps our minds and also keeps us attached to it. It is never the same as watching a movie or enjoying the staging of a play. While a staged play has its own charm in the very immediacy it can offer to the audience; the novel charms us with the absence of any immediate visual with its characters and the plot proceedings.

The narration and the definite point of view that takes us through the story is an integral part of this narrated flow of the matter. The novel was the most popular genre in the Victorian Age and it was profuse in both quantity and quality brought by great masters like Thomas Hardy, George Elliot, Thackeray and Dickens. The preceding age too saw the development of the novel, but the social order and the reading sensibility of the public was yet to emerge. Besides, the subject matter and technical aspects of the genre was wanting in maturity and because of this it remained less upgraded.

Although these great authors were all unmistakably unique in their own ways, the most prolific was Dickens. He wrote a number of novels and majority of them were successful and he became the most popular fictions writers of England. Thackeray is a great satirist too, his *Vanity Fair* exposed the superficiality and vanity of his times and how man degrades to corruption. Hardy created his own imaginary location called Wessex and he dealt with the countryside and the daily lives of the simple people in their mundane affairs with the play of fate and luck. We are going to discuss about the themes, techniques and structure of the second novel of Charles Dickens- *Oliver Twist*.

SAQ

How far does a social condition help and inspire a writer to create his piece of literature? (50 marks)

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5.3 The themes of *Oliver Twist*

I hope all of you have enjoyed reading the novel *Oliver Twist* and have gained considerable insight into the multifaceted ideas presented by the author Charles Dickens (1812- 1870). Along with the strongest idea of the deplorable conditions of the poor, He has also portrayed the darker side of the society i.e. the crimes which could be seen in such a wider scale in the city life of London. Here, we may also make ourselves think over the fact that these filthy conditions and the cruel mentality of such evil minded characters can also be the result of their poverty and the subsequent deprivation of healthy

family lives. When we look at the character of Oliver Twist, he is always and consistently being deprived of first, the basic amenities of living and then even the human conditions to stay; as he was bullied and tortured and insulted by almost everyone whom he meets. Although his parents were well to do people, the circumstances blocked the way of his real identity for a decade which made him suffer under inhuman conditions. He too came close to the world of crimes and could have easily turned into a thief or a robber with the help of the training and attachment which Fagin and his people were showering on him, but his inherent goodness and innocence prevented him from destroying his life and he almost stuck to the human qualities in him. In the novel the city life has been displayed much to be the result of the uncensored Industrial Revolution and the class divisions created by it. Besides, the consumerist culture has brought about an unhealthy promotion of the idea of individualism as opposed to that of the social concern which can bring about progress and moral upgradation in the society. Also, the city's accumulation of sordidness is posed with the stark contrast to the healing and friendly atmosphere of the countryside in this novel. Let us now discuss the important themes of this novel in detail.

Poverty

Invariably, poverty can be regarded as the most prominent theme of the novel. Also because it is this poverty which led Oliver to fall prey to such an endless series of misery, tortures and malnutrition in the entire story. Had the workhouse people known that his mother possessed such a big gold ornament, they might have been little lenient towards him; at least for the luring appeal of the valuable item.

Although poverty can be caused by many reasons, the poverty of the Victorian Age was mainly caused by the ill effects of the Industrial Revolution and the unscrupulous dealing of it by the government and other authorities. The growth of developmental schemes and operations led to material progress which was much approved of by the Queen, but the ill impact was on the common people. The social status of the Rich and the poor got widened.

The failure of charity

With the theme of poverty we must also look into the idea of the failure of the charity systems introduced by the government with some private collaboration. The major part of the novel definitely exposes the disappointing disaster of the so called charity acts which were introduced and practiced by

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the English government authorities to eradicate the burning problem of the street people. In this novel Dickens has tried to attack these measures which were taken that practically benefitted the middle men but were of little help for the poor in the work houses. The root of the problem was the Poor Act of 1834 which allowed help to the poor only when they entered the workhouses and did some work to literally earn their living, nothing was offered free. In fact, the authorities were of the notion that poverty is the result of laziness and inactivity. But unfortunately, the workhouse and the branches were run by such cruel and inhuman officials that they never allowed anything good to reach the paupers, especially the small children who were naïve and helpless to protest.

SAQ

Do you believe that any form of true charity was carried on in the entire novel? How does the concept of charity prove to be farcical in the context of *Oliver Twist*? (40 + 40 marks)

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Theft and crime

The world of active crimes that is depicted in the novel is really another theme. At first we are introduced to the endless miseries of the poor who are living in the workhouses in the provincial city of London. We read about the pathetic conditions of everyone who get innumerable doses of inhumanity and starve for a serving of the flowing gruel. These half fed are made to work on different types of places as apprentices without any single person showing sympathy of kindness towards them. The measures taken by the government are absolutely incapable of giving these children a decent life of any good teaching or a happy countenance. All they get is neglect, rebukes and deceit. Now, with such kind of upbringing by these surrogate parents in the workhouses, these growing human beings would definitely crave for a full stomach, a healthy environment and also a better life. The next thing that will come to their minds will be to achieve the facilities of life from wrong means, as they were never treated with the right way. This will give rise to criminal minds as there seems no respite from poverty. The character of Fagin represents this development from deprived paupers to thieves and criminals. He has

created a gang which works illegally to earn their livelihoods; not only this, he collects small children who are helpless or homeless (which was very common in London) and trains them to be expert delinquents. Most innocent and naïve children would be tempted and threatened to follow that path to gain the benefits of the city life, but Oliver could come back again and again, also with the help of some good people, to finally establish himself for a decent and respectable future.

Space for Learner

SAQ

Write a note on the concept of charity that has been criticized by Dickens in this novel. (100 words)

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Good versus evil

Although evil side seems quite stronger than the good in the beginning of the novel, good ultimately had to triumph in the long run establishing the idea of poetic justice. From the birth of Oliver Twist till the arrival of his happy moments, the child undergoes the company of only evil people. Right from the old nurse Sally to his villainous half brother Monks he meets and is tortured by all sorts of indecent and immoral people. He grows up with the cranky Mrs. Mann who never showed any sympathy to the children. Mr. Bumble brought him back to the workhouse only to torture him and call him the most audacious and the most ungrateful of the paupers. He only once escaped the task of chimney sweeping when one of the board members saw him pale and timid and ordered the beadle to treat him kindly

The perils of individualism

The Industrial Revolution led to the growth of capitalism which widened the gap between the rich and the poor causing the poor to the level of misery and starvation. Capitalism also seemed to promote the idea of the individual cause. The capitalists spread the idea and propaganda that society will make progress when individual causes are taken care of first. In the novel towards the end when the Artful Dodger was caught by the police and presented for trial, the villain Fagin tells that each of them must take individual care of their security so that the collective security of the group (gang) is maintained. This

statement of his indicates that individualism was believed to be the requirement to achieve social stability and ultimate progress. The absurdity of such a belief has been unveiled when Nancy goes against her group, for the cause of good, though; and other members also turn against a few others. This is because they had thought only about themselves and hence were torn apart at the strike of a blow. But the good people forming a world of their had love, affection, goodness and mutual trust amongst themselves; they were engaged in the larger concern of the society. This is the reason they did not fall apart but succeeded at last.

City life contrasted by Country life

The novel overtly contrasts the city and the country in a subtle manner. The provincial city where Oliver was born in the workhouse was the beginning of the cruelty and the sense of deprivation is shown to have taken birth. The sordid living condition initially at Mrs. Mann's lodging and then taken over to the tormenting life at Mr. Bumble's main branch are all the same- crowded, starved, dirty and full of tortures. When Oliver flees to the bigger city of London without any idea of the larger scenario of filth and danger he has only the hope of living peacefully with a full stomach and without being tortured and bullied. But life in London has more complexities and twists to offer to the young child who gets trapped in Fagin's gang and in dragged to face endless troubles including the fury of a mob and then arrest. It was the goodness of Mr. Brownlow who saved him and took care of him after this massive setback. While we see the countryside in the Maylies' house, even after a dangerous robbery attempt Oliver was accepted with kindness and humanity by these rich but benevolent people who remained with him in all his further hardships upto the discovery of his parentage and history and the final adoption by Brownlow. It is shown in the novel that Cities are more prone and vulnerable to exploitation and degradation of human life. On the contrary, the countryside can always give us respite from the exploitation caused by the consumerist culture and the callousness of greedy human beings. In terms of physical appearance too, the city looks more occupied, dirty and lacking in discipline whereas the country can be seen clean and not cramped. In the story the simplicity of the countryside has been shown to have offered some peace of mind even to the most complex character.

Fate

When Oliver was doomed to take birth in the workhouse, it was none of his faults nor was he able to change it because he could not get any information of his parents. His parents were noble people but they faltered to have become parents without getting married. The consequences were primarily by the mother as she was the one carrying the baby and the companion was already dead. Hence, the unwed mother embraced death almost deliberately. In all these developments Oliver had no bearing at all. Whatever possibility was left by the mother's necklace for Oliver's redemption from the sordid workhouse was also stolen by Old Sally. The meeting of Brownlow and the Maylies amid the unbearable 'torments can also be termed as the relief offered by Oliver's fate. Thus, it can be said that there is a recurring role of fate exemplified in the story. On a positive note, Oliver was saved from growing up into a poor adult as he gained a huge property with the revelation of his parentage.

Space for Learner

SAQ

1. Evaluate with reference to *Oliver Twist* how poverty can lead to the destruction of someone's mind and future. (50 words)

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2. Have you read any novel by Thomas Hardy? Do you think Dickens' presentation of the role of fate in *Oliver Twist* can be compared to Hardy's depiction of fate and destiny?

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Wastage of Childhood

What we learn in this novel is the complete caricature of the concept called childhood. The children staying in the workhouse do not enough food to fill their stomachs, no decent clothing but only dirty rags and the ultimate absence of anything called kindness. The officials like Mr. Bumble, Mrs. Mann, Mrs, Bumble, the Sowerberrys are so inhuman and callous that they have led many children to die of hunger and deprivation in the workhouse. The minds

and bodies of these young ones never seem to be full but they are terribly helpless to protest or ask for anything. And it becomes doubtful as to how many children will live to be healthy human beings for the future of England. Thus, the wastage of precious childhood is vividly portrayed by Dickens.

Exploitation

Exploitation, especially of the poor and the helpless, is one of the themes in the novel. The workhouse and the entire larger system of charity preached by the government bodies and the officials is fake and they are here only make profit of off the paupers. They misuse the funds which are granted for the care of the children, orphans, unwed mothers and old people in the workhouse. Thus, exploitation is yet another theme in this book which concerns with a noble social cause.

5.4 Symbols

Darkness

Darkness is a recurring symbol in *Oliver Twist*. Beginning from the darkness created during the child's birth by detaching him from his identity, he has been engulfed by only dark minded people wherever he went. He was confined to the dark cell as a punishment for asking for more food. When he leaves the lodging of Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry in the darkness, it symbolizes his uncertain future and grim prospects of a healthy life.

City

The city symbolizes the filth and crowded environment in which evil and crimes are planned and executed. It is not safe for strangers. It has strange looking streets and shops where anti social people hang out and look for new ways to trap naïve human beings into their hubs. In the city we can find struggle to survive and to sustain, there is no abundance of kindness and goodwill.

Countryside

The countryside is the place which can relieve us from the bondage of being trapped in the dark spooky streets. Contrasted to the congested city the countryside offers us sun – bathed mornings and fresh air from the vast open spaces. The openness of the locality also suggests the open minds of the people residing there. The countryside is a relief to the harsh and troublesome life in the city.

Check Your Progress

Do you think the symbols used by Dickens serve in the appropriate way for the novel? (40 words)

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Space for Learner

5.5 Characterization

Dickens is a master in the art of characterization and I hope there will not be many with any second opinion about this. Oliver Twist was published in 1839 as a direct attack on the social evils of the complex Victorian society. The depiction of the workhouses and the deplorable conditions of the poor and the small children has been demonstrated by Dickens.

Dickens’ characters are drawn with the vividness of his imaginative power which laid hold on some of the well – marked physical traits and some peculiarity of manner which every reader liked at once. And the plausibility with which they were presented to us occupies our minds to the exclusion of all criticism about it. Bumble’s three- cornered hat and his love for it represents his ambitions for recognition and power. The characters and their related details along with the extra details of the scenes are portrayed in such immediacy that we feel that we are beholding a picture of the events taking place right before us. Besides, the coercive fore of the realities of the common man’s life is another aspect which minimizes the criticisms and contradictions about his art of characterization.

Dickens has been criticized for creating flat and passive characters like the one of Oliver who seems to be static without any development or evolution. In Oliver’s case, it is the circumstances and the people surrounding him which never allowed him to show any of his characteristic development or evolution, or we may say, it could not be expected of a child of merely nine or ten years. Flat characters are those which do not grow or remain stagnant despite all opportunities. On the other hand, round characters are the ones which consistently evolve in the course of the story. Oliver cannot be criticized for being static; he too can be seen developing as an individual who learns through thick and thin, the real faces of people and how to contain oneself even in the

dire situations. Even not losing his goodness and remaining innocent amidst all the luring criminal opportunities are the instances of his growing up as the main character of the novel.

In his novels *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* too we get the stories of children as protagonists. David and Pip, the children protagonists are so well drawn that they are admired and forever remembered by everyone. When David Copperfield says “I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being surprised by anything” it is an indication how much exposed he is to the drastic conditions of life at an early age.

SAQ

What, according to you, is the distinguishing trait of Dickens’ characterization? (60 words)

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5.6 Point of View and Narrative structure

Point of view can be understood as the voice in which the story of the novel is transmitted to the readers. Who is the person or whose voice it is that is narrating the plot proceedings to us? The answer to this question is the point of view of a story. Point of view mainly is of three types:

- a) the first person narrative
- b) the second person narrative , and
- c) the third person narrative

The point of view of the communicator, in turn, goes on to develop a narrative style. In order to develop a narrative this voice is essential along with dialogues, the sentence construction and the extent of details used in the process of narration.

In the present novel the point of view is that of the third person omniscient narrator who stands at a distance from the happenings in the plot and keeps commenting on the speeches and feelings of each one of them. It is quite evident though, that the narrator here is not altogether objective. The third

person narrative voice seems to be supportive and sympathetic to the people who are with the protagonists. The narrator's voice leaves no space to criticize the authorities of the workhouse, the villains, and the police authorities as well. A sharp ironical tone has been employed by Dickens to condemn all of these institutions. It is known to all that Dickens is the most prolific and the most popular novelists not only of his time but of all time, his individual style of writing has been one of the factors that has brought this position to him. Very artistically he chooses his materials and renders his situations, characters, actions and descriptions of his novels. His choice of language and syntax is suited to the subjects he deals with. He is a real craftsman in creating and handling of the characters according to their places, roles and circumstances. The language that we find in the expressions of the characters is enough to tell us that it is the contemporary Victorian language with the accent and related tone of that time. Every writer has his/her individual style of writing, and that develops every time takes up new things to write. With the writer, the style evolves along with age, time, exposure and maturity. Poets like Wordsworth and W. B. Yeats are believed to have evolved so much in their styles of writing that each of them has three stages of their literary production. Their evolution takes them stand apart from their own creations when considered in isolation. It is interesting to note that although Oliver is the hero of the novel, it is not his highlighted exploited that the novel gains momentum and excitement but his intense suffering and continual deprivation which makes it so. The characters are described in details of not only their physical built up also their feelings and motives which are expressed through the apt choice of words by the author. The character of the most devilish villain Fagin is described in such a way which creates immediate disgust in the readers. Dickens has also employed some humorous touch in describing some characters. Particularly amusing is the description of Mrs. Corney's appearance when Bumble was flirting with her: "Her body was bent by age; her limbs trembled with palsy; her face distorted into a mumbling leer, resembled more the grotesque shaping of some wild pencil, than the work of Nature's hand." It amuses us to see that Bumble is flirting with this ageing lady, and that clearly is for his professional benefit.

The opening scene of *Oliver Twist* is free from any imposition on any institution or any character in particular. It refers to only the conditions of uncertainty and darkness that could be the destiny of the newborn so introduced. This introduction of the story reminds us of the dreary opening scene of *David Copperfield* in the graveyard with the orphaned boy in the marshes. Dickens was not much keen on creating some improbable fairy

tales for the readers but real life characters who really live among us and go through the journey of life. He does not force us to believe in something that he preaches, he rather leads us to feel and believe in some cause or concern of real worth.

As a nineteenth century Victorian novel, *Oliver Twist* can be regarded as a classic tale of an orphan boy who is named Oliver Twist accidentally by the workhouse beadle Mr. Bumble. While he has made lengthy details of the miserable and starved life in the workhouses, he willingly shows the truth about the squalid condition of poverty in the nineteenth century cities and points to the fact that this unbearable poverty converts many poor people into a forced criminal existence.

The biggest characteristic feature of Dickens' narrative technique is the use of satire in this novel. Satire is a literary device in which irony, humour and exaggerated language is employed to criticize the follies of some society or some individual. The shortcomings and hypocrisy of the contemporary England has been exposed and ridiculed by Dickens in the most naked manner. Beginning from the deprivation of the poor children from food and other human necessities to the harsh behavior of the officials extended upto his getting trapped in Fagin's gang- all of these bring to light the darker truth of the government's false declaration that it made adequate arrangements for the development of the poor. There is seen only snobbery, avarice and utter callousness in the officials who are in charge of the institutions available for charity.

Although Dickens is constantly criticized for extensive use of details in his description and the weakness of plots, what we have discerned in his narration is the magic of this very excess of detail. In fact, detail is his specialty. Besides, his small lapses are easily overpowered by his numerous qualities as a master of fiction writing. His skilful mastery of the pathos, humour and irony together manipulate the incidents and even his long narratives do not fail to give us immense pleasure. He has literally laughed at the follies of his society. The characters of Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry have been dealt with humour in their appearance. Bumble is called "so mighty a personage as a beadle" whereas the rank of beadle was of secondary importance in the workhouse. Even the members of the board of trustees have been described as being healthy people, suggesting that the rich exploit the poor and become obese monetarily as well as physically. In this process the poor people die of hunger and starvation as happens with little Dick. Also, to arouse passion in the readers, Dickens has used sentiment, gothic fiction (in the scenes liked with the fearful criminal acts) and

Although the narrative voice is that of the third person, on many points this voice seems to comment on the pitiable conditions of the poor. Hence, the narrator seems to be some sort of a moralist who has opinions to offer on the suffering of the poor as well as the cruelty of the oppressors. Dickens has been criticized for being too realistic but in reality he wished to make positive changes in the terrible conditions of his society and therefore entailed so much realism in the book. The appropriate indictment of the social evils probably could have been forced without this realistic portrayal in the novel’s narrative.

SAQ

Comment on the description of the criminals in the novel. How repulsive are they to you? (40 + 40 words)

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Another important aspect of Dickens’ narrative is his love and establishment of optimism and hence the victory (in most cases) of goodness. The triumph of good is assured in his world. Although many novelists can be seen presenting either the excess of evil in negative characters or the surplus of good in the protagonists. But in Dickens’s plots, evil is encountered repeatedly by the good, but it is tactfully diverted so that readers can be assured that whatever may come, we may achieve peace in our lives through goodness.

Interestingly, critics have condemned him for creating a world full of crimes, prostitutions and other evils, and they also criticize him when he does the contrary by depicting a world of peace and satisfaction. Thus, it is true that it is never possible to satisfy the critics. Moreover, geniuses are always being noticed and targeted by the strongest of critical opinions and this, in turn, paves the way for the further development of the author.

5.7 The Social Concern in the Novel

As already mentioned in the previous units, the social concern in the novel is very strong, rather it can be said to the most prominent of all the

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concerns in the book. As Dickens was forced to experience the harsh and sordid life of a factory worker at an early age, he could have had the first hand knowledge and information about the nooks and corners of the much industrialized city of London. He met different characters from diverse trades of the city life and could know them very closely; he could see the sufferings of the underprivileged section of people who go through harassment and deprivation from the capitalist set up of the society. Dickens did not hesitate to expose all the evils of all the social institutions existing in the Victorian Age, he is really blunt and furious while describing the extent to which the exploitation and the torture of the poor was carried at every level of the society otherwise replete with industrial development. He laughs at the callousness of the characters for the ways they treat the paupers, especially Oliver. For example, on the night after returning from Mrs. Mann’s lodging when Oliver sobbed to sleep on a rough, hard bed, Dickens comments: “What a novel illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!” The details of the inhuman treatment meted out to the young boy at every place he goes to is the indication how badly the workhouse residents were treated, herein lies the failure of all the social institutions like the government, the church, the police, the court, etc. although Dickens has been attacked by critics and moralists on his open demonstration of evil practices like crime and prostitution; he was resolute to bring the actual pictures of the society and not a manipulated one merely to look morally upright. He believed to present our lives in whatever way it exists, so that we can make positive repairs.

SAQ

Comment on the realistic portrayal of the social evils in *Oliver Twist*.
(75 words)

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5.8 Summing Up

Oliver Twist is a long work of fiction with detailed description of the workhouse in the provincial city, the grim conditions in the city of London and the countryside of the Maylies. We enter the world of Dickens and emerge out as sensitized and compassionate people after reading about so much

suffering in the poor people's lives and especially the little orphan Oliver. I hope you will definitely like to read more of Dickens's novels in the near future. Edward Wagenknecht once expressed his opinion that the novel is "the most beloved piece of fiction in the English language.." If that is so, Dickens in the novelist who has made this beloved piece of work the apple of our eyes by his sublime presentation of his writing style. And rightly so as we continue to read, discuss and research on his shining pearls even in this twenty first century.

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5.9 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 6 : Thomas Hardy: *The Woodlanders* (Background)

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Biographical sketch
- 6.4 Novelist's other works
- 6.5 Placing the text
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives

This unit attempts to acquaint the learners with the life and seminal works of Thomas Hardy, who is a pioneering Victorian novelist, Modern poet and a short story writer. This section will prepare you to approach the prescribed text from several dimensions.

With this object in mind the unit is framed to

- *familiarize* yourself with the biography of Thomas Hardy
- *identify* Hardy's significant works
- *assess* the relevance of Hardy's work in the Victorian context.
- *examine* the novel from a critical purview.

6.2 Introduction

Thomas Hardy is one of the most dynamic and versatile writers of Victorian as well as of the Early Modern era. Hardy's literary presence may be seen in his many ground-breaking literary works in the form of novels, poems, and short stories. Most of his novelistic exercises encompass a rigid denunciation of Victorian morality. Because of his bold and fearless revelation in his novels, most of his literary ventures were subjected to severe scrutiny. Despite the fact that Hardy is classified as a fin-de-siècle writer, he

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brilliantly bridges the gap between the two eras (Victorian and Modern) in terms of spirit and style. In an era when the novel was regarded as a representative genre, Hardy's contribution, along with that of his Victorian contemporaries, was significant. His contemporaries like Charles Dickens, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters often depicted Victorian conservatism and social hierarchy in their novels. However Hardy stood beyond the oppressive angles of the society and hence can be perceived as a social reformer.

His skill as an architect in real life is profoundly evident in his literary fabrication of characters and settings. Hardy is primarily celebrated for his surreal depiction of landscape as he extends a cinematographic view of his settings. His fictional Wessex adds pastoral flavour to the various characteristic dimensions of his novels.

SAQ

Who were Hardy's contemporary writers? What were their major preoccupations in the novel? (70 words)

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Hardy's novels are particularly an exposition of pessimism and darkness which are rooted in the social gaze. In his novels, circumstances play a vital role. An individual is not always in control of his or her life but it is the circumstances that govern it. It is this assertion which becomes a primary subject of enquiry in Hardy's fictions. The Victorian world tends to dictate the mind of most of Hardy's characters in his fiction. However, the protagonists of Hardy are mostly idiosyncratic individuals who never succumb to the set norms and conventions. Hardy's minute observation of Victorian society is amply reflected in his literary endeavours. Because of his conspicuous estimation of the Victorian double standardness and hypocrisy, Hardy's works are often subjected to numerous criticisms and contentions.

SAQ

Why does Hardy make the characters' hearts suffer with pessimism and gloom? (40 words)

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Stop to Consider

The Victorian age is also known as an Age of novels. The age witnessed material prosperity and commercial growth at the economic forefront. With the industrial revolution, and the Great Exhibition of 1851, England cemented its position as a global power and further this gave rise to a new commercial enterprise. With the establishment of railways in 1825, several new avenues were opened for the country to venture. It was an age marked by prosperity. However, the age also witnessed a miserable degradation in the social condition of the new industrial cities. The evils of the Industrial revolution degraded the living condition of the working class. The growth of slums and exploitation of the cheap labour class was evident.

Such occurrences are widely depicted in novels by prominent Victorian novelists like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Emile Bronte, Thomas Hardy etc. Victorian society was directed by an obsession with social hierarchy and class consciousness. It deeply relied upon social conventions and Victorian morals. The concept of the “Angle in the house” was deeply valued as established Victorian morals. Hardy explored these Victorian dimensions like fallen women and iconoclastic themes in his novels. His characters are mostly questioning characters who interrogate the norms set by stereotypical Victorian outlook.

Hardy’s graphical Wessex correlates with the grandeur of his thematic subjects. His delineation with the natural setup often evokes the essence of Wordsworthian sublimity and romanticism. Though Hardy is perceived as a Victorian as well as a modern writer, in terms of his naturalistic depiction it would not be wrong to perceive him as a Romantic figure too. He was an ardent admirer of the great Romantics who had a lasting impact on his later works. His genius handling permeates across the three ages. He mostly identifies his works with the supernaturalistic tendencies of the great Romantics in considering nature as the divine. Most of his works are placed in the milieu of inner conflict and his defiant outlook, which enables his characters to succumb to undesirable and perilous consequences.

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Stop to Consider

Hardy’s characters are typically placed outside the Victorian world in terms of their characteristic traits. His women characters are mostly bold characters who stand beyond the Victorian ‘mannerism’. They are presented as New woman who are much ahead of their times. Characters like Tess, Bathsheba, Eustacia and Sue are placed in stark contrast to an ideal Victorian woman. This is done to criticise the biased Victorian social constructs.

SAQ

Why does Hardy capitalize Wessex in his works? Comment on the significance of Wessex. (60 words)

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6.3 Biographical sketch

6.3.1 Life of Thomas Hardy

This section entails concise biographical information of the writer Thomas Hardy. The personal as well as literary transition which enabled him to attain the position of a representative writer of the period is comprehensively discussed with reference to some of the events occurring in his life. Some of the literary achievements have been referred to testify Hardy’s position as an eminent novelist. Let us have a glimpse of Hardy’s life and his prominent literary works.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), was born on 2nd June 1840 at Higher Bockhampton near Dorchester in Dorset. The eldest son of Thomas Hardy and Jemima Hardy, Hardy was a dedicated and inquisitive individual right from his tender age. His father, also named Thomas Hardy, was a self-employed stonemason. He wanted his son to learn violin and be a building consultant. His mother however was an avid reader who encouraged his love for reading. Much of Hardy’s literary likings were nourished by his mother since his early

childhood. Mitchell Millgate, a noted biographer of Hardy remarked “Hardy was a born bookworm, that and that alone was unchanging in him..” At the age of 16, he was apprenticed to be an architect under a local architect named John Hicks. His interest in reading was simultaneously nurtured along with his architectural training. Although under Hicks’ guidance he evolved as a successful architect by designing many local houses, churches and his personal home Max Gate, apparently his career as an architect gave way to his literary pursuits.

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Stop to Consider

Many characters of Hardy are borrowed from his real life. His experiences as an architect helped him to design his work with utmost care and precision. Characters like Stephen Smith, Elfride, the rural residents of Dorset resembles to some of his remarkable characters. Furthermore, his Wessex becomes a replica of the place where he was born and spent most of his time.

In 1862, on account of his architectural training, he visited London and was enchanted by the culture of London city which was much alien to him. This visit triggered his interest in writing and he began composing poems. He spent five years in London to resume his architectural orientation under the guidance of Arthur Bloomfield, a noted architect. It was in London he was exposed to the works of many literary scholars like Herbert Spencer, J.S. Mill, John Ruskin and Charles Dickens. These exposures inspired him in his later works. Although Hardy started his literary career with poetry, he gradually began to write novels by 1867. His first written novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* failed to find a publisher and was never published. However, with his first published work *Desperate Remedies* (1871) there was no looking back for the author. The fruit of his authorial success was reaped with the publication of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) which ushered his literary journey. With his next work *Far From the Maddening Crowd* (1874) Hardy witnessed tremendous fame and commercial success. His gradual fame as a writer enabled him to quit architecture and devote himself solely to writing.

Hardy's stay in London was a kind of pilgrimage for him as it enabled him to introspect on his earlier belief and ideas. It was in London that his prior religious belief dwindled and he withdrew himself from the institutional Christian faith. His cynicism is embodied in most of his pioneering works like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* where he portrays the inclination of the characters to lead purely by self-interest.

In 1868, on his professional trip to St. Juliot, Cornwall he met Emma Gifford whom he eventually married in 1874. He settled with his wife at Max Gate, the villa which he had designed himself. With Emma, initially Hardy's most of the creative faculties were encouraged as they attended opera theatres and visited places of artistic inspiration and aesthetic getaway. Gradually their relationship turned sour and they remained estranged. During the years spent with his wife, he travelled and lodged mostly in London and his home Max Gate in Dorchester. This gave him an exposure to perceive the social hierarchy which was widely prevalent in London society. Though he belonged to a middle-class family he realised the class differences which demarcated Victorian society. It is this first-hand impression of the class system in London society that becomes his extensive preoccupation in most of his works.

Although the marital relationship was not a blissful one, his relationship with Emma inspired many of his poems after her death in 1912. Two years later in 1914, he married Florence Dugdale who was a woman with literary ambitions. She served as a secretary to Hardy and eventually, both got married. It is widely speculated that Hardy's biography *The Life of Thomas Hardy* was Florence Dugdale's composition. However, eventually, it was known that Hardy wrote the biography himself and Dugdale just typed the manuscript of the same. The second marriage too resulted in failure.

Stop to Consider

Hardy and Wessex

Hardy uses the setting of Wessex in a majority of his novelistic pursuits. Wessex is a fictional region created by Hardy in which his novels are basically set. It is a topographically exquisite realm with a rustic essence in it. Many critics speculate the inspiration of Hardy's

Wessex to be from Southwest England and they estimate the inclusion of countries like Berkshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon. The clarity of Hardy's Wessex was obtained with the publication of Hardy's map of Wessex which resembled to parts of England but with bizarre names. The idea of Wessex is much inspired by Hardy's observation of his native place in Dorchester. His experience of artistic places which he visited with his wife triggered a new scene in Wessex. Thus Wessex is an amalgamation of Hardy's vision and real places he witnessed in his life. Wessex is a dreamy world with a suburban landscape abundant with Austrian pines and extended greenery of Hardy's imagination.

Hardy invests a lot of time in designing the Wessex setting for his novels. The poetic and surreal description of Wessex elevates its position from a mere geographical setting. Wessex allows the characters to evolve themselves from their existing precarious state. The fictional countryside of Wessex allows room for characters to identify their real selves and interact with the natural world. The setup and scene of Wessex is an embodiment of Hardy's philosophy. The absurdist occurrence in the life of the characters finds meaning in the sensible representation of rural Wessex. The fictional aspect of Wessex withstood the realistic setup.

Wessex apart from being a geographical location holds a symbolic and cultural significance in Hardy's novels. Wessex is blended by a splendid location and culture of the natives. The region becomes symbolic of the challenges the characters encounter. The intrusion of the outside affair corrupts the tranquillity of the region. Thus, Wessex becomes an embodiment of Hardy's mastery over picturesque setting, progressive plot and innovative characters who flourish amidst nature's bounty.

6.3.2 Awards, Accolades and Recognition

During his literary tenure, Hardy was conferred with many prestigious awards. In 1905, he was honoured as the most outstanding British author by the University of Aberdeen. In 1910, he was conferred with the Order of Merit. Because of his incredible contribution to literature, he was nominated for Nobel Prize in Literature. He also received honorary degrees from Cambridge and

Oxford. His success as a writer is also testified by the gold medal which he received from the Royal Society of Literature. Apart from these awards, he earned many rewards in the form of appreciation from his contemporaries like George Meredith, Robert Graves, Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden. In 1934, in a letter, Ezra Pound remarked: “Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died.”

Towards the final phase of his life, Hardy led a secluded life in his country retreat-Max Gate as he remained frequently ill by 1927. Succumbing to his ill health he died on 11 January 1928. Because of his fame, his death evoked heartfelt mourning across the country and world. After his death, his heart was buried by the side of his first wife Emma Lavinia Gifford in the cemetery of St. Michael’s Church in Stinsford, while his body was cremated in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey on the same day as per his will. His funeral in Westminster Abbey was attended by many important personalities from the literary as well as the political field.

Stop to Consider

Thomas Hardy was a Victorian novelist with a modernist outlook. We have to remember that though Hardy started his professional career as a trained architect, he later shifted his entire focus to novels and poetry. He found extremely difficult to find a publisher for his amateur works. But apparently with *Far From the Madding Crowds* (1874) he received tremendous fame and financial success.

6.4 Hardy’s Literary works

This section will give you a brief overview of Hardy’s prominent novels. The succinct discussion on the novels will help you to understand Hardy’s engagement with some of the recurrent themes of his novels. It will also enable you to understand the reception of Hardy’s works by critics and scholars. The section will emphasise on Hardy’s proficiency as a novelist and establish him as a representative writer of the era.

Hardy's literary career can be categorised into three phases: The initial phase can be marked as a dormant literary period as most of his works remained unacknowledged. In this stage although he began to compose poems, he failed to find a publisher to publish his works. During this stage his focus primarily rested on his architectural endeavours and thus his literary writings failed to mark its presence.

The second stage can be regarded as the most productive stage in Hardy's literary career. This phase was characterised by his successful literary productions in the form of publication of fourteen novels inclusive of his masterpieces like *Far From the Madding Crowd*(1874), *The Return of Natives* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) etc and many short stories. This phase assured Hardy's position as a towering figure in the literary world. It is in this period of literary prosperity that we witness Hardy's farewell to fiction writing pertaining to hostile remarks for novels like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*(1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

The final phase was featured by an acclaimed role as a poet with some of the path-breaking poetic productions. This stage showcased Hardy as a representative poet with some of his remarkable poems like "Darkling Thrush", "Neutral Tones", "The Voice", "Wessex Heights" etc. Though Hardy initiated his literary career with poetry it is at this stage that saw Hardy's maturity as a poet.

Stop to Consider

Recurrent themes of Hardy's novels at a glance

Though Hardy started with a failed career in poetry, his novels uplifted his role as a brilliant litterateur. It is because of his innovative way of addressing some of the social issues carved with an individual's sense of discretion, his fictions are held in high regard. Hardy's novels are mostly novels of characters and landscape. The rural backdrop in his novels works in tandem with the development of the plot and characters. His characters encompass an emotional inclination which at times conflict with the social consciousness. His characters are more an agent of

fatalism as most of them are driven by a strong sense of fate and destiny. They seem to oscillate between the sense of fate and a sense of social responsibility. His works are widely known for their forceful and vigorous exposition of the Victorian social condition. Although Hardy resorts to using profanities in his novels, yet his delineation seemed much ahead of the Victorian society.

A brief overview of Hardy's prominent novels are given below:

The Poor Man and the Lady: Thomas Hardy's earliest effort in fiction was seen in his first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*. However, the novel was never published as it was vehemently rejected by many reputed publishing houses of the time such as Tinsley Brothers, Macmillan and Chapman & Hall. This eventually led him to destroy the manuscript of this first composition. Though his first novel, which Hardy eluded to be a socialist novel, was never accepted for publication, George Meredith the reviewer of the work anticipated Hardy's literary potential from his first work and found his writing quite promising. He saw a literary resemblance of Hardy's work with that of Wilkie Collins and George Eliot who had already established themselves as reputed novelist of the time. Meredith observed a spark in Hardy's work which was yet to be evolved in his maiden work. He advised Hardy to polish his writing skills in order to attain artistic refinement and to focus more on the construction of the plot.

Desperate Remedies: By the next work Hardy implemented Meredith's suggestion and conceived his next novel *Desperate Remedies*, which bore replication of Wilkie Collins' plot structure. The novel focuses more on plot development than the characters' progress. It is based on the romantic exploits of Cytherea Graye and Edward Springrove and the complications which unfold with the progress of the plot. There is an element of a murky mystery and gothic essence in the novel which charges the anticipation of the readers. Critics like Gordon Hall Gerould remarked: "Hardy imitated Wilkie Collins in *Desperate Remedies* and learned how to manage the narrative." As his first novel was rejected on the grounds of inadequate plot structure, he strengthened the plot in this work. However, this novel was also subjected to negative remarks as critics objected Hardy's depiction as obscene and too sensational. Hardy himself was dismissive of this novel in his autobiography as he found the work to be superfluously charged in terms of its construction. The first

edition of the novel was published anonymously in three volumes by the Tinsley Brothers in 1871. Although the plot and the theme of the novel was rejected as being unpleasant, but there were commentaries on this work which acknowledged the buzzy setting and psychoanalytical vent. This second novel *Desperate Remedies* definitely prepared and nourished his later novelistic skills.

***Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872):** The second published and the third written novel of Hardy *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) can be considered to be the first work of Hardy which gained him acknowledgement and consideration as a novelist. It was published anonymously by Tinsley Brothers in 1872. However, one year later in 1873, the novel was published with Hardy's authorship in America. The novel attracted several readers because of Shakespeare's association with the title of the novel. The title of the novel is borrowed from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, which was a pastoral drama. The novel is also enriched with a profound pastoral setting with the lush greenery of rural life. Hardy blends humour, skill and scenic elevation to add a pastoral flavour to the plot. The romantic and harmoniously designed plot revolves around the love story of Dick Dewy, a sincere choir member of the church, and Fany Day, a self possessed, frolicsome lady. As the novel dealt with a lyrical and melodious serenity interwoven by a pastoral extravagance it accumulated lauds from many critics. Michael Millgate rightfully defines this novel as "nearly flawless". The novel anticipates the conception of Hardy's Wessex in his upcoming novels.

***A Pair of Blue Eyes*:** This novel was the first novel to be published with Hardy's name on it, unlike the previous three novels which were published anonymously. The work reflected a manifestation of Hardy's mature handling of novelistic exercise. He uses the technique of withholding information in the novel to keep the suspense of the story intact. The story of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* uses some of the autobiographical elements as it is based on the romantic relationships of Stephen Smith, who was a young architect assistant just like Hardy himself, and Elfrida Swancourt whom he met while he was on his architectural mission to restore the church. Elfrida bears some resemblance with Emma Lavinia Gifford. The novel entails issues pertaining to the class differences that serve as an obstacle for the lovers to unite. The novel also deals with the theme of a triangular love affair. It substantiates Hardy's growing interest in Darwinism as the story reflects that a man is a product of the social environment. Hardy allots a bold space to the heroine in this novel as she transcends the Victorian norms to save her second suitor, Henry Knight from

death. Hardy's depiction of a strong and powerful heroine thus envisages his upcoming novels like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, which have self-conscious and thinking woman characters.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874): It was Hardy's fourth written novel and first popular success. It is based on a pastoral tale. *Far from the Madding Crowd* heralded Hardy's literary success and it skyrocketed his fame to a whole new level. After the success of this novel, he felt his literary career was on track and thus he gave up architecture to focus primarily on writing. The title of the novel is borrowed from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard". The novel, like the poem, entails the decadence of rural culture at the hands of rising urban civilization. In the novel, Hardy presented an asserted woman who takes a commanding position in her life and relationship. Hardy's Bathsheba is an independent and capable woman. She adheres to the paradigm of the new woman. The setting and storyline of the novel remind one of Austenian plot with themes of love and marriage acquiring a centre stage. However, Hardy's woman character is guided by her own choice compared to Austen's heroines who are products of their social class. Bathsheba, a woman of nineteen years strives to conquer the heart of all her suitors with her assertive and witty nature. Although Bathsheba attempts to retain her individuality, the dominant patriarchal values eventually consumes her independence. Hardy conceived the idea of his fictional Wessex with this novel with its rich dreamlike illustrations of the rural setup. Hardy's inclination towards Darwin's social environment and its impact on man finds ample space in this novel. The novel despite several barriers ends with the romantic reunion of Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak.

The Return of the Native: *The Return of the Native* which came out in twelve monthly instalments is Hardy's one of the most popular and widely read novels. The plot of the novel is based on a complicated love relationship between the central characters: Miss Thomasin Yeobright, Diggory Venn, Eustacia Vye, Wildeve, Clym. The clandestine nature of love heightens the complications of the plot, thereby creating an enigma and suspense throughout the narrative. Though the narrative is filled with a lot of upheavals, Hardy presents an unconventional heroine who attempts to negotiate the tension between the traditional values and her personal desires. Eustacia is governed by self-fulfilment and her rebellious nature makes her a non-conformist to the patriarchal Victorian tradition. He presents the Victorian society's gaze which perceives such women as devilish and fallen women. The native who is being

referred to in the story is Clym whose return to Egdon Heath triggers the action in the novel. The setting of Egdon Heath is embodied as another character as Hardy devotes a lot of time to show the transformative role of the place. The place can be perceived as a personification of another character who celebrates along with the celebration of the dwellers and mourns their loss.

Space for Learner

Tess of the D'Urbervilles: One of Hardy's most controversial and popular works *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* shows a bold take on the paradoxical Victorian patriarchal society by Hardy. The novel titled after a woman character is all about a young girl named Tess who has encountered different phases of life and has been compelled to take decisions not conditioned by choice but by circumstances. Hardy showed the journey of Tess' life which was passing out of her control. Tess while working in a house met Alack who eventually raped her. She returns from the place and years later she met Angel who befriends her and later both gets married. However, there was something that was disturbing Tess. On their wedding night, they decided to share each other's past. Angel accepted his past affair with a woman but the moment he learns about Alack he feels devastated and leaves Tess. The hypocrisy of Angel affects Tess' future life completely. The subtitle of the novel "Pure Woman" is given by Hardy in order to show Tess as perfect, pure, and a subject of sympathy. Hardy faced a lot of criticism for the novel as he was dealing with a character and society where certain parameters of assessment were faulty. Tess is more a victim of fate and chance as she is often viewed as an object of desire by the male characters in the novel. Hardy wanted to present Tess as a symbol of purity which was quite conflicting for many critics and thus, the novel was subjected to hostile disapproval. Thus, Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* can be perceived as a harbinger of the later feminist movement of the twentieth century. Along with this novel, *Jude the Obscure*(1895) is another work which is often categorised together for being the most controversial works of Hardy.

Check Your Progress

Comment on Hardy's recurrent issues addressed in his seminal novels. (50 words)

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Space for Learner

How are Hardy's characters products of fatalism? (60 words)

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Wessex Poems (1898): The fifty-one poems published under the Wessex poems in 1898 introduced Hardy's position as a representative poet of the era. Though Hardy had already introduced the profound exuberance of the rural lifestyle and landscape in his novels, his poems contributed furthermore to further celebrate the sublimity of the place. After giving up his career in novels this is the first poetic volume assembled by him. These poems convey a great variety in their subjects and he sings about his perception of life. Although his initial attempt in poetry with this collection was also subjected to negative remarks however eventually with his later matured poems he cemented his position as a poet. Some of the famous poems from this collection are "Ambel", "Hap", "In Vision I Roamed", "In a Wood" etc.

Hardy's short stories: Hardy published over 50 short stories. He is praised for his collection of stories like *Wessex Tales* (1888), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891), *Life's Little Ironies* (1894). The versatility, innovative content, subject and style testifies to Hardy's calibre as a short story writer. Apart from this, he also tried composing a poetic drama of nineteen acts and 130 scenes titled *The Dynasts* (1903-08) which was based on the history of Napoleonic wars. Though he wrote plenty of short stories, his position as a short story writer is always underrated.

Hardy's other works of considerable merit includes:

- *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1875-76)
- *The Trumpet Major* (1880)
- *A Laodicean* (1881)
- *Two on a Tower* (1882)
- *The Romantic Adventure of a Milkmaid* (1883)
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)
- *The Woodlanders* (1887)
- *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1892)

His volumes of poetry comprises of:

- *Wessex Poems (1898)*
- *Poems of the Past and Present (1902)*
- *Time's Laughingstock (1909)*
- *Satire of Circumstances (1914)*
- *Moments of Vision (1917)*
- *Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922)*
- *Human Shows (1925)*
- *Winter Words (1928)*
- *The Collected Poems (1930)*

Space for Learner

6.5 Placing the text

Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders*, published in 1887, is set in the rural countryside of England during the late Victorian era. To understand the socio-historical context of the novel, it is important to examine the key factors that influenced the time period in which Hardy wrote.

The late 19th century was a time of significant social and economic change in England. The country was experiencing the effects of industrialization and urbanization, as rural communities were being transformed by the encroachment of cities and factories. However, Hardy's novel focuses on the dwindling remnants of rural life, presenting a picture of a changing world. One of the most significant socio-economic developments during this period was the Agricultural Revolution. Advances in farming techniques, such as the introduction of machinery, new crop rotations, and selective breeding, led to increased agricultural productivity. This resulted in the merging of smaller farms into larger ones and the displacement of many rural labourers. In "The Woodlanders", Hardy explores the impact of these changes on the characters and the land they inhabit. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century, was in full swing during the Victorian era. The rapid expansion of factories and the growth of cities led to a massive influx of people from rural areas seeking employment. The novel reflects the tension between the traditional rural way of life and the encroachment of industrialization. The woodlands of Little Hintock, the setting of the novel, become a symbol of the rural paradise threatened by progress. Also, "The Woodlanders" unfolds against the backdrop of a rustic woodland community, where the lives of the inhabitants are intimately entwined with the natural environment.

Social class divisions were also prevalent during this time. The Victorian era was characterized by a rigid class system, with the aristocracy and upper classes at the top and the working class at the bottom. In “The Woodlanders”, Hardy explores the complexities of social class through his characters. The protagonist, Giles Winterborne, represents the lower-middle class, while the Melbury family represents the gentry. The fictional village of Little Hintock serves as the focal point, inhabited by a diverse cast of characters, ranging from woodcutters and farmers to the local gentry. Hardy’s choice of setting is deliberate, as he believed that the countryside captured the true essence of English life and its profound connection to nature. The interactions and conflicts between these characters highlight the tensions and limitations imposed by social hierarchy. Moreover, the novel delves into the changing lives of women in society at that time. The Victorian era was known for its strict gender roles and expectations. Women were primarily seen as domestic caretakers, and their rights and opportunities were limited. However, Hardy’s portrayal of female characters challenges these conventions. Grace Melbury, the central female character, is depicted as independent-minded and capable of making her own choices. Through Grace’s struggles, the novel explores the limited agency and societal expectations placed upon women during this time.

Religion also played a significant role in Victorian society. While the influence of organized religion was waning, moral values and religious beliefs continued to shape societal norms. Hardy’s own questioning of religious faith is evident in the novel, as he explores themes of fate, morality, and the role of religion in rural communities. The characters’ struggles with their beliefs and the conflicts between traditional religious values and changing social attitudes add depth to the socio- historical context of late Victorian England. The novel captures the effects of industrialization, urbanization, social class divisions, changing gender roles, and religious transformation on rural communities. By examining these factors, readers gain insight into the complexities of a rapidly changing society and the challenges faced by individuals navigating the tensions between tradition and progress.

Thus, Thomas Hardy’s “The Woodlanders” is a masterful exploration of the human condition set against the backdrop of a changing rural England. Through his vivid characters and insightful themes, Hardy crafts a narrative that resonates with readers even today. The novel’s enduring appeal lies in its profound examination of different social constraints, and the delicate balance between tradition and progress. By intertwining the natural world with the

complexities of human existence, Hardy weaves a timeless tale that continues to captivate and provoke introspection. “The Woodlanders” stands as a testament to Hardy’s literary genius and his ability to illuminate the human experience through the lens of rural life.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Five major themes in Thomas Hardy’s *The Woodlanders*

- (a) **Love and Desire:** “The Woodlanders” explores the complexities of love and desire, particularly the conflicts that arise when societal expectations and class differences come into play. The characters grapple with their emotions, face unrequited love, and make choices that have far-reaching consequences.
- (b) **Social Class and Hierarchy:** Class distinctions and social hierarchy play a significant role in the novel. Hardy examines how social status impacts relationships, opportunities, and the characters’ sense of self-worth. The rigid social structure of the time is challenged and critiqued throughout the story.
- (c) **Nature and the Environment:** Nature serves as a powerful backdrop and metaphor throughout the novel. Hardy vividly describes the lush woodland setting, highlighting the beauty and indifference of the natural world. Nature also mirrors the characters’ emotions, symbolizing their desires, struggles, and fates.
- (d) **Tradition and Change:** “The Woodlanders” explores the tension between tradition and progress. The clash between the rural, agrarian way of life and the encroachment of modernization and urbanization creates conflicts and disorientation for the characters. The novel raises questions about the value of tradition in the face of societal change.
- (e) **Fate and Determinism:** A prevalent theme in Hardy’s works, the idea of fate and determinism is present in “The Woodlanders” as well. The characters often seem bound by their circumstances and face tragic outcomes that are seemingly predestined. Hardy explores the idea that individuals have limited control over their own destinies.

These themes intertwine and interact throughout the novel, contributing to the overall narrative and the exploration of human nature within the context of a changing society

6.6 Summing Up

The Introductory section of the unit on the Background has thus acquainted you with Thomas Hardy as a pioneering writer along with his recurring themes explored in his masterpieces. The introduction to his regular preoccupations in his novels will help you to contextualize Hardy's works. Hardy as a social critic extends his revolutionary opinion through his characters to highlight the biased social constructs of 19th century society. His central characters explore an unconventional space to reject the stereotypical impositions of Victorian society. The socio-cultural condition of the Victorian world becomes a contesting ground in Hardy's works. Moreover, the elevation of nature is also evident through a divine representation of Wessex.

In the second section of the unit you have familiarized yourself with the biographical information of the author which serves noteworthy from his novelistic pursuits. His real-life experiences in Dorchester become amply reflected in his novels. His fictional representation of Wessex encompasses the scenic elevation of Dorchester. Apprenticed to be an architect, Hardy from his childhood was profoundly interested in reading and his knowledge of architecture and craftsmanship helped him design his narrative plots with utmost precision. His life in London gave him exposure to the literary world and existing social prevalence which he was unaware of. Furthermore the major texts of Hardy are briefly overviewed in a compact manner to *help you* understand Hardy's handling of characters and themes. Apart from his novels, his poems are briefly mentioned to dwell upon the versatility of the writer. All these elucidations made in the section will *enable you* to approach any text of Hardy from an autobiographical framework along with your subjective interpretations of the text.

6.7 References and Suggested Readings

Dale, Kramer. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. CUP, 1999.

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Hardy, Thomas. Ed. Michael Millgate. *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*. Macmillan Press, 1984.

<https://literarymarge.wordpress.com/tag/morningpost>

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Unit 7 : Thomas Hardy: *The Woodlanders*

Introducing the Novel

Unit Structure:

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 What happens in *The Woodlanders*
- 7.4 Major Characters
- 7.5 Minor Characters
- 7.6 Summing Up
- 7.7 References and Suggested Readings

7.1 Objectives

This unit introduces you to *The Woodlanders*, the novel under discussion. It will help you familiarize with the various aspects of the text.

The unit is designed to help you to

- *appreciate* the novel in its totality of events
- *read* what happens in the novel, *The Woodlanders* ?
- *analyze* the characters and their roles in the coherent development of the plot.

7.2 Introduction

The nineteenth-century English novelist and twentieth-century poet, Thomas Hardy's novels were mostly situated in 'Wessex' and *The Woodlanders* is no exception as it is more imaginatively placed than most of his novels. Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* was published in three-volume format in 15th March, 1887. It contains vivid descriptions on the natural world, the countryside and the changing seasons.

Stop to Consider

In Hardy's novels, the fictional country of Wessex is a collective name for the countries of Southwestern England. In fact, his novels like *Far Cry from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Return of the Native*, *Jude the Obscure* including *The Woodlanders* are regarded as Wessex novels. In fact, the actual location of Hardy's Wessex novels 'on the ground' of Dorset interests many readers.

Set in the Victorian era, the novel is a pessimistic attack on the society in regard to marriage that concerns with social class mobility than honest emotions. This issues of class position is particularly evident from Mr. Melbury's hesitations between Giles Winterborne and Edred Fitzpiers as the husband who will either waste or enhance the value of the educational investment he has put on his treasured daughter, Grace Melbury. More significantly, Grace is to marry Giles, then marries Fitzpiers, then again seeks to divorce him and return to Giles, then vows eternal fidelity to the dead Giles but only before reconciling with Fitzpiers. However, none of the novel's romantic relationships resolves into a point of narrative closure, or provides that sense of an ending that readers of nineteenth-century are accustomed to find in the proper marriage.

Stop to Consider

Upon the completion of his work, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy intended to write 'a woodland story' in 1874 but he put it aside to first try his hand in other styles and genre until a serial was wanted for *Macmillan's Magazine*. Thus, *The Woodlanders* first appeared in serial form in *Macmillan's Magazine* and in *Harper's Bazar* in 1887.

7.3 What happens in the novel, *The Woodlanders*?

Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders* is a story that takes place in a small woodland village of Little Hintock. It begins with Barber Percomb trying to find his way to Dorset village of Little Hintock whose encounter with Mrs. Dollery, a horse-drawn van's proprietress, enables him to ultimately find the

route to Marty South, a twenty year-old girl's house who was deliberately trying to make amends by delivering spars for her sick father's business employer, Mr. George Melbury, the timber, bark and corpse-ware merchant for whom Marty's father did work for ages. This mysterious meeting unveils the readers with another character, Mrs. Felice Charmond, a lady of Hintock House and the owner of the surrounding glades and groves of Little Hintock. Initially, Percomb's proposal for her beautiful, brown hair is declined firmly though he offers her a gold sovereign as she presumably feels that the lady wants her curls just to trap some noble gentleman. However, the story then shifts to Mr. Melbury who was anxiously looking for ways to communicate with his only child (by his first wife), Grace who had been away for a while in the pursuit of her education and hadn't responded to his letter from quite a long time making him reveal his anxiety to his second wife including a young lad, Giles Winterborne, apple and cider trader, whom he intended to marry off his daughter as a compensation for his wrong doing towards the lad's father, his very own companion, John Winterborne by marrying his lady love, Grace's mother whom he admits to marrying by a trick. As a matter of atonement, Melbury becomes determined to let John's son, Giles marry his daughter, Grace and so he made all his possible ways to provide her the best education so as to make the gift as valuable as it lay in his power to bestow. As Marty overhears all of these conversations, she decides to secretly love Winterborne instead of revealing it to anyone around her. Furthermore, she makes a resolution to sacrifice her hair to Barber Percomb. On the contrary, Winterborne knew nothing of the timber-merchant's restitutory aims and so he presumes it to be a kindly chance especially when he is sent by Mr. Melbury to fetch his daughter, Grace to home from the fashionable school of the times at Sherton-Abbas. Both, thus, spends some form of happy conversations while on their way back to home. Now this is what concerns Mr. Melbury the most as he thinks Winterborne as poor and not worthy a gentleman to marry his cultured daughter and presumes that it would be just a sacrifice of his daughter for his own sin if he is to keep his promise. However, the second Mrs. Melbury believes that it is not a total sacrifice as the lad is honest and upright who has been head over heels in love with Grace. Meanwhile, Winterborne invites the Melburys at his place for a Christmas party which he particularly arranges to impress his lady love, Grace. On the other hand, Marty, despite her frequent meetings with Winterborne in regards of her father's trade, manages to hide her emotions from the lad pursuing Grace with all his might as she returns to Little Hintock with Mr. Melbury's consent though.

Space for Learner

Nonetheless, the latter's conscience for Grace as a complete investment soon makes him think as inappropriate for her to marry a man like Giles with no education as well as a proper house to move in especially after the house being seized for not availing his chance of renewal as per the real state of affairs in Little Hintock. It is at this time of social shortcomings of Winterborne that love blossoms prominently in the heart of Grace, making her to express her desire to continue with the childhood engagement with Winterborne before her father despite his decision to disengage herself from the lad. However, Mr. Melbury stands firm in his decision and persuades Grace to leave the lad over the newly arrived doctor (three months then), Mr. Edred Fitzpiers, a surgeon by profession. Though not even half the morally upright than Winterborne yet justified as an individual who matches Grace's educational standard. As consented by Mr. Melbury, Fitzpiers starts chasing his new love interest, Grace who in the process gets infatuated to him and decides to marry him. Not very long after, Fitzpiers sexual interest for a variety of women is revealed to Grace in all of his actions so much that he barely escapes from Grace in the matter of his illicit relationship with Suke Damson by a lie yet later again, he is easily seduced by the widow, Mrs. Charmond, the proprietor of the estates in Hintock. After a heated argument with his father-in-law, Mr. Melbury himself, Fitzpiers decides to leave his father-in-law's house and seeks for a shelter in Mrs. Charmond's house and together they leave for the continent while leaving Grace in all her destitution. They both starts living in Baden just as they do not ought to be. So, it is not only Grace but Mr. Melbury as well as the entire villagers who happens to learn about the bitter truth. This deeply saddens Mr. Melbury as he ultimately realizes his flaw and regrets over his decision of choice-making between Winterborne and Fitzpiers as Grace's husband. As misfortune befalls upon Grace, Mr. Melbury now tries to rescue her from the misery that he is equally responsible for by suggesting his only daughter, Grace to make amends with Winterborne by a reunion in marriage as he now considers his sincerity in love for Grace. Well, this becomes a matter of great difficulty as the law doesn't permit divorce for the women on the grounds of adultery. Meanwhile, Grace had already developed a strong connection once again with her childhood lover, Winterborne and wants as much as to resolve with him as her father had urged. Unfortunately, she's bound to abide by the law.

Stop to Consider

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 enabled man to divorce his wife for adultery but the woman had to prove that adultery had been aggravated by other things like physical abuse and desertion. Thus, ‘divorce’ was a totally male-oriented phenomena in England.

Space for Learner

No sooner Fitzpiers has an argument with Mrs. Charmond and so decides to send a message of his return to Grace. On hearing this, Grace then leaves the Melbury house before Fitzpiers’ arrival. She decides to take refuge in Giles’ house where Giles offers his cottage and decides to make a stay outside instead of sharing the room as he finds it inappropriate to do so. As days pass by, Winterborne’s health condition deteriorates during the cold winter. As Giles’ deteriorating health is felt by Grace, she decides to call Doctor Fitzpiers for an aid to which he arrives and to his much surprise finds Grace holding Giles in her arms. Fitzpiers’ curiosity soon agitates Grace who’s so in grief to learn the death of Giles and chooses to mourn for his death than take the remedies for her safety over the disease that has killed Giles. Marty soon joins Grace in her mourning and consoles her inspite of her own grief of having lost the man she has secretly and devotedly loved and yet helped him to keep Grace as his priority in love. It was at this time that Grace also meets Mr. and Mrs. Melbury to whom she asks Marty to deliver the truth of the unfortunate incident behind Giles’ death. Not long after, Marty helps reconciliation between Fitzpiers and Giles by choosing to reveal them about Mrs. Charmond’s lifestyle especially the secret of her hair in all the past years. By the end of the novel, most of its central characters are dispersed: Giles and Felice are dead, Suke and young Timothy Tangs have been mritally dispatched to New Zealand, Grace and Fitzpiers have more or less accidentally eloped to Sherton Abbas. The novel, thus, concludes with Marty as the only character mourning for real at the loss of a good-natured human like Giles as she pays a visit to his grave.

SAQ

1. Where does *The Woodlanders* take place? (30 words)

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Space for Learner

2. Why does Marty South decide to keep her love hidden from Giles Winterborne? Does it reflect something about her nature? (40 words)

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7.4 Major Characters

Grace Melbury: A young, beautiful and the only daughter of the timber-merchant, Mr. George Melbury by his first wife. Having educated in a fashionable school of the time, Grace is heavily influenced by her father’s personal expectations. In fact, the ‘fancy education’ which her father, Mr. Melbury provides cuts her off from her former plain way of life and from her old love, Giles Winterborne. She is weak enough to be lured by social status as she does not have a clear understanding of her inner desires and of what is really good for her. In her heart, she knows the worth of Giles but is unable to decide for herself. Throughout the novel, she’s caught up between her intuition for Giles Winterborne, a loyal, sincere and hard-working woodsman and her infatuation for Edred Fitzpiers, a strange surgeon of the village. Her struggle being an internal conflict reflects the broader aspect of the middle-class woman’s life who is torn between the personal desires and the societal pressures placed upon her such as to improve the social status of oneself and the family. As the story unfolds, Grace faces many challenges and disappointments as a result of her choices which brings her to realization about the complexities of love and the importance of self-fulfillment. In other words, Grace finally undergoes a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Towards the end, Grace’s reconciliation with Giles represents a turning point in her character as an individual as she embraces a new beginning while experiencing liberty in her personal life.

Giles Winterborne: A loyal, sincere and a hardworking woodsman who represents the traditional, rustic way of life in Little Hintock. Winterborne was in the apple and cider trade while still lending his assistance to Mr. Melbury in the busiest wood-cutting season. He has a close terms with the Melburys as Mr. Melbury was an old companion of his father, John Winterborne. His suffering begins as soon as he loses his lifeholds by the death of John South, Marty’s father which is immediately followed by the heart ache that comes from his separation with his childhood sweetheart, Grace Melbury. However,

Giles is portrayed as an individual with much strength and resilience. Despite facing heartbreak and disappointments, he continues to maintain his integrity and dignity as morally upright man. Sadly, he dies as much from sexual continence as from typhoid.

George Melbury: A thin, self-made man who has achieved a potential success through his business as timber-merchant in Little Hintock. His deep love for his daughter, Grace is evident throughout the novel though many a times he finds himself in a tug-of-war between his love for Grace, his desire for her happiness, and his aspirations for social elavation. Though his intentions are deeply rooted in a fatherly concern which, of course, does not align with Grace's desires, it does lead to some serious unintended consequences in Grace's marital life as he prioritizes Edred Fitzpiers, a surgeon over Giles Winterborne, a humble and a loyal woodsman whom he initially intended to give his daughter's hand for marriage.

George's character embodies the clash between tradition and progress that is explored throughout the novel. His aspirations for social ascent represent the desire for upward mobility and the impact of societal expectations on personal relationships. George's character, thus, highlights the tension between tradition and the changing dynamics of a rapidly evolving society.

Edred Fitzpiers: A young, well-educated, intelligent and an ambitious surgeon who arrives in Little Hintock to keep his practice in the village that he has very carefully chosen as a part of his exploration. He is extremely charming and a charismatic individual who happens to infatuate Grace Melbury, the daughter of a timber merchant. Thus, creating love triangle and conflicts within the story that which affects the lives of many. Throughout the novel, Fitzpiers is seen as a selfish and self-centered who cares only about his own interests than the well-being of people surrounding him. His illicit relationships with women particularly with Mrs. Felice Charmond and others like Suke Damson leads to a lot of complications in his marital life.

Marty South: A loyal, humble and selfless girl of not more than nineteen or twenty years old whose hair becomes the focus of observation and admiration for many like Barber Percomb and Mrs. Charmond. She is a humble, supportive and dutiful daughter of John South, one of the employees of Mr. Melbury who works deliberately to meet up the expectations of her father's employer. Marty deeply loves the woodlander, Giles Winterborne yet she prefers concealing it on leaning about his romantic love for Grace

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Melbury. She is an embodiment of patience and genuine yet sacrificial love. Despite the hardships she faces in the context of love as well as family, she remains steadfast and resilient.

Marty South, in fact, is a significant character as the novel opens with an important incident in her life and ends with her solemn speech in Giles' grave:

“Now, my own own love,” she whispered, “you are mine, and only mine; for she has forgot’ee at last, although for her you died. But I- whenever I get up I’ll think of ’ee, and whenever I lie down I’ll think of ’ee again. Whenever I plant the young larches I’ll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring I’ll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven. . . . But, no, no, my love, I never can forget ’ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!” (331)

Check Your Progress

1. Mention the character who embodies the tension between tradition and progress. (20 words)

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2. Name the character experiencing conflicting emotions in the novel? (30 words)

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3. Which character stands as a self-made man? (30 words)

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4. Do you think Doctor Fitzpiers is a self-centered man? If yes, why?(40 words)

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7.5 Minor Characters

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Percomb: a master-barber who is also known as a wig-maker in the story. He was the chief of his trade in Sherton-Abbas. He travels all the way from Sherton to Little Hintock to meet Marty for her extremely valuable, voluminous hair so as to get her curls for the wealthy proprietor, Mrs. Charmond as she considers Marty's hair colour as the exact shade of her own.

Mrs. Dollery: The proprietress of the horse drawn van who helps Barber Percomb to find his way to Little Hintock.

John Upjohn: Mr. Melbury's regular man; a neighbor engaged in the hollow-turney trade.

Old Timothy Tangs and young Timothy Tangs: top and bottom sawyers at work in Mr. Melbury's pit outside. The latter being the fiancé of a maiden, Suke Damson.

Farmer Cawtree: A person who was in-charge of the cider house of Giles Winterborne. He is alert and keeps information of all sorts.

Robert Creedle: An old man who worked for Giles Winterborne. He did everything that required doing, from making Giles's bed to catching moles in his field. He was a survival from the days when Giles's father held the homestead and Giles was a playing boy. In fact, Creedle's occupation of manuring the garden usually was governed by his mood which Giles was not much bothered with being the person he had spent much of his days.

John Winterborne: He is the father of Giles Winterborne; also an old companion of Mr. George Melbury whom he recounts as Jack. He is the person with whom Mr. Melbury initially wanted to make amends for his wrongdoing by giving approval to his son, Giles to marry his only daughter, Grace.

Lucy: Also known as second Mrs. Melbury; she's a placid woman who had been a nurse to Melbury's only child, Grace after her mother's death. She is a woman who seeks everybody's welfare. Her constant care, support and meaningful advices reflects her genuine love for the family.

Old Grammer Oliver: an old woman who helps in the household chores of the Melbury family. After John South's death, she too suffers from nervous breakdown and thus urges Grace to return ten pounds to Doctor Fitzpiers so as to cancel the deal she has made for some financial assistance. It is for Mrs. Grammer Oliver's request that Grace reluctantly goes to meet Doctor Fitzpiers to release her from the unfortunate agreement that he could have her skull

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after death by returning him a couple of five-pound notes.

John South: Marty's father, a fifty-five year old man. He worked for the timber-merchant, Mr. George Melbury. He has had an experience of working as an woodlander for forty years making spars for the thatching of houses, furniture, etc. As he suffers from a serious health condition, he fears that his death will come from the tree next to his roof.

Mrs. Felice Charmond: The widow of a very wealthy gentleman who was thirty years older to her on whose death she becomes the proprietor of most of the estates in Little Hintock where her will is the law. She is a mistress of Hintock House. A woman who enchants men especially Fitzpiers with her provocative appearance. She is, thus, regarded as a melodramatic temptress. Also characterized as merciless by most of the villagers in Little Hintock. Towards the end of the novel, she is murdered by her rejected lover who hails from South Carolina.

Suke Damson: a young woman of amoral character who despite of having young Tim Tangs as her fiancé does not hesitate to get indulged sexually with Fitzpiers.

Doctor Jones: an old doctor from Mr. Melbury's neighbourhood who told him that Grace had a feverish attack.

Fred Beaucock: The ex-lawyer's clerk and local dandy, who had been called the cleverest fellow in Sherton. He lost his post for several reasons and thus, returns to his native town, where, at the time of the foregoing events in Hintock, he gave legal advice for astonishing small fees. He informs Mr. Melbury about the new law in terms of divorce.

SAQ

1. What distinguishes Giles Winterborne from Edred Fitzpiers? (30 words)

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2. Is Mr. George Melbury fully responsible for Grace's misfortunes? Substantiate your argument. (40 words)

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3. What were the complexities particularly felt by the women folk in the Victorian Age?(50 words)

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7.6 Summing Up

Let us briefly look at some important points to remember:

- Thoms Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (1887) is an account of the woodlanders in Little Hintock.
- The novel opens with an important incident in the life of Marty South, a humble, hardworking woodlander who is confronted by Percomb for some mysterious work.
- The story revolves around the fortunes of Grace Melbury, the only daughter of a rich timber merchant of Little Hintock.
- The story also concerns the efforts of an honest woodsman, Giles Winterborne, the apple grower to marry the girl he loved since his childhood days.
- However, Mr. George Melbury plays a very crucial role in his daughter's marital matters as he considers her education as an investment which will pay well in the form of a gentleman as son-in-law, thus, imposing his will upon Grace to marry Doctor Fitzpiers, a young, attractive, handsome man with no moral constraints while abandoning Giles Winterborne, a hardworking woodsman of Little Hintock who loves Grace with all his being.
- Though Fitzpiers initially seems to be interested in Grace but soon his dislike for old-fashioned woodland form of life begins to get revealed as he encounters with young Suke Damson and eventually has a serious entanglement with Mrs. Felice Charmond, a wealthy and middle-aged widow which causes separation from his wife, Grace Melbury.
- Throughout the novel, Giles Winterborne and Marty South are the only characters who resembles the humble, rustic, woodlanders life and most remarkably, selfless, generous and thus, sacrifices their desires to meet other people's expectations to a great extent that the

latter choose to secretly love the former even while supporting him with all the possibilities in his pursuit of Grace till the end.

- Towards the end of the novel, Felice is murdered by her rejected lover from South Carolina, Giles dies as much from enforced sexual continence as from typhoid, Timothy Tangs seeks to use the man-trap to avenge the seduction of his fiancé by Fitzpiers.
- Both Suke Damson and young Timothy Tangs reconciles with one another and together they move to New Zealand.
- The novel ends with Grace who moves to a the new house bought by Fitzpiers in the Midlands, most likely in Sherton-Abbas after their reunion leaving behind Marty as the only one to deposit flowers on Giles' grave which otherwise the two had been delivering every week religiously for about eight months after Giles' death and thus Marty mourns in her solitude addressing her lover as her own.

7.7 References and Suggested Reading

Hardy, Thomas. *The Woodlanders*. Oxford UP, 2009.

Hooti, Noorbakhsh, and Masoud Ahmadi Mousaabad. "The Tragic Sense of Passivity, Docility and Marriage Conventionality in Hardy's *The Woodlanders*." *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 1, no. 2, Aug. 2011.

Fayen, George S. "Hardy's *The Woodlanders*: Inwardness and Memory." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1961, pp.81.

Unit 8 : Thomas Hardy: *The Woodlanders*

(Themes and Techniques)

Unit Structure:

- 8.1 Objectives**
- 8.2 Introduction**
- 8.3 Themes**
- 8.4 Narrative Technique**
- 8.5 Symbolism**
- 8.6 Imagery**
- 8.7 Aspects of Language**
- 8.8 Summing Up**
- 8.9 References and Suggested Readings**

8.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to provide you with the themes and techniques along with additional details of the text, which is the Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders*. Here you shall have a brief introduction to the author, followed by sections on the themes, Hardy's narrative techniques, Symbolism in the novel, Imagery and aspects of language used by him. In between the sections, there are "Stop to Consider" aimed at giving you some extra interesting tidbits on the prescribed text and one solved question for your understanding. I will attempt to also engage your retention capacities by providing short answer questions with given word limits after each section. This is aimed at enabling you to test yourself by summarizing these ideas in your own words in a concise and lucid manner. Finally, I have also provided "know your progress" sections with several Masters' level essay type questions each in order for you to get acquainted with the examination scenario and practice. The summary at the end of the unit is aimed at jogging your memory and allowing you to have these ideas at your disposal to incorporate in your own creative arguments. All in all, by the end of this Unit, you will be able to-

- *remember* the key details involved in the understanding of the novel and its author
- *understand* the various critical discussions related to its themes and techniques
- *apply* this knowledge further to various novel and prose works of similar writers you encounter later in your career.
- *analyse* the thematic application and the nuances of Hardy's language and duly appreciate them.
- *create* and formulate your own ideas from the novel and also identify more original themes and ideas applicable rationally to the text.

8.2 Introduction

Thomas Hardy, a renowned figure in the world of literature, presents a remarkable and profound work in his novel, *The Woodlanders*. Published in 1887, this captivating masterpiece stands as a testament to Hardy's literary prowess and his ability to delve deep into the complexities of human emotions, societal expectations, and the intricate dynamics of rural life in nineteenth-century England. If you are in search of a thought-provoking and multi-layered novel, it offers a rich tapestry of themes and narratives that unravel against the backdrop of the fictional village of Little Hintock. Through vivid characterization and compelling storytelling, Hardy crafts a captivating exploration of love, betrayal, social class, and the relentless conflict between personal desires and societal constraints.

At the heart of *The Woodlanders* lies the story of Grace Melbury, the daughter of George Melbury, a timber merchant residing in the secluded countryside. Grace, after receiving a city education, returns to her village as a cultured and accomplished young woman. Her return sparks a series of events that shape her life and the lives of those around her, leading to profound introspection and challenging decisions. Hardy masterfully portrays the clash between tradition and progress, as Grace's engagement to Giles Winterborne, a loyal and hardworking woodsman, is questioned due to her exposure to the city's influences. George Melbury, torn between societal expectations and his deep affection for Grace, undergoes a change of heart, believing Giles to be unsuitable for his daughter's newfound status.

However, the arrival of Mrs. Charmond, a captivating and influential figure from the city, further disrupts the lives of the woodlanders. Grace's interactions with Mrs. Charmond and the subsequent abandonment plunge her into a world of uncertainty and dashed hopes, while also highlighting the delicate balance between rural simplicity and the allure of social elevation. The narrative takes a compelling turn with the introduction of Dr. Edred Fitzpiers, a charismatic but morally flawed character. Fitzpiers, with his city-bred sophistication, attracts Grace, and she finds herself torn between loyalty to Giles and the magnetic pull of Fitzpiers' charm. Their marriage sets in motion a series of consequences, revealing the fragility of love, the consequences of misguided choices, and the inevitable collision of two vastly different worlds. Hardy's exploration of love, desire, and the limitations imposed by societal norms resonates deeply within *The Woodlanders*. Grace's journey serves as a reflection of the human condition, wherein the struggle between personal desires and the expectations of society often leads to heartbreak, remorse, and a profound questioning of one's decisions.

In the backdrop of the rustic English countryside, Hardy's evocative descriptions bring the setting to life, with the woods serving as a symbol of both solace and constraint. Nature's presence, intertwined with the lives of the characters, heightens the novel's themes, exposing the dichotomy between the untamed beauty of the natural world and the constraints imposed by human society. *The Woodlanders* offers literature students a rich and complex exploration of human emotions, societal dynamics, and the intricate interplay between personal desires and societal expectations. Hardy's *The Woodlanders* stands as a testament to the author's literary genius and remains a compelling work for those in the field of literature.

Stop to Consider

Some Interesting facts about Thomas Hardy

- Before pursuing a full-time career as a writer, Thomas Hardy trained as an architect. His architectural background is evident in his novels, where he often incorporates detailed descriptions of buildings and landscapes. The influence of his architectural knowledge can be seen in his attention to structural details and the way he creates vivid settings within his narratives.

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- Hardy initially gained recognition as a poet before becoming known as a novelist. His first literary success came with the publication of his poetry collection, *Wessex Poems* in 1898. However, it was his later novels, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* that solidified his reputation as a prominent figure in English literature.
- Despite its eventual critical acclaim, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* initially faced rejection from multiple publishers due to its controversial themes and depiction of female sexuality. Hardy had to make significant revisions to the novel before it was finally accepted for publication. Its subsequent success established Hardy as a powerful and daring writer.
- Thomas Hardy's love for his native Dorset, England, is evident in his novels, which often feature fictionalized versions of real locations. Two prominent landmarks associated with Hardy are Max Gate, his former residence near Dorchester, and Stinsford Church, where he is buried. Both sites continue to attract literary enthusiasts and fans of Hardy's work.
- In his later novels, Hardy received criticism for his use of authorial intervention, where he intervenes in the plot to highlight tragic events or give important insights into characters' motivations

SAQ

What is the central conflict in *The Woodlanders*? (60 words)

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How does the arrival of Mrs. Charmond impact the lives of the woodlanders in the novel? (50 words)

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8.3 Themes:

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8.3.1 Love and Relationships

The Woodlanders delves into the intricate landscape of human emotions, particularly the theme of love and relationships. Through vivid character portrayals and nuanced storytelling, Hardy weaves a compelling narrative that explores the complexities, challenges, and consequences of romantic entanglements. You will now delve into the multifaceted nature of love and relationships in *The Woodlanders* highlighting key examples from the novel.

One of the central manifestations of love in *The Woodlanders* is unrequited affection and longing. Marty South's deep and selfless love for Giles Winterborne serves as a poignant example. Marty silently endures her unrequited love for Giles, witnessing his heartbreak over Grace Melbury's engagement to Edred Fitzpiers. Her longing for Giles is evident in her unwavering loyalty and self-sacrifice, which highlight the pain and complexities of unreciprocated love. Hardy explores the conflict between personal desires and societal expectations within romantic relationships too. Grace Melbury's journey encapsulates this struggle, torn between her love for Giles and the allure of Edred Fitzpiers' social status. Grace's decision to marry Fitzpiers, driven partly by societal pressure and her own desire for upward mobility, leads to a tumultuous and ultimately unhappy union. This example underscores the consequences of prioritizing societal expectations over authentic emotional connections. Furthermore, betrayal serves as a significant theme within the realm of love and relationships in the novel. Edred Fitzpiers' affair with Felice Charmond and subsequent abandonment of Grace highlight the devastating effects of betrayal. Grace's trust in her husband is shattered, and the erosion of their relationship becomes palpable. This betrayal not only disrupts the marital bond but also exposes the fragility of trust within intimate relationships, leaving deep emotional scars on the characters involved.

The Woodlanders is seen to portray acts of sacrifice and devotion as expressions of love. Giles Winterborne's unwavering love for Grace is marked by his selfless sacrifices. He surrenders his home to Mrs. Charmond to secure Grace's well-being, ultimately succumbing to

illness as a result. Giles' self-sacrifice exemplifies the lengths to which individuals will go for love, showcasing the depths of his devotion and highlighting the complex interplay between love, sacrifice, and personal fulfillment. The theme of regret permeates the novel as characters grapple with the repercussions of their choices in love and relationships. Grace's regret over her decision to marry Fitzpiers becomes palpable as she realizes the depth of Giles' love and the sacrifices he made for her. This regret underscores the profound impact of choices made in moments of emotional turmoil and serves as a cautionary tale about the irreversible consequences of ill-fated decisions.

8.3.2. Social Class and Status

We can see that throughout the narrative, Hardy highlights the impact of social class on personal relationships, individual aspirations, and the quest for happiness. The characters' desires for upward mobility, clashes between tradition and progress, and the conflicts that arise when crossing societal boundaries give us a centre for examining the theme of social class in *The Woodlanders*. The novel explores the profound impact of social class on the characters' relationships. The central character, Grace Melbury, embodies this theme as her engagement to Giles Winterborne, a loyal and hardworking woodsman, is questioned due to his lower social standing. Grace's father, George Melbury, experiences a conflict between his impression of Giles and his desire to elevate Grace's social status. This conflict demonstrates how social class can become a barrier to genuine affection and can lead to strained relationships and unfulfilled love. This is seen when George Melbury changes his mind about the marriage, believing Giles to be unsuitable for Grace's elevated status. This decision underscores the influence of social class on the characters' choices and their willingness to conform to societal expectations, even at the expense of their own happiness.

Hardy portrays the clash between tradition and progress as a driving force behind the theme of social class. The characters in *The Woodlanders* are caught between the traditional rural values of their community and the allure of modernization and upward mobility. The tension between these forces shapes their identities and relationships. An example of this tension is Grace's exposure to city life and

education, which raises her social aspirations. Her desire for a higher social standing creates conflict within her, as she questions her engagement to Giles, who represents the traditional rural way of life. This clash between tradition and progress highlights the challenges faced by individuals attempting to reconcile their personal desires with societal expectations. The desire for upward mobility is prevalent throughout the novel, as characters yearn to transcend their social standing and attain a higher status. The pursuit of status often comes at the cost of personal relationships and moral integrity. The character of Edred Fitzpiers, the city-bred doctor who aspires to climb the social ladder embodies this idea very well. His attraction to Grace is influenced not only by his feelings but also by her potential to elevate his own status. Fitzpiers's ambitions lead him to abandon his rural wife, compromising personal values and causing immense harm to those around him.

Finally, Hardy highlights the consequences that arise when characters cross societal boundaries and challenge the established social order. The novel portrays how society can punish those who dare to defy its norms, reinforcing the rigidity of social class distinctions. For instance, Grace's brief interaction with Mrs. Charmond, a woman of higher social standing, raises her hopes for social elevation. However, when Mrs. Charmond abruptly drops Grace, her dreams are shattered, and she faces the consequences of attempting to transcend her social class. The disapproval and judgment from the village community exemplify the harsh consequences faced by individuals who attempt to navigate outside their prescribed social roles.

8.3.3. Nature's Influence and the Rural Landscape

The woods and countryside serve as vital symbols in *The Woodlanders*, representing both solace and constraint. Hardy portrays the woods as a place of tranquillity, where characters find respite from the challenges of their lives. Giles Winterborne, the dedicated woodsman, seeks solace in the woods, finding comfort and a deep connection with the natural world. The woods become a sanctuary where Giles can escape societal pressures and immerse himself in the

harmony of nature. However, the countryside and woods also symbolize the constraints placed on the characters. Little Hintock, the rural village where the story is set, is isolated from the broader world. The limited scope of opportunities and the weight of tradition can be stifling for the characters. Grace Melbury, for instance, feels the tension between her love for Giles, who represents the simplicity of rural life, and her aspirations for a more cosmopolitan existence. The woods and countryside, then, become a metaphorical boundary that characters must navigate in their pursuit of personal fulfillment. Hardy skilfully portrays the influence of nature on the characters' emotional states. The changing seasons, weather patterns, and natural landscapes mirror their inner turmoil and serve as a reflection of their moods. For instance, the harsh winter that coincides with Giles' illness and eventual death represents the bleakness and sorrow of his situation. Grace's moments of reflection amidst the natural surroundings convey her internal struggles and evoke a sense of melancholy. Nature becomes a mirror that reflects the characters' emotional journeys, accentuating their joys, sorrows, and conflicts.

Hardy further emphasizes the cyclical nature of life through his portrayal of the natural world. The recurring patterns of growth, decay, and renewal in the woods and countryside parallel the characters' experiences. The ebb and flow of life, as exemplified by the changing seasons and the life cycles of plants and animals, becomes a reminder of the impermanence of human desires and the transient nature of happiness. We see this in how the blossoming of Marty South's love for Giles, unrequited as it may be, echoes the natural growth and flowering of the woodland environment. Throughout the novel, nature is depicted as a source of wisdom and guidance. Characters often find solace and insight by immersing themselves in the natural world. When Grace frequently visits Giles' grave in the woods, seeking solace and finding a connection to his memory and the wisdom he embodied she exemplifies this very aspect of the theme. Marty South, deeply connected to the land, possesses a profound understanding of nature and its rhythms. Her insights and observations reflect a deep wisdom born out of her intimate relationship with the natural environment.

8.3.4. Sacrifice and Selflessness

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Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders*, presents a captivating exploration of the theme of sacrifice and selflessness, revealing the profound depths of love, devotion, and the moral dilemmas faced by its characters. The acts of sacrifice and selflessness serve as pivotal moments that influence the lives of the protagonists, leaving a lasting impact on their relationships, personal growth, and the overall trajectory of the plot. By examining key examples from the novel, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and consequences of these acts of sacrifice and selflessness.

Giles Winterborne serves as a prime example of selflessness and unwavering love. His deep affection for Grace Melbury is marked by his sacrificial actions and unwavering commitment to her well-being. Despite Grace's rejection and subsequent marriage to Dr. Fitzpiers, Giles remains devoted to her. He selflessly continues to care for her and puts her needs above his own, exemplifying a profound sense of sacrifice. Giles's selflessness is evident in his willingness to surrender his own happiness for the sake of Grace's well-being. When Grace seeks shelter with him during a harsh winter, Giles chooses to endure the cold and discomfort in a nearby shack, rather than intrude on her privacy. This act of sacrifice reveals his deep understanding of her emotional turmoil and his desire to protect her, even at the cost of his own physical well-being and eventually, his life. Marty South's unrequited love for Giles is another poignant example of selflessness in the novel. Despite knowing that Giles's heart belongs to Grace, Marty remains steadfast in her devotion to him. Her selfless love is depicted through her unwavering support, care, and sacrifices for Giles, even in the face of heartbreak. Marty's selflessness is evident when Giles falls seriously ill, and she becomes aware of his deteriorating condition. Despite her own pain and unfulfilled desires, she puts Giles's well-being above her own and strives to ensure his comfort and care. Her acts of sacrifice reveal the depth of her love and her willingness to prioritize Giles's needs, transcending personal desires.

Grace Melbury's journey in *The Woodlanders* highlights the internal struggle between personal desires and societal expectations. Initially engaged to Giles, she succumbs to the allure of social status

and marries Dr. Fitzpiers. However, her marriage exposes the consequences of her choices and triggers a profound realization of the sacrifices made by others for her happiness. Grace's self-reflection and growing remorse serve as a testament to the theme of sacrifice. She grapples with the guilt of betraying Giles's genuine love and recognizes the selflessness of his actions. Through her evolving understanding, Grace begins to question her own motivations and confronts the consequences of her choices, ultimately leading her to a path of self-discovery and personal growth.

Additionally, George Melbury, Grace's father, exemplifies the theme of sacrifice through his intentions for his daughter's happiness. Initially, he seeks to fulfill an obligation to a deceased friend by arranging Grace's marriage to Giles Winterborne. However, as his aspirations for Grace's social status evolve, George wrestles with conflicting desires, torn between his love for his daughter and the weight of societal expectations. George's internal struggle embodies sacrifice as he contemplates sacrificing Grace's happiness for the sake of societal advancement. His intention to elevate Grace's status by aligning her with Dr. Fitzpiers demonstrates the complex nature of sacrifice, as he grapples with the moral implications of his choices.

8.3.5. Betrayal and Regret

One of the most prominent examples of betrayal in the novel lies in the marital infidelity of Dr. Edred Fitzpiers, who betrays his wife, Grace Melbury. Despite the vows of love and fidelity exchanged at their wedding, Fitzpiers succumbs to the allure of Mrs. Charmond, engaging in a secret affair. This act of betrayal not only shatters Grace's trust in her husband but also undermines the foundation of their marriage, leaving her devastated and betrayed. Moreover, the discovery of Fitzpiers' infidelity by the community intensifies the pain and humiliation for Grace. She becomes a subject of gossip and scorn, exacerbating her sense of betrayal and regret for choosing Fitzpiers over Giles Winterborne, who had always been devoted to her. The consequences of this betrayal lead Grace down a path of immense remorse and self-reflection. While much of the focus is on the betrayal suffered by Grace, it is essential to acknowledge Giles Winterborne's betrayal of his own desires. Despite his deep love for Grace, Giles

willingly steps aside and allows her to marry Fitzpiers, adhering to societal expectations and suppressing his true feelings. In doing so, he betrays his own emotions and sacrifices his own happiness for the sake of Grace's perceived social advancement. Giles' regret and remorse become evident as he witnesses the deterioration of Grace's marriage and realizes the depth of his own feelings for her. He becomes consumed by guilt for not pursuing his own happiness and betraying his true self. Giles' betrayal highlights the inner conflict between personal desires and societal expectations, leading to profound regret and a haunting sense of what could have been.

The theme of regret reverberates throughout the novel as characters grapple with the consequences of their actions. This is quite common in the general corpus of Hardy's novels. Grace, plagued by remorse for choosing Fitzpiers over Giles, experiences a profound sense of regret as she witnesses the disintegration of her marriage. She is haunted by the realization that her decision resulted in not only her own unhappiness but also the pain she caused to Giles and the subsequent chain of events.

Furthermore, George Melbury, Grace's father, is consumed by regret for his role in orchestrating the marriage between Grace and Fitzpiers. He realizes the folly of his ambitions and the devastating impact his choices have had on his daughter's life. Melbury's regret emphasizes the profound responsibility individuals bear for the consequences of their actions, leading to profound soul-searching and remorse.

8.3.6. Tradition and Change

We will now examine the theme of tradition and change in *The Woodlanders* from the novel, highlighting the conflicts, dilemmas, and transformative effects experienced by the characters. The central aspect of tradition and change in *The Woodlanders* lies in the clash between the rural traditions of Little Hintock and the influence of the outside world. The introduction of Mrs. Charmond, a city-dweller with refined tastes, disrupts the lives of the woodlanders. Her presence serves as a catalyst for upheaval, challenging the customs and values of the village. Grace Melbury's association with Mrs. Charmond and

her subsequent abandonment reflects the allure of the urban lifestyle and the conflicts it creates within a traditional rural community. This is exemplified well by Grace's interaction with Mrs. Charmond initially raises her social status, offering her a glimpse of high society. However, the sudden termination of their association demonstrates the fleeting nature of change and the disruptive effects it can have on established relationships and aspirations.

The theme of tradition and change is intricately linked to social mobility in the novel. Characters like Grace and her father, George Melbury, desire upward mobility and strive to transcend their humble origins. They navigate the tensions between their aspirations for a higher social standing and the constraints imposed by traditional expectations. We see this when George Melbury's initial acceptance of Giles Winterborne as a potential suitor for Grace reflects his adherence to traditional customs. However when Grace's education in the city elevates her social status, George's views on her potential suitors change. He begins to question the suitability of Giles due to his perceived lower social standing, revealing the conflict between tradition and the desire for upward mobility. This novel also portrays the transformative effects of progress on the rural community. As the forces of modernity encroach upon Little Hintock, the characters grapple with the repercussions of change. While progress offers new opportunities, it often comes at the cost of losing cherished traditions and values. The arrival of Dr. Fitzpiers represents progress and urban influence. His marriage to Grace, driven by ambitions and the allure of city life, showcases the seductive power of change. However, the subsequent revelation of Fitzpiers' infidelity and the breakdown of their marriage highlight the consequences of forsaking traditional values and embracing change without understanding its true implications.

Finally, Hardy also explores the resistance to change that stems from a deep sense of nostalgia and attachment to traditional ways of life. Characters like Giles Winterborne, deeply connected to the land and its customs, embody a longing for the past and reluctance to abandon familiar traditions. Giles' steadfast love for Grace and his adherence to traditional values illustrate his resistance to change. Despite Grace's rejection and the influence of Dr. Fitzpiers, Giles remains rooted in his rural existence, finding solace and purpose in the traditions and simplicity of life in Little Hintock.

8.3.7. Identity and Self Discovery

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The Woodlanders presents characters grappling with the conflict between their authentic selves and the expectations imposed upon them by society. Grace Melbury, torn between her upbringing as a cultured lady and her heartfelt attachment to Giles Winterborne, experiences a profound struggle for authenticity. As she returns to her village after an education in the city, Grace's sense of self is tested, leading her to question societal norms and the implications of her choices. Hardy highlights the weight of societal expectations and the pressures to conform in *The Woodlanders*. Grace's father, George Melbury, initially supports her relationship with Giles but succumbs to the desire for social advancement, changing his stance to uphold the expectations placed upon his daughter. This clash between personal desires and societal pressures forces the characters to grapple with the notion of identity and the sacrifices they make to adhere to prevailing norms. In exploring identity and self-discovery, Hardy exposes the illusory nature of social status. Grace's infatuation with the charismatic Dr. Fitzpiers exemplifies the allure of an elevated social position. However, as their marriage unfolds, Grace realizes the superficiality of Fitzpiers' charm and the emptiness of the social status she had hoped to attain. This revelation prompts her to question her own desires and seek a deeper understanding of her true self.

Again, Hardy emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and introspection as crucial components of self-discovery. Through moments of solitude and introspection, the characters in *The Woodlanders* the novel embark on journeys of self-understanding. Giles, for instance, demonstrates self-awareness as he reflects on his love for Grace and the sacrifices he is willing to make. These introspective moments serve as catalysts for personal growth and the revelation of one's authentic identity. Love, a recurring motif in Hardy's works, serves as a catalyst for self-discovery in *The Woodlanders*. Giles' unwavering love for Grace and his selfless actions in the face of her choices highlight the transformative power of love. Through this love, Giles discovers his own capacity for sacrifice and selflessness, ultimately revealing an aspect of his identity that remains true despite external circumstances. Once again we see that Hardy portrays the emotional turmoil and identity crises that arise when individuals confront

the dissonance between their true selves and societal expectations. Grace's tumultuous journey reflects the internal struggle between her heartfelt attachment to Giles and the pressures of conforming to societal norms. Her moments of doubt and inner conflict epitomize the complex nature of

Stop to Consider

1. Lionel Johnson's *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (1894) is one of the earliest critical appraisals of Hardy's fiction discussed in terms of the discrepancy between urban discord and rural order. The critic provides evidence of kinship between Hardy's rural heroes and Shakespeare's rustics.
2. *William R. Rutland's Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background* (1938) traces the impact on Hardy of the Bible, the Greek and Roman classics, the English poets (Crabbe, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Swinburne), and the work of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Leslie Stephen, John Stuart Mill and others.
3. Interestingly, Hardy's novels are absent from the great canon of English fiction formulated in *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948) by the critic F. R. Leavis, who dismissed him from the rank of "the great English novelists". This influential critic even quoted Henry James's famous malicious remark about Hardy- "The good little Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is chock-full of faults and falsity, and yet has a singular charm."
4. One of the important works of postwar criticism is Albert J. Guerard's *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories* (1949), which is regarded as the first significant reassessment of Hardy's literary achievement. However, the study depended on a truncated edition of Hardy's writings and some of the opinions are not well-founded on the original text. Guerard regards Hardy as a forerunner of modern literary techniques, and he treats him as an antirealist in both form and technique.
5. Herbert Borthwick Grimsditch, in *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1925), presents, amongst

others, Hardy's upbringing, description of country life and local landscapes, manners, customs and superstitions of Wessex peasants, intellectual and artistic influences.

6. Ruth Anita Firor's *Folkways in Thomas Hardy* (1931) describes Hardy's use of folklore and folk customs, omens, premonitions, magic, folk songs, medieval legends and Napoleonana in his writings.

It is important to note that opinions may vary among different critics, and these are just a few examples of the diverse perspectives on Hardy's writing.

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Identity formation and the challenges inherent in self-discovery. *The Woodlanders* ultimately conveys the importance of embracing individuality and finding resilience in the face of societal pressures. Characters like Giles and Marty South, who remain true to their authentic selves despite adversity, embody the strength of character necessary to navigate the complexities of self-discovery. Their resilience in the face of heartbreak and societal expectations serves as a powerful testament to the transformative power of embracing one's true identity.

SAQ

What role does love play in *The Woodlanders*, and how does unrequited love impact the characters in the novel? (50 words)

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How does the theme of social class and status shape the relationships and choices of the characters in *The Woodlanders*? (50 words)

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Check Your Progress

1. How does George Melbury's change of heart regarding Grace's relationship with Giles Winterborne reflect the conflict between personal desires and societal pressures in the novel?

2. How does the illusion of social status impact Grace Melbury's pursuit of happiness and self-discovery in *The Woodlanders*?
3. Discuss the emotional turmoil and identity crises experienced by the characters in *The Woodlanders*, highlighting the challenges inherent in self-discovery and the dissonance between personal desires and societal expectations.

8.4 Narrative Technique

Thomas Hardy, celebrated for his intricate storytelling, employs a masterful narrative technique in his novel *The Woodlanders*. Published in 1887, this compelling work showcases Hardy's skill in crafting a rich tapestry of perspectives, symbolism, and foreshadowing to convey the complexities of human relationships, societal dynamics, and the timeless themes that permeate the narrative. Hardy employs a third-person omniscient narrative voice, enabling readers to access the thoughts, emotions, and perspectives of various characters. This narrative technique allows for a multifaceted exploration of the story, immersing readers in the subjective experiences and inner conflicts of the woodlanders. By providing insights into different characters' motivations and desires, Hardy offers a comprehensive portrayal of their actions and the resulting consequences. Also Central to Hardy's narrative technique is the use of symbolism and vivid descriptive imagery. Through the meticulous portrayal of the natural world, such as the woods and countryside, Hardy imbues his prose with rich symbolism that mirrors the characters' inner states and external circumstances. The woods, for instance, symbolize both solace and constraint, reflecting the conflicts faced by the woodlanders in their pursuit of love, social status, and personal fulfilment. Hardy also employs foreshadowing and premonition as narrative devices, imbuing the story with an atmosphere of anticipation and foreboding. Through subtle hints and clues scattered throughout the text, you will gain glimpses into future events and the potential consequences of characters' actions. Foreshadowing intensifies the emotional impact of pivotal moments, heightening tension and suspense as the narrative progresses.

Another technique that Hardy skilfully employs is that of flashbacks and recollection as narrative techniques which provides readers with crucial insights into characters' past experiences and their impact on the present. Through these narrative devices, readers gain a deeper understanding of characters'

motivations, inner conflicts, and the origins of their relationships. The use of flashbacks enriches the narrative by expanding the temporal scope and unveiling the complexities of the characters' histories. Within the narrative, Hardy employs irony and social commentary to highlight the disparities between societal expectations and individual desires. Through ironic twists and turns, he exposes the consequences of characters' actions, challenging prevailing norms and values. Hardy's astute social commentary invites readers to question the restrictive nature of societal expectations and contemplate the complexities of personal agency and authenticity.

Hardy's narrative technique also encompasses pacing and a well conditioned narrative structure, effectively enhancing the emotional impact of the story. The pacing varies, alternating between moments of introspection, gradual character development, and climactic events. The narrative structure reflects the passing of the characters' lives, encompassing moments of tension, resolution, and introspection that shape their individual journeys. Through inner monologues and introspection, Hardy delves into the depths of his characters' thoughts and emotions, further enriching the narrative. These introspective passages provide profound insights into characters' motivations, fears, and desires, fostering a deeper connection between readers and the woodlanders. Thus, by allowing readers to inhabit the characters' minds, Hardy invites a greater understanding of their complex inner worlds.

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SAQ

How does Thomas Hardy utilize multiple perspectives in *The Woodlanders* to enhance the reader's understanding of the characters?
(50 words)

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What role does symbolism play in Hardy's narrative technique in *The Woodlanders*, and how does it contribute to the exploration of the novel's themes? (60 words)

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8.5 Symbolism

The woods are a recurring symbol throughout the novel, representing both a physical and metaphorical space. As a physical setting, the woods embody the rustic and natural environment of Little Hintock. They serve as a sanctuary for characters like Giles Winterborne, providing solace, tranquillity, and a connection to the primal forces of nature. Metaphorically, the woods symbolize the wild, untamed aspects of human nature, contrasting with the constraints of societal expectations. The presence of trees and saplings serves as a symbol of growth, change, and the passage of time. The act of planting and cutting trees reflects the cyclical nature of life, mirroring the characters' own journeys of self-discovery and transformation. Saplings, in particular, represent hope, potential, and the possibility of new beginnings.

Mrs. Charmond's estate further symbolizes social status and the allure of the upper class. The grandeur and opulence of the estate fascinate the villagers, highlighting the desire for upward mobility and the temptations associated with higher social standing. The estate's presence in the narrative underscores the tension between the rural and urban worlds, as well as the conflicts that arise when individuals strive to break free from their societal constraints. The apple tree also serves as a powerful symbol of fertility, temptation, and the consequences of desire. It represents both the sweetness of love and the bitterness of betrayal, and becomes a focal point for Grace Melbury and Giles Winterborne's relationship, embodying their shared dreams and hopes. However, it also becomes a witness to their separation and the challenges they face due to societal expectations. Hardy skilfully employs weather and seasonal changes as symbolic elements throughout the novel. The changing seasons reflect the characters' emotional states, emphasizing the cyclical nature of life and the passage of time. Storms and harsh weather represent turmoil, conflict, and the challenges faced by the characters. Conversely, moments of calm and sunny weather signify moments of tranquillity and emotional stability.

Marty South's red ribbon acts as a symbol of unrequited love and devotion as she wears it as a constant reminder of her affection for Giles Winterborne, even though he does not reciprocate her feelings. The red ribbon represents Marty's unwavering loyalty and serves as a reminder of the sacrifices she is willing to make for love. The wedding ring also symbolizes commitment, vows, and the societal expectations associated with marriage. Its presence in

the narrative highlights the complexities of marital relationships and the weight of promises made. It becomes a source of conflict and regret, representing the entanglement of the characters' lives and the consequences of their choices.

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8.6 Imagery

Thomas Hardy, a masterful wordsmith, weaves a vivid tapestry of imagery in his novel *The Woodlanders*. This literary masterpiece from 1887 is replete with evocative descriptions and rich visual imagery that transport readers to the rural world of Little Hintock. Through his skilled use of imagery, Hardy not only paints a detailed picture of the natural landscape but also employs images that deepen the thematic and emotional resonance of the story. *The Woodlanders* is suffused with lush descriptions of the natural world, showcasing Hardy's keen observation of his surroundings. From the dense woods to the rustic village, every aspect of the landscape is brought to life with sensory detail. Hardy's vivid imagery immerses readers in the sights, sounds, and scents of the countryside, evoking a profound connection between the characters and their environment. The woods in *The Woodlanders* also play a crucial role beyond their physical depiction. They show both solace and constraint, reflecting the characters' experiences and inner struggles. The dense foliage represents the complexities of human relationships, as characters become entangled in a web of emotions and societal expectations. The juxtaposition of the tranquil beauty and the oppressive nature of the woods underscores the tensions within the narrative.

Hardy further skilfully employs seasonal imagery to signify the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. Each season carries its own imagery, reflecting the characters' emotional journeys. Spring represents rebirth and the potential for new beginnings, while summer signifies the height of passion and desire. Autumn and winter, with their fading colours and cold temperatures, evoke themes of loss, regret, and the inevitability of change. Even animals and creatures in the novel serve as images and enhance the thematic depth of the novel. For instance, the nightingale's melodic song symbolizes longing and unfulfilled desires, echoing the characters' yearnings for love and fulfilment. The owl's presence signifies wisdom, often juxtaposed with the characters' lack of foresight or their misguided choices. Hardy's use of animal imagery adds a layer of imagery to the narrative. Weather and atmospheric conditions in the novel also hold great significance as images, reflecting the characters' emotional states or foreshadowing significant events. Storms and tempests

mirror moments of conflict or emotional turmoil, while calm and sunny weather represents moments of serenity or fleeting happiness. By employing weather imagery, Hardy subtly enhances the mood and emotional impact of key scenes.

Another interesting facet of Hardy is his employment of colour imagery to convey meaning and evoke emotional responses. The use of vivid colours, such as red, show passion and desire, while muted or faded colours represent melancholy or resignation. Colour symbolism weaves throughout the narrative, enhancing the readers' understanding of the characters' inner thoughts and emotions. Hardy's attention to architectural details provides symbolic depth to the novel. Buildings and structures, such as Giles Winterborne's cottage and Mrs. Charmond's estate, represent contrasting worlds and social hierarchies. The decaying state of certain buildings reflects the disintegration of relationships or the erosion of traditional values, while well-maintained structures symbolize stability and societal expectations.

8.7 Aspects of Language

In Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders*, language serves as a powerful medium through which characters express their thoughts, emotions, and aspirations. It unveils the complexities of human communication and offers profound insights into the characters' inner worlds. This section delves into the various aspects of language employed in *The Woodlanders*, including dialect, symbolism, figurative language, and dialogue, and examines how they contribute to the novel's themes and the portrayal of its characters. Hardy's careful inclusion of dialect and regionalism lends authenticity and depth to the narrative, capturing the nuances of rural life in nineteenth-century England. The use of dialect reflects the characters' social and cultural backgrounds, emphasizing their connection to their rustic environment. For instance, the woodlanders' speech patterns, such as Giles Winterborne's distinct dialect, create a vivid portrayal of their local identity and establish a sense of place within the novel.

Hardy also employs vivid and evocative descriptive language to symbolically represent the characters and their surroundings. Nature, in particular, serves as a powerful symbol throughout the novel. The descriptions of the woods, trees, and natural elements evoke a sense of harmony, beauty, and the cycles of life. Symbolism, intertwined with language, creates layers of meaning, emphasizing the profound relationship between the characters and their environment.

Hardy also demonstrates his mastery of figurative language, including metaphors, similes, and personification, adds depth and richness to his prose. By employing figurative language, Hardy vividly depicts emotions, experiences, and the dynamics of relationships. For instance, he uses metaphors to describe love, employing phrases such as “the merest bud” “colossal passion in posse, a giant in embryo” or “to clip your own wings when you were free to soar”. Such figurative expressions amplify the characters’ internal struggles, desires, and the complexity of their experiences. Hardy’s skilful use of dialogue illuminates the characters’ personalities, relationships, and the social dynamics of the village. Through authentic and nuanced dialogue, he conveys the idiosyncrasies of speech, capturing the rhythm, expressions, and individual quirks of each character. Conversational patterns also reveal the tensions, misunderstandings, and underlying emotions within interpersonal interactions, making dialogue a significant tool for character development and plot progression. Hardy even employs irony and satire to critique societal norms and conventions. Through subtle and sometimes biting remarks, he unveils the contradictions and hypocrisies of the characters’ beliefs and actions. The use of irony serves as a lens through which Hardy comments on social hierarchy, class divisions, and the limitations imposed by societal expectations.

Lastly, Hardy skilfully employs inner monologues and streams of consciousness to provide readers with direct access to the characters’ thoughts and inner conflicts. These narrative techniques offer insights into the characters’ motivations, doubts, and desires, providing a deeper understanding of their psychological complexities. By capturing the unfiltered thoughts of the characters, Hardy immerses readers in their internal worlds, heightening the emotional and introspective aspects of the novel.

Check Your Progress

How does Hardy’s use of dialect contribute to the authenticity and depth of the narrative in *The Woodlanders*? (50 words)

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How does Hardy employ descriptive language to enhance the portrayal of characters and their surroundings in the novel? (60 words)

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8.8 Summing Up

In the introduction, we have seen how Hardy’s novel *The Woodlanders*, showcases his literary prowess with its exploration of human emotions, societal expectations, and the complexities of rural life. Set in the village of Little Hintock, the story revolves around Grace Melbury and her choices between tradition and progress, love and societal pressure. The next section deals with several themes like identity and self-discovery, exploring the conflicts and complexities faced by its characters as they navigate the pressures of societal expectations and their own personal desires. Through examples like that of Grace Melbury, who must reconcile her upbringing as a cultured lady with her genuine attachment to Giles Winterborne we have further learnt about Hardy’s representation of the struggle for authenticity. The burden of conforming to societal norms is also seen as evident in George Melbury’s transformation from supporting Grace’s relationship with Giles to prioritizing social advancement. The subsequent section discusses Thomas Hardy’s narrative technique in the novel encompasses multiple perspectives, symbolism, foreshadowing, flashbacks, and irony. It is explained in detail how these techniques enhance character development, evoke vivid imagery, and invite readers to delve into the complexities of human emotions and societal dynamics.

We have learnt in the next section that Symbols in Thomas Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* include the woods representing nature and freedom, trees symbolizing growth and change, Mrs. Charmond’s estate representing social status, the apple tree embodying love and betrayal, weather reflecting emotional states, Marty South’s red ribbon signifying unrequited love, and the wedding ring representing commitment and consequences. In the following section dealing with imagery, we discuss how the natural landscape comes alive through sensory details, while the woods show both solace and constraint. Seasonal changes reflect emotional journeys, and animals and weather hold rich imagery in terms of their significance. It is also demonstrated how colour

and architecture further deepen thematic resonance in this masterful work. Finally, the last section before this summary focuses on various aspects of language, including dialect, symbolism, figurative language, dialogue, irony, and inner monologues. Thus, we can conclude that with these techniques, Hardy unveils the nuances of rural life, human emotions, and societal critiques, creating a profound and introspective literary work.

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