

**BAEN 301CCT**

# **British Literature**

for

**BA**

**(Third Semester)**

**Directorate of Distance Education**

**Maulana Azad National Urdu University**

**Hyderabad-32, Telangana- India**

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**British Literature**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Semester**

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(SLM Based on UGC CBCS)

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## CONTENTS

<b>Message</b>	<b>Vice Chancellor</b>
<b>Message</b>	<b>Director</b>
<b>Introduction to the Course</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>
<b>Unit</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1. Introduction to British Drama	11
2. A Brief Survey of British Drama	29
3. University Wits	41
4. Life and Works of William Shakespeare	53
5. Shakespearean Romantic Comedy	66
6. Characteristic features of Romantic Comedy	76
7. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Plot construction	89
8. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Themes	99
9. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Major characters	109
10. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Language of William Shakespeare	124
11. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Style of William Shakespeare	137
12. <i>Merchant of Venice</i> : Relevance of <i>Merchant of Venice</i> in the Contemporary World	150
13. Introduction to the British Novel	162
14. A Brief History of the Novel	172
15. Important Novelists before Dickens	185
16. Life and Works of Charles Dickens	199
17. Types of Novels	212
18. Aspects of the Novel	221
19. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Introduction	233
20. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Plot Construction	246
21. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Major Themes of the Novel	266
22. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Characterization	281
23. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Language	297
24. <i>Oliver Twist</i> : Narrative Technique	309
<b>Sample Question Paper</b>	<b>319</b>

## Message

Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) was established in 1998 by an Act of the Parliament. It is a central university with NAAC accreditation and the mandate of the university is: (1) promotion of Urdu language, (2) accessibility and availability of professional and technical education in Urdu medium, (3) providing education through traditional and distance learning mode, and (4) a specific focus on women's education. These are the points that distinguish this central university from all other central universities and give it a unique feature. It has been emphasized even in the National Education Policy 2020 to achieve education in mother tongues and regional languages.

The very objective of promotion of knowledge through Urdu is meant to facilitate the accessibility of contemporary knowledge and disciplines to Urdu knowing community. For a long time, there has been a dearth of course material in Urdu. The non-availability of books in Urdu is a matter of concern and Urdu University considers it a privilege to be part of the national process of providing course material in mother tongue/home language as per the vision of NEP 2020. Further, the Urdu speaking community is at a disadvantage in gaining updated knowledge and information in emerging areas or newer knowledge in existing fields due to non-availability of reading material in Urdu. The unavailability of content related to the above domains of knowledge has created an atmosphere of apathy towards attaining knowledge that could significantly affect the intellectual abilities of the Urdu knowing community. These are the challenges that Urdu University is confronted with. The scenario of Self Learning Materials (SLM) is also not very different. The unavailability of course books in Urdu at school/college level comes under discussion at the commencement of every academic year. Since the medium of instruction of Urdu University is only Urdu and it offers almost all the courses of important disciplines, the preparation of books of all these subjects in Urdu is the most important responsibility of the University. To achieve these objectives, MANUU makes available course material in the form of Self Learning Material (SLM) to the students of Distance Learning. The same is also available for sale to anyone interested in gaining knowledge through Urdu. To further provide access to learning, eSLM in Urdu is available for free download from the University website.

I am immensely pleased that due to the hard work of the concerned faculty and full cooperation of the writers, the process of publications of books has begun on a massive scale. To facilitate the students of Distance Learning, the process of preparing and publication of Self Learning Material (SLM) is of paramount importance to the University. I believe that we will be able to meet the requirements of a large Urdu knowing community through our Self Learning Material and will fulfill the mandate of this University and justify our presence in this country.

With best wishes,

**Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan**  
**Vice Chancellor,**  
MANUU, Hyderabad

## Message

You all are well aware that Maulana Azad National Urdu University began to function from 1998 with the Directorate of Distance Education and Translation Division. Regular mode of education commenced from 2004 and various departments were established which were followed by the appointments of faculty. Self Learning Material was prepared through writing and translation with full support of competent authority.

For the past few years UGC-DEB kept emphasizing on synchronizing the syllabi of distance and regular mode to enhance the level of distance learning students. Accordingly, at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, the syllabi of distance and regular mode are synchronized by following the norms of UGC-DEB and Self Learning Materials are being prepared afresh for UG and PG courses containing 6 blocks - 24 units and 4 blocks - 16 units respectively.

Distance education system is considered highly effective and beneficial around the globe. The large number of people enrolled in it stands a witness to the same. Realizing the literacy ratio of Urdu speaking population, Maulana Azad National Urdu University implemented Distance education from its beginning. In this way, the university reached out to Urdu speaking population through distance learning method prior to regular. Initially, the study materials of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University and Indira Gandhi National Open University were borrowed. The intention was to prepare our own study materials rapidly and not to be dependent on other universities but the intent and effort could not go hand in hand. Consequently, it took plenty of time to prepare our own Self Learning Material. Eventually, the task of preparing Self Learning Material commenced systematically at war foot. We had to face numerous hindrances but never gave up. As a result, university started to publish its own study material at high speed.

Directorate of Distance Education runs fifteen courses consisting of UG, PG, B.Ed, Diploma, and certificate courses. In a short span of time, courses based on technical skills will be started. A huge network of nine regional centers (Bengaluru, Bhopal, Darbhanga, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar) and six sub-regional centers (Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jammu, Nooh, Varansasi, and Amravati) was established to facilitate the students. One hundred and forty four Learner Support Centres (LSCs) and twenty Programme Centres are run simultaneously under these regional and sub-regional centers to provide educational and administrative support to the students. DDE also utilizes ICT for its educational and administrative activities.

The admissions in all programs are done only through online mode. The soft copies of Self Learning Material for students are made available on the website of Directorate of Distance Education. In near future, the links of audio and video recordings will also be made available on the website. In addition, SMS facilities are being provided to students to have better communication. The students are informed through SMS regarding various facets of programs such as course registration, assignment, counseling, exams, etc.

Directorate of Distance Education will not only play a vital role to bring educationally and economically backward Urdu speaking population into the main stream but also in the increase of Gross Enrolment Ratio.

**Prof. Mohd Razaullah Khan**

*Director, Directorate of Distance Education, MANUU, Hyderabad*

## **Introduction to the Course**

The course *British Literature* is prescribed as a Core Paper in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Semester of BA. This course is a continuation of the English Compulsory Core Course under UGC CBCS. The course is designed by the Department of English and is adopted by the DDE for distance learners as part of syllabus synchronization. The course introduces the learners to British Literature. The defined course outcomes are: to introduce the students to the works of canonical British writers so that they develop aesthetics for literature such as drama and novel. Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to acquire background knowledge of British literature in respect of drama and novel.

In the course on *British Literature*, the learners will be introduced to British drama and British novel. They will study a brief survey of drama and novel in British literature. Under the study of drama, the prescribed play is *Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. Apart from a study of plot construction, theme, language, style and characterization, the course provides inputs into Shakespearean drama, romantic comedy and considers the relevance of *Merchant of Venice* to the present times.

The prescribed novel is *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. The course covers plot construction, theme, narrative technique, language along with aspects of novel and a history of English novel and precursors to Dickens.

The SLM on British Literature includes sample question paper. There are built-in activities, sample questions, suggested readings and glossary at the end of each Unit.

Suggestions and feedback are welcome on [dde.english@manuu.edu.in](mailto:dde.english@manuu.edu.in).

Happy reading and Good luck!

**Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb**

Professor of English, DDE, MANUU

# **British Literature**



# Unit - 1: Introduction to British Drama

## Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 British Drama
  - 1.2.1 Drama in England
  - 1.2.2 Elements of Drama
  - 1.2.3 Classification of Drama
- 1.3 Learning Outcomes
- 1.4 Glossary
- 1.5 Sample Questions
- 1.6 Suggested Readings

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## 1.0 Introduction

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Drama always finds a key place in literature. As a form of literature, drama complements poetry and prose. Dramatic compositions are for the joy of reading, for performance on the stage and relay from a studio. Drama can have elements of both poetry and prose. Dramatic works provide glimpses of the socio-cultural aspects of life besides revealing the historical and political events prevailing in a given space and time. Dramatic compositions enjoy a place of pride in English literature, and their performance in theatre has always been popular in England. As the British Empire spread all over the world, English literature also found its way everywhere. The British drama was instrumental in the spread of the English language and literature across the globe. Dramatic works embody vital information about the socio-cultural factors that condition the production of drama.

This expansion enriched English literature immensely, and in turn, English literature contributed to world literature. In the process, the British dramatic works produced in England, were translated into numerous languages and performed or adapted in different languages of the world. British drama is a treasure of information about English literature as well as the people,

culture, history, and politics of Britain. To appreciate all that, it is important to trace the historical growth of drama in England besides understanding the essential elements and the classification of British drama.

***Check your Progress***

1. How is drama related to literature?

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2. What information does British drama provide about the English language and culture?

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## **1.1 Objectives**

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- To introduce the readers to the conceptual terminology associated with the genre and sub-genre of drama.
- To familiarize the readers with the genre of drama in general and British drama in particular.
- To develop an understanding of the main elements of drama including plot, settings, characters, conflicts and themes.
- To assist the readers in understanding the classification of drama and introduce them to the various types of drama.
- To enable the readers to understand and appreciate the distinct aspects of British drama.

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## **1.2 British Drama**

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Etymologically, the word ‘drama’ is of Greek origin and it may refer to *act* or *to do* or *to perform*. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M. H. Abrams discusses the term ‘drama’ as a form of

composition that is designed for performance. A dramatist is a person who writes/produces drama. The word 'play' is often used as a substitute for the word 'drama.' Accordingly, those who write plays are called playwrights. Drama as a genre has played a vital role in the spread of the English language, literature and culture across the globe. Dramatic texts written in English, their translations and adaptations have been performed across the globe. To understand this, let us examine a short historical overview of drama in England.

### **1.2.1 Drama in England:**

In Britain, drama has mostly enjoyed popularity and patronage as a form of literature and art. British dramatists/playwrights who earned global recognition for their contribution to the field of drama include Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, G. B. Shaw, T. S. Eliot, Oscar Wilde, John Osborne, Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, to name a few. Their dramatic creations earned recognition across the globe and positively contributed to the spread of the English language and culture include the following: *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson, *Pygmalion* by G. B. Shaw, *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot, *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard, *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter.

The Romans are credited with introducing drama in England, though this genre was highly popular in Greece and India. The writing and performance of drama in England have their roots in church services. The church provided patronage to theatrical activities and the clergy participated in the growth of theatre as playwrights and actors. Religion had a tremendous impact on drama, and it occurred as the chief motif of early and medieval dramatic performances in England. Dramatic performances that undermined the power and dignity of gods, goddesses, saints, nobility, etc. were considered offensive. Such performances were considered morally unfit and did not receive royal patronage. These performances could not be part of the mainstream and were subject to systematic extinction. Mystery and Morality plays are early precursors to drama in English. The Interlude also had some influence on the development of drama in English.

#### **a. Elizabethan drama:**

The mid-sixteenth century England saw tremendous growth in theatrical activities and brought unprecedented recognition to British drama. Since this development took place during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the drama and dramatists of this time and tradition are known as

Elizabethans. The writings and performances of plays during this time amply manifest the social attitude, scientific temper and religious beliefs conditioned according to the renaissance that the entire Europe was experiencing. It would not be wrong to say that English drama saw its peak during the Elizabethan Age. With Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare representing this age, English drama started to impress the audience and inspire the authors beyond the territorial boundaries of England. The dramatic tradition during the Elizabethan Age was highly influenced by religious institutions. However, secular views also started penetrating drama during this age. Also, new models for dramatic works developed during this time perfected the models derived from the works of Latin and Greek philosophers.

**b. Jacobean drama:**

The death of Queen Elizabeth shifted the power to King James during whose reign writing and performance of plays in England experienced a recognizable shift. The plays following this new trend are known as Jacobean plays. Ben Jonson, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and William Rowley are the chief representatives of the Jacobean Age. William Shakespeare was actively writing during this era, but he followed the Elizabethan style and tradition. That is why his plays are not included in the list of Jacobean drama. *The White Devil* by John Webster and *Every Man in His Humour* by Ben Jonson are significant plays of this tradition.

**c. Restoration drama:**

During the Puritan period, theatre was closed following the order of the Parliament in the mid-seventeenth century and opened only after the crowning of Charles II and the restoration of the English monarchy. A new tradition of drama that emerged with this development is known as restoration drama in English literature. This new dramaturgical tradition was primarily for the upper class. Therefore, comedy of manners replaced the comedy of humours practised, before as the dominating theme. A notable development during this phase was the participation of women actors in plays. Several Elizabethan plays were also re-written in restoration mode. *All for Love* by John Dryden and *The Orphan* by Thomas Otway are typical examples of restoration drama.

**d. Victorian drama:**

During the reign of Queen Victoria, dramatic writings seem to have declined, although dramatic works remained popular all over England. It was a time when lyrical poetry remained popular as earlier and fiction writing saw an unprecedented growth. The theatre flourished as their numbers grew manifold while the performance of plays of earlier greats like William

Shakespeare drew big crowds. The drama during this phase focused on social problems and issues of ordinary people. Most dramatic works during this era comprised three acts while some came in the form of episodes. Prominent dramatic works of the Victorian era include *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge and *Arms and the Man* by George Bernard Shaw.

**e. Modern drama:**

Modern drama refers to the body of dramatic works produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modern drama focused on problems of life. These writings inherited and manifested some features of the Elizabethan drama. Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright, is considered the father of modern drama and it is represented by the likes of G. B. Shaw, W. B. Yeats, and T. S. Elliot. The British literary canon saw a revival of drama after the Second World War. During this phase, the works of dramatists like John Osborne, Samuel Beckett, J. B. Priestley, Peter Shaffer and Tom Stoppard stand out as they could create an impact on the audience. Among the works of these great dramatists, *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne have received highly enthusiastic responses.

***Check your Progress***

1. Mention the name of two important playwrights of Jacobean period.

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2. Who is considered as the father of modern drama?

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**1.2.2 Elements of Drama:**

Plot, setting, scene, characters, conflicts, dialogues, and theme are indispensable elements of drama. In addition to these, the background and structure of a play are significant too. Understanding these elements will help one to understand, analyse and appreciate drama in fullness. Let us examine them individually to understand why they are essential to a theatrical performance.

**a. Plot:**

The term ‘plot’ refers to the arrangement or sequence of events in a play. This term is comparable with ‘storyline.’ The plot is also relevant to stories, films and novels. In drama the plot unfolds through acts or scenes. It is a vital component of a play because all characters enact

their roles according to the plot. A plot can either be simple or complex. A simple plot has the sequence of events determined by one turning point. In other words, a simple plot is a straightforward string of events. Characters and events in a simple plot are predictable. In contrast, a complex plot may have more than one turning point. The events in complex plots are interwoven and have several twists and unpredictable characters. Major playwrights like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe are known for their distinct plot styles. The plot tells what happens to the characters. It contains the events that control the progress of the play and determine its end. Several scholars discuss the plot from the standpoint of a cause-and-effect relationship between the events. The major types of plays such as comedy and tragedy are determined by their plot. The plot in British drama has seen domination of structural trends; therefore, British drama is distinct from the drama of other places and is easily identifiable too. The term 'script' refers to the written/print pages according to which all action happens in a play.

#### **b. Setting and scene:**

The term 'setting' refers to the sum total of time, place and circumstance in which the play is enacted. The setting of a play contains the socio-cultural milieu and politico-economic situations that govern the play or that the play intends to portray. However, the term 'scene' refers to a part of a play that is often marked by a brief situation of action and ends with the fall of the curtains. A defining characteristic of a scene is that it has all action in one (distinct) place and at one (point of) time. Some plays are lengthy i.e., they are of considerable time duration. Such plays are divided into smaller parts known as Acts and Scenes. The division of a lengthy play into acts and scenes provides the actors and backstage workers reasonable time to regroup, change costumes and prepare the stage according to the flow of narration. Acts and scenes serve as units of analysis of dramatic work and help the audience to easily follow the narration. The terms 'act' and 'scene' are often used synonymously as both refer to a part of a play. However, it is important to note that act and scene are not identical. Act and scene differ in their length. An act not only runs longer than a scene, but it can also comprise several scenes. Usually, drama in the Elizabethan Age comprises five acts whereas drama in the Modern Age comprises three acts. One-act plays (dramatic performance comprising just one-act) are also common in modern times.

#### **c. Characters and characterization:**

The term 'character' refers to the real-life or imaginary person being represented in a drama. Characters are actors performing their roles according to the script. The persons being represented by the characters may be real-life persons of socio-political, cultural, and historical

significance. Alternatively, the persons represented by characters in a play may be fictional. Characters portray the desires, actions, contemplations etc. of people. The following four types of characters are most common: (a) Static characters, (b) Dynamic characters, (c) Stock characters, and (d) Symbolic characters.

The static or stable characters remain the same throughout the play. They are predictable and based on their initial actions it is easy to predict what they would do as the play advances. For instance, Prospero's character remains unchanged in the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Static characters are also known as flat characters. The dynamic characters go through metamorphosis, a process of change due to which their actions at the beginning of a play are in contrast with their actions towards the end of the play. Dynamic characters are also known as round characters. For instance, Shakespeare's Prince Hal and Hamlet are dynamic characters.

The stock characters represent typical persons or groups that the audience easily recognizes. They are used repeatedly. The presence of stock characters in a play helps the audience predict the kind of action that would unfold. Usually, the persons represented by stock characters are fictional and stereotypical and their motives are easily predictable. Supernatural characters refer to imaginary characters such as spirits, ghosts, gods, goddesses, witches, and fairies. Supernatural, extraordinary and magical powers are the main features of supernatural characters. These characters are taken from metaphysical things, old superstitions, ancient beliefs, and mythologies. Such characters frequently occur in British drama. William Shakespeare has used supernatural characters in comedies (e.g., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and tragedies (e.g., *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*).

The characters are also studied based on the action they perform in the play. Accordingly, the plot moves around the main character known as the protagonist or hero. Usually, the protagonist stands for the virtues established by society. The protagonist positively affects the lives of the people around them by heroic actions and inspires the audience by their courage and decisions. Occasionally, the protagonist does negative actions too. They would be called 'anti-hero' and their role as 'negative role.' In contrast, the protagonist and his/her actions are obstructed by another dissimilar character known as antagonist or villain. The main purpose of an antagonist in a play is to do evil things, create obstacles for the hero and add to his difficulties. Predominantly, the antagonists are persons; but sometimes the antagonist can be a situation also. In numerous plays antagonists are responsible for the rise of the hero. The antagonists are often portrayed as more powerful than the protagonists. Still, the protagonists can overcome the

challenges and difficulties and defeat the antagonists, especially for the fact that they uphold social and moral values.

Characterization is the process of presenting the characters. From the point of view of a playwright or dramatist, characterization refers to the art of portraying actors and performers as the person intended in the plot. The term characterization refers to the way the characters of a play try to create the effect in the roles being enacted by them. Characterization involves the use of creative impersonation and techniques such as masking, dressing, voice modulation, etc. In some plays, the actors play their roles while the audience decides about the kind of characters they witnessed. In others, a narrator describes the characters to assist the audience in following the sequence of actions that unfold. Based on the two contrasting methods, the process of characterization can be understood as a choice between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’. The characterization that follows ‘showing’ enables the audience or the readers to evaluate the characters and their actions. In contrast, the characterization that follows ‘telling’ provides direct or masked information about the personality disposition, actions and intentions of the characters to the audience.

#### **d. Conflicts:**

The term ‘conflict’ refers to a scene or situation that has a struggle between two diagonally opposite forces. Conflict is an essential and frequently used tool by the dramatists. Treating conflict as the basis of a play, G. B. Shaw opined, “no conflict, no drama.” The use of conflict as a dramatic device helps a dramatist build tension and curiosity in the audience and thus driving the plot forward. When characters participate in a conflict, they can build it or stand against it. Conflict builds tension and curiosity in the audience, and its resolution leads to the climax marking the end of the performance. The following two types of conflicts are common:

- i. Internal conflict: A conflict in which a character is shown to struggle against his/her ideas, beliefs, and desires. The internal conflict portrays the mental state of the character including the dilemma she/he is having. The internal conflict is purely psychological, and it may be understood as - person versus self.
- ii. External conflict: A conflict in which a character is shown to confront a person or situation that is not in his/her control. The external conflict portrays the mental strength of the character which is confronting a natural, supernatural, or accidental enemy that sometimes includes even his/her people.

#### **e. Themes:**

The term 'theme' refers to the central idea of a drama or play. Theme forms the basis for the plot and determines the actions performed by the characters. In other words, the theme is an idea that occurs most prominently in the play. It can be love, friendship, power, justice, unemployment, jealousy, corruption, terror, greed, ambition, religion, etc., just to name a few. Therefore, themes can be anything that abundantly affect an individual as well as the larger masses. The theme of a play may be understood from dialogues used by the characters or from the lessons learned by them. For the audience, the theme is what they remember the play for. Usually, a play has only one theme, but it can have multiple themes also portrayed through different acts/scenes. A piece of drama may be classified according to its theme, for it is an important thing that the audience can identify with and express in a word or two or a sentence at most. The theme has social significance too. Examining the theme of a play one can understand the socio-cultural and political issues prevailing during the times when the play was written or performed. Besides issues of socio-cultural and political importance, theme also enables the playwright to reinforce the moral values and the tenets of the religion. Themes like masculinity, politics, power, and morality occur predominantly in William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*. In his other play *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare deals with the themes of hatred, prejudice, and revenge. The themes in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* include humour, waiting, suffering and boredom. T. S. Eliot has adopted martyrdom, spiritual power, eternity, and loyalty as themes in his famous play *Murder in the Cathedral*. Similarly, the themes of Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* are sin and redemption.

#### **f. Song, chorus, and dialogue:**

Song and chorus are important elements of drama because they help in creating a psychological impact on the audience. Song and chorus have always been a part of the dramatic performances in England. Chorus refers to singing by a group of people. Songs and chorus are integral constituents of drama because they are performed in sync with the scene of a play. Song and choruses add emphasis to the scene being depicted. Often, the chorus would also include dancing by the group singing the song. Song and chorus have played a contributory role in drama, especially that of William Shakespeare.

It is important to note that drama in the ancient and medieval ages was in verse form. Verse drama refers to those dramatic works in which a significant part is lyrical. Verse drama has been the most prevalent form of drama from the Elizabethan Age to the Modern Age. Almost

all dramatic works of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson would qualify as verse plays. Verse plays became out of fashion with the change in the taste of the audience and the emergence of other forms of writing. T. S. Eliot, through *Murder in the Cathedral*, tried to revive the verse play in the twentieth century.

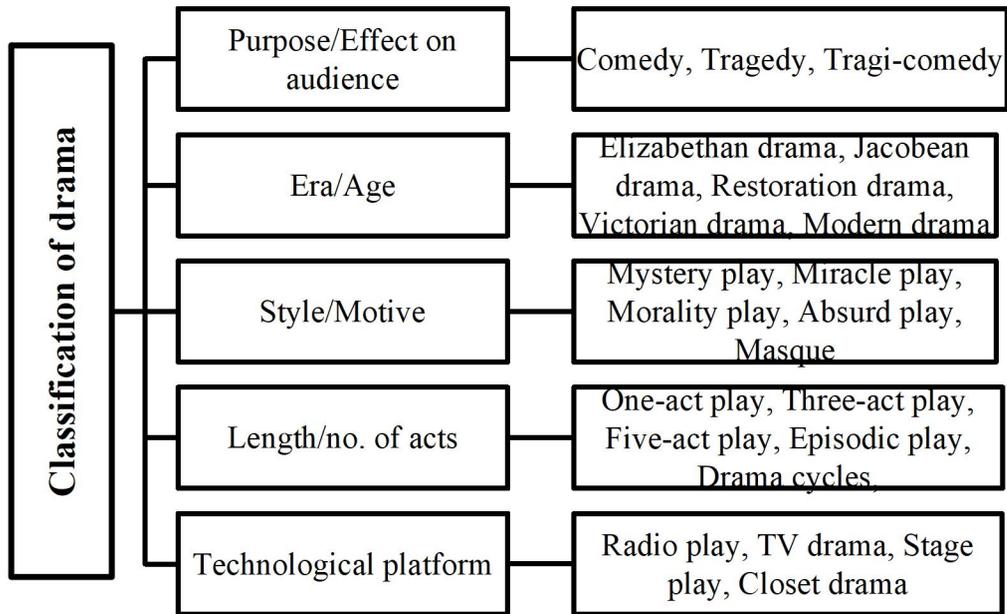
Dialogue is an indispensable element of drama, for it exhibits the literary techniques and rhetoric artistry of the dramatist. In an elaborate sense, all conversations on the stage would qualify as dialogues. However, in academic discourse dialogue refers to a script-driven conversation between the characters. Plays that have good dialogues are likely to stay in public memory for long. Many plays are identified by their dialogues. It is the dialogue that an actor combines with the costume to perform/produce a character. In turn, several characters are primarily remembered for their dialogues, especially if they are extended to day-to-day interactions. Occasionally, dialogues are so weighty that they become synonymous with the play in which they occur. Dialogues have the power to influence the way individuals and groups think in society. The audience also deciphers the performance of the play according to the dialogues used by the characters.

Since all instances of conversation cannot qualify as dialogue, two specific cases are taken up for discussion. First, when the flow of communication is internal or intra-personal or within an individual it is, called a monologue. When the communication is between two or more individuals it is, called a dialogue. However, the term 'dialogue' is also used as a cover term for statements made by individual characters, especially when such statements are weighty. In written plays, the dialogues of each character appear with his/her name to enable the reader to comprehend who said what etc. However, dialogues in plays that are performed on the stage are uttered by the concerned actors.

Some plays have a long speech delivered by a character in a scene or act. Such an instance of one-way speech is called a monologue. A monologue is not a play in itself but is a part of a scene or an act in which only one character speaks. The monologue is presented as a speech that one character speaks to other characters. In contrast, a soliloquy is what an actor says to himself/herself. Monologue and soliloquy exhibit the state of mind of the character who delivers it. Occasionally, dramatic scenes have instances of 'aside', that are short utterances made by a character, that the audience can hear; but other characters cannot hear. The instances of aside in a dramatic performance are contemplative and suggestive. Asides have the potential to engage the audience in the narrative and may be used to induce humorous effects on them.

### 1.2.3 Classification of Drama:

Drama as performance and as a genre of literature is of several types depending upon how a researcher wants to analyse it. Drama can be classified based on its effect on the audience, size, age/time in which it was written, style/motive, content, etc.



#### Size of the play:

The plays can be classified depending on their size. Accordingly, one-act plays are plays that have only one act. These plays are distinct from the ones that run into several acts. A typical drama from the Elizabethan age has five acts, whereas a typical modern drama has three acts.

#### Comedy:

One of the most widely available and easily identifiable sub-genres of drama is comedy. It developed in Greece and was immensely popular in England too. The purpose of a comedy is to make the audience laugh. Comedy is marked by the presence of content that the audience finds hilarious. The hilarious content may come in the form of dialogues or situations arising in the play. Comedy performances usually have happy endings. Comedy comprises a diverse range of plays, including farce, romantic comedy, comedy of manners, comedy of humours, tendency comedy, festive comedy etc. Some comic plays that have enriched the English literature are as follows: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare; *Volpone* and *Every Man in His Humour* by Ben Jonson; and *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde.

## **Tragedy:**

The tragedy is a dramatic composition that relies on misfortune and suffering. It is an easily identifiable and highly engaging sub-genre of drama wherein the protagonist has to suffer due to wrong actions or unfortunate circumstances. The suffering and defeat of the hero, often accompanied by a fall of character, evoke intense emotions in the audience. The purpose of tragedy is to reinforce the prevalent social values. It would not be wrong to say that tragedy has been the most dominant form of drama not only in England but in entire Europe. Several prominent philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Freud, Hegel, Lacan, etc., have contemplated tragedies resulting in the production of enormous ideas and theoretical discussions on the subject. The creative genius of playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Henrik Ibsen and T. S. Eliot has also come out appreciably well in tragic plays. The corpus of tragic plays is rich and diverse in English literature. To appreciate and analyse them properly, literary scholars and theatre critics have identified several categories of tragedy, including revenge tragedy, domestic tragedy, social tragedy, and romantic tragedy.

The revenge tragedy of sixteenth-century England has revenge and repercussion for wrong actions as its driving theme. In revenge tragedy, the protagonist belongs to a high rank. The downfall in his/her status is a loss for the individual and the system. Plays like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe are representative examples of revenge tragedy. In domestic tragedy, the protagonist is an ordinary individual who suffers personally due to the prevailing social values. *Othello* by William Shakespeare is an example of domestic tragedy. Social tragedy focuses on issues emerging from the prevalent social order. In social tragedy, the suffering of the protagonist is not due to a fall of character but due to the deplorable socio-economic and political conditions of life. *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller are typical examples of social tragedy. The Romantic tragedy has a plot in which the hero and heroine fall in love but cannot live together. They defy the social and political norms, but their union is opposed by all forces available. The climax of a romantic tragedy has heartache and grief for the audience as it has the tragic separation or death of the lovers. Romantic tragedy has received as much attention as a revenge tragedy, but this category of tragedy is distinct from revenge tragedy. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare are famous examples of romantic tragedy.

**Tragicomic drama:**

Also known as comic-tragedy, tragicomic plays are plays that do not strictly belong to the category of comedy or tragedy because they have elements of both. Tragicomedy constitutes a sub-genre of drama that blends tragedy and comedy. A drama qualifying as tragicomedy may be a tragedy with a number of comic scenes, or it can be a serious play in which the climax leaves the audience in a happy mood. With plenty of indirect references, satirical dialogues and dark humour, tragicomedy serves as an instrument for criticizing the state and expressing discontent for the policies. This form of literary composition is a product of creative experiments in the history of drama. Early drama writings did not have tragicomedies, but the form excelled in modern times. Plays like *Merchant of Venice* and *All's Well That Ends Well* by William Shakespeare and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett are typical examples of tragicomedy.

**History plays:**

History plays, also known as chronicle plays, are dramatic works based on persons and events of historical significance. John Heminges and Henry Condell edited perhaps the first collection of Shakespeare's works and named it First Folio. This collection mainly comprised plays that focused on historical figures and contributed to the development of a sub-genre mostly identified with William Shakespeare and known as 'history plays.' History plays refer to plays that constitute the sub-genre of drama that is based on historical narratives. History plays are distinct from the comic and tragic forms. These plays were highly popular in medieval England. William Shakespeare is considered the chief representative of history plays, for several of his plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V* belong to this category.

**Problem plays:**

Problem plays are dramatic works that deal with modern social problems and create awareness about them. The themes in problem plays are socially and politically relevant. Problem plays aim at changing people's attitude and rationalizing public behaviour on topics such as illiteracy, inequality of wealth, unemployment, discrimination, gender gap etc. The plot is designed in such a way to make the characters encounter or debate the issue taken up. The audience can identify with the issues taken up by these plays.

**Masque:**

Masque is a distinct sub-genre of drama in which actors use masks. Masque used to be very lively and dramatic as the actors would represent mythological figures disguised in masks. A masque performance would occur in courts and involve actors in specially designed costumes

besides immense singing and dancing. Such performances were popular during the Elizabethan Age as well as the Jacobean Age. *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare has masque performances in it.

### **Closet drama:**

The term closet drama refers to a distinct form of drama that is written for reading. The drama of this category is not intended for production and stage performances. This form gained a lot of popularity when theatre was banned in England from 1642 AD to 1660 AD and play reading replaced theatre-going for all who loved drama. Since non-stage-ability is a defining characteristic of closet drama, all forms of drama could be written with slight adjustments in the writing style and to make audience through readership. Closet drama saved the money; required for paying the actors for performance and rent of theatre. The theme of the dramas written in this category varied from serious to non-serious ones. Lord Byron and P. B. Shelley, well-known for their poetic excellence, also produced closet drama. A social advantage of this form of drama writing was that the women writers of England who remained out of public performances could also engage in drama writing. Margaret Lucas Cavendish emerged as a highly successful playwright. A political advantage of writing closet drama was that it could deal with sensitive issues and still escape the scrutiny and censorship that were applicable to stage performances.

### **Radio and television plays:**

The term 'radio plays' refers to a distinct kind of play performed in radio studios. Though the audience cannot see the characters of a radio play, they can follow these plays due to the creative use of sound effects, music, and a narrator. Some notable radio plays include *All That Fall* by Samuel Beckett, *A Slight Ache* by Harold Pinter and *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas. The term television plays refer to plays performed in a television studio for later broadcast on television channels. The introduction of these plays made the experience of theatre personal in nature. Both radio and television plays are recorded and then relayed according to the schedule. Apart from opening new dimensions in theatrical activities and creating new avenues for acting, these plays threw new challenges. Plays presented in the form of a serial on a radio or television channel are called soap operas. Often soap manufacturers sponsored these serialized plays, and soap advertisements accompanied their relay.

***Check your Progress***

1. What was the main purpose of closet drama?

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2. What does the term 'theme' refer?

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### **1.3 Learning Outcomes**

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This unit introduced the readers to the genre of drama; in general and English drama in particular. It also introduced how drama/play as a form of literature reveals the socio-political, cultural, and historical information about the place where it is written or performed. This unit acquainted the readers with the dramatic traditions that have prevailed in England; and explained various conceptual terminologies important to understand drama. The readers have read and understood the essential elements of drama; plot, scene, characters, conflicts, themes etc. They have also learned about the classification of drama with particular reference to English literature. This unit provided the readers with some introductory ideas about British drama. The readers are now ready to understand and appreciate the place of drama in British literature.

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### **1.4 Glossary**

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**Absurd plays:** A form of drama that emerged in the mid-twentieth century typically identified for showing unreasonable arguments, existential crisis and communication breakdown.

**Aside:** The term aside refers to short utterances by a character that the audience can hear but not the other characters.

**Chorus:** Singing by a group of actors in a drama.

**Closet drama:** A verse drama that is intended to be read instead of being performed.

**Comedy:** A type of drama that has hilarious content aimed at making the audience laugh.

**Dramatist:** A person who writes drama as a profession. A dramatist is also known as Playwright.

**History plays:** Dramatic works that are partially or wholly based on real people or events of significance.

**Melodrama:** A form of drama that is based on sensational plot, overly dramatic characterization, exaggerated dialogues, songs, and music aiming at strong emotional appeal.

**Modern drama:** The drama produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with style and techniques different from earlier traditions.

**Monologue:** A long speech by a character in a scene.

**Morality plays:** A form of drama that focused on reinforcing moral values through plot and characters derived from religious beliefs.

**Motifs:** The term motif refers to structures or images or ideas that occur repeatedly in a dramatic performance.

**Mystery plays:** One of the earliest forms of drama that portrayed stories from the Bible. Mystery plays are contrasted with miracle plays. Mystery plays often enact the Biblical events whereas miracle plays deal with the lives and miracles of saints.

**Plot:** Plot refers to the story or script. It is the sequential flow of actions that demonstrate the cause-and-effect relationship.

**Protagonist:** The leading or main character in a drama.

**Soliloquy:** A form of speech or monologue in which the character speaks his thoughts aloud thereby revealing his mind.

**Tragedy:** A type of drama that has a sad and sorrowful ending primarily due to the wrong actions or poor fate of the protagonist.

**Tragicomedy:** A drama that blends the elements of both tragedy and comedy.

**Verse plays:** Verse plays are plays that are written, mostly in verse form. Rhymed verses or blank verses dominate the performance of such plays.

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## 1.5 Sample Questions

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### 1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The play *Murder in the Cathedral* was written by \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Ben Jonson                      (b) T. S. Elliot  
(c) William Shakespeare      (d) Henrik Ibsen

2. The credit of writing the play, *Doctor Faustus* goes to \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) William Shakespeare (b) G. B. Shaw  
 (c) Ben Jonson (d) Christopher Marlowe
3. A typical Elizabethan drama has \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) Five acts (b) Three acts  
 (c) One act (d) Seven acts
4. The play *Every Man in His Humour* is written by \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) Ben Jonson (b) T. S. Elliot  
 (c) William Shakespeare (d) Harold Pinter
5. *Arms and the Man* is written by \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (a) Henrik Ibsen (b) G. B. Shaw  
 (c) Charles Dickens (d) Samuel Beckett

**Fill in the blanks:**

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an example of Shakespearean .....
2. Restoration drama is named so because ..... took the reign of England and monarchy was restored there.
3. Tragicomedy is a mixture of ..... and comedy

**True/False:**

1. A closet drama was primarily meant for performance.
2. The dramatic works of William Shakespeare belong to the Elizabethan Age.

**1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

- 1 Discuss the plot and distinguish between simple plot and complex plot.
- 2 Distinguish between act and scene as components of drama.
- 3 Write short notes on internal conflict and external conflict.
- 4 Discuss comedy and tragedy as subgenres of drama.
- 5 Compare and contrast Elizabethan drama and Jacobean drama.

**1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

- 1 Write an essay on dramatic traditions in English literature.
- 2 Discuss the essential elements of drama.
- 3 Discuss the classification of British drama with examples.

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## 1.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Abrams, M. H. 1999. *A Glossary of Literary Terms (7th Edition)*. Boston, Mass: Thomson Wadsworth.
2. Carter, Ronald and John McRae. 1997. *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. London: Routledge.
3. Drabble, Margaret (ed.). 2000. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: OUP.
4. Nicoll, Allardyce. 1925. *British Drama*. London: George G. Harrap.

## Unit - 2: A Brief Survey of British Drama

### Structure

#### 2.0 Introduction

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 A Brief History of British Drama

##### 2.2.1 Liturgical Plays

##### 2.2.2 Mystery and Miracle Plays

##### 2.2.3 Morality Plays

##### 2.2.4 Interludes

##### 2.2.5 Tragedy and Comedy

##### 2.2.6 Modern Drama

#### 2.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 2.4 Glossary

#### 2.5 Sample Questions

#### 2.6 Suggested Readings

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### 2.0 Introduction

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The beginning of drama in every nation is deeply related to the way religion is practised in that nation. The role and connection of drama go side by side as these are inseparable things. It is not only the case with British drama, but with drama all over the world. If we look at the ancient forms of drama enacted by Romans and Greeks, we will find that they too were related to the religious affairs and ceremonies of that time. The importance of religion resulted in the creation of dramatic form. As most of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew hence the masses were unable to have any insight into it. To fill that gap and to make it accessible to the common public, new ways and means were devised to acquaint them with the teachings of their religious books. For that purpose, they devised a method of enacting stories from the Bible before the viewers termed as; drama, in which characters performed and acted out the stories.

When drama originated in Britain or in English is not known for sure. However, it is deemed that it made its way into England when Norman Conquest took place in 1066. Some critics are of the view that Normans brought it while others think that Romans brought drama

into England. As you studied in the previous Unit, the word drama is derived from Greek and means “action,” “to do,” or “to act. In the words of William J. Long, drama can be: “an old story told in the eye; a story put into the action by living performers.” As drama had a distinctive connection with religion, it did not fully flourish until the 10<sup>th</sup> century when the Church itself began to utilize drama for different religious purposes and rituals. The exact reason for dramatic incorporation into religious norms is unknown; nonetheless, it gave an in-depth comprehension and developed the interest of its believers in religion and its rituals.

The oldest drama associated with the church and that has survived is “Quem Quaeritis.” It was the story of three Marys who came to visit the tomb of Christ and there they met an angel. Their conversation consisted of two lines inscribed in Latin that were adopted and performed by the clergy in a simple and common manner. It was the simplest form which later on became more elaborate and detailed. This simple form of play or drama is termed liturgical drama in which extracts are taken from scriptures. The earlier dramas were inscribed by clergy, performed and enacted by the clergymen and these were in the Latin language. The earlier dramas were written in the Latin language by clergy and performed and enacted by them only. It is also significant to note that these were not performed in all the religious centers or churches rather, there were only limited numbers of the churches where these were performed as the number of clergymen who could perform them was limited.

Then from liturgical drama, it turned towards other forms of dramatic art such as Miracle and Mystery plays. In France, Mystery plays represent what was derived from the scriptures, and Miracle plays gave insight into the life events of saints. However, in England, there was no such distinction. Even Miracle plays were meant to highlight both: the scriptures and the life of saints. It is also significant to note that the earliest of the Miracle play known to us was “*Ludus Santa de Katherina*”. The writer of this play is unknown; however, a French school instructor, Geoffrey, performed it. Since their origin, Miracle plays have captivated the attention of the masses and attained their fame to a considerable length. These originated from the church, began to make their way into the courts and courtyards. Then it happened that these plays started to interfere with the rituals of the church and thus banned in churches. So by the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Miracle plays were entirely shifted outside the church and religious places.

When plays were entirely moved outside the churches, the production and norms of the plays were decided by men other than the clergy. So, there were certain amendments and modifications, which perhaps marked the beginning of British drama. Since the language of the

church was Latin, so the plays were performed in the Latin language. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, these plays used local languages instead of Latin, hence becoming more accessible to the people. The actors were also taken from the local community, replacing the clergymen who used to act in the plays. They were no longer confined to a particular place and indebted to specific themes and versions. The drama acted on moving platforms was termed “pageant” and the acting area of those plays were called ‘pletea.’ The stage where these were performed was distinguished into three sections - hell, earth, and heaven. The left side of the stage was for hell, the centre for the earth; and on the right side was heaven. The costumes of the characters who represented God, angels, biblical figures or saints were that of churchmen, while those who enacted the role of common people wore the garments of the people of that time.

The next phase in the development of drama was morality plays, which personified the rivalry between virtue and vice. Morality plays deal with allegorical representations of the good angel, bad angel, death, and seven deadly sins. The objectives for such plays were to give moral lessons to the people. Such plays typically end up with the set pattern that virtue had to win over vice. The characters who were to represent the vice or evil were comic, humorous and even mischievous in the form of clown or jester. The introductory version of such plays was termed as “interlude,” which is the shorter version of morality plays. The instance of the interlude is *The Four Ps*, which was composed by John Heywood around 1497, and the examples of Morality plays are *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*.

The last but the most artistic period of English or British drama was the period which was termed as the “artistic” period. It neither preached religious rituals nor taught the audience any morality, but it showed the people as they were. During that period, English drama was still under the influence of classical plays and their norms. The first comedy of this type was *Ralph Roister Doister*, written by Nicholas Udall in 1556. It was written in a rhyming couplet and divided into scenes and acts. The first tragedy was *Gorboduc*, written by Thomas Sackville and his fellow Thomas Northon in 1562. It was inscribed in blank verse and also divided into acts and scenes. After that, English drama gradually began to make its mark on the literary and artistic horizon in the form of regular plays and dramas. It developed during the Elizabethan period and reached its present shape and form.

So it can be concluded that the drama started for religious purposes in the church by the clergymen passed through many phases such as liturgical drama, Miracle and Morality plays and interludes. With the influence of the classical form of drama, it reached its artistic form which is

still in vogue. Initially, the British drama which was under religious dominance, was later transformed into secular plays, and the church was replaced by the marketplace. It was meant to perform and exhibit religious rituals but was later transformed and became a source of entertainment. It was short and conventional but soon became diverse, manifold, and multi-layered. At present, it is not limited to just one or two types and themes, the subject matter is also varied, and dramatic forms too have transformed and have become versatile.

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## 2.1 Objectives

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After having gone through this unit, you will be able to have enough knowledge of British drama. In addition, you will be able to have subsequent objectives to achieve. At the end of the unit, you will be able:

- To have the idea of how British drama originated in England.
  - To have insight into how religion and church initiated the dramatic form for the promotion of religious rituals.
  - To be enriched with the ideas of how British Drama has passed through diverse forms to reach its present form.
  - To have a thorough comprehension of Liturgical, Morality, Mystery, interlude, and artistic forms of British drama.
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## 2.2 A Brief Survey of British Drama

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### 2.2.1 Liturgical Plays:

Liturgical play is also termed as ‘religious drama’ as it was written and enacted under various religious contexts and places, largely in churches. It was initially meant to make the complex rituals easy to comprehend and perform for the devotees in churches. Usually, these plays were based on religious rituals, written and performed by clergymen under the supervision of the church and so forth. The subject matter and theme of these plays were based on morality and religious rituals. Hence, church and clergymen played a vital role in the growth of an early form of dramatic art, especially in England. Initially, as these acts were meant for specific purposes or rituals to perform, they were short, brief, and to the point and were completely under the veil and tone of religion. For example, *Quem Quaeritis*, deemed as the first of this sort, was

mainly restricted to the limited conversation between the angel and three Marys, enacted in the 10<sup>th</sup> century on the occasion of Easter.

The texts for such acts and plays were mainly from holy books and stories derived from Gospels. These were mostly written in Latin prose, and common masses were unable to comprehend them hence such dramatization enabled them to derive some insight from them. But later, the prose was taken over by the use of verse for the extracts of these plays. Initial modification in style led to other alterations such as language and control of church and institution began to decline over time, and it began to slip towards individuals. Individual inventiveness and modification began to indicate its true colour, and the tone and authority of the church over form, tone and subject matter became loose though it had its hold yet. This evolution and modification took place in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.2.2 Mystery and Miracle Plays:**

After the initial phase of drama, came the phase of Mystery and Miracle plays which were related to scriptural contexts. Though no distinction was being made in England about Mystery and Miracle plays, these two belong to diverse forms of plays. The stories of religious or biblical events are dealt with in Mystery plays, while Miracle plays are related to the life events of the saints. But in Britain, the scriptural depictions are interlinked with the life events of saints; hence, a mixture originated, where there is no distinction left as far as Mystery and Miracle dramas as a form are concerned. The growth of the drama has attained much fame and fascination among the masses, and hence to meet their requirement the drama was secularized. It resulted in the change of venue, actors and even the subject matter. It was now shifted from church to marketplace.

Now the play no more remained within the hold of clergymen; rather it became a form of entertainment. After the change of venue, the previous place of enactment and performers tried to get back the hold they had over this form of dramatic art. But in the marketplace, it is not so easy that things remain within the control, and subsequently, all the control of the enactment and subject matter completely shifted from church and clergymen to guilds. Despite all the opposition from religious segments and churches, they continued to flourish. After church, there were some notable centres for performing art and especially that of dramatic art. The centres which have contributed a great deal in holding such activities were Chester, York, Coventry, Wakefield and Townley.

Initially, the marketplace was a stationary platform, but later on, the concept of moving a platform in the form of mobile theatre emerged and gained much popularity among the masses. In Miracle and Mystery plays, there was no proper state of the art stage, rather the sense of reality was tried to be visualized and incorporated; through the utilization of various symbols and signs. Even supernatural elements were portrayed similarly. To sum up, it can be said that there was no perfect production in those plays. The production was rather chaotic, and the presentation was crude with conventional themes and over-formal expressions. But despite these drawbacks, Mystery and Miracle dramas such as *Abraham & Isaac*, *The First Shepherd's Play*, *Noah*, *The Resurrection*, and *The Second Shepherd's Play* attained much popularity among the audience.

### **2.2.3 Morality Plays:**

The transformation of British drama from Mystery and Miracle to Morality was almost spontaneous. Morality plays took abstract ideas and presented them in the dramatic form before the audience. They were meant to show a clash between evil and virtue, and virtue was shown victorious in the end. There is always a tussle between virtue and vice, and it is bound to indicate that good powers have an upper hand over vice and evil powers. In spite of all the circumstances, goodness has to win.

Such plays were true, real and had an abundance of comic and humorous elements as far as the content was concerned. Here, the author has attained much relevance and significance as he is the one who has to handle the themes and bring to light the psychological trauma going on among characters in the plays and between good and evil in actuality. Two things gained much priority during the phase of Morality plays; these were the construction of the plot and the art of character depiction. Like other forms of drama, such as comedy and tragedy, Morality plays too have acts and scenes. Some notable series of Morality plays are *Everyman*, *Hyckescorner*, *Mankind*, *The Castell of Perseverance*, *The World and the Child*, *Wyt and Science*, *The Pride of Life* and *The Three Estates*. The role of Morality plays is significant in the development of English drama as it completely freed the play from the clutches of religion and church.

### **2.2.4 The Interludes:**

After Morality plays, English drama entered into another form of dramatic art termed the interlude. Although there is no strict and clear-cut mark of difference between the two, these two belong to diverse phases. Even the word interlude has no significance or connotation in itself except being named after a phase or form of play. These plays were enacted by several characters in the seasons of festivals and some business. These plays had very little strength of

dramatic art of their self rather they were having the same content and form of Morality plays. But there is a distinctive difference between Morality and interludes which is that interlude is more prone to the humanistic side and have very little to do with didactic and moral values to preach. In addition, the sense and value of realism are more apparent in them as compared to Morality plays. The significant names of these plays were *A Play of Love*, *The Four P.P*, *The Play of the Weather*, *Of Gentleman and Nobility*, *The Merry Play between John, the Husband, Tib his Wife, and Sir John, the Priest*.

### **2.2.5 Tragedy and Comedy:**

The next phase of English drama is that of tragedy and comedy plays, which were greatly under the stimulus of the Renaissance and tragedy was mainly influenced by Seneca. Seneca was a Latin playwright of the Nero era. The theme of revenge and blood was the most fascinating element to which the English tragedian was indebted to him. The first tragedy in English literature, *Gorboduc* was written on the same line. Even after that, almost all the earliest tragedies were under the indebtedness of Seneca, either in style or theme. A tragedy has subsequent formative elements, such as plot, characters, thought, diction, spectacle and song. As this sort of play has an unhappy and tragic ending, the concept of a tragic hero is also an essential factor as far as the development of the plot is concerned.

In addition, the persona of comedy could be traced in both morality and interlude form of plays which is culminated under the classical influence in this phase. This sort of play is meant to provide entertainment and amuse the audience through laughter. Unlike tragedy, where high-class people are involved, here people from humble and low backgrounds are involved. The environment of the comedy is also light and cheerful. It is usually dealt with those plays which are to end happily. Comedy was meant to correct and reform the conduct of human beings in a light and satirical manner. It has different types such as Classical Comedy, Sentimental Comedy, Romantic Comedy, Comedy of Manners and Comedy of Humours. Satire and irony are the two topmost devices used in comedy to maximize the effect. The first known comedy *Ralph Roister Doister* was written by Nicholas Udall. Apart from this, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* by William Stevenson was also highly popular in his time.

Apart from these two genres, there was yet another form of play that developed side by side with comedy and tragedy and that was history plays. These plays followed the same Seneca model, too. The pageants anticipated historical plays. But there is a distinctive difference as historical plays purely belonged to Britain as far as the theme and context were concerned. The

famous history plays are *King of England*, *The Troublesome Reign of John*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, *The Reign of King Edward III* and *The True Chronicle History of King Lear*.

### **2.2.6 Modern Drama:**

British drama faced decline during the Victorian Age, but it regained its boom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was, however, less innovative as far as the techniques of the drama were concerned as compared to poetry and novel. It can be divided into three broader categories. The first category is that of social plays, the second phase consisted of dramas that were in line with the spirit of nationalism, and the last phase of modern drama was that of poetic drama. Modern British drama had several notable traits, and the use of realism was the most illustrious and significant among those. The dramatists of that period were more interested in the problems of everyday life, and they brought drama closest to the reality of life and its problems. Henrik Ibsen was the one who introduced and perfected the genre of realistic plays in British drama. He was the one who dealt with the problems of life in a realistic manner. The modern drama has developed in line with the tone of a problem play.

These dramatists dealt with the problems such as marriage, law and justice, which were and are the problem of everyday life of common people. They had utilized theatre as a medium to voice out the problems, and to bring about reforms in society. Problem play was yet a new sort of play that had taken drama away from its conventional tones. Modern plays were, in addition, the drama of ideas rather than of action. Dramatists utilized this medium to convey certain ideas to the people and society. The reality of life too is based on the problem of everyday life and ideas. Initially, modern dramatists were realists, and they brought to light ideas, but later on, they shifted their attention from the bitter realities and turned towards the romantic aspect. T.S. Eliot was the one who introduced the poetic form of drama in English literature. The biographical drama was yet another trend of drama that was introduced in the modern era of English drama. These made use of historical and autobiographical elements as dramatic techniques.

Oscar Wilde and other dramatists revived the comedy of manners and introduced the concept of comedy of Wits in English drama. Impressionism was yet another trend that was incorporated into English drama. It was based on the expressions of artists and dramatists. W.B. Yeats was chief among those who followed the pattern of impressionism. Later on, modern dramatists turned towards expressionism. This sort of drama was deemed a strong reaction to naturalism. This trend in drama started in Germany and, later on, it made its way to modern the

English drama of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in England. Another key feature of the modern drama was that instead of projecting women as downtrodden and low-class entities, they were portrayed as empowered and emphasized characters. Even female characters showed the tendency of modern dramatists toward the feminist approach.

Another popular trend that emerged after World War II was the drama based on the absurdity of human existence termed Theater of the Absurd. It became a trend of the writers of the 1950s and 1960s. To such dramatists and playwrights, human existence is meaningless and without any purpose. To them, the world is beyond human comprehensions and man should not bother about it. It will always remain absurd, and we have no choice but to accept it. Samuel Beckett was the chief pioneer of such school of drama, and *Waiting for Godot* is a masterpiece and true representative of the Absurd School of thought. These writers, however, were not very comfortable with the term absurd, and they preferred to be called “anti theatre” or new theatre. The dramatists of this trend were much influenced by existentialism. They raised questions about the very existence of man. They deemed language as a meaningless medium of communication. Characters were engaged in meaningless speeches, and illogical plots were frequent among Absurd dramatists. Time, place and no characters or lack of characters was also common among them. They had, however, a fondness for abstract values of life.

Modern English drama is characterized by its unique handling of subject matter related to the realities of life. It also has an illustrious tone for them as far as the utilization of simile, metaphor, symbolism, and imagery are concerned. Characters of modern drama are common people. Usually, it centers around the common social issues of the common people. It is further illuminated with the utilization of natural and real dialogues of the characters. Themes usually revolve around politics, the impact of war, women’s rights, depression, anxiety, mental health, race, class discrimination etc. The language of this sort of drama is very natural and realistic. Modern dramatists have dealt with the psychological and inner descriptions of characters so well that it captures the attention of their audience. The flow of the dialogue and interaction among the characters is also natural and realistic. Last but not least, there are numerous trends that are key as far as modern drama is concerned. These include social drama, poetic drama, angry drama, absurd play and menace plays. Henrik Ibsen is deemed to be the father of modern drama.

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## 2.3 Learning Outcomes

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Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the following learning outcomes concerning the reader or learner are served.

- you should be able to clearly mark the origin of drama in general and British drama in particular.
- You should be able to distinguish the different phases through which British drama has gone through to reach its current form.
- You should be able to distinguish between liturgical, Morality, Mystery, interlude, and artistic form of drama.
- You should be able to designate the role of church and clergymen in the initial enrichment of dramatic form and how later on, the focus of attention in both form and shape changes.

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## 2.4 Glossary

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**Blank Verse:** It is poetry that is inscribed with a regular meter but with unrhymed lines, mostly in iambic pentameter. It was originated in Italy, used during Renaissance, and made popular by Marlowe.

**Clergyman:** It is a term referred to a male priest or a religious figure related to the services of the church in Christianity.

**Comedy:** It refers to a form of drama or play which is marked by humour and satirical tone consisting of jokes and sketches which are meant to make the audience laugh.

**Elizabethan Era:** It is usually referred to the period of literary works in England between 1562 to 1642. Marlowe and Shakespeare are chief dramatists of this notable era.

**Interlude Plays:** It was a form of drama that was short, ludicrous, and merry in form and content which was deemed to be the transition from morality plays and Tudor plays

**Liturgical Plays:** It is related to the type of plays or dramas which were enacted in churches; having stories derived from the Bible and Gospel. In addition, the stories and life events of saints were also projected in these plays.

**Rhyming Couplet:** It is referred to as a verse of two lines having the same length that are rhymed and having a single thought. However, there is no restriction as far as the limit of length of the lines is concerned.

**Tragedy:** It is related to the type of play or drama that is the opposite of comedy. Here tragic events and incidents are presented which culminate in a tragic end and the collapse of the major character.

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## 2.5 Sample Questions

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### 2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The earliest form of drama was written in Roman and Greek but was staged first in England.  
(a) Yes (b) No
2. The first comedy of British drama was written by Ralph Roister under classical influence.  
(a) Yes (b) No
3. The first tragedy of British drama was written in the year 1560 by John Lyly.  
(a) Yes (b) No
4. The liturgical form of British drama was mainly under the influence of the church and religious in theme.  
(a) Yes (b) No
5. Seneca was a Latin playwright of the Nero era who greatly influenced the concept of tragedy in English drama.  
(a) Yes (b) No
6. The earliest dramas of British were staged at the marketplace where clergymen were the performers.  
(a) Yes (b) No
7. History plays set the tone for the nourishment of the Renaissance for the English or British drama.  
(a) Yes (b) No
8. The first phase of British drama in England was the Morality and Interlude form of plays.  
(a) Yes (b) No
9. The first tragedy of British drama was written by Thomas Sackville and his fellow Thomas Norton.

(a) Yes

(b) No

10. Morality Plays were meant to create harmony between two opposite facets of vice and virtue.

(a) Yes

(b) No

### 2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. How far do you agree with the statement that “history plays set the tone for the nourishment of Renaissance period as far as the English or British drama is concerned”?
2. What modification does the change of venue from church to marketplace bring about in the earlier phase of British drama?
3. Is there any distinction in British drama between Miracle and Mystery Plays?
4. “Morality plays were based on the abstract notion of a clash between vice and virtue” elaborate.
5. What role do the church and clergymen have in setting the tone of British drama in Britain?

### 2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. How did British drama originate and how did it reach its present form and tone? Discuss.
2. What is meant by interlude and history plays in British drama? Do these forms of plays have any significant contribution to the development of English drama or not?
3. Discuss the following phases of British drama in detail.
  - a) Liturgical plays
  - b) Morality Plays

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## 2.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford UP: New Delhi, 1979.
2. Long, William J. *English Literature*. Maxford Books: New Delhi, 2003 (rpt).
3. Nayar, Pramod K. *A Short History of English Literature*. Amity University: New Delhi, 2018.

## Unit - 3: University Wits

### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
  - 3.1 Objectives
  - 3.2 University Wits
    - 3.2.1 Christopher Marlowe
    - 3.2.2 Thomas Kyd
    - 3.2.3 John Lily
    - 3.2.4 Robert Greene and Thomas Nash
    - 3.2.5 George Peele and Thomas Lodge
    - 3.2.6 Contribution and Role of the University Wits
  - 3.3 Learning Outcomes
  - 3.4 Glossary
  - 3.5 Sample Questions
  - 3.6 Suggested Readings
- 

### 3.0 Introduction

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The University Wits were a group of highly qualified scholars who belonged to either Oxford or Cambridge. These scholars greatly influenced the trend and tone of English drama at one hand and left much fascination for the dramatists who came after these scholars. The notable dramatists who were greatly influenced by this group of scholars were William Shakespeare and John Webster. It is also said that William Shakespeare borrowed some material from these scholars. For instance, *Hamlet* is greatly inspired by Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.

These young writers who are in the group of University Wits were acquainted with each other to some extent. One of the most common features among them was that most of these had led an irregular and stormy life which was full of ups and downs. But due to many similar features in their works, they were branded as a group that is widely termed as University Wits. It is noted through the study of their artistic works that there are numerous features which were common among them. First of all, they have a liking for heroic themes which were centred around the lives of great figures. As their themes were heroic in nature so, they treated them in a

marvellous way. In their works, we can trace variety, diversity, fabulous descriptions, lofty speeches, incidents that involve violent acts and are full of emotional scenes.

Second, the style of their narration is also heroic, which is in line with the loftiness of their themes. That is why it is noted that they were able to create strong and impactful lines. The most eloquent among them was Christopher Marlowe. He was well versed and is known for his use of blank verse. Third, the themes of these scholars were usually tragic in nature. It is also a very common feature in their works. Especially those works composed by them in the early phase of their artistic career lacked humorous and comic situations. Even when they tried to incorporate humour and comic elements, it seemed immature and out of place in comparison to other texts. Given below is the list of these scholars who are deemed as the University Wits.

- John Lyly (1554 to 1606)
- George Peele (1556 to 1596)
- Thomas Kyd (1558 to 1594)
- Robert Greene (1558 to 1592)
- Thomas Lodge (1558 to 1625)
- Thomas Nashe (1567 to 1601)
- Christopher Marlowe (1564 to 1593)

Thomas Kyd is a significant name as far as University Wits are concerned. He is the one who is deemed to have originated the concept of the revenge play. The features of this tone of play can frequently be seen in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and other plays of the Elizabethan age. The most famous of his works is *Spanish Tragedy*. Its horrifying plot, madness along with murder and death give it an everlasting popular touch. It is said that this play influenced great lines which were later created by William Shakespeare.

Christopher Marlowe was the most influential and greatest writer of his time and also among University Wits. He gave tragic vision to English plays and literature. He had no liking for comic or humorous events and scenes. His art of crafting character was very simple, but his plots lacked the loftiness which was seen later in William Shakespeare's works. The most notable thing about his characterization is that mostly the plot revolves around one character, that is why his plays are termed as; one-man-show. But, to estimate his true worth, we have to put aside these ideas and have to look at his poetic vision and craftsmanship. He was a lyricist and romantic who had a quest for beauty and love. Artistically his plays are highly poetical. His verse is famous for its energizing burn, matchless diction, sensuous enrichment and its responsiveness

towards the varying mood and tones. He is known as the creator of “mighty lines”, a term given by Ben Jonson. His great plays include *The Jew of Malta*, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, *Edward II*, *Tamburlaine* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

University Wits contributed a great deal as far as the nourishment of English drama is concerned. As duly acknowledged by Allardyce Nicoll, “they laid a sure basis for the English theatre.” Through their greatness in maintaining the classical norms along with their several innovations they not only left an everlasting impression on English drama in a very short span of time but also fanned the imagination of the greatest dramatist of all times, William Shakespeare, in both form and theme. It is due to their contribution that enabled Shakespeare, “a viable and fitting medium for the expression of his genius.” Another key feature concerning the contribution of University Wits is that they retained classical traditions of drama but never fell prey to these norms and traditions. They maintained their freedom and individuality even at the risk of violating fundamental principles such as “the concept of three unities.”

The University Wits did not just copy what the Romans and Greeks had inscribed but rather introduced a new form termed as ‘Romantic Drama’ which was later adopted and perfected by Shakespeare. Few of these University Wits also contributed to the growth of romantic comedy. The chief among them are John Lyly, George Peele and Robert Greene. The rest of the University Wits, like Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd were interested in romantic tragedy. Apart from these, they also focused on reformation and modification of dramatic diction. The utterances of the characters; they introduced were plaintive and responsive in all respects. The diction and tone that is used by Lyly are highly sophisticated, that of Peele enriched with rare sweetness, Greene utilized openness and geniality, Kyd introduced exaggerative bombast, and Marlowe utilized virtuosic brilliance as far as the use of language is concerned.

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### **3.1 Objectives**

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After going through the unit, you will be able to have glimpses of several aspects of University Wits. You will be able to:

- have a glimpse of the life events of the University Wits.
- gain insight into the artistic skills of these dramatists.
- acquaint yourself with the key features of the works of the University Wits

- gain insight into literary and dramatic traits of each of these writers collectively and individually.
  - understand the role of University Wits in the growth of English drama.
  - have an understanding of their contribution to the form and style of drama.
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## 3.2 University Wits

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### 3.2.1 Christopher Marlowe:

Marlowe was born on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1564 in the house of a well to do shoemaker of Canterbury and hence was very influential from his birth. He attended King's School at Canterbury and did his B.A. in 1584 and earned his M.A. degree after three years of B.A. He led a very conventional academic period. However, after earning his master's degree, he went to university, where he became acquainted with scholars of the time like Rawley, Kyd and Nashe. It is due to the company and literary magnificence of this group that before the end of 1587, both parts of his first play *Tamburlaine the Great* were staged. Marlowe was a young man of merely 23 at that time and was able to establish himself as a renowned dramatist because of this play.

During the period he had to travel a lot for the government but he retained his London address where Kyd was his roommate. It is through Kyd that we get to know that Marlowe had a violent temper and was cruel at heart. In 1589 he was imprisoned for being a part of a street fight in which William Bradley was killed by Marlowe's friend, but later he was released on bail with a warning to abstain from such acts. In 1592 he was charged with assaulting two constables and a fine was imposed on him. In 1593 he was charged with atheism and blasphemy. After mere 12 days of this charge, he got killed in a tavern.

Although Marlowe's dramatic period is very short, he has gained prominence during this period due to his four outstanding plays. The first of them was *Tamburlaine*; *Doctor Faustus* was the second, *Jew of Malta* and *Edward II* were the third and fourth respectively. Apart from these four dramatic creations, he also translated Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Ovid's *Amores*. Though he wrote a few poems, two of them became very famous *The Massacre of Paris* and *Hero and Leander*. He had perfected the art and use of blank verse as far as its usage in drama is concerned. Although he used rhymed verse in his initial writing, he found it very stiff and formal in nature and he shifted completely towards blank verse. Due to the perfect handling of his innovative

style of blank verse, he is followed by Shakespeare who utilized a natural flow of rhythm and blank verse.

In addition, the artistic style of Marlowe had music and rhythm, which is deemed, on par with that of Milton, a renowned and learned scholar and poet. His use of blank verse in his drama was metrically precise and concise, having imagery which was not present in English poetry at the time when he was utilizing it with perfection. Due to his artistic skills and masterful handling of blank verse, he is deemed by critics as the “Father of English tragedy and blank verse”. Further, he is considered the true spirit of the Elizabethan period. Last but not the least, he was an artist who was duly recognized and admired by men of letters. Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of all times paid great tribute to him when he quoted a few lines of Marlowe extracted from *Hero and Leander* in *As You Like It*. It also is said that Shakespeare was indebted to several themes from Marlowe for his plays.

### **3.2.2 Thomas Kyd:**

There is a dearth of information as far as the life events and literary works of Thomas Kyd are concerned. It is reported that he was born in 1558 in London. He was the son of Francis and Anna Kyd. He attended Merchant Taylor’s school in the same period as Edmund Spenser, the author of the famous *The Faerie Queene*. After leaving school, he used to be the roommate of Christopher Marlowe as we told you earlier. Although very little of his literary work has survived and is known to the world, we can have the idea that Thomas Kyd was an influential writer of his time; as Ben Jonson called him; the “famous Kyd” and Francis Meres called him as “our best for tragedy.” It is quoted that in 1589 he wrote his *Ur-Hamlet*, which is the lost and unknown version on which Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is based. For the revenge theme, Shakespeare was greatly indebted to Kyd, and he seemed to be very much impressed and fascinated by his style and thematic handling. In addition, his verse is extremely powerful and filled with emotions, which is also the reason behind his success as a dramatist. In 1589 he wrote his masterpiece, *The Spanish Tragedy*, the tale of family revenge and corruption found in the court. It was published in 1592 and went on for nine editions.

*The Spanish Tragedy* was written in blank verse with rhymed verse and mixed prose tone. In his masterpiece he has also incorporated the conventional and borrowed traditions of the past plays to keep the norms alive. He has utilized stichomythia to highlight the impact of urgency and combativeness in the dialogues of his plot and soliloquy to give insight into the motives and

emotions of the characters involved in the action of the play. The instance of stichomythia can be quoted from his famous *The Spanish Tragedy*.

*Lorenzo: Sister, what means this melancholy walk?*

*Bel-Imperia: That for a while I wish no company.*

*Lorenzo: But here is a prince is come to visit you.*

*Bel-Imperia: That argues that he lives in liberty.*

*Balthazar: No, Madam, but in pleasing servitude.*

*Bel-Imperia: Your prison then be like your conceit.*

*Balthazar: Ay, my conceit my freedom is enthralled.*

*Bel-Imperia: Then with conceit enlarge yourself again.*

### **3.2.3 John Lyly:**

John Lyly is considered to be the first influential writer of the Elizabethan age. He was born in 1553 or 1554 in Kent. He did B.A. from Magdalen College and M.A from Oxford University. Then he shifted to London where he tried to find a suitable job and later turned towards writing. He published his first piece of art in the form of the novel *The Anatomy of Wit* in 1578, which was full of romance, adventure, and travel and attained a fabulous sensation among the readers. His second attempt was *Euphues and His England* which was published in 1580. His success and sensation were due to his matchless writing style which is unusual. Later, he turned towards drama and dramatic art and between 1584 and 1592 he directed more than seven plays which were as much a source of delight for the audience as were his books earlier.

In 1592 he abandoned the art of dramatization, and hence, both his fame and repute began to decline which continued till his death in 1606. The most amazing thing about Lyly was his writing style which captivated London to a great extent. His style of narration has a few very distinctive features. One of them is short, crispy parallel sentences and phrases, which captured the attention of readers. The second one is striking utilization of similes derived from natural history and myth. Third, and perhaps the most fascinating is the oft-repeated usage of alliteration in his work. He wrote *Campaspe* in 1584, *Sapho and Phao* in 1584, *Endymion, the Man in the Moon* in 1588, *Gallathea* in 1588, *Midas* in 1589, *Mother Bombie* in 1594, *The Woman in the Moon* in 1597 and *Love's Metamorphosis* in 1601.

### 3.2.4 Robert Greene and Thomas Nash:

The writing of Robert Greene is full of wit, imagination and humour which highlighted his role as a key dramatist as far as University Wits are concerned. As far as his style is concerned, it is not of the highest quality, but his sense of humour is matchless. In addition, his method is less strict when we compare it with that of other tragedians. However, he lacks in crafting fabulous characters in his works. Robert Greene has written more and in a reckless manner. His role is very much immense as far as his contribution to English drama is concerned. He is famous for *The Arraignment of Paris*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward, the First*, *The Love of King David and Fair Bathsheba* and *The Old Wives' Tales*. Thomas Nash, another scholar of the group, is a journalist by birth. He participated in political affairs rather actively. The tone of his writing is satirical. His writing, *Unfortunate Traveller: or The Life of Jack Wilton*, contributed significantly as far as the nourishment of English novels is concerned. But as far as his dramatic art and writing is concerned, that is almost inconsiderable. He is more influential for his fiction as compared to his dramatic works.

### 3.2.5 George Peele and Thomas Lodge:

Among all the University Wits, George Peele attained much literary and artistic fame due to his well-known plays *Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First*, *The Old Wives Tales*, *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe*. The chief features of his works are romance, historical and satirical representation of events. Moreover, his style of narration is also violent enough to be termed absurd. The way he treated blank verse is matchless and has his own moments of poetry that can be seen in his works. His narration is fluent which is full of humour and pathos. In short, he is well versed due to the poetical potential of his verse, which has distinguished him from the rest of the writers of the University Wits group. Thomas Lodge had studied legal dynamics, but after leaving his law studies, he plunged into the literary horizon. Although his literary creations are few, he is reported to be an actor of his time. The most fascinating of his work is *Rosalynde*, which is said to be adopted by William Shakespeare in his play *As You Like It*. Like Nashe, his dramatic art is also not worth mentioning as compared to his fictional work, which is summed up by Gosson as; "little better than a vagrant, looser than liberty, lighter than vanity itself." And Allardyce Nicoll considered him as "the least of the University Wits, for he gave practically nothing to the theatre."

### 3.2.6 Contribution and Role of the University Wits:

The University Wits laid the foundation of the genre of English drama. Before them, the form and condition of English drama were chaotic. It had a form, but no enthusiasm and thrill in it before the University Wits. They brought it closer to the classical conception of drama. This group of dramatists centred around Christopher Marlowe. These were dramatists as well as actors. They were well familiar with the stage and audience; and hence were quite well versed with what was the need and craze of the audience. All of them had the same unified material through which they derived their stories and characters. Even common and similar names of characters can be found in their plays. They added romance to their plays which was the true representative feature of the spirit of the renaissance.

They contributed a great deal to the romantic comedy, which was perfected by William Shakespeare. They also initiated dramatic poetry in their plays. Lyly was well known for the production of lighter sentiment. Peele made a significant contribution to the enrichment of language as far as poetic expressions were concerned. Although the plots of their plays were loose, they had harmonized them so well that they connected all the threads of their stories into a perfect whole. As far as their themes were concerned, they were fond of heroic themes and subject matters. Marlowe perfected this type of subject matter through the depiction of the lives of great figures. He introduced the concept of conflict and struggle in his plays. As their plays were heroic, they devised heroic treatment which imparted thrill, passion, and fire.

Through *The Spanish Tragedy*, Thomas Kyd brought the scenes of bloodshed and violence to the stage. The concept of delayed revenge was also introduced by him. Marlowe introduced blank verse, or what is known as mighty lines with great perfection and authority. His poetic flair is also admirable. The art of character portrayal among the University Wits was also marvellous. Their characters were not mere puppets: Marlowe's characters were lifelike, full of vigour and force. They were forceful and full of passion and desires, as the character of Dr Faustus was. Besides being great contributors to the development of English drama the University wits played an important role in the growth of English prose. Lyly was well known for his plays written in prose style, and he was best known for romantic prose. His prose play, *Euphues*, is best known for its style which is known as the Euphuistic style in the English language. Overall, they adopted a style that was heroic in nature to match the loftiness of their themes and to create mighty lines.

They were more prone toward tragic themes and subject matters and there was a lack of humour and humorous elements in their plays as pointed out earlier. Their plays had variety, splendour and grandeur as far as description and incidents were concerned. They were meant to craft sound and powerful lines that might remain alive forever. The University Wits had due regard for classical plays and they retained the classical form but they had their own way of handling the form and subject matter. They enjoyed ample freedom as far as the concept of unities in the classical tragedy was concerned. They were committed not just to presenting before the audience the copy of what Latin and Greek tragedies were, rather they introduced sort of romantic plays which were later adopted and perfected by William Shakespeare. They also reformed the language of drama, which was more poetic, powerful, and fully in line with the impact of the drama. Lyly adopted the concept of comedy, Peele gave it unusual sweetness and Christopher Marlowe introduced the most poetic version of language known as mighty lines.

The contribution of Marlowe was so impactful that he was not only the chief among the University Wits but also known as the father of modern English drama and morning star of English drama. Shakespeare was greatly indebted to the University Wits. It is said that if there were no Marlowe, there would have been no Shakespeare. The University Wits drew their material for drama from legendary works of classical and historical writing and perfected them with their own approach and appropriateness. Their drama was full of suspense, emotion, thrill, and supernatural elements. They made a significant contribution towards the enrichment of the plot and characters. They also altered the concept of tragedy, especially Marlowe. Before them, the subjects of tragedies were kings and princes, but Marlowe's tragic heroes were not born great and were not from nobility. They achieved greatness through their actions and the themes rather than through great and powerful figures. The lyrical persuasiveness of these dramatists was a key feature of their heroic greatness.

The University Wits made drama popular among the audience as they were dramatists as well as actors who knew well the psychology of the audience. Christopher Marlowe was the first dramatist who divided drama into scenes and acts which brought about structural coherence. Apart from the collective contribution and impact, each of these dramatists had their impact and contribution. Thomas Kyd was well known for his well-crafted plot and powerful dialogues. His revenge plots were later adopted by Shakespeare. Robert Greene was illustrious for his romantic settings and liberal utilization of blank verse. John Lyly was well known for his humour, romance, and prose style. He mingled romance and humour in his drama. George Peele was

famous for his humorous, satirical, and romantic handling. Marlowe was the greatest among the University Wits who introduced ambitions instead of revenge in his drama. His concept of tragic heroes and tragic flaws was also matchless. The most notable contribution of Marlowe was the perfection of mighty lines or blank verse.

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### 3.3 Learning Outcomes

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Keeping in view the objectives of this unit you will be able to benefit from it in several ways and subsequent learning outcomes will be achieved from it. At the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- know the University Wits.
  - learn about the life events, literary works, and artistic styles of the University Wits.
  - equip themselves with the common traits that are shared by the University Wits.
  - become familiar and well versed with the artistic skills of each of these dramatists.
  - understand the role of this group of scholars with respect to the development of English drama.
  - have insights into the various innovations that these scholars bring about in the form and style of drama.
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### 3.4 Glossary

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**University Wits:** A group of highly intellectual and educated scholars of Oxford and Cambridge who wrote in the closing years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Blank Verse:** It is a sort of poetry that is inscribed with a regular meter but with unrhymed lines, mostly in iambic pentameter. It originated in Italy, was utilized during Renaissance and was popularly used by Marlowe.

**Heroic Themes:** Related with literary themes and oft-repeated ideas which involve heroic deeds and incidents often centred around some heroic figure.

**Elizabethan drama:** It is usually referred to as drama that was written in England between the years 1562 to 1642. Marlowe and Shakespeare are the chief dramatists of this notable era.

**Soliloquy:** It is usually referred to as the act of articulation of one's own thoughts and emotions regardless of the presence of hearers. It is specifically utilized for characters to convey their inner thoughts in plays or drama.

**Stichomythia:** It is a device that is consumed in verse drama in which single line, half-line or two lines speeches are designated to alter characters. It typically involves repetition and antithetical skills.

**Euphuism:** It is the writing style for which John Lyly is known for his dramatic art and it is named after his novel.

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### 3.5 Sample Questions

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#### 3.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The University Wits were closely associated with theatre.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
2. The University Wits wrote in the closing years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
3. They are termed as University Wits because they attended Harvard University.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
4. Nicoll considered "the most talented of pre-Shakespeareans" to be John Lyly.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
5. Marlowe is known for his mighty lines while John Lyly is known for his euphemism.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
6. Kyd is considered to be the father of English drama and also the father of blank verse.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
7. Marlowe's plays were poorly formed and lacked diversity of characterization, rather these are termed as a one-man show.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
8. Thomas Kyd wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*.  
(a) Yes      (b) No
9. George Peele wrote the *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*.  
(a) Yes      (b) No

10. Shakespeare was greatly indebted for themes and the use of the matchless style of John Lyly.

- (a) Yes      (b) No

### **3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. How is Marlowe “the most talented of pre-Shakespeareans”? Illustrate your answer with arguments.
2. Discuss Euphemism and the concept of Mighty Lines?
3. Which of the University Wits impressed Shakespeare due to his theme of revenge? And how?
4. Examine the concept of heroic themes and loftiness of style in the work of University Wits.
5. Write a note on Thomas Kyd.

### **3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the role of University Wits in the development and enhancement of English drama. How have they perfected the dramatic art during the closing years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century?
2. Why is Christopher Marlowe called “the father of English drama and blank verse”?
3. What are the chief traits that are common to all the University Wits with regard to their style and art of dramatization?

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## **3.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Compton-Rickett, *Arthur. A History of English Literature*. Filiquarian Legacy Publishing, 2012.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960.
3. Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World*. Delhi: Aitbs Publishers, 2003.

## Unit - 4: Life and Works of William Shakespeare

### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 William Shakespeare: A Brief Biography
  - 4.2.1 The Historical Background
  - 4.2.2 Shakespeare's Plays
  - 4.2.3 The First Folio
  - 4.2.4 Categories of Plays
  - 4.2.5 Poems and Sonnets of William Shakespeare
  - 4.2.6 Types of Sonnets
- 4.3 Learning Outcomes
- 4.4 Glossary
- 4.5 Sample Questions
- 4.6 Suggested Readings

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### 4.0 Introduction

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"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts"

- William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

The most influential and world-famous English dramatist, actor, and poet William Shakespeare, who is also known as the Bard of Avon or 'the Bard', was born to an English family of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1564. His writing is loaded with comedy, tragedy, philosophy, and most importantly diverse hues of human nature and behaviour. Some of the famous quotes from his works are known and applicable to all ages, such as "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5), "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1), "More in sorrow than in anger", "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions" (*Hamlet*) and "I am no orator, as Brutus is, But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man. I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech to

stir men's blood" (*Julius Caesar*). Such quotes also demonstrate philosophical depth in his writing. Jane Armstrong's book, *Arden Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations* (1999) scrupulously theme-wise compiled and documented quotations of Shakespeare.

Sometimes, most beginners and new learners of English literature might wonder why one needs to study William Shakespeare, especially the students from non-English speaking countries. But one should be aware of the fact that good writer and a good writing belong to everyone and everywhere. Such writers and their writings not only help us to understand the society of their respective time and place but also help us to enrich our understanding of creative works, use of language, stylistics, the art of articulation, dialogue writing, human nature, etc. Similarly, the study of William Shakespeare also facilitates us to understand the development of the English language, literature, society, and polity of 16<sup>th</sup> century England. It also teaches us about Shakespeare's extraordinary and innovative dialogues, rhetoric, story writing style, diverse construction of characters, powerful quotes, and their universal appeals. These are the reasons that Shakespeare is studied not only in English-speaking countries but also non-English speaking countries in the world even centuries after his death.

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## **4.1 Objectives**

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The objective of this Unit is to introduce you to William Shakespeare, one of the best and most notable English writers of all times, who has been translated into almost all the major languages and taught and prescribed in almost all languages and countries in the world. It aims to provide a brief biographical detail of the writer and his career as a playwright and poet. It gives a bird's eye view of his works, their characteristics, and his style of writing to you as a beginner of English literature. The unit is also designed to introduce the creativity and imaginative power of Shakespeare and his thematic and stylistic engagement as a writer through his works.

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## **4.2 Life and Works of William Shakespeare**

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### **4.2.1 William Shakespeare: A Brief Biography**

William Shakespeare is one of the most read, studied, influential and renowned writers across all ages, cultures, countries, and languages. Although there is no exact date of his birth

noted or documented, most scholars consider that he was probably born on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He did not receive any university or higher education unlike his contemporary dramatists (University Wits: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nash, John Lily, Robert Green, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kyd, who studied at Oxford and Cambridge universities), except that he attended King's New School where he learned basic Greek and Latin. This is one of the reasons why some scholars suspect the calibre and ability of Shakespeare as a writer capable of writing such meticulous plays and sonnets. This often leads to suspecting the authorship of Shakespeare's works. One of the important parts of his genuineness and originality was his personal touch on his works, as he himself was one of the best actors on the stage of his time. His firsthand experiences on the stage along with his profound creativity resulted in the unmatched quality of his plays. This also gave him the space to edit or modify the plays while doing rehearsals on stage according to the demands of the situation. He had profound psychological maturity of human nature, poetic imagination, and cohesion of dramatic elements, which separated him from his educated rivals.

William Shakespeare was the eldest son of Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. At the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than him and already had children from a previous marriage. The newlywed couple had three children from their marriage. Shakespeare disappeared for a couple of years from public life, and we do not have much detailed evidence about this time which is called "Shakespeare's Lost Years". There are various stories about his early life and these lost years. And perhaps there is a possibility of another question, did he really lose his six-seven years or spend these years in becoming what he is today? Murray Roston in his *Sixteenth-Century English Literature* (1982) writes, "The next seven years in his life are blank and have given rise to much speculation. He may have been a schoolmaster, a soldier, a lawyer's clerk, an apprenticed actor; and there is nothing but guesswork to rely upon" (178). It is said that Shakespeare worked as a schoolteacher in a country. It is also said that Shakespeare also worked at minding horses of the theatre patrons in London, which subsequently introduced him to the world of plays and actors. Later he started appearing in the London Theatre and started to establish himself as a good actor and playwright despite the criticism from his rival actors, playwrights, and critics. Robert Green used to make fun of and criticize Shakespeare because he was trying to overtake the University-educated playwrights, the University Wits. Murray Roston notes: "By 1592, the year of Greene's attack, he must already have been established in London as a rising actor and playwright, particularly as Greene

parodied there a line taken from one of his early plays, which readers, it was assumed, would easily recognize. Greene's attack was professional, not personal, and it is significant that in an age of venomous backbiting and professional jealousies, not a single comment has been preserved from that era which was aimed maliciously at Shakespeare as a man.”

Shakespeare gained economic prosperity too and purchased a huge house in London. His theatre group received acclaim in London and was given royal status in the reign of King James I. This company later came to be known as the King’s Men. Shakespeare wrote plays for performances that were not documented initially. From 1594 with *Titus Andronicus*, his plays started getting documented and published. By the time of his death, there were eighteen of his plays published in the *quarto edition*. Two of his long poems were also published during his lifetime. After the bubonic plague, he was less active in theatre life. In his later life, he also collaborated on some of his plays with other dramatists. "Shakespeare then collaborated with George Peele on *Titus Andronicus*, with either Thomas Nashe or Thomas Kyd on *Henry VI*, with Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, and with George Wilkins on *Pericles*. He later passed the baton of principal dramatist for the King’s Men to John Fletcher by collaborating with the younger playwright on *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the lost *Cardenio*” (Eric Rasmussen). He died on 23 April 1616 and, was buried in the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church with the following epitaph on the grave:

“Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear,  
to dig the dust enclosed here.  
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,  
And cursed be he that moves my bones”

#### **4.2.2 The Historical Background:**

William Shakespeare belongs to the Elizabethan Age (1558 - 1603) which is also known as the golden/renaissance age in English history because of the most powerful and vibrant reign of Queen Elizabeth I, discoveries, innovations, and revival of the classics. This period was also marked by industrial advancements, empirical superiority, intellectual thinking, adventures and glory, nationalism, education, the revival of Greek and other classical literature, course richness, and the making of distinct English culture and literature. The English drama took a fresh breath before the arrival of Shakespeare on the stage through the University Wits such as, “Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge; the generation educated at Oxford and Cambridge universities, who used their poetry to make theatre breathe

new life into classical models, and brought a new audience to the issues and conflicts which the stage could dramatize” (Carter and McRae). The plays of the 1550s and 1660s hold distinct categories of comedy and tragedy inspired and influenced by Latin sources. The comedies are borrowed and designed from the works of Terence and Plautus, whereas the tragedies are “largely from Seneca, with echoes from Greek antecedents in both cases. The medieval miracle and mystery play, and the kind of court 'interludes' played for the monarch, also contributed to the development of Renaissance drama. Its broad humour, its use of ballad, poetry, dance, and music, and its tendency towards allegory and symbolism flow from this native English source. Thus, although drama went through rapid changes in the period, its historical credentials were rich and varied as indeed were its range and impact. It was an age when the need for a social demonstration of English nationalism and Protestantism climaxed in the public arena of a diverse and energetic theatre. This was the golden age of English drama” (Carter et al 63).

#### **4.2.3 Shakespeare’s Plays:**

Shakespeare not only helps us to understand the 16<sup>th</sup> century Elizabethan English society (1558-1603) but also the general human nature and behaviour, which makes the reading of Shakespeare relevant even in contemporary times. If one looks at the earliest works of Shakespeare, they are mostly rooted in English history and dynasties. It was a time when England started to reign in all corners of the world and the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) marked the superiority of the English race over others. Shakespeare has also written some works based on Roman history, mostly documented in Plutarch’s *Lives*, such as *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus* (1605-1608) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607). His English history plays borrowed from Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (*Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline*). Shakespeare, like other writers of this time, started glorifying the English tradition, culture, history, and manners. He tried “to trace the human elements behind this conquest of power” (Carter et al.). Apart from history, most Shakespearean plays like *Henry VI* (1589-92), *Richard II* (1595), *Henry V* (1599), etc. depict the hero-worship of man – as a hero, king, and the finest creation. In *Hamlet*, a monologue of Prince Hamlet also portrays the same theme of man, “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving; how express and admirable! In action; how like an angel, in apprehension; how like a god!” Hero worship and the idealization of man were some of the main characteristics of the renaissance age. Another soliloquy in *Hamlet* where Shakespeare tries to define a man is given below:

“What is a man,

If his chief good and market of his time,  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more”.

Roland Carter observes: “Generally called the history plays, these works are on one level, a glorification of the nation and its past, but, on another level, they examine the qualities which make a man a hero, a leader, and a king. This is a process not of hero-worship; but of humanizing the hero. The king is brought close to his people.” Apart from this, many English writers like Joseph Conrad, Shakespeare, Alfred Tennyson etc. are criticized by postcolonial scholars for having a colonial orientation in their writings, dwelling on the English superiority and European zeal for explorations.

However, Shakespeare's works try to cover a wide range of themes of individualism, history, morals, universalism, social, power, love, death, etc. His works also provide insights into the moral and philosophical issues of his time. Ronald Carter and John McRae point out:

Time and again, aspects of human vulnerability are exposed, examined, and exploited for their theatrical possibilities. Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the same subject, in a comic vein, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*; the theme of revenge and family duty in *Hamlet*; jealousy in *Othello*; sexual corruption and the bounds of justice in *Measure for Measure*; misanthropy, or rejection of the world, in *Timon of Athens*; family rejection and madness in *King Lear*; the power of money and the vulnerability of the minority in *The Merchant of Venice*; the healing effects of the passage of time, and hope in the new generation, in the late plays – with a final return to historical pageantry in *Henry VIII*, the monarch with whose Reformation it all began.

The language of his plays is the language of common people. Shakespearean English is free from Latinized Medieval English. He used modern English by distancing it from medieval English. “The theatre permitted him to create characters who embody the themes directly, and who speak to the audience in a language that is recognizably the same as they speak. From kings to ordinary soldiers; from young lovers to old bawds, Shakespeare's characters speak modern English” (Cater et al.).

#### **4.2.4 The First Folio (1623):**

William Shakespeare's plays were written for performance rather than publication, thus, received huge popularity among theatre goers. This is also the reason why for a long time his

plays were not collected and published. Out of 37 plays, only 17 were printed in Shakespeare's lifetime, and the remaining were not documented. John Heminges and Henry Condell not only preserved the undocumented remaining plays, but also published them after his death in a volume: *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*; which is commonly known as *The First Folio* (1623). It contained 36 plays out of 37 that Shakespeare wrote, which were mostly performed in the Globe Theater of London. *The First Folio* becomes important because it tries to preserve almost half of the plays of Shakespeare, which include *Julius Caesar*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, etc., which were not printed earlier. The plays of Shakespeare, starting from the First Folio went under various editions, sophistication, and structural modifications.

#### 4.2.5 Categories of Plays:

*The First Folio* tries to categorize Shakespeare's plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories. The history plays can further be divided into Roman and English history plays.

<b>Tragedies</b>	<b>Comedies</b>	<b>Histories</b>
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	<i>Henry IV, Part 1</i>
<i>Coriolanus</i>	<i>As You Like It</i>	<i>Henry IV, Part 2</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Cardenio--A lost play.</i>	<i>Henry V</i>
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 1</i>
<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Cymbeline</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 2</i>
<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 3</i>
<i>Othello</i>	<i>Love's Labor's Won--A lost play</i>	<i>Henry VIII</i>
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>Measure for Measure</i>	<i>King John</i>
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	<i>Richard II</i>
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	<i>Richard III</i>
	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	

*Much Ado About Nothing*

*Pericles*

*The Taming of the Shrew*

*The Tempest*

*Troilus and Cressida*

*Twelfth Night*

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

*The Two Noble Kinsmen*

*The Winter's Tale*

The moment one talks of Shakespeare, the four main tragedies, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, appear to our mind. *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* were also included in this category of tragedy. Some other plays are also called tragedies because of the tragic elements in those plays. These tragedies have some elements of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. As Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics*, “A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” Shakespeare’s tragedies have a tragic hero who suffers from a tragic flaw or *hamartia*, supernatural elements, greed, fate/fortune, revenge, etc.

Shakespeare's comedies were as much popular as his tragedies. His comedies also had some serious elements, including tragedy; therefore, some scholars further categorized his plays as; “tragicomedy”. Most of his comedies have a 'happy ending' with a platonic union into a marriage. These comedies depict the struggle of young lovers to meet their love by overcoming certain obstacles, reunification, smart servants, use of pun, interwoven plots, disguises, pastoral images, etc.

Some scholars of Shakespeare did not find this categorization adequate thus, they further divided these plays into problem plays, tragicomedy plays, romance plays, lost plays, etc. The romance plays of Shakespeare first seems to appear in the work of Edward Dowden (*Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* 1875), wherein he used the term "romances" in Shakespeare's works such as *Princes*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. These plays also include tragic and comic elements, along with courtly and pastoral scenes. Some scholars try to distinguish between "romance plays" and "tragicomedy plays" by highlighting only tragic and comedy elements – the plays which are neither tragedy nor comedy, such as *Princes*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The Shakespearean critic F.S. Boas in his work *Shakespeare and his Predecessors* (1896), introduces the term "problem plays" to refer to plays with ambiguous tone, social problems, and tragicomic material in plays like *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Plays like *The Winter's Tale*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Merchant of Venice* are also counted under this category. Problem plays were initially associated with the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen.

Shakespeare's history plays, as discussed above, borrowed material from Plutarch's *Lives* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The role of a female character in his plays was also performed by the male actors. His plays are coloured with Elizabethan masculinity and patriarchal dominance. In her *Gender on Shakespeare's Stage: A Brief History*, Lucas Garcia observes that:

The tradition of men portraying women on public stages dates back to the theatre of the Ancient Greeks, and is present in several other theatrical traditions from around the world. The reasons for the development of these traditions, which were to endure to various degrees for thousands of years, are intricately connected to how concepts of gender and sex were understood, and specifically the role of women in society. Ancient Greek women, like many women of Shakespeare's England, did not have the right to vote or own property, and were expected to remain at home and rear children.

#### **4.2.6 Poems and Sonnets of William Shakespeare:**

Shakespeare was best known for his drama but in the early 1600s, with the bubonic plague breaking out in England, many theaters were closed to avoid public gatherings. London's Globe Theatre, which was for a long time was associated with William Shakespeare, was also

closed down. In the wake of this outbreak, the demand for Shakespeare's Sonnets, including his other poems increased, especially *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *A Lover's Complaint*. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. A sonnet is a form of English poetry, consisting of fourteen lines, written in iambic pentameter, mostly on the theme of love. It is derived from the Italian word; "sonetto" meaning; 'a little song'. Shakespeare wrote the finest sonnets, which also set an ideal pattern for this form of English poetry.

#### 4.2.7 Types of Sonnets:

- Petrarchan
- Shakespearean

The Petrarchan sonnet is one of the classical forms of love poems and derives its name from Italian master poet Francesco Petrarca, anglicized as Petrarch (1304 – 1374). It was he who developed the Italian sonnet. These sonnets are written in two stanzas, 'octave' (eight lines) and 'sestet' (six lines), with the rhyme *scheme abba, abba and cdecde or cdccdc*. It was Sir Thomas Wyatt, politician cum lyric poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who introduced this pattern of poetry into English. He introduced Petrarch's sonnet along with his sonnets to English readers.

Shakespeare championed this style of sonnets which later become known as the English/Shakespearean sonnets. He distanced himself from the Petrarchan style. His sonnets comprise three quatrains and a concluding couplet with *abab, cdcd, efef, and gg* as the rhyme scheme. The couplet at the end plays an important role in giving the gist of the poem, like in most of the *gazals*. Shakespeare's sonnets 1-126 are addressed to "Fair Youth" and from 127-152 are addressed to "the Dark Lady". Hannah Crawforth, in her article "An introduction to Shakespeare's Sonnets" writes:

The poetic persona who speaks through the sequence is not Shakespeare himself. While many readers of the poems have traced a love triangle between the 'poet' and two figures often called the 'Young Man' and the 'Dark Lady', the Sonnets themselves resist straightforward narrative. The poems seem to play with the reader in this regard, tempting us with hints of the kind of love story that underpinned other popular poetic sequences of the time, or the plot of a Shakespearean comedy.

Here are two sonnets of Shakespeare for your reference:

*Sonnet 144*

“Two loves I have of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colored ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil,  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.  
And whether that my angel be turned fiend,  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another’s hell:  
Yet this shall I ne’er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out”.

*Sonnet 116*

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments, love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand’ring bark,  
Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be  
taken.  
Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and  
cheeks  
Within his bending sickle’s compass come,  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved”.

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### 4.3 Learning Outcomes

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The specific Unit tried to introduce you to a brief account of the life and work of one of the best English playwrights and poets (sonneteers) William Shakespeare. It highlighted the historical background of the political, cultural and literary life of 16<sup>th</sup> Century England and the emergence of Shakespeare and his writing. It also tried to cover his writing style, poetry, sonnets,

and plays. So at the end of this Unit, you should have gained a background to the study of Shakespeare.

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## 4.4 Glossary

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**Hamartia:** Aristotle in his *Poetics*, discusses *hamartia* (a tragic error) in the life of the main character in the tragedy, which leads him to tragic destiny. The central protagonist is caught in such a situation which leads him to make an error in a judgment/action, which further leads to his fall. It is an integral part of a tragic character. The character must not be completely good or bad so that audience will have some pity on him.

**Anagnorisis:** It is a moment in a tragedy where the main character discovers or recognizes the actual situation. Aristotle tried to identify the tragic character's realization of his true nature/identity. He writes, anagnorisis is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune".

**Peripetia:** It is a reversal of fortune or circumstances in a tragedy. It is the most important element in the tragedy for a sudden change in a dramatic mood/plot. It is contrary to the audience's expectations.

**Catharsis:** As Aristotle points out, *catharsis* is a purgation (purification) of emotions of pity and fear, which was created among the audiences during the play, especially during the tragedy.

**University Wits:** The University Wits are the educated group of writers especially the English dramatists of 16<sup>th</sup> Century England who studied at Oxford and Cambridge universities. These dramatists tried to use innovative techniques in plays. The group includes Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge and John Lyly.

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## 4.5 Sample Questions

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### 4.5.1 Objective Questions:

#### One or two-line Questions

1. Shakespeare's Roman plays are based on \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Sonnet is a poetic form which derives its meaning from the Italian word \_\_\_\_ which means; "little song".

3. Shakespeare's English history plays borrowed its ingredients from \_\_\_\_\_ .

4. Which of the following great dramatist is not a university wit?

(a) Christopher Marlowe (b) William Shakespeare (c) Thomas Kyd (d) Robert Green.

5. How many sonnets did Shakespeare write?

6. Whom did Shakespeare address his sonnets to?

7. Which of Aristotle's works defines the theory of tragedy?

8. What is the rhyme scheme of Petrarch's sonnets?

9. When was *The First Folio* published?

10. Which of his contemporary dramatists criticized Shakespeare?

#### 4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Which are the major Shakespearean tragedies?

2. What are the different categories of Shakespearean plays?

3. Why is the First Folio important?

4. What are the different types of Sonnets?

5. What is the difference between Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets?

#### 4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the basic characteristics of Shakespearean tragedies and comedies?

2. What is a sonnet? Elaborate on characteristics of Shakespearean sonnets.

3. Briefly sketch the biographical account of William Shakespeare.

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## 4.6 Suggested Reading

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1. Callaghan, Dymna. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

2. Carter, Ronald and John Mcrae. *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland* (Third Edition). Routledge. 2017.

3. Roston, Murray. *Sixteenth Century English Literature* Macmillan History Of Literature, Macmillan. 1982.

4. Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford. Clarendon.

5. Smith, Emma. *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

## Unit - 5: Shakespearean Romantic Comedy

### Structure

#### 5.0 Introduction

#### 5.1 Objectives

#### 5.2 Shakespearean Romantic Comedy

##### 5.2.1 Mistaken Identity

##### 5.2.2 Logic against Emotion

##### 5.2.3 Elements of Fantasy

##### 5.2.4 Utopian Setting

##### 5.2.5 Broken Heart and Reconciliation

##### 5.2.6 Happy Endings

##### 5.2.7 Recurrent Features

##### 5.2.8 Analyzing *The Merchant of Venice* as a Romantic Comedy

###### 5.2.9.1 Love as the Central theme

###### 5.2.9.2 Female Characters

###### 5.2.9.3 Three Love Stories in One Play

###### 5.2.9.4 Theme of Love between Portia and Bassanio

###### 5.2.9.5 Humour

###### 5.2.9.6 Classical Role of Three Unities

###### 5.2.9.7 Role of Fate

#### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 5.4 Glossary

#### 5.5 Sample Questions

#### 5.6 Suggested Readings

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### 5.0 Introduction

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Critics often tend to consider Elizabethan comedy as a genre distinguished by its great fascination with marriage. Helen Gardner calls Romantic comedy “pure” as the genre is entirely different from the didactic tendencies of satire and the tragicomedy that focuses mainly on the plot. The pioneer in the field of Romantic Comedy in English is William Shakespeare. However, his plays do not blindly copy their Roman and Greek prototype of comedies. This Unit is

designed to present the salient features in Shakespearean comedies with particular reference to one of his masterpieces, *The Merchant of Venice* which was first performed in 1605.

Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare wrote: “He was not for an age but for all time.” The era of Queen Elizabeth bears its testimony, being mostly dominated by his works. Shakespeare maintains a strong foothold by excelling in plays, poems, sonnets and Shakespeare as a person himself gained much attention and fame. His expertise in the field of comedies is remarkable. Shakespeare is famous as he is one of the best playwrights for building his work close to ordinary people's lives. Therefore, they are also known as comedies of life by introducing human follies against the intervention of fate by presenting flawed and real characters. Both the readers and the audiences get the opportunity of aesthetic pleasure from Shakespeare's works.

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## 5.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are:

- to provide you with a better understanding of the salient features of Romantic Comedy
- to have an understanding of the role of disguise in Shakespearean comedies
- to analyze humour as an essence of his comedies
- to examine the role of strong female characters
- to understand the necessity of interweaving subplots
- to understand the use of three unities in Shakespeare’s works

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## 5.2 Shakespearean Romantic Comedy

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The common features of a Shakespearean romantic comedy are discussed now in a nutshell:

### 5.2.1 Mistaken Identity:

Mistaken identity and disguise play a pivotal role in a Shakespearean comedy. For example, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises herself as a man to guide her lover to become the man she desires. *Twelfth Night* shows another strong female character, Viola, who dresses up as a man to offer her service to Duke Orsino and make him realize his follies and whimsicality.

Swapping gender roles may seem old-fashioned initially, but they indeed produce humour and there is no doubt about that. The need for mistaken identity in the plot also arises from the fact that the role of women characters was performed by male actors.

### **5.2.2 Logic against Emotion:**

Shakespearean play is an example of an ongoing conflict between Apollonian ethics signalling reason versus Dionysian responding to the call of desires. What should a human being do? Follow passion or listen to the brain? Shakespeare is a genius at this game, as his plays cultivate the conflicts so well in raising expectations in the audiences' hearts.

For example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the female protagonist Hermia willingly disobeys her father by refusing the suitor her father has chosen for her. On the contrary, she engages herself in a romantic encounter with Lysander and is not afraid to face the death penalty for her actions. Her motives are governed by emotion that make her irrational in the first place. Shakespeare deliberately does this to show two sides of human behaviour: the heart and the brain. This attempt on the playwright's part made his plays a success.

### **5.2.3 Elements of Fantasy:**

Shakespearean comedies show the pettiness of humankind in the hands of the supernatural. Puck and Oberon decide the fate of the rest of the characters in the play called *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* through magic and mischief. The use of the magical element serves to emphasize humankind's fragility before fate. There is a popular way of having a happy ending in comedies. If one observes minutely, the audience will find the role of magic in making this happiness permanent at the end.

### **5.2.4 Utopian Setting:**

This is not so surprising that Shakespearean settings are almost perfect. The landscapes are rich and practically impossible to be real. Shakespeare purposefully chooses these locations because they are ideal for encouraging mishaps and mistakes, a typical feature of a romantic comedy. The audience finds it comforting, as in their lives, there is no scope of committing mistakes and getting a happy ending as an element of surprise. That is why Shakespearean plays are so appealing even today.

### **5.2.5 Broken Heart and Reconciliation:**

Love is the central theme of a Shakespearean play. He deliberately puts scenes of separation to make the background of reconciliation more interesting. Although there are uncertainties and a series of misunderstandings and mishaps with the touch of magic or cross-

dressing, everything gets settled at the end of each play. For example, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick and Beatrice hate each other to a level that a union between them seems almost impossible. Both the characters initially remain disillusioned with broken hearts from their previous courtships and are unwilling to initiate a new relationship. However, in the end, they not only fall in love but end up getting married. Benedick and Beatrice's complicated relationship results from Shakespeare's genius in depicting human nature from an insightful perspective, and he succeeds in doing so.

### **5.2.6 Happy Endings:**

Last but not least important part of a Shakespearean comedy is the happy ending. Unlike his tragedies, there is a transformation of a bad fortune to a good one as the characters start living happily ever after and marriage plays a crucial part in bringing this happiness. It is noteworthy that Shakespeare's romantic comedies employ *deus ex machina* to bring happiness at the end. It is popularly known as 'god in the machine,' a device that emphasizes God's role in ushering events and gives the final happy touch to the play. Shakespeare uses this technique to resolve misunderstandings and apparent problems that bar the reunion between two lovers. Technically, this provides comic denouement.

To put it simply, the numerous elements in Shakespearean comedy are part of the process of the storytelling. Ben Jonson was correct when he stated that Shakespeare is for all ages. Shakespeare through his intricate ways of storytelling, unique plot structure, and naive yet complicated characters made himself immortal through his oeuvre.

#### ***Check your Progress***

1. Do you think a happy ending is a necessary feature of Romantic Comedy?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How does logic play against emotion in Shakespearean plays?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How does a Shakespearean comedy show the pettiness of humankind in the hands of the supernatural?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **5.2.7 Recurrent features:**

In the next Unit, you will read in detail about the characteristic features of a romantic comedy. Now, you will be introduced to romantic comedy for an understanding of Shakespeare's play

*The Merchant of Venice*. The following are the recurrent features in Shakespearean romantic comedies:

- Assimilation of romance and reality
- Love as an important theme
- ‘Love at first sight’ as an oft occurring motif
- The role of music, frivolity, dance and mirth
- Multiple twists
- The role of opportunities or chance as a major factor
- main and the sub-plots interwoven together
- Disguise
- Mistaken identities
- Female characters tend to dominate
- Presence of strong, witty, and resourceful female characters

#### **5.2.8 Analyzing *The Merchant of Venice* as a Romantic Comedy:**

*The Merchant of Venice* undoubtedly falls into the category of a romantic comedy as already pointed out. It contains the features of a romantic comedy such as the theme of love, humour, witty dialogues, strong female characters, and happy ending. Shakespeare purposefully neglects the Aristotelian unity of place and time and focuses on the unity of action even in his comedies. He considered that the only relevant feature a play should focus on, is the unity of action. The characters look real and convincing and Shakespeare worked hard to make the contradictions of his characters more convincing.

##### **5.2.9.1 Love as the Central Theme:**

Love plays a crucial role in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare’s ways of weaving three love stories here deserve much appreciation for their uniqueness. Shakespeare skillfully interwove all the stories together. The central part of the story is the love encounter between Bassanio and Portia. The love stories of Gratiano-Nerissa and Lorenzo-Jessica get interesting with time. The enduring love between Bassanio and Portia is the main concern of the play. The lovers fight against all odds to make their love triumph. The element of disguise and the case of mistaken identities are also central to the theme. Portia plays a convincing role both as a woman character and in disguise as a man. In both the roles, Portia’s love for Bassanio and her successful attempts to turn the tables on Shylock are integral to the the plot.

### **5.2.9.2 Female Characters:**

Shakespeare undoubtedly is a revolutionary playwright in his attempts at creating strong women characters. He draws the character of Portia with precision. You may notice that Portia is a good example of a 16<sup>th</sup> Century woman and some of her actions project her as a woman ahead of her time. Shakespeare diligently crafts the revolutionary and dominating spirit in Portia. She is a character famous for her diligence, intellect, and witty humour. She excels herself mainly in the court scene by handling the courtroom brilliantly. Although she is a rich woman, she has to follow her father in marrying the right person according to his choice. Though rich enough, Portia cannot marry anyone of her choice, instead she has to follow her father's will. Despite her limitations, she rises to the occasion in the case of both Bassanio and Antonio. Therefore, it was in the hands of Portia to save two men at a time. And she was successful at doing so hence, proving herself worthy of being represented as a strong female character.

The other female characters in the play are not as strong as Portia. Nevertheless, they do serve their roles as delineated by Shakespeare and as per the requirements of the play. Jessica and Lorenzo are one pair of lovers while Nerissa and Gratiano are the other pair of lovers. Their love serves to complement the love between Bassanio and Portia.

### **5.2.9.3 Three Love Stories in One Play:**

There are three love stories in *The Merchant Venice*: Portia and Bassanio, Lorenzo and Jessica, and Gratiano and Nerissa. There is a bond of friendship and love between Antonio and Bassanio which resulted in trouble for both the characters. Antonio's love for Bassanio is limitless so much so that he becomes a victim of Shylock too. He helped Bassanio multiple times, but this time, his encounter with Shylock proved to be a fatal one. However, Portia handled the situation and saved the day. Portia's love is unique too. She requested Bassanio never to lose the ring that she had given him. But Bassanio lost the ring when the situation demanded so as to save his best friend's life which was in danger. Despite various perils the characters are saved and it can be said that their strong bonding, love, and trust in each other helped them have a happy ending. However, there is no denying that Portia gets most of the credit.

### **5.2.9.4 Theme of love between Portia and Bassanio:**

The play focuses on the themes of friendship, disguised appearances and love. The love theme centers around Portia and Bassanio. To get Portia's hand, Bassanio needs to participate in the casket test and select the correct casket. Portia's love comes effortlessly. She deliberately orders that there should be music while Bassanio chooses. Luckily, Bassanio smartly understands

the message of Portia's suggested song and chooses the correct casket and finds Portia's picture. Portia does not select Bassanio out of whim; instead, she picks him out of her practical wisdom. Bassanio is not arrogant after choosing the right casket, which shows that he is intelligent, sensitive, and thoughtful. Their love was meant to be a success.

#### **5.2.9.5 Humour:**

The play, *The Merchant of Venice*, is filled with humour. Humour is found in the witty character of Portia, Lorenzo, and Bassanio. Humour is also found in the ring scene and Shylock's whining and lamentation. Last but not least, humour is prevalent in the characters of Lancelot and Gobbo. The play is a perfect example of a romantic comedy as it stands in stark opposition to the classical or Aristotelian concept of humour.

#### **5.2.9.6 Classical Role of Three Unities:**

There are two basic settings in the play: Venice and Belmont. The primary action of the play shifts from one place to another, repeatedly from Venice to Belmont and from Belmont to Venice. The period of the play is more than three consecutive months. Shakespeare neglects the Aristotelian rules of three unities of time, place and action. He has always focused more on the action and less on time and place. Thereby there are two different settings, and also, the period has been stretched. More importantly, there are other tales and the subplots bring fun and humour to the main plot. Shakespeare's neglect of the classical unities does not affect the play in any way. The unity of character holds the play together.

#### **5.2.9.7 Role of Fate:**

Chance always plays a vital role in a Shakespearean romantic comedy. In *The Merchant of Venice* has several instances of chance and fate intervenes in the lives of the characters. First, it was due to fate that Antonio was bound to lose his ships in a shipwreck and become penniless. Another example of fate is that Antonio and Bassanio select Shylock, a moneylender, to provide them with some loan. Lorenzo and Jessica's love story, respectively being a Christian and a Jew, results from fate adding significant colour and changes in the text. Shakespearean comedy balances romanticism with realism. Most importantly, love as a powerful theme leads to incongruities, follies, and frivolities which are essential features of a Romantic Comedy.

***Check your Progress***

1. What is the role of fate in *The Merchant of Venice*?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What are the classical roles of the three unities?

\_\_\_\_\_

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### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

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At the end of the Unit, you should be able to:

- define romantic comedy
- understand the importance of love at first sight in a Shakespearean comedy
- recognize the various type of incongruities relevant in Shakespearean plays
- know the differences between main-plot and sub-plot
- identify the strong female characters in the Elizabethan age

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### 5.4 Glossary

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**Comedy:** A play that is distinguished by its sarcastic or humorous tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents in which the characters inevitably triumph over adversity

**Tragedy:** A play that deals with tragic events and has an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character

**Tragicomedy:** It is a genre that blends elements of both comedy and tragedy

**Romantic comedy:** It deals primarily with young lovers' follies and misunderstandings in a light-hearted way and culminates in a happy ending that typically avoids serious satire

**Disguise:** Give (someone or oneself) a distinctive impression to conceal one's identity.

**Humour:** It typically evokes genial laughter, and in suggesting whimsicality or eccentricity it can contrast with wit.

**Utopian:** An unrealistic and idealistic state of perfection

**Realistic:** Having or demonstrating a sensible, realistic and practical idea of what can be achieved or expected

**Ridicule:** The submission to contemptuous and derogatory language or behaviour of someone or something

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## 5.5 Sample Questions

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### 5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. What is the setting of the play *The Merchant of Venice*?
  - (a) Venice
  - (b) Belmont
  - (c) Both a & b
  - (d) None of above
2. When was *The Merchant of Venice* first performed?
  - (a) 1599
  - (b) 1602
  - (c) 1605
  - (d) 1608
3. Who is Portia?
  - (a) Bassanio's beloved
  - (b) Lorenzo's beloved
  - (c) Gratiano's beloved
  - (d) None of the above
4. What was Shylock's profession?
  - (a) School teacher
  - (b) Painter
  - (c) Money lender
  - (d) King
5. How did Antonio lose his ships?
  - (a) In a storm
  - (b) Got stolen

- (c) Both a & b
- (d) None of above

**Fill in the blanks**

- 6. Gratiano's beloved was \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7. Portia gave a ring to \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8. Jessica's lover was \_\_\_\_\_.

**True/False**

- 9. Portia and Bassanio are enemies.
  - (a) True
  - (b) False
- 10. Jessica is the leading heroine of *The Merchant of Venice*.
  - (a) True
  - (b) False

**5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

- 1. Write a brief note on the character portrayal of Portia.
- 2. What role do you think disguise plays in *The Merchant of Venice*?
- 3. Write a short note on the subplots of the play.
- 4. Does love play a significant role in this play? Discuss.
- 5. Do you agree that the character of Shylock is "too large?" Explain.

**5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

- 1. How did Antonio save Bassanio? Discuss.
- 2. Portia is a strong female character in *The Merchant of Venice*. Explain.
- 3. Define and discuss romantic comedy in detail.

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**5.6 Suggested Readings**

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- 1. Myrick, Kenneth (Ed). *William Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*. New York: New American Library, 1965.
- 2. Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Ed. M.M. Mahood. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- 3. Wilders, John. *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*. UK: MacMillan Education, 1969.

## Unit - 6: Characteristic Features of Romantic Comedy

### Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Romantic Comedy
  - 6.2.1 Defining the Genre of ‘Comedy’
  - 6.2.2 The Origin of Comedy
  - 6.2.3 Romantic Comedy – A Sub-Genre of Comedy
  - 6.2.4 The World of Fancy and Imagination
  - 6.2.5 Love and Romance
  - 6.2.6 Plot and Subplot
  - 6.2.7 The Purpose: Social values
  - 6.2.8 Mistaken Identities
  - 6.2.9 Battle of Wits
  - 6.2.10 Music
  - 6.2.11 Happy Union
- 6.3 Learning Outcomes
- 6.4 Glossary
- 6.5 Sample Questions
- 6.6 Suggested Readings

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### 6.0 Introduction

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In the last Unit, you were introduced to Shakespeare’s romantic comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*. You also read about the main features of a romantic comedy with reference to *The Merchant of Venice*. In this Unit, you will study in detail about the characteristics of a Romantic comedy. The characteristic features of Romantic comedy are found in a series of Romantic comedies written by various playwrights beginning with Aristophanes, Green and Lyly, and Shakespeare followed by the line of comic writers after him. The Romantic comedy is a sub-genre of the large genre of comedy that depicts the literary representation of human follies. In other words, a Romantic comedy by Shakespeare is a combination of romance and comedy, a

mixture of both romantic and comic elements together, producing a new taste for the readers or the audience. The Romantic comedy together with both romance and comedy produces not just the comic side of life but also a love-happy side of life, which William Shakespeare has demonstrated in his romantic plays, such as *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *As You Like It*. Apart from Shakespeare's craftsmanship of comedies, many contemporaries and successors have sketched the various facets of comic life. The comic elements are sometimes so natural that they occur in day-to-day life. The dramatists capture these incidents of life and tinge them with the colour of imagination. The Romantic comedies thus have produced various comic effects, which are the main substance of the unit.

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## **6.1 Objectives**

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The objectives of the Unit is to familiarize you with the genre of comedy and the features of Romantic comedy in English literature. The definition, a brief historical development of comedy, and the analysis of the literary texts will give you a vivid picture of the characteristic features of the Romantic comedies. The present Unit will focus on the textual descriptions and themes of Romantic comedies which have a universal appeal and are thus relevant to the present world.

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## **6.2 Romantic Comedy**

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### **6.2.1 Defining the Genre of Comedy:**

Romantic Comedy is a sub-genre of the core literary genre, comedy which for centuries has been amusing and entertaining the readers. Comedy developed over the centuries as an inseparable part of literature, giving birth to various other forms of comedy, and Romantic Comedy is the result of that development. Comedy is primarily a fictional text which amuses its audiences and demonstrates the follies of human characters; for the audience to witness the mistakes and trivialities of human characters enshrined in the comic representations of human life.

To understand the root of comedy, one has to dive deep into the etymological source given by Dr Johnson. The word comedy perhaps originates from the Greek words kosmos or komai and oda. Kosmos refers to 'revel', while komai refers to 'village'. Aristotle advocated for the second term, referring to the word 'village' as there is an assumption that the comedians toured through villages when they were expelled from their towns; for their disgrace. The other term, 'oda', refers to 'songs'; therefore, comedy is a song of festivity, which Dante has termed as; 'a rustic song'; in his *Divine Comedy*. Usually, comedy was associated more with rural or rustic life than the urban, as the comedians were more interested in the rural living environment; associated with agrarian fertility. Furthermore, the Greek word 'comedy' at some point in time begins with the revels of Dionysus, a Greek god. Zeus and Semele's son Dionysus was the deity of the productiveness of nature and plants' souls (Stott).

The broader meaning of the term comedy can be used to organize and understand the different sets of themes encountered time and again in various situations in life. These persistent themes cover different forms of inversion, where the world is turned around, and the world where things are different. The social order is made to stand on its head; the slave rules the master, and the man bites the dog, whereas the actual scenario is the opposite. The normal scenario is inverted, and the reality is re-imagined. The foolishness, intellectual myopia, or the systematic social order is satirized, ridiculed and transformed into a new world order. The social laws are mocked and turned upside down. Comedy can also be a word that can be expressed as a genre, symphony, or a chain of effects that demonstrate their presence in various situations and atmosphere. This is also a literary convention having structural qualities and representing a perfect reality (Stott).

Chris Baldick, in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, outlines "comedy as a fictional text or play written primarily to amuse or entertain its readers by appealing to a sense of superiority over the characters depicted. A comedy will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy; and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy's disastrous crimes. Its ending will usually be happy for the lead characters. In another sense, the term was applied in the Middle Ages to narrative poems that end happily: the title of *Divine Comedy* (c. 1320) carries this meaning."

According to Aristotle, comedy is different from tragedy as comedy is a mimic representation of the world, and tragedy represents noble actions of noble personages who are

admirable, and the characters have magnitude. He argues that comedy originated in rustic entertainment and it showcases the people of 'low' class by nature:

Comedy is (as he has argued) an imitation of low people — not, however, concerning every kind of defect: the laughable is as pieces of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction: for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain. (Aristotle).

### **6.2.2 The Origin of Comedy:**

The historical origin of comedy is traced to Greek society. The Greek comedy (both old comedy and the middle comedy) is confirmed to begin with Aristophanes. The old comedy, which dates back from 520 BC to 400 BC, indulged in abuse and profanity in a very artistic manner and was followed by the Middle comedy. In the Middle comedy, the abuse and profanity of old comedy were replaced by parody, the satire of myths, and criticism of philosophy and literature. Aristophanes, as an example of Middle comedy, has demonstrated his ridicule and satire towards the follies of the times in his comedies, *Birds* and *Frogs*.<sup>7</sup> The Greek comedy, which began with the subject of revelry, mirth, and delight in honour of Dionysus, the god of nature, fertility, and wine, later moved towards the theme of ridicule and satire (Mundra and Sahni).

The Roman Comedy in the times of Plautus and Terence further deviated from the Greek comedy. The Roman Comedy was chiefly based on intrigue and its object was to highlight the offenses against the social order or decorum. It is the Roman comedy that created scorn and contempt for the offenders in the mind of the readers or audiences. The Roman Comedy writers used satire as an instrument of exposing vices and appealed more to the mind than the heart of the readers. Therefore, the Roman comedies not just created entertainment but also created scorn for the offenders in the reader's mind.

Under the influence of Greek and Roman Comedy, English comedy began its journey from the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present times. However, throughout the journey, the English comedy adapted various formations and characteristics and came across different junctures of progress. The English comedy which began under the influence of Plautus and Terence produced the earliest English comedy, Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*; and continued its journey ahead with the comedies of Lyly and Green -- the University wits and reached its perfection in the hands of the legend, William Shakespeare who became the leader of

the English comedy. He was influenced by Roman writers such as Plautus and Terence, but he was unsatisfied with their classical themes of ridicule, castigation, and reform. He was a poet at heart and not a critic, and the classical themes of ridicule and satire failed to appeal to his poetic sensibility. He created an entirely new point of view in his comedies. He composed comedies with the essence of love, romance, true fun, and delight.

### **6.2.3 Romantic Comedy: A Sub-Genre of Comedy**

Romantic comedy, a sub-genre of comedy, has become the most popular form of entertainment. The Romantic comedy was popularized by Shakespeare with his plays like *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Goldsmith's play, *She Stoops to Conquer*; Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*; G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*; and the recent writer Noel Coward's *Blythe Spirit* are also romantic comedies. However, William Shakespeare continues to be the master of all Romantic comedies. For Shakespeare, the Romantic comedies are about a lighter part of human life, unlike tragedies. Chris Baldick, in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, defined romantic comedies as comedies that manifest, primarily the human follies and confusions of the young lovers, in a jocular and happily concluded way that generally shuns serious satire.

Further, M H Abrams defines Romantic comedy as a play which “represents a love affair that involves a beautiful and engaging heroine (sometimes disguised as a man); the course of this love does not run smooth yet overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy union. Many of the boy-meets-girl plots of later writers are instances of Romantic comedy, as are many motion pictures, from *The Philadelphia Story* to *Sleepless in Seattle*”. Abrams also refers to the critical work, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, where Northrop Frye points out that Shakespeare in some of his comedies has demonstrated a transition of the world conflict and trouble to the world of peace or green world – e.g., the fairy-hunted wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*,- and through instances of these comedies, it is shown that the occurrences of injustices in every day mundane life and world are soothed, adversaries reconciled and the true lovers brought together.

### **6.2.4 The World of Fancy and Imagination:**

The Romantic comedies of Shakespeare take the readers away to a world of fancy and imagination far away from the world of sick, hurry, and divided aims. The characters of these comedies are drawn from the world of men and women and have suffered like erring mortals of the work-a-day world. Realism and romance mix together; romance in the setting and realism in

characterization, and the “cardinal characteristic of Shakespeare’s romantic world is the union of realism and fancy” (Nicoll). In the world of Shakespearean comedy, we hear the ring of pure laughter without any venom and cynicism. Through the humorous and sweet speeches of all his comic characters, Shakespeare evokes amusement and pleasure. Fancy and imagination is the most crucial ingredient in the creation of the literary corpus. Furthermore, comedy is a more powerful vehicle that carries the readers into the world of fancy and imagination. It is a faraway world from the real and mortal world. Comedy, since the beginning, has been a perfect medium for this transportation from suffering, sickness, and sadness to amusement, laughter, and merry-making.

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is an example of a Romantic comedy that violates all the rules and laws of classical and neo-classical comedy. *As You Like It* deals with love at first sight, uncontrolled emotions, passions, imagination and fancy, fun and laughter. The mixture of comic and tragic incidents together makes the text more romantic. The banishment of Rosalind and Duke Senior; and Oliver’s setting fire to Orland’s house are sad incidents in the play. But the play as a whole gives the readers amusement and mirth. The play takes the readers to a faraway imaginary place, the Forest of Arden and to the imaginary wood in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The imaginary places, characters, and incidents are quite prominent in Romantic comedies.

#### **6.2.5 Love and Romance:**

Love is the basis of romantic comedies. Rosalind and Orlando, Benedick and Beatrice, Viola and Orsino are all characters in love and revel in the atmosphere of song and mirth, dance, and jollity. The theme of love in Shakespeare has certain common characteristics. His Romantic comedies deal with handsome men and beautiful young women who love one another but also suffer break-up and disappointment in love. The characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* live in a world of make-believe which is a representation of more magical imagination than worldly realities.

In *The Twelfth Night*, the Duke Orsino’s infatuation for Olivia - Olivia’s sentimental love for her dead brother - her love for Cesario - Viola’s true love for Duke Orsino - Malvolio’s shifting love are all different shades of love portrayed through the romantic characters. The entire play revolves around the theme of love and romance. Viola is shipwrecked on the seashore of Illyria and decides to serve the Duke, Orsino. As she serves the Duke, she falls in love with him, of which he is unaware. Strangely, she disguises herself as a man, and as a result, she does not leave any scope for the Duke to feel attracted to her. She is sent to Olivia with a proposal of

love which is out-rightly rejected by Olivia. In the course of time she falls in love Cesario who is, in fact Viola in disguise. Sebastian, Viola's brother, falls in love with Olivia and completes the love- triangle.

In the play, *As You Like It*, the most important romantic element is youthful love. Rosalind and Orlando, the main characters, fall in love with each other at first sight. They face several difficulties. But they struggle to overcome them. Orlando goes to the forest of Arden and composes verses in praise of Rosalind's beauty and virtue. Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede and meets Orlando in the forest. The other characters like Celia and Oliver, Phebe and Ganymede also find love.

### **6.2.6 Plot and Subplot:**

Romantic comedy generally consists of the main plot and a subplot. The main and subplots of almost all comedies have a particular pattern or structure. The main plot is structured with an eligible nobleman and woman having fallen in love with each other but facing difficulties to marry for some reason. The reasons could be their social incompatibilities, their longstanding family conflicts, or their unconscious love for each, as is displayed in the case of the characters; Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, John Worthing, and Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. After a long battle and endurance, the lovers are united by some external forces, like, an unravelling of a secret. Following their successful unity, their marriage or their willingness to marry is celebrated with songs and dance or a feast. The presiding deity is Hymen, the God of marriage.

Another important aspect of Romantic comedy is the subplot. In the subplot, the characters come from the lower section of society (labour, worker, servants, watchmen or guards) or act as a source of fun, like, Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*. The subplot has in general two significant roles; first, to serve as caricature to the main plot, and second, wittingly or unwittingly solve the problems of the characters in the main plot. In brief, there are times or situations where the main and the subplot intermingle and the play ends with reconciliation.

In most Romantic comedies, the plots and sub-plots are interwoven. In the *Twelfth Night*, if the main characters, Orsino, Olivia, Viola, and Sebastian, fall in love and, after difficulties become united, the characters like Sir Toby Belch and Maria face difficulties in the journey of love but in the end get united. In *As You Like It*, if the main plot is about the grand love of Orlando and Rosalind, the sub-plot consists of the relationship of lower characters like Celia and Ganymede, Oliver, and Aliena.

### **6.2.7 The Purpose: Social Values**

Romantic comedy has a larger purpose with emphasis on acceptance of social values. The main purpose of the Romantic comedy is to entertain the readers. While entertaining the readers, the aim is also to eliminate the social evils; discourage obsessive love or infatuation in the characters and to inculcate social values in the minds of the readers. The Romantic comedy also aims at correcting follies and foibles by gulling the characters. The comedies very subtly discard the malevolent attitudes of the characters, such as in Malvolio, and highlight and appreciate the uprightness of the characters as represented by Viola, Olivia, and Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, and Rosalind and Orlando in *As You Like It*. Therefore, the purpose of the Romantic comedy is not only to evoke laughter through humour and wit but also to correct the vices in the society as reflected through various characters.

### **6.2.8 Mistaken Identity:**

Mistaken identity, twists and turns abound in Romantic comedy such as in *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Twelfth Night* among others. In the *Twelfth Night*, mistaken identity occurs due to the disguises played out by different characters. Viola plays the role of a male attendant to Duke Orsino in pursuit of attaining his love. Viola is the sister of Sebastian. Throughout the entire play, Viola remains disguised as a male attendant and wins the Duke's heart at the end of the play; when the mistaken identities of both Viola and Sebastian (who had survived the shipwreck and was mistaken by both Olivia and Duke Orsino to be Viola), are unfolded. The physical resemblance of both Viola and Sebastian leads to mistaken identity and creates further confusion in the minds of the other characters in the play.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind is banished by Duke Frederick from the court. She disguised herself as Ganymede wearing the dress of a countryman. She is accompanied by Celia, who is disguised as Aliena. Both reach the Forest of Arden and meet Orlando, who mistakes their identities but finally discovers that Ganymede is his beloved, Rosalind. Another play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, abounds in instances of mistaken identity. Claudio is about to marry his beloved Hero, but the malcontent brother of the Prince of Arragon, Don John, disrupts Claudio's marriage by making him see that Borachio is wooing his beloved Hero (who is, in reality, her chambermaid disguised as Hero). Claudio mistakes the real identity of the chambermaid, thinking her to be Hero and denounces her. The family fakes the death of Hero. Later Claudio understands the trick played on him and repents. The play ends with the revealing of the real identities. Claudio gets ready to marry a veiled cousin of Hero, who surprisingly turns out to be

Hero herself. In Romantic comedies, mistaken identity creates endless laughter. The mistaken identities at the end of the plays lead to the climax and resolution of the events by unraveling of real identities.

### **6.2.9 Battle of Wits:**

Humour is an important feature of Romantic comedy. It is through humour that the writers satirize the human shortcomings, weaknesses and follies. Over and over again, the humour concentrates on the war of wits among the different characters in plays such as *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The use of humour in comedies plays a pivotal role in amusing the readers and in creating an atmosphere of ridicule and satire. The speeches of Malvolio regarding Olivia are a source of humour that entertains the readers and thereby exposes the trivial and funny attitude of a character. While humour may not always be the only focus in the play, the main lovers, even while facing difficulties, move forward to achieve their goals and happiness in the end.

### **6.2.10 Music:**

Music finds an important place in the Romantic Comedy. Music makes the play *As You Like It* more romantic as it has sweet songs that add special charm and a melodious environment to the play. The minor comic characters play songs for their amusement, exposing their follies. *Twelfth Night* opens with a quote made by Duke Orsino, who asks his men to play music and comfort his ear as he is sick with the love of beautiful Olivia, saying that music can be the food of love and soothe one's heart. Music has always been the summation of the mood of the plays. The Duke of Illyria says:

“If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken and so die.  
That strain again! It had a dying fall;  
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour! Enough, no more;  
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.  
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou!  
That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,

Of what validity and pitch soe'er,  
But falls into abatement and low price  
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy,  
That it alone is high fantastical.”

### **6.2.11 Happy Union:**

Happy union as an ending of a play is one of the most prominent features of Romantic comedy. It revolves around a love theme containing a happy ending, as you already know. These romantic plays mostly deal with romanticized or true love affairs. However, it is believed that true love never finds an easy way to fulfillment. Throughout the play, there is a chain of difficult events, leading to the climax and eventual resolution of all the difficulties and finally the happy union of the hero and the heroine.

In the *Twelfth Night*, several characters struggle and face difficulties to find their match. Viola struggles to convince Duke Orsino that his love for Olivia is not true love. Olivia pines for Viola in her disguise as Cesario. Sebastian pines for Olivia. As the play nears the ending in the cycle of events, Olivia meets Sebastian and Viola convinces and wins over Duke Orsino. The minor characters, such as Malvolio, Sir Toby Belch and Maria find their match and unite in the end leading to a happy union.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* also ends with a happy union of the protagonists, Orlando and Rosalind, and the union of the minor characters like Oliver and Celia. After facing many difficulties, they are reconciled with one another and end with a happy union through marriage. The plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, among many others do not just entertain and amuse the readers but also demonstrate a journey of life through difficulties, leading to happiness.

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## **6.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Through the reading of this Unit you should get a thorough idea about the genre of comedy and its sub-genre, Romantic comedy in English literature. You should be able to explain and elaborate the recurrent themes in Romantic comedy. You should also be in a position to appreciate the contribution of Shakespeare to Romantic comedy and be able to discuss it with reference to the prescribed play.

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## 6.4 Glossary

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**Romance:** A narrative genre in literature involving a mysterious, adventurous, or spiritual story relating to a love connection. It also focuses on the storyline of bravery and strong social values.

**Comedy:** A fictional genre in literature having the purpose of amusement and satirizing the human follies. It not only amuses or entertains the readers but also corrects the vices of human characters.

**Satire:** A literary cleverness of diminishing or downgrading through ridicule and laughter, disdain, contempt, or indignation. The true purpose of satire is to make amendments to vice by castigation.

**Tragedy:** Type of drama that represents human suffering and primarily the unfortunate or sorrowful events that befall the main characters. It highlights the human errors and the subsequent purification or purgation of the emotions.

**Fancy:** The power of imagination and depiction in artistic manifestation. The term is sometimes referred to as a synonym for imagination, particularly in the sense of the power of visualizing and creating artistic form, which is not existent, known, or experienced. Imagination is an alternative word for fancy and is also known as supernaturalism.

**Realism:** In the arts, the precise, thorough, unornamented presentation of nature is more about contemporary life. Realism discards imaginative veneration; in respect of the close observation of external appearances.

**Plot:** In literary arts, the plot is the structure of interconnected actions, intentionally selected and designed by the author for creating a coherent story. The plot, in general, involves a considerably higher level of narrative organization, which normally does not occur in an ordinary story or a fable.

**Subplot:** It is a side strand of a plot that runs parallel to the main plot. It has a storyline somewhat related to the events of the main plot, and in a way, the subplot supports the development of the main plot.

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## 6.5 Sample Questions

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### 6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. What is another title for *Twelfth Night*?
  - (a) Virtue Rewarded
  - (b) A Pure Woman
  - (c) What You Will
  - (d) A Fair Story
2. Whose identities are mistaken in *Twelfth Night*?
  - (a) Olivia
  - (b) Viola
  - (c) Sebastian
  - (d) Antonio
3. Where does *Twelfth Night* take place?
  - (a) England
  - (b) Illyria
  - (c) Ruritania
  - (d) Denmark
4. Find out the author of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
  - (a) William Shakespeare
  - (b) Joseph Conrad
  - (c) Oscar Wilde
  - (d) G.B. Shaw
5. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare was published in \_\_\_\_
  - (a) 1595
  - (b) 1585
  - (c) 1600
  - (d) 1610
6. Which text can be considered the earliest Romantic Comedy?
  - (a) Robert green's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*
  - (b) Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*
  - (c) William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*
  - (d) Plautus's *Pot of Gold*
7. Chronologically arrange the Romantic Comedies of William Shakespeare \_\_\_\_
  - (a) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
  - (b) *As You Like It*
  - (c) *Twelfth Night*
  - (d) *Much Ado About Nothing*
8. Who is the author of *Pygmalion*?
  - (a) William Goldsmith
  - (b) Joseph Conrad
  - (c) G.B. Shaw
  - (d) William Shakespeare
9. William Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* was published in \_\_\_\_
  - (a) 1595
  - (b) 1585
  - (c) 1600
  - (d) 1610
10. What is it that Antonio criticizes and that Shylock does as a regular business practice?
  - (a) Loans
  - (b) Usury

(c) Bribery

(d) Advertise his services

### **6.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Define Romantic comedy and provide some examples of Romantic comedy in English literature.
2. What is the role of music in Romantic comedy? Answer with reference to *Twelfth Night*.
3. Examine in brief the elements of mistaken identity in a Romantic comedy.
4. How did Shakespeare alter the formula of a Romantic comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Discuss briefly.
5. What is the main plot of Romantic comedy? Why does it have feasting or dancing in the end?

### **6.5.3 Long Answer Question:**

1. Explain the romantic and comic elements in any play by Shakespeare .
2. Discuss in detail the features of Romantic comedy in English literature.
3. Discuss the historical significance of Romantic comedy in English Literature.

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## **6.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Abrams, M H, and Geoffrey G Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston, Mass: Thomson Wadsworth, 1999. Print.
2. Bradbury, Malcolm, and David Palmer (eds.), *Shakespearean Comedy*. London: Edward Arnold, 1972. Print.
3. Charney, Maurice (ed.), *Shakespearean Comedy*. New York: New Literary Forum, 1980. Print.

## Unit – 7: Plot Construction

### Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Plot Construction in *The Merchant of Venice*
  - 7.2.1 Historical and Literary Sources of Plot
  - 7.2.2 Plot Summary
  - 7.2.3 Plot Analysis
    - 7.2.3.1 The Subplots
  - 7.2.4 Plot Structure
    - 7.2.4.1 Exposition
    - 7.2.4.2 Conflict/Rising Action
    - 7.2.4.3 Climax
    - 7.2.4.4 Resolution/ Falling Action
    - 7.2.4.5 Denouement
- 7.3 Learning Outcomes
- 7.4 Glossary
- 7.5 Sample Questions
- 7.6 Suggested Readings

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### 7.0 Introduction

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The play *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare centers around intolerance, revenge, prejudice, money, mercy, law, greed, friendship, and marriage. The play belongs to the genre termed comedy, as you are aware. However, comedy is mixed with some dark aspects of human life and nature. A pound of flesh, a ring, and the game of casket has symbolic significance in the play. The tone of the play is comic, romantic as well as tragic. Law, cross-dressing, and mercy, in the end, have been implied as motifs in the play. The foreshadowing technique is very much evident in the opening scene as Shakespeare is aware of the wretched fate of his characters - the loss of Antonio's ships and the attitude of Shylock.

The setting of the play is the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is set in Venice and Belmont. Although the tone and mood of the play are light, there are a few dark scenes, for instance, the scene where

Shylock demands a pound of flesh as already pointed out in previous Units. Clever dialogue and witty remarks among characters are the key features of the play. Deception and disguise also play an important role in the development of the plot. These have also acted as a source of humour. Either Antonio or Bassanio could be considered the protagonist of the play. The role of Antonio is relatively passive. However, the way Bassanio saves Antonio and wins Portia in the famous scene of the caskets, he is most likely the protagonist of the play.

Religious hostility between Jews and Christians is also a key feature in the theme. Shylock is furious mainly because of the attitude of Christians towards Jews and how he is wronged by two Christians - Antonio, who fails to return his money in time, and Lorenzo, who elopes with his daughter, Jessica along with his money. The reversal of fate occurs when Antonio forgoes his money on the condition that Shylock converts to Christianity and upon his death, he must bequeath all his property to his daughter Jessica and Lorenzo. The play asserts that friendship and love have more power than hatred and revenge. Antonio helps his friend Bassanio even at the risk of his own life. It is paid back by Bassanio and Portia when Antonio lands in deep trouble.

Friends and family play a vital role in the play. Bassanio is able to win the love of Portia and marry her after Antonio helps him by gambling his own life in the hands of Shylock. Though their marriage is initially disturbed by the episode created by Shylock, it settles down amicably later on. Meanwhile, Jessica elopes with Lorenzo along with a handsome amount of money. Bassanio and Antonio reunite after Antonio is saved. He is able to become a rich merchant again because his ships safely arrive at the port.

The main conflict in the play is when Antonio takes a loan for Bassanio from Shylock on a bond of a pound of his flesh. The rising action is when it is made known that the ships of Antonio are lost. The climax takes place when Portia disguises herself as a lawyer, and falling action is when Shylock converts to Christianity and the way he lends half of his fortune to Jessica and her husband Lorenzo.

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## 7.1 Objectives

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The objectives of the Unit are to make you:

- know the historical and literary sources of the play

- understand the significance of plot in *The Merchant of Venice*
- comprehend the play and its sub-plots.
- understand the characters and the conflicts
- study *The Merchant of Venice* as a comedy

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## 7.2 Plot Construction in *The Merchant of Venice*

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### 7.2.1 Historical and Literary Sources of Plot:

*The Merchant of Venice* was written keeping in view the historical context, the exile of Jews, and the restriction on their rights in Europe. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell allowed the Jews to come to England. However, it was believed that even during that period Jews in a limited number were there in and around London. The major reason behind this restriction was their dealing with the usury that they were addicted to. Scholars and critics believed that during that period, they remained in England in the guise of practising Christianity and they continued to practice usury as is also seen in *The Merchant of Venice* in the character of Shylock who not only practised usury but he was also cruel and inhuman at heart. He lends the money on the condition that if the loan is not paid within the time period, he will take the pound of flesh from the body of Antonio.

Apart from utilizing a historical context in writing this play, Shakespeare has also utilized the literary context and background in writing *The Merchant of Venice*. He has used both medieval and contemporary literary sources in the play's plot. It is pointed out by critics that Portia's game of three caskets is taken from the 13<sup>th</sup> century concept of tales and anecdotes that have been inscribed by Chaucer in *Gesta Romanorum*. It is also believed by literary critics that *The Merchant of Venice*, is derived from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* which was written and staged a decade before William Shakespeare wrote this play. The concept of Jews, Christianity, and revenge go hand in hand in both plays. Conversion to Christianity is also common in both the plays. However, unlike Shylock, Barabas physically harms the characters in *The Jew of Malta*. The ending of the two plays is also different, as Shylock is treated gently while Barabas is killed by his enemies. Another source from which the plot seems to originate is *Il Pecorone*, a collection of short stories from the 14<sup>th</sup> century written by Giovanni Fiorentino. It had an episode that involved an Italian merchant who owed a pound of flesh to a Jewish moneylender.

### 7.2.2 Plot Summary:

Antonio is a rich and wealthy merchant of Venice. Being rich and popular he has many friends. Among his friends, there is a young man named Bassanio. Bassanio tells Antonio that in Belmont, there is a rich and wealthy lady whom he can win for marriage but for that, he has to look as rich and wealthy as other suitors to cast a good impression. At this Antonio informs young Bassanio that he would have happily lent him the amount he requires but at present, he himself is short of money as his entire money is tied up due to a shipwreck. However, he helps Bassanio to take a loan from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, by using his own good reputation as a merchant.

At Belmont, Portia tells Nerissa how she is fed up with the persistent stream of suitors. In addition, she wishes to be free from the obligation of the will made by her father. As per her father's will, she can only marry the person who correctly chooses the casket containing her portrait out of three caskets - gold, silver and lead. None of her earlier suitors, other than Bassanio were successful in choosing the right casket. She was not interested in any of her earlier suitors but when Nerissa mentions the name of Bassanio as a possible suitor, Portia, is filled with joy. Bassanio had once come to Belmont and Portia was greatly impressed by him. Meanwhile, Shylock, who has a long-standing grudge against Antonio, agrees to lend Bassanio the required three thousand ducats for three months on the surety of Antonio. He puts the condition that if money is not returned on the fixed day, he will cut one pound of flesh from the body of Antonio. Antonio agrees as he believes that his ships will reach within a month, much before the bond will be due.

At this point, in a subplot of the play, Lorenzo, a close friend of both Antonio and Bassanio, falls in love with Shylock's daughter, Jessica. Lorenzo and Jessica elope along with her father's money. This incident enrages Shylock and he decides to take revenge. After this incident, Bassanio leaves for Belmont to choose the casket. Portia immediately falls in love with him and implores him to wait a few days before attempting to choose the casket. Meanwhile, Bassanio also falls in love with Portia. He rejects the gold and silver and chooses the lead casket containing Portia's portrait. The overjoyed Bassanio and Portia decide to marry. Nerissa and Gratiano, who are also in love, follow suit.

There is happiness and enjoyment all over Belmont until Bassanio finds a letter from Antonio which states that his ships are lost in the sea, and if money is not arranged, Shylock will take a pound of his flesh. Bassanio is horrified but his wife Portia gives him the money to pay off

the bond to save Antonio. Bassanio leaves for Venice with the money. Shylock is enraged and wants revenge. He is adamant that the money be paid to him by the bond. Except for the fulfillment of the bond, nothing else would satisfy him. In the court of law, which is presided over by the Duke of Venice, Shylock faces his enemy Antonio who is accompanied by his friends, whereas Shylock is surrounded by enemies. Bassanio offers Shylock double the money Antonio owes him, but he refuses.

Presently, Portia and Nerissa enter the court in the disguise of a lawyer and clerk respectively. Portia informs the Duke that she has been sent by a learned attorney whose name is Dr Bellario, to plead the case of the defendant. She requests Shylock to be merciful but he does not pay heed to her. At this, she offers a triple amount to spare Antonio but he is unmoved. Then she agrees that Shylock has all the legal right to take one pound of flesh from Antonio's body. However, she warns him that as per the bond, he is entitled to take only a pound of Antonio's flesh and cannot spill even a single drop of blood in the process. If it does happen all his lands and money will be confiscated. At this, Shylock immediately agrees to the triple amount be paid on the bond. But now Portia refuses. Shylock is now even ready to accept the original amount of the bond, but again Portia refuses. She reminds him that he demanded to have the hardest interpretation of the law and now he has to face the consequences.

She also reminds him that he is an outsider in Venice and he has attempted to take the life of a Venetian citizen. Hence, his property will be divided between Antonio and the State, and his life will be at the mercy of the Duke. Now the life and property of Shylock are at stake. However, the Duke decides to spare Shylock if he pays half of his money to Antonio and the rest to the state. Antonio, at this point, says that he will not take money from Shylock if he agrees to become a Christian and agrees to bequeath his entire property to his daughter Jessica and her husband Lorenzo upon his death. Finding no other way out, Shylock accepts all these conditions. Antonio and his friends are overjoyed and decide to pay whatever the young lawyer wishes. But to their utter surprise, she refuses to take the money and wishes only for the ring worn by Bassanio. Bassanio gets disturbed as it is given to him by his wife who had asked him not to part with it. Portia, disguised as the lawyer, insists on the ring. Bassanio unwillingly takes off the ring and gives it to the young lawyer. Similarly, Nerissa, disguised as the clerk manages to get her ring from Gratiano which she had earlier given him. Both the ladies plan to tease their husbands about the rings back in Belmont. When Bassanio and Gratiano come back to Belmont along with Antonio, their wives ask about the rings they had given them. Portia and Nerissa

teasingly blame that they have given away their rings to other ladies. Eventually, Portia and Nerissa disclose that they are the learned attorney and the clerk to whom they had given the rings. Portia hands over Antonio a letter bearing the good news that all of his ships have safely arrived at the port. Thus, all problems get resolved, and the play has a happy ending.

### **7.2.3 Plot Analysis:**

#### **7.2.3.1 The Sub-Plots:**

The play has three sub-plots. In the first plot, we are informed that to win Portia, Bassanio takes a loan from a moneylender, Shylock. As per the contract, if he fails to pay the money within three months, Shylock is entitled to take a pound of Antonio's flesh, who stands as a surety for the loan. The second plot centers around how Bassanio can win Portia in the game of caskets and how Antonio lands in trouble since he fails to pay the money to Shylock. At this, Portia disguised as a lawyer defends Antonio in the court of justice. The third plot is about how Portia reverses the table by saying that he can take flesh but cannot spill a single drop of blood from the body of Antonio. This plot concludes that all the couples live happily after their marriage.

### **7.2.4 Plot Structure**

#### **7.2.4.1 Exposition**

The beginning of the play introduces us to the problems of various characters. Antonio is sad as he gets to know that he is going to lose his friend Bassanio to Portia. Portia is also unhappy as her father while dying had left her fate to a game of caskets. She is unable to choose a husband of her choice as she can marry only the suitor who wins the game. To win the game, suitors should choose the casket containing a portrait from the three caskets made of gold, silver and lead. So far, none of the suitors could choose the right casket to win her. The other reason for her unhappiness is that she does not like any of them.

#### **7.2.4.2 Conflict/Rising Action**

The conflict is a key element in the play. Everyone in the play has one or the other conflict. Antonio's conflict is that he is going to lose his friend yet he is willing to pay anything for him. It is due to this fact that he is ready to sign a bond with Shylock on unfavourable conditions merely because of Bassanio. Another conflict is that of poverty. Bassanio is poor and he has not repaid to Antonio his previous loan, and finds himself again in need of money. The conditions imposed by Shylock serve as another conflict as Bassanio thinks it unfair to risk the life of his best friend. However, Antonio assures him that everything would be alright. The game

of the caskets is yet another conflict. As he has to choose only one, it could be a gamble and could turn either way. He could have Portia as a wife in case he chose the right casket but, in case it was otherwise, he would lose her forever. Out of impatience, Bassanio decides to play the game without any delay and with subtle help from Portia selects the right casket. There is a sense of conflict in the character of Shylock. A miser, he loses his daughter and his wealth as his daughter has eloped with Lorenzo with his money. He wants to take revenge for it. Another conflict lies in his hatred and religious grudge against Antonio.

After choosing the right casket, Bassanio is allowed to obtain his love, and it seems that his conflicts are resolved as he will have lots of money to repay his loan. But soon, a letter is handed over to him which describes the sad fate his friend Antonio is going to have. His ships have been lost, and he is unable to repay the loan to Shylock. Shylock, due to his old hatred against him and because of the elopement of his daughter with a Christian, wants to take revenge on Antonio and demands one pound of flesh from his body. It is also narrated in the letter that finding no-way-out Antonio has resigned to his fate. He only says that he wants to see his friend Bassanio before meeting his fate. Bassanio, finding no alternative, has to leave his young, newly-wed beautiful bride and to go to Venice to see his friend. Portia lends him the required money to pay off the loan and secure Antonio's release. In addition, she sends her people in disguise to see the proceeding of the court and to see what can be done on their part to save the life of Antonio.

#### **7.2.4.3 Climax**

The trial is held in the court and is presided over by the Duke of Venice. As per the contract, Shylock demands one pound of flesh and refuses Bassanio's offer to pay double the money. Finding no alternative, Antonio resigns to his fate and is shirtless to meet his fate as Shylock wants to take one pound of his flesh. This scene is the climax of the story.

#### **7.2.4.4 Resolution/ Falling Action**

When Shylock is not ready to take the money and insists on taking a pound of flesh, a learned lawyer and a clerk are introduced to the court to defend the case of Antonio. Portia, disguised as a lawyer, offers Shylock triple the amount to spare Antonio but he is still unmoved. At this, a twist in the tale takes place when she agrees that Shylock is entitled to take a pound of flesh as it is his legal right but on condition that he would not spill a single drop of Antonio's blood in the process; otherwise, he will forfeit all his property. At this, Shylock hastily agrees to take the triple amount, but the lawyer refuses to pay him the amount. He even agrees to take just the initial amount, but she refuses. The Duke spares Shylock on the condition that he pays half of

his wealth to Antonio. Antonio says that he will not take the money if Shylock becomes a Christian and agrees to bequeath all his property to his daughter Jessica and Lorenzo. Shylock, in his helplessness, agrees to all the conditions. Bassanio, overjoyed by this unexpected turn of events, is ready to pay the lawyer whatever he wishes. The lawyer (Portia in disguise) refuses payment and expresses his desire to have the ring Bassanio was wearing. After much hesitation, Bassanio parts with the ring which was given to him by his wife, Portia. Similarly, the clerk (Nerissa in disguise) acquires the ring from Gratiano. Then they return to Belmont.

#### **7.2.4.5 Denouement**

The play culminates when Antonio is released. The misunderstanding regarding the rings is also resolved. Meanwhile, Portia comes with the news to Antonio that his ships have safely arrived at the port. Antonio is rich again. Thus, everything gets resolved, and the play ends on a happy note.

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### **7.3 Learning Outcomes**

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The present Unit introduced you to historical and literary sources of the play *The Merchant of Venice*. After going through the Unit, you should be able to identify the play as a tragicomedy. You should be familiar with the plot and its structure. You should be able to have an understanding of the play from your study of this Unit.

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### **7.4 Glossary**

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**Tragicomedy:** A play or novel containing elements of both comedy and tragedy.

**Casket:** A box or a chest

**Motifs:** dominant or recurring themes, ideas or concepts in a work of art.

**At stake:** At risk.

**Climax:** The point at which the highest level of interest and emotional response is achieved in a play.

**Usury:** The practice of lending money at high rates of interest

**Anecdote:** A short account/story of a real incident or person

**Conflict:** A clash, dispute or disagreement

**Culminate:** To end or conclude

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## 7.5 Sample Questions

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### 7.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. In which year was *The Merchant of Venice* published?  
(a) 1616                      (b) 1590  
(c) 1600                      (d) 1690
2. Who is the protagonist of the play?  
(a) Antonio                  (b) Bassanio  
(c) Shylock                  (d) Portia
3. Which casket contains the portrait of Portia?  
(a) Gold casket              (b) Silver casket  
(c) Lead casket              (d) None of these
4. Who chooses the correct casket?  
(a) Antonio                  (b) Bassanio  
(c) Lorenzo                  (d) Shylock
5. Who disguises as a lawyer in *The Merchant of Venice*?  
(a) Nerissa                  (b) Lorenzo  
(c) Portia                      (d) None of these
6. Why do Shylock and Antonio despise each other?  
(a) Religious differences    (b) Commercial differences  
(c) Social differences        (d) All the above
7. Who is the merchant of Venice in the play?  
(a) Lorenzo                  (b) Antonio  
(c) Bassanio                  (d) Gratiano
8. What is Shylock's profession?  
(a) Lawyer                    (b) Sailor  
(c) Merchant                  (d) Usurer
9. If Antonio cannot pay the money back in three months, he must give Shylock \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) A piece of land                      (b) A pound of his flesh  
(c) His ships                                (d) None of these

10. Why does Bassanio want to marry Portia?

- (a) She has money                      (b) He loves her  
(c) He is lonely                          (d) She is beautiful

#### **7.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss Antonio as one of the major characters of the play.
2. Why was Shylock adamant about taking a pound of Antonio's flesh?
3. What was the condition to win the hand of Portia for marriage?
4. Discuss Portia's relevance to the play.
5. Discuss the ending of *The Merchant of Venice*.

#### **7.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Is Shylock a victim, a villain, or a combination of both? Discuss.
2. Discuss in detail the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*.
3. Discuss *The Merchant of Venice* as a play about friendship and loyalty.

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## **7.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Janik, V. K. (2003). *The Merchant of Venice: A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
2. Margolies, D. *The Merchant of Venice*. In *Shakespeare's Irrational Endings* (pp. 86-111). Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2012.
3. Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Fingerprint Publishing, New Delhi. 2018.

## Unit – 8: Themes in *The Merchant of Venice*

### Structure

#### 8.0 Introduction

#### 8.1 Objectives

#### 8.2 Themes

##### 8.2.1 Revenge

##### 8.2.2 Prejudice

##### 8.2.3 Friendship

##### 8.2.4 Money & Wealth

##### 8.2.5 Mercy

##### 8.2.6 Love and Marriage

##### 8.2.7 Law and Justice

##### 8.2.8 Self-Interest vs Selflessness

#### 8.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 8.4 Glossary

#### 8.5 Sample Questions

#### 8.6 Suggested Readings

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### 8.0 Introduction

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As the play *The Merchant of Venice* opens, it is made known to the readers and audience that a beautiful, wealthy and virtuous heiress of Belmont, Portia has captivated the attention of numerous suitors. Among her suitors is a nobleman whose name is Bassanio but he is penniless. Without the wealth to woo her, he may never be able to win over Portia. So, to win her, he takes a loan from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender through his friend Antonio. The money was lent on the condition, that if Antonio fails to pay back the amount in due time, Shylock would take a pound of flesh from his body. After borrowing the money, Bassanio goes to Belmont and chooses the right casket and wins Portia as his bride. Portia is also happy at this and gives him a ring as a sign of her love and asks him never to part with it. In the meanwhile, Jessica, Shylock's daughter, elopes with Lorenzo; and they come to live there as well. Lorenzo is a good friend of

Bassanio. Jessica not only deserted her father but has also stole his money. Shylock is angry that his daughter has not only eloped with a Christian but has also taken away his wealth.

Amidst the wedding and happiness, we are informed that Antonio's ships have not arrived at the port; hence, he is unable to repay the loan. Shylock appeals to the court of Venice to let him take a pound of flesh as per the bond. Hearing this, Bassanio immediately leaves for Venice to save his friend Antonio. Portia comes disguised as a lawyer. She pleads for Shylock's mercy in vain. She even offers extra money to spare Antonio, but Shylock is not interested in money and wants to take revenge. When Shylock refuses to accept anything except the pound of flesh, Portia turns the table.

Portia agrees that as per the law, Shylock is entitled to take a pound of Antonio's flesh, but he has to ensure that not a drop of Antonio's blood is split in the process. Otherwise, he will forfeit all his property and money. In addition, he will face execution as per Venetian law on the charge of plotting to take the life of a Venetian citizen. At this, Shylock agrees to take the previously offered amount and spare Antonio, but now Portia refuses to give him any money. Antonio agrees to let Shylock go on the condition that he convert to Christianity and agree to give half of his money to Jessica and Lorenzo. Finding no-way-out Shylock agrees to the terms and leaves the court. Once they win the trial, Portia and Nerissa, disguised as the lawyer and her assistant, respectively demand the rings from their husbands as a token of gratitude for their services. Both the suitors unwillingly give their rings to them. Both the ladies hurry back to Belmont and wait for the return of their husbands. On the arrival of their husbands, they tease them by asking about the rings but later relate to them the entire scene. Meanwhile, Antonio's ships arrive at the port, and his fortune is restored. Thus, the play ends happily except for Shylock.

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## 8.1 Objectives

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The objectives of this Unit are to:

- discuss the various themes as depicted in the play.
- present the worldly and self-centred approach side by side with selflessness.
- assert the fact that friendship and human values are more respectable as compared to self-centred and monetary values.

- project the idea that those who do not take mercy on others have to face the music of their wrongdoing in this very world.
- underline the fact that money and wealth do not mean that we are happy and contented. Money is a dual-edge weapon, as is shown in the play.
- indicate that human relations, values and friendship need sacrifices.

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## 8.2 Themes

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### 8.2.1 Revenge:

Revenge is one of the major themes in the play. Shylock's need to take revenge on Antonio is heightened by his dislike for the entire Christian community. He is also angry at the fact that his daughter has eloped with Lorenzo, a Christian, along with his wealth. Shylock is so full of revenge that he justifies his act of hurting Antonio and the entire Christian community in these words, "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Shylock feels that he has been disrespected by Christians. So he tries to take revenge on Antonio. He is not ready to alter the conditions of the bond because he wants to punish Antonio. But he forgets that he is more emotional and logical, hence, he loses the trial in the play.

### 8.2.2 Prejudice:

Shylock is prejudiced against all Christians and refuses to trust them. When he first appears in the play, he remarks about Antonio, "I hate him for he is a Christian." Later, he asks his daughter to close the house because he does not trust Christians. It is the result of his strong hatred towards Christians that his daughter Jessica runs away with Lorenzo. She knows that her father will not be ready for her wedding to Lorenzo. He feels betrayed by his daughter. This betrayal strengthens his prejudice toward Christians. Christians are equally prejudiced against Shylock because he is a Jew. Although Antonio takes a loan from Shylock, his opinion about him remains the same: "I am as like to call thee [dog] again / to spit on thee again, to spurn thee too." It shows his deep hatred and prejudice towards Shylock. Shylock's lack of mercy towards Antonio, when he fails to repay the loan, strengthens Christian prejudice towards Jews. It is apparent that after the change of fate, Antonio puts the condition of Shylock's conversion to

Christianity, indicating that he and other Christians have a deep prejudice against Shylock's Jewish identity.

### **8.2.3 Friendship:**

Friendship is another recurrent theme in the play. Antonio's friendship is so strong that despite Bassanio not repaying his previous loan, Antonio still arranges another loan for him at the risk of his own life. Even though Antonio dislikes Shylock, he still takes a loan from him for the sake of his friend Bassanio. Bassanio asks Antonio not to accept the harsh conditions of the loan, but Antonio states that he is more than happy to die for him. This willingness to help his friend at any cost is testimony to their deep friendship. Bassanio's remark that "life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me, esteemed above thy life" also asserts their strong friendship. Later in the play, when Antonio is in trouble, Bassanio leaves his newlywed wife and comes back to Antonio to save his life. He offers Shylock double the amount to save his life. Hence, friendship is one of the main themes of the play.

### **8.2.4 Money & Wealth:**

Money and wealth is another major theme in the play. Some of the important characters in the play are wealthy, such as Antonio, Shylock and Portia. Wealth, however, does not guarantee happiness or contentment. Though Antonio is a rich merchant, his wealth could not guarantee the safe return of his ships. Though Portia is a rich heiress, she is unhappy due to the conditions her father puts on her marriage. Shylock is wealthy yet unhappy and discontent. Money is shown as a source of greed as well as a test for friendship in the play. Antonio has money, but he is not greedy and selfish; Shylock has money too, but it makes him greedy, cruel and inhuman. Money also acts as a resolution of the problem as Bassanio takes money to play the game of casket to win Portia. When Antonio was in trouble due to a lack of money to repay the loan, Portia suggests, "You shall have gold / To pay the petty debt twenty times over." Again, money comes to resolve the issue.

### **8.2.5 Mercy:**

Mercy, a divine quality, is yet another significant idea or subject matter in the play. The conflict between Shylock and Antonio has a major role in defining the concept of mercy. Shylock, by law and according to the terms of the bond, is eligible to take one pound of flesh from the body of Antonio, but everyone expects mercy and a feeling of humanity towards him. These feelings become strong when Antonio's well-wishers offer him more than the double amount to let him go. But here, Shylock shows a merciless attitude which develops even more

hatred and prejudice against Jews by the Christians. Later on, when the table is turned, and Shylock is in trouble, he expects that Antonio will treat him just the way he has treated him, but unlike him, Antonio shows mercy and kindness. He even tells him that if he turns to Christianity, he will not take any amount rather it will go to his daughter.

#### **8.2.6 Love and Marriage:**

In the play *The Merchant of Venice*, we have the theme of marriage that is closely associated with the theme of love. First, Bassanio's marriage takes place with Portia at Belmont; second, the elopement of Jessica, the daughter of Shylock, and her marriage with Lorenzo, a close friend of both Antonio and Bassanio. In both the marriages, there is a liking and love that is deeply linked with the attainment of marriage. When the marriage of Portia and Bassanio takes place after the game of caskets, there is great joy and happiness. The second marriage takes place between Lorenzo and Jessica, the daughter of the wealthy businessman Shylock. Lorenzo, a Christian, develops love for her, and she also loves him. She was unhappy with her father as he harbours hatred against Christians. She takes her father's money and elopes with Lorenzo. Though that act of his daughter enrages Shylock, he is unable to get back either his daughter or the money she has taken with her at the time of elopement. One of the key aspects of marriage at the time of Shakespeare was not associated with romance, love or liking, but it was more of a business deal, economical value or something of monetary benefits. Bassanio wants to win Portia in the game of casket mainly because he wants to become rich and get out of his debt as Portia was a rich woman and had a bright and prosperous future ahead. Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo takes place mainly because she was going to come with lots of money which will assure Lorenzo of a bright prospect.

There is yet another kind of love that does exist between Antonio and Bassanio that is shown time and again in the play. Antonio gives Bassanio a loan though he has no hope of getting it back. He gives him a loan at the risk of even his own life. Similarly, Bassanio is happy after winning Portia, but when he receives a letter from Antonio about his trouble, he hurries back to him to save him, and with the help of his wife, he is able to save his friend. Shylock's love for money is yet another type of love shown in the play. When money is taken away from him, he becomes dejected and depressed.

#### **8.2.7 Law and Justice:**

Law and justice have a significant role in the play *The Merchant of Venice*, as Shylock gives the required amount of money to Bassanio on the condition that if it is not returned in time,

he will take a pound of flesh from the body of Antonio. But when the time approaches, Antonio is in deep economic trouble, and he is unable to pay the amount of the loan. On the other hand, the daughter of Shylock has eloped with his money with the friend of Antonio and Bassanio, so he is even more enraged. In addition, he has a secret hatred against Antonio, so he comes to the court of law of Venice headed by the Duke of Venice. He demands the pound of flesh as the conditions of the bond are not fulfilled. Although, by law, Shylock was right in his demand, however, in the court of law he is expected to show mercy; when the friend of Antonio is ready to pay the amount of debt. Bassanio even offers him double the amount of the debt to spare Antonio, but Shylock insists on the pound of flesh instead of money.

Law and Justice go hand in hand as these are the inseparable part of the same coin. One cannot exist without the existence of the other. Venice was a city that was heavily indebted to foreign businessmen who had contributed a great deal to the economic development of the city. So they were duly protected and supported by the law of Venice. As Shylock is aware of the fact that he is supported by legal rights and the law is on his side, he demands justice in accordance with the court of law and justice system of Venice. But on the other hand, Antonio and his friends, who are Christian, depend on the New Testament law of mercy and salvation, which is why they plead Shylock to take the amount and spare Antonio from the pound of flesh. However, Shylock has a secret hatred and currently is infuriated with the episode of Jessica, so he is unmoved by the repeated requests.

Although such an attitude of Shylock is associated with the negative portrayal of Shylock, but if the law and justice are followed, he is not unjustified in his demand for a pound of flesh. On the humanitarian ground, he is expected to show mercy but by law, he is entitled to take that flesh. That is why a feeling of sympathy emerges for Shylock for the way it is settled down at the end. It is also important to note that in terms of Christian view, held by Bassanio and Portia, based on the notion that justice is ahead of the law and it requires justice and salvation instead of being cruel and inhuman, and that is a fundamental difference between the concept held by Shylock and the friends of Antonio in the court of law in Venice.

### **8.2.8 Self-Interest vs. Selflessness:**

Antonio and Shylock are both wealthy moneylenders. Unlike Antonio, Shylock charges interest. Shylock is cruel and inhuman and is unmoved by others' plight, Antonio values friendship and is willing to do anything for it, but Shylock fails to ensure his daughter's

happiness. This depiction of Shylock in the play reinforces the notion that the Jews are greedy and selfish. Antonio, Bassanio and Portia represent Christian values of humanity and loyalty.

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### 8.3 Learning Outcomes

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This Unit will assist the learners to achieve the following:

- discern the nature and mindset of two opposite and conflicting ideologies, Jews and Christians, as depicted in the play.
  - unearth the worldly, materialistic and monetary values over love, humanity, relation and friendship.
  - knowledge about the role of mercy in human life. Those who do not show mercy to another human have to suffer in the end.
  - learn the fact that money, power and authority are not a sign of happiness and contentment.
  - discern that hatred and prejudice against other human beings lead to insecurity, unhappiness and destruction.
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### 8.4 Glossary

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**Moneylender:** A person who lends money and charges interest

**Weed:** Prepare

**Spurn:** To scorn, despise or disdain

**Culminate:** To end or conclude

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### 8.5 Sample Questions

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#### 8.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Of what materials are the caskets made to be picked from by Portia's suitors?
  - (a) Gold, Silver, Teak

- (b) Silver, Pine, Stone
  - (c) Gold, Silver, Lead
  - (d) Copper, Iron, Lead
2. What is the reason behind Shylock's unreasonable condition while lending a loan to Antonio?
- (a) Hatred
  - (b) Love
  - (c) Inhumanity
  - (d) Friendship
3. The name of Shylock's daughter is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) Lorenzo
  - (b) Jessica
  - (c) Portia
  - (d) None of these
4. Shylock is a \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) Muslim
  - (b) Hindu
  - (c) Jew
  - (d) Christian
5. With whom does Shylock's daughter elope?
- (a) Antonio
  - (b) Bassanio
  - (c) Lorenzo
  - (d) Cook
6. Which of the following conflict is depicted in *The Merchant of Venice*?
- (a) Cultural
  - (b) Economic
  - (c) Academic
  - (d) Religious
7. How does Antonio react when Shylock insists on a pound of flesh from his body?
- (a) He cries
  - (b) He becomes restless
  - (c) He accepts his fate

- (d) He declines
8. Who comes to rescue Antonio disguised as a doctor of law?
- (a) Portia
  - (b) Jessica
  - (c) Bassanio
  - (d) Lorenzo
9. What reward does Bassanio give to the lawyer who saves Antonio?
- (a) Money
  - (b) Gold
  - (c) Ring
  - (d) House
10. What news does Antonio receive at the end of the play?
- (a) He has won a lottery
  - (b) His ships have sunk.
  - (c) His ships have arrived safely
  - (d) He has lost all his money.

**8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Why does Antonio accept Shylock's inhuman conditions while taking loan?
2. What is the actual reason behind Shylock's insistence on a pound of flesh?
3. How is Bassanio able to win Portia despite his humble background?
4. What is the result of hatred and prejudice in *The Merchant of Venice*?
5. Love and friendship are valued over selfishness in *The Merchant of Venice*. Discuss.

**8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss mercy vs inhumanity in light of Antonio and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Examine the portrayal of Shylock as a merciless moneylender.
3. Discuss in detail the themes in *The Merchant of Venice*?

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## 8.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Supernova Publishers. New Delhi, 2010.
2. Kaplan, M. Lindsay, ed. *William Shakespeare. The Merchant of Venice: Text and Context*. New York: Bedford, 2002.
3. Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Fingerprint Publishing. New Delhi, 2018.

## Unit - 9: Major Characters

### Structure

9.0 Introduction

9.1 Objectives

9.2 Major Characters

9.2.1 Shylock

9.2.2 Portia

9.2.3 Antonio

9.2.4 Bassanio

9.2.5 Let's Sum Up

9.3 Learning Outcomes

9.4 Glossary

9.5 Sample Questions

9.6 Suggested Readings

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### 9.0 Introduction

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*The Merchant of the Venice* is a play that remains relevant even today for its universal appeal. The play is often analyzed for its stereotypical portrayal of Jews and notion of Christian mercy. The characters portrayed by Shakespeare are timeless and universal. This Unit attempts to understand the major characters as portrayed by Shakespeare and understood by readers across the centuries.

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### 9.1 Objectives

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This Unit will help the students to:

- study the major characters in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of the Venice*.

- assess different dimensions of major characters such as Portia, Antonio, Shylock and Bassanio

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## 9.2 Major Characters

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William Shakespeare is a master of human psyche. He is always appreciated for the portrayal of psychological, moral and emotional turmoil of his central characters. His understanding of human nature has made him a universal craftsman and his characters can be easily adapted by people across the globe for their spatial, cultural, and political similarities. His mastery in portrayal of women characters is beyond comparison. As readers of his plays and students of English language and literature, one has to admit that William Shakespeare has influenced the art of play writing and character-building through his plays.

*The Merchant of Venice* is divided into five acts. Act One introduces most of the major characters i.e. Bassanio, Antonio, Shylock and Portia. Shakespeare portrays these characters in a subtle way and every scene reveals different shades and layers of these characters. Now let us analyse these major characters one by one.

### 9.2.1 Shylock:

Shylock is a major character in the play. He is a money lender. Shakespeare has given different dimensions to Shylock's character which are difficult to understand on surface level. Though *The Merchant of Venice* seems to be a love story, it brings out the hypocrisy of followers of Christianity, their sense of morality, as well as anti-Semitic views. Portia's universal appeal for mercy and eloquent speech must be seen from Jewish point of view also not just as mercy shown to contemporary Jewish society by the Christian rulers. Shylock is not a born monster or vicious character.

Shylock being a Jew, is put under scrutiny vis-à-vis Christian values and principles. This obviously portrays him in dark colors. Christian characters like Antonio harshly comment on Shylock for being a Jew, openly express their anti-Semitic feelings and boast about Christian values of love, mercy and kindness. Antonio and others expect Shylock to treat them with respect, love and kindness. Many such humiliating conditions reduced the Jews as low class citizens. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is punished for attempting to take a Christian life in Venice. The important thing is that one should examine Shylock not only as a Jew from the

Christian point of view. One should also look at him as a human being from any other religion, in his case, he is Jew. Shylock expresses his agony thus:

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else,  
it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and  
hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my  
bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine  
enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath  
not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with  
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject  
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as  
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?  
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison  
us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not  
revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will  
resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,  
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian  
wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by  
Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you  
teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I  
will better the instruction.

Shylock is portrayed as a miser and a greedy moneylender who seeks vengeance for the mistreatment received at the hands of Antonio. Antonio time and again scolded him for lending money on interest. But historical facts reveal that Jews were restricted to ghettos. Christian soldiers used to protect these ghettos from the attacks of Christians. The Jews were restricted from participating in politics and military. They were not allowed to keep weapons. Then Jews were only left with the choice of business like lending money. It is natural they would charge interest on it for their livelihood. On the other hand, they took care that money would be returned otherwise their own existence was in jeopardy. Shylock for that matter loved his money as much as his own daughter. In fact he loves his wealth more than his daughter. When he finds that his

daughter has eloped with his wealth, his first concern is his wealth. He laments over the loss: “O, my ducats! O, my daughter!” However, a close reading of his character suggests that he valued the people and their memories more than money. For instance, he was hurt because Jessica, his daughter, sold his ring. This ring was gifted to him by his wife as an expression of their bonding before their wedding. His grief becomes heavier as the ring was a connection between him and his dead wife.

In the Trial Scene, he is shown as a completely evil character for demanding a pound of flesh, instead of the money that was offered to him. If he was solely after money, he would have accepted the offer. But his resentment for Antonio is stronger than his greed for money.

It was a relationship of mutual hatred between Antonio and Shylock. Antonio hates Shylock because he is a Jew and Shylock dislikes him for being a Christian. Shylock says:

“How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian.”

Shylock acts as a mirror to Antonio’s character. The major argument of the play is hatred is a circular motion. It comes back to the sender. Shylock argues rationally, when Salarino wondered what Shylock would do with the pound of flesh. Shylock conveys that he is just following the footsteps of Antonio. His resentment and thirst for revenge is the result of Antonio’s hatred for him, as Shylock says:

“The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard  
but I will better the instruction.”

Shylock’s strong sense of victim-hood is highlighted when his daughter Jessica marries a Christian. This can be seen from the perspective of a father whose daughter eloped with a person belonging to a community who hated their existence as a Jew. His understanding of the dehumanization and oppression at the hands of Christians provokes him to avenge Christian community as the whole. He justifies his sense of revenge as:

“If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”

But blind hatred and vengeance leads to downfall. Shylock forgets this. His argument to seek a pound of flesh is legal, but the exact nature of law brings out some loopholes in the bond. Portia cleverly points it out and the argument is completely reversed. Shylock has to suffer at the hands of Venetian Law for his attempt to kill Antonio, a Venetian Christian. Though Antonio only confiscates half of Shylock’s property, his demand to Shylock to convert to Christianity is

cruel. He correctly says, “you take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live” (Act IV, Scene i).

However, it must be remembered that the portrayal of Shylock is true to the times that he represents. Shakespeare does not intend his audience to admire Shylock or to sympathize with him. The sympathies remain with his daughter and with Antonio. So in the historical perspective of the play we cannot say that Antonio was cruel to ask Shylock to convert to Christianity. That was not how Shakespeare delineated him.

### **9.2.2 Portia:**

Portia is one of the well-known women characters of William Shakespeare’s dramatic universe. Shakespeare makes her strong not only by virtue of her beauty as per the contemporary norms of society but also by sharp wit, natural wisdom combined with essential common sense and compassion. Her appeal as an individual reflects her sense of commitment in relationship.

She keenly uses the heroic metaphor at the end of the casket scene. When Bassanio chooses the casket, she compares him to Hercules. For her it was heroic action because, Bassanio accomplished the difficult task of choosing the correct casket. The condition put forward to win her hand was a great punishment for her. This meant that she can only marry one who chooses the correct casket or nobody. She wanted a life partner with all manly attributes combined with great sense of commitment in relation, who would go to any extreme for her, who would be expert in decision making in crisis, who would rise above all odds and protect her through her life.

Portia is portrayed as fair minded, wise and witty. However, she is portrayed as prejudiced when she disdains the color of the Moroccan prince. When he fails to identify the correct casket, she heaves a sigh of relief and says, “Let all of his complexion choose me so” (Act II Scene vii). In reality, she does not want anybody who looks like him or has his skin tone to win her in marriage. It clearly hints at her racist nature. But let us remember that racial prejudices are considered thus only later not during Shakespeare’s times. Portia was only reacting according to the times in which she lived.

Portia is portrayed as generous and large-hearted. When she comes to know that Antonio is in trouble due to the bond he has signed to help Bassanio, she admires their friendship. She is impressed by Antonio’s gesture towards Bassanio. She is ready to give her wealth to satisfy the greed of Shylock and to rescue Antonio from his legal trap:

“You shall have gold / To pay the petty debt twenty times over.”

Thus, it can be said that Portia's wealth came to the rescue of Antonio. In doing so she saved Bassanio from the guilt he would have suffered due to his inability to save his friend.

Portia's mettle is proved in the Trial Scene. She, disguised as lawyer, preaches the value of mercy. She requests Shylock to show mercy and forgive Antonio. When Shylock asks her the reason, she eloquently says:

The quality of mercy is not strained:  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes[.]

In Shakespearean era, Christians believed in the values and principles of the New Testament. The same is reflected in Portia's argument. It suggests her awareness of religious implications and courage to put it in public. This perspective of *Mercy* from Portia's point of view is a Christian value where God forgives the sinner on pleading for mercy and leads the sinner towards salvation. This Christian value is reflected in the New Testament. Portia preaches that Mercy is an attribute of God. God is more powerful than law and human beings. But according to St. Paul in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as one who requires the strict adherence to the rules. On breaking the rules, God punishes and brings the strayed person on to the right path.

Portia (or for that matter the Christians during Shakespeare's times) wanted to follow the path of God as depicted in the New Testament. But they do not show any mercy to Shylock who wanted to execute the law not in the spirit but in letter. She, thus, promotes the pro-Christian and anti-Jewish agenda. It would be impossible to portray a Jew to show mercy, so Portia a Christian has to do so. On reading the bond carefully, she finds the loophole in the execution of the law. She forces him to beg for mercy by seizing his estate and his honor. So mercy in *The Merchant of Venice* is not delivered in the true sense of its spirit as Portia attempted to portray it.

Portia outwits Shylock using a legal loophole in the deed. She justifies the basis of Venice's law by using the law only to save Antonio. Portia invites Shylock to get the pound of flesh from Antonio's body:

Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.  
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more  
But just a pound of flesh: if thou cut'st more  
Or less than a just pound, be it but so much

As makes it light or heavy in the substance,  
Or the division of the twentieth part  
Of one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn  
But in the estimation of a hair,  
Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.

Portia shows the skills of a lawyer, minute observations and interpretation of the bond. On the basis of her intelligent reading and interpretation of the bond, she saves the life of Antonio.

She helps other characters to achieve their kind of perfection in the course of time with her own development as a poet and a lawmaker. It can be witnessed in the scenes devoted to lottery, Antonio's trial, and the ring. Her use of poetic language is completely different from the way she interprets the law. It increases the complexity of the character. Her sense of commitment as well as rising to the moment brings out the happy ending in all the three important events of the play i.e. lottery episode, safeguarding the Venetian law and the ring-bond scene at the end of the play.

She has a good understanding of music and can relate that with the possible perfection of human life:

"Nothing is good (I see) without respect,  
Methinks it [the music] sounds much sweeter than by day."

Human beings observations of perfection are casual and circumstantial as:

The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark  
When neither is attended.

It is exactly through such possibilities that Portia identifies perfection:

"How many things by season, season'd are  
To their right praise, and true perfection?"

Portia, thus, is portrayed as a woman with rare combination of brain and beauty. Her wisdom outwits all the men in the play.

### **9.2.3 Antonio:**

Antonio is one of the central characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. He is an influential and rich aristocrat of Venice. He is a merchant by profession. His ships are on the sea and his financial future is attached to his shipments. When the play begins, he hopes that he would earn a lot of money through his shipments. But later on, it is reported that his ships are looted and his

reputation as a wealthy person is in danger. He also signs the bond with Shylock offering a pound of flesh on failing to repay the loan taken for his friend Bassanio. He seems to be proud of his Christian lineage as he repeatedly scolds Shylock for his money lending and hurls abuses and insults for being a Jewish moneylender. Antonio is melancholic. His love for Bassanio is one of the reasons for his melancholy. When he comes to know about Bassanio's love interest and his desire to win Portia, Antonio feels insecure at the loss of his love. He attempts to show that his love for Bassanio is greater than any woman can love Bassanio. His jealousy and possessive nature causes him desperation to hold on to his friend. This jealousy is evident in the trial scene when he implores Bassanio:

Commend me to your honourable wife,  
Tell her the process of Antonio's end,  
Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death:  
And when the tale is told, bid her be the judge  
Whether Bassanio had not once a love.

Antonio has a reputation for giving loan without interest. This becomes one of the reasons of Shylock's hatred as it affects his business. He says:

How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls "interest."  
Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him!

Antonio helplessly goes to Shylock to help Bassanio to get a loan. Antonio predicts Shylock's behaviour. He knows that Shylock would treat them with great humility and honor but would not leave his cunning and vengeance nature:

Mark you this, Bassanio,  
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart:  
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

Antonio too hates him and even though he has taken loan from him, he does not want any favor or mercy from him. He cautions Shylock to lend him money not as a friend but as an enemy on whom he can exact the punishment. He says:

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend?  
But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face  
Exact the penalty.

Antonio knows very well that Shylock would never favor him. His understanding of Shylock's personality is prophetic. He foresees Shylock's vindictiveness. Antonio being Bassanio's friend, is ready to die for him. His love never falls short to safeguard Bassanio's happiness. When time comes to face the punishment, he ponders on his love for Bassanio. He wants to convey this love for Bassanio to Portia as well as quoted earlier.

In the Trial Scene, Antonio forgives Shylock for trying to kill him by using the bond he has signed against him. Instead, he demands Shylock to convert to Christianity and give up money lending. Previously, Shylock was publicly insulted for lending money on interest and spat on his face in public. Antonio pleads the Duke thus:

So please my lord the duke and all the court  
To quit the fine for one half of his goods,  
I am content; so he will let me have  
The other half in use, to render it,  
Upon his death, unto the gentleman  
That lately stole his daughter:

Two things provided more, that, for this favour,  
He presently become a Christian;  
The other, that he do record a gift,  
Here in the court, of all he dies possess'd,  
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

Antonio comes to know about Portia's reality. He assures her that Bassanio has given his ring as a payment for saving his life. But now onwards, Bassanio would never run short of wealth. He says:

I once did lend my body for his wealth;  
Which, but for him that had your husband's ring,  
Had quite miscarried: I dare be bound again,  
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord  
Will never more break faith advisedly.

Thus, Antonio's love and sacrifice for Bassanio lands him in trouble but the same friendship and love come back to him and he is saved in the end.

#### **9.2.4 Bassanio:**

Bassanio is another nobleman of Venice. He is extravagant in his effort to showcase status. He is bankrupt and is in search of fortunes for luxurious and comfortable life. He decides to marry Portia for her wealth. This was the norm of Elizabethan times that aristocrats would enter into matrimony for acquiring wealth. Bassanio is also impressed by the beauty and intelligence of Portia and genuinely falls in love with her. Though he may seem to exploit Antonio's love for his own goals, he displays the same loyalty to rescue his friend from death. He is ready to sacrifice all his wealth, wife and fortune for Antonio. It can be said that he is the cause for major events in the play.

Bassanio and Antonio are portrayed as great friends. Bassanio turns to Antonio when he needs money to impress Portia. Antonio readily gives him lots of money without a second thought. He borrows money from Shylock by signing a bond offering a pound of flesh if he fails to repay the debt. It shows that Antonio's friendship is superior to any other relationship. He deeply loves his friend. He is ready to undergo any trial to fulfill the desires of his friend and his happiness. Bassanio passionately expresses his love for Antonio. He says, "life itself, my wife and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life."

Bassanio is mesmerized by the beauty and reputation of Portia. He compares her with Portia, wife of Brutus and daughter of Cato. It hints at the influence she has in political and financial affairs. Portia's wealthy status and her riddle show these qualities. He considers that his travel to Belmont is in reality a gold rush:

In Belmont is a lady richly left;  
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,  
Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes  
I did receive fair speechless messages:  
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued  
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia:  
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,  
For the four winds blow in from every coast  
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks  
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece;  
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,  
And many Jasons come in quest of her.  
O my Antonio, had I but the means  
To hold a rival place with one of them,  
I have a mind presages me such thrift,  
That I should questionless be fortunate!

This makes Antonio more jealous of Portia. But he borrows money for him from Shylock at the cost of his own life. Bassanio reaches Belmonte determined to win Portia. He cleverly decodes the caskets. He wins the puzzle by following his heart. He is not a rationalist. Portia expresses her love for Bassanio in an elaborate manner:

You see me Lord Bassanio where I stand,  
Such as I am; though for myself alone  
I would not be ambitious in my wish  
To wish myself much better, yet for you,  
I would be trebled twenty times myself,  
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times  
more rich,  
That only to stand high in your account,

I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends  
 Exceed account: but the full sum of me  
 Is sum of something: which to term in gross,  
 Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised,  
 Happy in this, she is not yet so old  
 But she may learn: happier than this,  
 She is not bred so dull but she can learn;  
 Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit  
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,  
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.  
 Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours  
 Is now converted. But now I was the lord  
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,  
 Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now  
 This house, these servants, and this same myself  
 Are yours, -my lord's! -I give them with this ring...

This is necessary to understand how Portia too was desperate to get a suitable husband to lead a happy and meaningful life. She wanted a partner equally witty, loving and who would know her worth. It simultaneously underscores the disparity in gender relations.

Portia gifts him a ring to check his fidelity and sincerity. He promises her that he would consider the ring more than his life and only death would part him from the ring:

Madam, you have bereft me of all words,  
 Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,  
 And there is such confusion in my powers,  
 As after some oration fairly spoke  
 By a beloved prince, there doth app  
 Among the buzzing pleased multitude,  
 Where every something being blent together,  
 Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy  
 Express'd, and not express'd: but when this ring  
 Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence,-  
 O then be bold to say Bassanio's dead!

But Portia disguised as a lawyer asks for the ring as her reward and Bassanio gives it as a reward for saving the life of his friend. Later on he comes to know that the lawyer was Portia disguised as a man. He feels happy to save the friend's life as well as secure the love of his life also.

### 9.2.5 Let's Sum Up:

William Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* portrays the characters in the light of contemporary belief and assumptions. Portia had to disguise as man to present herself as a lawyer to save Antonio. All important offices were held by men in Elizabethan times. Antonio's ships on the sea suggests the import, export and colonial expansion during the period. Bassanio too is portrayed in the light of contemporary understanding of masculinity and courtship. Shylock's depiction as villain shows the prevalent anti-Semitism. However, Shakespeare leaves it to the readers to interpret these characters as per their understanding. All the characters have their unique roles to play. Shakespeare thus proves that he is master of character portrayal.

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## 9.3 Learning Outcomes

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand the major characters in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of the Venice*.
- discuss the different dimensions of characters as such as Portia, Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock.

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## 9.4 Glossary

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**Mercy: Compassion or Forgiveness.** A Christian value as depicted in the play. It is a virtue that leads to salvation.

**Anti-Semitism:** Feelings against Jews.

**Old Testament:** Old book of the Bible where Prophet Moses gave religious preachings and rules to lead pious and disciplined life.

**New Testament:** New book of the Bible; it contains the life and preachings of Jesus Christ. It also contains preaching of the disciples of Jesus.

**Jew:** A member of a community whose traditional religion is Judaism.

**Christian:** the follower of teachings of Jesus Christ

**Usury:** Money lending

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## 9.5 Sample Questions

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### 9.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. State whether the following statements are True or False:

- a. Mercy is a Christian value as depicted in the play. (True or False)
- b. Portia belongs to the city of Venice. (True or False)
- c. Shylock is against Jews. (True or False)
- d. Antonio loves Bassanio. (True or False)
- e. Portia helps other characters to attain perfection. (True or False)

2. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:

- a. "My \_\_\_\_ upon the forfeit, that your lord  
Will never more break faith advisedly."  
a. Soul b. Body c. Fortune d. Property
- b. "but when this \_\_\_\_  
Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence,  
O then be bold to say Bassanio's dead!"  
a. Button b. Ring c. Hair d. Nail
- c. "Mark you this, \_\_\_\_\_,  
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."  
a. Lorenzo b. Portia c. Bassanio d. Shylock
- d. "How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a \_\_\_\_\_."  
a. Jew b. Muslim c. Hindu d. Christian
- e. "Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.  
Shed thou no \_\_\_\_\_, nor cut thou less nor more  
But just a pound of flesh:"  
a. Tear b. Blood c. Hair d. water

### **9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

**Write short notes on the following:**

1. The character of Portia as a lawyer
2. Importance of the Trial Scene
3. Antonio's love for Bassanio
4. The role of the ring in the play

### **9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Examine in detail the character portrayal in *The Merchant of Venice*.
  2. Discuss the role of Antonio and Bassanio in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
  3. Elucidate with illustrations the significance of Portia in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
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## **9.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Cerasano, S.P. Ed. *William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*. Routledge: New York, 2004
2. Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*. Ed. M.M. Mahood. Cambridge UP: London, 2003.

## **Unit - 10: Language of William Shakespeare**

### **Structure**

**10.0** Introduction

**10.1** Objectives

**10.2** Language of William Shakespeare

**10.2.1** Shakespeare's Style of Writing Plays

**10.2.2** Shakespeare's Use of Sentence Structure

**10.2.3** Shakespeare's Use of Diction

**10.2.4** Wordplay in Shakespeare's plays

**10.2.5** Implied Stage Action

**10.3** Learning Outcomes

**10.4** Glossary

**10.5** Sample Questions

**10.6** Suggested Readings

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### **10.0 Introduction**

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Dear readers, we know that language is the medium of communication. Whenever we want to express our wishes, opinions, and ideas, we use language. Although there are many different languages in the world, the use of all the languages is the same. We in India have different dialects (dialect is a regional variety of a language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). Similarly, other countries also have their own dialects. Writers sometimes switch between languages which makes it difficult to understand them. For example, while writing a play in English, a writer may use some Latin and/or Greek phrases or, slang (slang refers to use of colloquial words, expressions, and meanings that are informal and used by a particular group of people) and dialects etc.

William Shakespeare is a writer with universal appeal and has contributed a lot to the development of the English language. Most readers may find it difficult to understand

Shakespeare's use of language. However, it is an issue that can be resolved with ease. Those readers, who are familiar with Latin, French, and German, and those who have read poetry, will have no trouble grasping the language of poetic plays. Others will have to strive to make sense of complicated sentence constructions. Shakespeare's words can be difficult to read even for people who have mastered the talent of reading universal sentence forms. Mostly, these issues are handled for us in the theatre by actors, who learn the language and express it for us so that the key meaning is heard, and at least felt when combined with the stage action. When we read on our own, we must follow the same pattern as the actors: go over the lines (with a dictionary in hand) until the puzzles are solved, lines reveal their poetry, and people speak in words and phrases that are satisfying, and delightfully remembered. In this Unit, we will attempt to understand Shakespeare's use of language and observe how the skilful organisation of sentences, words, and phrases accomplish various goals.

***Check your Progress***

1. What is the use of language?

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2. What is a dialect?

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## **10.1 Objectives**

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This Unit will have the following objectives for learners:

- to learn the special use of language by playwrights.
- to learn the art of decoding the language of the playwrights, especially Shakespeare.
- to observe the art of sentence structure in Shakespeare.
- to observe different linguistic techniques used to produce dramatic effect and meaning in *The Merchant of Venice*.
- to experience the use of stage action in Shakespeare.

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## 10.2 Language of William Shakespeare

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Shakespeare lived in a period when the English language was rapidly evolving. He is a significant figure in English literature who contributed to the development of the English language. Shakespeare recognized the rapid language change and took advantage of it by attempting to add new phrases, words, and idioms. He was always interested in using modern English's newly emerging grammar and spelling patterns to create aesthetic ambiguity. Shakespeare's use of language is based on several sophisticated patterns which are essentially the themes and ideas both in prose and poetry. Shakespeare employs motifs (repeated concepts, symbols, words, etc.) such as; “honesty” in *Othello*, “Time” in *Macbeth*, and “Enactment” in *Hamlet* to build a lexicon with his unique artistry.

However, Shakespeare's preference for words is not only important in providing specific meanings but also helpful in enacting those meanings. In other words, Shakespeare used his words to act according to his will. Shakespeare, for example, successfully uses Latin derived terminology and ordinary native English lexicon to create a dramatic effect in his play, *Macbeth*. Let us observe the following lines from the play and examine the lexical technique:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly. If the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success but that this blow  
Might be the be-all-and-end all-here  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come...

This soliloquy presents the two lexicons of Latin and English. Shakespeare does it to serve his purpose. The Latin words are used to show that Macbeth is unable to find a common term to describe the heinous act of murder. When a person witnesses a murderous scene, he must be shocked and becomes dumb for a while. So, the words like “assassination”, “Surcease”, and “Consequence” come out as words that are rare and unsaid, and the act is equally unspoken. Macbeth is in a way dumb to express the situation. He is unable to bear the murderous scene. The two possibilities are portrayed by two sorts of diction, a double voice, as Macbeth is torn between the surface look and the dismal reality. A similar contrast between formal Latinate and

informal Anglo-Saxon language may be seen in many plays that contrast different ways of perceiving.

Shakespeare is an expert in showing dichotomous ideas. This duality is also used in *The Merchant of Venice*. In this play, there is a debate between competing ideas; of justice and charity, profit and suitability, gentile and Jew: “Hath not a Jew’s eyes? Hath not Jew Hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affectations, passions...” Shakespeare's language is enchanting in terms of surface form, formal invention and evolution; nevertheless, when it is at its best, the language resources become a subject, pervading the text's entire internal design and architecture.

***Check your Progress***

1. Shakespeare has used fluidity of language to coin new words and phrases. (true/false)
2. Motif is an idea that appears frequently in a story. (true/false)

**10.2.1 Shakespeare’s Style of Writing Plays:**

Shakespeare’s plays are written both in prose and verse. Prose and verse are used extensively in *The Merchant of Venice*. It was common in Elizabethan drama to use a combination of prose and poetry. The prose passages are generally reserved for the common folk while the elite class use poetic expressions. The use of poetic expressions has contributed immensely to the rich source of quotations from Shakespeare that are extensively in use even in the present times. Some examples of famous quotes from Shakespeare’s plays are:

“To be, or not to be: that is the question.” (*Hamlet*)

“If music be the food of love, play on.” (*Twelfth Night*)

“Cowards die many times before their deaths;

The valiant never taste of death but once.” (*Julius Caesar*)

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other word would smell as sweet.” (*Romeo and Juliet*)

“All the world’s a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.” (*As You Like It*)

“Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” (*King Henry IV*)

Now let us study the use of prose in Shakespeare’s plays.

**Prose:** Shakespeare often uses dichotomous ideas in his plays. He is aware that there are different classes in society, for example, common masses and nobility. So, he chooses prose for the common masses and verse for nobility. When we talk in daily life we talk in a simple language. There is no complex terminology used in our day-to-day conversations. So, Shakespeare uses prose for common characters in his plays. It is a sort of language aimed to make the listener feel as if they are using their own language. Hence, there is no rhythm or meter in these lines. He gives these dialogues to characters such as killers, servants, and porters. Many important personalities are also shown to communicate in prose because it was common in the middle class society. For example, *Merry Wives of Windsor* is mostly written in prose because it is about middle-class society. Another example is of Lancelot Gobbo from *The Merchant of Venice* who speaks in prose:

To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master who (God bless the mark!) is a kind of devil; and, to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the friend, who (saving your reverence) is the devil himself.

Lancelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant, despises Shylock's methods and thinks about taking up a new job. We classify it as prose because it does not have rhythm or rhyme and runs freely without regard for where the line should end on the page. We can also say that Lancelot is a commoner who uses Elizabethan slang. To differ in the status of a class in a society, one needs to have a difference in behaviour and in the words he/she utters. For this special purpose, Shakespeare uses prose for his common characters.

**Verse:** Shakespeare's plays are mostly written in verse. In Shakespearean plays, a verse speaker belongs to the nobility or upper class, just as a prose speaker belongs to a lower class. His plays are usually about noble characters. He uses the blank verse in his poems. It lacks rhyme, but each line has an inherent rhythm that follows a predictable pattern. Shakespeare always preferred iambic pentameter. Let's have a look at an example:

“The pound of flesh which I demand of him  
Is dearly bought. is mine, and I will have it.”

*(The Merchant of Venice)*

Here, every other syllable's accent is as in the natural accent of each word.

Shakespeare occasionally found it necessary to remove a vowel from a word to keep the line's flow. For example, in Portia's speech, ‘strain'd’ and ‘bless'd’ are pronounced as a single syllable:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath; it is twice bless'd;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that take.

*(The Merchant of Venice)*

Shakespeare employed this writing technique to direct the action on the stage. When two characters are speaking, one of them may finish the ten-syllable line that the other character started, demonstrating that one line must swiftly follow the other. This is referred to as a shared or split line. Consider the following scenario from the same play:

Portia: You stand within his danger, do you not?

Antonio: Ay, so he says.

Portia: Do you confess bond?

Antonio: I do.

Portia: Then must the Jew be merciful.

**Trochaic Verse:** Shakespeare uses different kinds of verses at some key points. The accent is reversed, and the line is cut in half. An accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable in this metrical foot. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*, where magic or ritual is involved, he regularly uses this verse. In *Macbeth*, the witches talk in trochaic verse, which differs from that of earthly mortals, giving them an unnatural sound, for example:

Witch: "Round about the cauldron go;

In the prisoned entrails throw."

*(Macbeth)*

You can count the syllables in the lines while reading or performing a Shakespearean play. You will be astounded by Shakespeare's consistency. Draw circles around the syllables that have an accent. You will note that he emphasizes the most critical terms. Words like; "the," "is," and "and" that have no meaning are usually seen in unaccented lines. Iambic pentameter has been dubbed a "heartbeat," and it appears in each of Shakespeare's lines.

### 10.2.2 Shakespeare's Use of Sentence Structure:

We can only understand the meaning of an English phrase or sentence if the words are in the correct order. Take this example: "The snake bit the boy" and "The boy bit the snake" have very distinct meanings even though the constituent phrases are identical. This occurs because, in the English language, the place and order of words are extremely important. The reader may be

perplexed by the unique arrangement. Shakespeare makes use of such a unique order of words that readers get astounded to see and perceive anything out of it. One must read his play multiple times to understand these unique patterns.

Shakespeare regularly deviates from the “standard” English phrase structure for the sake of rhythm. He does it for laying stress on a specific word in a line’s poetic rhythm, and to allow the character to have his/her own speech patterns. The performers will only be able to give an effective performance of the play if they figure out the sentence patterns and can express the sentences clearly. When reading a play, we should do the same thing: if we are perplexed by a character's speech, we should observe if words are being expressed in an unexpected order.

Shakespeare frequently conveys unpleasant emotions in unusual ways (e.g., instead of “he does not go”, we find “he goes not”). When Antonio says in the first line of *The Merchant of Venice*, “I know not why I'm so sad,” he is using this structure; Selarino responds in Act I, scene i, “Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.”

Shakespeare's sentences are usually difficult to understand because he omits words rather than using unique patterns or interruptions. When we say, “Heard from him yet?” our listener sub-consciously adds the missing “Have you?” at the beginning of the question. When Gratiano says: “Well, keep me company but two years more,/Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue,” he omits the words “if you” before “keep”. Omissions are infrequent in, *The Merchant of Venice*, and they appear to be used primarily to generate regular iambic pentameter lines.

### **10.2.3 Shakespeare’s Use of Diction:**

You may notice some new vocabulary as you begin reading the initial Acts of a Shakespearean play. These words are no longer in use, which is why they are archaic. Such words can be found in the opening scenes of *The Merchant of Venice*. There are words like; “sooth” meaning ‘truth’, “piring” meaning ‘peering’, “an” meaning “if” and “doit” meaning ‘jot’. Only by reading more of William Shakespeare's plays will you get familiar with these terms.

Shakespeare uses obscure words in all of his plays, as he does in *The Merchant of Venice*. For example, the word “yet” is used in place of “always,” the term “straight” is used in place of “at once” or “immediately,” the phrase “disabled” is used in place of “depleted” or “reduced,” and the word “ripe” is used in place of “urgent” in the opening scenes of *The Merchant of Venice*. Such words will become more recognizable to you as you continue to study Shakespeare's language.

Most of the words used by Shakespeare appear unusual not because they have remained static or fluid in English across time, but because Shakespeare has used them to create a dramatic world with its own space, time, and history. *The Merchant of Venice* is a great example of Shakespeare's use of language to create dramatic worlds. Shakespeare succeeds in creating two such worlds in this play: the commercial world of Venice and the romantic world of Portia's estate in Belmont.

He builds background mythology that underpins Bassanio's quest in the first and third scenes of the play, referring to "argosies," "signiors," "ventures," "shallows," "ducats," "the Rialto," and "Usances"; in the same scenes, he refers to "Jason," "the Golden Fleece," and "Colchosstrand." The "local" references help to recognize the places in which Antonio, Bassanio, and Shylock live (Venice) or Portia and Nerissa (Belmont). As you progress through the play, you will increasingly become familiar with these places.

#### **10.2.4 Wordplay in Shakespeare's plays:**

Many books have been written on the subject of language in Shakespeare. He uses literary devices such as puns, metaphors, malapropisms, and similes. A pun is a combination of words that sound alike but have completely distinct meanings (or one word; that has multiple meanings). "Suffrance is the badge of all our tribe," Shylock says; in the third scene of, *The Merchant of Venice*, playing on two meanings of sufferance ("forbearance" and "suffering"); his line, "And all for use of that which is mine own" contains a pun on the word *use*, which means both; "lending with interest" and "putting to use." The pun on gentle/gentile is the one that is heard the most in this piece. It's not always clear when "gentle" means "gentile," but in numerous instances, such as; "gentle Jew," "Now by my hood, a gentle and no Jew," and "we all expect a gentle answer, Jew," the pun appears to be extended. Shakespeare's ingenuity has used a prolonged pun to great effect.

In some Shakespearean plays, we find the use of malapropisms (grotesquely misused words) in humorous sequences. Both Lancelot Gobbo and his father, old Gobbo, are prone to such gaffes. Lancelot, for example, uses "incarnation" to mean "incarnate" and "impertinent" to mean "pertinent"; Old Gobbo uses "infection" to mean "affection" and "defect" to mean "effect." Lancelot also uses "rebuke" and "agitation" for "approach" and "cogitation," respectively.

A metaphor is a literary device that compares two unrelated things through a perceived similarity. Bassanio says to Antonio, "If you please/ Shoot another arrow that self-way/which

you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,/ As I watch the aim, or to find both/or bring you latter hazard back again.” Antonio's loan to Bassanio is metaphorically depicted as an arrow, and Antonio is encouraged to shoot a second arrow in the same way as he shot the first (i.e., get back both the loan for which Bassanio is now asking and the first loan, now lost).

Metaphors are commonly employed to represent complex topics, and the speaker is provided vocabulary to help him or her communicate the idea or feeling to his or her listener and audience. Metaphors play an important role in expressing characters' emotions in several Shakespearean plays. Similes abound in *The Merchant of Venice*. For example, when Bassanio describes Portia to Antonio, he says, “her sunny locks/ Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,/ Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' Strond,/ And many Johnsons come in quest of her,” equating her hair to the golden fleece sought by Jason and the Argonauts, her estate of Belmont to the land where the Fleece was to be found.

#### **10.2.5 Implied Stage Action:**

Finally, while reading Shakespearean plays, it is important to keep in mind that we are reading a performance script. It should be noted that the dialogues are written to accompany actions on stage. Some directions are given by playwrights in “stage directions,” while others are conveyed through dialogues. Jessica says; “Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains” in *The Merchant of Venice*, implying that she throws a casket (allegedly laden with jewels and money) from her window. When Bassanio exclaims in the trial scene, “Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?” from Gratiano's later phrase, “Not on thy sole but on thy soul, hard Jew,” it is apparent that Shylock sharpens his dagger on the sole of his shoe.

There are many situations in the play which are not clear. It is unclear what Antonio does to cause Shylock to declare: “How like a fawning publican he looks!” when he describes Antonio's entrance. It is also unclear how Lancelet's interaction with his practically blind father should be staged. Lancelet kneels (his father instructs him to get up), and his father replies, “Lord revered may He be, what a beard hast thou? Dobbin, my filly, has more hair on his tail than you have on your chin.” “It would appear, then, that Dobbin's tail develops backwards,” Lancelet responds. When I last saw him, I'm sure he had more hair on his tail than I do on my face.” Where Lancelet kneels, it is customary for him to turn his back on his father, causing the father to misinterpret his son's long hair for a beard—but this is a point when the director (and we, as readers, in our imaginations) can select how the joke should be played.

Working closely with Shakespearean language, readers have noticed that the proposed stage action has been extremely fulfilling over the past four centuries. Attending a fantastic theatrical performance may be more pleasurable—though this is not universally agreed upon. One finds pleasure while staging a Shakespearean play; revisiting the passages is more fun because it continuously provides new meanings (or new questions) as one reads them. These are pleasures that, for many, rival (or at least complement) those of the performed text and that make “breaking the code” of Elizabethan poetic theatre and letting loose the extraordinary language that makes up a Shakespearean text well worth it.

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### 10.3 Learning Outcomes

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Dear students, the Unit furnished us with information about the language of William Shakespeare. We learnt the special use of words in his plays, especially *The Merchant of Venice*. We also came across the wordplay by Shakespeare, particularly the use of puns, metaphors, similes, and malapropisms in *The Merchant of Venice*. We also understood the dramatic techniques employed by Shakespeare in his plays. At the end of this Unit, you should be able to comprehend the play better. You should be able to understand Shakespeare’s use of language and you should be able to appreciate the use of prose and poetry in his plays to serve specific purposes.

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### 10.4 Glossary

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**Dialect:** Dialect is a regional variety of a language, distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

**Slang:** Words, expressions, and meanings that are informal and are used by a particular group of people. Colloquial speech.

**Motif:** Recurring ideas or symbols; in a play, novel or story.

**Meter:** A meter is described as the basic rhythmic structure of a line within a work of poetry.

**Pentameter:** Line of verse containing five metrical feet.

**Iambic:** Unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

**Simile:** Comparison between two things using; “as” or “like”, e.g., Bob is like a lion.

**Metaphor:** Two diverse things are compared without using; “like” or “as”, e.g., Bob is a lion.

**Idiom:** A group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words (e.g., “once in a blue moon” meaning rarely).

**Pun:** Paronomasia, or wordplay with various meanings. It is a type of wordplay that uses several meanings of a phrase or similar sounding words for a comic or rhetorical effect.

**Malapropism:** The unintentional misuse or distortion of a word or phrase.

**Soliloquy:** An act of speaking one’s thoughts aloud, especially by a character in a play.

**Jew:** A person or group of individuals whose traditional faith is Judaism and who can trace their ancestors back to Abraham.

**Gentile:** A non-Jewish person from a non-Jewish nation or faith; notably, a Christian as opposed to a Jew.

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## 10.5 Sample Questions

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### 10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The word “honest” is used as a motif in Shakespeare's:

- (a) *Hamlet*
- (b) *Othello*
- (c) *Macbeth*
- (d) None of these

2. In which of the following play does Shakespeare use Latin and ordinary lexicon to achieve dramatic effect?

- (a) *Othello*
- (b) *Macbeth*
- (c) *Hamlet*
- (d) All of these

3. *Merry Wives of Windsor* is written in prose because:

- (a) It is about higher class
- (b) It is about middle class
- (c) It is about foreigners
- (d) All of these

4. Shakespeare uses prose for:

- (a) Kings
- (b) Women
- (c) Commoners
- (d) All of these

5. Shakespeare uses verse for:

- (a) Noblemen
- (b) Upper class
- (c) Both of these
- (d) None of these

6. Who said, “The pound of flesh which I demand of him is dearly bought.' Tis mine, and I will have it”

- (a) Antony                      (b) Bassanio  
(c) Portia                        (d) Shylock

7. Trochaic is:

- (a) Stressed Unstressed      (b) Unstressed Stressed  
(c) Two Unstressed followed by stressed      (d) Two stressed followed by unstressed

8. Which of the following meter has been dubbed as “heartbeat”:

- (a) Trochaic meter      (b) Anapestic meter  
(c) Iambic meter      (d) None of these

9. “He was the lion of the fight” is an example of:

- (a) Simile                      (b) Metaphor  
(c) Alliteration                (d) None of these

10. “Hang on her temples like a golden fleece” is an example of:

- (a) Metaphor                (b) Simile  
(c) Alliteration                (d) Personification

### 10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a short note on 'trochaic verse' used by William Shakespeare in his plays?
2. Discuss briefly how William Shakespeare uses sentence structure in *The Merchant of Venice*?
3. What is a pun? Give an example of its use in *The Merchant of Venice*?
4. Comment on the wordplay of William Shakespeare?
5. Discuss the special use of prose by William Shakespeare in his plays?

### 10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the different styles that Shakespeare employs in his plays? Explain with reference to *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Write an essay on the use of diction by William Shakespeare in his plays. Cite some examples from the play *The Merchant of Venice*?
3. How does William Shakespeare create formal Latin vocabulary and informal native English vocabulary for dramatic effect?

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## 10.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Bloom, Harold. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Merchant of Venice*. New Edition. Infobase publishing, 2010.
2. Smith, Emma. *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
3. Wheeler, Thomas, Ed. *The Merchant of Venice: Critical Essays*. New York: Garland, 1991.

## Unit - 11: Style of William Shakespeare

### Structure

11.0 Introduction

11.1 Objectives

11.2 *The Merchant of Venice*

11.2.1 *The Merchant of Venice*: Introduction

11.2.2 *The Merchant of Venice* as a Tragi-Comedy

11.2.3 Shakespeare's innovative use of the Sources

11.2.4 Biblical Allusion and Allegory

11.3 Learning Outcomes

11.4 Glossary

11.5 Sample Questions

11.6 Suggested Readings

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### 11.0 Introduction

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One of the reasons why Elizabethan age is called the golden period is because of William Shakespeare's literary genius. Unschooled and dismissed by his erudite critics as an “upstart crow,” William Shakespeare’s style of writing has been unparalleled. At the time when the theatrical effects were limited, the effective use of language, references, images, and symbols were crucial in creating the visual and aural affect. Shakespeare excelled in this art by use of poetic expression in blank verse. Shakespeare along with Christopher Marlowe popularised blank verse in their tragedies. Known to have introduced by Earl of Surrey in 1540, the form was later perfected by Shakespeare through his famous tragedies and by John Milton. Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter with alternating stresses on the syllable. It mimics natural rhythm of speech and thus is more real without any bearing of artifice. Blank verse is also used to deliberate on something grand, sublime and lofty. The famous soliloquies of Hamlet, Henry V, plotting speeches of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are all in blank verse. Prospero’s speech on relinquishing magic and Caliban’s moving complaint in *The Tempest* are also delivered in blank verse.

Shakespeare as a master craftsman is also believed to have invented almost 1700 words in English language through innovative usage. His fluid use of words not only suggests his poetic sensibility but also delivers precise meaning. For e.g. “When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended, / That for the fault's love is th' offender *friended*.” Here the word “friended” is used to imply the meaning “befriended”. Shakespeare’s complex use of metaphors and similes together is his unique descriptive style. The description of Cordelia’s behaviour upon hearing his father’s condition in *King Lear* as:

You have seen  
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears  
Were like: a better way, --those happy smilets  
That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know  
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence  
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd.

Shakespeare intertwines and conjoins similes and metaphors as unified intense emotion. Smiles and tears are described as sunshine and rain; Shakespeare condenses the contrasting emotions to depict Cordelia’s feelings, implying the image of how it rains while sunshine. As smile sits on her full lips unaware of the moist eyes, Cordelia is caught between polite smile and anguish over Lear’s mental state. Tears are not only rolling down like parting guests but they brim in her eyes like diamonds and drop on her cheeks like pearls.

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## 11.1 Objectives

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After going through the Unit, you will be able to:

- understand Shakespeare as a literary genius
- appreciate Shakespeare’s innovative mixing up of genres as a distinct style.
- comprehend Shakespeare’s use of style, especially the use of allusions and allegory, in *The Merchant of Venice*
- analyse Shakespeare’s style in creative use of pre-existing (known and familiar) sources.
- evaluate the contemporary understanding of *The Merchant of Venice*.

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## 11.2 Style of William Shakespeare

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### 11.2.1 *The Merchant of Venice*: An Introduction

In the previous Units, you have already read about *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare and you are already familiar with the plot, theme and characterization. In this section we will recapitulate it. *The Merchant of Venice* is considered to be one of his mature plays written between 1596 and 1598. Although the play is often classified as a romantic comedy, it is important to understand that *The Merchant of Venice* recently gained popularity because of Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock, the Jewish merchant. The play has been performed and adapted innumerable times and is very crucial in analyzing the perception of Christians towards Jews in the Elizabethan times. Inviting criticism of racism and xenophobia, *The Merchant of Venice* unpacks numerous attitudes and practices of its time.

The play is situated in the trading city of Venice where Bassanio, a young aristocrat is in debt after losing all his inheritance, and is in need of money to woo a rich heiress, Portia. Antonio who is Bassanio's friend finds himself helpless because he is unable to lend him money as all his fortune is stuck on his ships. Antonio decides to visit the moneylender Shylock to borrow money for Bassanio. Shylock and Antonio share different religious views which is a bone of contention between the two. Shylock lends money on condition that in the absence of repayment on time, Shylock will be entitled to a pound of flesh from Antonio's body.

Portia is a young lady surrounded by many suitors, and only the one who selects the right casket out of three would be allowed to marry her. Bassanio selects the right casket by choosing the lead casket over gold and silver. Bassanio wins over Portia with his impressive judgment. Antonio, on the other hand, loses all his ships on the sea and is unable to repay the loan. Pleased with the news, Shylock is ready to take his revenge using the bond. Bassanio tries to save Antonio by offering money on Antonio's behalf but to no avail. Portia disguised as a male lawyer, Balthazar, pleads for mercy but Shylock remains adamant and stubborn to exact his revenge. Portia with her ready wit and acumen discovers a flaw in the bond. The bond demands for flesh and not the blood hence the flesh should be extracted in the manner that no blood is spilled. Portia through her clever literal interpretation of the bond makes the execution of the bond impossible. She also accuses Shylock of a crime as she points out to another Venetian law

which executes outsiders on attempting to murder Venetian Christian citizens. Shylock thus loses on all counts and is completely defeated.

The present Unit will discuss the style of Shakespeare with respect to the use of language and context. As one of the later plays of Shakespeare, one can see a very well defined and developed Shakespearean style in *The Merchant of Venice*. The play is often seen as romantic comedy yet it addresses some serious issues of the time.

<p><b><i>Check your Progress</i></b></p> <p>1. Where is the play <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> situated? -----</p> <p>2. Who is Shylock and what is the bond? -----</p> <p>3. How did Portia save Antonio's life? -----</p>
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### **11.2.2 *The Merchant of Venice* as a Tragi-Comedy:**

*The Merchant of Venice* reveals some interesting insights into the changing style of Shakespeare's plays. Written after a romantic comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a romantic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, we find a combination of both the comic and the tragic in *The Merchant of Venice*. Comic elements can be traced in the character of Launcelot Gobbo. The just punishment accorded to Shylock also fits into the comic category. However, in the recent understanding of the play, *The Merchant of Venice* posits some serious moral dilemmas which allow it to be categorised as a "problem play," especially the coerced conversion of Shylock towards the end of the play.

By defying the neat boundaries of comedy and tragedy, the play opens itself into complexities of human existence where grave issues are combined with light-hearted romantic interludes. As a romantic comedy inspired by love, the play offers three romantic plots revolving around Portia and Bassanio; Gratiano and Nerissa; and Jessica and Lorenzo. The play uses disguise and cross-dressing, Portia and Nerissa disguise as male lawyers, create theatrical comic confusion. The superior intellectual prowess displayed by Portia is also in line with romantic

comedies. The romantic plots, however, are not without barriers and challenges. Portia can marry only the one who selects the right casket, which by the romantic coincidence is Bassanio. Jessica is Shylock's daughter who is in love with Bassanio and Antonio's friend, Lorenzo. Against her father's wishes, Jessica elopes with Lorenzo adding to his hatred. The romantic resolution to the marriages of Portia and Nerissa are subjected to the tragedy of Antonio, who had pawned himself for Bassanio. The interconnected story of Antonio adds tragic elements to the play. Antonio has not only lost all his wealth with the sinking of all his ships but also stands to lose his life due to the bond. Antonio is saved by a loophole in the bond and the play ends on a happy note. All lovers are united with their beloveds and Shylock loses not only his money, daughter, cherished ring, ducats but is also charged under Venetian law and he had to plead mercy for his life. He is spared only on the condition that he would convert to Christianity.

The treatment meted out to Shylock and his obvious religious stereotyping has come under the modern scanner as tragic and pitiable. Shylock's speech that you studied in earlier Units, is reproduced below and is a clear accusation and a tirade of an individual from a persecuted community:

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else,  
it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and  
hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my  
bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine  
enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath  
not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with  
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject  
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as  
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?  
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison  
us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not  
revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will  
resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,  
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian

wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by  
Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you  
teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I  
will better the instruction.

Shylock's moving speech is a clear indication of the alienation and marginalization he faced in a Christian society, where his values and practices are not accepted because of his religion. The coercive attempt at his conversion also implies persecution of his religious identity. The charges of anti-Semitism in the play often presents Shylock as a tragic character who has not met justice in being compelled to convert into Christianity and loss of all his wealth. With this new reading of Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice* further veers towards the different contours of tragedy.

***Check your Progress***

1. Why is *The Merchant of Venice* considered as tragic-comedy?

-----

2. What makes Shylock appear as a tragic character?

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**11.2.3 Shakespeare's Innovative use of Sources:**

Shakespeare, like many of his contemporaries, is known to have borrowed from previously known works. Be it historical plays like *Richard II*, *Henry IV* or romantic comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*, Shakespeare uses the old and familiar plot and surpasses it with his immaculate wit and inventiveness. As a result, Shakespeare's plays without being original become uniquely his.

*Il Pecorone* (The Dunce) by Sir Giovanni Fiorentino is considered to be the inspiration for *The Merchant of Venice*. The original story carries the story of a selfish and greedy Jewish moneylender who lent money in lieu of a pound of flesh. While the Jew was defeated and plot was foiled in *Il Pecorone*, Shakespeare adds the moral dilemma by forcibly converting Shylock to Christianity.

The story of casket is also complicated to fully develop the character of Portia and Bassanio and to project Bassanio as truly deserving Portia by selecting the right casket after careful consideration. Furthermore, the subplot of Jessica and Lorenzo is also Shakespeare's addition not found in *Il Pecorcone*. In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock's daughter Jessica elopes with Lorenzo and converts to Christianity thus justifying Shylock's anger and revenge. Shakespeare's inventiveness is crucial in adding layers to Shylock's character. Shakespeare's Shylock ceases to be a stock character of a Jew as in *Il Pecorcone* but a complex human, much like Caliban of *The Tempest* who does not fail to draw attention to his miserable plight. Shakespeare's style of humanizing even the supposed villain of the story renders it to multiple and often contradictory interpretation.

*The Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe is also an obvious inspiration for the character of Shylock with whom the Elizabethan audience was already familiar. The Christian governors punished Barabas, the Jew of Malta by confiscating all his property. Enraged by this, Barabas decides to seek revenge by plotting evil for the people of the town. He kills the nuns by poisoning their porridge, but Barabas is finally trapped and pushed into a boiling cauldron to die. Marlowe's depiction of Barabas borders on a caricature. Dramatized as a comic buffoon, Barabas is a source of entertainment despite his crimes and wickedness. Shylock on the other hand is more humanised version of Barabas. By exploring the psychological state of Shylock, Shakespeare is able to portray his villain with traces of sympathy. This style is peculiar to Shakespeare where the villain is not a pure evil but defined by his context.

In situating Shylock within the prevalent tradition of anti-Semitism, by making him raise some crucial questions and also pointing out the hypocrisy in Christianity, Shakespeare is able to present Shylock's complaint as a lingering concern. Shakespeare gives Shylock enough reasons in the play to justify his anger and revenge. Shylock's remark, "the villainy you teach me" shows the pain of anti-Semitic attitudes behind his merciless and ruthless behaviour. Shakespeare contrived Jessica's plot to make Shylock appear reasonable in his evil plot against Antonio. Although his demand for the pound of flesh shows his innate evil designs, being betrayed by his own daughter makes him a wronged father. By manipulating the earlier sources, Shakespeare in his unique style is able to create sympathy for the villain, be it *Macbeth* or *Richard III*. Unlike Barabas of *The Jew of Malta* or the Jew of *Il Pecorcone*, Shylock stands out as the most memorable depiction of the Jew in Elizabethan times as Shakespeare gives voice to the marginal

thereby breaking the stereotypes and conventions. In making the villain argue their case so passionately, Shakespeare allows the possibility of an alternate discourse.

***Check your Progress***

1. Who wrote *The Jew of Malta*?

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2. What are Shakespeare's sources for *The Merchant of Venice*?

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**11.2.4 Biblical Allusion and Allegory:**

Shakespeare's use of Christian images and myths in the play points towards its theological dimensions. Many critics believe that it is inspired by the medieval morality plays. The use of allegory and allusion also impart a consciously built thematic unity. The Christian concept of love runs through the entire play. Antonio's melancholy in the beginning of the play is the result of not the worldly concern as suggested by Gratiano, "You have too much respect upon the world:/ They lose it to buy it with much care" clearly recalling Mathew from the Bible. Antonio is saddened because of the parting of his friend Bassanio as testified by Salerio "I think he only loves the world for him." Antonio's love is characterized by empathy, care and concern. While Bassanio is unable to repay his previous loan, Antonio is eager to help his friend at the risk of his own life. Unlike Shylock, Antonio as a paragon of Christian virtue lends money without interest and helps those who are trapped by Shylock's usurious ways. By contrast to Antonio's selfless Christian love, Shylock's 'thrift' ways are unchristian and evil. He is greedy and stingy with his servants. His love for the worldly things overtakes all other relationships, including his relation with his daughter. When Jessica elopes with Lorenzo, Shylock cries for his daughter and money in the same breath, "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" He mocks Antonio's "simplicity" in lending money without interest and displays pride and self-righteousness in censuring Bassanio's feast as "shallow foppery". Shylock conspires a plan to exact his revenge on Antonio, "thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause, /but since iam a dog, but beware my fangs."

Antonio and Shylock thus symbolize two different theological worlds of the New and Old Law respectively. Shylock addresses himself as “sacred nation” and calls Antonio a “fawning publican.” These are allusions to the parable of Pharisee and the Publican from the Book of Matthew in the Bible. The Christian belief that righteousness is impossible on the fallen men unless it is replaced by faith also echoes in the trial of Antonio.

The argument on usury is also situated in the biblical context. Shylock justifies his trade by bringing the analogy of Jacob’s breeding of ewes and rams to multiplying money through interest. Antonio, on the other hand, considers usury as “barren metal”. "If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not/ As to thy friends, for when did friendship take/A breed for barren metal of his friend? /But lend it rather to thine enemy."

Shylock’s gradual loss of servant, daughter and his wealth echo the biblical curse upon the nation “Behold your habitation shall be left unto you desolate” while his subsequent conversion is the Christian prediction of the final conversion of the Jews. “The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind.” Shylock’s daughter Jessica voluntarily converts to Christianity and Lorenzo’s prediction about Shylock’s conversion “If ever the Jew her father come to heaven/it will be for his gentle father’s sake” is an allusion to Paul’s prophecy that gentiles will ultimately be the saviours of Jews. The play also maintains the analogy of the devil with Shylock. Jessica’s escape from Shylock as she says, “our house is hell” can be seen her escape from damnation to salvation. The identification of the devil with Jew is repeated several times in the play as was the common Elizabethan anti-semitic perception.

While Antonio’s story exemplifies Christian love for friendship, Bassanio’s selection of the right casket in order to win Portia implies allegorical understanding of love. The Prince of Morocco selects the gold casket, which shows that he desired Portia for her wealth. The Prince of Arragon picks up silver, which according to him represents “as much as he deserves.” Bassanio by selecting the lead casket, shows his Christian values of selflessness. Bassanio's renunciation of silver as ornament and gold as transience and corruption of the worldly things makes him the most deserving of the three. Bassanio’s detachment in the romantic love can be equated with the Christian and mystical love from the Songs of Solomon. The defeat of the Prince of Morocco (the pagan) and the Prince of Arragon (the Spaniard) can be seen as the rejection of anti-Christian values and worldliness.

The trial episode is the culmination of the defeat of the old law and the establishment of Christian love with the rejection of revenge. Portia’s speech on mercy echoes Ecclesiasticus

xxxv.19 “O how far a thing is mercy in the time of anguish and trouble: it is like a cloud of rain that comes in the time of drought”. The trial of Antonio and his righteous cause is presented like ‘Parliament of Heaven’, a popular mystery play in France known for its debate between four daughters of God about the fate of Mankind. Truth and Justice demand the law of God to be served, Mercy and Peace implore God to forgive Mankind. The courtroom scene in the play is based on the same heavenly debate where Mercy and Peace is invoked by Portia but to no avail. Unmoved by pleas of mercy, Shylock’s obstinate insistence also reminds the Elizabethan audience of the crucifixion of Christ. Antonio’s willingness to sacrifice his life for the sake of his friend is an uncanny resemblance with Christ’s sacrifice to save mankind. Shylock exclaims, “my deeds upon my head” and it indicates the collective guilt of the Jews for Christ’s crucifixion; “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matthew xxvii, 25).

Shylock’s conversion is a prerequisite for the mercy under Venetian law, recalling Paul’s declaration that “a man is not justified by the works of law but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians: 2:16). In denying Portia’s request for mercy Shylock’s contention on law is defeated by a greater law of Venice (Shakespeare’s invention).

All the allusions discussed above are biblical. It was easy for Shakespeare’s audience to recognize the allusions while the play was performed. The biblical allusions also serve to justify the portrayal of the Jews and the pagans. The allegorical representations are literary devices employed to enhance the quality of the play. Both the allusions and the allegorical representations enrich the language used in the play.

***Check your Progress***

1. Give two biblical allusions used in the play?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How is Shylock punished in the end?

\_\_\_\_\_

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### **11.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After reading the Unit, you should be to:

- identify Shakespeare’s use of poetic expressions.
- appreciate Shakespeare’s style

- understand the use and significance of religious allusions and allegory in the play.
- comprehend Shakespeare's skilful use of sources in creating memorable characters.

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## 11.4 Glossary

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**Abode:** here, it refers to delay

**Argosy:** Large sized merchant vessel or ship. It is corruption of 16<sup>th</sup> century word 'Aragouse'

**Black Monday:** Easter Monday. Lancelot describes it as a 'movable' day in the play

**Cater Cousin:** 'Scarce cater cousin' refers to cousins who are not on talking terms with each other

**Cerecloth:** Wrapping sheet dipped in melted wax

**Egall:** Equal

**Gaberdine:** A loose long coat with long sleeves

**Gravel-Blind:** Almost completely blind. It is comical connection between sand-blind and stone-blind

**Guiled:** Treacherous.

**Interrogatory:** Interrogations of the defendants under oath in search of truth

**Jew's Eye:** Something which has a great value and is precious

**Knap:** Biting with a sound of crackle

**Mind of Love:** Scheming love

**O'er-look:** To look upon with an evil eye in witchcraft

**Peise the Time:** Weighing with deliberation each and every precious moment. The word Peise is technically used for clocks in the Elizabethan times

**Reed-Voice:** It refers to squeaking voice in music

**Roth:** Obsolete spelling of 'ruth' which means grief and calamity

**Sand-Blind:** Partial blindness

**Servitor:** It is a theatrical term; it refers to an attendant

**Set Forth:** To extol or to serve at the tables

**Single Bond:** It refers to the bond without the names of the sureties attached.

**Sonties:** A Shakespearean oath. It is diminutive of saint

- Slubber:** Slovenly manners  
**Vendible:** an old woman who is past her marriageable age  
**Venture:** taking risk, commercial speculation  
**Wind About:** to ‘beat about the bush;’ to speak indirectly
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## 11.5 Sample Questions

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### 11.5.1 Objective Questions:

- Portia takes the name \_\_\_\_\_ in her disguise as a lawyer.  
(a) Balthazar (b) Antonio  
(c) Gobbo (d) Lancelot
- On which grounds does Portia argue Antonio’s case in the courtroom scene?  
(a) Justice (b) Faith  
(c) Mercy (d) Trade
- What does Shylock demand in the absence of the repayment of his loan?  
(a) Double amount (b) Pound of Antonio’s flesh  
(c) Confiscation of Bassanio’s wealth (d) None of the Above
- Which casket is chosen by the Prince of Arragon?  
(a) Silver (b) Gold  
(c) Lead (d) Iron
- How does Antonio lose all his money?  
(a) By gambling (b) By paying off others’ debt  
(c) With the sinking of the ships (d) Due to Shylock's evil plotting
- Jessica swaps her father’s ring with a \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Cat (b) Monkey  
(c) Parrot (d) Dress
- Lancelot plays the character of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Jew (b) Moneylender  
(c) Fool (d) Priest
- “Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?” Who says these lines?

- (a) Antonio                      (b) Portia  
(c) Bassanio                    (d) Shylock

9. "My Ducats" refers to the amount \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) Jessica steals from Shylock              (b) Antonio loses in the sea  
(c) Shylock lends to Antonio                (d) Shylock is forced to pay
10. Balthazar is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Antonio's servant                          (b) One person who tries to help Shylock  
(c) A fool    (d) A lawyer

### 11.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What was the condition under which Shylock agreed to lend money to Antonio?
2. How did Portia plan to marry and was it successful?
3. What made Antonio sad in the beginning of the play?
4. How does Shakespeare describe the relationship between Jessica and Shylock?
5. Explain in brief what an allusion means.

### 11.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss *The Merchant of Venice* as a tragi-comedy.
2. Comment on Shakespeare's style with specific reference to *The Merchant of Venice*.
3. Critically comment on the use of allusions and allegory in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.

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## 11.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Barnet, Sylvan. "Introduction." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Merchant of Venice*, Prentice-Hall: 1970, 1-10.
2. Kaplan, M. Lindsay, Ed. *William Shakespeare. The Merchant of Venice: Text and Context*. New York: Bedford, 2002.
3. Lanier, M, Douglas. *The Merchant of Venice: Language and Writing*. Bloomsbury Publishing: 2019.

## Unit – 12: Relevance of *The Merchant of Venice* to the Contemporary World

### Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Objectives

12.2 Relevance of *The Merchant of Venice* to the Contemporary World

12.2.1 Shakespearean Comedy

12.2.2 Summary of the Play

12.2.3 Contemporary Social Relevance

12.2.4 Contemporary Political Relevance

12.2.5 Contemporary Cultural Relevance

12.2.6 Let's Sum up

12.3 Learning Outcomes

12.4 Glossary

12.5 Sample Questions

12.6 Suggested Readings

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### 12.0 Introduction

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William Shakespeare wrote tragedies, comedies, tragi-comedies, historical plays, romances and 154 sonnets. A question often arises as to why he is still read. The simple and logical answer to it that the universality of his works. His plays are not only period plays; they are relevant to all places in all times. The dialogue is marked by quotable expressions that are still in use. The socio-cultural, political and economical spheres of the world have drastically changed in the course of time. The life pattern of Elizabethan period is not similar today, yet the clash of human being for human values such as good, kindness, truth and sincerity is still going on. The present play *The Merchant of Venice* was written in 1597 but the play is still applicable to the present world in many ways. The problems of trade, antisemitism, justice, class and racial conflict discussed in the play still exist. Today's world is a composition of materialistic objects where every action of life is under the control of scientific equipment but the clash for peace,

harmony and equity is visible in every corner of the world in which class, caste, creed, religion and race playing a crucial part. When we talk about the relevance of the present play in contemporary time it is also important to note that not only the present play but most of his plays are applicable with same intensity. The visionary composition and legendary passion for theatre made the theatrical contribution of Shakespeare dignified. William Shakespeare was a dramatic genius who handled the concepts of gender, culture, politics and race through a comedy. The high intense topics of the society were highlighted in comic mode through the plays of Shakespeare. The form of comedy in the words of M.H. Abrams is rightly applicable to the present play as:

Comedy is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfiture engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern, we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters.

A good reader or a student can ask a question that if the play was written in 1597 then why after five hundred years it is being studied and analyzed. This is a very valid question but let me tell you William Shakespeare wrote plays not for an age but for ages. The concepts of power, justice, discrimination and business had been fundamentally analyzed through his plays. His plays like *The Merchant of Venice* inspire the audience to think over it again and again. The procrastination or indecisiveness of Hamlet is universal as every person is confused by relation, responsibility and social discourse. The over ambition of Macbeth is also universally applicable where the rat race symbolizes unnecessary dilemma of humankind. The jealousy of Othello is visible in extensive way in every part of the society. Thus, the characterization, understanding of human nature, exploration of inner dilemma and presentation of tragic flaws of human character on stage made William Shakespeare a dignified voice of English drama. Moreover, he is successful in compelling the members in the audience to find their own selves reflected in the characters on the stage. This significant skill of Shakespeare gives him a universal appeal. Let us get it clear that psychological conflict, social conflict, class conflict and racial conflict are universal. The social discourse of Elizabethan period has been presented in such a way in the plays of Shakespeare that his plays not only represent the age but contemporary times too.

***Check your Progress:***

1. In which year was the play *The Merchant of Venice* written?

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2. Which is the tragic flaw of Hamlet?

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3. Which human aspect is central in William Shakespeare's writing?

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## **12.1 Objectives**

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This Unit has the following major objectives:

- to acquaint you with the versatile genius of William Shakespeare
- to understand the significance of the play in current times
- to comprehend the historical, cultural, political and social relevance of the play
- to understand the similarity of conflicts between Elizabethan age and contemporary age.
- to comprehend the dramatic genius of William Shakespeare in exploring the human issues

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## **12.2 Relevance of *The Merchant of Venice* to the Contemporary World**

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### **12.2.1 Shakespearean Comedies:**

Before we look at the relevance to the play, let us quickly recapitulate the Shakespearean comedy and the summary of the play. Usually the plays of Shakespeare are categorized as comedy, tragedy, history and romance plays. Over the years the comedies of Shakespeare are identified as plays of fun, irony, and wordplay. They also abound in disguise and mistaken identity with very convoluted plots that are difficult to follow with contrived endings. Any attempt at describing Shakespeare's plays as a cohesive group can not go beyond superficial outline. The highly contrived endings of most Shakespeare's comedies are the clue to what these plays are all about. For example, the play *The Merchant of Venice* deals with the theme of love

and relationship. A young woman disguises as a man through a major part of the play like a usual Shakespearean comedy plot. There is also a Jewess who elopes with her Christian lover. The play ends with the lovers' unification, celebrating their love and all things turn out good. The resolution is arrived by completely defeating the Jew, Shylock. In most of Shakespeare's comedies, women characters play an important role. They also disguise as men in most part of the play. During the Elizabethan age, women actors did not perform on stage. The role of women was performed by young boys. Through irony, humour and wit, the comedy is presented on stage. The fools and minor characters also add to the comedy. The gull as in the character of Malvolio also incites laughter in the audience. Mistaken identities, confusion, conflict and chaos is finally resolved. The comedies often revolve round the theme of love and marriage and often at the end of the plays, the lovers are united or reunited and there is invariably a happy ending in each of the comedies. The popular comedies of Shakespeare are *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *Cymbeline*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Two Gentleman of Verona* etc.

### **12.2.2 Summary of the Play:**

The action of the play *The Merchant of Venice* is largely set in Venice, Italy. Venice was a popular, commercial city with many Christians were living there. Antonio was also one of them and of a kindhearted nature. Antonio used to help anybody in need of help while a greedy Shylock made a good fortune by lending money on interest to people. The moneylender Shylock had hatred for Antonio despite his masque of respect, honesty and kindness. Whenever the two meet, Antonio criticizes Shylock for his deeds and high rates of interest on money lending. Eventually, Shylock developed a feeling of revenge but was unable to receive the right opportunity to teach a lesson to Antonio. On the other hand, Antonio was admired by all his friends including Bassanio for honesty and generosity. Bassanio was a close friend of Antonio and admired for his good character though he was poor. Bassanio was in love with a young, rich and beautiful lady Portia, the lady of Belmont. To win her heart and her ancestral fortune Bassanio needed three thousands ducats to appear as an appropriate suitor.

Eventually, Bassanio approached Antonio as he did in the past too for money borrowing but Antonio told him that all his fortune is tied up in merchant ships at sea. Hence, Antonio decided to borrow money from Shylock who was eagerly waiting to teach Antonio a lesson. Shylock hated Christians as his daughter had eloped with a Christian. Antonio and Shylock made

a contract in the presence of a lawyer. If Antonio failed to repay the loan within the specified period, Shylock would claim a pound of flesh from nearest his heart from Antonio.

When the time came for repayment, Bassanio heard a very shocking and sad news from Antonio that he had lost all his ships at the sea and would not be able to repay the loan to Shylock. Hence, he decided to part with a pound of flesh from his body as agreed upon. His final wish is to see Bassanio before death. The repentant Bassanio confessed to his beloved wife Portia that he owed his friend Antonio three thousand ducats which Antonio took from Shylock. Portia impressed by the pathetic circumstances of Antonio, hands over double the amount to Bassanio to secure Antonio's release and advised Bassanio to visit Venice. Bassanio tried in vain to convince Shylock to take the money but he insisted to have the pound of flesh as had been agreed upon in the contract. Portia decided to visit Venice and defend the case of Antonio.

Portia along with her honest servant Nerrisa visited Venice, disguised as a lawyer for Antonio. In the court, she appealed to Shylock for mercy, to be more compassionate and let go his condition of taking a pound of flesh from Antonio and offered to pay three times more than the original amount of three thousands ducats. Shylock remained unrelenting. So Portia turned the tables on him. She told him as per the condition in the bond, he could cut a pound of flesh from Antonio but he could not shed a drop of blood in the process. Moreover, the piece of flesh should be cut out precisely to be a pound. If any drop of blood was shed or if even a little more part of flesh was cut, his property would be confiscated and he would be killed for trying to take the life of a Venetian as per law.

The shocked Shylock asked the court for mercy but the court ordered to surrender half of his property to Venice authority and second half to Antonio. Antonio intervenes and requests that Shylock be spared if he converts to Christianity and the portion of Shylock's wealth given to Antonio, be handed over to Shylock's daughter and her Christian husband. Shylock agreed to all the conditions.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Who was Portia in the play?

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2. Who was a Jewish moneylender in the play?

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### 12.2.3 Contemporary Social Relevance:

In this section we are going to understand the contemporary social relevance of the play. A society is always an embodiment of various things such as people, relation, customs, culture, class, power, politics etc. The social structure of society is formed in hegemonic order that creates the poor and the rich, the upper class, the lower class, the noblemen and the commoners. Different social periods have varying social class distinctions that create conflict. Along with conflict, power also plays an important role in the society. Power defines the direction of social discourse because the manipulation of objects can make life difficult for the survival of laymen. The place of centre and margin never allow in discourse to substitute; rather the displacement brings conflict.

The play *Merchant of Venice* is very much relevant to contemporary social times. The racial discrimination of contemporary world is depicted in the present play. Shylock as the Jew, and Antonio as the Christian had a constant struggle. The struggle is mainly based on their business competition but inside the business story, race played a crucial role in deconstructing their relationship. Today, we witness lot of cases where racial discrimination takes lives of innocents. The intensity of racial discrimination in 16<sup>th</sup> century is still present in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, in the play Bassanio is torn between his love for Portia and his friendship with selfless Antonio, who has placed himself in danger his sake. The message is very clear that even today people are innocent and honest like Antonio who can sacrifice anything for the sake friendship. The true companionship that existed in Elizabethan age still remains.

The play, at the surface level, expresses the social theme of selfless love versus self interest. The character of Shylock represents Jews. The Christian characters like Antonio lend money free of interest and put themselves at risk for those they love. On the other hand, Jewish characters like Shylock lend money on interest and are selfish and greedy. Shylock agonized over the loss of his wealth, runs through the streets crying “O my ducats! O, my daughter!” With these words, he apparently makes it clear that he values his wealth over his daughter. Initially, Bassanio seeks Portia because he is deeply in debt and needs money desperately. Bassanio borrows money from his friend Antonio who loaned it from Shylock to appear as a dignified member of the society in front of Portia. In other words, Bassanio is anxious to view his relationship with Antonio as a matter of business rather than true love. Finally Shylock eloquently argues that Jews are human beings just as Christians because Antonio hates Jews because they are Jews. The next social aspect discussed in the play is prejudice that is dominant

in every society of the world. The hatred is based on religion, caste, color, creed and class. Throughout the play Shylock claims that he is simply applying the lessons taught to him by his Christian neighbors. This phenomenon becomes the crucial aspect of his character in society and in his arguments in court. Shylock conspires to harm Antonio but his entire plan seems to be a result of the insults and injuries Antonio has inflicted upon him in the past. In all these, we find the relevance of Shakespeare to this day.

The next social relevance of the play reflects on the aspect of friendship. Human relations such as mother-father, brother-sister, husband-wife and friendship is integral part of any age. The theme of friendship drives most of the play, Bassanio needs money and eventually turns to Antonio who has already offered him substantial financial support in the past. Antonio unquestionably does whatever he can do for Bassanio. Antonio even declares that he can die for his friendship. The play depicts friendship as one of the most intense and important emotional bonds of humanity. The true bonding of humans also reflects through the relationship of Portia and Nerissa. Gratiano and Nerissa show great loyalty in their friendship and even fall in love with each other after being brought together by their friends. The next social relevance of the play revolves round wealth. The problem of wealth and its relevance has been efficiently described in the play. The play *The Merchant of Venice* explores the complexities of wealth and treats this theme with ambivalence. Several wealthy characters are depicted as unhappy despite their vast fortunes. At the beginning of the play Antonio is shown a prosperous man on the verge of more financial success but he suffers from a sense of melancholy. Today, we can see a lot wealthy persons with innumerable fortune but still lonely. The inner peace is scarcely visible in them while true love, friendship, companionship, and trusty partners remain evasive in their lives. The uneven distribution of wealth also causes problems to the characters: Bassanio seems to be a noble person but he suffers from a lack of wealth. Money is depicted as a source of greed and dissatisfaction and the play also asserts that wealth gives individual freedom and power.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Which social discrimination is reflected in the Jew, Shylock?

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2. For whose friendship is Antonio ready to die ?

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#### 12.2.4 Contemporary Political Relevance:

In this section we will be able to understand the contemporary political relevance of the play, *The Merchant of Venice*. Through the play *The Merchant of Venice* William Shakespeare created a microcosmic model of Elizabethan society through which he explores not only the readily evident theme of anti-Semitism but also the changing economic faces of Europe during his period. The present play efficiently explores the political aspects such as trade, usury and villainy. In Elizabethan period the form of government was monarchy but today the form of government in several countries of the world is democratic, yet the obsession of power among political leaders is visible with the same intensity.

The play, as you know, is centred in Venice, a city of prosperity, trade and world communication center. The play explains the shift from feudalism to capitalism, in broader anthropological terms, a movement from a ritual system of social organization to market system. Shylock represents capitalism and Antonio signifies the common consumer. The enmity between these two is further embedded in racial discrimination backed by the political system. The play further acutely explains the politics of gender like the contemporary world where every social clan offers an insignificant position to women and women they are not allowed to break the traditional discourse. In the present play, Portia is a gentle lady and not allowed full freedom to choose her own soul mate. Even Jessica was not allowed to choose her life partner. In both cases we see the contemporary relevance of gender politics. Portia, Nerissa and Jessica all had to disguise themselves as men. Thus, the play explores the politics of gender, race, commerce, state as well as efficiently narrates judiciary system headed by the political head, the Duke.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Does the play talk about anti-Semitism? -----
2. Is gender politics efficiently explored through the play?

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#### 12.2.5 Contemporary Cultural Relevance:

In this section we will discuss the contemporary cultural relevance of the present play. It is often better to know the cultural context of any text for a better understanding. It is more so when the text is distanced in terms of space and time. To understand the play *The Merchant of Venice* and its relevance in contemporary times, we need to understand the Elizabethan pattern of

culture. Culture is the fabric of any society in which aspects from food, shelter, clothing, ideology, etc is included. Culture is a complex term difficult to define, but in brief, it includes life pattern of contemporary society. Culture is dynamic and it often changes with time. Likewise, since the Elizabethan age a lot of time has elapsed but some features of its culture are still similar. The play explains the huge cultural difference between Shylock and Antonio because these two belonged to different cultural backgrounds. The racial despotism of Shylock was absent in Antonio. The biggest reason behind it was religion. The cultural differences of Jewish and Christian community is explored through these two men. The conflict between Jews and Christians is often witnessed in contemporary times. Anti-semitism prevails across the world as does the aggressiveness of the Jews. The money lending business was the easiest way in Elizabethan age to become rich and earn more fortune. Today, people do the same; they charge high interest rate and even reach to any level to fulfill their decided target. The generous nature of Antonio makes him have lot of friends while the avaricious Shylock is left with few friends in life. However, this does not affect his personality as he is blindly obsessed by money.

Dowry was a common practice in the Elizabethan age. Wooing, courtship, prenuptials as shown in the play are as much a part of the cultural fabric in the contemporary society. The next important and visible similarity of Elizabethan and contemporary culture is the prevalence of patriarchy. In Elizabethan period men were the powerful figures in family and society. We see many examples of the restrictions in the play, when Portia and Nerissa leave the city they have to dress up as men. Portia is restricted by her father's will; when she marries all her land goes to Bassanio. Jessica is restricted by Shylock. Similarly, Jessica has to dress up as a man to break free from Shylock but in doing so she simply put herself in the control of another man. The man as father or husband remains the controlling authority. Not much has changed since then. Despite the empowerment of women, in many societies, women play a subordinate role in the patriarchal setup.

No culture remains static and stable, only those cultures which change according to the needs of time survive. Bassanio took money to impress Portia and to appear as a gentleman. Show of wealth and an innate desire to express one's status in terms of wealth is still reflected in contemporary society. The hypocrisy of life is presented both in *The Merchant of Venice* and contemporary world.

***Check your Progress:***

1. Does the play describe cultural differences?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Is patriarchal structure found in the Elizabethan and contemporary society?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The \_\_\_\_\_ of life is presented both in *The Merchant of Venice* and contemporary world.

**12.2.6 Let Us Sum Up:**

The plays of Shakespeare often reflect the contemporary times. The relevance of *The Merchant of Venice* to contemporary times can be studied at various levels as discussed in this Unit. The main aspects of Shakespeare’s play are relevant today because Shakespeare transcends time in his choice of themes and depiction of characters. The universality of Shakespeare makes him a canonical writer and the study of British literature as well as of literatures in English remains incomplete without Shakespeare.

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**12.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Upon the completion of this Unit, you should be able to:

- know the dramatic genius of William Shakespeare
- comprehend the contemporary social relevance of the play
- recognize cultural similarities of both ages
- realize the universality of Shakespeare

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**12.4 Glossary**

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**Relevance:** Close affinity

**Static:** Stopping at moment

**Instinct:** Innate desires

<b>Ducats:</b>	Currency
<b>Deprived:</b>	Isolated
<b>Usury:</b>	interest-based money lending

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## 12.5 Sample Questions

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### 12.5.1 Objective Questions:

State whether the following statements are true or false:

1. *The Merchant of Venice* does not have any relevance to the present times. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The play explores the ideas of anti-Semitism. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The play is a tragedy. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Portia is the beloved of Antonio. \_\_\_\_\_
5. William Shakespeare wrote 150 sonnets. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Cultural similarities are seen in *The Merchant of Venice* and contemporary society.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. The play does not correlate racial discrimination. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The name of the servant is Nerrisa. \_\_\_\_\_
9. The play does not have any historical relevance. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Antonio liked Shylock. \_\_\_\_\_

### 12.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Give one relevance of the play?
2. Is dowry common to Elizabethan and contemporary society? Discuss in brief.
3. Write in brief on the political relevance of the play to contemporary times.
4. Which relevant aspects of the play are predominant in the contemporary world?
5. Examine the social relevance of the play.

### 12.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the social relevance of the play in present times?
2. In what ways is the universality of Shakespeare an essential feature of the popularity of his plays even today?
3. Explain the major ideas of the play which are relevant to contemporary times.

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## 12.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Jose, J.K. *The Merchant of Venice*. Inter University Press: London, 2019.
2. Tillyard, EMW. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Vintage: New York, 1959.

## **Unit-13: Introduction to the British Novel**

### **Structure**

**13.0** Introduction

**13.1** Objectives

**13.2** An Overview of the British Novel

**13.2.1** Novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

**13.2.2** Factors Responsible for the Rise of the Novel

**13.2.3** The Social Environment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

**13.2.4** The Democratic Movement

**13.2.5** The Rise of Realism

**13.2.6** Decline of Drama

**13.2.7** Freedom of a Writer

**13.2.8** Novels that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

**13.3** Learning Outcomes

**13.4** Glossary

**13.5** Sample Questions

**13.6** Suggested Readings

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### **13.0 Introduction**

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Dear readers, this Unit will give you an overview of the British novel in general. We will try to locate the historical background of the British novel and identify some features that helped novel to emerge and develop as a genre. Although some critics have attempted to locate the novel in ancient Egyptian texts and middle-eastern Japanese writings, it is essentially a western fabrication. The truth is that the novel began in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the death of Shakespeare in 16<sup>th</sup> century in England, there was a common slogan that ‘it is not the death of Shakespeare but the death of drama’. The writers tried their hand on other genres for example, in the Jacobean era ‘masques’ were written, in Caroline and Neo-Classical periods, poetry was written. The novel came into vogue after the decline of drama with the complete closure of theatres in 1642. After the rise of the industrial revolution in England, the writers switched towards novel writing generally because of two factors. Firstly, the common masses were no

longer free and idle to spend time watching drama. Second, with the establishment of the printing press newspapers, journals and bulletins became readily available in the market and as such gave birth to new readership. Third, female writers were not much acknowledged therefore, they started to write novels to prove their worth. In the beginning they would use pseudo names to write the novels but once their work was acknowledged, they revealed their real names. For example, Mary Ann Evans used to write under the pen name of George Eliot, Bronte/ Stormy sisters viz. Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, and Anne Bronte used to write under the pseudo name of Currer Bell, Elis Bell, and Acton Bell respectively. The novel in England flourished in the Victorian era with a quartet known as “Four Wheels of English Novel” viz. Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett, and Lawrence Sterne. Henry Fielding laid the early foundation of the English novel Sir Walter Scott termed him the Father of English Novels.

The novel as a genre is difficult to define due to its open yet complex structure. Not only novel but other genres of literature viz. drama, short story, poetry, and other literary terms are challenging to define. A novel is a kind of lengthy narrative fiction written in prose style, exhibiting a story of characters in a specific setting. A novel is a complex narration as it includes a plot, setting, multiple themes, and many versatile characters. The story is crafted in such a way that it keeps the readers engaged from beginning to end. A novel is written on any or almost every theme, be it political, social, economic, scientific, psychological, etc. It can either be fictional or realistic as it may cover the burning issues, truths, or facts of a particular time or period. The novelist as a narrator or by being one of the characters in the novel narrates the story in such a way that it makes the readers connect with the overall plot, thereby invoking different responses in them. E. M Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* published in 1928 stated that a novel should have maximum wording of 50,000 words. Anything less than it would be considered a novella or a short story.

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## 13.1 Objectives

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This Unit has the following objectives:

- to provide an overview of the British novel
- to identify some famous pioneers of British novels
- to recognize the contribution of some important novelists
- to highlight the factors responsible for the rise of the novel
- to study the social realism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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## 13.2 An Overview of the British Novel

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The word novel is derived from the Italian word *novella*, and is a late variant of *novellas* that means “new.” It was an enlarged anecdote that was found in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian classics like Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In most of the fictional works, the medium is prose and the description of events is unheroic. Streets and taverns are generally a part of the setting in early novels. The genre achieved its first flowering in Spain at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the masterpiece *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. It contains many elements of prosaic fiction as compared to the *Satyricon* or *The Golden Ass*. Novels have heroes, though, not in the classical sense or even in the medieval sense.

A novel is a piece of prose of a reasonable length. However, not all novels are written in prose. Some novels are written in verses too like *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth. We are not sure what length should be considered suitable length to consider a short story as a novel. Interestingly, *The Immoralist* by Andre Gide is treated as a novel while *The Duel* by Antony Chekov is treated as a novella. However, both of these works are of the same length. Hence, it may be said that a novel is invented with a prose of a considerable length having a plot and definite end. It must have some complexity that imaginatively deals with human experience through a series of events by involving several people in a particular setting. As we know that the novel is one of the genres of fiction. Fiction may be defined as the art of representation of human life through imagination. It is a genre that has been a medium of entertainment, information, or a blend of both. In the light of these things, any art piece that is long enough to be adapted as a book can be said to have achieved “novelhood.” However, it also admits to quantitative categories, therefore, a relatively brief novel may be called a novella. Similarly, a very long novel may overflow and become a *roman fleuve* which means it can be in a series or volumes like the *Harry Potter*.

Considering its broader framework, novel has developed into an extensive range of types like picaresque, romantic, gothic, epistolary, historical, realist, campus novel, and many more. You will study more about the types of novel in Unit 17 of Block V of this course.

***Check your progress***

1. Where has the word *Novella* been derived from?

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2. Name any two novelists that you have read.

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**13.2.1 Novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century:**

Today novel is considered an important art form of the English language. It is because it affects the grand aspects of language and that is why it is now considered an integral part of art. But it can be claimed that the novel received recognition primarily in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, it does not mean that there were no novels written before this period, it only means that there was an increase in the release of novels during this period or age.

As we know that English novel is an essential part of English literature, therefore, it has evolved in varied forms and with modifications over the period of time. This period witnessed many revolutions that impacted the structure of the then society to a great extent. The trend of enlightenment thinking was at the fore of these revolutions. It was experienced in the French and American revolutions.

**13.2.2 Factors Responsible for the Rise of Novel:**

Some of the best gifts that the eighteenth century received were periodicals and novels, and interestingly both had no precedents. These are both in prose form and were suitable for the genius of 18<sup>th</sup> century men and women. Both these literary productions (periodicals and novels) were advocates of the same sensibility in many respects. These literary products aimed at instructing humans to live a more purposeful life.

Out of these two literary genres, the periodical essay was more a peculiar product of the environment prevailing. It was born in the eighteenth century and ended in the same period after enjoying a brief yet phenomenal reputation. The ‘novel’ on the other hand not only survived but sustained as well and attained more popularity with every passing day ever since its origin. Even today, we know that drama has become almost a defunct genre, while novel still holds its head high as a predominant genre. Let’s consider now some of the important factors responsible for the rise of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **13.2.3 The Social Environment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century:**

According to David Daiches, the novel “was in a large degree the product of the middle class, appealing to middle-class ideals and sensibilities, a patterning of imagined events set against a realized social background and taking its view of what was significant in human behaviour from agreed public attitudes.” Oliver Elton states: “It came to express, far better than the poetry could do, the temper of the age and race.” It is to be remembered that the eighteenth century is also known for the rise of the middle classes. There was an increase in trade and commerce and most of the people were becoming wealthy while many poor people found themselves in the respectable ranks. The literary works before the eighteenth century were meant for reading by the higher strata of society. The new middle class of the century demanded some sort of literature that would conform to their temperament and was designed to voice their aspirations to meet their needs.

England was turning into a country of big and small rich traders. It is believed that these people took less interest in the exaggerated romances of heroes and heroines, they had no liking for villainy which interested the upper class of England. Therefore, some new type of literature was demanded: something which could express the ideals of the eighteenth century, the importance of individual life, to tell a man not about kings and crowns but themselves. This was the main concern of the early novelists.

The novel kept its explicit or implicit purpose of ‘teaching’ something to the reader. The moral and ethical objective of the eighteenth century was taken for granted. The novel was yet another literary form like the periodical essay to inculcate morality and ethical good among the general masses.

### **13.2.4 The Democratic Movement:**

The eighteenth century served as a warning for old English feudalism. It also removed many hurdles that were prevalent among many social classes. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 led to the dominance of Parliament and the forging of the democratic spirit. This democratization reached its height in the eighteenth century; the era of coffee houses which were encouraged by free and frank discussions and deliberations. Bonamay Dombre in *The Literature of Early Eighteenth Century* states, there emerged two different classes of readers, the rich or sophisticated or the common masses. The motive of the democratic movement was to stress the importance of life and activities of the common masses. There was an urgency of a literary form

that would act like a mirror to the society and unlike tragedy and romance would depict a realistic picture about the various aspects of the society. There was a need for a literary form that would deal with the problems and guide the common masses to live a better life. No doubt the new form was novel, which was kind of a democratic epic. Writers like Richardson, Fielding, Sterne and Smollett and their followers advocate the theme of commoners. The protagonist of the novel *Pamela* (Pamela as the main character) is the name of a female maidservant. If it was not the first novel of English literature, it was certainly the first nevertheless to associate the feelings and emotions of the middle class. Hence, we may say that eighteenth century was a period of great transition.

***Check your progress***

1. Mention any two factors responsible for the rise of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the protagonist of the novel *Pamela*?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**13.2.5 The Rise of Realism:**

The eighteenth-century literature was filled with realism and was devoid of enthusiasm, passion and suggestiveness which predominated romantic works. Every writer, whether a poet, essayist, dramatist, or novelist believed that if they want their works to appeal to the general masses, it was essential on their part to present a rational appraisal of reality. Hence, novel was yet another medium to explore the presentation of social reality. Most of the novelists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were stark realists who presented a realistic picture of the then society. In this connection, David Daiches observes, “Like the medieval fabliau, also a product of the urban imagination, the novel tended to realism and contemporaneity in the sense that it dealt with people living in the social world known to the writer.” Thus, it may be claimed that the novel became a favourable field for realism.

**13.2.6 Decline of the Drama:**

The fall of drama was a great factor responsible for the rise of the novel. It was no longer a forceful factor as it was in the Elizabethan period or even during the period of Charles II. The Licensing Act of 1737, which was meant to curb scurrilous political satire in drama led to the disappearance of drama from the literary scene. The extreme licentiousness of drama in the

Restoration period and the subsequent closing of the theaters during the Puritan age led to the decline of drama. It no longer remained an influential form of literature. The public demanded a new literary form that would represent the bitter realities of society and satisfy their thirst for social reality.

### **13.2.7 Freedom of a Writer:**

The emergence of the novel was also possible because the novel offered more freedom to the writer than drama. It must be admitted that there were many limitations while writing a drama: the writer had to stay in the background and then complete the entire play in a limited time span of two or three hours. This was not the case with the novelist, he could remain omniscient and could intrude as and when required or as per the demand of the script. Moreover, in drama there was a limitation in terms of length, therefore, the novel offered a better choice of freedom than drama. Interestingly, the novel did not remain confined to Britain. Hence, novel was considered a welcome substitute for drama.

Another important thing is that novel had no precedent which made it different from other literary forms like drama or poetry. Presuming that a writer wanted to write a play, an epic, or an ode, he could look into how they were written by others before him. This was not the case with the novel. Therefore, those who wanted to write a novel had to set a tradition and not follow any writer in the strict sense of following any authority.

### **13.2.8 Novels that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century:**

Before Richardson and Fielding could shape the novel, some other writers had already started which helped the pioneers of the novel to a great extent. Some of the writers who had already started giving shape to the novel were Swift and Defoe. *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift provides an interesting account of travels. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is also a travel narrative. The period between 1840 to 1900 witnessed the emergence of many writers. More than a hundred novels were written during this phase. However, the true pioneers of the novel were Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. There were others too, but they were not as popular as these four novelists. Oliver Elton maintains: "The work of the four masters stands high, but the foothills are low." Fielding was the greatest of the four. Sir Edmund Gosse calls Richardson "the first great English novelist" and Fielding, "the greatest of English novelists." Fielding may not be the greatest of all, but he was certainly one of the greatest English novelists and the greatest novelist of the eighteenth century.

In the following Units of this block, you will study about the historical survey of the British novel and the major novelists in a detailed manner.

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### 13.3 Learning Outcomes

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

- know the background of the British novel
- understand the definition of the novel
- identify the factors responsible for the rise of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- understand the social environment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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### 13.4 Glossary

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**Genre:** A category of art or literature.

**Novel:** A novel is a relatively long work of narrative fiction, typically written in prose and published as a book.

**Plot:** The series of events that make up the story, traditionally, conflict, climax, denouement, and conclusion.

**Setting:** The place, the time, and the social circumstances of the work.

**Tone:** The general attitude of the author toward the characters or the subject matter of the book.

**Characters:** The sentient or non-sentient beings alive or dead who are the actors of the events.

**Point of View:** Perspective from which a work is told, 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, omniscient, limited.

**Static:** That cannot alter or is never changing.

**Anarchy:** Absence of law and order.

**Corruption:** Bribery, the state of being tainted or debased.

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### 13.5 Sample Question

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#### 13.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following is not an essential element of a novel?

- (a) Plot
- (b) Character

- (c) Argument
  - (d) Theme
2. What is the leading character of a novel called?
- (a) Protagonist
  - (b) Antagonist
  - (c) Confidant
  - (d) None
3. Which of the following novelists used the pseudonym 'George Eliot'?
- (a) Jane Austen
  - (b) Virginia Woolf
  - (c) Elaine Showalter
  - (d) None
4. Who among the following wrote *Gulliver's Travel*?
- (a) Vikram Seth
  - (b) Thomas Hardy
  - (c) Mathew Arnold
  - (d) Jonathan Swift
5. Who wrote *Jane Eyre*?
- (a) Jane Austen
  - (b) Emily Bronte
  - (c) Charlotte Bronte
  - (d) George Eliot
6. The novel *Pamela* is written by
- (a) Virginia Woolf
  - (b) Jane Austen
  - (c) Emily Bronte
  - (d) Richardson
7. *Aspects of Novel* is work by
- (a) E. M. Forester
  - (b) W.H Auden
  - (c) T.S Eliot
  - (d) None

8. The word 'Novel' has been derived from

- (a) Italian
- (b) French
- (c) Greek
- (d) None

9. What does the word *Novella* mean?

- (a) New
- (b) Young
- (c) Old
- (d) None

10. Who wrote *Robinson Crusoe*?

- (a) Daniel Defoe
- (b) Henry Fielding
- (c) Charles Dickens
- (d) George Eliot

### 13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a short note on the social environment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Name any five novelists that you have studied from this unit.
3. Comment on the emergence of realism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
4. Discuss any two reasons for the decline of drama.
5. Throw some light on the origin of the novel.

### 13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss in detail the factors responsible for the emergence of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
2. The novel as a genre presented a realistic picture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Discuss.
3. Write a detailed note on the origin and development of the English novel.

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## 13.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Atlantic Publisher: New Delhi, 2004.
2. Lukacs, George. *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge UP: London, 1990.
3. Williams, Raymond. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. Chatto and Windus: New York, 1970.



## **Unit-14: A Brief History of the Novel**

### **Structure**

**14.0** Introduction

**14.1** Objectives

**14.2** Introduction to the Novel

**14.2.1** Factors Responsible for the Rise of the English Novel

**14.2.2** Pioneers of the Novel

**14.2.3** Women Novel Writers

**14.2.4** Different Types of Novels in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

**14.3** Learning Outcomes

**14.4** Sample Questions

**14.5** Glossary

**14.6** Suggested Readings

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### **14.0 Introduction**

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Literature consists of different kinds of writings that have evolved over a period of time. These writings in literature have their journey with poetry being the oldest and novel being the latest. The rise of the novel in itself is an interesting topic to read, as it was an outcome of new adventures, evolving societies and changing times. ‘Novel’ is the most recent genre in literature that came into existence in the eighteenth century. After prose writing, the novel has opened gates for writers in the most widely used language across the globe i.e., English. Since the inception of the novel, its popularity has been maintained among the masses as the most widely read of all kinds of literature in the twenty-first century. Until the eighteenth century, fiction in prose writing existed but novel as a genre took a definite shape much later. You will find it interesting how novel as a medium of writing evolved in the eighteenth century. You will further be acquainted with how the novel has taken different forms over the period.

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## 14.1 Objectives

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The following objectives will be achieved in this Unit:

- introduction to the rise of the English novel
- explanation of the four wheels of the English novel
- introduction to the women novel writers
- introduction to the types of novels in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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## 14.2 Introduction to the Novel

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As you already studied in the previous Unit, the word ‘novel’ is derived from the Italian word “novella” which means “new.” It is a prose narrative of considerable length representing characters and action meant to tell a story published in a book form. Unlike epic poetry, the novel tells the story of a specific human character in prose form. It is now applied to a variety of writings that are extended works of fiction written in prose. M.H. Abrams states: “it’s [the novel’s] magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, a greater complication of the plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motives than do the shorter, more concentrated modes.” Long narrative pastoral romances written in English or Greek like Sidney’s *Arcadia*, Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*, Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* continued to influence novel writing in English.

Novels overtook all the popular forms of storytelling like epic poetry and chivalric romances. The development of the novel owes much to the picaresque narrative in prose style. The picaresque prose narratives like Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) are among the progenitors of the modern English novels.

The eighteenth-century novels centred around real-life issues that led to complex plot structures, realistic settings, representation of people from different sections of the society. Unlike earlier prose writings which mainly focussed on the aristocratic class, individual experiences were celebrated and recognised through novel writings that common people could easily relate to by looking into strengths and weaknesses of the characters. As drama began to decline, the novel became a source of entertainment, information, enlightenment for the general public as they could see themselves transported to the real world represented in the novels.

### **14.2.1 Factors Responsible for the Rise of the English Novel:**

The emergence of coffee houses, leisure in literary activities, increased readership, establishment of publication houses and rise of the middle class marks the social change in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The factors that marked the transition from Augustan prose, poetry and drama into the novel are discussed in detail:

**1. The Printing Press:** The printing press made newspapers, periodicals, bulletins, journals readily available in the market. Books became commercialized as the publication became easy due to the affordable price of ink, paper, bookbinding, etc. Literacy rates started surging, as a result, many writers started contributing through their writings. Thus, prose writing became dominant as it offered an introduction to new learnings, ideologies, movements in England and Europe. In the 18th century, the widespread publication of newspapers and magazines attracted a large number of readers from the middle class. A significant number of people from the lower class started reading more and more books, newspapers, periodicals that helped them to know about the condition of the working class throughout Europe. This change brought about by newspapers specifically encouraged the lower strata of society to share their narratives and conditions in prose writings. The prose writings included old romances in the language used by common people resulting in the rise of novels in England. Newspapers, journals, and magazines published letters from readers in different editions. Periodicals became an important part of social groups and coffee houses as well. The new readers showed little interest in romances and tragedies. This gave rise to epistolary and episodic writings which matured into novels like Pamela by Richardson written in the form of a series of letters. Thus, the opening of more publication houses to cater to new readership resulted in the rise of novels in the eighteenth century.

**2. The Glorious Revolution:** The Glorious Revolution of November 1688, is a term used by John Hampden in late 1689. It is a term associated with the deposition of King James II when the throne was taken over by his daughter Mary II and William of Orange. After this revolution, the democratic movements started surging all across England that emphasized giving power to the commoners. In addition, the French Revolution, the American Revolution, and the Haitian Revolution questioned the structures that subdued the voice of the common man, for instance the monarchical system, slave trading, and human trafficking. Thus, revolutions became an important factor in the rise of the novel during the period. During such movements, the commoners became the subject matter of the writings, and stories of the common people were

celebrated in the novels that brought common people together. Moreover, this age came to be called as the age of reason as accepted norms were replaced with rational thinking, logic, intellect, reason, and realism. This was marked by discoveries in the field of science, change in new laws and revolutions across the globe.

Immanuel Kant in an essay titled ‘What Is Enlightenment?’ (1784) described this age as ‘Dare to know! Have the courage to use your reason!’ Interestingly, people in the 18th century lost interest in reading about the aristocracy and became interested in reading about everyday events and the lives of fictional characters that were close to themselves. Thus, characters like Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, etc became popular as they represented a life full of adventure doing away with the boredom of aristocracy.

**3. The Rise of the Middle Class:** The rise of the middle class in the 18th century had a significant effect on the rise of novels. Many merchants, travellers, and manufacturers amassed great wealth due to the growth of industrialization in England. These people made trade more lucrative by increasing their social and political influence. Due to exponential growth in trade and commerce, the newly rich class wanted to take over the canonical structures as they were neglected by the high-born writers who had been part of prominent universities. Thus, the rise of the novel was quite natural with the growth of the middle class who were ambitious and rational at the same time. David Daiches writes: “[it] was in a large measure the product of the middle class, appealing to middle-class ideals and sensibilities, a patterning of imagined events set against a realized social background and taking its view of what was significant in human behaviour from agreed public attitudes.” The widespread education among the middle class made them liberated in their thoughts, they began to challenge already established laws and conventions.

**4. Literacy:** Due to the easy availability of printed books and newspapers, there was a surge in the number of people gaining education. Many middle-class and lower-class people wanted to explore the world of knowledge through books and newspapers which used to be a privilege of the high-class people. A large number of the population could read and write by the 18th century, thus there was a rise in readership. So several publishing houses sprung up that made novels popular in England. The novel became a source of entertainment that could be read at any time without losing the storyline; it opened the gateways for amusing stories from new and far-off lands visited by merchants, travellers, and imperial representatives. Being literate became a necessity for people in the eighteenth century, a luxury to be enjoyed by all.

**5. Decline of the Drama:** The decline of the drama also contributed to the rise of the novel in the 18th century. Due to industrialization, many people started working in factories. Though the economic condition of the lower and the middle class improved, they did not have much time to enjoy themselves in the theatre. In the 18th century, drama lost its fame as an influential literary form that it had enjoyed during the Elizabethan Age. Due to affordable luxuries, one could read novels after work which created space for individual learning and knowledge.

**6. Realism:** The rise of realism in the 18th century also affected the growth of the novel. The pivotal subjects that concern the realist movement such as reason, intellect, and rationality became part of the novel writing. The readers welcomed the depiction of reality in the novels. It was easy for them to identify with the characters and situation presented through realism.

***Check your Progress***

1. Mention any two factors responsible for the rise of English novel in 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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**14.2.2 Pioneers of the Novel:**

The novel writing in England matured with the contribution of writings by Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. They are known as the pioneers of the novel who laid a strong foundation for the genre to flourish in coming years.

**1. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761):** Samuel Richardson made a debut with the publication of the novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* in 1740. It is considered the first modern novel to be written in English. It is an epistolary novel i.e., written in the form of letters. The plot is simple and well written. The characters and situations are developed through the exchange of letters by the characters. It talks about the life of the heroine belonging to the commoners background. She goes through trials and tribulations in the novel and finally settles in a happy marriage. Richardson presented the morality of common people through this novel. Another novel that is written by Richardson is *Clarissa or The History of A Lady in eight volumes* (1748). It is regarded as one of the greatest novels of the eighteenth century. It provided Richardson with a good audience and established him as a novelist. It is a realistic novel with psychological insights which led to the introduction of sentimentality in English novels. His works contain stories about common people told from psychological insights that are true to human nature.

According to Ricket, by portraying females as protagonists he encouraged many female writers to write their stories in the form of novels. He paved way for *Tristram Shandy* and *Joseph Andrews*.

**2. Henry Fielding (1707-54):** Henry Fielding is known as the father of English novels. He is the greatest novelist of the 18th century. He wrote his first novel *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr Abraham Adams* in 1742 as a parody on Richardson's *Pamela*. It is a picaresque novel that represents his deep understanding of human nature that he imbibed through his understanding of life and experiences. It is a burlesque that narrates the adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Parson Adams. Fielding completely rejects the epistolary form and moralizing as used by Richardson in his novel *Pamela*. He introduced humour in his novel and genial insights into human nature. Fielding also wrote *The Life and Death of the Late Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743) in which he presented glimpses of the ruffian mentality. *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) is regarded as Fielding's masterpiece. It is a significant work as it represents a rich, vivid, realistic picture of the contemporary society of eighteenth-century England. His novels *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are regarded as the comic epics in prose and are more than a picaresque novel. Another novel by Fielding is *Amelia* (1751) where the protagonist is a good and faithful wife. The theory of novel writing is credited to Henry Fielding who formulated a definite shape and form for the novel. Fielding is a realist, a founder of modern realistic novels and novels of manners. He presented to us a close-knit organic plot that reflects his craftsmanship through his novels. He broke away from the artificial style of writing and infused vitality and comic elements in the novels through the characters like Adams, Partridge, Mrs. Slipslop, to cite a few. In his novels, he uses irony as a weapon of satire. He replaced Richardson's morbid morality presented in *Pamela* and other novels with a commonsense morality that is not overarching.

**3. Tobias Smollett (1721-71):** The most famous contributions of Smollett to this genre are *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), etc. His novels are narratives about adventures in life with a loose plot structure. Smollett wrote episodic novels where he presented the harsh realities of life. Smollett expressed evils of life with the realism of the ship scenes in *The Roderick Random* that led to improving conditions in the naval service. Thus, most of his novels are novels with a purpose. Dickens was much inspired by Smollett for presenting lively characters.

**4. Laurence Sterne (1713-1768):** *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) by Sterne is the most celebrated novel that won him recognition in England. He writes about the experiences of the Shandy family. Through his odd characters like Uncle Toby and Corporal Trimm, he presents human eccentricities in a brilliant style. Lawrence Sterne had a university education and he became a celebrated author with the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* being a big commercial success. It offered bawdy jokes, parodies, and a different kind of unpredictable narrative moving back and forth in time. The second novel by the author *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) has a remarkable style as it combines essays, travel, and fiction in a non-existent plot and chronology. A significant contribution made by Sterne in the novel as a genre is that of characterization. His characters are created with minute detail of gesture, expression, body language, etc that make his characters like a moving picture in front of our eyes. Sterne's non-existent plot and impressionistic characterization influenced writers to make use of the stream of consciousness technique in their writings. He is regarded to use the word sentiment for the first time as its contemporary understanding and usage. Sterne's impressionistic style of writing resonates with that of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Thus, these four novelists perfected this genre with sentimentality as seen in Richardson's work, humour in Fielding's writings, Smollett added liveliness and Sterne reflected impressionism in his works. The above-mentioned novelists laid down the pavement for the most popular writing form which is evolving ever since the eighteenth century.

**5. Other Novelists:** Many other writers who explored this genre to make it popular during the eighteenth century were Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Mackenzie and William Godwin to list a few. Oliver Goldsmith gains popularity with his work *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). It has a simple plot blended with humour and pathos represented through erratic yet realistic characters to elucidate a romantic and gratifying picture of domestic village life in England.

Henry Mackenzie was a Scottish novelist who moved to London in 1765. He is also called Addison of the north. He was caught in the spirit of the time and used the concept of sentimentality established by Sterne in his works. Mackenzie shows the influence of Sterne in his quasi-ironic sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771). The novel is about the naive protagonist Harley's life in scrappy episodes and non-existent chapters. The novel highlights the tribulations of Harley, who lost his parents as a young boy and under the custody of numerous guardians moved to London to improve his financial state. This work, through its sentimentality,

influenced the work of Charles Dickens in the following years. *The Man of the World* (1773) is the second novel by Mackenzie where he shows a real picture of the world through a shady character. *Julia de Roubigné* (1777) is an epistolary novel written by Mackenzie.

William Godwin (1745-1831) was a prolific writer who encompasses the changing times of his period in his writings. He wrote *Caleb Williams or Things As They Are* (1794) in three volumes to show how man-made institutions destroy man. The story is about a servant who knows about the dark secret of his aristocratic master and is forced to flee as judicial/ legal institutions would destroy Caleb forever. The novel highlights Godwin's ideas discussed in his polemic work *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Godwin was very famous among radical circles in London for his direct attack on the privileged aristocratic people. He married Mary Wollstonecraft who is among the pioneers of women writers in England.

Many women surfaced as professional novelists and journalists in the eighteenth century and voiced female perspectives through their writings. This shall be discussed in the next section.

### **14.2.3 Women Novel Writers:**

Ian Watt remarks in *The Rise of Novel* (1957) that during the eighteenth century “the numerical (if not qualitative) majority [of novels] were written by women.” As women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were devoid of leisure activities like hunting, drinking, etc they invested their time in reading novels which also motivated them to write about their stories. The new genre and changing times in the eighteenth century gave women an opportunity to explore their creativity and imagination through their works.

Frances Burney (1752-1842) is regarded as the first woman novelist in English. Virginia Woolf called her “Mother of English Fiction.” In her works, one can find the influence of the pioneers of the novel. Her major work includes *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) written in an epistolary style inspired by Richardson, depicts the life of Evelina who is raised in a rural setup until she turns seventeen years of age. However, she explores the complexity of eighteenth-century England during her visits to London and Bristol. The novel is a sentimental novel mingled with the humour of Fielding and Smollett. Fanny Burney's other works include *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782). It is a novel about the domestic life of Cecilia in eighteenth-century London and her search for a match, *Camilla, A Picture of Youth* (1796) concerns with the matrimonial and social fabric prevalent during that time, and *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814) deals with the story of a mysterious

woman trying to gain economic independence. Through her works, she inspired Jane Austen to write about feminine sensibility prevailing in the nineteenth-century England.

Aphra Behn is regarded as the first woman novelist who earned a living by her writing. Her famous work *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688) is an interesting, adventurous yet horrifying narrative about an African prince who is captured and forced into slavery. *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684) is another famous work by her in epistolary form. She wrote vigorously to contribute fourteen novels and a dozen plays.

Eliza Heywood became the rival of Defoe with the publication of her first novel *Love In Excess* (1719) which was the bestseller that year along with *Robinson Crusoe*. It explores the treatment of a fallen woman along with education and marriage. *Idalia; or The Unfortunate Mistress* (1723) touches the amorous adventures of the protagonist in Italy. She was attacked by Alexander Pope in his *Dunciad* (1728) which almost destroyed her career.

Hannah More wrote one novel titled *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, which is about the life of a submissive wife. Jane Barker in her famous novel *Love Intrigues; Or, The History Of The Amours Of Bosvil And Galicia* (1719) depicts psychological realism.

Delarivier Manley, Penelope Aubin, Mary Davys, Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Rowe are a few other novelists who became professional writers who legitimized women's voice as novelists in the eighteenth century.

***Check your Progress***

1. Name any two women novelists that you have read.

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2. Mention any two important novels by women writers.

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**14.2.4 Different Types of Novels in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century:**

**1. Picaresque Novel:** The word picaresque came from the Spanish word “picaro” which means a ‘rogue’ or ‘rascal’. The picaresque is a genre of prose fiction that originated in Spain. It is generally an autobiographical account of the adventures in episodes of a low social class hero who makes his way into the world by his wit, comedy, and predominant satire.

Miguel de Cervantes was a Spanish writer who is regarded as the pioneer of the picaresque novels with his famous work *Don Quixote* (1605). Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller or The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594) is seen as an example of the picaresque novel before Defoe. This form gained its popularity in the eighteenth century as it was extensively used by Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett. Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) is considered the first picaresque novel in English. Other noteworthy picaresque novels of the period are Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743), and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749). The genre became popular with the works of Smollett which included *Roderick Random*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, and *Peregrine Pickle*. This novel type is realistic in manner, episodic in structure and satirical in aim.

**2. Sentimental Novel:** The sentimental novel also called the novel of sensibility refers to the genre of fiction prevalent in the latter half of eighteenth-century England. The plot relies on the emotional sensibilities of the characters who are generally innocent, virtuous, compassionate, and have a charitable impulse towards a situation and nature that defines the course of action. The most famous sentimental novels in English are Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765–70) and Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). In the nineteenth century, it gave rise to domestic fiction that talks about the daily lives of the characters living in the society. Frances Burney and Jane Austen were famous domestic fiction writers who observed life closely in their description of the society.

**3. Epistolary Novel:** An epistolary novel is a novel written in the form of a series of letters. The characters in the novel correspond with each other through letters; sometimes diary entries and newspaper snippets are also used to build the story. Through the letters, the characters express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Aphra Behn explored the genre through her writing *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684), but this genre gained popularity in the eighteenth century with the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* in a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison. Henry Fielding wrote *Shamela* (1741), a parody of Pamela.

**4. Gothic Novel:** The term 'Gothic' originally referred to 'Goths' which means a Germanic tribe. Gothic romance or novel of terror was an outcome of a revival of interest in the medieval ages.

The gothic romances first made their appearance in the poems of the late eighteenth century. The shift towards romantic tendencies from realistic lines played a significant role in the description of time, space, landscapes, and nature that contribute an important aspect of gothic fiction. Abandoned castles, churches, secret passages, haunted places, satanic forces, ghosts, supernatural terror, mystery, and emotions of fear and awe were the main elements of the gothic writings. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is among the earliest of the gothic novels in English, Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* were famous Gothic novels with well-written plots creating suspense and horror throughout the novel, William Beckford's *The History of the Caliph Vathek* (1786) deals with the mysteries of oriental necromancy. Satire mingles with sensation in his novels. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, Miss Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* are a few more examples of Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century.

Thus, at the close of the eighteenth century, we find novels that deal with social life and manners, symbolize emotional delight in nature and the medieval past, and undertake to right the wrongs of society. Moody and Lovett defined these three schools as the realists, the romanticists, and the social novelists which have continued in some form or the other till contemporary times.

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### 14.3 Learning Outcomes

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At the end of this Unit, you should be acquainted with the rise of the novels in English and various factors contributing to its growth. You should have learned about the contribution of the key writers who made novel writing a popular genre in England. You should be able to understand the contribution of women writers in experimenting with different kinds of novel writing. You should also be aware of the different types of novel at the end of this Unit.

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### 14.4 Glossary

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**Evolving:** Advancing or growing gradually

**Inception:** Foundation/starting of an institution

**Acquaint:** Familiar

**Ampler:** Abundant, plentiful

**Milieu:** Social setting

**Surging:** Rising, increasing

**Strata:** Layer, section

**Patronage:** Sponsored/funded by someone

**Tribulations:** Difficulties, sufferings

**Snippets:** A short piece of writing, an extract

**Necromancy:** A magic practice to communicate with the dead

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## 14.5 Sample Questions

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### 14.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which one of the following is not regarded as the pioneer of the novel?
  - (a) Samuel Johnson
  - (b) Richardson
  - (c) Samuel Tobias
  - (d) Lawrence Sterne
2. Who among the following was a woman novelist during the eighteenth century?
  - (a) Virginia Woolf
  - (b) Jane Austen
  - (c) Fanny Burney
  - (d) George Eliot
3. Which of the following is not the work of Daniel Defoe?
  - (a) *Robinson Crusoe*
  - (b) *Moll Flanders*
  - (c) *Captain Singleton*
  - (d) *Shamela*
4. Who among the following is not a novelist?
  - (a) Daniel Defoe
  - (b) Henry Fielding
  - (c) William Shakespeare
  - (d) Samuel Richardson
5. Who is a pioneer of English novels among the following?
  - (a) John Dryden
  - (b) Daniel Defoe
  - (c) John Milton
  - (d) John Keats
6. Who wrote *Pamela*?
  - (a) Daniel Defoe
  - (b) Jonathan Swift
  - (c) Tobias Smollett
  - (d) Samuel Richardson

7. Who wrote *Robinson Crusoe*?

- (a) Daniel Defoe  
(b) Thomas Nash  
(c) Samuel Richardson  
(d) Tobias Smollett

8. *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* is \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) an epistolary novel  
(b) science fiction  
(c) a travelogue  
(d) a picaresque novel

9. Who is considered a pioneer of women writers?

- (a) Samuel Richardson  
(b) Mary Wolstonecraft  
(c) Edward Gibbon  
(d) Tobias Smollett

10. Who is a novelist among the following?

- (a) Dr. Samuel Johnson  
(b) Daniel Defoe  
(c) S.T. Coleridge  
(d) FR Leavis

#### 14.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write about any one pioneer of novel writing.
2. Mention any two characteristics of the novel.
3. What were the different factors responsible for the rise of novels in England?
4. What role did revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century play in the rise of the novel?
5. Discuss the major themes of the majority of novels written during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 14.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Examine the different types of novels that were produced during the eighteenth century?
2. Discuss the historical development of the novel.
3. How has novel writing emerged as major writing in contemporary times? How are novels written during the eighteenth century different from contemporary novels?

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## 14.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Albert, Edward. *The History of English Literature*, Fifth Edition. London: Oxford University Press. 2004.
2. Clive, T. Probyn. *English Fiction of the Eighteenth Century 1700 — 1789*. Longman, 1992.
3. Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell. 2012.
4. Ian, Watt. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

## Unit-15: Important Novelists before Dickens

### Structure

15.0 Introduction

15.1 Objectives

15.2 Important Novelists before Dickens

15.2.1 Novel and its Pioneers

15.2.2 Novelists of the Romantic Age

15.2.3 Contemporaries of Dickens

15.3 Learning Outcomes

15.4 Glossary

15.5 Sample Questions

15.6 Suggested Readings

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### 15.0 Introduction

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The novel as a genre of literature evolved in English society because of inherent class conflict. A divide between elite ruling classes and common working classing manifested in various domains and periods in British society. A notable incident of class conflict at the political level was the formation of the Puritan government which signalled the dominance of the middle-classes. With this began a new phase in the English society where the middle-class grew in size and readership. The novel and short story found their much-needed readers who had time to read written pieces of fiction at convenience. In this situation, novels not only provided them with a source of entertainment after day-to-day tiring labour but also became a literary medium of their own as they contained characters that appeared, spoke, thought, and behaved in ways like they did. Over the centuries, the novel was influenced by societal and historical developments.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) belongs to the Victorian period. Though he was not the first writer to give the English readers a new genre called novel, Dickens set a benchmark for writers of later generations to produce novels that mirror society in its true form—filled with realistic characters, human anomalies, miseries, mundane circumstances, injustices, and a purpose to reform the society. Before Dickens wrote his first novel, which was serialized for a magazine,

many writers contributed to the development of the novel as a genre. The table given below gives you some important novels that appeared before the arrival of Dickens on the literary scene of the English soil.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Publication Year</b>
Daniel Defoe	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	1719
Daniel Defoe	<i>Moll Flanders</i>	1722
Jonathan Swift	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	1726
Samuel Richardson	<i>Pamela or Virtue Rewarded</i>	1740
Henry Fielding	<i>Tom Jones</i>	1749
Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	1813
Charles Dickens	<i>The Pickwick Papers</i>	1836-37

In this Unit, we will trace the origin of the novel and discuss notable novelists who appeared before Charles Dickens, a British novelist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century known for social realism in his fictional works. Some of the novelists who will be discussed at length in the Unit are Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Lawrence Stern, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott. You have already read about them in the previous Unit. In addition, minor novelists from the Augustan Age, the Romantic Age and the Victorian Age will also be discussed.

## 15.1 Objectives

The objectives of the Unit are as follows:

- to provide an overview of English novelists from the start of the novel as a new genre up to Charles Dickens
- to introduce important novelists before Dickens

## 15.2 Important Novelists before Dickens

### 15.2.1 Origin of the Novel and its Pioneers:

The novel found its early fertile ground for emergence as a new genre in the Augustan period. It was a literary period that started in 1700 and ended in 1798. In the first half of the period, classical tendencies were in practice while the second half witnessed the transition from

classicism to romanticism. On the political front, two new parties emerged after the accession of Queen Anne in 1702. They were the Whigs and the Tories. People began showing a growing interest in politics and political discussions.

In the meantime, coffee houses emerged as a central point of convergence for writers, thinkers, politicians, intellectuals, and artists. The discussions in the coffee houses were marked with polished language, contemporary culture, and lucid style. In a way, this coffee house culture contributed to the evolution of the prose style of the day. One such prose writer, Joseph Addison clearly stated in *The Spectator* about the new tone in writing: “I shall endeavour to enliven morality with wit and wit with morality.” The period had seen assimilation of the aristocracy and the middle class. After the emergence of the middle class, feelings, emotions, and sentimentalism not only rose but also influenced the literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The decline of drama in the Puritan age and during the Augustan period made way for the novel. It was a genre that embodied the story of human life with all its mundane chores, emotions and feelings, hardships, adventures and so on. As many argue, the four pioneering figures of the novel are Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. Another major novelist of the time was Daniel Defoe. In their works, these writers attempted to reflect life in its true spirit in the form of a story. Though they set a new trend with a new genre in England, this art of making a story out of the lives of the common man was refined at the hands of the novelists in later eras.

### **Daniel Defoe (1660–1731)**

Daniel Defoe was an English novelist known for his popular work *Robinson Crusoe* (1719–22). During the reign of Queen Anne, he single-handedly brought out the *Review* from 1704 to 1713. It often served as an organ of the government and mirrored the views of Tories. Through this paper, Defoe discussed morals, religion and trade besides providing commentary on current affairs. This periodical served as a remarkable influence for periodicals produced by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison. Defoe produced an extended work of prose fiction titled *Robinson Crusoe*, a story of adventure with a hero and a situation that readers could easily identify themselves with. The success of *Robinson Crusoe* prompted him to produce more novels including *Moll Flanders*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, *Colonel Jack*, and *Roxana*. His novels give an insight into human nature—his characters are ordinary human beings placed in unusual circumstances, living in solitude, and struggling in day-to-day life. His fiction is marked with matter-of-fact direct style, vivid details, random subject matter, moralizing tone, and naiveté. With his novels, he succeeded in holding the reader’s interest.

### **Samuel Richardson (1683–1761)**

Samuel Richardson was an English novelist and prolific writer who introduced sentimentality into the English novel. Though he printed close to 500 works such as periodicals and poetry in his lifetime, he started a distinct variety of writing called epistolary novels. Written in the form of letters, his first novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1739) develops into a story as the characters exchange letters. The novel immediately became successful. Richardson skillfully blended morality and social purpose into the story while keeping the plot simple and Pamela's character well-drawn. His second novel *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* appeared in 1744. The characters of Clarissa and Lovelace have been given a realistic touch. The former contains psychological insight while the latter offers a fine example of a scoundrel. Richardson's novels were immensely popular in his lifetime itself. His novels contain sharp details, an impeccable dramatic technique and an insight into women's thought and action. He earned a place for himself among English novelists through the power of his craft. *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* is his last novel which appeared in 1753-4. He breathed his last in 1761 and was buried in London.

### **Henry Fielding (1707–1754)**

Henry Fielding was a novelist, essayist, playwright, and pamphleteer during the Restoration period. Born in Somerset, he was educated at Eton College in classical literature and languages. Along with Richardson, he was considered among the founders of the English novel. His first success came with *Shamela* (1741), a parody of *Pamela*. He was a witty man with a passion for justice and reform. With his humour and satire, he established his literary position. His ability to create a wide variety of characters representing varying social classes made his position strong among literary figures. His two popular novels are *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). He also wrote comedies, satires, burlesques, masques, and farces. His burlesque *Tom Thumb* (1730), political satires *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) are worth mentioning. He edited two journals—*The True Patriot* (1745-1746) and *The Jacobite's Journal* (1747-1748). *Tom Jones* remains his comic masterpiece. This picaresque novel is hailed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as one of the "three most perfect plots ever planned". The novel has been adapted into the motion picture and for stage multiple times since its first publication.

### **Lawrence Stern (1713–1768)**

Lawrence Stern was an Irish-born English novelist and humorist. He was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge where he learnt Locke's philosophy. He wrote two novels—*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). Though he produced only two works of fiction, he rose to fame among his contemporary novelists because he experimented with the novel as a genre. *Tristram Shandy* (1759) presents the story in a straightforward narrative with humour, sentimentality, absurdness, wordplay, innuendo, and unknown narrative devices. His novel pokes fun at *Pamela* for over-precise detailing and sentimentality. It dwells on two themes—isolation of people from each other and time. The isolation is caused by inadequacies of language whereas clock time and sensed time show discrepancy. It is still regarded as a precursor to stream-of-consciousness. On the other hand, *A Sentimental Journey* is a light-hearted comedy with a flat flavour of moral sentiments. Though it has been translated into many languages, its comic effect is lost while sentiments get emphasized in translation. Besides novels, Stern produced a pamphlet, *A Political Romance* (1759) as a satire on Dr Francis Topham, and a piece on preaching, *A Fragment in the Manner of Rabelais* which was published posthumously.

### **Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)**

Jonathan Swift, an Irish-born English author known with pseudonyms Isaac Bickerstaff, Lemuel Gulliver and MB Drapier, was a trendsetting prose satirist who shot to fame with the novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). It is considered his masterpiece. The novel in four books recounts voyages to four different fictional lands. Often criticized for misanthropy and deflating human pride, the novel reflects on the shortcomings of Enlightenment in a satirical way. Swift's style of writing shows the use of two kinds of satire, namely Horatian and Juvenalian. Besides being a well-known satirist, he was an essayist, poet and political pamphleteer who initially supported the Whigs and later the Tories. Most of his works were published with pseudonyms or anonymously. He is remembered for *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), a prose satire; *A Modest Proposal* (1729), a satirical essay; *The Conduct of the Allies*, a pamphlet; *Journal to Stella*, a series of letters; and *Drapier's Letters*. His satirical essay *Argument Against Abolishing Christianity* (1708) addresses many real and rhetorical arguments against Christianity. He also tried his hands at poetry, though without much success, and produced many poems most notably six odes. Most of his prose works were composed at Moor Park, including *A Tale of a Tub*.

### **Tobias Smollett (1721–1771)**

Tobias George Smollett, a Scottish author known for the picaresque tradition of novel writing, was one among the pioneers. He set himself apart from Richardson, Fielding and Sterne with his unique style of writing that incorporated violence, brutality and the coarseness of language in his novels. He became a controversial literary celebrity with the publication of *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748). His second picaresque novel *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), a story with naval characters and a personal attack on Fielding and Garrick, is read widely. His third novel with a rogue hero titled *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* came out in 1753. Unlike his first two novels, the last one was less successful financially. His works are marked with the grossness of satire, and keenness of caricatures.

In addition, minor writers have contributed to the growth of novels in their respective ways as pioneers. Scottish novelist **Henry Mackenzie** (1745-1831) wrote *The Man of Feeling*, *The Man of the World* and *Julia de Roubigné*. **Horace Walpole** (1717-1797) published *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is considered the first Gothic novel in English. He also wrote two more fictional works: *The Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy* (1768) and *Hieroglyphic Tales* (1785). British woman novelist **Elizabeth Inchbald** (1753-1821) published two novels of passion titled *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796). Anglo-Irish novelist **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774) produced *The Vicar of Wakefield* in 1766, a sentimental novel widely read by Victorians and finds mention in novels of Eliot, Austen, Dickens, Bronte, Goethe and others.

### **15.2.2 Novelists from the Romantic Age:**

Though poetry remained the dominant form of writing in the Romantic Age, a few fiction writers have made significant contributions to novels. Jane Austen and Walter Scott are among those novelists who took the genre to greater heights. On the other hand, some continued to imitate the Gothic style from their predecessors.

### **Jane Austen (1775–1817)**

Jane Austen, an English woman novelist known for her social commentary in novels, was born in Hampshire and began to write as a teenager. She wrote her first novella, *Lady Susan*, in epistolary form. This Georgian era author rose to fame with her comic novels of love. Her novels were set among the English middle and upper classes. Loaded with wit and social observation, her novels gave rare insights into the lives of early 19th century women. Two of her novels—*Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)—are considered literary classics

and anthologized across universities and colleges. Initially titled *First Impressions*, *Pride and Prejudice* depicts a narrow world with accuracy and satirizes it too. Writing anonymously, she revealed her gender to show her male readers that a woman could write well. She also wrote *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815). Her two other novels *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously in 1818. Austen remains popular even today for her literary contributions—realist novels, defiance against gender roles and portrayal of women characters. Her works—only six novels—have enchanted millions of fans across the globe and adapted into movies, dramas, and TV shows. Today she remains as popular as ever and is revered as much as any literary figure in the history of the English language.

### **Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)**

Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish novelist popular for showing pageantry of history on broader canvases. He set a trend of historical novels with his first publication *Waverly* (1814). It was followed by a series of historical novels including *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), and *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), *A Legend of Montrose* (1819), *Ivanhoe* (1819), *The Monastery* (1820) and *St. Ronan's Well* (1823). Set in Scotland, these works are now known as the “Waverley” novels. His novels deal with the adventurous life of the Highlanders—people living on the border of Scotland and England. His historical novels, which are marked with chivalry and romantic elements, remain classics in Scottish and English literature. He is considered the first English novelist to elevate the scene as an indispensable element in action. His choice of the place and its detailed description make the action seem an outcome of the natural environment.

#### ***Check your Progress***

1. Name any two important romantic novelists.

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2. Name any two women romantic novelists.

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#### **Other Novelists:**

Apart from Austen and Scott, a plethora of other writers have written novels in the Romantic period. **Frances Burney** (1752-1840), an English satirical novelist, wrote *Evelina* which became a trendsetting work of the novel of manners. Her second novel titled *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an*

*Heiress*(1782) was also a social satire with an elaborate plot and moralistic themes. She brought out her last novel in 1796 as *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth*. **Mrs. Anne Radcliffe** (1764-1832), a pioneer of Gothic fiction, produced several novels including her most famous *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. She uses supernatural machinery in her novels, which contain well-constructed plots, medievalism, and romance.

Anglo-Irish writer **Maria Edgeworth** (1767-1849) began a new variety “regional novel” with her work *Castle Rackrent* (1800), which has inspired Sir Walter Scott. Historical novelist **Jane Porter** (1776-1850) produced *The Scottish Chiefs*, a novel popular with more Scottish children. **John Galt** (1779-1839), a Scottish novelist who portrayed the rural life of Scotland and issues of the Industrial Revolution in his novels such as *The Ayrshire Legatees* (1820), *The Annals of the Parish* (1821), *Sir Andrew Wylie* (1822), *The Provost* (1822), *The Entail* (1823) and *Lawrie Todd* (1830).

**Susan Ferrier** (1782-1854), a Scottish novelist, wrote three novels that became popular in her lifetime itself—*Marriage* (1810), *The Inheritance* (1824), and *Destiny* (1831). Portraying a vivid account of life and culture in Scotland, her novels comment on female education and marriage with a touch of humour. She remained popular in the nineteenth century. Another Scottish novelist, **John G. Lockhart** (1794-1854) who is known for his seven-volume biography *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, published four novels. They were: *Valerius* (1821), *Adam Blair* (1822), *Reginald Dalton*(1823) and *Matthew Wald*(1824).

English novelist **Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley** (1797—1851) is popular for writing *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), a novel that has features that make it partly Gothic and part science fiction. The title of the novel ‘Frankenstein’ became synonymous with the manmade monster she created as a character. It could also be seen as possibly the first example of science fiction. English novelist **William Harrison Ainsworth** (1805-82) published his first novel in 1826 anonymously but he rose to fame with *Rookwood* (1834), which featured the highwayman, Dick Turpin. His next novel, *Jack Sheppard* (1839) was a story of a burglar from the 18th-century. The glamorization of crime in a novel is categorized under the “Newgate” school, of which Ainsworth and Edward Bulwer-Lytton were exemplary. He moved from crime to history and wrote about places. Out of around 40 novels he produced, a few of the historical novels are *The Tower of London* (1840), *Old St. Paul’s* (1841), *Windsor Castle*(1843), and *The Lancashire Witches* (1849).

**George P.R. James** (1801-60) was a prolific English writer, novelist, and historiographer. He produced more than sixty novels, of which a majority is historical. Some of them are: *Richelieu* (1829), *Philip Augustus* (1831), *Henry Masterton*(1832), *Mary of Burgundy*(1833), *Darnley* (1839), and *Smuggler* (1845). **Charles Lever** (1806-72), an Irish novelist known as *Charles O'Malley*, wrote as many as thirty novels besides short stories and essays. His picaresque novels depict Irish military life. Among his works are *Harry Lorrequer* (1839), *Jack Hinton* (1843), *Tom Burke* (1844), *Arthur O'Leary* (1844) and *Con Cregan* (1849). **Fredrick Marryat** (1792-1848) is considered a pioneer of nautical fiction. He wrote a number of adventure novels including *The King's Own* (1830), *Peter Simple* (1834) and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836). His fiction is marked with a direct narrative style, lucid language, and humour.

Scottish novelist **Michael Scott** (1789-1835) is remembered for his two works—*Tom Cringle's Log* and *The Cruise of the Midge*—based on his observation of slavery in Jamaica. **Thomas Love Peacock** (1785-1866), an English satirical novelist, produced seven novels which were “comic romances”. May it be *Headlong Hall* (1816) or *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), the conversation takes precedence over plot or character. His essay ‘The Four Ages of Poetry’ (1820) compelled Shelley to respond with ‘Defence of Poetry’.

### **15.2.3 Contemporaries of Dickens:**

The Victorian period has witnessed some of the greatest English novels and novelists. Besides Charles Dickens, the frontrunners who not only experimented with the form but also gave a new purpose and direction to the novel as a genre in the nineteenth century were Thackeray, Eliot, Hardy and Bronte Sisters.

#### **William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863)**

William Makepeace Thackeray, an Indian-born British novelist, is known for his masterpiece *Vanity Fair* (1847–48). Set in the early 18th century, the novel is about the Napoleonic period in England. This novel, along with *The Newcomes*, *Major Gahagan* and other works, features the culture of Anglo-Indians. As a child, Thackeray not only observed Indian culture and traditions but also became orphaned at the age of five. His father served as the Collector of a district near Calcutta. *Vanity Fair* with an antiheroic subtitle “A Novel Without a Hero” deals with two women characters—Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp. Of these two characters created by Thackeray, the latter stands out for being an unprincipled adventuress. He also wrote a few more novels, including *The Virginians*, *Lovel the Widower*, and *The Adventures of Philip*.

### **George Eliot (1819–1880)**

Mary Ann Evans, who is known in the literary world by her pen name George Eliot, was an English novelist of the Victorian era and a contemporary of Dickens. Before publishing her own novel, she wrote for Westminster Review and later married its editor George Henry Lewes. He encouraged her to use the pen name George Eliot for her writings. In 1859, she published her first novel, *Adam Bede*. Her other major works are *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871–72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Her works show that she was greatly influenced by the lives of ordinary people.

### **Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)**

Thomas Hardy, one of the greatest English writers of all times and most notable contemporary of Dickens, challenged the oppressive conventions of Victorian society. Though he bore much criticism in his lifetime, his reputation spread far and wide making millions of fans globally. Most of his works are set in Wessex, a name that encompasses countries of southwestern England. He wrote a number of novels, but five are hailed as masterpieces—*Tess of The D'Urbervilles* (1891), *Far from The Madding Crowd* (1874), *Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), and *Jude The Obscure* (1895). Of these novels, Tess and Jude are considered his finest works and they contain worth-sympathizing, working-class characters.

### **Bronte Sisters**

Three Bronte sisters—Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), Emily Bronte (1818-1848) and Anne Bronte (1820-1849)—were English writers whose novels have become classics. In their first-ever publication of a volume of poetry, they used pseudonyms: Currer Bell for Charlotte, Ellis Bell for Emily and Acton Bell for Anne. They retained these names for publishing their novels. In 1847, Anne's *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* were published. In 1848, Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* appeared. The two novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, are heavily prescribed across universities and schools.

In addition to these notable contemporaries of Dickens, some other novelists of his time were:

<b>Name of the Author</b>	<b>Popular Novels</b>
R.L. Stevenson (1850-1894)	<i>Treasure Island and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> <i>Kidnapped</i>
Charles Reade (1814-1884)	<i>The Cloister and the Hearth</i>
Anthony Trollope (1815-1882)	<i>Barchester Towers</i>
Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873)	<i>Falkland</i> <i>Pelham</i>

	<i>Eugene Aram</i>
Charles Kingsley (1819-1875)	<i>Hypatia</i> <i>Westward Ho!</i> <i>Hereward the Wake</i>
Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865)	<i>Mary Barton</i> <i>Cranford</i> <i>Ruth</i> <i>Sylvia's Lovers</i> <i>Wives and Daughters</i>
Richard Doddridge Blackmore (1825-1900)	<i>Lorna Doone</i> <i>Clara Vaughan</i> <i>Cradock Nowell</i> <i>The Maid of Sker</i> <i>Springhaven</i>
George Meredith (1828-1909)	<i>The Ordeal of Richard Feverel</i> <i>The Egoist</i>

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### 15.3 Learning Outcomes

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Upon completion of the Unit, you should be able to:

- know the origin of the Novel in English.
- identify the major novelists from Augustan Age and Romantic Age.
- know important novelists before Charles Dickens, understand the works they produced, and themes they wrote about.
- familiarize themselves with different types of novels and their pioneers.
- able to discuss in detail a few English novelists before Dickens by focusing on their works, styles, themes and contribution in general.

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### 15.4 Glossary

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**Gothic novel:** A pseudo-medieval fiction, a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror

**Picaresque novel:** A fictional work that depicts adventures of a roguish but appealing hero from low social class

**Sentimental novel:** A novel that exploits the reader's capacity for tenderness, compassion, or sympathy to a disproportionate degree

**Newgate novel:** Old Bailey novels, glamorized the lives of the criminals they portrayed and published in England from the late 1820s until the 1840s

**Campus novel:** Academic novel; the main action is set in and around the campus of a university

**Bildungsroman novel:** A novel that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood

**Realism:** A literary movement that stresses the faithful representation of reality in works of art and literature

**Victorian period:** The period of Queen Victoria's reign, from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901.

**Bronte Sisters:** Three English novelists—Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte and Anne Bronte—known by the pseudonyms Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, Acton Bell respectively

**Satire:** A humorous way of criticizing people or ideas to show that they have faults or are wrong, often using exaggeration, irony, and other devices

**Romanticism:** A movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual

**Wit:** The ability to use words in an amusing and intelligent way

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## 15.5 Sample Questions

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### 15.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *Robinson Crusoe* appeared in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Jonathan Swift wrote \_\_\_\_\_ novels.
3. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The *Vicar of Wakefield* is written by
  - (a) Daniel Defoe
  - (b) Tobias Smollett
  - (c) Oliver Goldsmith
  - (d) Horace Walpole
5. “Newgate” school of novel writing is associated with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) John Galt
  - (b) Mary Shelly

- (c) Horace Walpole
- (d) William Harrison Ainsworth

6. Match the following:

- | (A)           | (B)            |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. Newgate    | i. Smollett    |
| b. Gothic     | ii. Shelly     |
| c. Picaresque | iii. Ainsworth |
| d. Sci-fi     | iv. Walpole    |

7. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) 1813
- (b) 1919
- (c) 1731
- (d) 1819

8. The real name of George Eliot was \_\_\_\_\_.

9. Match the real names of Bronte Sisters with their pen names

- | (A)            | (B)               |
|----------------|-------------------|
| a. Currer Bell | i. Charles Bronte |
| b. EllisBell   | ii. Ellis Bronte  |
| c. Acton Bell  | iii. Anne Bronte  |

10. The name of the Indian-born English author is \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) E.M. Forster
- (b) W. M. Thackeray
- (c) Oliver Goldsmith
- (d) Frances Burney

### 15.5.2 Short Answer Questions

1. Daniel Defoe is one of the earliest novelists. Discuss.
2. Justify Jonathan Swift as a satirist.
3. Write a note on Sir Walter Scott as a historical novelist.
4. Briefly comment on the works of Jane Austen.
5. Write a note about "Waverly" novels.

### 15.5.3 Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the origin and growth of the novel as a genre.

2. Discuss the contribution of the early novelists in English.
3. Write a detailed note on the novelists before Charles Dickens and their contribution.

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## 15.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Arata, Stephen, et al., eds. *A Companion to the English Novel*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
2. Caserio, Robert L., and Clement Hawes, eds. *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
3. Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

## Unit-16: Life and Works of Charles Dickens

### Structure

#### 16.0 Introduction

#### 16.1 Objectives

#### 16.2 Life of Charles Dickens

##### 16.2.1 Dickens as a Reformer

##### 16.2.2 Some Important Works of Dickens

##### 16.2.3 *Pickwick Papers*

##### 16.2.4 *Oliver Twist*

##### 16.2.5 *Great Expectations*

##### 16.2.6 *David Copperfield*

##### 16.2.7 *Hard Times*

#### 16.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 16.4 Glossary

#### 16.5 Sample Questions

#### 16.6 Suggested Readings

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### 16.0 Introduction

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Charles Dickens is one of the greatest British novelists. Besides, being a novelist, he was an illustrator and a social commentator. Dickens has given the world of literature some classics like *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Christmas Carol*. He has been praised and acknowledged as one of the few writers who influenced English writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is appreciated for representing the Victorian era in his works that led to social change. In this Unit, we will discuss some of the important works of Dickens which established his reputation not only as one of the remarkable novelists of the Victorian period but also of English literature.

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### 16.1 Objectives

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The following objectives will be focused in this Unit:

- to make you aware about the life of Charles Dickens.
- to familiarize you with the literary works of Charles Dickens.
- to present Charles Dickens as a great novelist of the Victorian Period.
- to appreciate his efforts of social reformation

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## 16.2 Life of Charles Dickens

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Dear readers, it is important in the first place to throw some light on the life of Charles Dickens for our understanding. Charles Dickens was born on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1812 in Landport Portsmouth. His real name was Charles John Huffam Dickens and Charles Dickens became a short version of his name. They were eight siblings, and he was the second child of his father, who was a clerk in the Navy office. John Dickens along with his wife Elizabeth Dickens decided to move to London around 1814 and after spending two years in London they again moved to Chatham, Kent. It was here that Charles Dickens spent the childhood years of his life. However, they moved back to London because of financial difficulty and settled in Camden town. Dickens was only 12 when he had to experience a defining moment of his life: his father was imprisoned as a result of being in debt therefore, Dickens had to face difficulty in managing his finances.

Charles had to leave school because his father could not pay the fee and he started work in a warehouse where he would polish shoes to support his family. It had a strong psychological and sociological impact on Charles. It is perhaps because of this experience that he understood poverty from a broader perspective. It can be said that because of his firsthand experience with poverty he became one of the influential and vigorous voices of the working class in the Victorian period.

Charles went to school again, soon after his father was released from prison. His formal education came to an end as he got the job of office boy at an attorney's office. Though he left his formal education, he would study shorthand at night.

Dickens started to write and contribute his short stories and essays in magazines. His first published story was *A Dinner at Poplar Walk* featured in a magazine called *Monthly Magazine*. It was published in the year 1833. He chose to write under the pseudonym Boz while still being a newspaper reporter. His first book, a collection of stories titled *Sketches by Boz* was published in 1836. It was in the same year he got married to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of the editor of *Evening Chronicle*. They had ten children together before they finally parted ways in 1858.

We all know Dickens as a novelist; however, he continued his pursuit of journalism till the end of his life by editing *The Daily News*, *Household Words*, and *All the Year Around*. His acquaintance with all these newspapers and journals helped him to cater the opportunity to publish his fiction at the beginning of his career.

*The Posthumous Papers of Pickwick Club* was published in parts from April 1836 to November 1837. It was one of the popular works of that time. It was after the *Pickwick Papers* that Dickens started to establish himself as a novelist. From then onwards, Dickens regularly produced works like *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge* as part of the *Master Humphrey's Clock* series, all of these were published in monthly installments before being finally published in the form of books.

In 1842 he wrote the controversial *American Notes* which also provides some basis for *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Soon, five Christmas books of Dickens followed, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man* (1848). Dickens continued his success with books like *Dombey and Son* (1848) and the autobiographical work *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861).

Dickens mostly focused on fictional characters like lawyers, clerks, bankers instead of industrial manufacturers. It is because Dicken's London was a commercial rather than an industrial metropolis. The only work in which Dickens portrays industrialisation is *Hard Times*. However, we never even get to know what is produced in Bounderby's Factories, and the city of Coketown is portrayed vaguely in impressionistic terms as if he was watching it from a train. Dickens cannot be called an urban novelist merely because he writes about the city, but it is more so because he writes about it in an urban way.

***Check your progress***

1. Name two novels by Dickens.

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2. What was Dickens besides being a novelist?

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### 16.2.1 Dickens as a Reformer:

Dickens enjoyed the reputation of being a social reformer during his lifetime. He is often credited for the reforms in education, public health, and criminal laws that helped Britain to be a better country. Dickens was also a serious critic of the socio-economic structure of his times. He lived in an era when Britain was undergoing several changes. It is important to present an overview of the three great thinkers who made extensive contribution to such changes. These three members were: Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and Jeremy Bentham. Adam Smith's masterpiece *Wealth of Nations* (1776) had become a revelation for those who believed the government should not interfere with the economy in any case. If everyone would work for his own sake and advantage, Smith's famous 'invisible hand' would ensure that it was for the good of the public. There are many things that the government should do as they cannot be left in the hands of the individuals like the system of law-making, enforcement, and many other things and maybe relieving the country from poverty; however, any interference in the economy would be harmful.

Thomas Malthus argued that population growth had a natural tendency to exceed food supply. There was a tremendous growth of population; this was referred to by Malthus as a 'presaged disaster'. Malthus offered the solution as self-control on the part of the parents, otherwise, we may face starvation. He was often referred to as a killjoy person. Bentham professed utilitarianism. Dickens, however, set himself against such established doctrines. In *Hard Times*, Thomas Gradgrind's younger child was called Adam Smith. Gradgrind himself was a preacher of utilitarianism associated with Jeremy Bentham. Dickens cooperated with Utilitarians on the grounds of health reforms, but it must be noted that he was instinctively against the philosophies associated with the three influential powers Adam Smith, Malthus, and Jeremy Bentham, about the government during his days. Dickens neither acknowledged their power nor did he offer any critique of their understanding of society.

Dickens was working on *Morning Chronicle* during his reforms on poor law. The issue of the poor law in *Oliver Twist* was not an attack on a new piece of legislation. Dickens considered himself to be with those who were the victims of the law. Around the 1850s Dickens published many articles in *Household Words* on industrial accidents, blaming mill owners and magistrates. Dickens was certainly conscious of the issues of his times and the issues posed by child labour in the working conditions during the industrial revolution. However, it is interesting to know that none of his child heroes or victims has been shown directly associated or involved in such work.

Dickens was more serious about the lack of education of the children rather than the work they had to do. He was particularly concerned with two things of his time, education of children and health.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was dissent whether the mass of the working class deserved to be educated or not. It was believed that they were supposed to work and education would make them restless. Dickens by that time had varied experience of schooling and it was resolved that every child must have some kind of schooling. Thereafter, even if someone wanted to work in a factory, he was allowed some schooling too. Two important factors promoted a new level of energy to engage with some of the social issues, the first was cholera which hit Britain around 1832, and the second was the politics of public health. Dickens published several articles on health issues in *Household Words* and the journal entitled *All the Year Around*. Dickens did all that was possible to make Britain cholera free and reformed the health sector to a great extent.

***Check your progress***

1. Discuss two important aspects of Dickens as a social reformer.

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### **16.2.2 Some Important Works of Dickens:**

Dickens wrote extensively. Some of his works are *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Great Expectations* (1861), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854), *The Little Dorrit* (1857) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1868). Here we will discuss a few of the important works of Charles Dickens for our understanding.

**16.2.3 *Pickwick Papers*:** This work of Dickens was published in the year 1836. The novel has 57 chapters. The novel is set in southern England between the years 1831-1837. It has given an enduring literary expression of “coaching days” of English life. While Dickens was writing this novel, the Britain of his times was overtaken by railroads and macadam roads. The same is reflected in this book in too many instances.

The novel is about a Pickwick Club which is presided by Samuel Pickwick who plans to establish a travelling society in which four members will travel to England and make a report on their travelling. The four members who will travel are Mr. Pickwick, a retired businessman;

Tracy Tupman; Augustus Snodgrass, a poet who never wrote a poem; and Nathaniel Winkle a sportsman.

On their first journey, they are confronted by a cabman. However, they are rescued by Alfred Jingle who travels to Rochester. Jingle being an adventurer is attracted to wealthy women. At Catham, they witness army drills and meet Mr. Wardle who invites them. Pickwick visits him along with his friends in the evening and enjoys card games, flirting, storytelling, etc. Meanwhile, Tupman develops an affair with Mr. Wardle's spinster sister Racheal while Mr. Snodgraas falls in love with Mr. Wardle's daughter. However, Tupman is deceived by Jingle, who elopes with the spinster sister of Mr. Wardle. Then Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick chase Jingle and are able to catch him with the help of his lawyer, Mr. Perker. They buy off Jingle preventing Racheal from entering into an unhappy marriage. The novel is filled with elements of comedy. Some of the important characters in the novel are Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Wardle, Jingle, Sam Weller, Tony Weller, Bob Sawyer, etc.

**16.2.4 *Oliver Twist*:** This novel was published in the year 1838. Oliver is born in 1830 in England, his mother whose name hardly anybody knew died soon after giving birth to Oliver. He had to spend his first nine years of life in an orphan house. Oliver later is transferred to an adult workhouse. Here he was bullied many times by other young boys to ask for more food at the end of every meal. Therefore, Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle decides to offer five pounds to someone who will take the boy away from the workhouse. Oliver was lucky not to be apprenticed to a cruel Chimney Sweeper but was apprenticed to a local undertaker Mr. Sowerberry. Here too Oliver is involved in a fight after one of the apprentices makes some disparaging comments on Oliver's mother. Oliver in response attacks him and therefore he has to tolerate the anger of Mr. Sowerberry. Oliver in a state of desperation escapes to London.

Oliver meets Jack who offers him shelter in London in the house of Fagin. Interestingly, Fagin is a career criminal who trains orphans in pickpocketing. After some days of training, Oliver along with two others is sent for pickpocketing. The other two try their hands on an elderly man and try to steal his handkerchief, Oliver is terrified, and he escapes narrowly. He almost ends up being caught for the theft. Mr. Brownlow whose handkerchief was stolen takes Oliver to his home since Oliver looked weak due to starvation. Mr. Brownlow serves and nurses him back to his health. Mr. Brownlow is surprised to see a photo hanging on the walls of his room resembling Oliver.

Oliver was doing well at his home until the two other partners arrived and took him back to Fagin. Fagin sends Oliver and another person, Sikes, to commit another burglary. In the episode, Oliver is apprehended by the house staff, but Sikes gets to flee. Mrs. Maylie, who lives there with her adopted niece, welcomes Oliver into the house. They become attached to Oliver, and he spends a lovely summer in the countryside with them. Fagin and a mystery man named Monks, on the other hand, are hell-bent on recapturing Oliver. Meanwhile, it is revealed that when Oliver's mother died, she left behind a gold locket. The locket is obtained and destroyed by Monks. When the Maylies arrive in London, Nancy meets Rose in private and warns her of Fagin's plans, but the meeting is overheard by a member of Fagin's gang. When Sikes learns of Nancy's confession, he violently murders her and escapes. He hangs himself accidentally while fleeing an angry mob.

Maylie united Oliver with Mr. Brownlow; she confronts Monks and enquires the truth about Oliver's parentage. We are told that Monks is Oliver's half-brother. Their father Mr. Leeford, who was married to a wealthy woman was not happy with the marriage and therefore had an affair with Oliver's mother Agnes Fleming. Monks tried his best that Oliver did not get his share of the property. Mr. Brownlow made Monks sign on the petition to ensure that Oliver gets his share of the property. In the meantime, it is also discovered that Rose is the younger sister of Agnes Fleming, hence, she is the aunt of Oliver. Fagin receives punishment for his crime and Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver finally to live a peaceful life.

**16.2.5 *Great Expectations*:** This novel was published in the year 1861. A young boy named Pip lives with his sister and her husband in the marshes of Kent. One evening he sits in a cemetery looking at the tombstones of his parents and all of a sudden a runaway convict appears behind the tombstone of a grave. He grabs Pip and orders him to fetch some food. Pip obeys the order and gets him the desired food; soon the runaway convict, Magwitch, is captured, but he saves Pip and claims he himself stole the items.

One fine day Uncle Pumblechook takes Pip to play at Satis House. This is the house of a wealthy lady called Miss Havisham, she is an eccentric lady who wears an old dress always wherever she goes and when she leaves the house, she stops all her clocks in the home. Pip during his visit meets a beautiful lady named Estella, she is very indifferent to him. However, Pip can't help himself from falling in love with her. He dreams of becoming rich only to be worthy of Estella. He also suspects that Miss Havisham is training him to become a gentleman

only to get him married to Estella. However, he is disappointed after he understands the intention of Miss Havisham to make him regular and common labour to assist the family business.

Pip then collaborates with Joe, his brother-in-law, under Miss Havisham's supervision. Pip works reluctantly, but with the help of the plain, compassionate Biddy, he seeks to further his studies and meets Joe's spiteful day labourer, Orlick. Mrs. Joe, Pip's sister, is violently attacked one night following an altercation with Orlick, and becomes a mute invalid. Pip believes Orlick was behind the attack.

Meanwhile, a lawyer named Jaggers brings the news to Pip that one of his well-wishers had left a large fortune for him. Pip is delighted that his dream of marrying Estella was coming true. He apprehends that Miss Havisham had left the large fortune to ensure that Estella likes the match for her. He believes that the secret benefactor was none but Miss Havisham. In the meantime, Mrs. Joe dies and Pip is deeply grief-struck by her departure. After several years Magwitch visits him and informs Pip it was he, who had left the large fortune for him and not Miss Havisham. He was deeply moved by the kindness of Pip that he decided to devote his life to making him a gentleman.

Pip is surprised but he is morally bound to help Magwitch because he is pursued by police and Compeyson, his partner in the crime. Pip becomes confused after knowing that Compeyson is the man who abandoned Miss Havisham and Estella is the daughter of Magwitch. Miss Havisham raised Estella only to break the hearts of men to seek revenge for her pain, however, Pip was too young an experiment for all of this. Miss Havisham is delighted to see Estella playing with the emotions of Pip, although she pleaded with Pip to forgive her for all her misdeeds and Pip forgives her. Later, in an accident near the fireplace, she is engulfed in flames, because of which she becomes invalid. She repented all that she did. Meanwhile, Estella is married to an upper-class clout Bentley Drummble. The end of the novel takes a dramatic shift when Magwitch dies and Pip loses his fortune. He wanted to marry Biddy but on his return home, he finds that she had married Joe already. He decides to work with his friend Herbert. After many years when he visits home, he finds Estella lost, her husband had treated her badly, though he is dead now. Pip feels that Estella's indifference is replaced with a sad kindness, the two of them then, hand in hand roam together only to believe they would never depart again.

**16.2.6 *David Copperfield*:** This novel was published in the year 1850. It is an autobiographical novel. David narrates his story of the youth when he happily lived with his mother and the nurse Peggotty. His father died even before the birth of David. While David was still a child, his

mother married another man Mr. Murdstone. He treats David cruelly. He also brings his sister, Miss Murdstone into the house, therefore, doubling the troubles of David. The Murdstones send him away to school. David attends the school at Salem House which is owned by Mr. Creakle. Peggotty goes on a visit to her home where she meets her brother Mr. Peggotty and his two adopted children Ham and Emly.

In the meantime, while David was on a visit, he received the news about the death of his mother. He is neglected by Murdstones. He starts work in a wine bottling company owned by Murdstone where Mr. Micawber mismanages his accounts. While Mr. Micawber tries to run to London to escape from his debt, David tries to search for his father's sister Miss Besty Trotwood. He travels a long distance to reach out to her. She takes him in, on the advice of his friend Mr. Dick.

Miss Besty Trotwood sends David to a school operated by Doctor Strong where David forms a connection with Agnes, Mr. Wickfield's daughter. Uriah Heep, another astute fellow, resides at Mr. Wickfield's boarding. He interferes in people's affairs unduly, aggravating their problems. Miss Betsey travels to London to tell David that her financial security has been exposed as a result of Mr. Wickfield's collaboration with Uriah Heep.

David, who has grown increasingly enamoured of Dora, promises to do everything he can to make their future together a reality. However, Mr. Spewlow bans Dora from marrying David. That night, Mr. Spewlow is killed in a carriage accident, and Dora is sent to live with her two aunts. Meanwhile, Uriah Heep warns Doctor Strong that his wife Annie Strong is having an affair with Jack Maldon, her young cousin.

David marries Dora, who proves to be an inept wife due to her lack of knowledge of home responsibilities. However, this in no way diminishes David's feelings for her. Miss Dartle, Mrs. Steerforth's ward, summons David and informs him that Steerforth has left Little Em'ly, and Mr. Dick arranges the reconciliation between Doctor Strong and Annie. Miss Dartle also mentions Steerforth's servant Littimer proposing to her and Little Em'ly fleeing. Little Em'ly's childhood friend Martha helps David and Mr. Peggotty locate Little Em'ly and deliver Mr. Peggotty to her. Little Em'ly and Mr. Peggotty, as well as the Micawbers, decide to relocate to Australia, saving the day for Agnes and Miss Betsey by exposing Uriah Heep's deception against Mr. Wickfield.

There is a strong storm that hits the Yarmouth and Ham is killed in the process of saving a wrecked ship sailor. The sailor is none but Steerforth. In the meantime Dora falls ill and dies.

David leaves the country to travel abroad and when he returns his long-lasting secret love for Agnes grows. They live happily married with several children.

**16.2.7 *Hard Times*:** This novel was published in the year 1854. Thomas Gradgrind is a wealthy man living in England. He is devoted to rational philosophy. He guides his oldest children Louisa and Tom according to the principles of this philosophy and prohibits them from plunging into any fanciful or imaginative pursuit. As the children grow older, they both struggle with themselves, Tom turns self-interested, becomes self-indulgent and a hedonist. Similarly, Louisa also struggles with her inner confusion. She feels incomplete in her life as if something very important in her life was missing. Finally, she marries Josiah Bounderby, a friend of Gradgrind who was more than twice her age. He was also a wealthy man. He speaks about his success as self-made because he was abandoned by his mother when he was an infant.

Meanwhile, another impoverished “Hand” (a name that Dickens uses for the poor labours of the town) named Stephen Blackpool struggles with his love for Rachael. He cannot marry her because he is already married to a woman who drinks and remains absent from home for months and even years at times. Stephen enquires from Bounderby about the divorce he wants to take from his wife but learns that it is only for the rich.

From London, James Harthouse arrives to begin his political career. He aspires to be a Gradgrind disciple. He develops feelings for Louisa and attempts to seduce her. Mr. Sparsit, who is having difficulty persuading Louisa, tries to persuade her. Mrs. Sparsit sees Harthouse declare his love for Louisa, and Louisa agrees to see him later that night in Coketown. Louisa, on the other hand, goes to her father's house, where she bemoans her upbringing, confessing to Gradgrind that her upbringing had left her married to a man she didn't love, emotionally distant, painfully unhappy, and probably in love with Harthouse. Gradgrind is rendered speechless with self-reproach as she collapses to the floor, and he begins to see the flaws in his logical self-interest ideology.

Sissy, who adores Louisa, pays a visit to Harthouse and encourages him to leave town for good. This enrages Bounderby, who intensifies his search for Stephen. Stephen falls into the Old Hell Shaft mining pit while returning home. Despite the fact that he is discovered by Rachael and Louisa, he dies soon after giving Rachael an emotional farewell. Gradgrind and Louisa suspect Tom of robbing the bank, and they devise a plan to smuggle him out of England with the help of the circus performers with whom Sissy had grown up. They come close to succeeding, but are stopped by Bitzer, a young man who attended Gradgrind's school and represents all of the

qualities of detached rationality that Gradgrind previously advocated, but who now recognises its limitations. The lipping circus owner arranges for Tom to escape Bitzer's clutches, and the young burglar manages to flee England in the end.

Finally, Mrs. Sparsit, eager to assist Bounderby in his search for the robbers, pulls Mrs. Pegler in to meet Bounderby, believing Mrs. Pegler is a potential witness. Mrs. Pegler is revealed to be Bounderby's beloved mother, whom he has barred from visiting him: after all, Bounderby is not a self-made man. Mrs. Sparsit is fired and sent to her unfriendly relatives by Bounderby. He dies alone in the streets of Coketown five years later. Gradgrind abandons his fact-based ideology in favour of using his political influence to aid the underprivileged. Tom recognises his mistake, but he dies before seeing his family again. Unlike Sissy, who marries and raises a huge and loving family, Louisa never marries or has children.

In the following two units, you will study Dickens in detail along with his important work *Oliver Twist*.

***Check your progress***

1. Name two characters from the novel *Great Expectations*.

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### 16.3 Learning Outcome

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Upon the completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- understand Charles Dickens as an established novelist of English Literature.
- know about the life of Charles Dickens
- recognize Dickens as a social reformer
- acquaint yourselves with some important works of Dickens
- understand the political and social conditions of the Victorian Period.
- Examine the various themes that Dickens employed in his works.

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### 16.4 Glossary

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**Illustration:** Providing examples with detail

**Autobiographical:** Dealing with one's own life

**Hyperbole:** A figure of speech, exaggeration, overstatement

**Extravagant:** lacking restraint in spending money

**Melodramatic:** Overemotional

**Tyrannical:** Autocratic, oppressive

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## 16.5 Sample Questions

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### 16.5.1 Fill in the blanks

1. Charles Dickens was born in\_\_\_\_\_.
2. The full name of Charles Dickens was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Charles Dickens wrote novels during\_\_\_\_\_ period
4. Oliver is an important character in the novel of Dickens titled \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Estella is an important character in the novel \_\_\_\_\_ by Dickens.
6. Which novel of Dickens is autobiographical? \_\_\_\_\_
7. *David Copperfield* was published in the year\_\_\_\_\_.
8. The *Pickwick Papers* was published in the year\_\_\_\_\_.
9. Pip appears as a character in\_\_\_\_\_ work of Dickens.
10. *Great Expectations* was published in the year\_\_\_\_\_.

### 16.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Mention some of the important works written by Dickens.
2. Discuss Dickens as a social reformer.
3. Write a short note on the life of Charles Dickens.
4. What are the autobiographical elements in *David Copperfield*?
5. Discuss the theme of the novel *Pickwick Papers*.

### 16.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss Charles Dickens as a Novelist.
2. What are the various themes employed by Dickens in his works. Discuss in detail.
3. Write a detailed note on the contribution of Dickens as a representative writer of the Victorian Period.

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## 16.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Bloom, Harold. *Charles Dickens*. New York: Infobase Learning, ed. 2013.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Volume II revised ed, Great Britain: 1994.

## Unit-17: Types of Novel

### Structure

17.0 Introduction

17.1 Objectives

17.2 Types of Novel

17.2.1 Realistic Novel

17.2.2 Picaresque Novel

17.2.3 Historical Novel

17.2.4 Epistolary Novel

17.2.5 Bildungsroman

17.2.6 Gothic Novel

17.2.7 Autobiographical Novel

17.2.8 Satirical Novel

17.2.9 Allegorical Novel

17.2.10 Regional Novel and Others

17.3 Learning Outcomes

17.4 Glossary

17.5 Sample Questions

17.6 Suggested Readings

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### 17.0 Introduction

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You have studied about the novel in Unit 13 and 14 in Block 4 of this course. In this Unit, we will discuss the types of novels. The word novel, as you already know, is a shortened version of the Italian word *novella*, which means “new.” A *novella* is a form of an extended anecdote, similar to those found in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian classic, each of which exhibits the etymology adequately. A novel, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, “a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length, in which characters and actions, representative of real-life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity”.

A novel encircles a wide variety of styles and kinds viz. historical, gothic, picaresque, epistolary, romantic, sci-fi, realistic etc. This unit will discuss various types of novels like

romantic, horror, epistolary, picaresque, etc. A detailed discussion about them will improve our understanding of the novel in the broader sense.

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## 17.1 Objectives

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This Unit has the following objectives:

- to enable students to know the types of novel
  - to familiarise them with elements of the novel
  - to help students differentiate between simple and complex plots
  - to discuss the variety of characters used in a novel
  - to distinguish between characters and their types.
  - To appreciate the variety of novels written by different novelists.
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## 17.2 Types of Novels

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Novels have been classified into many kinds by critics and it may not be a helpful endeavour to list all varieties of novels because no formal classification is conceivable: the same novel may belong to more than one type. Therefore, in this unit, we will try to know some of the major types of the novel that are written in English.

### 17.2.1 Realistic Novel:

The realistic novel is a type of novel that includes fiction based on true events or events that could have occurred in real life. The realistic novel aspires to portray society as it stands. There are no filters, fantasies, metaphysical elements, or unnatural elements in it. The events depicted in the novel are “actual” in the sense that they may occur in real life. A realistic novel is a great blend of fiction and an accurate depiction of real-life events or circumstances. This type of novel is also called the ‘novel of manners.’ It is a humble attempt to present the realistic effect of something. It is characterized by complex characters with multiple motives. These characters are rooted in the social setting and act accordingly within the highly established social setup. The characters generally exchange dialogue with other characters and undergo many plausible and everyday experiences. Two examples of the realistic novel are *Looking for Alaska* by John Green and *Thirteen Reason Why* by Jay Asher.

### **17.2.2 Picaresque Novel:**

Generally, a picaresque novel recounts the adventures of an eccentric or disreputable hero in episodic form. This genre was formed after the Spanish word *Picaro* or *rogue*. Two examples of Picaresque novels are *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling and *The History of Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding.

### **17.2.3. Historical Novel:**

The historical novel is about historical occurrences. The novel may depict real historical figures or a mixture of historical and fictitious characters. It has an adventurous nature to it. A historical novel generally refers to a novel that has been set before the time it was written. Some of the examples of Historical novels are *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens and *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott.

### **17.2.4. Epistolary Novel:**

It is a type of novel which is generally narrated through various letters or documents. The word epistolary comes from a Latin word *Epistola* which means “Letter”. It must be noted that not only letters but diary entries are also included in the epistolary novels. An example of an Epistolary novel is *Pamela* as well as *Clarissa* by Richardson. *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker is also an epistolary novel. Epistolary novels are novels that are written in the form of a series of documents or letters. This is one of the novel's most important forms. It portrays the joys and sorrows of life. The majority of the time, it is autobiographical in nature. It tackles some of the life's most pressing issues. The main purpose of this novel is to provide readers with an intimate understanding of the character's emotions, ideas, and sentiments, as well as to develop a connection with the events through the medium of letters without the author's interpretation. In its most basic form, an epistolary novel is a story recounted through letters written by one or more characters. This work is also known as the novel of letters.

### **17.2.5. Bildungsroman:**

The words “Bildungs” and “Roman” denote “education” and “novel” respectively. As a result, the word essentially refers to a novel about education, sometimes known as a novel about formation. It was first proposed by Karl Morgenstern in the early nineteenth century, but Wilhelm Dilthey popularized it in the early twentieth century. The fundamental aim of this genre is character improvement and moral development. In other words, a Bildungsroman is a coming-of-age novel that emphasizes not only the physical but also the moral and psychological evolution of a young character. It is a fictional autobiography that deals with the progress or

development of the protagonist's mind and spirit and characters normally from boyhood to childhood. *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* are examples of Bildungsroman's novel.

#### 17.2.6 Gothic Novel:

If a novel depicts terror, horror, mystery, supernatural elements, doomsday scenes, decay and death, haunted buildings, scary images then it can be called a gothic novel. You must be familiar with *Frankenstein* of Mary Shelly, *The Vampire* by Jon Williams, and *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole. Gothic novels are frequently characterized as “wonder novels” or “horror novels.” These are also known as pre-romantic novels. These books are packed with tension and action. Novels like this are full of passion, love, and romance. Strangeness and obscurity are also themes in the genre. The setting is typically dark, mysterious houses designed to elicit fear and horror. An example of Gothic novel is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

#### ***Check your Progress***

1. What do you mean by *Bildungsroman*?

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2. Give one example each of Epistolary novel and Picaresque novel.

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#### 17.2.7 Autobiographical Novel:

An autobiographical novel is based on the life of the author. It has personal elements in it. The story narrated is the story of the author in a real sense. *David Copperfield* by Dickens is an autobiographical novel. An autobiographical novel is a type of novel in which the author uses auto-fiction techniques. Any work of fiction that is based on the author's real-life conditions, events, or experiences can be classified as an autobiographical novel.

#### 17.2.8 Satirical Novel:

A satire by definition is the act of ridiculing the follies of a particular thing or person, it is used or intended to provoke readers to change their opinion about it. So, satirical novels identify the issues about certain things. A satirist novelist aims to highlight the lacunas by offering a reasonable solution. Satire is a literary attack on a person or a group. This is an intellectual attack against a community or a single person by a writer. Although satirical novels are typically hilarious, their main objective is generally constructive social criticism, employing wit to draw attention to both specific and broader social issues. Simply said, it refers to a literary genre that

ridicules and mocks human misbehaviour and ridicules their follies, stupidities, and vices. An example of this genre is Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

### **17.2.9 Allegorical Novel:**

Usually, any allegorical novel has two levels of meaning, one on the surface level and the other holding a connotative or symbolic meaning. The symbolic meaning can be historical, cultural, political, or religious. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* are some excellent examples of allegorical novels. Allegorical novels feature several degrees of meaning, such as surface meaning, which can be seen simply by looking at the work, and a latent, in-depth meaning which can be deciphered by reading the text intensively. These novels generally aim to instill moral values in the reader.

### **17.2.10 Regional Novel and Other Novels:**

A regional novel is a novel set against a particular background or an area or in other words we can say that a regional novel is one in which the author describes a specific geographic region and its people. The piece is frequently set in a well-known location. The behaviour, language, social customs, dialects, culture, social relations of people, history, and other factors of the location that affect the character's life in the novel are featured in the regional novel. The regional novel is written to reflect the local flavour, character, temperament, and the way of thinking of a specific location. A regional novel, on the whole, provides a detailed account of a location, scene, or region. Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* is an example of this type of novel.

### **Novella:**

This genre of fiction first appeared in Italian literature. It is a brief piece of literature that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. It usually has 60 to 120 pages in it. A novella, on the whole, displays fewer conflicts than a novel. Furthermore, the novel is far more perplexing than a short story. It is a shorter version of the novel. It is a short narrative prose fiction. As for the origin of the novella is concerned it dates back to the period of renaissance in French and Italian writing. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad is one such example.

### **Detective Novel:**

It is a form of literary work in which a crime is first committed, then investigated, and finally, the perpetrator is revealed. This story follows a clever detective as he attempts to solve a crime. Finally, the culprit is apprehended or put to death. These books are full of intrigue and mystery. The story depicts a society in its most realistic form. This style of work frequently has a complex plot. For example Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. It is extracted as

a sub-genre from crime fiction or a mystery novel. In such novels, a detective generally investigates a crime or a murder. Examples of detective novels can be *A Study in Scarlet* (Sherlock Homes) *Sonar Kalla* by Satyajit Roy.

#### **Psychological Novel or Stream of Consciousness novel:**

When a novel deals with an internal conflict of the protagonist, then the novel may be treated as a psychological novel. The term stream of consciousness was coined by William Joyce in his book *Principles of Psychology*. The psychological novel is a story in which the author delves into the characters' emotional, spiritual, and mental life. To create the plot of the novel, the novel concentrates on the reasons for the character's behaviour. The psychological novel shows the character's inner self and motivations. The psychological novel and stream of consciousness are inextricably intertwined. The term "stream of consciousness" refers to the unbroken flow of thoughts. James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf are examples of Psychological novel.

#### **Political Novel:**

A political novel is a literary work that frequently criticizes or describes a society or political institution that is currently in place. It is a powerful way to express political events or provide social commentary. The novel focuses on the possible development of societies, very often dominated by totalitarian governments. This type of novel must have a social and political message. The term generally refers to fiction in Europe and the Soviet Union reacting to Communist rule. Examples of political novels can be George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

#### **Hypertext Novel:**

It is a new of electronic literature, characterized by the use of hypertext links that provide a new context for non-linearity in literature and reader interaction. The reader typically chooses links to move from one node of text to the next, and in this fashion arranges a story from a deeper pool of potential stories. Its spirit can also be seen in interactive fiction. The reader in this novel does not follow a set path through the plot. Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* is the most well-known example of hypertext fiction. In 2001, the fiction received an award from the Electronic Literature Organisation (ELO).

#### **Sentimental Novel:**

A sentimental novel is emotionally extravagant. Characters' and readers' emotions are crucial in this sort of novel. Emotions take precedence over logic in the novel. This type of novel was popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It celebrates the emotional and intellectual concepts of sentiment

and sensibility. It is also called a novel of sensibility. Examples of this type of novel can be *Pamela* or *Virtue Rewarded* by Richardson and *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne.

### **Utopian Novel:**

A Utopia is an imaginative place or society where everything is perfect. This type of theme is presented generally in speculative fiction or science fiction. The setting of utopian fiction is described as lovely and idealistic, with ideal attributes. It represents a society free of chaos, sorrow, anguish, trauma, and other negative elements. Plato's *Republic*, Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Francis Bacon's *Atlantis* are examples of Utopian novels.

### **Dystopian Novel:**

A dystopian novel, unlike a utopian story, depicts a gloomy and nightmarish world marked by corruption, injustice, and poverty. Everything is dispersed in this style of narrative, and nothing is ideal. In every way, society is suffering greatly. Society is dominated by dilemmas, sufferings, anguish, and desperation. It is a typically disorganized society as opposed to a Utopian society. This sort of literature is exemplified by George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury.

### **Anti-Novel:**

When a novel does not follow the established norms or conventions and creates its own rules, such a novel is called anti-novel. An anti-novel is an experimental work of literature that defies the novel's traditional norms. Anti-novel purposely breaks the rules of a novel, such as having a consistent protagonist and storyline, and so on. *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence and David Markson's *This Is Not a Novel* can be placed in this category.

### **Campus Novel:**

This type of novel takes place on a university campus. As a result, it is also known as an "academic novel." The story is told either from the perspective of students or from the perspective of instructors. Any novel, which is set or located around a university, can be called a campus novel. For example, Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

### **Magic Realism:**

It is a form of literature that realistically depicts the current world while still incorporating mystical elements. It combines the real and the magical to create a surreal but convincing plot. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an example of this type of fiction.

## Elements of Novel:

It is interesting to note that there are various elements in a novel. Some of them are plot, character, theme, point of view, setting etc. **Plot** is the sequence of events in a story or a play, **Character** is the person and his characteristics in a work of fiction, **Theme** refers to the central idea or belief, **Point of View** means the perspective from which the story is told, **Conflict** is the opposition of forces that ties one incident to another and makes the plot move. **Setting** means the time and location in which a story takes place. You will study these aspects in detail in the following Unit of this block.

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## 17.3 Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- recognize various types of novels and their significance
- understand the richness of fiction in English in the form of various types of novels

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## 17.4 Glossary

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**Prose:** A written or spoken language in its ordinary form without metrical structure

**Drama:** One of the genres of literature like poetry, prose, and novel. It is staged and performed before an audience.

**Protagonist:** The main leading character of the story.

**Genre:** A category of art or literature.

**Narrator:** The mind from which all aspects of the story are necessarily told.

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## 17.5 Sample Questions

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### 17.5.1 Objective Questions:

Fill in the blanks with appropriate answers:

1. Plot is one of the elements of the novel \_\_\_\_\_ True/False
2. Protagonist is villain of the story \_\_\_\_\_ True/False
3. Gothic novel deals with horror \_\_\_\_\_ True/False
4. *Lucky Jim* is a campus novel \_\_\_\_\_ True/False

5. *Jane Eyre* was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Mrs. Dalloway is written by \_\_\_\_\_.
7. An example of an epistolary novel is \_\_\_\_\_. Pamela/ Gulliver's Travels
8. The novel which deals with mystery and crime is called \_\_\_\_\_
9. Autobiography is the story of an author about his own life \_\_\_\_\_ True/False
10. Name one Utopian novel \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 17.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What is an autobiographical novel? Mention one example.
2. What is a utopian novel? Give examples.
3. Explain the term *Bildungsroman*?
4. Define Gothic novel with examples.
5. What is a psychological novel?

#### 17.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Explain the importance of the different types of novels.
2. Discuss historical novels and detective novels.
3. Write notes on the following:
  - (a) Allegorical novel,
  - (b) Dystopian novel
  - (c) Detective novel.

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## 17.6 Suggested Readings

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1. Georg Lukacs. *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, 1990.  
<https://www.eng-literature.com/2016/01/different-types-of-novel.html> <https://www.britannica.com/art/novel>
2. Raymond Williams. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. Chatto and Windus. 1970.
3. Terry Eagleton. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Atlantic Publisher, 2004.  
[www.britannica.com/art/novel](https://www.britannica.com/art/novel)

## Unit-18: Aspects of the Novel

### Structure

18.0 Introduction

18.1 Objectives

18.2 Aspects of the Novel

18.2.1 Plot

18.2.2 Character

18.2.3 Setting

18.2.4 Point of View

18.2.5 Style

18.3 Learning Outcomes

18.4 Glossary

18.5 Sample Questions

18.6 Suggested Readings

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### 18.0 Introduction

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Dear Learners, as you already know by now, literature has many genres like Prose, Poetry, Drama, Novel etc. Each genre has some special features, elements and types. For prose we have fictional prose and non-fictional prose; for poetry, we have an ode, lyric, sonnet, epic, mock-epic, elegy etc. The drama also has to be staged, making it a little more practical than the rest of the genres. We have different types of dramas like tragedy, comedy, romantic tragedy, etc. Each genre and subgenre is characterised by some specific aspects. Similarly, the novel too has many elements like plot, setting, characters, theme, etc. This Unit will therefore focus on elements of the novel and their characteristics.

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### 18.1 Objectives

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The Unit has the following objectives for the readers:

- to understand the various elements of the novel.
- to know the types of plots.

- to recognize various perspectives of narratives.
- to understand the complexity of characters.
- to identify the importance of setting.
- to appreciate the significance of the style.

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## 18.2 Aspects of the Novel

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When we talk about the Aspects of the Novel, we are referring to the study of a novel through specific attributes. It is vital to examine every aspect of the story from several angles. To comprehend the novel, we must examine and evaluate it thoroughly. If you are going to read a novel, you must first learn about its various components before you can fully comprehend it. We cannot understand a novel until we are familiar with its various aspects. Plot, story, characterization, style, topic, narrative mode, the notion of space and time, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, rhythm, and so on are all elements of the novel. Let's take a look at the main elements of the novel one now

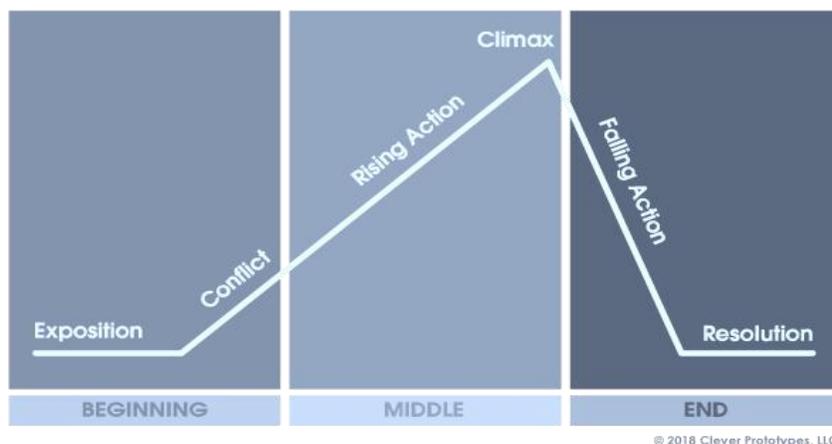
### 18.2.1 Plot:

A plot is a set of events that provide the story with conflict. The storyline is sometimes referred to as the 'spine of a story.' The term plot was originally mentioned in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC by Greek philosopher Aristotle in his popular work *The Poetics*. According to Aristotle, a plot is “a combination of incidents, events, situations, and actions in a story.” Aristotle saw the story as a necessary component of tragedy as a theatrical form. He called the plot “the soul of the tragedy”. His definition, however, is equally applicable to other genres as well such as novels and short stories. According to Henry Hudson, plot, characters, language, time, and location of the action, style, and so on are the main aspects of a novel. Aristotle never distinguished between 'story' and 'plot.' But there is a lot of difference between a plot and a story. In his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Edward Morgan Forster, a well-known critic, and writer drew a contrast between story and plot. According to E.M. Forster, a story is a “narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence.” He goes on to define a plot as “a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.” The term ‘causality’ is highlighted in this definition. This can be best illustrated with the help of the following example. “The King died, and the Queen died” is a story. Another picture for a story goes like this: “The King died, and the Queen died because of the grief of the King’s death.” It is simple to understand the distinction between plot and

story with the help of this example as “Causality” is the keyword to keep in mind here. In a nutshell, the plot is structured to logically convey events and information. The plot structure determines the structure of a novel.

A novel is generally boosted by a storyline or a plot. In other words, it may be considered as the nucleus of the work of art, a jotting on an old envelope: for example, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as “a young couple destined to be married have to first overcome the barriers of pride and prejudice,” or Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866) as “a young man commits a crime and is slowly pursued in the direction of his punishment.” Developing a detailed nuclear idea requires much creativity, since each novel's plot is expected to differ from one another, and there are few basic human situations for the novelist to draw upon. Dramatists can use plots taken directly from fiction or biography--a form of theft sanctioned by Shakespeare--but novelists must produce what appears to be original.

One can recall Shakespeare’s sense of producing creative plots. A plot does not require any extraordinary effort other than a string or thread of devices to create excitement or concern among the readers. A reader’s interest may be born at the very outset by the mysteries, by the conflicts, frustration and maybe finally be happy when all matters are resolved in the end. A plot follows a sequence; there is a beginning, middle and end. In other words, a plot has the following steps: Exposition, Conflict, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Resolution. (See fig. 1)



(Source: <https://www.storyboardthat.com> fig: 1)

Dear Students, we shall discuss all these terms one by one.

**Exposition:** It refers to the introduction of the story; here, important characters are revealed, besides setting, mood and time are also introduced to the readers.

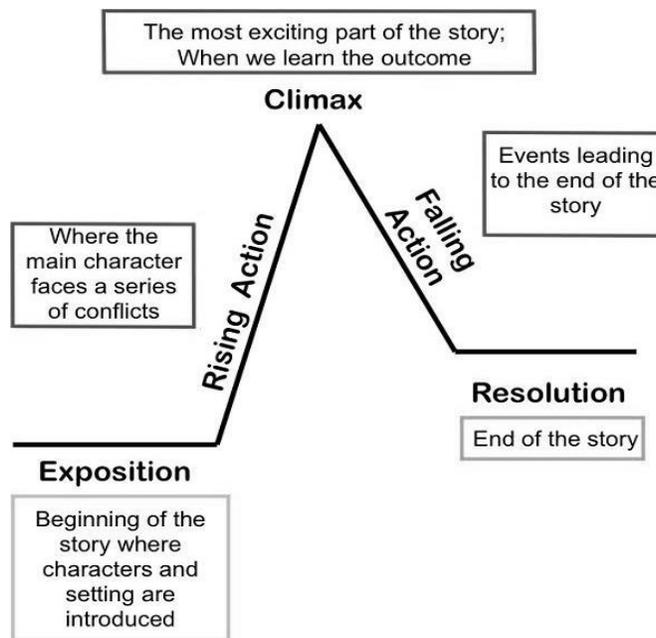
**Conflict:** It is one of the primary parts of the novel or the goal. Conflict simply is a problem that drives the plot of a story. The ultimate aim of the protagonist is to overcome this problem or to win over it.

**Rising Action:** It simply means that all the leading events of the story eventually lead to a climax, whether it is character development or events that create suspense.

**Climax:** It is the turning point of the story. It is here that a shift of the events takes place on either side. This is the height or intermission stage of the plot.

**Falling Action:** This takes place only because of the climax, wrapping of all plot points, questions answered and the development of the plot.

**Resolution:** It is the end of the plot in a story. It may leave readers sad, depressed, or happy depending upon the type of the work whether it is a romantic comedy or tragedy. (See fig. 2)



(Source: <http://diagramscharts.com/tag/plot-diagram/fig: 2>)

***Check your progress***

1. What is the end of the story called?

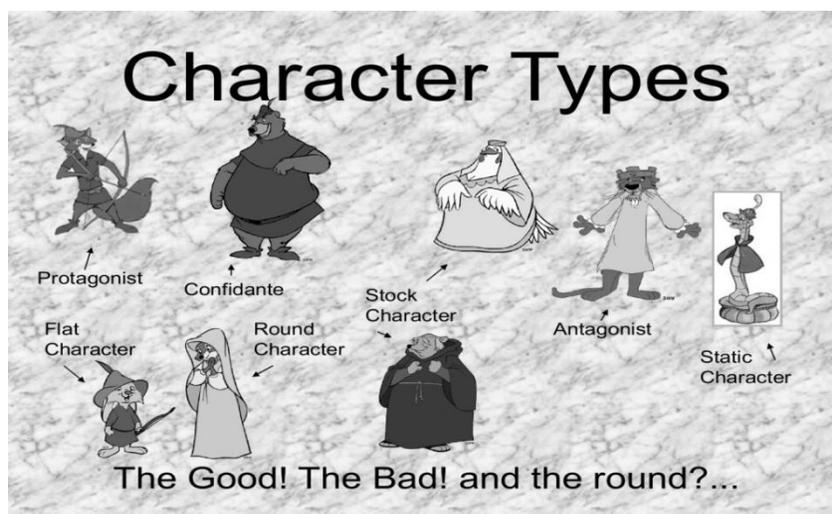
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is referred to as the introduction of the story?

\_\_\_\_\_

### 18.2.2 Character:

This is the second important element in a novel. It was once believed and agreed that there can be a novel without a plot but not without characters. It is essential to bring characters to life. The details of characters can be thumbnail sketches to deep, or wordy, highly detailed biographies of a character. It is important to note that different genres require different characters. Characters are important for any plot of a story. However, it is the main character that has the greatest effect on the plot or storyline. Some of the common types of characters are **Protagonist, Confidante, Anti-hero, Antagonist, Flat, Round, Static, and Dynamic.** (See fig:3)



(Source:<https://studylib.net/> fig: 3)

#### **Protagonist:**

Dear Learners, we shall begin with the protagonist; a protagonist is considered as the main character around whom the entire story revolves. We always see a protagonist fight against all odds and make the decision that helps the plot of the story to move forward. Generally, protagonists are all of heroic nature. They solve every issue and fight till the final resolution of any problem. If you're writing in the first person and choosing to tell your story through a narrator that will typically become your protagonist. However, that's not a hard and fast rule. Consider *The Great Gatsby*: in this novel, F. Scott Fitzgerald made Nick the narrator, even though Gatsby was the protagonist.

#### **Antihero:**

The antihero should not be confused as a villain, rather it is similar to a protagonist, it is just that he lacks some conventional traits of a hero or heroic attributes. If you remember, JK Rowling in her book *Harry Potter*, created the character of Severus Snape, he is the polar

opposite to Harry Potter, he is a classic hero in every sense of the word. Jake Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* can also be considered an antihero. Anti-heroes can be exciting characters; there is a lot of depth in them.

**Confidante:**

He is generally regarded as the best friend of the main character. The protagonist confides himself in a confidante. It is he who offers advice or suggestion to the main character when he is struggling or fighting any problem. A confidante reveals the intention, plans and personality traits of a protagonist. It must be admitted it is not a hard and fast rule that a confidante has to be necessarily a human being it can be an animal as well.

**Antagonist:**

It is the character who may be called a villain of the story. He stands in the ways of the protagonist to halt his process of achieving his desired goals. Antagonists do whatever they can to block the path of the hero. They are the source of many dramatic and thrilling scenes. If you remember *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby wanted Daisy, however, he could not have her because she was married to Tom. This made Tom detestable for Gatsby because he had to face off Tom. He was unlikeable because he was cheating on Daisy and would not let her be with the love of her life.

**Dynamic:**

As the term suggests, a dynamic character is someone who changes over a period of time. This term is often associated with the main character or protagonist for all the transformations that he undergoes while resolving various issues. Let's remain with *The Great Gatsby*. "As mentioned, F. Scott Fitzgerald did something interesting with his creation of the narrator, Nick Carraway. Nick's evolution throughout the novel was extreme. He was a nice, hard-working boy who just wanted to secure a role on Wall Street. Then, he met Gatsby and everything changed. By the end of the novel, Nick was disillusioned, sick of everything Wall Street stood for, and disgusted by his rich friends".

**Static:**

This character is opposed to the dynamic character, someone who does not change. Generally, the father or mother of the protagonist falls into this category of characters. They are wise and enlightening. The term is used for peripheral characters. Daisy's friend Jordan Baker in *The Great Gatsby* could be considered a static character. She does not change much throughout the novel.

**Round:**

Many people or characters have difficult spouses or mothers, you are not in a position to decide whether they love or hate them. If you find this “difficult person” it can be referred to as a round character and a type of complex character. They do not follow a smooth arch and are inconsistent in their approach and acts. To a great extent, they neither are cruel nor kind. They are mostly conflicted and to the readers and protagonist, they are contradictory. Round characters are more developed and display more than one characteristic.

**Flat:**

A flat character is the opposite of a round one. They may be overtly kind or innately cruel, and it shows. When you think of a flat character, you will immediately recognize their main characteristic. As opposed to the complex nuance of a round character, the flat character is simple and obvious. Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, is an example of a flat character. She's opinionless and, worse, clueless. Most of the characters, especially Claudius and Polonius, use her as a pawn and she is completely unaware of what is happening. A flat character remains unchanged throughout the novel. Such a character has only one specific trait.

**Foil:**

A character may serve as a foil to another character that contrasts them and has opposing tendencies. The main purpose of a character who is a foil is to distinguish and emphasize the protagonist's or other characters' characteristics. Helen is the foil to Jane in the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. In *The Tale of Two Cities* Sydney Carton is the foil to Charles Darnay. In the name of honour, Charles Darnay rejects his family. He explains how to do the right thing for everyone, including Lucie and Dr. Manette. His soft goodness and compassionate demeanour steal Lucie's heart. Sydney Carton, on the other hand, is attractive and brilliant, but he feels as though he has accomplished nothing meaningful in his life. He believes Lucie could be the solution to his troubles, but she is in love with Charles.

**18.2.3 Setting:**

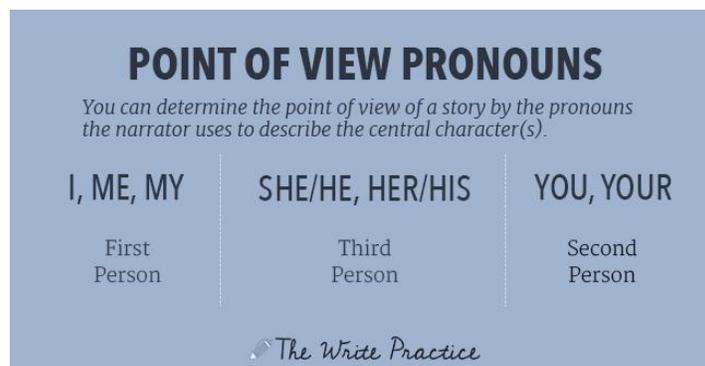
It is one of the important elements of the novel. It refers to the scene or scenes where the action takes place. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the story's first setting is the Dursleys' house. Thereafter, the action is moved to another place Hogwarts, similarly, we see Harry along with friends feel fascinated when they discover the castle and its grounds. It would be safe to claim that Hogwarts is such a well-designed setting that it almost becomes a character on its own. (See fig: 4)



(Source: Internet, fig:4)

### 18.2.4 Point of View:

Dear Students, you should always keep this thing in mind that all novels are told from a certain perspective. The narrative can be first-person, second-person narrative or third-person narrative. Sometimes we have a third-person narrator who is not a part of the story. Let us continue with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*: in this story we have a third-person narrator who is not part of the story, yet, the narrator speaks mostly from Harry's perspective, delving into his thoughts and feelings rather than those of other characters. There are some instances where an omniscient third person narrates the plot from multiple perspectives. Still, there is also a first-person narrator who generally narrates or speaks for himself or herself. See fig.(5)



(Source:Internet fig:5)

### 18.2.5 Style:

Another important feature of a novel is its style. The way a writer writes and presents their thoughts and ideas is referred to as style. It is a literary style by which novelists express their ideas using a variety of literary approaches, sentence structure, rhythm, and other literary components. Style can also be defined as the "voice" that a reader hears when reading an author's

work. It varies from one author to the other. Every writer has a distinct style in which he or she expresses his or her thoughts or ideas. Tone, word choice, syntax, diction, grammar, language, and descriptive method are all used to create an author's style. It is a novelist's characteristic approach to writing. The reader learns about a particular novelist's creative talent through the use of style. Furthermore, style may be defined as the way a novelist or writer employs various literary devices to organize her or his thoughts or message. As a result, style is the peculiar factor that distinguishes a novel from other novels. How a text is constructed is referred to as style. It is a literary term that is difficult to define. A single text or work of literature might contain a variety of styles.

Any author can make use of a particular language in a novel. He or she can make use of the syntax, word choice and other necessary linguistic elements. J. K Rowling has made use of a fairly simple language in *Harry Potter*. However, one can see the use of imagery and symbolism is frequent in the book. Similarly, different authors have used different styles in their works. The style of Dickens is different from that of Hardy or the style Richardson is different from that of Virginia Woolf.

**18.2.6 Theme:** Novels explore various themes that readers are able to grasp and absorb the meaning of the story or message. *Harry Potter* revolves around various themes, thirst for power, love, friendship, belonging and many more. Generally, all novels revolve around a certain theme or some sub-themes, like identity, women emancipation, power, poverty, education, war, love, friendship. These are some of the common themes that authors generally write about.

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## 18.3 Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this Unit you should be able to understand:

- elements of the novel like Plot, Character, Setting, Point of view, Theme, Style
- types of plots like simple and complex
- exposition, Climax and Falling action in a plot
- types of characters like flat, round, static, protagonist, antagonist etc.
- point of view in a novel
- importance of setting and style of the novel

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## 18.4 Glossary

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**Narrator:** The mind from which all aspects of the story are necessarily told

**Theme:** One or more direct or indirect statements about the human condition as evidenced through the work as a whole

**Plot:** The series of events that make up the story; traditionally, conflict, climax, denouement, and conclusion

**Setting:** The place, the time, and the social circumstances of the work.

**Tone:** The general attitude of the author towards the characters or the subject matter of the book.

**Characters:** The sentient or non-sentient beings alive or dead who are the actors of the events.

**Point of View:** Perspective from which a work is told, 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> ; omniscient, limited.

**Society:** A group of individuals living for a common reason as an organised group of people or a society.

**Static:** That which does not alter or never changing

**Anarchy:** Absence of law and order

**Hierarchy:** A political, economic, religious or social structure in which individuals are ranked above others with some supremacy.

**Corruption:** Bribery, the state of being tainted or debased.

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## 18.5 Sample Questions

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### 18.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following is not an essential element of the novel?

- (a) Plot
- (b) Character
- (c) Lecture
- (d) Theme

2. What is the leading character of a novel called?

- (a) Protagonist
- (b) Antagonist
- (c) Confidant
- (d) None

3. Exposition is a part of:
- (a) Plot
  - (b) Theme
  - (c) Character
  - (d) None
4. *Harry Potter* is a
- (a) Campus novel
  - (b) Detective novel
  - (c) Horror novel
  - (d) None
5. Who wrote *Jane Eyre*?
- (a) Jane Austen
  - (b) Emily Bronte
  - (c) Charlotte Bronte
  - (d) George Eliot
6. Conflict is a part of
- (a) Plot
  - (b) Setting
  - (c) Style
  - (d) None
7. When a character changes frequently in a novel what do you call it?
- (a) Dynamic
  - (b) Round
  - (c) Flat
  - (d) None
8. The climax in a plot means
- (a) Turning point
  - (b) Defensive
  - (c) Aggressive
  - (d) None
9. What does Resolution in a plot mean?
- (a) End

- (b) Young
- (c) Old
- (d) None

10. If the novel is told from a ‘third-person point of view’, then the writer uses

- (a) I /us
- (b) We /you
- (c) They /he/she
- (d) Us /me

**18.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is meant by the plot of a story?
2. What do you mean by “Rising Action” and “Falling Action”?
3. Differentiate between a “round character” and a “flat character”?
4. Differentiate between the protagonist and the antagonist of a novel.
5. Discuss the significance of setting in a work of literature.

**18.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Examine the aspects of novel.
2. Discuss the importance of point of view, narrative technique and character in a novel.
3. Illustrate various stages of plot construction.

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**18.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Terry Eagleton. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Atlantic Publisher, 2004.
2. Georg Lukacs. *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, 1990.

## **Unit-19: *Oliver Twist* - Introduction**

### **Structure**

#### **19.0 Introduction**

#### **19.1 Objectives**

#### **19.2 Overview of the Period**

##### **19.2.1 Victorian Literature**

##### **19.2.2 Realism in the Victorian Period**

##### **19.2.3 Charles Dickens and his Writings**

##### **19.2.4 Background of *Oliver Twist***

##### **19.2.5 Publication of the Novel**

##### **19.2.6 Synopsis of the Novel**

##### **19.2.7 Portrayal of Characters in *Oliver Twist***

##### **19.2.8 Social Issues in the Novel**

##### **19.2.9 Moral Values in the Novel**

##### **19.2.10 Critical Response of the Novel**

#### **19.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **19.4 Glossary**

#### **19.5 Sample Questions**

#### **19.6 Suggested Readings**

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### **19.0 Introduction**

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Human beings are bound to live together with the people around them. People differ according to their perception, feeling, temperament and thinking. This leads to the gap between the communities in a society. As witnessed during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), this period reflects some major developments in English writing. It was the era of transformation of rural England to an urban one. People of this period realized their lives were changing. It was a period of economic expansion and rapid change and the population of England had increased to 6.5 million. England became one of the largest industrial centres. The industrial revolution brought new technologies like the railway, steam engine, printing press etc. However, the industrial revolution was merely the beginning of the era of cruelty for the poor people who were forced to work in mills and factories for their livelihood. They were underpaid and ill-treated;

especially the women and the children. There developed a strong division between the working and the opulent class. It was due to the Industrial revolution England became the first to encounter social problems despite being the first richest country in the world. This period is known for refined and conservative moral values. Their religious faith was breaking into Christian and atheist beliefs. New genres were getting established. Amid the changes of this great age, two things stand out clearly – democracy and education. People started protesting for the right to vote especially the women and the working class as they realized it is the common people who bear the burden of sorrows whereas the privileged gain the most political and monetary benefit. At the same time, the growth of education had a great influence on the lives of people. As it was the age of newspapers and books, literary art began to flourish. People began to read more and more with the growth of libraries and an increase in the publication of books.

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## 19.1 Objectives

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Our primary objectives in this Unit are to:

- give you an overview of the history of the Victorian period
  - acquaint you with the emergence of the English novel
  - provide you an idea about the Victorian literature
  - familiarise you with Charles Dickens and his writings
  - introduce you to *Oliver Twist* written by Charles Dickens
  - familiarise you with the various issues which Dickens raised in the novel
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## 19.2 Overview of the Period

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As you are aware from your reading of the previous Units, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the age of English novels. It flourished more due to the development of the printing press during this period. Writers and philosophers brought about myriad reforms in Victorian society including the abolition of slavery and child labour. It was a high point in the history of English literature when novel as a genre expanded. England became the centre of novel-readers as various transformations in the English society were expressed by the writers of the age. The novel became a tool to present the picture of life prevailing at that time especially in middle-class people as they rose in power and importance. The middle class contributed to a rapid rise in the popularity of the novels. Novelists tried their best to portray what the middle-class readers were

interested to read. The novel in this era holds the same importance which drama held in the Elizabeth age. Realism was the main focus of Victorian literature making it different from romantic literature. The purpose was to portray realistic circumstances of people living at that time. It was the amalgam of optimism and pessimism. Optimism in a sense changes in the standard of living by progress in technology and the Industrial revolution while the pessimism is related to poverty, hunger and miserable condition of the working class. Therefore, it was the age of conflict with many social problems prevailing at that time, from science to moral breakdown.

### **19.2.1 Victorian Literature:**

Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seems to diverge from artistic criteria. This age produced many writers who deserve to rank among the greatest of writers. The main motive of the writers was to project the basic problems of human experience through the presentation of great characters in their work. As we see, the novel of William Makepeace Thackeray *Vanity Fair* shows the world as a dark and unfair place, it satirizes middle-class society. Through the character of Becky Sharp, he shows his criticism towards the society. Thomas Hardy in his novels used to question religious and social structures through his characters. His novels like *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* analyse the social confinement on the lives of people living in England and criticises beliefs relating to marriage, education and religion that caused trouble in the lives of people. Bronte Sisters (Emily Bronte, Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte) created remarkable works like *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Bronte to analyse myth, class and gender. *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte used gothic elements and showed deception and bigamy prevailing at that time. Another novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Bronte was based on realism and is known as one of the first feminist novels. Similarly, George Eliot was one of the famous female writers with an unbelievable intellect as she portrays thoughts, anxieties and inner feelings of characters as in her work *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) where she shows the growth of various marriages in a small town. There were some great prose writers too whose works are of artistic merit. Their main focus was the conflicting issues related to democracy, education, religion and politics. Poetry also plays an important role in the Victorian era. It was different from romantic poetry. The main centre of Victorian poetry was the realistic view of people's lives revolving around the Victorian conflict prevailing at that time. Two new forms were introduced at that time i.e. Narrative Poetry and Dramatic Monologue. Narrative poetry was written in the form of stories like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and

Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) while in a dramatic monologue, the speaker narrates the main part of the poem to an audience subtly present in the poem itself. Examples of dramatic monologues are Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* (1842) and Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Ulysses* (1842).

### **19.2.2 Realism in Victorian Period:**

Realism as a literary movement started as a reaction to and departure from the idealism of the Romantic period. The word realism refers to the faithful perception of the world in literature. Realism appeared in literature in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly in novels. It was a mediation between the actual and the ideal, particular and general, individual and species. The main motive of realism was to recreate reality as it was. As a result, the plot was no longer the central focus of the author, but creating interesting characters was a high priority. It also laid stress on describing the substantial details of life, as opposed to the natural world portrayed by the Romantic period. It was the way to explore the interior lives of characters and to show transparency regarding the problem of representation of people. The writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rejected the artificiality of both the classicism and romanticism. They believed that artificiality misrepresented the harsh realities of life. They tried to represent the lives, appearances, customs, and the problems of the middle and lower classes, of the undistinguished, the ordinary, the lowly and the unadorned. They scrupulously set themselves to reproduce the so far ignored aspects of contemporary life and society - its mental attitudes, physical settings and material conditions. Despite rising prosperity, a huge gap was witnessed between the rich and the poor. The novelists of the period represent realism like George Eliot in her first novel *Adam Bede* (1859). The novel *Bleak House* (1852) by Dickens encounters the depths of hardship, disease and loss suffered by the poor. Another novel *North and South* (1854) by Elizabeth Gaskell compares the rural south with the unpleasant conditions of the industrial north. Another novel dealing with realism is Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845). The novel is a social commentary on the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The novelists of this age tried to represent this inequality that lay hidden under the outward affluence.

### **19.2.3 Charles Dickens:**

As you are already aware of the early life of Dickens by now, let you quickly recapitulate it. Charles John Huffam Dickens, born on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1812, Portsmouth in Hampshire England belonged to a poor family whose father along with the entire family except for Dickens was sent to Marshal sea prison for not clearing debt. Dickens was nine years old and was taken out of

school to work in the factory at the age of eleven. He was supporting his poor family by pasting labels on bottles. His life was transformed when he entered journalism and his first work *The Pickwick Papers* got published in 1836 at the age of 25. It was published serially in 1836-1837, it was full of liveliness and merriment. It was an overnight success, he was acknowledged with fame around the Victorian society, huge audiences would gather over his arrival in England. Dickens, the first famous author of that period, was known as the hero of realism as he made the stories out of incidents that he faced and the people who were facing the same. He was a brilliant enthusiastic observer with an active imaginary power which led him to be a famous novelist. Dickens used to produce the writings that the public wanted, everything that Dickens attempted was full of liveliness and intensity. At the age of 15, he acquired knowledge of inns, stables and rough life which is seen in his novels. Dickens began drawing sketches for various magazines and newspapers under the pseudonym 'Boz'. At the age of 21, he made his first sketch by the name of "Mr. Minns and his cousin" and it was seen in his first book, *Sketches by Boz*, in 1835.

Dickens's works reflect the dullness of life to which people could relate themselves, as they lived in the same condition. He gained knowledge of human life, by understanding and analysing the victims of the society. He began to give a dramatic outlook to his works by exaggerating the situations, voices and gestures of characters that pleased the audience. His empathetic soul gave courage to the weak, hope to the weary and fought against injustice. The novels of Dickens are full of symbolic images and situations of desperate alienation of the individual which is reflected in the characters of his novels. In other words, we can say he was the victim of his own book. He edited a weekly journal for 20 years, wrote 15 novels and hundreds of short stories. His work *The Pickwick Papers* was followed by *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop* with many other works which indicate the limitless invention of his literary art. He also travelled to America where he was received as a popular novelist. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was his last work before he died. It was left incomplete. Themes, such as arranged marriages, child cruelty, betrayal, deceit and relations between people from different classes have been fully explored in his famous works.

#### **19.2.4 Background of *Oliver Twist*:**

*Oliver Twist or The Parish Boy's Progress* is known as one of the best novels of Dickens. The subtitle "*The Parish Boy's Progress*" was taken from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It was well-loved by the people of England as Dickens had already achieved success from his first work *Pickwick Papers*. The reason behind writing *Oliver Twist* was to palliate the evils

under which the poor were suffering. *Oliver Twist* is a remarkable critique of poverty, the industrial revolution, child labour and the treatment of orphans. In the novel, he shows the life of an orphan living in the streets. The protagonist of the novel is a poor child, the miserable victim of society. He exaggerated the sorrowful condition of the poor child and showed the sentiments related to him.

Charles Dickens's novels like *Oliver Twist* represent the immense split in society. His novel *Oliver Twist* was a great success as it is referred as 'Newgate Novel' and was written as a protest against the Poor Law of 1834. The raising of the workhouse was induced by the Poor Law. The Poor Law promoted the poor people to depend on charity rather than utilising themselves in work or looking for employment. The children were forced to work like savages, in other words, child exploitation was happening at that time. The novel revolves around a boy namely Oliver who encounters a city of evils and avoids being corrupted. The plot is about how Oliver's life is changed from the workhouse to becoming an aristocrat. The novel exposes a lot of Victorian irreverence which Dickens had experienced as he had experienced poverty himself. In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens shows us many of the social inequities of those historic times. He was disgusted by the way the poor people were treated. He believed that the characterisation of the novel would affect the government to bring a change in society. This novel is known for the spunky realism with which Dickens represented the lower-class and the horrifying living circumstances of London slums. Dickens shows the reality of England through his fiction.

#### **19.2.5 Publication of the Novel:**

*Oliver Twist* was a serial publication, as you know, between 1837 and 1839 in a magazine called *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which Dickens was an editor. This only held the reader's interest and increased the publicity of his novels. Dickens started writing *Oliver Twist* in instalments before his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. The novel *Oliver Twist* was implausibly popular for the style i.e "Newgate novel", as this style was best-selling from the 1820s to 1840s. The name was taken from the Newgate Prison, the main prison for crooks (thieves, murderers, pickpockets) in London. While critics often denounce such novels for spreading immorality, the readers usually love them. *Oliver Twist* is the only "Newgate Novel" of Dickens. It has been adapted as a film and Broadway musical and has been believed to have lasting worth since it was published. The novel was not only based on the orphan but the worst environment he was facing, and the mean people on the streets of London. The novel was considered as the exact painting of social reality that Dickens presented in public.

### **19.2.6 Synopsis of the Novel:**

The novel is about the young orphan, Oliver, who is born in a workhouse to a woman not known to anybody. She dies after giving birth to him, and the boy Oliver was sent to an orphanage, where he was mistreated by other orphans. One day the boy asked for more gruel, this led Mr. Bumble to decide to get rid of him. The constant hardships and sufferings forced Oliver to run away to London where he meets a boy namely Jack Dawkins, or the Artful Dodger, who takes him to an apartment where he meets Fagin, a gentleman. He offers Oliver a place to stay and food to eat. Oliver eventually after some time comes to know that Fagin and his boys are pickpockets and thieves. He is also wrongly accused of stealing the handkerchief of an old gentleman, Mr. Brownlow. Oliver then is taken to the courtroom where he faints. Mr. Brownlow feels sympathy for Oliver and takes him to his own place. He takes care of him as a guardian but on the other hand, Fagin is not happy about losing him. He has a fear to getting exposed. He then hatches a conspiracy with his people to get him back. So one day when Mr Brownlow sends Oliver to return some books to the bookseller and there Nancy, one of Fagin's conspirator, kidnaps Oliver and takes him back to the evil Fagin. Oliver is forced at gunpoint by Fagin to go for robbery where he is shot by one of the servants. The next morning Mrs Maylie and her beautiful niece decide to protect him from the police and nurse him. Meanwhile, Nancy feels pity for Oliver when she overhears Fagin and Monks' deal. Nancy decides to tell the truth to Rose Maylie that Monks is Oliver's half-brother, and is the big enemy of Oliver and is trying to destroy him. Finally, all crimes committed by Fagin and his conspirators come to an end and they get severe punishment. And in the end, Oliver lives happily with Mr. Brownlow.

### **19.2.7 Portrayal of Characters in *Oliver Twist*:**

The characters in the novel are depicted as social commentary, criticising the hypocrisy and laws of government and criminal structure. Dickens through his characters points out the suffering imposed by the system and its unfairness. Dickens's purpose was to make the novel the instrument of morality and justice by the exaggeration of the characters. In *Oliver Twist*, he puts across that the attributes of wisdom and humanity can be irrecoverably lost if it is exposed to unrestrained corrupting influences. For this reason, Dickens laid great emphasis on the environment in the development of characters in the novel. From the character of Oliver to the character of Monks, the novel depicts the two sides of the same coin. Oliver, the innocent and virtuous exact opposite of his brother Edward Monks, Dickens shows us the dark side of Victorian society as well as his optimism for a brighter future. These two main characters created

by Dickens not only tell us about Oliver's courage and Monks' self-interest but also shows us the Victorian society that he lived in as well as the society it could become. Dickens throughout the novel provides numerous examples where Oliver proves himself righteous with no self-interest at all. Dickens through the character of Oliver represents how society should look like, while through the Monks' portrayal Dickens shows the world is filled with greed and hate. Monks desires to destroy the life of Oliver so that he could inherit all his property. Monks' character shows the coldness and detachment of society where the only priority is self-interest. The novel displays the brighter side in terms of Oliver, while on the other side it shows the darker side in terms of Monks. As Oliver and Monks are related by blood they could have loved each other but the society and its influences made Monks view Oliver as his enemy. Dickens expresses his views on Victorian society through these two characters. Oliver and Monks represent the best and the worst of humanity. Through the portrayal of Oliver, he gives the role model to the society. Dickens reflects the horrors that children were put through as a result of covetousness that labelled industrial society. Dickens not only shows the reality of people but he also tries to show that change is needed.

#### **19.2.8 Social Issues in the Novel:**

*Oliver Twist* reflects the unfair treatment from society while it exposes the poor condition of people especially the sufferings of children during the Victorian era. Dickens raises the issues of persecution of Poor Law, the evils of London and the exploitation of children. Social issues like disparity, discrimination, prejudice were known to a great extent at that time. In *Oliver Twist*, the children were facing hard times, they were tortured every day, the misery was common in their life. There was no justice for them. They were treated as savages and were made to work all day and night. We saw it in the character of Oliver as he had to go through many hard circumstances to survive. During the Industrial Revolution, their condition was same and the children were forced to work from a very young age. They had to struggle for their livelihood. While on the other side, social prejudice was much prevalent at that time just as in the novel, the children were mistreated by the people who had more money. Children who came from lower backgrounds were even not considered worthy of getting affection. Prejudiced beliefs resulted in biased treatment of individuals based on equality. In the novel, Oliver was very fragile because he did not get anything to eat. Nobody was there to take care of him. At that time there were so many children who were suffering. An orphan was not treated like the other children, they were assumed to be worthless and the lowest in society. In the earlier chapters of the novel, the head

of the workhouse appears to be very cruel. He did not balk to be violent with children if they went against the rules in the workhouse. As in the novel *Oliver* just because asked for more food, the punishment he got was beyond his imagination. Life in the workhouses was unenviable, the ill-treatment of children was widespread, and children would get severely punished if they would do anything wrong. It was common to see children dying in the workhouses. The condition of that time was all depicted through the portrayal of Oliver. The effects of the Industrial Revolution are seen on the characters in the novel, especially children.

### **19.2.9 Moral Values in *Oliver Twist*:**

Despite the social conflicts in the novel *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens represents the moral values through the characters in the novel. As moral values play an important role in shaping human life Dickens uses the novel *Oliver Twist*, as a perfect medium to explore important moral values in the Victorian society. As audience, we notice that society uses various stereotypes against characters in *Oliver Twist* like Mr. Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry.

The moral values that can be seen in the novel concerning the characters are:

**(a) Courage:** It is the ability to take a stand on the right thing in hard situations. From the novel, we have seen in the character of Oliver, how he stands up for the right from the beginning till the end. At the start of the novel, he asks for more gruel from the master without fear. Although he appears to be weak his courage pushes him to do the action. Throughout the novel, we saw him courageously fighting for the right.

**(b) Honesty:** We witness the character of Nancy, who works for the criminal Fagin. She feels pity when she sees Oliver suffering. She decides to tell the truth to Mrs. Maylie about the wicked plan of his master Fagin with Monks. Monks, half-brother of Oliver, is the biggest threat to Oliver as he wants all his inherited property from his father. He is the only proof, who knows Oliver's family background. However, she knows that her revelation will put her in danger. But instead, she chooses the path of honesty, she is ready to face the consequences without being afraid.

**(c) Sympathy:** It is sharing the feeling of others (especially feelings of sorrow and anguish) or we can say feeling sorry for others. We see the character of Mr. Brownlow as the victim of pickpocketing. He thinks Oliver was the one who stole his handkerchief till the time he was proven innocent in front of the magistrate. He feels sympathy for Oliver, as he faints in the courtroom. He took Oliver to his own house and decided to take care of him as a guardian.

**(d) Steadfastness:** It means trueness or we can say our attitudes and aims are not changed. In the novel, we have seen the character of Miss Rose Maylie. When she meets Nancy for the first time, she asks Nancy to leave Fagin and his criminal activities. She persuades her to live a better life. Although Nancy refuses, as she did not want to betray Fagin, Rose did her best to motivate her for a bright future.

**(e) Generosity:** It is the trait of being kind or the concern of being good or willing to be charitable and pleasant. Meanwhile, in the novel, we have seen the characters of Mrs. Maylie and Rose. They decide to nurse him when he was injured. They try to protect him from the police and save him from a difficult situation. Oliver feels safe, he gets happiness and peace while being with them. Through *Oliver Twist*, Dickens not only shows us the evil side of the society but also gives us the moral messages which are implied in the novel. Therefore moral values are important to humanity.

#### **19.2.10 Critical Response:**

Charles Dickens amicably represents the emotions of Victorian people through his novel, *Oliver Twist*. The author was fully acclaimed for his description of implacable reality. Dickens was admired to find good in all mankind despite the grimy environment of miserable orphans like Oliver. Dicken's representation of evils of the workhouses, starvation of children, factory system and venality done in the name of Poor Laws existent at that time caught the attention of the readers. Despite being socially pertinent, *Oliver Twist* faced criticism as well, such as that the novel appeared too mawkish and lacking. The major criticism was raised by the Jewish community against the negative portrayal of Fagin, the Jew. Fagin is considered one of the most monstrous and villainous Jew characters in all of English Literature. In 1854 the Jewish Chronicle demonstrated the criticism of Dickens in public. Despite the portrayal of Fagin, Dickens never openly mistreated any Jew nor did he openly hold any anti-Semitic beliefs. Dickens has been criticised for his selection of backdrop and characters. At times the novel inclined towards the sentimentality that appears more loathsome to readers. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the novel plays a significant role in denouncing the Poor Laws, ill-treatment of children, criminals and other social miscreants who are disregarded by so-called civilised people. Dickens's goal was to show the reality of society and how Oliver lived and survived in the circumstances where society did not need him. The novel illustrates the bright and dark side of human nature. This reason made Charles Dickens one of the best figures of his time.

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### 19.3 Learning Outcomes

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Upon the completion of this Unit, you are expected to know the brief history of the Victorian era. You should be able to know about the Charles Dickens' contribution to the society despite various problems and issues prevalent at that time. You are also expected to understand the humanistic intention of writing the novel *Oliver Twist* and to recognize the connection between history and literature. The key characters in the novel will be identified. After the detailed study of the Unit, you are expected to answer questions related to *Oliver Twist* or Dickens in the examination without difficulty.

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### 19.4 Glossary

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<b>Reign:</b>	Rule
<b>Amalgam:</b>	Combination
<b>Optimism:</b>	Hope
<b>Pessimism:</b>	Despair
<b>Palliate:</b>	Lessen
<b>Irreverence:</b>	Disrespectful act
<b>Inequity:</b>	Injustice
<b>Gruel:</b>	Porridge
<b>Disparity:</b>	Inequality
<b>Irrecoverably:</b>	Impossible to recover
<b>Spunky:</b>	Courageous
<b>Implausibly:</b>	Unbelievably
<b>Seraphic:</b>	Kind personality
<b>Unflagging:</b>	Energetic
<b>Prejudice:</b>	Bias
<b>Flimsy:</b>	Weak
<b>Unenviable:</b>	Hard
<b>Unrestrained:</b>	Uncontrolled
<b>Implacable:</b>	Merciless
<b>Grimy:</b>	Dirty

**Merriment:** Happiness

**Venality:** Corruption

**Sentimentality:** Falsely emotional

**Mawkish:** Insincerely emotional

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## 19.5 Sample Questions

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### 19.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The Victorian Era was known due to Industrial Revolution. [     ]   
(a) True  
(b) False
2. The novel was a popular form of literature in the Victorian Period. [            ]   
(a) True  
(b) False
3. Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* to protest \_\_\_\_\_ law.  
(a) Death penalty  
(b) Poor law of 1834  
(c) Law of estates  
(d) Restoration Act
4. Oliver was born in\_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Hospital  
(b) Railway Station  
(c) Workhouse  
(d) Streets
5. The rule Oliver violates in the workhouse was\_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Asking for more gruel  
(b) Pickpocketing his master's ring  
(c) Try to run from the workhouse  
(d) Asking for new clothes
6. \_\_\_\_\_ saves Oliver from getting arrested on charges of pickpocketing a handkerchief.  
(a) Mr. Brownlow  
(b) Nancy

(c) Jack Dawkins

(d) Monks

7. \_\_\_\_\_ is the magazine in which *Oliver Twist* appeared in 1837.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ adopts Oliver at the end of the novel.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ is the Artful Dodger's real name in the novel.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ is the name of the author whose main theme of the novels is the suffering of children.

### **19.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Give a brief note on the emergence of the novel in the Victorian period.
2. Write a short note on child labour raised by Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*.
3. Discuss the critical reception of *Oliver Twist*.
4. Write a brief note on the villains in the novel *Oliver Twist*.
5. Mention any five important works of Charles Dickens.

### **19.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. What was the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the people of Victorian society?
2. How far did Charles Dickens succeed in showing the problems of Victorian society in his novel *Oliver Twist*? Explain
3. The two main characters Oliver and Monks reflect the two sides of Victorian society – Explain with reference to character portrayal in *Oliver Twist*.

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## **19.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Bloom, Harold. *Charles Dickens*. New York: Infobase Learning, 2013.
2. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*, Vol II. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1994.
3. Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*, 9th ed., London: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1994.
4. Eliot, George, *Middlemarch*, Ed. Ashton. London: Penguin, 1994.

## Unit 20: *Oliver Twist* - Plot Construction

### Structure

20.0 Introduction

20.1 Objectives

20.2. Victorian Period: Overview

    20.2.1 Plot Summary

    20.2.2 Analysis

    20.2.3 Conclusion

20.3 Learning Outcomes

20.4 Glossary

20.5 Sample Questions

20.6 Suggested Readings

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### 20.0 Introduction

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As you are fully aware, *Oliver Twist* is a novel by the Victorian novelist, Charles Dickens. This Unit introduces you to the plot of the novel. The Unit provides a brief socio-political context to the plot of *Oliver Twist*. Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* in the backdrop of the conditions in workhouses, child-labour, crime and poverty which was widespread in Victorian England, along with the growing wealth and progress of the country. You have already read about this in the previous Unit.

The Victorian Age roughly refers to the period when Queen Victoria (1837-1901) ruled over Britain, as you already studied. The period saw the emergence of Britain as the world's most powerful economy after winning the Napoleonic wars with France (1793-1815). This status of the great power and becoming the first industrialised urban society helped in the expansion of the British Empire worldwide. The period of Victorian age is considered to be “the modern period of progress and unrest.”

Due to several reasons this period is a time of the “Victorian Paradox.” It is because of the several contrasts and conflicts that were taking shape at this time. Some of these paradoxes

had to do with the conflict between the rich and the poor; science and religion; men and women and the moral basis of authority.

The striking development that affected this period was the Industrial Revolution, because of which the Victorian period in England was a time of great prosperity. England had gained control over large parts of the world due to trade, slave-trade, colonial occupation and slave-based plantations. All these factors brought great wealth to the small island from all parts of the world. However, it was tragic to see that this wealth was not shared by all. In fact, the gap between the rich and poor was so enormous that it appeared as if Great Britain was not one, but two nations: one rich and one poor.

Secondly, there was a conflict between Science and Religion. The authority of the Church had been challenged due to the increasing use of rationality. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was no debate between science and religion. Science was considered to be the result of some divine expression, and not separate from God. It was the development of a scientific temperament that directed intellectual inquiry towards the Bible, especially, the story of the Creation of the World. In 1859, Darwin presented his theory of evolution in his book, *The Origin of Species* in which he argued that man has evolved from the lower species instead of being a production of some divine power. This led to a huge division among the intellectuals of the society, in which some spoke for and others against the theory. This created a “crisis of faith” among the ordinary people, who were traditional and religious. The growth of science challenged the teachings of the Bible. Doubt became the order of the day in Victorian England. The concept of religious sin was replaced with the zeal to participate in the rapid development of the period.

The third major influence in this Age was the emergence of Utilitarianism. This philosophy resulted from the arguments of Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, James Mill, and Thomas Malthus regarding the morality of governance. They advocated a morality that can create happiness and reduce those decisions that can bring discontent. The utilitarian philosophy sought the betterment of society as a whole, and did not consider the idea of suffering of the individual. According to Utilitarians, an action is to be judged as good if it is able to create “the greatest good of the greatest number” of people in any given situation.

The fourth element was the position of women in society. It was a strange fact that despite the ruling monarch of England being a woman, the women in Victorian England were seen as weak, incapable of being independent and were treated as secondary to men at home, as well as in the society. She was considered to be docile, loving and patient, “an angel in the

house,” whose loving touch brought harmony to the home, and consequently to the society and to the nation. Women had no right to study beyond a basic level, hold jobs or own property. Marriage was the only way women could get respect in society. The unmarried women were objects of pity and scorn, and subjects of jokes as spinsters. The Victorian poet Tennyson wrote a poem “The Princess: A Medley” addressing the matter of women’s higher education. It was widely appreciated and led him to the title of the Poet Laureate of England in the Victorian court. The subject of women’s freedom and individuality were in conflict with the existing ideas about the role of women in society. In short, Victorian society believed in the “doctrine of separate spheres” for men and women.

The Victorian society represents various industrial, cultural, political, scientific and military changes which influenced the literature of the period. The literature produced in this era envisions the challenges of the labour class in the factories and ponders upon the emerging number of child labourers. It also depicts the treatment of women and children and reflects upon the plight of the lower class in the society.

The Romantic Age gave way to the distinctly different Victorian poetry of Alfred Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’ and the novels of Charles Dickens (1812-70), George Eliot (1819-80), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65), the Bronte sisters, William M. Thackeray (1811-63), Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81). It is believed that, “more than 60,000 works of prose fiction were published in Victorian Britain by as many as 7,000 novelists.”

The novel emerged as a new literary genre in this period. It has followed the “three-decker” or three-volume structure initially and it reaches the modern single-volume format only in the 1890s. This period has noticed the flourishing of political, historical, religious, crime and comic novels. The novels also questioned different laws and bills through the literature of the period.

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## **20.1 Objectives**

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The Unit has been designed to fulfil the following objectives:

- to familiarise you with the novel and the main plot
- to make you acquainted with the sequence of events that make up the plot of the novel
- to help you analyse the cause of certain occurrences, and their impact on the characters and the development of the plot
- to enable you to comprehend the relationship between the plot, characters and themes

- to understand the plot as author's representation of his times

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## 20.2 Victorian Period: Overview

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As you already read, *Oliver Twist* was published in 1837-38 in London. At first it was published in the form of a series in Bentley's *Miscellany*, a periodical edited by Dickens himself, between February 1837 and April 1839. In its first edition, the book was published in November 1838. The novel is a mixture of a children's story, a detective story and is also a novel of social protest. It tells in vivid detail the darker side of the policies and administration in Victorian England

As discussed above, this was the time of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, and the new emerging towns were rich in comparison to most rural areas due to various reasons that affect rural economy such as farming and agriculture. Most of these people preferred to work in the towns and cities because of the wealth that these cities promised to anyone who worked hard. This promise turned out to be tragically untrue for a vast majority. Consequently, this migration caused great suffering as the living conditions for these labourers were pathetic and wages were not enough. Moreover, people in small villages also found themselves starving or falling ill due to lack of money. There was a great divide between the rich and the poor.

The care of the poor, those who find themselves in difficulty due to many factors, has been a cause of concern in all societies across time, throughout the world. Mostly it was considered a religious duty to take care of those who were less fortunate. In medieval times in Europe, the Church, through the monasteries, took on the task of looking after those who could not find work or had come upon bad times. But slowly with the declining power of religion and the corruption of the Church, this responsibility was taken over by the political state. So "The Poor Law" was first approved in England in 1601. This law included the incapacitated, blind, old, impotent, and other such in the category of the poor who were unable to perform labour. It demanded that parishes manage these poor people and look after the poor in their own areas. But the advent of the Industrial Revolution changed the situation and living conditions of England and created new problems with families, property and work. The peasants who lived in a rural community were more secure within their close family circles for many generations. The capitalist relationship between an employer and worker was dependent on the cash-nexus and the

persistent rhythm of productivity, which left no room for respite. Moreover, the gap between the employer and the employee was much more.

As a result, new policies brought in Gilbert's Act in 1782. This new law allowed Parishes to work together in bigger groups, in shared poorhouses. Secondly, these poorhouses were to provide shelter to the homeless, jobless and the destitute only till they became self-sufficient. This meant that the poorhouses brought relief for a brief period, helping the poor to work towards improving their lives.

These different aspects of the Poor Laws were criticized strongly. There were a few who were critical of those whom they thought would just be taking advantage of the system, while the others found the system too harsh and supported a more generous system. It was the philosophy of Utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus that went against the poor. Their moral position was that such a system would make them more dependent and idle. Since there was a lot of government money involved, a new law was made.

The new law was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, or the 'New' Poor Law. It was of great significance because it replaced the poorhouse with the workhouse. Before this amendment, poorhouses and alms-houses were for the benefit of starving families and the homeless. The needy were provided with food, clothing, covers and if required, money. However, with the coming of the 'New' Poor Law, the workhouse became the only place for those who needed support. But this was a very demanding system, as they were designed to discourage rather than support the poor. They looked like prisons and were often located on the outskirts of small rural towns. It was required that these people live at the workhouse to get the benefits, instead of coming and going. Therefore, they were forced to leave their home and belongings behind. Tragically, families, husbands, wives and children used to get separated as the poorhouses which were segregated people on the basis of gender and age. The workhouse demanded intense labour from them in exchange of a negligible amount of food and shelter, and kept them working according to a strict timetable.

Dickens and his family are said to have been in a debtors' prison, due to his father's bankruptcy. Even though the debtors' prison was a confined and dreary place, he appears to find it better than a workhouse. Most importantly, in the debtors' prison, Dickens and his family could stay together, whereas the workhouse separated families. The inhuman nature of this arrangement for the unfortunate made him take up the issue on behalf of these voiceless victims of the governing laws. Therefore, in *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens uses the novel form to convey

to his contemporary readers an understanding of the social situation faced by the lower classes of England, including the helpless men, women and children, that he found intolerable.

***Check your Progress***

1. What do you understand by workhouses and poorhouses?

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2. What are the aspects of the Victorian period relevant to the novel?

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**20.2.1 Plot Summary:**

*Oliver Twist* is the story of an orphan named Oliver Twist from his birth to a time when he is about ten. It tells about his miserable existence in a workhouse and his adventures after he runs away from humiliation. As mentioned earlier, this novel is considered to be a response to the New Poor Laws of 1834.

Oliver is born in 1830s in a workhouse located in an unknown village of England. He is born to a young woman who has been found on the street outside the workhouse. She had fallen down in a faint, which was a result of her weakness due to hunger and pregnancy. The doctor of the parish and an old woman who also lives in the workhouse attend the birth and helps to bring him into the world. The baby is weak and sickly. His mother proves to be too weak to survive and after holding and kissing him on the forehead, she dies. The woman's name is Sally and she notices that the young woman had no ring on her finger showing her to be unmarried. It appears that Oliver is an orphan, with the additional stigma of being born to an unwed mother, and since there is no one to support him, he will have to live in the workhouse. He is dressed up in the old clothes that are passed on from baby to baby in the poorhouses. He is thus marked as a parish child.

Oliver's fate appears to be in the hands of Mr. Bumble, who is the beadle of the parish church. It is the beadle who names him, finding his name alphabetically as he has already named infants from A to S. That is why he is named "Twist." Again, it is the beadle who decides that being a baby, he cannot go to the workhouse as yet. So, he is at first given into the care of Mrs. Mann who runs a foster care centre with financial support from the Parish. Though the parish officials pay Mrs. Mann "seven pence half penny," she doesn't feed him adequately. Oliver and children like him are robbed of much of their share of nutrition and given very poor portions of

food. Several children die due to malnutrition or neglect— “eight and a half out of ten,” as Dickens says.

Mr Bumble visits Mrs. Mann on Oliver’s ninth birthday, and informs her that Oliver is too old to stay at her establishment. There had been an official search for Oliver’s parents or family, but no one has been able to discover his mother’s or father’s identity.

Oliver is removed from the only place he has known as home, and taken to the workhouse, because a law had been enacted that required people in poorhouses and workhouses to work in return for food, clothes and shelter. There, he is given his task by a board of rich and well-fed men. He is to “pick oakum” in the workhouse. At the workhouse, he works with several other orphan children and is not even paid with enough amount of meal to sustain him. The authorities feed the growing children with a very thin gruel that hardly serves their hunger. The workhouse is not a shelter for the poor but a hellish place that “starves slowly.” Oliver is encouraged by other children to ask for more if he is hungry. When he goes to the master of the house, who is serving them and asks for “some more,” everyone is shocked. The poor children have been disciplined into accepting whatever is given to them and they are never allowed to complain or “ask for more.”

The authorities punish him and lock him up. Knowing that such a spirited boy can create problems for them, they offer five pounds as a reward to anybody who wants to take Oliver away. He is nearly taken by Mr. Gamfield, who is known to be so harsh to the boys who work for him that several of his child workers have died. Thankfully Oliver is spared that when the magistrate can see from Oliver’s face how afraid he is of the man. Finally, he is handed over to Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry, along with a sum of five pounds by Mr. Bumble. Mr. Sowerberry is the parish undertaker, responsible for arranging the funeral and burial of the dead.

Oliver faces similar circumstances in his new workplace, lots of cruelty, and food being provided unwillingly. But there is no change in his behaviour. He works tirelessly in the day time and sleeps in the coffins at night. He attends the funerals arranged by Sowerberry and through his eyes; the narrator can make the readers understand how the poor are disrespected by the parish officials, Sowerberry and the public, even when they are dead.

Noah Claypole and his girlfriend Charlotte both of whom work for the Sowerberrys, keep bullying and teasing Oliver. One day when Noah refers to Oliver’s dead mother as “a regular right-down bad ‘un,” referring to the story of her being unwed, Oliver attacks him in a fit of rage. Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry rush to Noah’s aid, and the three of them beat Oliver and

lock him in the cellar. Later, Oliver is beaten up and also caned by Mr. Bumble and locked up again. Oliver's rage dissolves into tears when he is alone.

Oliver runs away early next morning. On his way out of town, he passes the workhouse where he used to live and sees his old friend, Dick, in the yard. He tells him that "they beat and ill-used" him, so he's running away. He also says optimistically, "I am going to seek my fortune." He requests Dick to keep quiet about meeting him and Dick vows not to tell anyone about Oliver's flight and bids him a warm farewell.

***Check Your Progress***

1. Write the sequence of incidents in Oliver's life from birth till he goes to London.

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2. What is the attitude of the parish officials towards the poor?

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Oliver decides to walk seventy miles to London. He only had "a crust of bread, a shirt, two pairs of stockings, a penny in his pocket". His journey is full of ups and downs, and he faces hunger, cold, and weakness and only his strong will keeps him going. During his journey he experiences the meanness of the common people of the various villages he passes through, but he also meets a man and a woman who provide him food without expecting anything in return. On the seventh morning, just before entering London, Oliver faints when he reaches the town of Barnet. He is saved by a boy who introduces himself as Jack Dawkins. This is his original name but he is famous by the nickname, Artful Dodger. Jack shows him mercy by buying him lunch and offers to help him reach London.

In London, Dawkins takes Oliver to a shady house and Dawkins strangely uses a password "Plummy and slam" to get into the house. But Oliver does not find it odd. Dodger introduces Oliver to the "old gentleman" Fagin. Oliver is offered food at Fagin's place and is assured of help. In the house, Oliver meets other boys of the same age, but like Dodger they also behave like grown men. They all have supper together and the boys drink and smoke and Oliver is so tired that he falls into a deep sleep right after dinner.

It turns out that the Artful Dodger is a pickpocket and a thief and works for Fagin, who is a crafty old Jew, who finds young innocent boys and girls coming from the villages and trains

them to become thieves, pickpockets and robbers, or prostitutes like Betty and Nancy. Although Oliver sees other boys trying to practice picking Fagin's pocket, he thinks it's a game and even joins in when Fagin invites him to try. Fagin actually wants to make Oliver a trained pickpocket like the other boys under him. He sends him on a pick-pocketing mission with Dodger and Bates. They go to the Highstreet and standing next to a gentleman reading a book at a book-stall, take a handkerchief from his pocket. When he raises the alarm and tries to catch them, Oliver realises to his horror that they are really pick-pockets. He is so shocked that he starts running and everyone mistakes him for the thief and runs to catch him.

The gentleman whose pocket is picked is not sure that Oliver is guilty. There is something about Oliver that reminds him of something, but he can't recall it. So Mr. Brownlow and the Book-stall owner manage to convince Mr. Fagin, the magistrate at the Metropolitan Police Station, that he was not the thief, and he is set free. Mr Brownlow takes him home with him and looks after him while Oliver recovers from his fever and weakness due to the happenings of the last few days. During his stay there he meets Mrs. Bedwin, the housekeeper and thinks of her as a mother because of her kindness to him. Mr. Brownslow can see the resemblance between the portrait of a girl in his house and Oliver, but Oliver is disturbed by the face in the painting. Mr Brownlow is happy to have Oliver with him and assures him that he would like to keep him at his house and teach him to read and gain knowledge.

One day, Mr Brownlow sends Oliver to return some books and money to the book-stall owner, but he does not return. Mr. Bronslow is convinced by his good friend, Mr. Grimwig that the boy is not honest and has run away with the money. They are disturbed by his disappearance. Though none of them want to suspect Oliver, they are not sure what to think. But once again chance plays a part and Mr. Bumble again appears to shape Oliver's destiny. He reads an advertisement in a paper when he goes to London for some work, in which Mr Brownlow has offered an award for information on Oliver. Mr Bumble meets him and assures him that Oliver is not to be trusted. Finally, despite Mrs Bedwin's trust in Oliver, Mr. Brownlow is convinced of Oliver's guilt.

The truth is that on the way to the shop, Oliver is caught by Nancy, who has been told by Fagin to find Oliver and bring him to his house. His clothes, the books and the money are taken away from him. He begs Fagin not to take Mr. Brownlow's things but no one listens. Fagin locks Oliver up, and leaves him alone so that he feels lonely and frightened. Oliver wants to run away but cannot find a way to get away. He sees Bill Sikes and Nancy, Dodger, Charley Bates, Toby

and Fagin planning something. He finds himself forced to go with them on a burglary mission. Oliver's small size is used to get him inside a small window of a house. Oliver is determined not to do anything wrong but warn the people in the house about these criminals. But before he can do so, he is shot in the arm. Sikes and Toby Crackit pick him up and carry him outside the area of the house but leave him in a ditch close by and go back to London.

After spending a night in the ditch, Oliver manages to go to a door and rings the bell, but by the time someone opens the door he faints just outside the door. The owner, Mrs Maylie and her niece, Rose, are shocked to find the thief in this state and ask the servants, Giles and Brittles, to carry him to a room upstairs and call a doctor. They realise that he couldn't have been the thief and save him from the police. Dr. Losberne is a good man and helps Oliver to get better and more confident. He spends some pleasant days with them during which they all develop a liking for Oliver and he for them. He also tells them about his earlier stay with Mr. Brownlow and expresses a wish to meet him. Dr. Losberne takes Oliver to London to meet Mr. Brownlow but they find out that Brownlow has left for West Indies a while back. Oliver feels sad at this news but feels happy in being away from the criminal gang. There is a Romantic angle with the arrival of Mrs Mylie's son Harry, who is in love with Rose. Oliver develops a warm bond with Harry too.

In the meantime, the story takes an interesting turn when Old Sally, the nurse who had helped at the birth of Oliver, reappears at the workhouse where Mrs. Corney is the matron. Sally confesses to the matron that Oliver's mother had given a gold locket and a ring to take care of the needs of Oliver, but she had kept it and pawned it. When she dies, Mrs Corney finds a ticket of a pawnbroker for some item in her hand. She keeps it without telling the others what Sally has revealed. She gets the locket and chain from the pawn shop. It so happens that Mr Bumble is interested in marrying Mrs. Corney who is a widow and well off financially.

The story returns to London, and Fagin gets angry when he hears that Sikes and Barney had left Oliver behind. He rushes to a pub called, "The Three Cripples" to look for a man named Monks. With the entry of Monks the plot takes a new turn. Monks comes to meet Fagin at his house since he gets to know Fagin was looking for him. Nancy overhears a conversation between Fagin and Monks and realises that that Monks is somehow involved in Oliver's life. She learns that Monks was to pay Fagin for contriving to ruin Oliver. Fagin was to ensure that somehow, Oliver committed some crime so that he is forced to lead a criminal's life. Monks had been paying Fagin to keep Oliver with him and turn him into a criminal. She rushes to share her

knowledge with Rose Maylie who she knows has taken Oliver to her home. Nancy tells Rose that she is part of the group of people who are behind Oliver's troubles. She admits that she was the one who had taken Oliver to Fagin when he was going to the book-stall on his errand for Mr. Brownlow. She tells Rose that these people are out to harm Oliver for some reason. She is very grateful for her kindness and tells her all about Monks' devilish plot to harm Oliver. She tells her that Monks had told Fagin that Oliver was his half-brother and he hated him because he could claim a share in his inheritance according to the will of his father. But Monks wants Oliver's identity to be hidden so that Monks himself can get hold of their family's fortune. Monks admits that if he were not afraid of punishment he would kill Oliver without thinking twice. He has been scheming with Fagin to get Oliver into trouble and even that day he had promised to pay Fagin if Oliver is found again. She promises to meet her on the London Bridge between eleven and midnight on a Sunday. Rose is very grateful for Nancy's help and worried for her. She offers to help Nancy get out of her sordid life. Nancy is overwhelmed by the kindness Rose is showing her but she refuses any help.

With the entry of Monks, the plot nears a climax as his involvement in Oliver's life looks suspicious. In the following chapters, the plot moves towards some kind of recognition of the danger that Oliver may be facing. All the good people in his new life get together to save him from the bad. Since Mr. Brownlow's new address becomes known through the efforts of Oliver and Mr. Giles, Rose immediately takes Oliver there. Upon their arrival they also meet Mr. Grimwig. Oliver has a happy reunion with Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin. Rose speaks to Brownlow alone sharing the information given by Nancy. Brownlow and Rose share the same with Mrs. Maylie, Dr. Losberne, Grimwig and Harry so that they are all able to discuss the situation and plan accordingly. They agree to spare Oliver the worry but decide to meet Nancy at the time and place suggested by her, if possible.

Nancy fails to meet Rose the next Sunday as Sikes is suspicious of her, but the Sunday after that she manages to get away because Sikes is away. She meets Rose and Mr. Brownlow, and when she describes Monks to them, he immediately understands who he is and his interest in Oliver.

In the previous chapters, Noah and Charlotte reach London after stealing from Sowerberrys. They are now part of Fagin's gang. When Fagin finds Nancy going out at night, he gets suspicious and wants to know what she's up to. So, he offers to pay Noah a pound to follow Nancy wherever she goes. At this meeting, Noah overhears everything and reports back to Fagin,

who is so furious with Nancy that he tells Sikes about her. He says nothing about her loyalty and concern for her fellow criminals, especially Sikes, whom she doesn't want to betray or get into trouble. So, Sikes being a brute, starts beating up Nancy for doing something against his will when he reaches home. In a rage he kills her and runs away from his home and keeps trying to find some safe place to hide.

***Check your Progress***

1. Discuss the importance of Nancy's revelations to Oliver's friends.

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2. Think about the people that Oliver has met in these chapters.

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Monks reappears in Oliver's life through his connection with Mr Bumble. He meets Monks accidentally in a pub. Monks wants to know anything he could find out about Oliver, so Bumble gets interested when Monks promises him a lot of money in return for the information, he agrees to see what he could find out about the old woman who had helped at his birth. He remembers that Old Sally had told the matron, now his wife, something before dying. He asks her to reveal the details to Monks. They meet at a remote place near a river, and Mrs Bumble tells him Oliver's story and gives him the tokens of his mother. Inside the locket, he finds a wedding ring and two locks of hair. The name "Agnes" is engraved on the ring, along with a blank space for the surname. He drops all of them into the water so that no one may have any proof about Oliver's parentage.

While Monks is planning Oliver's ruin, Mr Brownlow is getting ready to catch him. He finds and captures Monks with the help of his men and brings him to the Brownlow home. The mystery is resolved during this meeting. Monks's real name is Edward Leeford and Brownlow was a good friend of Monks's father, Mr. Leeford. Mr. Leeford was forced to marry a wealthy woman older than him by his family. The couple eventually separated but did not seek a formal divorce, and his wife and son Edward went to Paris. After some time, Mr. Leeford met Agnes Fleming, a retired naval officer's daughter, and they both fell in love with each other. They did not get married, but Agnes became pregnant. It so happened that the family member who had forced Mr. Leeford, repented and left Mr. Leeford a fortune. Mr. Leeford had to go to Rome to

claim his inheritance. Before that, he left a portrait of his beloved Agnes in Brownlow's care while he was away. Mr. Leeford's wife, took Edward with her to meet Leeford in Rome in order to take some share of his inheritance. Unfortunately, Mr. Leeford fell ill and died while in Rome. Brownlow knew for a certainty that Edward or Monks' mother burned Mr. Leeford's will, so that she could claim the fortune. Monks lived in the West Indies on this stolen fortune after his mother's death. Mr. Brownlow had gone to the West Indies to find Monks after Oliver was kidnapped, because he was intrigued by Oliver's resemblance to the portrait. Mr. Brownlow confronts Monks with the facts and forces him to confess and redeem himself by executing the will in Oliver's favour as desired by their father.

This happens even while the criminals are being hunted and are caught by the authorities. Fagin and Noah are the first to be captured. The others are hiding in a dilapidated house in an area of London, near River Thames, called Jacob's Island. Sikes, Tony Crackit, Charley Bates, Kags and Mrs Chitling are all there. When the police reach them, Sikes tries to get on the roof with his rope in his hand. In his fear, confusion and guilt of murdering Nancy, he accidentally hangs himself. The others are taken away by the police.

The last chapters of the novel tie up all the threads of the plot together to reveal the grand design. The good people come together to defeat the hypocrites and villains. In a reunion in Oliver's birthplace, Mr Brownlow and Oliver visit Mr Grimwig. Monks is also present and he reveals that when he and his mother had gone to Rome to meet his dying father, they had found a letter addressed to Agnes Fleming's mother and his will. In the will, Leeford has left a yearly income of eight hundred pounds to his son Edward and his wife. The will was in favour of the child that was to be born. If it were a girl, she would get her share unconditionally, but a boy would have to be an honest and upright person and neither dishonest, nor a criminal. Monks and his mother had destroyed both the items and taken all the property without bothering about Mr. Leeford's wishes. Rather, Monks's mother set out to take her revenge by first finding Agnes and then hounding her and her family.

It was Monks's mother who lets the story about her affair and pregnancy be known so that Agnes's father flees his hometown and changes his family's name. Agnes ran away to save her family from the shame of her condition, and her father died soon thereafter. His second daughter was very young and was taken in by a poor couple where she lived a tough life with them. Mrs. Maylie lived near this family and taking pity on the little girl she raised her as her niece. That

child is Rose. Oliver is ecstatic to find out that she is his aunt. In such a short time, in that room, Oliver had found his whole family, where once he was a poor orphan.

In an interesting twist, the guilt of Mr. and Mrs. Bumble is also revealed by two old women who had overheard the conversation between Old Sally and Mrs. Bumble as the Matron. They knew everything about the locket. Left with no defence, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble confess to their fault in concealing facts regarding Oliver's history. Mr. Brownlow makes sure that they are never allowed to be employed in such a position again. Harry gives up his political ambitions and vows to live as a poor clergyman so Rose happily agrees to marry him.

Dickens' melodrama is seen in the courtroom where Fagin is waiting to hear his sentence. The narrator focusses on "the helplessness of Fagin caught in the net of his crimes." Oliver and Mr. Bronslo visit Fagin in his cell on his last night before he is to be executed, and find him filled with terror at the thought of death and full of rage at being punished and is full of hate and desperation.

The final chapter brings to a close all the little unnarrated details. Rose and Harry get married, Mrs. Maylie moves in with them and the three friends, Bronslo, Losberne and Grimwig shift near the rural church where Harry has joined as a priest.

Brownlow advises Oliver to share Leeford's property with Monks. Using his share, Monks travels to the New World, dies as a prisoner after losing his money and getting into bad company. Mr. Bronslo is able to adopt Oliver legally as his son. He takes great pains to ensure that Oliver is filled with all kinds of knowledge.

The Artful Dodger is the first to be punished. The other boys are in police custody. Fagin and Sikes are dead. But some get off and are able to live a reasonably decent life. Noah Claypole is pardoned because he testifies against Fagin. He and Charlotte settle into a life of bluff and fraud. This couple is down to be naturally crooked. Charley changes his ways and begins his new life as a cattle-grazer. Mr and Mrs Bumble are reduced to poverty and misery, and finally became paupers in the same workhouse. Giles and Brittles remain in the service of the Maylie family.

The novel ends with the memory of Agnes Fleming, in the Dickensian mood of a sentimental farewell to the one who suffered so much due to her mistake.

### **20.2.1 Analysis:**

The story is set in the 1830s in London and its surrounding countryside which remain unnamed. The plot is narrated by an unknown or anonymous narrator. This narrator is speaking

on behalf of the author as well as all the characters. The narrator is sympathetic to the main character and strongly critical and sarcastic with the figures who abuse their positions of responsibility. While dealing with the misfortunes of the gentle souls like Oliver, his mother Agnes and aunt Rose, and when describing the incidents around Nancy, the tone is mostly sentimental and shows anger against injustice.

The main action in the novel revolves around the conflict between the gentleness of Oliver by birth and the harshness of his social environment. He is raised in a poorhouse, sent to a workhouse and sold to an undertaker. Unable to take more humiliation he runs away to London with the hope of making his fortune but gets involved with a group of pickpockets, thieves and prostitutes. Oliver struggles against his situation, always resisting the immoral or wrong conduct of his associates. The novel creates suspense around his birth, parentage and destiny. But chance plays a very important role in saving him time and again. The plot creates some mystery, conflicts and then twists around so that every misfortune takes Oliver closer to his real identity and finally enables him to rise above the poor and helpless conditions of the lower class. It is notable that Oliver is taken good care of by the lowest of the low in London, who are Fagin's group of petty thieves. Despite his innocent acceptance of Fagin's food, clothing and shelter he is repulsed by their crimes and remains aloof from them. In his many adventures, he is taken in by a well-to-do family of the Maylies but the gang of robbers and the villainous Monks keep searching for him and ultimately trace him down to his new home.

The Fagin gang is also instrumental in uniting him with his family. The first victim of the pickpockets turns out to be Mr. Brownlow, who knows his mother's family. Nancy, the girl who forces him back into the Fagin headquarters, plays an important role in uncovering the plot of his half-brother, Edward Leeford/ Monks to stop Oliver from finding out his real identity. It is Nancy who is able to reveal Monks's plans to Oliver's guardians. Mr. Brownlow gets the full story of Oliver's origins from Monks. But she has to pay with her life for this good deed, which is a kind of penance for her immoral life.

Finally, justice is served and the plot moves swiftly towards handing out the due punishment to Fagin, who is executed and Sikes dies accidentally by hanging himself. Nancy is a specially etched character who has gotten into a sinful way of life, but retains her innate goodness just like Oliver. While Oliver is able to get away to a better future perhaps because he is blameless, Nancy has to die in order to redeem herself. But her death is also the beginning of the end of the gang, as if her sacrifice was necessary. Oliver and his new family live together in

happiness, paying their respects to Oliver's erring mother, and forgiving Agnes Fleming for loving a married man.

The plot uses devices such as disguise or mistaken identities; hidden family relationships; surrogate families; Oliver's innocent face and his resemblance to a portrait. The device of sudden discoveries is used to move the plot towards the end that the author desires: the portrait in Mr. Brownlow's house, the locket that Old Sally had stolen, and Monks's pursuit of Oliver.

Dickens has used his masterly talent for retaining the interest of the readers. It is perhaps one of the few novels with the most elaborate chapter titles. These titles serve as synopses of the chapters. The plot is Episodic as it deals with different people and places. The journey motif is picaresque in the first few chapters when Oliver moves from one house to another and lives with different sets of people. This type of structure helps to introduce several characters and situations. The structure helps in increasing the scope for the representation of a large section of the English society.

The plot is also melodramatic and full of chance incidents and coincidences. He uses twists, suspense, irony, satire, humour and pathos which are key ingredients in Dickensian art of writing. The plot uses contrasting events, situations, characters and ideas to create the impression of the hypocrisy of people in positions of authority and their ruthless pursuit of wealth and power.

Just as Fagin and Sikes are ruthless in their pursuit of money, Mr Fang and Mr Bumble are ruthless in the misuse of their positions of power. The pathos and sentimental tone is very Dickensian. But as always, the large canvas of life that Dickens succeeds in bringing to life, loses a coherence and tightness of plot construction. *Oliver Twist* is remarkable in that the seething sense of injustice felt by the author is woven with great skill in the plotting of the narrative and is transformed into a piece ironic humour. However, there remains a certain amount of rambling, particularly in the constant commentary by the omniscient narrator.

The novel has the Dickensian touch of lively narration. The novel served to focus public attention on the incredibly apathetic and inhuman manner in which paupers and orphans were treated in Dickens' time. The novel is the kind of art that is also based on reality and serves as a document recording some aspects of the social history of Victorian England.

### **20.2.2 Conclusion:**

At the time of writing the novel, Charles Dickens studied "The Poor Law" of 1834. His study (as a reporter) of the law builds up the backdrop and the prime motive of the novel, to divulge to the readers the mishappenings and the absolute horror of the middle class and poor

citizens of London. The society that he wrote about in his novel, *Oliver Twist*, resulted from the law and the cruelty often bestowed by the rich onto the poor for monetary gains. The law required people to get enrolled in workhouses and push to a daily limit of work for minimum wages, which eventually was breaking homes and hardly making ends meet. Dickens realized it was inconsiderate circumstances that led to poverty and the sickening of poor people.

Dickens showcases men and owners of the workhouses who were extremely cruel and operated on the belief that laziness was the cause of poverty. As per the law, only the people working in the government houses would receive assistance, although this turned out to be blatant exploitation. Mr. Bumble, Fagin, and Monks personify absolute greed in the novel. They act on their dispositions while maintaining a high standard of their certified morality. They are driven by greed and they hurt the poor in the process. Fagin used to train children to become pickpockets, although he never participated directly. He corrupts them to earn his living, and the children perish because of his ill work, all because they want bread and a living. Mr. Bumble is the epitome of hypocrisy and folly. He is a minor church official who has a grave misconception of the teachings of Christianity. He quickly devalues the essential virtue of Christ, that is compassion. He makes the paupers suffer so much without a single ounce of mercy under his care. Monks, a wholly immoral and violent man, tries to put down Oliver ruthlessly.

Dickens tried to display the utter disgrace of the society and the offenders of the Christian morality while putting on the robes of Christian philosophy. It is evident in the novel that Dickens researched profusely and did a remarkable job in showing a clear picture of the moral ethics of the society during the 1860s and 1870s. He has subtly, yet strongly, shown the demerits of the Poor Law and built his plot along the daily grind of life of the needy at the mercy of administrative violence. Art imitates life so that readers must have sympathized at every point and not just after the end of the novel.

*Oliver Twist* took up the cudgels for the poor and framed a powerful narrative that teaches us that having any power over others needs to be used in the service of the other, not self. Power when compared with empathy does true wonders. Despite the bleakness of the age, there is also an air of optimism with which Dickens creates his world. Points of conflict, climax and revelation are clearly marked in the plot. In fact, the plot unfolds the theme of “home-away-home” commonly used in children’s literature along with its resolution in a happy ending. Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* stands as one of the classic literary pieces and timeless perfection in print.

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## 20.3 Learning Outcomes

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It is expected that upon the completion of this unit, you are able to recall the events and incidents that have been presented in the plot of the novel. The element of the story is simple; *Oliver Twist* is the story of an orphan who becomes a victim of the policies of the Government that are based on Utilitarianism. The hypocrisy and the greed of the society that considers itself superior and more morally upright than the poor, is shown through the plot. The complex presentation of these themes within the plot of the novel through a series of happenings produce the horror of this false morality in the reader and a sense of pity and fear for the wasted lives of infants, children and adults under the guise of charity. You should be able to analyse how any occurrence in the plot is related to the subsequent actions of the characters, and how the chain of events is designed to make the public sensitive to the inhuman conditions of the workhouses that came up in the reforms of 1834.

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## 20.4 Glossary

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**At the gallows:** To wait to be hanged.

**Beadle:** A minor church official.

**Board:** Paid accommodation with meals.

**Dilapidated:** In a very neglected condition

**Errand:** A task that involves taking or bringing some item for someone.

**Juvenile:** Young people

**Pawn:** To exchange an item for money that can be taken back after the repayment of the amount and interest within a certain time.

**Parish:** A designated area under one priest with its own church, constituting a kind of local government.

**Pick oakum:** To separate strands of old rope is called "picking," and the new threads are called oakum.

**Unpropitious:** Not favourable or advantageous.

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## 20.5 Sample Questions

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### 20.5.1 Objective Questions:

#### A. Read the sentence and choose an appropriate option:

1. What does Oliver's mother do before dying?
  - (a) She tells her story.
  - (b) She cries in pain.
  - (c) She kisses Oliver.
  - (d) She tells her name.
2. Who takes care of Oliver after his mother dies?
  - (a) His father.
  - (b) A foster care centre.
  - (c) The nurse.
  - (d) His aunt.
3. What did Agnes Fleming give to Old Sally before dying?
  - (a) A letter
  - (b) A shilling
  - (c) A gold locket and chain
  - (d) A ring
4. Where do Oliver and Fagin meet for the last time??
  - (a) At Mr. Fang's office
  - (b) In the law courts
  - (c) In his prison cell
  - (d) In Jacob's Island
5. Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* as a criticism of which law?
  - (a) The Marriage Act
  - (b) Gilbert's Act
  - (c) Death sentence
  - (d) The Poor Law of 1834

#### B. Read the following statements. State if they are True or False.

1. Oliver Twist is given his name by his mother.

- (a) True
  - (b) False
2. Sally is the name of the nurse who helped at Oliver's birth.
- (a) True
  - (b) False
3. Nancy is killed by the Artful Dodger
- (a) True
  - (b) False
4. Rose Maylie is Oliver Twist's mother:
- (a) True
  - (b) False
5. The novel ends with remembrance of Agnes Fleming.
- (a) True
  - (b) False

#### **20.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Where and in what circumstances is Oliver Twist born?
2. Write a short note on the conditions in the juvenile home where Oliver is first taken.
3. Why does Oliver run away from the village?
4. Explain in brief the incident in which Oliver is shot.
5. How does Mr. Bronslow meet Oliver again?

#### **20.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the plot construction of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.
2. Elaborate on the role of chance in Oliver's life.
3. Write a detailed summary of the story of *Oliver Twist* as the victim of circumstances.

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## **20.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Leavis, F.R., and Q.D. Leavis. *Dickens the Novelist*. New York: Pantheon, 1971.
2. Long, William J. *English Literature*. (Rpt) New Delhi, AITBS Publishers, 2016.
3. Wilson, Angus. *The World of Charles Dickens*. New York: Viking, 1970.

## Unit-21: *Oliver Twist* - Themes

### Structure

21.0 Introduction

21.1 Objectives

21.2 Overview of the Novel

21.2.1 Theme of Child Abuse and Exploitation

21.2.2 Theme of Poverty

21.2.3 Theme of Good versus Evil

21.2.4 Theme of Institutional Cruelty

21.2.5 Theme of City versus Countryside

21.2.6 Theme of Love and Affection

21.2.7 Theme of Kinship and Friendship

21.2.8 Theme of Criminality

21.2.9 Theme of Disguised and Mistaken Identities

21.2.10 Theme of Class and Fate

21.3 Learning Outcomes

21.4 Glossary

21.5 Sample Questions

21.6 Suggested Readings

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### 21.0 Introduction

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In this Unit, you will be introduced to Dickens's second novel *Oliver Twist* published in the year 1837. As you already know, it was published serially in the episodic form in Bentley's Magazine with the subtitle *The Parish Boy's Progress*. This title alludes to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* as well as the 18<sup>th</sup> century series *A Rake's Progress* and *A Harlot's Progress* by William Hogarth. *Oliver Twist* is an early example of a social novel where Dickens satirizes the hypocrisy prevalent in Victorian society. Dickens intended to write this novel to highlight the hardships faced by poor people in England due to the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. In this Unit, you will get acquainted with the thematic aspects of the novel presented by Dickens. You will note that this novel mainly focuses on the issues and the problems related to the poor people of Victorian England during the Industrial Revolution.

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## 21.1 Objectives

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This Unit shall cover the following objectives:

- To get knowledge about the historical background of the Victorian Age.
- To get an idea of the background of *Oliver Twist*.
- To summarize the context of the novel.
- To understand the significance of the novel in accordance with the time period it is written in.
- To explore the various themes of the novel.

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## 21.2 Overview of the Novel

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The setting of the novel is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England. In the novel, Dickens gives background information of the Victorian England including the issues related to Industrialization and New Poor Law. The novel reflects the problems faced by poor people at that time. Dickens throws light on the prevalent social issues like child labour and abuse and exploitation of the poor. The poor were not given the opportunity to prosper. Dickens also throws light on the patriarchal side of the society where women were treated as an object and were oppressed. The story revolves around the titular character Oliver Twist. Oliver, an orphan boy since birth has to face many hardships and gets unfair treatment in the society. Oliver is born in a workhouse and his mother dies after giving birth to him. He is sent to a parochial orphanage where he along with other orphans had to suffer terribly. The orphanage is located around 70 miles from London where Oliver along with other orphans had to survive with very little food. The poor children and orphans were sent to workhouses as child labour was very common at that time. The events in the story are based on Dickens's own life. The novel catches the attention of the people as it deals with many social evils of the time. Oliver's life is miserable in a workhouse and his sufferings represent the sufferings of all poor people in the society. When Oliver was of nine years of age he was sold as an apprentice to Mr. Sowerberry by Mr. Bumble. Due to repeated mistreatment and suffering Oliver escapes from there and flees to London where he meets Artful Dodger who is a member of a gang of pickpockets led by Fagin. Oliver becomes part of this gang. On one occasion when the boys take the handkerchief from an elderly man Mr. Brownlow, Oliver gets confused and runs away in fear. The elderly man mistakes Oliver as

guilty and gets him arrested. However, when he learns more about Oliver, he offers to take care of him at his home. Oliver assumes that he got rid of Fagin and his pickpockets but Nancy who is the mistress of one of Fagin's men, Bill Skyes, takes Oliver back to Fagin from Mr. Brownlow. Oliver is then taken by the family (the Maylies) whom he attempts to rob. The Maylies reunite Oliver with Mr. Brownlow and Oliver is entitled to the large fortune that he receives. Though he goes through different ordeals but eventually finds a good home and happiness. Dickens portrays the life of criminals and highlights the cruel treatment of poor children in Victorian England. Dickens satirizes the exploitation of children by rich people and their recruitment as criminals. It is a social protest against the condition of children and women in those times.

Dickens in this novel throws light on prevalent social issues. As you already read, his intention in writing this novel was to show the terrible condition of workhouses and to satirize the poor laws. The laws made by the government favoured the rich people and exploited the poor. The rich became richer and the poor remained miserable. It pictures the negative effect of Industrialization on poor people. It highlights how difficult it was for the poor to survive in Victorian England. Dickens mixes realism and satire in this novel. The story passes through different phase but ends on a happy note. *Oliver Twist* is a story with many interrelated themes. The theme of poverty is at the center of the novel. This poverty gives rise to cruelty, crime, child exploitation and abuse.

### **21.2.1 Theme of Child Abuse and Exploitation:**

Dickens tried to relive his lost childhood through different characters in his novels. He had sympathy for children and was concerned about their condition in contemporary society. Through his works, he focused on the responsibility towards children. The situation in the society has a direct influence on its members. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrialization hurt poor children. It gave rise to many workhouses and mills. The increase in mills and workhouses pushed the children to work. The ratio of children depended on several parents working in the workhouses because the owners pushed parents to bring their children with them for work. *Oliver Twist* can thus be called a book of child abuse. The children in the novel face inequality, prejudice, discrimination and social injustice. There are about twenty to thirty children who worked at the parish workhouse. This novel mainly focuses on the story of the orphan who lives in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Victorian London which predominantly witnessed the abuse of child labour. Oliver experiences a very harsh life. Child labour was prevalent in Victorian London which snatched away childhood from the children. Dickens's sympathy for the children makes him

realize the responsibility towards children in his works. *Oliver Twist* mainly deals with the issues of child abuse and the negative influence of the workhouses on poor children is exposed. As you already know, Dickens wrote this novel as a reaction against the Poor Amendment Act of 1834 due to which poor children were used for labour. He stresses the abuse of poor children and orphans in parochial workhouses due to poor laws. It is seen at the very beginning when Mr. Bumble picks up Oliver from the village to the workhouse. On the way, Oliver is treated very badly and is asked to remain silent without enquiring where they were going and just to follow him. This is just the beginning of harsh treatment with Oliver when he moves from parish authorities to the workhouse. These poor children were paid in the form of food and boarding. The condition of these children is very pathetic. Dickens mentions, "...where would be injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty and wrong that each day's life brings with it" (268). Child labour was a dreadful factor of poverty. In order to save themselves from being homeless most of the families preferred their children to work. These children at the age of four or five started to work in factories and mills for long hours and at the appropriate age, they were apprenticed. However, these children were apprenticed into a profession like the chimney sweeping which would cause them an early death. The children in the novel, including Oliver are exploited with unpaid work. Oliver spends nine years of his life in the workhouse where he along with other children works hard but is not paid. Oliver along with other children is given little food and treated very rudely. Dickens mentions, "with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oat-meal and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and a half of a roll on Sundays," is the food given to poor children. Once when Oliver asks for more oatmeal, he receives punishment of confinement in a solitary room for a week. A young child like Oliver does not deserve to face the torture and work at workhouses. They had to live a hard life due to which many of them died young. Oliver's friend Dick hopes to die early so that he can go to heaven and "see kind faces that I never saw when I am awake". Dickens uses these words to expose that these poor children preferred to die young than to live a life of abuse.

There are different forms of child abuse in the novel - domestic form, forced labour and slavery and child trafficking. Oliver faces domestic abuse when he lives in the workhouse where he is asked by one of the authorities to pick Oakum up at six o'clock. He says, "so you'll begin to pick Oakum at six o'clock" (Dickens 15). Oliver has to start his work at 6 o'clock that is why he gets no chance to attend school. This condition does not let Oliver grow better than he could have. Thus, Oliver at a young age has to spend several hours in domestic work. He starts work

from six o'clock in the morning and does not get time to attend school. Besides doing domestic chores Oliver is used for Industrial work as well. Oliver is very weak because he does not get a proper diet and has to work for long hours. He is employed as a chimney sweeper by an old gentleman who says to him "...tomorrow morning you must up to chimney sweeping" to which Oliver replies in positive and Mr. Bumble also convinces the old gentleman that Oliver is fond of this job. Oliver was offered to Mr. Sowerberry by Mr. Bumble to work as a servant in the shop of Mr. Sowerberry. "...five pounds and Oliver Twist was offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business or calling." Oliver lived as a slave and followed what Mr. Sowerberry said. He was given dog food and made to sleep under the counter among the coffins. Oliver keeps working for his master without getting any salary. In the same way, Dodger was employed as a pickpocket by Mr. Fagin. Every day Dodger had to give his stolen money to Fagin and he was not given food if he did not steal anything. The children are also exploited in the form of forced criminals. Oliver meets Jack Dawkins in London who introduces Oliver to Fagin. Fagin is the head of the criminal gang who wants Oliver to be a thief and teaches him to pick pocket handkerchiefs. Young children who worked for Fagin committed crimes. They stole and gave their profit to Fagin. Dickens's portrayal of these child pickpockets highlights how pitiful the life of these poor and orphan children was.

Dickens specifically deals with the terrible effects of poverty on the life of the children which consequently led to child abuse and exploitation. The poor children face discrimination and social inequality in the novel. They are exploited by the people who have money.

### **21.2.2 Theme of Poverty:**

*Oliver Twist* gives a detailed account of horrible fate that poor people face. This novel reflects the lives of poor people who live in suffering. Poverty is one of the main themes of the novel. The problem of poverty became one of the serious issues in 19<sup>th</sup> century England and that is the reason Dickens chose poverty as one of the main themes in the majority of his novels. Poverty gives rise to crime which completely dehumanizes the society. This novel particularly deals with how poor people were affected by the law of 1834 that created workhouses which lead to the oppression of the poor. Dickens gives a real picture of poverty and how poor people are suffering. Poverty has degrading effects and the worst consequences on society. Poverty leads to oppression and makes the condition of the poor terrible and *Oliver Twist* reflects the terrible effects of poverty on the individual's life. It deals with the terrible impact of poverty on Oliver's life and how poverty made his life miserable. This is shown when Oliver asks for more supper in

chapter two and the reaction of the workhouse staff to Oliver's request. Dickens mentions, "For a week after the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room." The master hits Oliver for asking more and through this Dickens satirizes his contemporaries who dehumanize the poor instead of educating them. The poor people were treated worst in the society. "Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months; at last, they got so voracious and wild with hunger...that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next to him." Dickens here highlights the condition of the poor who were hungry and dying in starvation.

Poverty gives rise to crime and violence in the novel. The poor children commit crimes in order to escape from hunger. Poverty corrupts innocent characters like Oliver and Nancy and leads to criminality. Oliver is driven to theft and Nancy to prostitution only due to poverty. Nancy feels helpless and isolated and no one understands her feelings. Dickens mentions, "Bleak, dark and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless starving wretch to lay him down and die." Through these lines, Dickens makes his readers aware of the real condition of the poor people who were in deplorable and bad condition. They were so poor that they couldn't even fulfill the basic needs of having a proper house. Dickens realistically presents the world of poverty.

### **21.2.3 Theme of Good versus Evil:**

The fight between good and evil is prevalent from earlier times. Throughout this novel, there is a battle between good and evil where evil continuously tries to exploit the good but, in the end, good triumphs over evil. There are good characters that represent goodness and corrupt characters that represent evil. Oliver represents good in contrast to his friend Fagin and the group of thieves who represent evil. Fagin and the thieves have some good qualities but most of the time they are seen committing crimes. All the evil characters meet the same fate. Fagin and Skies die due to their crimes. Oliver's half-brother Monks represents evil. Monks wanted to ruin the life of Oliver so that he could keep the fortune that he illegally inherited from their father. Eventually, Oliver came to know the truth and gets his fortune while Monks dies in another country. In contrast to these evil characters, the good characters like Oliver and Rose are represented as pure, virtuous and innocent. Both are kindhearted, affectionate and helpful to

those who are in need. Oliver is abused throughout his life and is treated unfairly but he is eventually vindicated.

The characters of Nancy and Charles also represent good versus evil. Nancy hesitates to leave her life of crime but Charles who initially worked as a thief, reforms himself and earns an honest living. All the good characters in the novel especially, Oliver, face many hardships and challenges. However, they remain true to themselves due to which they triumph over darkness. Oliver grows in corrupt surroundings and evil companions, but his purity remains stable. The good characters in the novel earn their rewards but Dickens highlights that the society in which they were living was unjust. *Oliver Twist* is a story about the journey of a good person in a world of darkness, but there is a hope that goodness outcasts the evil and the evil gets punished. In the novel, we see a continuous struggle of good to overpower evil.

#### **21.2.4 Theme of Institutional Cruelty:**

*Oliver Twist* is the second novel by Charles Dickens where various societal issues have been explored by Dickens that depict the realistic condition of England at that time. With the increase in poverty, the workhouses run by parishes spread all over England. Dickens critiques the Victorian workhouses which were run according to a regime of prolonged hunger, physical punishment, hypocrisy and humiliation. Although these workhouses were established to give relief to the poor it made their condition horrible. Instead of providing relief to the poor, they abused them and made their life miserable. Dickens's main aim in writing this novel was to draw the attention of people towards the deplorable condition of paupers. Dickens wrote this novel as a protest against the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which represents the cruelty of government against poor and helpless people. The poor people suffered due to the Poor Law of 1834. Under this law, the poor and orphans were placed in the workhouses where they were exploited and even deprived of their basic needs of life. These poor people had to live like prisoners in the workhouses. The cruelty of these institutions and governments towards poor people is one of the prominent themes of *Oliver Twist*, and that makes it a social novel. Dickens criticizes the system of workhouses which gives rise to crimes. The people in the workhouses had to suffer and were treated as prisoners. Dickens writes:

...the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some thirty miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of

too much food, or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female who received the culprits at and for the consideration of seven pence-halfpenny per small head per week.

Dickens deliberately uses these words to show how poor people worked hard in these institutions but were not paid. This is the reason the poor remained poor and the rich became richer. Dickens satirizes the cruelty of government institutions towards people but the cruelty of these institutions is not separated from the cruelty of the people. In these workhouses, the poor and orphan children had to work hard for long hours and they were not given proper food. The result was that these children grew up weak. Oliver had grown up weak because he did not eat anything. He was very dirty and people stared at his condition. Dickens states, "...and the people began passing to and from. Some few stopped to gaze at Oliver for a moment or two, or turned round to stare at him as they hurried by, but none relieved him."

Here Dickens emphasizes how people used to stare at Oliver because he was weak but nobody helped him. The owners of the workhouses were so cruel that they did not hesitate to inflict violence upon children. They punished the children harshly if they disobeyed in any matter which is evident from the scene when Oliver was punished for demanding some extra food. Dickens presents the dark and grim condition of the institutions in England. He exposes the cruelty of these institutions that have given rise to crimes in England. Due to the criminal laws, the underprivileged had no other option but to live a life of exploitation in these institutions.

### **21.2.5 Theme of City versus Countryside:**

The novel takes place in both locations- city as well as countryside. Outside London everything is country. For Dickens, the countryside is the place for peace and warmth, but the city means crowd and disturbance. In the novel, both city and countryside have symbolic meaning and stand opposite to each other. The city is dirty and corrupt, but the country is pure and clear. Oliver escaped to London to find peace where he is dragged into criminality. Oliver when living in the city is forced into immorality but in the country, he gets peace and happiness and recovers his health. Dickens uses negative language while describing the city, but in the countryside, even the poor are described as clean. Dickens idealizes the countryside. All the injustice and inequality suffered by the poor occurs in cities like London or the city where Oliver is born. The city is the symbol of impurity, and the countryside is the symbol of purity.

Dickens asserts that the people who have spent their entire lives in cities find peace and happiness in the countryside at the end. In the end, Oliver settles with his family in the

countryside giving a happy ending to the novel. The countryside provides serenity that is not usually found in the city.

#### **21.2.6 Theme of Love and Affection:**

Love is an emotion of affection, compassion, and interest. Love inherits compassion and kindness. In the novel, the feeling of love and affection is described when Agnes gives birth to her son Oliver while risking her life. Dickens writes, “The pale face of a young woman was raised feebly from the pillow; and the faint voice imperfectly articulated the words, Let me see the child and die.” This quote depicts the love of a mother towards her son who only wants to see her child once before she dies. Harry Maylie loves his sister Rose Maylie who rejects him. Rose rejects her brother due to her bad and embarrassing past. Harry always tries to convince her but fails. He says to her,

there is no pursuit more worthy of me, more worthy of the highest nature that exists than the struggle to win such a heart as yours...for years- I have loved you, hoping to win my way to fame, and then come proudly home and tell you it had been pursued only for you to share; thinking in my daydreams, how I would remind you in that happy moment, of the many silent tokens I had given of a boy's attachment.

It describes the love and devotion of Harry towards Rose.

#### **21.2.7 Theme of Kinship and Relationship:**

It forms another significant theme of the novel. There are two types of relationships found in the novel. First is the real which is formed lawfully, and the second relationship is formed with outlaws. Oliver is an orphan who is claimed by two families. Oliver has a different relationship with different people like Mrs. Mann, Mr. Bumble, Mr. Sowerberry, Nancy, Noah, Dodger, Fagin etc. Here we find a man-man relationship, man-woman relationship, master-servant relationship, boy-girl relationship etc. The relationship between Oliver and Mrs. Mann is important in the novel. After the death of his mother, Oliver was brought under the care of Mrs. Mann in an orphan's home. Mrs. Mann was paid for Oliver's food. Although she is a motherly figure to Oliver she is a greedy woman who has no sympathy for Oliver. The amount of money she used to get from Parish authorities for the maintenance of Oliver was not all used for him. Oliver is not only claimed by two guardians (Brownlow and Rose Maylie) who have the right to claim over him but he is also claimed by a community of thieves. Fagin and his group of thieves claim for Oliver to increase the number of people in his gang and for personal benefits. The

familial values are illustrated by Dickens, "...the young lady would sit down to the piano and play some pleasant air, or sing...and Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet music, in a perfect rapture." This reflects the family atmosphere created in Maylie's home. There is no distinction between rich and poor. They are happy together. There are different thieves in the group, and J. Miller mentions the relationship of thieves:

The true relation of the thieves to one another is given not by the image of a mutually loyal group crouching around their single candle in an underground room, but by the recurrent motif of spying. Fagin himself spies on Oliver and one other member of his gang; Nancy herself is spied on by Fagin's representative. Her betrayal of the thieves is thus discovered and her death brought about. And Oliver is spied on by Fagin and Monks as he dwells in what he assumes to be the total security of Mrs. Maylie's country home."

Bates and Nancy represent loyalty. When Skies kills Nancy, a member of his own gang, he is denied by his own companions. Rose Maylie's attachment towards Oliver and the latter's love and concern for her reflects the affection needed by every human being. Mr. Brownlow becomes a fatherly figure for Oliver under whose care Oliver never deviates from the goodness, which is inherent in him. In contrast, Monks who is Oliver's half-brother becomes his enemy and plots against him to destroy him and to become the sole inheritor of Leeford's property.

#### **21.2.8 Theme of Criminality:**

Crime was common in the London streets in the Victorian era when Dickens was writing. Dickens chooses crime as one of the themes for his novels and presents it realistically, thereby horrifying the readers. In the preface to the 1841 edition, Dickens states,

It is, it seems, very coarse and shocking circumstances, that some of the characters in these pages are chosen from most criminal and degraded of London's population; that Sikes is a thief, and Fagin a receiver of stolen goods; that the boys are pickpockets, and the girl is a prostitute...It appeared to me...to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to show them as they are, forever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was greatly needed, and which would be service to society. And therefore I did it as I best could.

Dickens writes about crimes and the techniques used by young pickpockets in the streets to pick wallets. The Industrial Revolution made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Life was horrible for poor people, and it resulted in crimes. Many people chose to be thieves or to work in workhouses. The rise in poverty directly led to increase in crimes. It gave rise to murders, violence and terrible imprisonment. These people committed crimes for their livelihood and to survive. Dickens intends to show that criminals are not born as criminals rather driven into crime.

Dickens in this novel highlights how criminals lived. Crime is not limited to lower classes only but the characters like Monks and Mr. and Mrs. Bumble also exceed all levels of criminality. Fagin and his gang take thievery as a delightful game. After some time they become habituated to this crime and cannot think about life without it. Dickens states:

What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. The prospect of the gallows makes them hardy and bold. Ah, it's a fine thing for the trade! Five of them strung up in a row, and none left to play booty or turn white-livered.

These lines are spoken by Fagin teaching young children pickpocketing. To escape hunger, the poor children choose crime. Nancy is an unfortunate woman who falls into the evil hands of Fagin due to her poverty. She is always haunted by the guilt of her criminal world. Nancy is a prostitute but Dickens portrays her as a victim. Dickens portrays that some criminals are forced into crime rather than born as criminals. These criminals are innocent victims who are driven into the criminal world due to poverty. Fagin is depicted as the devil in the novel and Skies is the villain who enjoys committing a crime. Through the character of Skies, Dickens suggests that there are some dangerous criminals in the world. Skies and Fagin are natural criminals who have crime inherited in them. Nancy and Artful Dodger learn crime. Dodger is a partner in crime not out of choice but out of ignorance. *Oliver Twist* depicts the danger and excitement filled in the criminal world. Through different characters, the novel explores what kind of people commit crimes and what kinds of crimes are committed.

### **21.2.9 Theme of Disguised and Mistaken Identities:**

The novel deals with the theme of mistaken identities too. Many characters don't know who their parents are, and some don't even know where their parents are. A person's name is his basic identity. Oliver's name is imposed upon him by Mr. Bumble. His name is chosen randomly rather than inherited from his father. Mr. Bumble always chooses the names of orphans randomly. Oliver's name is thus a reflection of his status as another boy from orphans. Oliver has different

identities in the world. The story of *Oliver Twist* revolves around mistaken identities imposed upon Oliver by other characters of the novel for their own benefit. Mr. Bumble and the workhouse officials portrayed Oliver as an ungrateful and undisciplined pauper. Monks also try his best to hide the real identity of Oliver for his own benefit so that he can claim over the inheritance of Oliver. Nancy pretends to be the sister of Oliver to bring him back to Fagin. The parish world and criminal world of Fagin either deny Oliver's true identity or try to give him the new one.

Dickens has made the use of clothing as a symbol for the identity of a person. When Oliver is enclosed in a blanket his identity is anonymous, but when he put on some ragged clothes he becomes a parish child and when Mr. Brownlow gives him a suit to wear he receives a new identity. The young thieves who work for Fagin are dressed poorly and described as dirty. Dodger wears a long coat that is too big for the young man but it matches his manners. Fagin is described as "villainous-looking" and wearing greasy clothes when he first met Oliver. When Sikes is first introduced, he is wearing soiled clothes with a handkerchief around his neck. All the members of this gang look like underworld thieves.

#### **21.2.10 Theme of Class and Fate:**

Dickens highlights that the socio-economic circumstances into which one is born to determine one's fate. When one is born as an orphan or poor, it set a particular environment and options for children in the Victorian England. In the novel, Oliver and Rose suffer because of their identities as orphans. Oliver never gets love and affection from anyone until he meets Mrs. Bedwin who nurses him at Brownlow's house. Society regards poor and orphan children as a burden. Oliver luckily falls into the hands of two loving families who take care of him. However the other poor and orphan children are not fortunate. The lives of children like Jack, Charles and young prostitutes like Nancy suggest that the poor lead on a dangerous trajectory. Meanwhile, the middle-class people who were neither rich nor poor looked down upon the poor because they wanted to feel superior to someone. Mr. Bumble is an example of such type of a person who abuses and oppresses paupers. On the other hand, Dickens also depicts the rich and prosperous characters who feel pity for Oliver and Rose and welcome them into their families.

Oliver may not have met Fagin and Sikes if he would not have been shot during a robbery. Fate changes Oliver's story completely. Oliver is lucky in this matter and is an example of good defeating evil.

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## 21.3 Learning Outcomes

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After going through this Unit, you are expected to have clearly understood the historical background of Victorian England and how Dickens reflects it in his writings. Although *Oliver Twist* is a book about child abuse, at the same time, it reflects various social and political issues of his time. The novel projects various classes of England and how social division affects the people and makes their life terrible. It highlights how Industrial Revolution led to the exploitation of poor children in England. The failure of the Poor Law Act of 1834 is reflected. Dickens not only exposes the realities of Victorian Society but also conveys a message, about the abolition of child labour altogether. At the end of this Unit you should be able to apply all these to your reading of the Novel, *Oliver Twist*.

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## 21.4 Glossary

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**Industrialization:** The development of industries in a country or region on a wide scale.

**Revolution:** A sudden change in social, political or economic fields.

**New Poor Law:** The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed by the Whig government.

**Alludes:** To make indirect reference.

**Child Labor:** It is the employment of a child in an industry or business and is a violation of the basic rights of children.

**Exploitation:** The action or fact of treating someone unfairly for their work.

**Patriarchy:** It is a social system in which men hold a primary position in the society and dominate women.

**Protest:** A statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something.

**Oppressed:** It is the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally as well as physically.

**Orphanage:** A home or residential institution for the children whose parents are dead.

**Apprentice:** It means to agree to some work for a fixed period at lower wages.

**Satirize:** It means to attack or ridicule someone or something.

**Contemporary:** It means belonging to the same period or stated period in the past.

**Historical:** Belonging to the past or based on history.

**Imprisonment:** The state of being physically confined in an institutional setting such as prison.

**Parochial:** It means related to a church parish.

**Trafficking:** Is the act of selling or buying people illegally and making money from work they are forced to do.

**Pickpocket:** A person who steals from people's pockets.

**Juvenile:** An individual who is under an age fixed by law (as 18 years).

**Oakum:** It is a loose fibre obtained by unravelling old rope and treated with tar, used as a caulking material.

**Coffin:** It is a long narrow box typically made of wood in which a dead body is carried, buried or cremated.

**Countryside:** It means the land and scenery of rural areas.

**Disguised:** It means to change one's appearance to hide one's identity and remain unrecognizable.

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## 21.5 Sample Questions

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### 21.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The subtitle of the novel *Oliver Twist* is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The novel *Oliver Twist* was published serially in the episodic form in \_\_\_\_\_ Magazine.
3. The subtitle of the novel *Oliver Twist* alludes to John Bunyan's \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Dickens in this novel satirizes the New Poor Amendment Act of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) 1830      (b) 1832      (c) 1834      (d) 1836.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ mother dies while giving him birth.  
(a) Oliver's (b) Bumble (c) Sikies (d) Fagin
6. In the preface of \_\_\_\_\_ edition of this novel, Dickens discusses the theme of criminality in the novel.  
(a) 1841 (b) 1843 (c) 1845 (d) 1840
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is the leader of a gang of thieves.
8. Oliver was offered to Mr. Sowerberry by Mr. Bumble to work as a servant for an amount of \_\_\_\_\_ pounds.
9. *Oliver Twist* was published in \_\_\_\_\_.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ character in the novel is forced into prostitution due to poverty.

### **21.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. How does the novel depict the condition of Victorian England?
2. Discuss *Oliver Twist* as a Social Novel.
3. How can child abuse and exploitation be considered as the main theme of the novel?
4. How is the relationship between different characters depicted in the novel?
5. How is countryside idealized by Charles Dickens?

### **21.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. How is Child Labour displayed in *Oliver Twist*?
2. Discuss the theme of poverty as reflected by Dickens.
3. Discuss the depiction of crime in the novel *Oliver Twist*.

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## **21.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Bloom, Harold, Ed. *Charles Dickens*. Infobase Learning: New York, 2013.
2. Dunn, Richard J. *Oliver Twist: Whole Heart and Soul*. Twayne Publishers New York, 1993.
3. Jordan, John O. *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. CUP Cambridge, 2001.

## Unit - 22: *Oliver Twist* - Characterization

### Structure

22.0 Introduction

22.1 Objectives

22.2. Dickens's Art of Characterization in *Oliver Twist*

22.2.1 *Oliver Twist*

22.2.2 Fagin

22.2.3 Nancy

22.2.4 Monks

22.2.5 Bill Sikes

22.2.6 Mr. Brownlow

22.2.7 Mrs. Rose Maylie

22.2.8 Minor Characters

22.3 Learning Outcomes

22.4 Glossary

22.5 Sample Questions

22.6 Suggested Readings

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### 22.0 Introduction

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The present Unit familiarizes you with the art of characterization with special reference to Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. It briefly throws light on how the characters are categorized and how Dickens deftly created his characters in the novel, *Oliver Twist*. It also discusses in detail some of the major characters and throws light on the minor characters as they appear in the novel.

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### 22.1 Objectives

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The Unit has been designed to fulfill the following objectives:

- Understand Charles Dickens's art of characterization
- Exploring the portrayal of various characters in *Oliver Twist*
- Trying to connect the fictional characters with real social conditions

- Understanding the values the characters represent

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## 22.2 Dickens's Art of Characterization in *Oliver Twist*

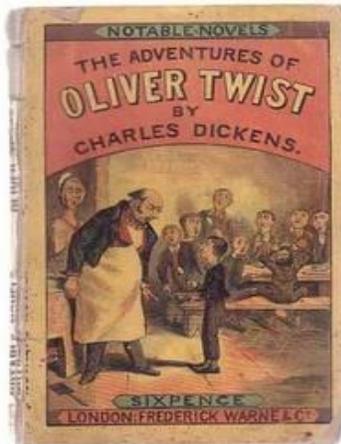
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In any conventional narrative, novel or short story, “characters” are of equal importance as the “plot”. There is a traditional approach or “Epic characterization” which divides the characters into good and evil, virtuous and damned, white and black. This sort of characterization is based on extremes making a person the hero or the villain. In literary narratives, this characterization makes the distinction between a protagonist and an antagonist. The protagonist is the central character and the antagonist may be seen as a villain or a character marked by contrasting ideas to a protagonist. Therefore, the term “hero” in the novel is now replaced by the term protagonist. As Aristotle says in his *Poetics*, “plot is the soul”, and characters are the representations of moral values. The characters represent some value, opinion, ideology, position, thought, idea or emotion in a narrative. Aristotle has also developed the idea of “Grey character” in defining “Tragic Hero” who is “neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad.” He is otherwise good but only with one flaw or “hamartia” (“tragic-error”).

In the *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster describes two types of characters: Round and Flat. “Round characters” are those who evolve during the course of the novel. They keep on developing and changing as they come across various events. On the other hand, “Flat characters” are those who are limited in their approach and represent a single idea or emotion. They do not develop along the course of the novel. They remain unchanged, more or less.

George Bernard Shaw, the famous dramatist, said that his purpose is not to distinguish the characters as black or white but to create grey ones. The idea of creating “Grey characters” was to portray life-like characters. These characters appear like real human beings, as real people with real life-like problems. This is how Dickens created his characters from the ordinary and everyday life experience in the Victorian Society of London. In fact, because of the spirit of Dickens, G. B. Shaw compared Marx and Dickens thus: “The difference between Marx and Dickens was that Marx knew he was a revolutionist whilst Dickens had not the faintest suspicion of that part of his calling.” Dickens gave voices to the characters who were exploited in the system marked by poverty, discrimination, malnutrition, and hunger. In this context, Arthur-Compton Rickett describes the humanitarian intention and spirit of social reform found in Dickens's novels. His characters are vividly drawn with a sense of humour, satire and pathos. He locates his characters in a society driven by class-consciousness, which has double standards,

known for its “Victorian Paradox” and “Victorian Temperament”. His characters attempt to challenge the established order and thrive in the most miserable conditions of London with its jails, opium dens, and workhouses.



Andrew Sanders describes Dickens’s novels as “London Novels” or “Conditions of England Novels.” The novels and characters of Charles Dickens brought into light the problems of factory workers and child labour. On the contrary, Dickens’s contemporaries believed that poor people were inherently unscrupulous. *Oliver Twist* advocates that one should not be judged based on one’s birth. Although Dickens goes overboard and pushes Oliver, the central character away from reality, the Dickensian character Oliver is a prime embodiment of virtue. It is hard to believe that Oliver is capable of speaking Standard English despite his adverse conditions and poor education. Also, Dickens tries to depict the abuse suffered by children. Oliver meets a gang of pickpockets and is forced to assist them in a robbery. According to him, it is better to “run away and die in the fields.” The criminal fraternity puts Oliver through a lot of difficult situations. Yet he never loses his composure and stays dignified. *Oliver Twist* connects with the readers on a visceral level.

John Peck and Martin Coyle note that Dickens “challenges the inhumanity of aspects of the new social legislation” and “shares the anxieties of his time about potential disorder” so the most alarming elements in *Oliver Twist* are marked by its notorious characters: “Fagin and his gang, the violent Bill Sikes, and...the prostitute Nancy.”

David Daiches points out that when Dickens realized his talent in creating his characters, he thrilled his readers with “eccentrics, villains, unfortunates, hypocrites, social climbers, *nouveaux riches*, criminals, innocents, bureaucrats, exhibitionists, self-deceivers, roisterers, and confidence men, human oddities of all kinds.” In *Oliver Twist*, we come across characters from all strata of society. One of the achievements of Dickens in *Oliver Twist* is that it becomes difficult to decide between minor and major characters. Though the characters may appear minor yet they acquire a magnitude of their own and become crucial in the development of the narrative. On the other hand, the major characters may lead a prominent role, yet they seem to remain flat. The characters are so placed in the novel that all of them seem to be important and unique.

***Check your progress***

1. What do you understand by characterization?

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2. Briefly comment on Charles Dickens's art of characterization.

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**22.2.1 Oliver Twist:**

The opening of the novel predicts the character of Oliver Twist when the readers are told about his birth:

The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration,--a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next...Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to ...as loud a cry as could reasonably.

At his birth, Oliver struggled for breath, for life. This marks the characteristic trait of his will to survive. Despite all the unfavourable circumstances, Oliver Twist survives.

Oliver Twist is born in a workhouse and his mother, Agnes Fleming dies giving birth to him. His father was already dead. So, he is an orphan boy left to the cruelty of the world. This novel is written in "Third Person Omniscient Point of View" which means that the story of Oliver is told to us by a narrator who knows everything. Unlike the later novels of Dickens where the protagonist tells his story in "First-Person Point of View" giving a closer understanding of the character, Oliver's character is revealed to us by this third-person narrator. However, this narrator has a soft corner for Oliver, so the focus essentially remains on Oliver. This also marks a difference in Oliver Twist and other characters of Charles Dickens like Pip in *Great Expectations* and David Copperfield who grow up into an adult, suggesting a *bildungsroman*. But Pip remains a child and does not develop as such. Oliver Twist is more of a "Picaro" ("rogue"), a picaresque hero, who has no fixed means of living and keeps on travelling

from one place to another. In a picaresque novel hero comes across the real face of society and exposes hypocrisy, hollowness, depravity, licentiousness, and debauchery. Oliver Twist faces similar circumstances of a society dealing with double standards.

An important aspect of Oliver Twist's personality is his face which reflects the beauty and innocence of a child. His face is read by different people differently. While the good people are moved by his innocence the bad people try to exploit him. Associated with his outward appearance is his innate innocence. Unlike the other people in Fagin's gang, he is the same inward out, pure of heart and intentions.

Oliver Twist is seen as luckier than other characters. He is as easily relieved as he is trapped. Whenever he is in trouble he is always saved. When he is born he finds his breath after a long time, when he is with Mr. Bumble he is bullied, he makes a narrow escape from becoming a chimney sweeper, he is always saved even when he is with his gang, even when he is shot he is in good hands. Because of his good heart, destiny is trying to restore him to his rightful place. This also emphasizes the significance of his name as Oliver encounters the twists of life and destiny.

Another aspect of his character is the sensitivity and softness that Oliver has for people around him. He remains concerned about the kind of image Mr. Brownlow will have of him once he is kidnapped. He also prays for Rose when she falls sick. His relationship with good people in the novel is of giving and taking. Being a helpless child, he has nothing to offer for the help and care of these people but his good-heartedness and innocence.

All the qualities which are the mark of a good human being are found to be present in Oliver. He is honest, loyal, truthful, and kind. So, when he confronts the gang while he is set out on an errand by Mr. Brownlow to deliver books in the shop, he says do anything to me but do not take the books and money which he has to give. When he is kidnapped and comes back he wants to tell Mr. Brownlow that he had not run away with his books. He was repentant to hurt Mr. Brownlow. Because of his own virtuous nature, he also inspires goodness in other people as well. People around him were compelled to show their generosity to him. He benefits from the good people, particularly women, be it Mrs. Maylie or Rose or even Nancy who loses her life in an attempt of saving him.

Analysing Oliver with a critical eye, readers finds him a person who is the supposed protagonist of the novel but who has very little capability to be one. There is a dearth of qualities that usually define a protagonist, where decisions taken by him affect the sequence of events.

Instead of being a hero who is actively moulding his future, Oliver is the reward against which contrasting agencies are competing. Only once is he acting in charge, when he runs away from a life of servitude to Sowerberry. Apart from this event, he is mostly passive as the Artful Dodger takes Oliver under himself and then again Brownlow becomes his decision-maker. He appears as an undeveloped character. Our understanding of his character is based mostly on the author's proclamations. His disposition is impressionable and placatory because his nurture has been cruel and authoritarian. Therefore, when the time comes that he is out alone in the world, Oliver lacks the defences to face immoral and brutal situations. It is noteworthy that Oliver speaks remarkably little as he merely repeats the clichés of Charles Dickens.

Irrespective of such criticism Oliver stands prominent as a child-hero, who appeals "more to our sentiments than to our literary sensibilities." His character is incredible for the kind of virtues he has and the difficulties he faces. Nevertheless, he is the symbol for the poor, paupers and orphans. These marginalized factions were misunderstood and were tagged with evil. Oliver challenges these Victorian notions about the evilness of the poor. Poverty cannot define one's character. Unlike other paupers who indulge in crime, Oliver is also forced into it but is never convinced of such acts. He is marked by conventional picaresque dilemmas found in English novels. He keeps on deciding and judging between right and wrong and always sides with goodness. He is goodness incarnate. Through the character of Oliver, Dickens wanted to challenge the prejudices of Victorian society against the poor.

### **22.2.2 Fagin:**

Fagin, the master criminal, is not only ugly looking in appearance, but also repulsive. He is the villain, the antagonist in the novel. Through the character of Fagin, Dickens sought to portray a character that showed the complexity of humanity. When angry, the old man may succumb to anger, but usually, he indulges in the ironic humour that gave him the nickname "the merry old gentleman." Fagin's dominance among the thieves shows his leadership qualities to harness his evil plans. He is smarter and more thoughtful than his companions. He brags about his position to the young members of his group. Fagin understands his role in managing and organizing crimes. He is attentive and vigilant. His analytical power becomes evident when he lectures Oliver and Claypole on the interdependence between outlaws. He has exceptional self-control even under extreme circumstances.

Fagin skillfully drives Sikes and Nancy to a life of crime. He has given enough orders to warn Sikes about excessive violence and is always on the lookout for the danger of inadvertent

movement. There is some evidence that Fagin's corrupt nature still has some human emotions left. Several times he has shown evidence of kindness to Oliver. The night he piloted Oliver on the Chertsey expedition, he controls his urge to disturb the sleep of the tracked child. The next day he seriously asks Oliver to pay attention to Sikes unconditionally, for his own safety.

Despite his denial, Dickens could not conceal his entrenched stereotypes against ethnicity when it came to Jews and his characterization of Fagin was no exception. He has been foisted upon the expletives like ugly, simpering, and full of avarice to say the least. His being referred to as "the Jew" with no holds barred and with relative ease cannot help but underline the distasteful attributes forced upon him for his association with a particular ethnicity. Identity is the mainspring of behaviour in what Dickens latently tries to underscore. His prejudiced characterization is not confined to his ethnicity but extends to a motif of unalloyed villainy. He is even dehumanized and branded a reptile in the possession of "fangs" akin to those of "dogs" and "rats". Fagin is labelled "the old one" a famous name attributed to the devil. He is detested for casting nightmares on children and readers in the same manner. His end, when he has to face the gallows and people are staring at him in the face creates such a horrific scene that even surpasses the fear that Fagin has always conjured up throughout.

### **22.2.3 Nancy:**

Nancy is another character who becomes a victim of the circumstances. She finds herself near the fringe of criminal society. Her character is marked by conflicting thoughts. She is aware of her situation. She understands the difference between right and wrong. The thought to go on the right path has not been extinguished in her but she is entangled in bad company. Despite her unwillingness, she cannot stop her involvement in crimes. She is aware of her condition and finds herself hopeless. Nancy entered the world of criminals in sheer helplessness but she gets trapped in it.

Society is the mirror, and when Nancy tries to see herself in that mirror through Rose and Brownlow, only then does she realize that she has taken a wrong path that will inevitably lead her to destruction. She can analyse her situation and she is convinced that she is so caught in the thickets of evil that no amount of good intentions or effort could extricate her anymore. She is a lamentable example of "human waste", basically a good person who has drifted so far from the honest ways that no return is possible.



(Oliver trapped by Nancy and Sikes: Image 2)

One of the important issues of *Oliver Twist* is whether an adverse situation can harm an individual's being or not. As the novel progresses, it is the character of Nancy that best explains such a phenomenon. As Nancy has spent her childhood on the streets in extreme poverty, she becomes an excessive drinker and ends up stealing from people to meet her needs. Some of the instances given by the narrator also suggest that she is a prostitute. Though none of her features is that of a noble person in the society, she behaves the exact opposite of her character when she gives up her life to save Oliver. She is one of the complex, yet unique characters in the novel. She is also a "grey character" in *Oliver Twist* who represents both good and evil. Her definitive decision to accomplish something beneficial at an extraordinary individual expense is a solid contention for the moral soundness of fundamental goodness, regardless of the number of obstructions it might confront. Nancy's love for Sikes shows the ethical complexity of her character. She explains to Rose that for men devotion in love is for solace and it makes them feel proud to some extent but for her such devotion gives her a cause to commit something evil. Her explanation proves to be true when her love for Sikes ultimately leads to her death. There could be various effects and outcomes of the same thing in different circumstances. In the novel as well, virtues like truth, nobility and morality have clear significance but it is only through the character of Nancy that readers can comprehend that virtues and vices cannot have a clear division in any situation.

#### **22.2.4 Monks:**

Even though he is a minor character, Monks influences and manipulates many major characters and situation because of his background and connection with the protagonist, Oliver Twist. He manipulates evil characters like Fagin and his companions so much that he is even afraid of his mysterious presence. The nastiness in his character can be seen as a result of his

childhood experience. His mother chained him in an irreversible childhood which made him cruel and malicious. His character makes it clear that it is not only poverty that can deprive human beings of humanness but also the lack of love, care, support and protection, especially in childhood. A troublesome childhood can easily disturb the psychology of a person and their inner self. The characters of Monks stand as a testimony to this fact. Out of greed and selfishness, he destroys his father's will which had allocated also a portion of his share for Oliver. But Monks following the clever plans of his mother destroys the will to eliminate the possibility of dividing his property. In this attempt, he becomes a modus operandi for bringing in all the troubles in his life of Oliver.

#### **22.2.5 Bill Sikes:**

Bill Sikes is one of the most skilled burglars brought up in Fagin's gang. Sikes is Nancy's pimp and lover. His treatment of Nancy and his dog Bull's-eye is mixed with ambivalent emotions of love and cruelty. He is reckless and completely loyal to Fagin so much so that he even murders Nancy. He has become a ruthless criminal. He has lost all sensitivity, humanness and tenderness. He shuns any kind of discussion on morality. He is very serious and humourless. He has no concern for any human life, not even for his own. He takes a sound sleep until it is disturbed by the haunting face of his last victim. His fearlessness is more of a sign of stupidity than genuine courage. His bestial nature is a base amalgam of low intelligence and brute strength. Sikes lacks foresight and insights into the consequences of his actions. He is not even worried about the dangers that can occur in his trade. While Fagin hides his hatred for Sikes, Sikes could also not think about the effects of suppressing his contempt for Fagin. In a way, Sikes invites trouble by inciting Fagin.

The only person that Sikes is shown to have some feeling is for Nancy. But even in this relationship, Sikes remains aloof and sort of detached. He fails to realize that his mistreatment of Nancy can cause serious damage not only to their relationship but also to her psyche. Though Fagin understands that there is something wrong with Nancy's behaviour, Sikes is still clueless. He thinks that the oddity in Nancy's behaviour is because of her sickness. Taking the advantage of the situation, Fagin malevolently stimulates Sikes by revealing Nancy's immorality. Lacking in judgement and prudence Sikes fails to see the trap set by Fagin. He goes to Nancy's home and murders his only friend. He is a type of irrational evil, beyond the light of humanity.

### **22.2.6 Brownlow:**

Mr. Brownlow is one of the grey characters with good and bad traits. He is kind and hard at the same time. The first encounter that takes place between Oliver and Brownlow is in the police station where he testifies that he is not sure if Oliver was the thief. Once they are out of the police station Brownlow sees Oliver falling because of sickness. Seeing the condition of the boy, he takes Oliver to his house where he is given good care. When Oliver recovers, he gives him a new suit, cap and shoes. He also sets Oliver on the task of delivering the books to the shop. Later he is encountered by a man who accuses Oliver of being a thief but Brownlow discards it as a kind of misunderstanding. The visitor predicts that Oliver will not come back and he will side with his gang of criminals. Brownlow waits for Oliver but he never returns as he is kidnapped by Nancy. Oliver also attempts to clear the misunderstanding of Brownlow but he is unable to meet him as Brownlow had gone to West Indies. Nancy reveals everything to Rose. Rose then informs Mr. Brownlow about everything, and he is relieved that Oliver was not involved in the wrongdoings. Later in the novel, Brownlow with the help of Nancy unfolds the secrets about the relationship between Monks, Oliver and Rose. He is the person who is shown with a sense of righteousness. He takes the responsibility of setting everything right in the lives of the people around him. He forces Monks to accept his misdeed and ensures Oliver gets his share of the property. When everything is resolved Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver. He moves to the country along with Oliver and Mrs. Bedwin, where they live near Harry and Rose.

### **22.2.7 Rose Maylie:**

Rose Maylie typifies as an example of ideal Dickensian womanhood. Though she appears as a minor character in the novel she fulfils the role of the missing mother in the life of Oliver Twist. She conforms to the Victorian idea of womanhood represented in the phrase “angel in the house.” This phrase was first used by Coventry Patmore in his poem “The Angel in the House” (1854/1862) which he wrote for his wife. Though the phrase got popular later, his idea of womanhood became a dominant one in the Victorian society. This image of a woman came to be associated with devotion, dedication, passivity, beauty, grace, sacrifice and above all purity. They were the qualities that were believed to be embodied in the angels. Rose Maylie conforms to this image of a woman. In contrast to depraving and corrupting world around her, Rose emerges victorious, pious and pure. She acts as an intermediary between Oliver Twist and the mischievous world around him. Initially, Rose is introduced as a 17 years old girl, sweet and lovely, filled with positive vibes.

When Oliver is brought sick to Maylie's Home both Mrs. Maylie and Rose are convinced that Oliver must have been through tough times. Rose says though he might have been wicked, yet he is a child. In Oliver, it is Rose who finds an innocent child and not a nasty thief. She is against the idea of sending him to prison. In Maylie's house, Oliver learns to read and to write better. Rose along with Mrs. Maylie takes good care of him. The vulnerability of Rose becomes evident when she falls sick. She loses her strength and energy. She becomes deathly pale. The relationship between Rose and Oliver is very close. Though Oliver finds himself helpless in her sickness, he prays in the church. Oliver is relieved when he hears the news of Rose's recovery.

Mrs. Maylie warns Harry Maylie that there is no information about the family and lineage of Rose and so he might lose all the prospects of becoming a parliamentarian. But he is firm in his love and decision. When he discloses his decision of marrying her, Rose is also uncertain. She says there is a blot upon her name; she knows nothing about her family and parents. So, she declines Harry's proposal. Later Nancy reveals the truth to Rose. Everything changes once it is revealed that she is aunt of Oliver. Finally, when Harry and Rose are married, she grows into a lovely and caring woman, exemplifying the perfect image of womanhood.

### **2.2.8 Minor Characters:**

Minor Characters in *Oliver Twist* can be divided into the following groups:

Oliver Twist's Family

Characters in Workhouse

Characters in Sowerberry Household

Characters in Fagin's Group

Characters in Brownlow's Household

Characters in Maylies's Household

Characters in Administration

#### **Oliver Twist's Family:**

**Agnes Fleming** is the mother of Oliver Twist. She is the daughter of a respected naval officer who has retired. She is a beautiful and charming lady. Her predicament begins when she falls in love with Mr. Leeford and becomes pregnant. She is afraid for her family's reputation, so she leaves them and dies unidentified in a workhouse. Oliver has taken after his mother in terms of his appearance.

**Mr. Leeford** is the father of Oliver and Monks. He was an intelligent and determined man. His family forcefully marries him off to a wealthy woman. He is not happy in his marriage, so he separates from his wife. Later he comes across Agnes Fleming. As he falls in love with Agnes,

both of them decide to leave the country. But in an unfortunate incident, he dies, and Agnes is left alone in her state of pregnancy. He is already dead when the narrative begins.

**Monks' mother** was the wife of Mr. Leeford. She lived an immoral life and ignored her husband. She destroyed Mr. Leeford's will in which Oliver Twist was entitled to have a part of his property. Monks has presumably inherited his cleverness from his mother.

#### **Characters in Workhouse:**

**Old Sally** is a pauper who helps Agnes during the birth of Oliver. She proves her meanness by stealing Agnes's gold locket which was the only clue to Oliver's identity.

**Mr. Bumble** is a pompous beadle in the workhouse where Oliver is born. He exemplifies the "Victorian paradox" and hypocrisy. Though he talks about Christian morality, he has no pity, compassion and mercy for the orphans and poor people. He is greedy, selfish, and apathetic. His name typifies his character marked by its hollowness and pretensions.

**Mrs. Corney** is the matron of the workhouse where Oliver is born. She is married to Mr. Bumble. Just like him, she too is pretentious, careless and materialistic. She is very dominating and demanding in her treatment of Mr. Bumble.

**Mr. Gamfield** is a cruel chimney sweeper. Oliver very narrowly escapes from becoming his apprentice.

#### **Characters in Sowerberry Household:**

**Mr. Sowerberry** undertakes Oliver in his apprenticeship. He earns his living by making arrangements for cut-rate burials for paupers. However, he is very kind to Oliver.

**Mrs. Sowerberry** is Sowerberry's wife. She is very mean and critical. She keeps on criticizing her husband.

**Charlotte** is Sowerberrys' maid. Charlotte falls in love with Noah Claypole and follows him like a slave.

**Noah Claypole** is a charity boy and Mr. Sowerberry's apprentice. He is a trouble-maker in the life of *Oliver Twist*. He bullies Oliver and later he joins Fagin's gang.

**The Artful Dodger** is the most skilled and cleverest of Fagin's pickpockets. His real name is Jack Dawkins. He is of the same age as *Oliver Twist*. He dresses up like an adult man. This hints at the loss of the innocence and maturity he acquires before his age. He introduces *Oliver Twist* to Fagin.

**Charley Bates** is also Fagin's pickpockets. He is shown as light-hearted with ready laughter.

**Toby Crackit** belongs to Fagin and Sikes's group. He is dull and unintelligent. He is involved in the burglary of Mrs. Maylie's house.

**Bet** had worked as a pickpocket for Fagin in her childhood. Now she is a prostitute.

**Barney** is also a Jew like Fagin and is an accomplice in his crimes.

**Tom Chitling** is a criminal. He works in Fagin's gang. He has also served his term in prison for doing nasty jobs for Fagin.

**Bull's-eye** is Bill Sikes's dog. It is as dangerous as his master. It functions as Sikes's alter ego.

#### **Characters in Brownlow's Household:**

**Mrs. Bedwin** is Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper. She is very kind and sensitive. She is not ready to accept Mr. Bumble's negative report of Oliver Twist.

**Mr. Grimwig** is a friend of Mr. Brownlow. He is pessimistic and cynical, but he is a good human being.

#### **Characters in Maylies's Household:**

**Mrs. Maylie** is a kind, old woman. She is Harry Maylie's mother and adoptive "aunt" of Rose.

**Harry Maylie is the son of** Mrs. Maylie. He is very handsome and ambitious. He wants to establish his reputation in politics, but he gives up his dreams to marry Rose. Between the pomp and show of the material world, he chooses the simplicity of Rose.

**Mr. Giles** is a butler in Mrs. Maylie's house. He is very loyal but also a big show-off.

**Mr. Brittles** is a handyman for Mrs. Maylie's estate. As could be noticed he is slightly disabled psychologically.

**Mr. Losberne** is a family physician of Mrs. Maylie. He is an old bachelor. He gets angry easily, but he is good-hearted. He owes his loyalty to the Maylie family and so to Oliver Twist.

#### **Characters part of Administration:**

**Mrs. Mann is a** superintendent of the juvenile workhouse where Oliver is brought up. Mrs. Mann physically abuses and half-starves the children in her care.

**Mr. Fang is a** magistrate who presides over Oliver's trial for pickpocketing. He is very harsh and power-hungry.

**Duff and Blathers** are investigating police officers dealing with Mrs. Maylie's home burglary case.

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## 22.3 Learning Outcomes

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It is expected that on the completion of this Unit, you should be able to understand the art of characterization of Charles Dickens concerning the characters in his novel *Oliver Twist*. You should be familiar with the portrayal of major characters and develop an understanding of literature, representation of various people through characters present in the novel. You should be able to understand that Dickens's characters are effective in developing a sense of awareness and sensitivity among the readers for the people who are under-privileged, poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

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## 22.4 Glossary

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**Paradox:** Means an inherent contradiction. “Victorian Paradox” implies that on one hand there are images of richness and prosperity, and on the other hand, there is poverty and squalor. People talk about morality and engage in dishonest and inhuman practices. This dichotomy marks the paradox in the Victorian society.

**Third Person Narration:** In third-person narration, the story is told by a narrator different from the central characters. The narrator is an observer or maybe a participant in the events. S/he relates the actions of the characters by referring to their names or by the third-person pronouns he, she, or they. Third-person narration is of three types: omniscient, limited, and objective.

**First Person Narration:** In first-person narration the narrator tells his or her own story. S/he is usually a central character who narrates events from his or her point of view. The narrator uses personal pronouns such as I/me/Mine or we if the narrator is speaking as part of a group.

**Bildungsroman:** It is a novel about the growth or development of a character. It usually deals with the physical, psychological, philosophical, moral, social and spiritual maturing and transformation of a protagonist.

**Picaro:** The central character in a picaresque novel is called a *Picaro*. *Picaro* means rogue, rascal or brute. Usually, a *Picaro* belongs to the lower strata of society. S/he has no fixed source of income and keeps on travelling from one place to another, partly out of necessity and partly out of compulsion. Usually, a *Picaro* is a thief, robber, bandit, or prostitute who have to change their names and hide their identity from society.

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## 22.5 Sample Questions

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### 22.5.1 Objectives Questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ is the father of Oliver Twist.  
(a) Mr. Brownlow (b) Mr. Leeford (c) Mr Gamfield (d) Mr. Sowerberry
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not a member of Fagin's Gang.  
(a) Bill Sikes (b) Oliver Twist (c) Jack Dawkins (d) Harry Maylie
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not associated with the workhouse.  
(a) Mr. Bumble (b) Mrs. Corney (c) Mrs Mann (d) Mr. Losberne
- Mark the Wrong pair:  
(a) Agnes and Leeford (b) Bumble and Corney (c) Oliver & Nancy (d) Rose & Harry
- Which of the following pairs is of criminals?  
(a) Agnes and Leeford (b) Bumble and Corney (c) Sikes & Nancy (d) Rose & Harry
- Mark the wrong pair:  
(a) Agnes-Oliver (b) Mrs. Leeford-Monks (c) Mrs Maylie-Harry (d) Mrs. Corney-Sikes
- \_\_\_\_\_ is known as The Artful Dodger.  
(a) Jack Dawkins (b) Bill Sikes (c) Charley Bates (d) Toby Crackit
- Nancy is killed by \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Jack Dawkins (b) Bill Sikes (c) Charley Bates (d) Toby Crackit
- Monks is Oliver Twist's:  
(a) Uncle (b) Half-brother (c) Step-brother (d) Real-brother
- At the end of the novel, \_\_\_\_\_ is called an "erring woman."  
(a) Nancy (b) Mrs. Bedwin (c) Mrs. Brownlow (d) Mrs. Rose Maylie

### 22.5.2 Short Answer Question:

- Fagin and his gang show a bleak picture of Victorian society. Comment.
- Oliver Twist projects a world of good and evil characters. Discuss.
- Comment on the significance of the name of Mr. Bumble and Fagin.

4. Compare the characters of Nancy and Rose.
5. Write a short note on the role of Mr. Brownlow in the novel.

### **22.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss the character of Oliver Twist.
2. Throw light on Charles Dickens's art of characterization in *Oliver Twist*.
3. Discuss the role of female characters in the life of Oliver Twist.

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## **22.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature: The Restoration to the Present Day*. Vol. 2. Allied publishers private, 1979.
2. Peck, John, Martin Coyle. *A Brief History of English Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
3. Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Clarendon Press, 1994.

## Unit-23: *Oliver Twist* - Narrative Technique

### Structure

23.0 Introduction

23.1 Objectives

23.2 Different Techniques of Narration

23.2.1 Narrative Technique in *Oliver Twist*

23.2.2 The Commanding Voice of the Omniscient Narrator

23.2.3 Dramatic Tinge in the Narrative

23.2.4 *Oliver Twist*- not a Product of Pre-conceived Plot Construction

23.2.5 The Narrator and the Characters

23.2.6 The Omniscient Narrator as an Omniscient Preacher

23.3 Learning Outcomes

23.4 Glossary

23.5 Sample Questions

23.6 Suggested Readings

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### 23.0 Introduction

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The reception of a text by the readers or audience is, among other things, dependent upon the way the text appeals to the readers. The appeal of a text, in turn, rests on the way or the style in which the story of the novel progresses. The mode or the technique that the author uses is called the technique of narration. The technique of narration helps a reader to understand the various characters, perceptions, and ideologies which the characters manifest and reflect. The author of a novel is, in essence, a storyteller who throws before us a story page by page. The author seems to be at a vantage point overseeing the movement of the narrative. Moreover, the author can, at times, employ or choose a persona to tell a story from his perspective. That is where we find multiple voices in a narrative.

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### 23.1 Objectives

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This Unit has the following objectives:

- To introduce to the students with the different techniques of narration in general.
- To expose students to the omniscient narrator as employed by Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*.
- To make students understand the central importance of narration to the whole plot of the novel.
- To enable students to analyze and critically evaluate the importance of a certain narrative technique and its advantages and disadvantages.

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## 23.2 Different Techniques of Narration

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Often classified based on the pronoun used, narratives are first person, second person or the third person. The first-person narrator(s) doesn't often use the direct I or we but can be identified as one of the characters in the plot. The character, as part of the narrative, takes the plot forward by his introduction of the other characters, his deliberations over their physiognomies, multiple traits, weaknesses, foibles etc. In the second-person narration, the story is told by someone who is addressed as you. The second-person narrator is at times used by the author as a vehicle to carry forward the narrative whereas, in the third person point of view, the narrator is most often outside the confines of the story. He seems to speak or narrate the story from a vantage position. The third-person narrator addresses the characters either by their names or by using gender-specific pronouns like he or she. The third-person omniscient narrator, as the word omniscient connotes, introduces the readers to the physical appearances, mental make-ups and other leanings and feelings of the characters. Hence, the third person omniscient narrator is the general gateway to the plot of the novel.

### 23.2.1 Narrative Technique in *Oliver Twist*:

In *Oliver Twist*, we see the third person omniscient narrative technique. Omniscient means "all-knowing," and hence an omniscient narrator knows every character's life, thoughts and feelings in depth. To begin with, the novel starts in media res. The Omniscient Narrator unfurls before us an assortment of buildings intending to introduce us to the workhouse. It is in the workhouse that we are introduced to our protagonist and his genesis:

Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I 'will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and in this workhouse was born; on a day and date which I need not trouble

myself to repeat, since it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events; the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.

The narrative progresses linearly, and the readers see the story unfold layer by layer. The narrator seems to be the all-knowing commentator who drops multiple hints at the beginning of each chapter. The subtitle of each chapter helps the readers put together the story that is to follow. The readers, in anticipation of the further information, read on. For instance, we see chapter 9 is subtitled as “Containing further Particulars concerning the pleasant old Gentleman and his hopeful Pupils” The narrator here, like a typical or archetypal storyteller, lends to the narrative some conventional touch.

It was late next morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long sleep. There was no other person in the room but the old Jew, who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round, with an iron spoon. He would stop now and then to listen when there was the least noise below: and when he had satisfied himself, he would go on, whistling and stirring again, as before.

In the above paragraph, the narrator first talks of the simple act of making coffee and then takes upon himself the onus of commentating authoritatively over the “*drowsy state, between sleeping and waking.*” The narrator strikes us as a sagacious persona who first philosophizes Oliver’s sleepy state and then further explicates the lessons that the routines like these teach:

Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half-open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrap in perfect unconsciousness. At such times, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate.

The third-person omniscient narrator, at places, assumes the role of a moderator. He comments on the way the story progresses. For example, at the beginning of chapter 13, the narrator says:

“Some new Acquaintances are introduced to the intelligent Reader; connected with whom various pleasant matters are related appertaining to this history.”

We further see a dialogue-type progression of the narrative:

*‘WHERE’S Oliver? Said the Jew, rising with a menacing look. ‘Where’s the boy?’ The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at his violence, and looked uneasily at each other.’ But they made no reply.*

*‘What’s become of the boy? Said the Jew, seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations. ‘Speak out, or I’ll throttle you!’*

In *Oliver Twist*, we find, especially to the end, that the narrator chips in to comment on the progression of the story itself. Here he seems to be keenly following the main character to inform the reader about his life so far:

SPRING flew swiftly by, and summer came. If the village had been beautiful at first it was now in the full glow and luxuriance of its richness. The great trees, which had looked shrunken and bare in the earlier months, had now burst into strong life and health; and stretching forth their green arms over the thirsty ground, converted open and naked spots into choice nooks, where was a deep and pleasant shade from which to look upon the wide prospect, steeped in sunshine, which lay stretched beyond. The earth had donned her mantle of brightest green; and vigour of the year; all things were glad and flourishing.

### **23.2.2 The Commanding Voice of the Omniscient Narrator:**

From the very first word, the narrative form of *Oliver Twist* is the third person narrative form. The third-person narration means that the narrator seems to stand at a vantage point, with a thorough command over the doings of his characters- from birth, through their movement through the labyrinthine ways of the world. The third-person narrator is a strong voice and presence in the whole narrative structure of a novel or a story. As the name has it, an omniscient narrator is a commanding, all-seeing and all-knowing voice. The omniscient narrator has unbridled access to the consciousness of a few or many different characters. This particular perspective allows the writers to create a typical “godlike” or deliberately “authorial” persona that affords them to distantly comment on the action in multiple and different ways and perspectives.

*Oliver Twist* is undoubtedly a classic novel that documents the myriad problems faced by the common masses during the industrial revolution in England. In the year, 1837 when Dickens

began *Oliver Twist* in its episodic form, it was given a subtitle *The Parish Boys Progress* making it replicate the much-emulated John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Oliver Twist, the protagonist of the novel, goes through a series of hardships, only to emerge as a changed and different character in the end. The omniscient voice lends the credence to the story by way of assuming a powerful position of command and voice and the reader, at times, finds him as a guide goading from behind.

### **23.2.3 Dramatic Tinge in the Narrative:**

Charles Dickens's narrative style has a characteristic dramatic tinge to it. It shuffles between tragedy and comedy, and so, is able to successfully hold the reader's interest. Dickens's novels were published in episodic form in the periodicals and so each chapter had to come to a sort of a climax. Notably, the writing style of Charles Dickens possesses remarkable linguistic creativity. Since Dickens' novels, like a typical dramatic cast, teems with a panoply of characters and the characters come from varied classes and stations, Dickens uses a unique language style and vocabulary for his characters to be commensurate with their societal position. For example, the urban middle class speaks in refined British English whereas the paupers and the miscreants speak in the typical cockney style. Also Mr. Bumble, the beadle is shown often confusing the word parochial and pronouncing it as "Parochial". In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens has used the third-person narrative form and he tries to narrate it from the perspective of an individual who belongs to the nineteenth-century London. One can easily mark that the narrative acquires an omniscient narrator's view, where the narrator knows everything and is recording each important event in the life of the protagonist as well as the other characters.

In *The Examiner*, September 1837 Edition (September 10, 1837), a reviewer asserted that this novel was an "exact painting" of the societal reality that Dickens wished to present to the public. Dickens was widely hailed for capturing the emotions upon the death of Nancy and the intrinsic minutiae of Oliver's life as an orphan. The reviewer was surprised to see Dickens making use of the poor Law Debates in the first chapter of the novel, and he understood the social cause for which Dickens wrote. In conclusion of this review, the author states: "We leave him most whatsoever is most loveable, hateful, or laughable, in the character of the everyday life about him."

***Check your Progress***

1. Which narrative point of view has been used by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*.

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**23.2.4 *Oliver Twist* - not a Product of Pre-conceived Plot Construction:**

*Oliver Twist* appeared month by month in the new magazine Bentley's Miscellany and there is flimsy evidence to indicate that Dickens had any preconceived notion of the whole novel. When he brought Oliver's birth to the notice of the reading public in the first episode that is when he put elements of his story beyond recall by publishing them. Dickens always favoured part-issue publication-not one of his novels appeared for the first time as a single and complete work, but later in his career, he drafted ideas for the overall design of work before any part of it was written and published.

The novel is by its very nature a satire that reveals Dickens's artistic allegiances. Jonathan Swift's 'savage indignation' is heard again in the narrator's exposure of jacks-in-office whose cruelty, shuffling from mere coldness to sadism, is sanctioned, even dignified, by the ordinances of legislation driven by the social vision of Benthamism, the utilitarian ideology associated primarily with the philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). The high irony of many passages early in *Oliver Twist* is repetitive and strained to sustain a reader's interest for long and this satiric mode was never to be Dickens's forte. His genius drew its inspiration from the satiric art of two other eighteenth-century masters, from the paintings of William Hogarth and the novels of Henry Fielding.

**23.2.5 The Narrator and the Characters:**

The variety and certain inexplicable strangeness of the characters in *Oliver Twist* are perhaps one of his seminal achievements of Dickens as a novelist. Some characters in Charles Dickens' novels seem to be his only and they seem to be central to the plots in which they breathe and throb. Moreover, it seems that the meanderings of a public-school life must have its Steer forth, any description of the stratagems of criminal life must rest on its Bill and Nancy and any fishing community its Piggott. Dickens parades his characters in a typical dramatic style. His novels even display a 'cast-list' at the beginning. He seems to keep a note ready to describe the physiognomy of his character(s) and every word that the reader comes across vis-à-vis a

character seems to expose him steadily to the reader. Dickens' characterization in *Oliver Twist* teems with variety. On one hand, we have Oliver, a poor decrepit orphan, then Fagin, a scheming Jew and on the other hand Mr. Brownlow, a gentleman, so very civilized and philanthropic.

Charles Dickens's writing involves a crafty evocation of landscapes, such as the marshy swathes in *Great Expectations* or Yarmouth beach in *David Copperfield* and the like. Despite seeming to write for a stage as a dramatist, the stage, in its limited canvas and paucity of space, shall fail to accommodate the numerous changes of scene which occur in Dickens's novels. The 'stage' Dickens appeals to is the stage of the reader's imagination, and his narrative technique plays upon that 'stage' to draw us into his stories. Dickens' myriad "pictures" are an integral part of the fabric of the narrative. It is through conjuring images on the stage of our imagination that he draws us into the story. Dickens remarkably captures London in its very ferment of life and its variety and vastness. Moreover, the 'attraction of repulsion' of revulsion may also perfectly apply to Dickens' creation of settings in the novel. According to Robert Garland, what could be more eerie and sinister than the house where Monks meets Bumbles in chapter 38? It is set in the riverside slum. Once a place of employment...

... 'it had; long since gone to ruin. The rat, the worm, the action of the damp, had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood; and a considerable portion of the building had already sunk into the water; while the remainder, tottering and bending over the dark stream, seemed to wait for a favourable opportunity of following its old companion, and involving itself in the same fate.'

The above passage brings to us the delight which Dickens takes in piling on all these details of decay which combine with the thunderstorm and the sinister presence and actions of Monks to create the atmosphere of evil into which the former beadle and his wife have indeed bumbled. The omniscient voice seems to wield enormous power and the power of the voice seems all-pervading. This enormous narrative voice unfurls the world before our eyes-the vast and varied world around and in which Oliver treads along.

### **23.2.6 The Omniscient Narrator as an Omniscient Preacher:**

In his preface to *Oliver Twist*, Dickens writes:

As I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the dregs of life (so long as their speech did not offend the ear) should not serve the purpose of a moral, as well as its froth and cream, I made bold to believe that this same Once upon a time would not prove to be All-time or even a long time. I had read of thieves by scores;

seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in the pocket, choice in horse-flesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I have never met( except in Hogarth) with the miserable reality. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they were, forever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest parts of life, with the great black ghaſt gallows closing up to their prospect, turn them where they might; it appeared to me that to do this, would to be attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a ſervice to ſociety. And I did it as I beſt could.

The full title of *Oliver Twist; or, The Pariſh Boy's progreſs* invokes John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progreſs*, the moſt famous account in the language of how a ſtruggle againſt temptation and evil wins, at laſt, a ſecure reward. But 'Progreſs' alſo invokes Hogarth's beſt-known and moſt powerful ſeries of images, *The Harlot's Progreſs*, *The Rake's Progreſs* and *Industry and Idleneſs*, and Fielding's moral progreſs comedies, *Joſeph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Both artiſts are ſummoned in the 1841 Preface to *Oliver Twist* as precedents for the author aſpiring to become 'moralist and cenſor of his age' but Dickens hardly needed to proclaim his allegiance when ſcenes ſuch as this announced it ſo unmiſtakably:

By the bye,' ſaid Mr. Bumble, 'you don't know anybody who wants a boy, do you? A parochial apprentice, who is at preſent a deadweight; a millſtone, as I may; round the parochial throat? Liberal Mr. Sowerberry, him, and gave three diſtinct raps upon the words 'five pounds:' which were printed thereon in Roman capitals of gigantic ſize.

'Gadſon!' ſaid the undertaker: taking Mr. Bumble by the gilt-edged lapel of his official coat; 'that's juſt the very thing I wanted to ſpeak to you about. You know-dear me, what a very elegant button this is Mr. Bumble! I never noticed it before.'

'Yes, I think it is rather pretty,' ſaid the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large braſs buttons which embellished his coat. 'The die is the ſame as the parochial ſeal-the Good Samaritan healing the ſick and bruised man. The board preſented it to me on Newyear's morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I

remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.’

The moral monstrosity of the exchange is as clearly signalled in the reference to the parable of Good Samaritan as it is in the scene in *Joseph Andrews* where Joseph, stripped, beaten, and robbed, is noticed by passengers in a coach, and a Lady, learning that ‘there was a Man sitting upright as naked as ever he was born,’ cries, ‘O Jesus... A naked Man! Dear Coachman, drive on and leave him.’ But the moral import of the tableau works also because Bumble’s human monstrosity is so substantially realized and because, as in the rendering of such figures in a Hogarth composition, every detail confirms the larger truth of the whole. The ‘gilt-edged lappel’ of the coat that warms his fat body contrasts with the rags, also an official issue that covers Oliver’s starved frame. The Beadle’s cane recalls freezing mornings when Mr. Bumble ‘prevented [Oliver] catching a cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane’. Love of his own eloquence betrays Bumble into exactly Christ’s words about millstones around the neck of those who impede the progress of his little ones, but, secure in his own self-esteem, Bumble does not know he is betrayed.

***Check your Progress***

1. What is full title of the novel *Oliver Twist*

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### **23.3 Learning Outcomes**

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The discussion in this Unit provided you with a clear idea about the different techniques of narration used by writers to develop their ideas into stories. In addition, it also demonstrated the technique of narration as used by the prolific novelist Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*. You are expected to appreciate the narrative techniques used by different authors before Charles Dickens and thus compare and contrast the narrative techniques to better understand the ways which different writers use to tell their stories. Moreover, you should also be able to place Charles Dickens among his contemporaries so that they see as to how he differs from them vis-à-vis his art of writing and as to how he shakes hands with the tradition.

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## 23.4 Glossary

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**Omniscient:** Knowing everything

**Narrator:** The person who tells a story or explains what is happening in a play, film, etc

**Authorial:** Belonging or relating to the writer of a book, article, or document

**Narration:** The way that a story is told

**Physiognomy:** The general appearance, shape and features of a person's face

**Benthamism:** The philosophical system of utilitarianism proposed by the English philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham

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## 23.5 Sample Questions

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### 23.5.1 Objective Questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ type of narrator does Dickens use in *Oliver Twist*.
  - First person
  - Second person
  - Third Person
  - Third person omniscient
- Oliver Twist* was written in episodic form with the subtitle "The Parish Boys Progress." On this account, he is believed to resonate with \_\_\_\_\_ famous novel of John Bunyan.
  - The Holy War
  - The Jerusalem
  - The Pilgrim's Progress
  - None of these
- \_\_\_\_\_ public building, the omniscient narrator gives a fictitious name.
  - The workhouse
  - The hospital
  - The hostel
  - The storehouse
- In \_\_\_\_\_ the notorious Newgate prison in London was demolished.
  - 1902
  - 1903

- (c) 1900
  - (d) 1912
5. \_\_\_\_\_, according to the narrator, takes care of Oliver after his mother dies.
- (a) His father
  - (b) A foster care center
  - (c) The Nurse
  - (d) His Aunt
6. \_\_\_\_\_ among the following is employed by Fagin on a Secret Mission.
- (a) Mr Bumble
  - (b) Mr Bolter
  - (c) Noah Claypole
  - (d) Mrs Bumble
7. \_\_\_\_\_ of the following characters is described as a “lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great quantity of hair.”
- (a) Mr Bolter
  - (b) Noah Claypole
  - (c) Mr Fang
  - (d) None of the above
8. \_\_\_\_\_ the parish is willing to offer to someone to take Oliver off their hands.
- (a) 5 pounds.
  - (b) 15 pounds
  - (c) 10 pounds
  - (d) 20 pounds
9. \_\_\_\_\_ the “Point of View” signify.
- (a) It signifies the way a story is told
  - (b) It signifies the way a story begins
  - (c) It signifies the way a story ends
  - (d) None of these
10. In \_\_\_\_\_ ‘point of view’ the narrator is supposed to know all and everything about the characters.
- (a) Third-Person (omniscient) point of view
  - (b) First-Person Point of View

- (c) Second-Person Point of View
- (d) None of the above

### **23.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is Narrative Technique?
2. What type of Narrative Technique do we find in *Oliver Twist*?
3. Comment on the sentence “you are nine years now and it is time you started work.”
4. Comment on the character of Mr. Bumble as introduced by the narrator.
5. What regular work does Oliver do in the workhouse?

### **23.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Examine the narrative technique employed by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*.
2. Discuss the relationship between the workhouse scenes and the rest of the novel.
3. The Narrative Technique in *Oliver Twist* has some cinematic touch. Discuss.

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## **23.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Dunn, Richard J. *Oliver Twist: Whole Heart and Soul*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
2. Miller, J. Hillis. *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958.

## Unit-24: *Oliver Twist* - Language

### Structure

#### 24.0 Introduction

#### 24.1 Objectives

#### 24.2 The Language of *Oliver Twist* -The Regional Dialect

##### 24.2.1 *Oliver Twist*: A Novel of Protest and the Language of Protest

##### 24.2.2 The Language and the Oppressive Environs

##### 24.2.3 Dickens' Own Life and The Words of his Own

##### 24.2.4 *Oliver Twist* and the Jargon of the Times

##### 24.2.5 Giving Characters their Perfect Mouth

##### 24.2.6 Special Use of Language and Symbols in *Oliver Twist*

##### 24.2.7 Choosing Words for Comparison and Contrast

#### 24.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 24.4 Glossary

#### 24.5 Sample Questions

#### 24.6 Suggested Readings

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### 24.0 Introduction

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The language of the novel is seminally important to the flow and texture of its story or plot. If we take a worm's eye view of prominent novels written in the English language, we find quite a few of them stand out because of their flowery language. In this context, *Oliver Twist* stands out because of its dramatic element as it easily shuffles between tragedy and comedy and in doing so holds the reader's interest. Dickens's writing style is marked by immensely abundant linguistic creativity. He succeeds in using different language styles for different characters in consonance with their class and position. For example, the paupers speak in typical cockney style and the middle class in the refined British.

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### 24.1 Objectives

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The Unit has been designed to fulfill the following objectives:

- To familiarize the students with the importance of language to the novel in general.

- To expose students to the art of using language for a particular purpose vis-à-vis *Oliver Twist*.
- To make students understand the nuances of the language in *Oliver Twist* and its subtleties
- To enable students to appreciate the certain special uses and dexterity of language in *Oliver Twist*.

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## 24.2 The Language of *Oliver Twist* - The Regional Dialect

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Professor G. L. Brook remarks “the remarkable thing about the popularity of Dickens is that it has lasted as it has. Much of his appeal lies in his mastery of comic effects, and the appeal of humour is particularly evanescent.” He further goes on to say that one aspect that receives attention is the language in which they are written. Dickens makes profuse use of the regional dialect in his novels. This adds a local tinge or colour to his novels. The dialect of which he makes the fullest use is the class dialect of the poor. His novels teem with poor characters and they are strewn here and there in most of his novels and his novels represent them in their own languages and dialects. The use of distinctive dialects, especially the *cant* variety (the variety which is distinctive of rascals and criminals), is prominent in the speech of two Street Runners Blathers and Duff. Further, the words *crack* for burglary and *blunt* for money are common in nineteenth-century thieves’ *slang*. In *Oliver Twist*, we find that Dickens gives proper language to each of his characters in keeping with the class he comes from.

### 24.2.1 *Oliver Twist*: A Novel of Protest and the Language of Protest:

*Oliver Twist*, the first of Dickens’s novels to be published in his own name, is far removed from *The Pickwick Papers* in both its atmosphere and its tone. As Elgar Johnson states in his biography of Dickens:

“From the sunny landscape of Pickwick, no more than dappled with shadow, *Oliver Twist* plunges into a confined world of darkness, and oppressive, lurid intensity from the workhouse to the criminal slum and the jail.”

Moreover, a critic, while describing the development of the story, called it a ‘*waking nightmare*’. We can imagine how the poverty and insecurity of Dickens’s early years must have affected his growth as a writer. Above all, he was determined never again to live in the deprived circumstances of his life at the shoe blacking factory. One motive behind his phenomenal energy and speed in writing was an overriding desire for personal success and security.

Dickens presents his characters in their true colours. He takes us through the dark recesses of the juvenile crime world. We find Nancy is caught in the mire of this crime world and she finds a way out of it to be quite difficult. Her screaming in Chapter XVI at Fagin gives us the large picture of the world of thieves, “the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home and you are wretch that drove us to them long ago, and that will keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die.”

The above lines sensitize us to the world of crimes and criminals and the cry of a character like Nancy moves us like anything. Young homeless boys are driven to crime and Oliver is one typical example of how these young boys are allured to it. As reflected in *Oliver Twist*, when a young boy gets trapped in the nightmarish world of crime, it is quite hard to return. Thus, it is a real deathtrap after a small-time flash of joy. Dickens nicely captures the attendant pains and joys of this world of crime in the language it deserves.

***Check your Progress***

1. How many chapters does *Oliver Twist* contain?

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**24.2.2 The Language and the Oppressive Environs:**

Dickens began writing *Oliver Twist* three years after a new system of administering relief to the poor was set up and named the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The first seven chapters of *Oliver Twist* are set in and around a workhouse established under the new system. It is their way of working, thoroughly described to the minutest of details in these chapters. Dickens protested against what he saw as the inhumanity and injustice of the new system.

The proposal for the changes in the Poor Laws was made by Royal Commission in 1934. The following quote unequivocally, in its tone and tenor, gives us the shabby picture of what the typical workhouse was all about:

By the workhouse system is meant having all relief through the workhouse, making this workhouse an uninviting place of wholesome restraint, preventing any of its inmates from going out or receiving visitors, disallowing beer and tobacco, and finding them work according to their ability.

The lofty yet hollow tone of moral superiority in the report conveys the chagrin that the Victorians felt towards the poor. They believed the poor were to blame for their own condition and that unemployment was evidence of bad character rather than of misfortune.

Before 1834 there were two separate ways of providing help to the poor. Those who were able-bodied but unable to support themselves on their income or incapable of finding work were provided with 'out relief' which enabled them to continue living in their own homes while gaining financial assistance from the parish. The non-able-bodied, on the other hand, including the aged, the infirm and the orphaned, were put into institutions called workhouses. Eventually, these workhouses, which had originally been intended to provide work for the unemployed, such as spinning and weaving, became the dumping ground for all sorts of destitute including lunatics and criminals. They acquired a very bad reputation. Not only were they being very inefficiently administered, but they were also proving extremely costly. By the 1830s reforms in the Poor Law were desperately needed, since the system was clearly being abused and the number of poor was steadily rising.

Dickens's language had to be a perfect match to the depressing conditions that the poor environs reflected. The author, through the words of the omniscient narrator, gives us a broad picture of the despicable conditions that the poor lived in. The choice of words seems to be perfect to match the degree of deprivation that they convey. The author parades the veneer of false morality and exposes the inhumanity and the regressive conditions in which the poor lived.

### **24.2.3 Dickens's Own Life and the Words of his Own:**

Dickens was just twenty-five years old when he began writing *Oliver Twist* in 1837. He was then still in the process of completing *The Pickwick Papers*. His first novel, but, before finishing *Oliver Twist* in 1838, he was already in the early stages of his third novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Furthermore, his methods of publishing added to the pressure. The novels came out in instalments, published each month, and so Dickens condemned himself to a rigorous writing regimen in which his material had to be produced by regular dates. There was never any possibility of revising a novel when he had completed the first draft because there was no such thing as a first draft: there were merely monthly instalments or, at some periods in his life, weekly instalments which Dickens rushed to the publisher as soon as they were completed. We know that the ending of *Oliver Twist* was written at a furious pace to meet such a deadline.

Another reason for the urgency of Dickens' writing many wells has been a desire to explore and understand the emotional hurts and deprivations he had experienced as a child. Throughout his novels, there are prisons, criminals, exploitation of the people and children who have to play the role of a parent and look after dependents, instead of being looked after by their parents. Oliver, himself, is an isolated and vulnerable child at the mercy of unsympathetic institutions or of explosive criminals for much of the novel. Similarly, Charles Dickens was, at a tender age, alone and exposed to a frightening world.

#### **24.2.4 *Oliver Twist* and the Jargon of the Times:**

Sylvère Monod while commenting on Dickens' style and way of writing says that he has steadily become "more of a fastidious stylist". He further attributes two adjectives to Dickens' writing- "mannered", and something teeming with "lyricism". Monod juxtaposes these twin qualities with Dickens' early works and remarks that the earlier works of Dickens seem to be lacking in these qualities. Now, let's analyze the speeches of different characters in *Oliver Twist* and mark their respective ways of pronunciation or style. The substandard and vulgar pronunciation of Gamfield in Chapter III is a good example of Cockney:

That's accause they damped the straw afore they lit it in the chimbley to make 'em come down agin, said Gamfield, that is all smoke, and no blaze, vereas smoke ain't o' no use at all in makin' a boy, for it only sends him to sleep, and that's wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, gen'lmen, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down with a run. It's humane too, gen'lmen, acause, even if they've stucvk in the chimbley, roastin' their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves'

Let us mark the following words in the above paragraph for their cockney pronunciation and see as to how their Cockney pronunciation is far removed from their Standard one: "*Acause is the standard because, afore is before, Chimbley is Chimney and agin is again and sinds is sends, vereas is whereas, vith is with and so on.*"

Furthermore, we notice that Barney, a young Jew, has a chronic catarrh which goes to affect his pronunciation of nasals [n] and [m].

#### **24.2.5 Giving the Characters their Perfect Mouth:**

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens went beyond his practice of manipulating idiolects to create memorable characters for his serial public. In his third and structurally eccentric novel, criminal characters seem to use slang as a code for moving without detection in a harsh ideology

constructed by England's "higher" orders; their flash or *cant* language, however, is also a decoding device for illuminating their plight at the hands of this higher social class. Their decisions and impulses to translate slang create spaces in the narrative in which we see them affirming their social and personal identities. An analysis of criminal slang—particularly in the Artful Dodger's trial scene—argues for a clearer sense of structure than is generally accorded the novel.

Thus, we see that there is a variety in the respective languages of various characters which can be identified with their class vis-a-vis their language and vice versa. Moreover, Dickens does not mince words in addressing a particular character and does not arrogate to him anything beyond his position and status.

#### **24.2.6. Special Use of Language and Symbols in *Oliver Twist*:**

*Oliver Twist* thrives on the special and symbolic use of words to connote certain thought processes which otherwise betrays any simpler description. For instance, ‘Have the goodness to look at me,’ said Bumble, fixing his eyes upon her. (‘If she stands such an eye as that’, said Mr Bumble to himself ...). The brackets used here are used as if the words couched within them are stage directions typical of a drama.

Moreover, there are some examples of *Neologism* as well. The term *Neologism* means the coinage of words. G. N. Leech calls it “Lexical Innovation”. In this context, in *Oliver Twist* we see Jack Dawkins, on finding Oliver greenish in complexion, tells Charles Bates jestingly that he is from Greenland:

‘A new pal’, replied Jack Dawkins, pulling Oliver forward.

‘Where did he come from?’

Greenland. Is Fagin upstairs?

The above use of words Green and Greenland is a typical example of Nonce-Use. There are among other linguistic and lexical innovations, many instances of Functional Conversion, Coinage, Compounding, Malapropism etc.

#### ***Check your Progress***

1. What does Neologism mean?

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### 24.2.7: Choosing Words for Comparison and Contrast:

To elaborate on the contrasts and comparisons in *Oliver Twist*, let's go through the following passage:

... the heavy bell of St Paul's tolled for the death of another day. Midnight had come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the jail, the madhouse; the chambers of birth and death, of health and sickness; the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of the child – midnight was upon them all." This is another moment of social levelling through the use of darkness: Dickens lists a lot of contrasting places – palaces, night-cellars (bars that didn't have liquor licenses), jails, madhouses, etc. – and also juxtaposes a lot of extremes: birth and death, sickness and health, corpses and sleeping children. Time passes for all of these extremes, and it's equally dark at midnight whether you live in a palace or a madhouse.

Now read the following passage for the matter of comparison with the above:

The sun – the bright sun, that brings back not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man – burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did.

The following passage is a philosophical treatise. The author talks about the sun as a selfless performer and an egalitarian entity. The author, through the medium of this description, serves an important moral purpose of preaching humanity about the futility, the pessimism.

“The sun, like midnight, is a social leveller – it shines equally on everybody, whether through expensive stained glass or a window mended with paper or duct tape. He even uses the word "equal" – the sun "shed its equal ray" – after juxtaposing a bunch of extremes ("costly-coloured glass" and "paper-mended window," and "cathedral dome" and "rotten crevice"). And no matter how dark it was, you can bet the sun is going to come out. Dickens even makes the parallel between "light" and "life" explicit here – the sun "brings back" both.”

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## 24.3 Learning Outcomes

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The learners should be able to:

- Locate the novel in the tradition as well as in its own milieu vis-à-vis the linguistic and structural aspects.
- Appreciate the special use of language in the representation of different characters of different social groups and classes.
- Understand the importance of language to the plot of the novel in general and *Oliver Twist* in particular.

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## 24.4 Glossary

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**Gruel:** A thin porridge

**Pauper:** A poor person or a destitute

**Choleric:** Someone who is given to anger

**Controvert:** Prove to be false or incorrect

**Domicile:** Place that someone lives at.

**Voracious:** Having a strong craving for food

**Mollify:** Appease someone's anxiety

**Beadle:** Minor official of the parish with a range of duties

**Daffy:** A widely used tonic named after its inventor Revd. Thomas Daffy

**Porringer:** A small bowl

**Per Diem:** Latin meaning 'each day'

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## 24.5 Sample Questions

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### 24.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is Mr. Bumble's favourite word.

- (a) Trick
- (b) Rash
- (c) Parochial
- (d) Parish

2. Malapropism is \_\_\_\_\_ .

- (a) Pronouncing words in a wrong manner.
- (b) Speaking many wrong words together

- (c) Talking a lot
- (d) Ludicrous misuse of words

3. \_\_\_\_\_ dialect is used by thieves?

- (a) Slang
- (b) Cant
- (c) Standard
- (d) Both a and b

4. Counting the names of all the sounds and sights of the scene in the morning in chapter XXI: countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass is an example of...

- (a) Hyperbole
- (b) Enumeration
- (c) Paradox
- (d) None of these

5. 'good unhealthy port' is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Simile
- (b) Metaphor
- (c) Oxymoron
- (d) None of these

6. In thieves' slang the word *trap* means \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Doctor
- (b) Driver
- (c) Police officer
- (d) Father

7. Named after its inventor, \_\_\_\_\_ tonics has been referred to in the novel *Oliver Twist*.

- (a) Honoto
- (b) Daffy
- (c) Trend
- (d) Traix

**State whether the following statements are true or false:**

1. *Oliver Twist* is written by Thomas Hardy. [      ]
2. Oliver is the protagonist of the novel. [      ]

3. *Oliver Twist* was published in 1890. [ ]

#### **24.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is malapropism?
2. Give two examples of usage of Double Negation in *Oliver Twist*.
3. Which particular variety of languages did the thieves use in the novel?
4. Identify the use of Enumeration in the text.
5. Write three sentences about the ending of the novel *Oliver Twist*.

#### **24.5.3 Long Answer Questions**

1. There are differences in the usage of language in *Oliver Twist* and other novels of the same era by Charles Dickens. Elaborate.
2. *Oliver Twist* is known for the usage of some special dialect as spoken in the Victorian era. Discuss.
3. How can we draw parallels and differences in the description of characters in relation to the languages they used? Elaborate with examples.

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### **24.6 Suggested Readings**

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1. Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist, intro*. Humphry House. London, 1949.
2. Fielding, K.J. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction*. Boston, 1965.

# MAUR101CCT

MAULANA AZAD NATIONAL URDU UNIVERSITY

Bachelor of Arts

U.G (UGEN301CCT) III SEMESTER EXAMINATION (December 2017)

Paper : BRITISH LITERATURE

Time: 3 hours

Max. Marks 70 marks

**Note:** This question paper consists of three parts:

Part – A, Part-B and Part-C. Number of words to answers each question is only indicative. Attempt all parts.

**Part–A** contains **10** compulsory questions of multiple choice/fill in the blank/very short answer type question. Answer all questions. Each question carries **1** mark.

**(10x1=10 marks)**

**Part-B** contains **08** questions of which students are supposed to answer **05** questions. Answer each question in approximately 200 words. Each question carries **06** marks.

**(5x6=30 marks)**

**Part-C** contains **05** questions of which students are supposed to answer **03** question. Answer each question in approximately 500 words. Each question carries **10** marks.

**(3x10=30 marks)**

## Part-A

### Question: 1

- (i) What is the sub – title of the novel *Oliver Twist*?
- (ii) What is a tragi – comedy?
- (iii) What is the year of publication of the novel *Oliver Twist*?
- (iv) What is a plot?
- (v) What is a round character?
- (vi) How many plays did Shakespeare write?
- (vii) In which year was the play *The Merchant of Venice* first performed?
- (viii) Jessica is a character in which drama?
- (ix) Nancy is a character in which novel?
- (x) Who is Mr. Giles?

## Part-B

- 2) Write a character sketch of Rose Maylie.
- 3) Comment on the life of orphans as depicted in *Oliver Twist*.
- 4) The conflict between purity and correction is central to the novel *Oliver Twist*. Justify.
- 5) Discuss the narrative technique used in the novel *Oliver Twist*.
- 6) Examine the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio.
- 7) Enlist the features of Shakespearean Comedies.

- 8) Write a character sketch of Nerissa.
- 9) Examine the plot construction of the play *The Merchant of Venice*.

**Part-C**

- 10) Is Shylock a villain or a victim? Substantiate your view with justification.
- 11) Write a character sketch of Portia.
- 12) Discuss *The Merchant of Venice* as a romantic comedy.
- 13) *Oliver Twist* is an unheroic hero. Justify.
- 14) Enlist the themes in the novel *Oliver Twist*.

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