

B.A. (HONS.) ENGLISH-DSC-14

B.A. (PROGRAMME) - MINOR

TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVEL

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC CORE COURSE
SEMESTER - V COURSE CREDITS- 4

AS PER THE UGCF-2022 AND NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

(FOR LIMITED CIRCULATION)



DEPARTMENT OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION
CAMPUS OF OPEN LEARNING, SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING, UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

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Published by:
Department of Distance and Continuing Education
Campus of Open Learning, School of Open Learning,
University of Delhi, Delhi-110007

Printed by:
School of Open Learning, University of Delhi



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Printed at: **Taxmann Publications Pvt. Ltd., 21/35, West Punjabi Bagh,
New Delhi - 110026 (4300 Copies, 2024)**



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Twentieth Century Novel

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Heart of Darkness

Joseph Conrad

Nalini Prabhakar

Structure

1. Learning Objectives
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1. Learning Objectives

This Lesson will enable you to understand the following:

- ◆ Historical context of *Heart of Darkness*
- ◆ Autobiographical elements in the novel
- ◆ Summary and critical commentary with emphasis on critical issues at work in the novel
- ◆ Narrative structure of the novel and the narrative techniques employed

2. Introduction

Joseph Conrad: A Biographical Sketch

Joseph Conrad was born on 3rd December, 1857, in Poland. His parents belonged to the Polish landed gentry. His father took part in a rebellion against Russia, as the part of Poland in which they lived was under Russian domination. The rebellion was foiled and the family was exiled to the north of Moscow. Conrad's mother died in exile when he was seven, and his father too died after their return to Poland. From the age of eleven he was under the care of his maternal uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski. Despite his uncle's



efforts Conrad did not take to formal education and had set his heart on going to sea. Despite family resistance, Conrad had his way and left Poland for Marseilles at the age of seventeen. He initially served in the French merchant navy for four years, and after that until 1894 he served in the British merchant navy. He started off as an ordinary seaman aboard a British freighter, and rose to the rank of a Captain. He travelled to the far East, India and Australia quite frequently. In 1886 he became a British Citizen.

In all, Conrad wrote thirty-one books and a large number of letters. His important novels include *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Typhoon* (1903), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911).

Heart of Darkness: Historical Context

The nineteenth century was notable for the Imperialist expansion carried out by European nations. This was nothing more than gross exploitation of the colonized lands and peoples. The Europeans however chose to vindicate imperialism on moral grounds. It was considered as a way of bringing enlightenment to the “uncivilized, savage” non-European races, in the form of superior religion, culture, and rational thought.

Ian Watt, in the article ‘Victorian Ethics, the New Science, and Colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*’, draws our attention to the influence of Darwinian philosophy in shaping the Imperialist rhetoric. He writes “merely by occupying or controlling most of the globe, the European nations had demonstrated that they were the fittest to survive; and the exportation of their various economic, political and religious institutions was therefore necessary step towards a higher form of human organization in the rest of the world.” (p.45) Watt further points out that Marlow by his repeated use of the metaphor of the darkness, for the interior of Africa towards which he is travelling, seems to be reiterating the Darwinian position of superior/inferior races.

This supremacist rhetoric of Imperialism came to be questioned only partially, by the end of 19th Century because of the discrepancy between the professed humanizing principles and the harsh truth of colonial exploitation. Until the middle of 19th Century Equatorial Africa was an unknown quantity. In 1875, only one-tenth of Africa had been turned into European colonies but by 1895, in a short span of twenty years more than ninety percent of Africa was colonized. This is the period when the “scramble for Africa” took place.

David Livingstone a Scottish missionary disappeared into east central Africa in 1866. Livingstone went there on a request from Royal Geographical society to look into the matter of five river basins of Southern Africa. Stanley went looking for Livingstone and found him in 1871 in Tanganyika. It was Stanley’s expedition that generated the interest of Belgian King Leopold II in Congo river basin peopled by independent tribal groups.



Despite lack of support from his government and people, Leopold II in his private capacity founded an organization called Societe Anonyme Belge Pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo, ostensibly to develop the upper Congo basin. Stanley entered the service of Leopold II in 1878, and from 1879 to 1889, he opened up the Congo basin by launching steamers and establishing stations along the river. At the end of Berlin conference (1884-85), Africa was partitioned into zones of influence and Congo free state came under the personal sovereignty of King Leopold II of Belgium. Compulsory collection of rubber and ivory led to cruel exploitation of the native population. The exploitation of the people and the resources was carried out under the guise of 'noble' cause, and the King entrusted the agents of the state to accomplish this. Ostensibly the mission of these agents was to , "continue the development of civilization in the centre of Equatorial Africa, receiving their inspiration directly from Berlin and Brussels. Placed face to face with primitive barbarism, grappling with sanguinary customs that date back thousands of years, they are obliged to reduce these gradually." (qtd. in Brinda Bose ed. Joseph Conrad *Heart of Darkness* p.4) Stanley was so inspired by this civilizing mission of Leopold II that he set forth to Congo "to relieve it of its horrors, rescue it from its oppressors, and save it from perdition." (Bose ed., p.4)

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the historical context of the novel *Heart of Darkness*.

Autobiographical Elements in the *Heart of Darkness*

The autobiographical element in *The Heart of Darkness* is very strong and it would be worthwhile to familiarize ourselves with Conrad's experience of the Congo, which is very similar to that of Marlow's in the text. In the year 1890, unable to find suitable merchant command he took employment with Brussel's based Societe Anonyme Belge Pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo as captain of one of the steamers owned by the company and which plied between Kinshasa and Stanley Falls on Congo River. It was Conrad's brief experience here, which became material for the *Heart of Darkness*.

Conrad in *A Personal Record* writes that at the age of nine while poring over a map of Africa he had put his finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent. In 1889, Conrad's position was the same as Marlow's "just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific China seas – a regular dose of the east.. and I was looking about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your home, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you" (HD p.28) For Conrad there was the other problem of shortage of money. He was in search of a command and like Marlow was reminded of



his boyhood dream of visiting the blank space in Central Africa which by then had “become a place of darkness”(HD p.28) Like Marlow he “set the women to work - to get a job” in Congo. Conrad’s aunt Marguerite Paradowska arranged a meeting with Captain Albert Thys. This interview is evoked in *The Heart of Darkness* where the Captain is described as “an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat”(HD p.31) In the novel Marlow replaces Fresleven, just as Conrad had replaced Freiesleben. Conrad’s impressions of his voyage down the coast find a faithful re-presentation in the novel. The disillusionment arising out of the discrepancy between the professed high goals and the actual reality of cruelty, death and exploitation, seems to have set in quite early in Conrad’s case, as is with Marlow. Conrad was horrified by what he had seen at the Company’s station at Matadi which is portrayed effectively in the “grove of death” incident of the novel. Marlow’s walk to the Central Station finds close resemblance to Conrad’s own, and also the subsequent event, i.e. the sunk steamer experience. Conrad, however, unlike Marlow did not wait for the steamer to be revived instead set sail as second-in-command to Captain Koch on the *Roi des Belges*. The *Roi des Belges* travelled up-river to Stanley Falls with the sole purpose of relieving seriously ill agent called Klein (Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*). Whether Kurtz is a total reproduction of the original Klein is not known but Conrad reinvents Klein in the form of Kurtz to represent a certain type of white man frequently encountered in Africa at that point of time.

On the whole, the four months experience of the Congo for Conrad totally belied the romantic expectations that he had cherished since boyhood. The Congo experience affected Conrad’s health and altered his outlook on life.

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the autobiographical elements in the *Heart of Darkness*.

3. Heart of Darkness

Heart of Darkness was first published in a serial form in *Blackwoods’s Magazine* from February to April 1899, and later in *Living Age* from 18th June to 4th August 1900. It was only in 1902 that it was published in a book form. *Heart of Darkness* consists of three long chapters.

3.1 Chapter I

Summary

Nellie a cruising yawl with her five passengers is waiting for the turn of tide to move into the open sea, from the Thames Estuary. There are five men on board Nellie – The



first narrator (whose name is not disclosed) the Director of Companies (captain and host), a lawyer, an accountant and finally Marlow. Of the five only Marlow is a professional sailor, the other four are men who work in the city and probably are week-end sailors; what binds and brings these five diverse men together is the fact that at some point of time in their lives they had “followed the sea”. While waiting for the tide to turn, Marlow tells the others of his experience in Africa. Marlow begins his narrative by confessing to the fascination he had for the River Congo (unnamed in the narrative) in the heart of Africa, ever since his childhood. This childhood dream was actualized when Marlow managed to obtain command of a steamer to travel up the river. The company which sponsored his journey is located in Brussels (unnamed). Marlow describes this city as a “whited sepulchre”. The “dead silence” of the city and the strange behaviour of the people in the company headquarters makes Marlow feel uneasy. This uneasiness begins to increase during the Journey to Africa. Marlow’s first glimpse of the colonialist enterprise is that of a French man-of-war shelling the interior from her off-shore anchorage, at no particular target for no particular purpose. The situation, essentially of purposelessness and brutality is reiterated at the outer station on the river. Black men are made to work for no particular purpose and if too weak to work are simply left to die. In direct contrast to this “gloomy circle of some inferno” is the company’s chief accountant meticulously dressed who keeps the company’s books in “apple pie order”. It is from the accountant that we first hear of Kurtz, the first class agent, whom Marlow would meet in the interior.

Eventually a Caravan comprising of sixty men embark on a two hundred mile trip by foot to the central station and reach after fifteen days. Upon reaching the central station, Marlow is greeted with the news that the steamer he was to command had sunk, when the manager had decided to leave for the inner station without waiting for Marlow. The manager of the central station was an unremarkable man, and although he was obeyed he did not inspire any love, fear or respect in his subordinates. The only reason he was a manager was because of his health, which had not succumbed to the diseases which had taken a toll on all the other agents.

The atmosphere at the central station is one of suspicion and mistrust and behind the pretence of philanthropy was pure and simple greed. The brick maker, the pilgrims and others were waiting to be appointed as agents to trading posts, so that they could earn percentages from procuring ivory. The manager and the brick maker are suspicious of Marlow because they think that he, like Kurtz has high connections within the company and is one of the “new gang of virtue”. Marlow is stranded at the central station for three months. Meanwhile a group of explorers led by the manager’s uncle arrive at the central station with the single objective of looting the riches Africa had on offer.



Critical Commentary

Nellie's Passengers

The first narrator remarks that the Director looks like a pilot “which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified” and suggests that his place is however “not out there in the luminous estuary” (HD p.23). His appearance is deceptive. He works in the city of London “within the brooding gloom” (HD p.23). The lawyer, who is the senior most member of the group is stretched out on the deck. The accountant is “toying architecturally” with some domino pieces referred to as “bones” made of ivory. Marlow is sitting in the posture of a Buddha, connoting intense meditation and contemplation in the hope of enlightenment. Except Marlow, the others have no names, just designations. The importance of this becomes evident in the narrative that follows, which is Marlow’s narrative. In Marlow’s narrative it is the directors, lawyers, accountants who figure prominently in the exploitation of Africa and its people and what is at stake is ivory.

The Setting

The novel has two settings. The first setting is the Cruising Yawl on the Thames River. The second setting is of the actual narrative – Brussels (Ivory Company) to Congo in Africa and then back to Brussels. The first narrator notes that there is a luminous space in the office, where the “sea and sky were welded together without a joint” (HD p.23) and a darkness “condensed into a mournful gloom” (HD p.23) over the city of London. The “darkness” here is not merely descriptive of the fading light of the setting sun, but rather symbolic of something sinister and monstrous of the city of London itself, a city where companies flourish. The first narrator is however ambivalent in his description of his surroundings. He also eulogises the nation’s heroes- adventurers, settlers, fighters, merchants “hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they had all gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of the spark from the sacred fire.” (HD p.25) The first narrator believes that often the colonizers carried the torch of enlightenment into the darkness.

Beginning of Marlow’s Narrative

In direct contrast to the first narrator’s eulogy of Britain’s glorious past, Marlow suddenly says “and this also has been one of the dark places of the earth.” (HD p.25) Marlow is referring to the primitive dark ages of Britain, when it was invaded by Romans. He however makes this distinction, that whereas the Romans were mere conquerors, the colonizers are saved by their possession of an idea, a philosophy for their actions. The



colonizer for Marlow is different from his Roman predecessor because he has something to believe in, an ideal in which he can repose his faith. Marlow is already aware of the contradiction here. He says “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly fatter noses than ourselves is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.” (HD p.27) but he nevertheless defends this conquest in the case of colonizers by arguing that it is redeemed by the “idea at the back of it; not a sentimental preference but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (HD p.27)

Marlow also seems to sympathize with the predicament of the young colonizer - “He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination too that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination- you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.” (HD p.27) Right at the beginning Marlow seems to be offering a defence for the moral darkness of Kurtz’s soul.

Marlow explains his boyhood fascination for maps, especially the blank spaces on them. The blank spaces remembered from his boyhood had been filled with “rivers and lakes and names.” (HD p.28) His interest is awakened in particular by a river which uncoils like a huge snake “with its head in the sea... and its tail lost in the depths of the land.” The snake like river fascinated him like it would a “silly little bird: on which it is about to prey”. Congo River is seen as a snake winding its way into the heart of darkest Africa, the serpent being a known symbol of evil and compelling influence in the Bible.

Death

There are many references to death- Brussels is described as “white sepulchre”. The two women knitting black wool in the company office, remind Marlow of Mythical fates “guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall”. (HD p.32) Marlow silently addresses them and says “we who are about to die, salute you.” Marlow is well aware that more than half of those who went into the “darkness” never returned.

The vacancy on the steamer that Marlow is about to fill arose with the death of his predecessor Fresleven. Images of wasted life and death confront Marlow as soon as he steps ashore and is walking towards the outer station.

Outer Station

This comprises of three wooden huts in an advanced state of dilapidation. There are men blasting away the cliff with little success and even less reason. Pieces of rusty machinery



are scattered around indicating waste and inefficiency. The supplies seem to be random and while some starve to death, others seem to live with abundance of food. Marlow is appalled by the spectre of men and women left to die in the grove of death. It is as if the blacks are viewed merely as machines for extracting ivory and then discarded when not of use. Marlow witnesses at close quarters the corruption, ugliness brought about by the abuse of power by the white men. Marlow narrates “I’ve seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed and the devil of hot desire; but by all the stars! There were strong lusty, red eyed’ devils that swayed and drove men.. men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly.” (HD p.37)

Marlow calls the grove of death the “gloomy circle of some inferno” and says, “They were dying slowly it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now- nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.” (HD p.38)

In this section there are a lot of references to black and white good and evil, dark and light and the reader has to decipher which is which.

Kurtz

Marlow sees a painting by Kurtz on the wall of the brick maker’s hut. It portrays a woman draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The brick maker tells Marlow that Kurtz is destined for great things with the company. He was sent as a special emissary by the company’s directors to promote European ideals. Slowly, Marlow begins to be intrigued by Kurtz. Kurtz is clearly envied by those at the station. He obtains more ivory than all the other agents put together. Kurtz painting is probably intended to represent the European ideals. Despite their praise of Kurtz, Marlow begins to suspect that they would rather have him out of their way. Marlow’s picture of Kurtz is through third parties and Marlow struggles with this incomplete picture of Kurtz.

Check Your Progress

1. According to Marlow how are the European colonizers different from the Roman conquerors?
2. Explain with examples Marlow’s critique of the colonial enterprise.



3.2 Chapter II

Summary

At the central station, it is purely by accident that Marlow overhears a conversation between the manager and his uncle who is the leader of the Eldorado Expedition. Marlow learns that the manager is deliberately trying to delay the departure of the steamer in the hope that this delay would hasten the death of Kurtz who is lying very ill at the inner station. The manager goes on to say that Kurtz had sent a large quantity of ivory of superior quality with his clerk. He further states that Kurtz had initially started on the journey but had turned back after three hundred miles and returned to the inner station. Marlow is fascinated by this image of Kurtz turning his back upon civilization to return to the interior of wilderness. This image of Kurtz urges Marlow to repair the steamer, to hasten his meeting with Kurtz. Working on the steamer also is Marlow's only way to keep a grip on reality and save himself from sinister realities of the heart of darkness.

The clerk had however reported that Kurtz was not in good health. The manager seems to envy Kurtz and the power that he seems to enjoy and is angling to obtain Kurtz's position. He strongly expresses the hope that Kurtz will either succumb to the harsh conditions of existence in the inner station or to the local diseases. Marlow is disturbed by their conversation and decides to reveal himself. The two men are startled and move away ignoring Marlow altogether. Soon after this the Eldorado Expedition we are told set off into the wilderness and nothing more was heard of them apart from the fact that all their donkeys died, with the implication that the men suffered a similar fate.

Marlow tells us that the journey up the river to the bank below Kurtz's station took about two months. According to Marlow "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings." (HD p.56)

For Marlow the journey "crawled" or "crept" towards Kurtz exclusively. Some fifty miles below the inner station they chance upon a hut of reeds with a message written on a piece of board "wood for you. Hurry up. Approach Cautiously." (HD p.61) It seems that the warning is not in vain. About eight miles from their destination they are so totally enveloped by a white blinding fog, that Marlow who had ordered the chain to be heaved in, in preparation for moving on, reverses his decision. Just then quite unexpectedly they hear a loud cry "of infinite desolation" which culminated in a "hurried outburst of almost intolerably excessive shrieking". (HD p.63) It ended as suddenly as it began, and Marlow says that "it seemed to me as though the mist itself had screamed." (HD p.63)



Marlow and the other whites fear an attack, but the natives on board seem to welcome this attack hoping that any casualty, would be handed over to them for their meal. Interestingly this is the only time that the leader of the native crew speaks “catch im’ he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth -;catch; him; Give im’ to us.” (HD p.64)

About one and a half miles from Kurtz’s station the steamboat is attacked by natives whose cries expressed sorrow and grief rather than aggression. All the white men except Marlow, as also the black helmsman seem incapable of restraint. Marlow shows great presence of mind in keeping the boat clear of snags and pulling the steam whistle which frightens their attackers. Marlow jumps ahead in the story and comments on his meeting with Kurtz. At the inner station just as Marlow sets anchor a Russian “harlequin” runs to the boat and tells Marlow stories of Kurtz. The Russian is in strong contrast to his surroundings. He is in complete awe of Kurtz and admits that Kurtz had “enlarged” his mind. The Russian also reveals that the boat was attacked on Kurtz orders and that the natives do not want Kurtz to leave with the crew.

Critical Commentary

The Landscape

This chapter includes some of the most mysterious passages of the novel. Passages such as “and this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect.” (HD p.57) A little later, “But suddenly as we struggled around a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy...We were cut off from comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a mad house.” (HD p.59) These passages seem to be Marlow’s way of trying to describe the transition from civilization to the primordial world. Marlow also seems to suggest that language is incapable of conveying the full horror of this part of Africa. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*, on the other hand writes that by using adjectives such as, “unspeakable rites”, “unspeakable secrets”, “monstrous passions”, “inconceivable mystery”, to describe the landscape and the Africans, “Conrad is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means.” (p.173)

When Marlow declares “we penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness”, he is summing up the purpose of his journey. The heart of darkness is Kurtz himself. The



narrative becomes more symbolic and the landscape becomes a psychological as much as a physical reality. Marlow therefore says, “The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a monster, but there you could look at a thing monstrous and free.” (HD p.59) The darkness of the landscape becomes symbolic for the darkness within Kurtz’s soul.

Marlow’s description of the landscape as wild, incomprehensible, inscrutable, unearthly, monstrous, and vengeful betrays the deep seated racist prejudice of the western mind with regard to civilizations different from their own civilization. The beauty of the landscape escapes him; a different way of life appears uncivilized and savage to him. Achebe in “An Image of Africa; Racism in the *Heart of Darkness*” rightly points out that the physical reality of Africa is being used “as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril”. (p.213)

The Journey to the Inner Station

The emphasis in this chapter is on the description of Marlow’s approach to the inner station. Marlow feels that he is travelling back to the primordial times. Apart from the manager of the central station and several pilgrims, Marlow’s crew consists of – boiler men, helmsman and several deckhands (all natives). Marlow begins to reflect on the nature of man. He realizes that the blacks are human and that the white men must recognize the bond that links all humanity. Marlow observes that the hippo meat that the Africans had brought with them for food had rotted and was thrown overboard and furthermore, the ‘cannibals’ could not afford to buy rations. Marlow argues that there was nothing to prevent the blacks from attacking the men on board, yet they did not. Marlow realizes that this is because the ‘cannibals’ lived by a certain ethical code and once Marlow acknowledges this, he begins to admire the fortitude with which the ‘cannibals’ seemed to battle their hunger.

With Marlow’s change in perspective there is also a growing empathy for the natives. This is illustrated in the part where the steamer is attacked with flying arrows. Whereas the white men grab their guns and start firing, the black helmsman continues to steer the boat through treacherous waters. When the helmsman is killed by a flying spear Marlow grieves for him and wonders if the trip to save Kurtz was worth the life of the black helmsman.

Despite Marlow’s shift in perspective vis-a-vis the natives, they are viewed through out as inferior beings. About the fireman Marlow comments “he was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and feather hat, walking on his hind legs.” (HD p.60) The fireman according to Marlow is useful because he has been told that if the water level in the water gauge reduces, the



evil spirit inside it will seek vengeance! The natives are denied language altogether. The one time the natives actually speak is to convey that the prisoners be given to the crew for a meal. Marlow does not credit the natives with any intelligence beyond instinct. One description of the natives here would suffice to illustrate this point. Marlow describes them as “a whirl of black limbs, mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy.” (HD p.59)

Although Marlow concedes that they are not inhuman, but this human face to him is “ugly”. “We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster but there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it- this suspicion of their not being inhuman.... They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity-like yours- the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly” (HD p.59)

Kurtz

In this section, Marlow’s story moves ahead in time to describe Kurtz. Kurtz’s inner station overflows with ivory, chiefly begotten by loot and plunder. He has built an army of natives who worship him as a god. According to Marlow, Kurtz had submitted himself to forces of darkness. Kurtz the poet, musician, writer, orator, visionary is reduced to a tyrannical brute, who rules with cruelty and hate. The line “exterminate all the brutes” written as a post-script at the end of the report for ‘The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs’ is an eloquent testimony to this. The report Marlow tells us was beautifully written, wherein Kurtz writes, “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded”. Between the script and the post-script we can chart the movement of Kurtz from good to evil, from light to the heart of darkness.

However the thought that Kurtz could also be dead fills Marlow with extreme disappointment and sorrow. But Kurtz was alive and Marlow not only sees him but hears him too. Marlow says of Kurtz “the Man presented himself as a voice... The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out prominently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words- the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible the pulsating stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.” (HD p.71) Kurtz was alive and Marlow says that Kurtz was “very little more than a voice” of Kurtz’s physical appearance Marlow describes as “The wilderness had patted him on the head and



behold it was like a ball an ivory ball; it had caressed him and – lo! - he had withered’ it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh and sealed his soul to his own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation.”(HD p.72)

For Kurtz everything began with ‘my’ – “My ivory”, “My intended”, “My station”, “My River”- the feeling that everything belonged to him induced by complete power that he enjoyed. But the point, according to Marlow is, how many powers of darkness did Kurtz belong to when he presided at midnight dances ending with “unspeakable rites” and had “ taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land.”(HD p.73)

Although Marlow proclaims that he is not trying to find excuses for Kurtz, he nonetheless tries to put up a strong defence for Kurtz’s actions. He directly addresses his listeners and asks them “stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums- how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man’s untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude.. utter silence when no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness.”(HD p.73) The seventeen page report written by Kurtz for the ‘International Society for Suppression of Savage Customs’ shows his initial idealism when he sincerely believed that “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.”(HD p.74) He also believed that to the ‘savages’ the whites appeared as deities with supernatural powers. It is perhaps this desire to be the omnipotent God, that Kurtz becomes just the opposite i.e. the devil incarnate. The post-script to this Report ‘Exterminate the Brutes’ scrawled much later shows what Kurtz had become. Marlow here seems to suggest that although Kurtz’s sympathies were in the right place, but in the absence of the policeman and butcher he had succumbed to the inherent devil and darkness of the place. The reader it seems is being prepared for the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz and Kurtz final act of degeneration.

Check Your Progress

1. Marlow’s description of the landscape and the people of Africa betrays a deep seated racist prejudice of the western mind. Explain with examples from the text.
2. Why is Marlow disappointed at the thought that Kurtz could be dead?
3. How is Kurtz described in this part of the novel?
4. What is the defence put up by Marlow for Kurtz’s actions?



3.3 Chapter III

Summary

“I looked at him , lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem” (HD p. 80). This is Marlow’s first reaction to the Russian Harlequin. He is astounded by the fact that with absolutely nothing to support him in the dangerous and hostile surroundings, the Harlequin was “thoughtlessly alive”. Marlow attributes this to his “pure, un-calculating, unpractical spirit of adventure” (HD p. 86). The harlequin is totally devoted to Kurtz despite the fact that Kurtz tried to kill him for a small lot of ivory which was given to the harlequin by the village chief.

His devotion is based on a simple principle, that Mr. Kurtz is not to be judged using parameters applied to ordinary human beings. It is from the harlequin that Marlow receives confirmation of what he had suspected all along regarding Kurtz’s accumulation of huge quantities of ivory. Kurtz raided and pillaged the country for ivory with the help of the tribesmen of the villages around the lake. The harlequin also says that for most of the time Kurtz lived with the tribe of the villages around the lake and only sometimes visited the inner station near the river. He also says that Kurtz “hated all this, and somehow he couldn’t get away” (HD p. 82).

The house at the inner station looked dilapidated and did not exhibit any signs of life. Marlow looking around the place with the binoculars shifts the focus to the house. The poles with round knobs, which Marlow had earlier considered as attempts at beautifying the house, suddenly take on a terrifying aspect when seen through the binoculars. The round knobs were the heads of the natives killed, and all the heads except one, were facing the house. Marlow, however clarifies that he was not ‘shocked’ but merely surprised, and unlike the manager is not willing to pass an opinion on Mr. Kurtz’s ‘methods’. Marlow’s own explanation is that Mr. Kurtz lacked “restraint in the gratification of his various lusts” (HD p. 83) and “hollow at the core” and this deficiency was found out by the wilderness which “whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things about which he had no conception till he took solace with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating” (HD p. 84). Marlow refuses to hear about the various “unspeakable rites” and “ceremonies” performed by Kurtz and cannot believe that the harlequin was trying to justify Kurtz’s abominable actions as products of a complex and extraordinary mind.

Kurtz finally appears carried on a stretcher, and to prevent Kurtz’s departure the natives materialize from the bushes “naked human beings – with spears in their hands, with



bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements....” (HD p. 85) Kurtz however speaks to them and they disappear into the forest. Marlow’s sees Kurtz for the first time through the binoculars. He describes him as an “animated image of death carved out of old ivory.... I saw him open his mouth wide - it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him.” (HD p. 85) Kurtz is carried to the steamer and laid down in one of the small cabins. Marlow is “struck by the fire of his eyes”, and thinks that although Kurtz looked like a “Shadow”, he was not in pain or exhaustion from the disease. On the contrary, Kurtz looked “satiated and calm”. Following the harlequin’s gaze, Marlow spots the figure of a wild, gorgeous woman moving from right to left on the shore. She stands at the edge of the water, her aspect full of “sorrow” and, “dumb pain”. (This is Kurtz’s mistress) Marlow overhears Kurtz telling the manager angrily that he will return to carry out his ideas.

Between the two nightmares i.e. the manager and Kurtz, Marlow chooses Kurtz and when the manager criticizes Kurtz for his “unsound method” and “want of judgement”, Marlow calls him a “remarkable man”. Marlow also promises the harlequin that he will safeguard Kurtz’s reputation. It is shortly after midnight that Marlow is called to be “loyal to the nightmare of my choice”. Deep within the forest there is a fire, beating of the drums and the drone of wild incantation, and Marlow finds Kurtz crawling towards it. Marlow tells Kurtz that he would be “utterly lost” if he gives in to the spell cast by the wilderness. Marlow seems to believe that it is the spell of wilderness that causes the “awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts”, which Kurtz is unable to resist. Marlow is a witness to the struggle within Kurtz soul– “I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself”(HD p.93) The next afternoon when the steamer is about to leave, the natives make one more effort to prevent Kurtz from leaving, but all except Kurtz’s mistress disperse when Marlow pulls repeatedly the string of the whistle. As on the earlier occasion the sound of the whistle frightens them away.

Marlow is the chosen audience for Kurtz’s discourse on the noble and lofty ideas of the original Kurtz, as also the self- aggrandizing utterances of the morally degenerate Kurtz. Kurtz’s soul vacillated between love and hate of all his atrocities and evil deeds. When the steamer breaks down on the way and help for Kurtz is delayed, Kurtz gives Marlow a packet of papers and a photograph for safe keeping. Marlow is also witness to the last coherent moments of Kurtz, before his death. He says “Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn’t touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an



intense and hopeless despair. The Horror! The Horror” (HD pp. 95-96). Marlow believes that Kurtz has pronounced a judgement “upon the adventures of his soul on this earth” by his utterance ‘The Horror, The Horror.’

The manager’s boy in a tone of contempt announces the death of Kurtz “Mistah Kurtz – he dead” (HD p. 96).

Marlow himself almost died, and the close brush with death made him more loyal to the “nightmare” that was Kurtz. He explains this loyalty thus: “True, he made that last stride, he stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom and all the truth, and all the sincerity are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. ...Better his cry - much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory” (HD p. 97).

“The Horror” uttered with conviction and a note of revolt, according to Marlow was a “glimpsed truth,” of a remarkable man who had stepped over the precipice and glimpsed the truth, that the evil at the heart of darkness was not outside but within his own soul; judged and recognized it as such.

Marlow returns to the “sepulchral” city once again to be nursed to health by his aunt. Marlow gives the report on the ‘Suppression of Savage Customs’ to a journalist for publication but tears off the post-script, “Exterminate all the brutes.” As an act of “unconscious loyalty” to the memory of Kurtz, Marlow decides to give the photograph and a slim packet of letters in person to Kurtz’s ‘Intended’. He is haunted by the image of Kurtz “a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night....” (HD p. 100) Although it was more than a year since Kurtz’s death, his ‘Intended’ was still in mourning, and seemed as if she would mourn forever. She describes Kurtz as a great man to whom people were drawn by the power of his eloquence. For her “of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains - nothing but a memory....” (HD p. 103) The Intended’s memory of Kurtz is diametrically opposite to Marlow’s memory of Kurtz. When she says that “He died as he lived”, Marlow with a dull anger replies, “His end, was in every way worthy of his life.” The irony is evident to us, readers. The anger however is replaced by pity for the woman, and he lies to her and tells her that Kurtz died with her name on his lips. This lie is in keeping with Marlow’s belief that women should be allowed “to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse.” (HD p. 72).

Marlow’s narrative ends here and the frame narrator closes the narrative.



Critical Commentary

In the previous chapters we have seen how Marlow is critical of the colonial enterprise of the whites. Their cruelty, their greed, is described by him in some very extremely evocative images. We have also seen the inherent racism in Marlow's description of the natives, their language, physical attributes, food habits, and dress. It is also evident in the description of the landscape, whereby its darkness, mysteriousness and wildness, becomes a metaphor for evil.

Marlow is aware that Kurtz collected more ivory than all the other agents by employing inhuman, savage, barbaric means. The heads of the natives displayed on stakes is an eloquent testimony to this. He also says that the loss of the helmsman's life was not worth that of saving Kurtz. Kurtz pillaged, plundered, looted and had acquired for himself the status of a God amongst the natives. Nonetheless, Marlow chooses to preserve Kurtz's reputation, and tries to account for his actions.

Marlow calls his loyalty to Kurtz as a "nightmare of my choice". Why does Marlow feel compelled to hide the inner truth, the reality of Kurtz?

Heart of Darkness has often been interpreted as a journey into the depths of a man's soul, especially of the evil within it. This interpretation echoes the biblical story of the Fall, and the Faustian myth. Marlow's loyalty to Kurtz's memory despite all his evil deeds is because of Kurtz's "glimpsed truth", of the recognition of the evil nature of his deeds, and the probable repentance by Kurtz in that whisper "The Horror, the Horror."

Marlow is reluctant to attribute agency to Kurtz for his evil deeds. It is the landscape of Africa that is given the agency; the Satan that corrupts Kurtz's soul and claims for its own. Marlow explains, the wilderness "has taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his views, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to his own..." (HD p. 72)

The cry "The Horror" to Marlow was a "moral victory" an affirmation by Kurtz of the evil that had possessed him and his cry was a judgement on the same. Marlow believes that like Kurtz everyone experiences that moment when one could step over the edge into the world of evil. Most of us however do not, because we are caught within the boundaries of the "butcher" "the policeman" and "public opinion". In the absence of these regulators, in the wilderness/darkness of Africa, Kurtz surrendered to the "gratification of his various lusts."

This rather elaborate explanation of Kurtz's actions by Marlow at various stages in the narrative must be seen in the context of the representation of Africa by the western world, as a place of darkness and evil inhabited by savages and cannibals. Achebe in "An Image of Africa; Racism in the *Heart of Darkness*" contests this representation of Africa and calls Conrad a "thorough going racist". To all those who reduce Africa to a



mere backdrop, a setting, he writes:, “Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor, Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?” (p. 213)

Feminist critics have often pointed out that the domain of voyages, adventures, and empire building, completely excludes women, who only serve either as fringe elements or as passive supporters of the Imperialist enterprise. What we have in *Heart of Darkness* in terms of female representation is two stereotypes; (1) the white lady in the tower (the Intended), who must be protected from the evil of the outside world and (2) the black savage queen, explicitly connected to the wilderness and darkness. Marlow’s description of these two women only reinforces the stereotypes. The Intended is described as “a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk....She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering....This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which her dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound confident, and trustful.” (HD p. 101) The black mistress is on the other hand described as the exact opposite- “She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent....She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.” (HD p. 87) From the descriptions it is evident that neither of them has any agency and their identity is dependent on Kurtz. What binds them together is the sorrow and grief caused by Kurtz’s absence.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a brief note on the Russian harlequin.
2. Discuss in detail the reasons for Marlow’s loyalty to Kurtz.

4. Narrative Structure, Setting and Timeline

Heart of Darkness essentially is a story within a story. Marlow is narrating the story of his experience in Africa to the occupants of Nellie a cruising yawl docked in Thames estuary. One of the listeners, is re-narrating Marlow’s story, and this unnamed narrator provides a frame for Marlow’s narrative. The setting of the frame narrative as noted already is the Thames river. Marlow’s narrative however begins from the sepulchral city (Brussels) moves to Africa and concludes in Brussels. It takes Marlow upwards of 30 days to reach the outer station. He had to wait there for 10 days before starting out for the central station. He reaches the central station after 15 days. The repairs to the steamer



took another three months. Two months post that they reach the inner station. Marlow's narrative comes to an end more than a year after this.

5. Narrative Technique

The story ostensibly is being narrated by Marlow, but a large part of this narrative is through multiple voices, and a vivid evocation of the spirit of the landscape, much before the appearance of Kurtz. It is from these aspects surrounding, enveloping the “kernel”, that we make sense of the narrative. This sense is however not complete, but only partial glimpses that allow us a peek into the “enigma” that is Kurtz.

Early on in the narrative Marlow asks his listeners, “It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams... No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone.” (HD p. 49) Marlow here is drawing the attention of his listeners to the inadequacy of words to communicate the essence of his experiences in Africa.

To overcome this discrepancy Marlow uses various techniques to capture and recreate the sensory impressions to bring his listeners as close as possible to his real life experiences. Marlow's attempt here is to use language in special ways whereby the listeners imaginatively can be present with Marlow on the entire journey. Ian Watt in the essay “Impressionism and Symbolism in *Heart of Darkness*” writes that Marlow's story telling has two distinct qualities, symbolist and impressionist. “These two qualities are suggested metaphorically, and may be geometry of the metaphor is symbolist because the meaning of the story, represented by the shell of the nut or the haze around the glow, is larger than its narrative vehicle, the kernel or the glow; but the sensory quality of the metaphor, the mist and haze, is essentially impressionist.” (p. 154)

Impressionism: Impressionism is a term used in connection with the paintings of a group of French artists, notable among them being Monet. Their work did not have the meticulous details of conventional artists, instead tried to portray a visual impression of a specific moment that makes a powerful impact on the senses. The subject in the impressionistic paintings is seen through the atmospheric conditions in which it is set and their interpretation is left to the viewer. The frame narrator right at the start hints that Marlow's method of telling a story is different from that of his counterparts. The meaning



of Marlow's narrative was not inside (kernel) the cracked nut but outside "enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine". The narrator also tells us that they were about to hear one of Marlow's "inconclusive experiences".

In the *Heart of Darkness* the images of the mist and the haze are impressionistic, and is an essential component of our understanding of the narrative. The haze and the mist point to the ambiguous nature of individual understanding of a given situation or a person. Marlow's knowledge of Kurtz from various sources as also from his own interaction is not complete, yet has the power to alter his own perception of the world.

Marlow describes the landscape and occurrences as he travels up the river, in terms of how he experiences them and leaves the interpretation to the listeners. Let us look at some examples from the text.

1. "... there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roots, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs; a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage." (HD p. 59)
2. "A complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed." (HD p. 63)
3. "I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, – the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour." (HD p. 68)

Ian Watt also points out another impressionistic narrative device, "delayed decoding", which "combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning. Through this device...the reader participates in the instantaneous sensations, and is made to see." (p. 156) By using this device Marlow presents a sense impression, the meaning of which becomes clear only later. For instance, Marlow refers to "little sticks flying about-thick" and realizes later that they are arrows and that they were being shot at. Similarly he mistakes the round globes on poles around the inner station as some form of ornament and later when viewing the same through a binoculars realizes it is the heads of the natives.



Symbolism

The images of darkness, mist and haze have a symbolic significance and play an important role in our understanding and interpretation of the narrative. The ‘darkness’ is not only the physical reality of the landscape but also refers to the darkness within Kurtz soul and also the darkness that lurks within each one of us, which is kept in check by societal regulators. The mist and haze are symbolic of the ambiguity that envelops human beings and their actions, and the impossibility of completely understanding of the same. The grove of death and the heads on the poles at the inner station symbolize the cruel and inhuman nature of the colonial enterprise. The journey from the outer to central to inner station is symbolic of an inner journey into the self, and the unconscious.

Some of the characters too are symbolic. The native mistress who is described as ‘gorgeous’, ‘magnificent’, ‘superb’ symbolizes the wild energy of Africa, where as the intended represents the European idealism. The woman holding a lighted torch in the painting could be the ‘Intended’, but the painting itself is strongly ironic because the woman who carries the torch is herself blind and cannot see the light. The two women in the company office continuously knitting are symbolic of the Fates in classical mythology, who determine the course of the man’s life.

The imagery of “light and darkness” pervades the entire narrative, suggesting the darkness at the heart of the shining civilization, “a brooding gloom in sunshine,” (HD p.25)

6. Summing Up

In this lesson we have 1. Contextualized the narrative from a historical perspective. 2. Summarized the three chapters in the novel, and critically analysed it. In our analysis we have seen how the racist prejudices of the white colonizers surface in the narrative. We have also seen how the text can be read as a critique of colonialism. At a metaphysical level, we have analysed the narrative as a journey into the soul of Kurtz, and also as a journey of self-discovery for Marlow. We have also looked at the narrative structure and also the narrative techniques at play in the novel.

7. Works Cited

Note: All textual references to *Heart of Darkness* (HD) are from:

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Sons and Lovers

D. H. Lawrence

V.P. Sharma

Structure

1. Learning Objectives
2. Introduction
3. Life Sketch of D.H. Lawrence
4. Lawrence's Life: A Chronological Table
5. Critical Summary
6. Summing Up

1. Learning Objectives

This study material will enable you to:

- ◆ Situate Lawrence in the modern tradition
- ◆ Identify the autobiographical elements that have a strong bearing on the novel
- ◆ Critically analyse the novel and understand the various issues at work in it

2. Introduction

This introduction is designed to give you an idea of the kind of material that has gone into this novel. It focuses primarily on two things: its modern sensibility and its strongly autobiographical note. The discussion on both these counts, will be brief. If you are acquainted with the social and literary background of the modern age, then you can see how much of the modernity is there in *Sons and Lovers*. If you keep in mind the life sketch of the author, which follows the *Introduction*, you should be able to see how much of Lawrence's own life goes into the novel. And it is best to make your own judgement.

Sons and Lovers, published in 1913, is one of the earliest novels of D.H. Lawrence and also his most popular novel except, perhaps, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which gained a dubious kind of popularity for its so-called pornographic material and was banned in England (and many other countries including India).



The first thing to note about Lawrence is his modern sensibility – modern not in the sense of his being a 20th century writer but in terms of historical discontinuity. This discontinuity is to be seen both in form and content of modern literature. The 19th century fiction had in general an organic wholeness and a compactness in plot. But the form (as we know it in the 19th century fiction) now tends to break down and the plot no longer seems to be tight. The moral vision of George Eliot and the economic vitality of Charles Dickens are at a discount in modern literature.

The break from the Victorian norms has made the anti-cultural bias the most important attribute of modern imagination so that individual existence has gained precedence over social man, unconscious feeling over self-conscious perception, passion and will over intellect and morals and dynamic vision over static image, with the result that two basic themes of modern literature have been those of ‘isolation’ and of ‘relationship’ within what has been considered a decaying moral order.

As in any age, this change has been the product of the social transformation itself. If Darwin shook the Victorian society, Freud and Marx have done the same to the 20th century society. But even though discontinuity marks the transition from one age to the other, some of the tendencies of the former still get passed on. The despair following the loss of faith is transformed into a feeling of isolation and insecurity. If industrialisation and urbanisation led Hardy to lament the decline of the rural world, Lawrence looks for a source of vitality in the dehumanized environment: he boldly seeks to diagnose some of the psychic dangers besetting his society, and the potential source of strength from which they might be combatted. (John Holloway in *Pelican Guide* Vol. VI p. 81).

Man-woman relationship is the focus of Lawrence’s works but this alone in itself can hardly be called an original theme. But Lawrence brings to bear a keen psychological realism upon his subject and he makes sex the source of vitality in human life; it becomes the centre of the psychic forces that control and direct life. Many of the ‘highbrow’ critics and writers, heirs to the Victorian prudery and authoritarian private morality, raised their eyebrows at Lawrence’s rather frank discussion of sexual experiences and its importance in restoring harmony in man’s soul. He can indeed be shocking sometimes. But let us not pre-judge the issue. You must analyse the novel critically yourself and form your opinion of its merit and of Lawrence the writer. After all we have absolutely opposing views even among well-known critics. If T.S. Eliot dismisses Lawrence as a writer ‘suffering from a lack of intellectual and social training’ (a contemptuous reference to his working class origins) and Bertrand Russell calls him an ‘exploded prophet’, F.R. Leavis and John Holloway consider him to be one of the greatest writers of this century. In any case a controversial writer poses a greater challenge to a reader than does one who has received a perfect slot in critics’ opinion box.



The other point of note in Lawrence and in *Sons and Lovers*, in particular, is the autobiographical element. At least three of Lawrence's novels are autobiographical in nature, *Sons and Lovers* being the most so. In fact at many places it becomes difficult to see where autobiography leaves off and the novel begins. As Lawrence himself admits, "One sheds one's sicknesses in books – repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them." (Qtd. in Worthen, p. 26) "And so *Sons and Lover* comes to be a novel concerned with the creation of a damaged hero like his creator – "a hero almost irretrievably caught in his past... Paul Morel (is) tragically unable to do anything with his life except, finally, cling to the fact that he is alive, 'at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing'." (Worthen, p. 27) The question of how much of Lawrence's own life can be read in Paul Morel's story will need to be discussed in detail later. Let us at the moment only remember that *Sons and Lovers* is the tragedy of a young man whose mother possesses his soul so fiercely that he finds himself incapable of establishing a normal satisfying emotional relationship with any other woman. When the mother dies there is only a void in his life which cannot be filled. And this tragedy reflects a great deal of Lawrence's own tormented, unhappy life.

Check Your Progress

1. In terms of form and content, how is modern literature different from the Victorian literature?
2. How did industrialisation impact modern sensibility?
3. How is Lawrence's treatment of man-woman relationship different from that of his predecessors?

3. Life Sketch of D.H. Lawrence

David Herbert Lawrence was born in Eastwood, a small town at the centre of the Erewash Valley in Nottinghamshire. His father Arthur Lawrence was an uneducated coal-miner whereas his mother Lydia was the daughter of an engineer and was educated. She had even worked as a teacher for some time before her marriage. She had met Arthur at a party at Nottingham and was attracted by his graceful dancing, his musical voice, his gallant manner and his overflowing humour and good spirits. She had married him in spite of the class difference but was soon disillusioned. Theirs was a very unhappy married life. The father was a typical working class man. He was short-tempered at home but was quite popular with his fellow workers and liked to drink with them at the pub at night. The mother had pretensions of being a gentle-woman; she liked to discuss religion and



poetry. She didn't allow her children to speak the dialect of their father. They quarrelled frequently. The scarcity of money made their life more unhappy. It was in fact a struggle between the working class values of Arthur Lawrence and the middle class values of his wife, a struggle that never ceased.

She turned to her children for succour. She sought for a vicarious emotional fulfilment through their success in life. She hoped they would rise above their class. But her second son Arthur, who was the centre of her hopes and ambitions, died in London at an early age leaving her crushed. It was then, the younger son David's turn to receive his mother's attention. David was a delicate, sensitive child and had always been greatly attached to his mother. But now he came to take Arthur's place completely. After the husband had failed her she had taken her sons as her lovers. But if she was emotionally fulfilled the effect on her son David was disastrous. She so came to possess his soul that when he grew up he found it difficult to enter into a normal relationship with any other woman.

Lawrence first studied at the local Board School and then at Nottingham High School. He was an average student. He did win a small scholarship, which partly financed his studies at Nottingham, and even won a prize in Mathematics in 5th Form.

In 1901, Lawrence left school and began working as a clerk with J.H. Haywood, Nottingham, a surgical appliance manufacturer where he stayed for three months. He fell seriously ill in December 1901 and took almost five months to recover. But the illness brought the son and the mother closer together. Lawrence could never really tear himself away from her hold after this. In 1902 he joined the British School, Eastwood as pupil-teacher. This was one of the unhappy periods of his life for, he had to teach uncouth collier-boys in a huge room. Four years later a scholarship enabled him to enroll as a student with the Teacher Training Department of Nottingham University College. He was not very happy even here but he managed to qualify for the Teacher's Certificate and then began teaching at Davidson Road School, Croydon, South London.

Though Lawrence had already written a few poems and even completed the first draft of *The White Peacock*, it was only now that his writing career really began.

But a more important development must be taken note of before we discuss his writing career as this influenced both Lawrence the man and Lawrence the writer. In July 1901, he met Jessie Chambers whose family had moved to the Hags Farm, about two miles from Lawrences' residence only three years previously. Lawrence often walked or cycled to the Farm. Together they read a whole lot of fiction, poetry and serious prose. Lawrence taught her how to read French. Lawrence had started writing now and she encouraged him in it. In fact this intensely romantic girl simply adored the young Lawrence. The period between 1906 to 1908 was one of intense friendship between the two. And it was during this period



that he wrote the first draft of *The White Peacock*. But Lawrence's mother was jealous of this relationship for she was afraid that Jessie might draw him away from his mother even though the three had a holiday together in 1908 at Yarmouth: Lawrence knew that Jessie was necessary for his creative effort and yet the mother seemed to possess his very soul. The mother fixation was so strong that he broke off his six year old engagement with Jessie in November 1910 although they continued to meet. Less than a month later his mother died of cancer. There was a great emotional void in his life. But even otherwise his health had been very bad and he found the only antidote to sickness in hard work.

In 1912 Lawrence finally broke off with Jessie, a month after he met Frieda Weekley, wife of one of his former professors at Nottingham, and fell in love with her. He eloped with her and went to Germany. She secured a divorce from her husband in 1914 and Lawrence and Frieda were married soon after. Frieda seemed to have understood Lawrence better than any other woman. She cured him a good deal of his mother-fixation and although he was often irritable and they had bitter quarrels they always made up thanks largely to Frieda's patience.

Sons and Lovers appeared in 1913. This was his third novel after *The White Peacock* (1911) and *The Trespasser* (1912). It proved to be his most popular novel. Jessie Chambers had earlier read through a large part of the second draft and Frieda helped him with the final draft. And as you will see these women have been portrayed in the novel.

Lawrence's brief but most productive period had begun. But it also brought him more trouble. His novels dealt with sexual experience in a frank, uninhibited manner. It brought him into sharp conflict with the critics and the establishment. And a public already shaken by Freud's psychoanalysis was not yet ready to allow anyone to pry into what it considered their 'private' experiences. But Lawrence kept writing as 'venomously' as ever.

Lawrence got into trouble with the British authorities during the First World War because of his German wife. After the War they travelled widely – to Italy, Ceylon, Australia, America, Mexico. *Women in Love* (1920) brought him some money but he was falling ill regularly. He wrote at a hectic pace now - novels, short stories, poems, criticism. He returned to England, for a brief period in 1926 and then settled in Italy. His last and the most controversial novel was *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which was published in 1928. Already very ill, Lawrence had a hard time defending himself against the charge of obscenity. He did not deny pornography – and he said there was nothing wrong with it – but he denied obscenity in it. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was confiscated in England and in many other countries.

Lawrence moved to a sanatorium in Venice, France. He died an unhappy man on March 2, 1930.

**Check Your Progress**

1. How did the class conflict affect the married life of Lawrence's parents?
2. Who are the three women in Lawrence's life, who are portrayed in the novel?
3. How did Lydia's estrangement from her husband, alter her relationship with her sons?

4. Lawrence's Life: A Chronological Table

Year	Events
1885	<i>11 Sept</i> Birth at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England
1891	Attends Beauvale Board School, Eastwood (to 1898)
1898	Wins County Council Scholarship; enters Nottingham High School; daily train trip
1901	<i>July</i> Leaves Nottingham High School; meets Jessie Chambers <i>Winter</i> Begins work as clerk in Nottingham Dec. Serious illness
1902	<i>April</i> Convalescence at Skegness, Lincolnshire <i>Oct.</i> Becomes pupil-teacher at British School, Eastwood
1906	Student-University College Nottingham
1908	Teachers at Davidson Road School, Croydon
1910	<i>April-Nov.</i> Completes <i>The White Peacock</i> ; begins <i>The Trespasser</i> ; begins <i>Sons and Lovers</i> ; Breaks betrothal with Jessie Chambers <i>Dec.</i> Death of Mrs. Lawrence



- 1911 *The White Peacock* published
- 1912 Meets Frieda Weakley, breaks with Jessie; *The Trespasser* published
Feb.
Love Poems published
May
Sons & Lovers published
- 1914 Marriage with Frieda
- 1915 *Sept.*
The Rainbow published
Nov.
Suppression of *The Rainbow*
- 1918 New Poems published
- 1919 Very ill with flu; leaves England for Italy
- 1920 *Women in Love* published
- 1922 Trip to Ceylon, Australia, America, Mexico
- 1923 Returns to England
- 1924 Goes to America
- 1926 Seriously ill; trip to England
- 1928 *Lady Chatterley's Lover* published; attacked in British press as obscene
- 1929 *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Pansies (poems) seized
- 1930 Moves to a villa at Venice, France
2 March
Death of D.H. Lawrence

5. Critical Summary

Before you read this section, make sure that you have read the novel very thoroughly. There are certain things that we must look for in our analysis, apart from, of course, the plot development and character-growth. In fact, Lawrence is not known for much attention to plot. In *Sons and Lovers*, however, we do have a simple plot in which events follow in a chronological sequence. The author is always present, sometimes telling us about



the physical movements of the characters and sometimes (or rather all the time) leading us to the inmost recesses of their minds and showing us what is happening there. The character-interaction is brought to us less through verbal dialogues and more through the articulation of their thoughts and feelings by the author. As the characters struggle to control their feelings of love and hatred the author is there to tell us about it. In fact so much of the character conflict takes place in the arena of thoughts and feelings without being articulated that we should be baffled about the changing attitudes and relationships if we did not take careful note of them.

- (i) The markedly autobiographical nature of the novel should become apparent as you read it in the background of Lawrence's turbulent life. But the story sometimes diverges sharply from Lawrence's life history. Try to find out if such divergences serve an artistic purpose or if Lawrence brings them in to register a particular viewpoint of life.
- (ii) The novel deals predominantly with the theme of mother-fixation. The idea should not appear very original to our generation which has heard so much of Oedipal complex but let it be remembered that the idea was novel and in fact shocking to the generation of Lawrence's times. What makes Lawrence prophetic is the fact that he had possibly not read anything of Freud when he wrote *Sons and Lovers*. You will have to note the development of Paul Morel's relationship with his mother and its impact on his personality.
- (iii) The plot of the novel is primarily woven around the hero's relationships with three women, his mother, Miriam and Clara. The development of the three relationships is to be studied, but more important is the study of Paul's failure to achieve an emotional fulfilment with Miriam and Clara.
- (iv) An important aspect of the novel, though not central to its theme, is the conflict between the values of the working class and the middle class which is brought out in the description of the married life of Paul Morel's father and mother. There is an intensity about this description, obviously, because it is rooted in the author's own life story. Paul Morel's parents are modelled on Lawrence's own parents.
- (v) Finally, Lawrence's attitude to women. We will not take sides right now. There are feminists who denounce Lawrence for his total inability to understand a woman's character, but there are others who credit him with a faithful portrayal of woman's psychology. We will keep both in mind.

In outlining these objectives of study we are only suggesting to you to keep certain things in mind but we are not asking you to adopt a particular approach or a critical



viewpoint. Reading a novel for examination is somewhat different from reading it for enjoyment. In the former case you have to be careful about your reactions to the various aspects of a particular novel (we have tried to help you in the matter of these ‘various aspects’ of *Sons and Lovers*). They must be weighed against standard established critical opinion.

If, by the time this Study Material reaches you, you have read the novel but not read any criticism on it, so much the better. The time for standard critical viewpoints on *Sons and Lovers*, the time for taking a stand will come after you have known your own reactions to the novel.

5.1 CHAPTERS 1-6

1. The Early Married Life of the Morels

The novel begins with a description of the coal-mining region in Nottinghamshire where most of the action will take place. There were gin-pits all over the area which had been worked by individual miners since the time of Charles II. Then in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the gin-pits were elbowed aside by the vast coal miner¹ discovered in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire area. A big company, Carston, Waite and Co. took them over. Six large pits linked by the railway now dotted the countryside. The old dilapidated block of coal miner’s cottages in the Brook valley of Bestwood, “Hell Row” was burnt down and “The Bottoms” consisting of six blocks of miners’ dwellings came up.

“The houses themselves were substantial and very decent”(SL p.6) with little gardens in front. But the kitchen where families spent most of their time, opened onto a nasty alley of ash-pits “where the children played and the women gossiped and the men smoked.”(SL p.6)

The Morel family moved into the Bottoms. (Notice that the first introduction to the Morel family is through Mrs. Morel rather than her husband. Does it have any significance?) But Mrs. Morel was not very keen to do so for she was not really interested in associating with the colliers’ wives although her own husband was a miner.

Mother of a son and a daughter already, she was expecting her third child when they moved in.

Mrs. Gertrude Morel came from a middle class family, a good old burgher family. Her father George Coppard was an engineer. Gertrude had, like a true Coppard, clear, defiant blue eyes, a broad brow, a resolute bearing and a proud and unyielding temper.

1. Early coal pits using hoists worked by donkeys to draw up the coal.



She was thirty-one years old and had been married eight years now. She had met Walter Morel at a Christmas party. A twenty-seven year old young man from Erewash Valley, he was erect and smart with a rich, ringing laughter and she was fascinated by his dialect and his humour, that was soft, non-intellectual and warm, and his vigorous dancing. She herself was opposite. She was considered an intellectual and loved to talk on religion and poetry. To Walter Morel, who was every inch a working class man, she was a lady.

They were married next Christmas and for six months they were very happy. But then the bubble burst. Mrs. Morel was shocked to discover that her husband had lied about the house. Let alone the house, even the furniture did not yet belong to him. He had sworn not to drink. But the pledge did not last long. Mrs. Morel's paradise was shattered. She was not simply disillusioned, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness. There were frequent quarrels between the husband and the wife especially when they were short of money and Morel came home drunk:

At last Mrs. Morel despised her husband. She turned to the child (her first child, William): she turned from the father.... There began a battle between the husband and wife a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She sought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it- it drove him out of his mind. (SL p.18)

Paradoxically, instead of bringing them together, the first child only made them drift further apart. "Now she ceased to fret for his love; he was an outsider to her. This made life much more bearable." (SL p.20)

But the battle continued and both suffered, though the wife did more. He drank heavily, and always beer, especially on week-ends. His wages fell off as he had rather sharp tongue for his boss although he was quite popular with his fellow colliers.

Then one day there was a big battle when he came home after a ten mile walk to Nottingham with his friend Jerry Purdy. She said he was drunk which he denied. He called her a liar. Stung, Mrs. Morel did not spare him. "The house is filthy with you", (SL p.28) she cried. The fight continued and then Morel thrust her out, shutting the bolt behind her with a bang.

It was a cold night of August and the moon shone beautifully. The beauty and serenity of the lovely night suffused with the scent of the white lilies gave her a strange sensation. She felt at peace with herself. But it was getting chilly and she was afraid for her unborn child. Inside, Morel had, fallen asleep. After a great deal of knocking by her he opened the door to let her in.



Check Your Progress

1. Describe Gertrude Morel.
2. How did Gertrude meet Walter Morel?
3. What were the causes of discord between Gertrude and Walter?

2. The Birth of Paul, and another Battle

Then her third child was born, a child she had little wanted to bring into the world. It was a boy and that was great consolation:

The thought of being the mother of men was warming to her heart. She looked at the child. It had blue eyes, and a lot of fair hair, and was bonny. Her love came up hot in spite of everything. She had it in bed with her.
(SL p.37)

But Morel's reaction to the news was clumsy as ever. He went up to her, spoke "Bless him!" (SL p.38) rather mechanically and walked away awkwardly. He could not even bring himself to kiss her. Every such incident that reduced the already dim warmth of love between them took them further apart and made Mrs. Morel feel lonely. Her sons were her only hope. She had long given up trying to have serious conversation with her uncouth husband. But she enjoyed talking to the young Mr. Heaton, the congregationalist clergyman who regularly visited her. Sometimes he stayed to tea and she didn't mind it. His ideas seemed quaint and fantastic when he discussed a sermon, and she brought him down to earth with a brief comment. Morel was generally not at home when Mr. Heaton came and if he did happen to come early he did not hide his contempt for the poor Mr. Heaton and rather scared him.

And his behaviour was enough to start off a quarrel between husband and wife. When they fought the children were scared and they hated their father.

Then one day he hit her during a fight, though only accidentally, with a drawer he was trying to pull out. Mrs. Morel's brow was cut and bled profusely. He was sobered but she would not easily allow him to dress it. Mrs. Morel did not tell children what had happened but they could guess and they hated their father more now.

Check Your Progress

1. How did Mr. Morel's action at Paul's birth further the rift between him and his wife?
2. Who is Mr Heaton?
3. Why did the children despise their father?



3. The casting off of Morel - The Taking on of William

Morel fell seriously ill and Mrs. Morel had a difficult time nursing him for he was one of the worst patients imaginable. There was no love in her heart for him, yet she did not want him to die, for, 'still there was one part of her wanted him for herself.' (SL p.54)

The neighbours were very generous and saw to it that the family did not suffer for want of money. Morel recovered and the old hatred returned in Mrs. Morel's heart. But the fruit of the brief period of peace and tenderness between the two was another child, a boy. He was named Arthur, Paul was seventeen months old then.

As the children grew up, Morel came to be sidelined. Mrs. Morel diverted all her attention to her eldest son William. And William grew up to be a fine smart lad. He was as popular among girls as among boys. But his mother did not approve of the girls he met at dances. In fact the mother did not like his going to dances at all.

William worked hard and made steady progress from fourteen shillings a week job in the local Co-op office to a thirty shilling job in Nottingham. Mrs. Morel's dream of rising above her working class status was getting to be realised. And then he got a real jump with a hundred and twenty pounds a year job in London. William was excited but the mother was not very happy at the prospect of her son, in whom she had put so much hope, going away from her.

Mrs. Morel was unhappy not because she was a mother whose son was going away from her but also because she was seeking from him what her husband had failed to give her.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the two things about William which met with his mother's disapproval.
2. Why was Mrs. Morel not happy about William moving to London?

Critical Comments

The first chapter begins with a vivid but authentic description of East Midlands landscape which is to be the setting for much of the action in the novel. It is no ordinary neutral setting but one which has to be lived with and an ever present force in the lives of the miners as well as their families. The coal mines do not simply give employment to the miners, they govern their lives. Morel is so used to darkness that he loves to read his newspaper by the candle rather than in sunlight. The women folk and their children are always face to face with the ash-pits in the 'nasty' alley that forms the back lane of the houses in The Bottoms. The mines are responsible for much of the "poverty, the meanness, the ugliness of life" (SL p.9) as Mrs. Morel puts it. They create an environment



that brutalizes men and makes them insensitive. But it does not mean disharmony in the community. If *Sons and Lovers* is a critique of industrial capitalism, it is also a sensitive portrayal of the working class life with all its problems, and difficulties. But the 'insiders' have learnt to cope with them or to accept them; it is the 'outsiders' like Mrs. Morel who suffer because they cannot accept the situation as it is. When Morel falls ill or when Mrs. Morel is in confinement, the whole neighbourhood rushes to their help. It is this sense of a community that is significant in understanding the implications of the threat to the society from the aristocratic ruling class.

But apart from this, the first three chapters of the novel introduce us to a conflict between two different kinds of values, those of the working class and of the middle class. Mrs. Morel with her ideas of a genteel way of life comes to hate everything that her husband loves - his language, his drinking, his manners. She would like her children to rise above this kind of life.

But let us remember that the nature of the conflict is much too complex for such a simple explanation. After all she did marry a miner and she was happy for six months. Morel's lying and deceit shocks the Congregationalist heart of Mrs. Morel immensely. A woman of possessive nature, Mrs. Morel can no longer love him. And Morel couldn't care less. And so we find her transferring all her love to another man, her son William. Every fight with her husband distances her further from him, and the children are with her. There seems to be no end to the struggle between a brutal father and a wronged mother whose passion remains unsatisfied. But what of the son who is going to be the centre of attention of such a mother, a mother who is fiercely possessive? The ominous signs are there in her strong disapproval of her son's going to dances and meeting girls there.

You will have noted that the first character to be introduced to us is Mrs. Morel. And in fact the story is presented to us through Mrs. Morel's point of view, her reactions and her experience. This is going to be the trend. It is the character on the centre-stage whose impressions and experiences take the story further. It is Mrs. Morel now, it will be Paul later. But Mrs. Morel will never be irrelevant to the story. She is the dominant influence on his life now, actively moulding and shaping it. But even later when Paul takes charge of his own life or attempts to, she will remain a potent influence on his life. But Morel fades away as she discards him and adopts her sons as objects of her passion. He was important to the family as the bread winner but once the sons begin to earn, he becomes irrelevant and can be discarded and by the third chapter is already fading away. The process of his alienation which started with the birth of William will be completed when the children grow up.

The autobiographical contours of the novel have already begun to emerge in the parents. The contours will become more pronounced as Paul grows up.

**Check Your Progress**

1. The coal mines do not simply give employment to the miners, they govern their lives. Explain.
2. The discord between Gertrude and Walter is not only due to class conflict, but also due to their personalities. Do you agree?

4. The Young life of Paul

With the fourth chapter the focus has begun to shift to Paul who is to be the hero of the novel. Since William, whom he adored so much, has gone to London, Paul now followed his sister Annie everywhere and she was very fond of him.

Like William and Annie he too had ranged on his mother's side against their father. In fact his hatred was more intense. Morel continued to be as terrible as earlier even though after every encounter with his wife, it was he who was humbled morally. Paul could never forget coming home one day to find his mother with her eye swollen and discoloured and William glaring at his father. It was with great difficulty that the mother could prevent her son from hitting his father.

Afterwards the mother cried bitterly and the children were very miserable. But Morel had been further alienated from his children. Paul hated his father so much that he prayed very often, "Lord let my father die." (SL p. 76) Yet the family suffered intensely when the father did not come home from work at the usual 5 O'clock. They knew he has drinking at the pub but the anxiety remained. And then Paul prayed. "Let him not be killed at pit." (SL p. 76) Mrs. Morel suffered but now her children suffered with her.

When William was growing up the family had moved to a house on 'the brow of the hill' which commanded a full view of the valley. The children were happy in the morning. and happy playing here at night but their eyes were always full of anxiety and terror - terror born of what they heard at night as they lay in bed almost every night: their drunken father coming home, the quarrel with mother, the shouting, the father sometimes hitting the mother. And this mingled with the shrieking of the ash-tree in front of their house as the west wind swept through it. Suddenly there would be total silence.

The children told their mother everything about the day's happening. But not to their father. All conversation would stop as soon as he entered. He was an outsider. In fact any conversation beyond two or three sentences was impossible between the father and other members of the family. Morel was about as uncomfortable with them as they were with him.



The only time the father and the children were in harmony was when the father worked. Mending the boots or the kettle or doing some carpentry. Then he was in good humour and sang and talked to children about work in the mine, and the children were happy to listen to him.

As the children grew up Mrs. Morel came to be occupied wholly with their life, especially William the elder son. She had long given up her husband as a companion and a mate. She now sought in William the love and warmth which her husband had denied her.

Paul was growing up to be very attached to his mother and loved to help her in domestic chores. She did not realise it in her preoccupation with William. But she had Paul as companion now after William started going to Nottingham and later took a job in London. Soon William would go out of her life and Mrs. Morel would turn to her second son and the son will gladly accept her. But as yet he is only a child.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the children's relationship with their father.
2. Do you think Mrs. Morel is partly responsible for the hate that the children feel for their father?
3. What is your assessment of Mr. Morel?

5. Paul Launches into Life

With this chapter Paul begins to occupy the centre stage in the story. The chapter shows how much Paul, depends on his mother and how naturally and confidently she takes on the responsibility of launching him into a career. William had, in contrast, not depended so much on her even though her intimacy with him was much more passionate than with Paul.

The chapter begins with a description of an accident Morel had in the mines in which he hurt his leg badly and had to be hospitalised in Nottingham. The chapter reveals or rather confirms the distance that separates the husband and the wife:

She was grieved, and bitterly sorry for the man who was hurt so much. But still, in her heart of hearts, where the love should have burned, there was a blank... she felt indifferent to him and to his suffering. It hurt her most of all, this failure to love him, even when he roused her strong emotions.
(SL p. 100)

And this wasn't Mrs. Morel's attitude alone. The children seemed to share her indifference: "And whilst Morel was progressing favourably in the hospital, the family was extraordinary happy and peaceful." (SL p. 101)



Morel's only value, possibly, had been as the family's sole breadwinner. And the family was not badly off whilst Morel was in the hospital with money coming in from the employers, the sick club, the disability fund. And in fact as the children would begin to earn, Morel would be completely cast off.

But the chapter's real concern is Paul going out into the world and taking up a career. He was fourteen now but like all boys of his time and social status, he was looking for work. He was a sensitive boy and dreaded the first contact with anything. When he first went to the starting school at seven, he suffered terribly. When as a small boy he used to go out to collect his father's weekly wages on Fridays, the uncouth manners of the cashier and his clerk made him feel not only frightened but quite crushed as well. "And now that he felt he had to go out into life, he went through agonies of shrinking self-consciousness." (SL p. 102)

Paul had learnt some French, German and Mathematics that Mr. Heaton had taught him. He was a good painter too for his age. Thanks to his French he got a job in Nottingham with Thomas Jordan, manufacturer of surgical appliances. After the usual pangs, Paul found himself in harmony with the people in that untidy, dingy place. He specially became the darling of the girls working there. A new chapter had begun in Paul's Life.

6. Death in the family

This chapter focusses on William, the girlfriend to whom he is eventually engaged, his illness and death in London.

He had almost moved away from his mother both geographically and psychologically. Annie too had started working. And Arthur the youngest son was growing up into a restless young boy with an uncertain temper. They were all their mother's children and like her loathed the dirty, disgusting ways of their father who only became more irritable at the children's very obvious contempt of him.

Arthur went to live with one of his mother's sisters in Nottingham after he won a scholarship for the Grammar School there and only came home on week-ends. With William already in London Mrs. Morel now got closer to her second son Paul. She would talk to him about her day when he came home in the evening and Paul sat and listened patiently.

William came home on Christmas along with his fiancé Miss Lily Western. The girl with her airs of being a lady made everyone feel ill at ease but she ended up being rather clumsy and clownish. She didn't seem intelligent either. Poor William was hard put to defending her silly, childish behaviour to his mother. William knew that she was more in love with herself and more interested in the parties to which William took her rather than in him. And yet he was fatally drawn to her.



Meanwhile, Paul too had a diversion, in his acquaintance with the Leivers family at Willey farm. He had been introduced to them by Mrs. Morel. They were a family of three brothers and a sister, apart from the parents. It was a new and interesting experience for Paul going around the farm. The girl Miriam would play a major role in Paul's life.

Then tragedy struck, William died in London after a brief illness. Poor Mrs Morel was disconsolate for she had waited for him to grow up and give her what the husband could not. And the father too suffered: "never in his life would he go for a walk up Shepstone past the office where his son had worked, and he always avoided the cemetery." (SL p. 157) The mother was so distracted in her grief that she neglected her other children. Nothing that Paul said to her could rouse her to her senses. Then Paul fell seriously ill with pneumonia. Mrs. Morel suddenly realised "I should have watched the living, not the dead." (SL p. 156) His illness saved his mother. The mother nursed him day and night. Paul recovered and a perfect intimacy grew up between them. Mrs Morel's life now rooted itself in Paul.

Critical Comments

'The Young Life of Paul' deals with not only Paul, though largely it does so, it also describes the new relationships and attitudes that emerge as children begin to grow up. In a sense the father Mr. Morel is the deciding factor. The children see their mother being abused and battered by him. If there was only a blank in the mother's heart for him, there was intense hatred in their hearts for their father. Of course, the mother had brought them up to be different from their father. The children were, in a sense, her revenge upon her husband for his brutality to her.

But the chapter also throws hints that Mr. Morel is not altogether to blame. Mrs. Morel had consciously, or as a reaction to her husband's boorishness, developed an environment that was hostile to his working class ways. That is why there is a sense of harmony and togetherness when Morel is busy making or mending something. But otherwise his alienation from the family seems complete. The children would take great pains to please their mother to bring her a token of their affection or run errands for her while they would not even like to mention to their father about a prize that one of them might have won.

Paul forms a contrast to William. William is smart, athletic, energetic and is a sociable young man. Paul, on the other hand, is a sensitive, delicate boy who is content to be his mother's son and shrinks from first contact with anything and anyone. But it was to William that Mrs. Morel had turned for companionship and love denied by her husband and William had responded to it. When he went to London she turned to Paul. But William could not really get out of her hold on him. Part of the reason, but only part,



for the failure of William - Gyp (Miss Lily Western) relationship is to be sought in the mother's pull on the son. William's death, in Lawrence's own view, is the consequence of his unsuccessful efforts to break away from the mother's pull; if this is so the signs are ominous for she holds Paul's soul more fiercely than she did William's. And that perhaps is the most significant consequence of William's death.

Of course Paul, the young boy, himself adores his mother. When the mother suffers at the hands of her husband he too suffers and hates his father intensely. Unlike William who was always ambitious and a man about town, Paul is much too modest:

His ambition, as far as this great world's gear went, was quietly to earn his thirty five shillings a week somewhere near home, and then when his father died, have a cottage with his mother, paint and go out as he liked and live happily ever after. (SL p.102)

It looks like a childish dream but is a pointer to the shape of future mother-son relationship, nevertheless. One of the most important aspects of these chapters is the vividness in the description of the conflict between the husband and wife. The confrontation between a drunken husband and an angry wife at night, the bitter noisy quarrels, the physical violence, the eerie silence that follows vividly build up an atmosphere of fear, cruelty and pain, affects the children so deeply that their eyes retain the expression of terror long after the scene is over. Amid all this the ash-tree shrieking in the wind becomes an ominous symbol of the hateful strife between husband and wife.

Check Your Progress

1. Analyse the relationship between Mrs. Morel and her sons.
2. How do Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel grieve William's death?
3. What was Paul's modest ambition?

5.2. CHAPTERS 7-9

7. Lad-and-Girl-Love

The second part is wholly concerned with the emotional life of Paul Morel, his relationship with his mother and with Miriam, and the terrible conflict between the two, and later his relationship with Clara.

Miriam was shy, reserved but romantic in nature. Tied to her household drudgery and often humiliated by her brothers over even such trivial matters as the burning of potatoes, she imagined herself as some kind of a princess turned into a swine-girl. She hated her position and wanted to learn and read. Like her mother she was intensely religious.



Paul was fascinated by this atmosphere where everything took a religious value, so that Miriam's 'religious intensity, which made the world for her either a nunnery garden or a paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly, cruel thing'. (SL p. 164) But they both had a feeling for nature and their love started with it.

Paul's sketches brought him closer to the Leivers family, especially to Miriam. They took keen interest in them and made Paul glow with satisfaction with their appreciative comments. Miriam, of course, pondered longest over them. The sketches not only brought him into greater intimacy, they also revealed Paul and Miriam to each other. She would ask him why she liked a particular sketch. Paul would reply: "It's because – it's because there is shadow in it; it's more shimmery, as if I had painted the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere." (SL p. 167) But Paul could not really understand why she always looked so sad.

And he hated Miriam when she clasped her five-year old brother to her breast tightly in a display of her intensely possessive love. This intensity of emotion was in contrast to his reserve.

The conflict between his mother and Miriam was now beginning. He loved to sketch with his mother beside him but he always wanted to go and show it to Miriam. The mother would be angry when he returned home late after wandering in the woods with Miriam. Miriam, Mrs. Morel thought, will not let Paul become a man. She believed that Miriam would "suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left." (SL p. 180)

On a Good Friday, Paul organised a walk to Hemlock Stone. Apart from Annie, Arthur and Miriam, and her brother Geoffrey there were three more lads in the group. On Easter Monday, he led the same party to Wingfield Manor. The two excursions gave Miriam a chance to come closer to Paul and to understand his sensitive nature more intimately. But a sense of guilt now seemed to overpower Miriam. She did not know if she should love him: "O Lord, let me not love Paul Morel. Keep me from loving him, if I ought not to love him." And then in a religious fervour, "But, Lord, if it is Thy will that I should love him, make me love him- as Christ would, who died for the souls of men. Make me love him splendidly because he is Thy son." (SL p. 191) And like Christ she was willing to be a sacrifice.

Miriam used to call on Paul every Thursday evening and they would go together to the library in Bestwood. But Mrs. Morel resented her visits and made it very obvious to Miriam. So Miriam stopped going there, Paul refused to meet her elsewhere on these evenings. He would still not admit to himself that they were lovers: "The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract, such a matter of the soul, all thought and weary struggle into consciousness, that he saw it only as a platonic friendship." (SL p. 192)



Paul was twenty when he could afford to take the family for a holiday. It was a big party, the Morel family, some of Annie's friends, a friend of Paul's and, of course, Miriam. But Paul was excited that he was taking his mother on a holiday, Miriam did not get enough of him except when he was sketching and when the others were at the 'Coons' listening to songs.

Then one evening they went up the noisy seashore. It was dark and an orange moon shone in the sky as they walked back to their cottage through the gap in the sandhills and it was so quiet. Paul's blood was roused. But Miriam seemed to be deeply moved and religious and Paul could not get across to her in this state. Her "purity" as he saw it, would not let him give her a deep hug or even a kiss. Their intimacy was so abstract (or- so he thought) that he could not transmute it suddenly into anything physical. And he hated her for making him despise himself.

Check Your Progress

1. Miriam's 'religious intensity' prevented her relationship with Paul from being anything more than platonic. Do you agree?
2. How did Mrs. Morel react to Paul's relationship with Miriam?

8. Strife in Love

The battle between his mother and Miriam to assert their control over him now begins in right earnest and reaches a stage where Paul is forced to make a choice.

But since the novel describes the life history of the Morel family, which is a fictional transcript of Lawrence family, it touches upon the careers of other members of the Morel family as well.

Arthur had turned out to be a handsome but rather reckless young man and was often getting into trouble. Then one fine morning they received the news that he had gone and enlisted in the army. When he realized what he had done he wrote to his mother imploring her to help him out. She went and saw the officer in charge, the sergeant, but to no avail.

Meanwhile Paul was doing well as a painter. He did his mother proud by winning two first prizes at an exhibition in the Castle.

Then one day Paul met Miriam at the Castle Gate walking with a striking woman, "blonde, with a sullen expression, and a defiant carriage." (SL p. 204) This woman, whom Miriam introduced as Mrs. Clara Dawes, studiously ignored Paul when she found him watching her with a fixed gaze. Paul now remembered that Clara was the daughter of an old friend of Mrs. Leivers. She was separated from her husband Baxter Dawes who was



smith for Jordan's factory, making the irons for cripple instruments. After separation she had taken up women's rights and that interested Paul immensely.

Paul and Baxter Dawes disliked each other although there was no palpable reason for it except that Paul always looked at him with the curious but impersonal and deliberate gaze of an artist which put him into a fury. They hated each other from the first day. Clara Dawes was going to influence his life profoundly.

Paul was getting merciless in his criticism of Miriam. Her restraint, her reserve and her meditateness irritated him:

"Why can't you laugh?" he said "You never laugh laughter. You only laugh when something is odd or incongruous, and then it almost seems to hurt you." (SL p. 207)

And he thought he was affected by her religious fervour. "I'm so damned spiritual with you always!." (SL p. 207) Poor Miriam could not bring herself to say, "Then why don't you be otherwise?" But to Paul her "abstract purity" was the barrier to even a passionate kiss.

Miriam did make timid attempts at physical contact, gingerly running her hands down his sides as he stood with his back to her. And although his blood was roused he felt "she never realised the male he was." (SL p. 208)

On the other hand his mother found a real rival in Miriam for Paul's love:

"She exults-she exults as she carries him off from me", "she is not like an ordinary woman, who can leave my share in him. She wants to absorb him ... He will never be man on his own feet-she will suck him up." (SL p. 211)

Paul hated Miriam for causing his mother suffering and felt angry with the mother for suffering over his association with Miriam. But interestingly, he was with his mother in feeling that Miriam wanted the soul out of his body, not him. She wanted to draw all of him into her. And he told her as much.

Things finally came to a head when the mother saw her son being inexorably drawn towards Miriam. He was paying less attention to her than to Miriam. Once two loaves of bread burnt in the oven because he did not look to them while Miriam was there. And that was Mrs. Morel reason to pour out the lover's grievances to him: "It seems to me you like nothing and nobody else... Is there nobody else to talk to? ... Yes, I know it very well-I am old. And therefore I may stand aside you only want me to wait on you the rest is for Miriam." (SL p. 231)



Then like a lover, as Paul rose to bid her good night, she threw her arms around his neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and cried... “I can’t bear it.... And I’ve never-you know, Paul-I’ve never had a husband- not, really-”. (SL p. 231) Her voice was trembling with passionate love. When Morel came in - in his usual drunken state - he was like a rival to Paul who had now accepted his position as the son-lover. He hated his father. He could have hit his father after a quarrel over a trivial matter but Mrs. Morel, who was already ill with a bad heart, fainted and saved the situation. As he rose to go to bed-Paul said to his mother; “Sleep with Annie, mother, not with him.... Don’t sleep with him, mother.” (SL p. 233)

Check Your Progress

1. Describe Paul and Clara Dawes first meeting.
2. On what grounds does Paul criticise Miriam?
3. Do you agree with Mrs. Morel’s assessment that Miriam “will suck him(Paul) up”? Is this assessment also true for Mrs. Morel herself?

9. Defeat of Miriam

Paul had made his peace with his mother but he could not get away from Miriam. Spring came and the love-hate battle between him and Miriam began all over again. Miriam still had that old feeling that she was to be a sacrifice to his love. In fact she wanted to be. And Paul hated this. Paul battled with himself, he pitilessly criticised her for her eternal and abnormal craving to be loved rather than giving her love to anyone and finally he convinced himself that he did not love her. He told her so. And he was happy that he had come back to his mother. He had the feeling that he had made a self-sacrifice because he had to be faithful to his mother. But the mother could see this restlessness. He now fought against his mother almost as he had fought against Miriam.

Only a week later he was again at Willey’s farm telling Miriam they could be engaged if she thought it better. Miriam of course, could not say yes. But she knew he could not do without her. She wanted to prove it to him, so she asked him to come to Willey’s Farm and meet Clara Dawes:

She believed that there were in him desires for higher things, and desires for lower, and that the desire for the higher would conquer ...she forgot that the “higher” and “lower” were arbitrary. (SL p. 247)

Her expectations were belied. Paul took keen interest in Clara for he found a degree of sensuality in her very movements which Miriam lacked. Miriam was dismayed but she was confident he would come back to her.



But the mother was his first love. He took her to Lincoln's for an outing and almost felt like taking his girl out. He treated her to a lunch at a rather expensive place, bought her blue violets to stick in her coat and chafed when she ran short of breath while climbing up the Cathedral hill:

"Why can't a man have a young mother? What is she old for?"

And again,

"What are you old for!" he said, mad with his impotence. "Why can't you walk? Why can't you come with me to places?"

"And the mother knew that her son needed to fall in love with some woman who would - she did not know what". (SL p. 260)

About this time Annie got married. For some time the mother and her two sons were very depressed after Annie left with her husband. But Paul assured his mother he would never marry and never leave her. The mother knew better.

Clara had only made him more restless. There was a triangle of antagonism between Paul and Clara and Miriam; With Clara he took on a smart, worldly, mocking tone very antagonistic to Miriam. It did not matter what went before. She (Miriam) might be intimate and sad with him. Then as soon as Clara appeared, it all vanished, and he played to the new comer.

The battle between him and Miriam went on and on. She felt distressed that Paul could choose the lesser in place of the higher. Then when she turned twenty-one he wrote her a letter, a stinging letter in which he denounced her as a 'mystic nun': "In all our relations no body enters. I do not talk to you through the senses- rather through the spirit." (SL p. 269)

He thought he had finally broken off with her but Miriam was sure he only belonged to her.

Critical Comments

Chapter seven sees the hesitant beginning of a love affair between Paul and Miriam. But temperamentally they seem to be so different. Miriam, we are told, is romantic yet deeply religious. Paul's urge for a passionate, physical relationship finds no response in her patient, suffering nature.

As Paul sees it she reduces everything to abstraction. It is not the physical but the spiritual quality of a thing that attracts her. His sketches fascinate her when she sees a kind of shimmeriness in them.



We note here the absence of a proper narrative. Ordinary events and situations are used to weave the web of emotional life in which Paul and Miriam are caught. The autobiographical element in the identity of Paul with the author is getting stronger. What Paul says is often immediately endorsed by the author. In fact, the reader sometimes finds it perplexing. Paul's judgement of Miriam is a case in point. While Miriam's spirituality is the inhibiting factor in Paul's expression of love-at least that is what he thinks-Paul's inability to break free of his mother's hold over him is no less responsible for it, though he would not admit it.

The mother becomes openly resentful of her son's intimacy with Miriam for she thinks the young girl will possess him completely leaving nothing to her. In fact, it is she who is doing what she blames Miriam of. Paul knows that his mother does not want him to meet Miriam but he cannot keep away from her. Torn between the two of them Paul takes out his irritability on the weaker of the two Miriam. It is difficult to decide whether it is her religiosity or her immense patience which makes her bear with all that he inflicts upon her.

But if her spirituality enrages him, her timid attempts at physical contact with him make him shrink back. Her French diary is an open invitation to love but he cannot bring himself to kiss her face that is so close to his.

It is interesting that Paul is capable of more intimate physical contact (quite unlike that between a mother and son) with mother than with Miriam. The mother confesses her need for his love as a lover when she says, "And I've never - you know Paul - I've never had a husband - not really." (SL p. 231)

And the son responds. After the fight with his father (in chapter 8) who is like his rival, he implores his mother, like Hamlet, not to sleep with him (her husband).

A new complexity is introduced with the entry of Clara in the story. You will have noted that Miriam is introduced to Paul by Mrs. Morel and very soon Mrs. Morel is fighting to keep him to herself. Likewise Miriam introduces Paul to Clara and she loses him to Clara almost immediately. And, ironically, Miriam had hoped that Paul would really know her worth after he observed the 'commonness' of Clara. She is mistaken. Clara's indifferent attitude to him, her active interest in women's rights and the defiant gleam in her eyes are a challenge to his male psyche, especially, because he has seen enough of Miriam's religious fervour, her keenness to be a sacrifice and at the same time her fierce possessiveness. Clara comes as a relief. When spring comes, it only aggravates the tension between the two lovers, Paul and Miriam. Paul will soon move away from her to Clara.



The mother's attitude to Clara is rather ambivalent. She is not hostile to her as she is to Miriam. She is not sure if Clara is the right sort of nice woman for her son to fall in love with and marry. But she is quite sure that Clara does not threaten her sovereignty as Miriam did. Miriam is quickly sidelined as Paul gets closer to Clara.

The intimacy between the mother and son with all the sexual overtones comes out in their visit to Lincoln. He treats her and he says so clearly as his girl whom he is taking for an outing. He feels frustrated when she can't behave like a young girl and asks, "Why can't a man have a young mother?"

Paul's letter to Miriam towards the end of "Defeat of Miriam" brings out the irony of the changing relationships. Miriam had introduced Paul to Clara so that he could see the difference between her and Clara and recognise her worth. In fact he did see the difference though not the way Miriam would have liked it to be: "See you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun - as a, mystic monk to a mystic nun. Surely you esteem it best." (SL p. 268-69) The words go through Miriam like a barb in the wound but she is still sure he will come back to her some-day.

Check Your Progress

1. Mrs. Morel's expectation from her son is more in the nature of a lover than a mother. Explain with specific instances.
2. Why does Mrs. Morel find Clara more acceptable than Miriam?
3. What is Miriam's intention in introducing Paul to Clara? Does she succeed?
4. What impression do you get of Paul in the Lincoln outing?
5. How does Miriam's defeat come about?

5.3. CHAPTERS 10-15

10. Clara

Paul was now getting to be recognised as a painter. One of his landscape paintings won the first prize at the winter exhibition at Nottingham Castle and was sold for twenty guineas. Mrs. Morel was simply ecstatic over this achievement of her son. And she expected still better things from him. Perhaps her dreams were being realised. She frankly wished him to climb into middle class, a thing not very difficult now, she knew. But Paul said he liked common people for they had real warmth. Mrs. Morel did not subscribe to his romantic notions.

Paul was attracted to Clara. She got employment at Jordan's through Paul. In the beginning she was cold to him but gradually he discovered that her feminism was more or less a sequel to her emotionally unhappy life with her husband Baxter Dawes. He got



closer to her and she excited him sexually. Notice that the description of Clara as given to us through Paul's perception is very different from that of Miriam. As the author tells us, 'He loved Miriam with his soul. He grew warm at the thought of Clara....' (SL p.294) The contrast between "love with soul" and "growing warm" explains the whole difference. And he had a sense of guilt in listening to his blood rather than the soul. His duty, he thought, lay with Miriam but she only wanted 'a sort of soul union'. It was Clara who forced him to reconsider his opinion of Miriam:

"That she doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you. He pondered over this. Perhaps he was wrong."
(SL p. 296)

11. The Test on Miriam

Paul went back to Miriam when spring came. And again he found her virginity and spirituality as impregnable as ever although he seemed to realise his own 'over-strong virginity' as a barrier, too. "There seemed an eternal maidenhood about her.' But Paul was determined to test Miriam and himself. His problems were further compounded by the renewed coldness between him and his mother now that he had gone back to Miriam.

But he now courted her like a lover. And finally, Miriam gave herself up to him though not in passion but sacrifice. And Paul "realised that she had not been with him all that time, that her soul had stood apart in a sort of horror." (SL p. 304) But after it was over Miriam loved him deeply. He was tender and beautiful. But was Paul himself wholly committed?

They had some beautiful time together a whole week at Miriam's grandmother's cottage in Woodlinton. She had gone there to nurse her ailing grandmother, and Paul would often visit her. They had the cottage entirely to themselves when her grandmother went to stay with her daughter at Derby for a few days. It was not, however, a very happy experience. Miriam's reserve, which Paul considered her puritanic temperament, set against his passion only exposed the brittleness of their relationship. But Paul himself was no less to blame for the failure of the relationship.

Paul turned back to Clara even though he tried to convince himself that he still belonged to Miriam only. But he often hated Miriam and the old feeling that "she took all and gave nothing" returned.

In sheer exasperation he decided to break off. And he told her. Miriam was for once bitter and angry and thought that he was like an infant, "when it has drunk its fill, throws away and smashes the cup" and cried, "You are a child of four." (SL p. 313) She realised that deep down she had always tried to resist his domination over her. Now in her



freedom of him she could tell him, “Always - it has always been so! “...It has been one long battle between us-you fighting away from me.” (SL p. 314)

It stung him because it was the truth but more because he did not know that she knew it. So he left her and she was alone.

Check Your Progress

1. With regard to Miriam, what advice does Clara give Paul?
2. Miriam gave herself up to him though not in passion but sacrifice. Explain.
3. Why is Paul disappointed with the sexual aspect of his relationship with Miriam?
4. What is Miriam’s reaction when Paul breaks up with her?

12. Passion

After the break with Miriam Paul let himself go with Clara in a play of pure passion. The sense of guilt, which he often had earlier because he thought he would be betraying Miriam by going to Clara, was no longer there.

In the beginning Clara seemed cold and hesitant though it was not certainly the same thing as Miriam’s puritanic temper. But Paul was not to be discouraged. Every movement of her body roused his blood. If he touched her hand hot passion flowed through his loins.

They had a long lunch break at Jordan’s. He and Clara would often walk down together and roam around. They went one particular day to an isolated spot on the bank of river Trent after climbing down a steep slippery red clay cliff and walking through a slushy path to a tiny spot between two beech trees. And there Clara responded to his passion. Unlike in his relationship with Miriam, it was Paul who felt a little uneasy after the act. He asked her again and again if she felt like a sinner. (Compare this scene with the one in Chapter 7 where Paul is alone with Miriam among the sandhills and his blood is roused as an orange moon rises behind them. Yet he can’t bring himself to even kiss her). But, for the moment, he felt fulfilled. There was glow and quietness about her that made him glad.

Paul still kept up his acquaintance with Miriam. When she asked him about Clara he gave her enough hints about his intimacy with her. She was rather disconcerted and knew that what Paul was seeking was “baptism in the fire of passion” (SL p. 334), something that she could not provide but perhaps Clara could. He invited Clara to meet his family and Miriam came along, ostensibly, to meet Clara. And she discovered that ‘Clara had been accepted as she had never been.’ (SL p. 340) (Can you see why?)



Paul overhears Clara telling his mother that she hates the “blood-hound quality in Miriam” and his mother readily agreeing to it. Paul is furious that Clara should take the liberty of being critical of Miriam, and believes that Miriam is the “better woman of the two.” (SL p. 342) But when after Clara’s departure Paul, who seemed to have discovered a new excitement in life, asked his mother about her opinion of Clara she made a significant, a rather prophetic comment, “You will tire of her, my son; you know you will.” (SL p. 345)

Right now there was no stopping Paul. He stayed one night at Clara’s house having missed the last train to Bestwood after an evening at the theatre. Her mother seemed to resent it at first. But Paul would have liked Clara to be bold enough to sleep in his bedroom.

Check Your Progress

1. How is Paul’s relationship with Clara different from that with Miriam?

13. Baxter Dawes

Baxter Dawes, Clara’s husband comes in a big way in this chapter although there is much else in this chapter. In fact it is after a long time that there seems to be a significant movement in the plot. But although Paul, Baxter and Clara seem to form the eternal triangle of two men and a woman, Baxter is simply not a traditional villain.

Paul and Baxter clashed in a bar the day after Paul and Clara had visited the theatre. Obviously stung by jealousy Baxter provoked Paul, who threw a mug full of beer in his face, and ended up being thrown out of the bar.

Baxter, a strong and sturdy man, confronted him later at the Jordan’s bent upon punishing him even though Paul seemed to pay no need to him. When Mr. Jordan tried to intervene and warn Baxter he was rudely pushed away and slightly bruised. Baxter was dismissed from his job at the Jordan’s. He was hauled up but much to the annoyance of Mr. Jordan and Clara, Paul spoke the truth in the court and Baxter was let off with a warning.

Meanwhile, as Mrs. Morel had predicted, Paul was tired of the passion play with Clara. Once he had roused her she seemed to seek him out everywhere and all the time.

And now the mother had necessarily become distant from him. As in the case of his relationship with Miriam, Paul now often seemed to hate Clara. But for once he could look at himself critically:

“You know mother, I think there must be something the matter with me, that I can’t love. When she’s there, as a rule, I do love her. Sometimes, when I see her just a woman, I love her, Mother; but then, when she talks and criticizes. I often don’t listen to her.” (SL p. 365)



How does it compare with his attitude to Miriam earlier? Do you think he listened to her seriously? He realised the role of the mother in all this:

“I couldn’t belong to them. They seem to want me, and I can’t give it to them... And I never shall meet the right woman while you live.” (SL p. 365)

Clara knew he was going away from her. But “she took him simply because his need was bigger either than her or him. And her soul was still within her. She did this for him in his need even if he left her, for she loved him.” (SL p.368) Like Miriam she could sacrifice herself for him.

But she too no longer got the satisfaction out of their love-making. It seemed as if they were both seeking some sort of spiritual experience in sex and, missing that, were moving apart. In the spring they had a vacation by the seaside and stayed there as man and wife. But it only exposed them to each other’s sense of frustration.

Were they sated or had they discovered the inadequacy of sex to give them spiritual bliss? Or was it that the kind of communion they sought needed total commitment from both of them which was not there?

Baxter ironically, came to their support. She said she did not want to divorce Baxter because he belonged to her even though she did not belong to him. And Paul told her that she had treated Baxter rottenly expecting him to be a lily of the valley which he was not. She shocked him by commenting on Paul’s self-centredness: “But you’ve never come near to me. You can’t come out of yourself, you can’t. Baxter could do that better than you.” (SL p. 376) Do you notice any similarity between this comment and Miriam’s earlier? And so there was a constant battle between them which made them drift apart.

About this time Paul ran into Baxter Dawes while on his way to catch his train. It was night. Baxter did not miss his opportunity and bashed him up badly. Paul staggered home after he regained consciousness. But, ironically, the incident did not fill him with hatred or a feeling of revenge against Baxter. It only made him more distant from Clara.

Mrs. Morel had been keeping bad health for some time now. She went to live with her daughter Annie in Sheffield. There it was discovered that she had a tumor, possibly malignant. She was very weak and often had severe pain. But she insisted on going back home. When she reached home they knew she was dying.

Check Your Progress

1. “And I never shall meet the right woman while you live.” In the light of this statement, analyse Paul’s relationship with Miriam and Clara.
2. Why do Paul and Clara move away from each other?



14. The Release

Two things happen in this chapter. Mrs. Morel dies and Clara goes back to her husband. And even though both events were inevitable Paul was instrumental in hastening both. That is what 'The Release' is about, Paul's release from the two relationships which had almost destroyed him emotionally.

Mrs. Morel had cancer. She died a slow lingering death struggling till the end against it. In sheer desperation, Paul and Annie put her out of pain by giving her an excessive dose of morphia.

Paul met Baxter Dawes in the hospital at Sheffield where he happened to be after contracting typhoid. He seemed to be in a bad shape both physically and psychologically. After initial hostility Dawes responded to Paul's overtures of friendship:

In a way Morel felt guilty towards the other, and more or less responsible. And being in such a state of soul himself, he felt an almost painful nearness to Dawes, who was suffering and despairing, too. (SL p. 392)

Paul told Clara and she went to meet Baxter. They did not make up immediately but there was no hostility either between them, especially because she wanted to be humble and penitent. Her failure with Morel had given her a new perspective on Baxter's personality.

Paul went to see him again after his mother's death. In fact Baxter was staying at Paul's lodgings having nowhere else to go. Clara came there, too. She compared the two men. Her husband had more manly dignity while there was nothing stable about Paul. But Paul himself realised now how his mother's death had left a gap in his life. So long as she was alive there was no life possible for him without her, and now with her gone he was crumpled up and lonely. No one could help him. He bid good-bye to the two of them and left for Nottingham. Clara and Baxter Dawes were reunited.

15. Derelict

Life now had no meaning for him. In fact, every activity around seemed to be pointless to him: the people hurrying around or talking or the tramcars moving on the streets or even the first snowdrops of the season-nothing seemed real to him. Only the darkness was real. He reasoned with himself that he did not have to destroy himself because his mother was dead. But it was no use. He was completely broken. He wandered around aimlessly.

Then one day he ran into Miriam. Perhaps she could give meaning to his life. He invited her to his lodgings. Perhaps she could help him reconstruct his life. Miriam said they should marry. But Paul's old fears returned: "But-you love me so much, you want to put me in your pocket. And I should die there smothered." (SL p. 427) He wanted them



to begin a new life but on his terms. And she was quite sure they could do nothing unless they married. And there the dialogue that promised a new beginning ended.

Paul was left in his old state of misery moaning over the loss of his mother who alone had sustained him and, ironically, left him incapable of any existence without her. But in this state of total bleakness he tried to assert himself: “No, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city’s golden phosphorescence.” (SL p. 430) For once he moved away from darkness and silence towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly. But is Paul Morel capable of transforming himself by negating his entire past?

Check Your Progress

1. How does Mrs. Morel’s death affect Paul?

Critical Comments

Chapter Ten deals with the artistic and emotional development of Paul. Mrs. Morel is delighted at Paul’s success in bagging prizes for his paintings, for, after William’s death she has pinned all her hopes on Paul. He will move into middle class which will give her the satisfaction that she had been deprived of in her marriage to a collier. And when Paul expresses his preference for the common people we know he is unconsciously defending his father, notwithstanding his hatred for him. The autobiographical element too seems to be intruding here. Much later in life Lawrence was to admit that his father was not exactly the sort of an insensitive brute he had imagined him to be in his early childhood.

The growth of Paul-Clara relationship is inevitable not only because her sensual movements and studied indifference are a challenge to his manly pride but also because she offers him an emotional satisfaction that Miriam could not.

But, in spite of what Paul and his mother say-and the author too-Miriam does not seem to us to be wholly responsible for the emotional tangle in which Paul and Miriam get caught. Paul’s mother fixation looms large over it.

This chapter brings out Clara’s character beautifully. Clara is independent and emancipated. Alongside her emotional hunger, there is also the contrary emotion of hostility towards men. This shift between attraction and repulsion helps us in our understanding, not only of the individual characters but also their relationship with each other. Unlike Miriam and Mrs. Morel, Clara does not look at his paintings uncritically. She often angers him - by her criticism, more so because Paul sees truth in it.

‘The Test on Miriam’ (Chapter 11) marks the end of a turbulent love affair between Paul and Miriam and in spite of what Paul says, leaves us with a feeling that Paul is no



less responsible for its failure. It is a poignant chapter in which we see the inability of both of them to come out of their shells so that, instead of the sense of fulfilment following physical consummation there always remains the sense of failure and death. Paul's rationalisation of his failure is both an act of self-deception and an indication of his poor understanding of his affairs with Miriam: "At last the whole affair appeared in a cynical aspect to him. She had really played with him not he with her." (SL p. 315)

Another significant aspect of this chapter is the growing coldness between mother and son. Mrs. Morel realizes that she can no longer hold him. So she stops protesting now. But the fact is that Paul will never be really able to tear himself away from her possessive love. Given his mother's spell over him, his relationship with any woman, now or later, is doomed to failure. That is what gives a tragic intensity to the failure of Paul - Miriam relationship.

Chapter 12 offers a contrast to the earlier chapter both in style and content. Paul is able to achieve both physical and emotional fulfilment in his relationship with Clara. The description of their relationship is fairly objective and avoids sentimentalisation. The sense of uncertainty, constraint and tension of the earlier chapter gives way to cheerfulness and abandon.

In spite of his earlier experience with Miriam, this is the real physical awakening for Paul; and in spite of her marriage behind her and her rather non-committal reaction in the beginning, it is a fulfilment for her too. But threat of disillusionment and failure following cloying excess of sexual experience is already there and is hinted at in Mrs. Morel's warning that Paul will tire of her soon.

All the same Mrs. Morel is hardly resentful of Paul's relationship with Clara. Would you say that it is because Clara is less of a challenge to her hold over Paul than Miriam or because Mrs. Morel now feels that she no longer has the same hold over her son as earlier? Perhaps both the reasons hold good.

It is easy to appreciate the tone of vigour and spontaneity here because for Lawrence with his religion of belief in the blood and flesh, Paul-Clara relationship is a celebration of passionate love.

In chapter 13 the plot seems to spring into action suddenly. Baxter Dawes suddenly comes on the scene and it is a remarkable coincidence that the Paul-Clara relationship begins to flounder at about the same time. In spite of his airs of a bully, Dawes does not give the impression of being the villain. In fact, Clara, in one of her bitterly frank comments, tells Paul that Baxter is a better lover than him. And although Dawes knocks Paul Morel unconscious he does not seem to gloat over it: "he felt on his foot the place



where his boot had knocked against one of the lad's bones. The knock seemed to re-echo inside him: he hurried away to get away from it." (SL p. 380)

The love-scenes between Paul and Clara invite comparison with those between Paul and Miriam. Paul and Miriam never achieved the bliss that Paul and Clara do especially in that scene when the peewits are calling overheads as the lovers lie on grass. But they never achieve the ecstasy of this experience again; which gives to this scene a poignancy all its own. The anxiety and uncertainty that marked the entire Paul-Miriam relationship now hovers over Paul-Clara love also. This time, however, Paul cannot and does not blame the woman for failure. He is more self-critical and realizes that his mother's fiercely possessive love has rendered him incapable of a lasting relationship with any woman.

A notable feature of this chapter is an authentically objective picture of Paul's character. The author's identification with the protagonist often makes it difficult for us to accept his comments on Paul as indicative of his true personality. But here we have the viewpoint of his mother, Clara and above all Paul's detached look at himself to complete the picture.

But, of course, it is the poignant description of the dying mother and the intense grief of her son that make this chapter one of the most remarkable in this novel. Towards the end of the chapter Paul finds a long grey hair of his mother's on his coat. He holds it up and lets it go. It floats away into the blackness of the chimney. The metaphor and metonymy fuse into a haunting symbol of the inevitable departure of the mother from the son's life. The plot movement that began in the last chapter, continues in chapter 14.

The encounter between Paul and Baxter gives us an expected portrayal of Paul's character. We expect him to behave as he does because he is a sensitive artist. It is Baxter Dawes who gains in stature. His painful embarrassment his feeling of both guilt and injury make him an altogether convincing character. Paul and Dawes develop mutual respect after the first meeting in the hospital. The equilibrium of friendship and hostility between them makes for a realistic picture of their relations - there is neither sudden transformation in their character nor intense hostility - which provides us with a deeper understanding of the psychology of the two men.

While it is true that the experience with Miriam makes Paul more self-critical when there is a cooling down of their passion for each other, the final break is still blamed more on Clara than on Paul. Lawrence seems to be 'protecting' Paul thereby forcing Clara's reversal of her attitude to her husband. In fact, though her parting from Paul seems inevitable after their 'baptism in the fire of passion' her reunion with her husband remains rather unconvincing.



Paul's emotional development has been marked by his increasing independence from his mother's hold. But when his mother falls ill and begins to die he has to pay a heavy price for it because there has been no psychological release for him from the mother's hold over him. His feeling of guilt, his mental suffering and his death wish emanate from this psychological hold of the mother on his mind.

Lawrence uses the metaphor of religion of belief in the blood to describe his belief in sex as the primary impulse of life. This religion metaphor is translated into the Paul-Clara affair faithfully. Paul and Clara achieve perfect bliss which Lawrence sees as spiritual happiness when both are committed to it but in this chapter we see their love-making (even as Paul's mother is ill) turn into a ritual in which they do not achieve a communion, for, there is not the same total commitment to it from both as earlier. Ritual is the death of religion and Paul and Clara drift apart.

But the most remarkable aspect of this chapter is the powerful prose of Lawrence capturing with poetic intensity the agony of Mrs. Morel as she lies dying, and the agony of Paul caught in a tangle of loneliness, weariness, possessive love and a death wish.

The final chapter shows Paul as a completely broken man having lost his faith in himself and in things around him. Everything becomes insubstantial to him, every activity becomes as meaningless as his own life. The pathetic fallacy is carried right into the very existence of things:

"There seemed no reason why people should go along the street, and houses pile up in the daylight. There seemed no reason why things should occupy the space, instead of leaving it empty -But why there should be the noise of speech he could not understand." (SL p. 420)

His consciousness has been totally paralysed and dialogues with himself send him into further paroxysms of agony instead of helping him to get a hold on the reality. His mother, although dead is more real than life itself.

Miriam seems to be his last hope. He looks for mother in her but dreads her possessiveness when she offers to protect him. He would like to be son and lover both. He wants to give up his responsibility yet retain his individuality. Failure in such a situation is a foregone conclusion.

Towards the end Paul expresses his determination not to follow his mother into the world of darkness, and resolutely walks towards the light- the "city's gold phosphorescence." The ending of the novel, does not provide any closure for Paul. He rejects the spiritual Miriam and the passionate Clara, but is unable to come to terms with a life without his mother. But will he be able to return to the world of reality when there has



been no change in his situation on either the physical or the emotional planes, and when his inner resources to assert himself are so suspect? His 'drift towards death' seems to be the only certain thing at the end the novel.

Check Your Progress

1. Analyse the ending of the novel.
2. The various conflicts in the novel are psychological in nature. Explain.

6. Summing Up

In this lesson we have explored the following:

- (i) The many crucial instances in Lawrence's turbulent life which have a corresponding bearing on the novel.
- (ii) Class conflict and its impact on the Morels marital and family life.
- (iii) The predominant theme of mother-fixation. We have analysed in detail the development of Paul Morel's relationship with his mother and its impact on his personality.
- (iv) The development of Paul's relationship with three women; his mother, Miriam and Clara, and more importantly Paul's failure to achieve an emotional fulfilment with Miriam and Clara.

Note: All references to the text *Sons and Lovers* (SL) are from:

Lawrence, D.H. *Sons and Lovers*. Ashok Celly, ed. Delhi: Worldview, 2010.

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Mrs Dalloway Virginia Woolf

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Structure

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1. Learning Objectives

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is considered one of the most representative novels of the modernist period in English literature. Read the novel carefully before going through this study material. The main objectives of this study material are:

- ◆ To familiarize you with Virginia Woolf and her work;
- ◆ To draw your attention to narrative style of *Mrs. Dalloway*; and
- ◆ To discuss *Mrs. Dalloway* as a modernist novel.



2. General Introduction

Let it be stated at the outset that Virginia Woolf is a difficult novelist to read. Going through any one of her major novels, we are bound to get puzzled as their characters and events are often unclear. Why? For the simple reason that she follows an entirely different method in writing her novels, known as the 'stream of consciousness.' She rejected the conventional conceptions of the novel, with its straightforward narration, with an emphasis on incident and external description. The 'stream of consciousness' was not a new technique. Earlier, novelists like Dorothy Richardson had used it in her novels. However, James Joyce was considered a master of this technique.

But first let us be clear what precisely is meant by the 'stream of consciousness' technique. Briefly stated, one can say that the novelist attempts to convey all the contents of a character's mind - memory, sense perceptions, feelings, intuitions, thoughts - in relation to the stream of experience as it passes by, often in a seemingly random manner.

Some critics use the terms 'stream of consciousness' and 'interior monologue' interchangeably: however, preferring to use the latter to refer to the strict attempt to reproduce the flow of consciousness in a character's mind, without intervention by the author and, perhaps, even without grammar or logical development. This technique has its own advantages and disadvantages. Its great advantage is that it offers previously undreamt-of possibilities for the analysis of mental states, but the absence of a discernible linear sequence in the narrative can result in confusion for the reader, making it difficult to comprehend the accumulation of seemingly random thoughts presented in the novel.

We will have occasion to say more about this technique later in the lesson. But right now, let us come back to our original point: difficulties in Virginia Woolf's novels. For example, how do we react when we open a novel like *Mrs. Dalloway*? After a few pages, we are bound to get puzzled, and start wondering: where is the story, where is the author or the narrator who is supposed to tell us about incidents, characters, and so on? Instead, what we find is quite different: an exploration of the consciousness of a few characters. The whole thing, no doubt, seems quite irritating to the uninitiated. However, once one gets fully familiar with the technique, one is bound to enjoy the subtle explorations of the restless minds of the characters. Our minds are never at rest: we are always thinking of one thing or the other. There is a constant flow; a constant stream of feelings, emotions, and memories passing through our minds. Our mind suddenly goes to the past - remote or recent - or comes back to the present, and even thinks about the future.



In *Mrs. Dalloway* too, the narrator delves deep into the minds of a few people, and skilfully portrays their characters and, in the process, manages to tell a sort of tale which, undoubtedly, is quite different from the one in a traditional novel. But the fact remains that we need a lot of patience to go through the whole novel. One may wonder at this stage: why write novels which are complex and difficult, and which turn away most readers? The answer can be given in one line. Because modern literature is, by and large, complex and difficult - be it poetry, drama, or a novel. In order to understand fully what Virginia Woolf stood for, and what she was trying to do in her novels, it would be quite fruitful if you get acquainted with some of the salient features of the modern novel.

3. The Modern Novel

The novel in the twentieth century, as in the Victorian age, was the most popular form of literature. Judging by quantity alone, the number of novels poured forth by the British and American presses was large enough to swamp all other forms of literature put together. In quality, however, the modern novel has made no significant advance. The modern novelist has developed some new and eccentric techniques; he/she enjoys greater freedom of expression in the treatment of sex; he/she delves deeper into the hidden corners of the mind. And he/she employs these resources to reflect an outlook of crises, of impending doom and despair. Apart from the demoralizing effect of the two world wars on the European mind, the pressures and complexities of a highly technological age - urban congestion, unemployment, pollution of water and the atmosphere, menace of noise - have made man's life a nightmare.

The twentieth-century English novel is best studied against the background of the Victorian novel, from which it has evolved. Victorian society was homogeneous and stable, with a generally accepted code of moral and social behaviour. Within this framework, the novelist portrayed the interplay between the hero and heroine on one side and the people and institutions around them on the other. The experiences of the protagonists bring them a deeper understanding of themselves and of others; together with keener discrimination between the genuine and the false, between good and evil. The Victorian novelist was as much interested in society as in the individual. In a Victorian novel, the narrator is the 'omniscient author' who, as detached observer, comments on the action and even directly addresses the reader.

The evolution of the modern novel from the novel described above can be traced through several more or less clearly marked stages. The influences that transformed the Victorian novel to what it is today have been the following: (a) Henry James (b) French



and Russian Realists (c) Post-Impressionists (d) The new Psychology of Bergson, William James and Freud (e) Technological advance and communism (f) Post-war crisis.

- (a) *Henry James (1843-1916)*: This gifted American, younger brother of William James the psychologist, travelled all over Europe and eventually settled in England, because he found there the bond of a continuous cultural tradition, which his country lacked. Known as the 'the Master' because of the meticulous care with which he constructed his stories and polished his style, James taught English novelists a salutary lesson in form. The great novels of the 19th century were, by and large, sprawling and loose in structure. Notable exceptions to this pattern are the novels of Jane Austen and Hardy. Besides, James was the first novelist to make a minute and penetrating psychological analysis of his characters.
- (b) *French Realists*: The next important influence on the modern novel was that of the French Realists Emile Zola (1840-1902) and Guy de Maupassant (1850-93). The Realists aimed at presenting a scene in its salient features, with a few broad strokes, but as they considered the individual a product of environment, they described the environment in minute detail or in what is called the Naturalistic style. Further, as they were in revolt against the bourgeois conventions of the Victorians, they emphasized the seamy side of life - filth and squalor, sex, violence and vulgarity. Much of the alleged cheapness and vulgarity of the realistic novel is undoubtedly due to the deterioration of manners and morals brought about by the two great wars.
- (c) *Post-Impressionists*: In the early 20th century, literature felt the influence of a new school of painting called post-impressionism. The Impressionists were concerned with expressing the external reality; the post-impressionists wanted to go further and express a new vision of reality - inner or spiritual reality. Influenced by the post-impressionist painters, the younger writers strove to be more realistic by capturing this inner, spiritual reality in their novels. The French novelist Marcel Proust; James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were some of the novelists to turn their artistic gaze inwards.
- (d) This super-realism may, however, be traced to William James (1824-1910), and Henri Bergson (1859-1941) whose works appeared in the 1890s. James, in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), compared consciousness to a stream or a river which carries submerged and floating memories and receives constantly changing impressions of the external world.

The French philosopher Bergson in his *Matter and Memory* (1896), revolutionized our conception of the nature of reality and time. The centre of his philosophical system was the belief in life as change, as a continuous flow or flux. Man's consciousness is simply



a part of this ever-flowing stream of change, and man's experience is also the awareness of the ever-flowing stream of real Time or Duration - not a mere succession of moments, but the steady progress of the past, through the present, and into the future. The *duree reelle* (actual duration) or 'inner time' on which Bergson lays so great an emphasis is the approach to time as quality and not as quantity. His works emphasize the importance of spiritual values, of what Bergson himself called the 'uninterrupted melody of our inner life.' It influenced greatly the fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Charles Morgan, and the plays of J. B. Priestley.

Perhaps an even greater influence, however, has been exercised by the psychoanalytical discoveries of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). His works became essential reading for all those interested in the study of personality. During the course of his analysis of the nature of certain mental disorders, he came to the conclusion that human personality is largely influenced by the combined action of the conscious with what he called the "unconscious" mind, the latter being explained as a region which is brought into existence by a system of repression. Freudian theory has had a powerful influence on almost all European literature of a progressive nature. It has brought about an almost complete change in our basic ideas about character and morality; it has meant a re-emphasis on the importance of individualism; and finally, it has opened up a vast new field of experience to the novelist, the dramatist and the poet. All the major work of modernist writers; such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence, and that of many of the younger poets was influenced by Freudian thought.

4. Virginia Woolf: Her Life

Virginia Woolf was the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, one of Britain's most celebrated writers; most well-known as the editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Born in London in 1882, Virginia grew up in an environment that moulded her artistic and literary sensibilities. Her father allowed her to read whatever she fancied in his library, and encouraged her to write.

A few specific details about her life may interest you here. She was born of Leslie Stephen's second marriage to a woman named Julia Duckworth, who was a widow and already had three children. From his first marriage to Laura, who died suddenly, Stephen had a mentally challenged daughter. Thus, at the time of their second marriage, Stephen and Julia had four children between them. To these four, they added four more during the years 1879-1883: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. Virginia was very close to her sister Vanessa, and brother Thoby. She had a stepbrother George, too, and both Virginia



and Vanessa suffered a great deal at his hands. He subjected them to intense sexual advances, and the two sisters underwent a traumatic experience. The memory of this painful experience in her early youth left a permanent mark upon Virginia's whole career.

Right from her early years, Virginia suffered from bouts of depression and mental instability. For Virginia, mental illness became almost a regular feature in her life, and she had to undergo long periods of treatment and care. Understanding of mental health was not so well-developed at the time and we should not let Woolf's suffering come in the way of appreciating her literary output.

Bloomsbury Group

Since Sir Leslie Stephen was one of the best-known scholars of late Victorian England, Virginia came in contact with a particular section of London's privileged and literary society. The Stephen family friends included novelists such as Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and George Meredith. After her father's death in 1904, Virginia, then twenty-two, moved from Kensington to Bloomsbury Square with her siblings Thoby, Adrian, and Vanessa; and formed part of a close circle of intellectuals. Collectively, they came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group. Many of them had studied with Virginia's brother, Thoby, at Cambridge. They included Leonard Woolf (Virginia's future husband); the novelist E. M. Forster, the painters Duncan Grant and Vanessa (Virginia's sister), the economist Maynard Keynes, the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell (Vanessa's future husband); the biographer Lytton Strachey, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and the historian G.M. Trevelyan - to name some of the leading lights.

The many accounts and reminiscences of this group's shared values and practices all emphasize the importance which they placed on aesthetic enjoyment, on personal ties and affection, and on intellectual honesty and clarity. They were remarkably sure of their position as the self-appointed leaders of English culture. They saw themselves at the front of new social and cultural trends; experimenting, in their different fields, with new forms of analysis and expression; more suited to post-First world war Britain than those established values which were firmly rooted in the nineteenth century. The Bloomsbury Group members were quite hostile to imperialism and to militarism. This hostility, in Virginia's case, was directly related to her feminism. She regarded wars as man-made, arguing that the sympathies of women are too broad to be contained within national boundaries: "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world" (*Three Guineas* 197).



Marriage and Mental Illness

In 1912, Virginia married Leonard Woolf, for, as she told her friends later, he allowed her a lot of freedom and privacy. Virginia, however, did not enjoy good health and, occasionally, suffered from fits of partial insanity. In 1915, her condition was so bad that she had to be looked after by nurses all the time. After her recovery, and to keep her busy, her husband established a press, calling it the Hogarth Press. In spite of her delicate health, she continued to write, and also work, for the rights of women. She knew that women were suffering socially and economically, and showed her concern for them in her *works A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

As mentioned earlier, Virginia did not keep good health throughout her life, and suffered from nerve shattering fits of depression. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 had a traumatic effect on her. Later, the outbreak of the Second World War completely destroyed her will to live and, in 1941, she committed suicide by drowning herself in a river near her home.

Virginia Woolf's Works

Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and the next one *Night and Day* (1919) are both conventional; characterized by an emphasis on exploring character, rather than development of plot. However, it is with her novel *Jacob's Room* (1922), that Woolf first uses her innovative technique to good effect. In place of a single narrative voice outlining the character of Jacob, the reader is presented with a number of impressions, received from different characters.

This same method is followed in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Woolf focuses on the happenings of a single day in the life of her main protagonist, to develop her narrative. With scant attention paid to documenting external surroundings, the novelist attempts to approximate the inner workings of the human mind – in all its randomness. Her next novel, *To The Lighthouse* (1927), shows a further development of the 'stream of consciousness' technique, and is considered to be her finest work. *The Waves* (1931) has come to be known as her most experimental work - in which plot is replaced by six, intersecting, narrative voices. Her other novels are *Flush* (1933), *The Years* (1937), and the unfinished *Between the Acts* (1941). She also wrote a sort of fantasy, *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), which stands alone among her novels. In addition to her novels, Woolf wrote a number of essays on literary criticism and feminism, which appear in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924); *The Common Reader* (1925); *A Room of One's Own* (1929); *The Second Common Reader* (1932); *Roger Fry* (1940); *The Death of the Moth* (1942); and *The Moment* (1947). They reveal her as a critic of penetrating insight and superb stylistic gifts.



5. The Literary Background

When she looked around her in the 1920s, Virginia Woolf was disappointed by the limitations she found in many contemporary novelists - writers like H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett. She complained that they wrote far too much about material things, and not enough about people; and if they described people, they were far more interested in what they looked like, what kind of house they lived in, what furniture they put in it, rather than in their thoughts and feelings. Her chief accusation against novelists such as Bennett was that they spent, “immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring” (“Modern Fiction” 147).

If we look at her non-fictional writings, they help us understand not just what she was hoping to achieve in specific novels, but also to see the way in which she was experimenting with the traditional form of the novel. From 1920 onwards, she was trying to come up with a new type of fiction: one based upon the novelist’s own feelings and not upon convention. It was to have “no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style” (*Modern Fiction* 150). These elements are not easily discernible in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Take, for example, the death of Septimus, which is undoubtedly a tragic event in the novel. In a conventional novel, the novelist would have spent a few pages, and developed it into a moving scene. But here, Septimus’ death is casually reported during Clarissa Dalloway’s party. It is a different matter that the news deeply affects Mrs. Dalloway’s consciousness. The love interest, in the accepted style is also missing. We are only told what happened in the past. One wonders if this reporting can be as effective as the usual description in a conventional novel.

In fact, Woolf wanted to write fiction in which there is “no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen” (*Diary*, 26 Jan. 1920). Instead of focusing on creating a carefully constructed plot, she preferred to try and replicate the inner workings of the mind; in order to show the way in which “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” receives “myriad impressions” (*Modern Fiction* 150). As pointed out earlier, her two earlier novels were fairly conventional in their style. However, her later novels show her experimentation with new techniques at work. In *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and a few others, the novelist stresses the importance of understanding her characters from within. These novels represent a working out in practice, of the theories which she put forward in two important essays, “Modern Fiction” (1919) and *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924). In these, she makes it clear that the presentation of life and thought is never going to be clear-cut, because of the disorganized nature of experience and because, at any one time,



there is always taking place in anyone's mind a complicated interaction between response to the present and memory of the past. Let us quote Woolf in full:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance comes not here but there: so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged. Life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelists to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

It is, at any rate, in some such fashion as this that we seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers, among whom Mr. James Joyce is the most notable, from that of their predecessors. They attempt to come closer to life, and to reserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. ("Modern Fiction" 150)

Logically, of course, it is hard to see what could be 'alien and external' if one is presenting impressions—any impressions—as they fall upon an individual mind, since this mind, as Woolf makes it clear elsewhere, had the power to select from, to assimilate, and to bring order to an otherwise confusing mass of facts and sensations. Perhaps Woolf is suggesting that if the reader is too much aware of the narrator, presenting ideas and information which haven't been filtered through the mind of a character, this narrator becomes something of an alien, distracting presence? The way in which she believes, in



fact, that any thought or impression may indeed be relevant to the novelist's presentation of consciousness is made clear in a sentence in the concluding paragraph of her essay "Modern Fiction": "The proper stuff of fiction does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (154). You will notice that for Woolf, feelings, thoughts, and emotions are important; everything that passes through the human brain or touches the human soul is fit enough for a novelist to deal with.

6. Plot Overview

Mrs. Dalloway revolves around a single day in June, a few years after the first world war. Mrs. Dalloway walks through the West End of London. In fact, every character reacts to different sights and sounds, while walking around important places in the city; such as Green Park, Regent's Park, Russel Square, the Strand, Piccadilly, Bond Street, Whitehall. London is indeed important in the novel.

Since this is an experimental novel with no conventional features like a clear-cut story, we have to put it together ourselves. Of course, we have to appreciate the technique that Woolf is following in this novel. Mrs. Dalloway goes out shopping, which is an ordinary act for any lady in London. But there is a difference. We have to follow her thought-processes: what she thinks, how she reacts to sights and sounds, and so on. And as more and more characters are introduced, we have to follow their thought-processes as well. Mrs. Dalloway is out to purchase flowers, but we quickly learn that when she was young, she was in love with Peter Walsh. However, she preferred to marry Richard Dalloway as she thought he would give her greater freedom and independence. Dejected, Peter went to India. That was years back. Now we learn that he has returned to London; having separated from his Indian wife.

Thinking about Peter and her past, Mrs. Dalloway comes to the conclusion that she was right to marry Richard Dalloway. He allows her a great deal of freedom in life, and so does she. Peter, on the other hand, would have been very demanding and possessive. Clarissa also remembers her relationship with her friend. Sally Seton. They liked each other and developed a lesbian relationship. Mrs. Dalloway is also worried about her daughter Elizabeth's relationship with her teacher Miss Kilman. She is unhappy with Miss Kilman's hold over her daughter and she suspects that they are in love.

Next, we learn about Septimus Warren Smith, who has become mentally unstable. He was an efficient employee in a firm, and joined the army when the war broke out, winning laurels in the war. However, his immediate officer, Evans was killed; deeply impacting



Septimus' mind. After the war, he went to Italy, where he married Lucrezia. However, Evan's tragic death begins to haunt him, leading to severe depression. Lucrezia (or Rezia as she is often referred to), has brought him to London, where Dr. Holmes is treating him.

Coming back to her home, Clarissa gets busy mending her green dress. Peter arrives to meet her, and the two talk about various things and think about their past relationship. He still loves Clarissa deeply and thinks about his past. Filled with a sense of failure in life, he starts weeping. Clarissa consoles him and Big Ben strikes the half-hour. It is half-past eleven, and he quickly leaves, running into Elizabeth on the way. He too has been invited for the party in the evening.

We learn more about the relationship between Septimus and Rezia, and their past. Rezia is unhappy as Septimus says very cruel and harsh things to her. She wonders why he feels the loss of his friend Evans so deeply, as lots of people lost their friends and relatives in the war. Septimus, indeed, is no longer sane and is being treated by Dr. Holmes, who does not find anything wrong with him. On Dr. Holmes' suggestion, Rezia takes Septimus to a specialist, Sir William Bradshaw. The new doctor quickly comes to the conclusion that Septimus has had a complete physical and nervous breakdown. Septimus is fed up with Sir William also and distrusts him completely. In fact, both doctors seem to be symbols of evil, who want to impose their will on him. In order to escape their tyranny, he thinks of putting an end to his life. At last, he does commit suicide. As soon as he learns that Dr. Holmes has come to see him, he jumps out of the window.

Then we approach the main event of the novel - the party at Mrs. Dalloway's home. The Prime Minister and other important people arrive and everybody is in a mood to enjoy. The arrival of Sir William Bradshaw and Lady Bradshaw signals a new development in the story. They are late because, as Lady Bradshaw informs the hostess, one of Sir William's patients has committed suicide. A young man had jumped out of a window and killed himself. The news of the death of a young man disturbs Mrs. Dalloway a great deal.

Even though she is unhappy that Lady Bradshaw should spoil her mood with the terribly sad news, Mrs. Dalloway cannot help thinking about the young man and the manner of his death. It was only because of her husband's active support and co-operation that she was still alive and mentally sound. The novel ends at the point where Peter looks at Clarissa, completely fascinated by her, as he still adores her.

This is only a brief outline of the story that one can piece together from the thought-processes of different characters. There are a whole lot of other details about characters and their past and present history, which have not been discussed. But the point is, even this bare outline will help you understand the novel. The whole exercise of following the



stream of consciousness of various characters can be quite interesting. However, you must be fully familiar with the various aspects of this technique.

Check Your Progress

- i. Where is the novel set and in which year?
- ii. What is the occasion for which Clarissa Dalloway is preparing?
- iii. What does Richard Dalloway do?
- iv) Who is Doris Kilman? Why does Mrs. Dalloway dislike her?
- v. Why does Septimus Smith commit suicide?
- vi. Who is Sally Seton?

7. Mrs. Dalloway: A Critical Analysis

It is now time to come straight to the novel, consider its story in brief, and then discuss some of the important aspects of the text. As you will see, the story-line is quite thin. Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged woman belonging to London high society, steps out of the house to purchase flowers. She is hosting a party that night, and a number of important people, including the Prime Minister, have been invited. As she moves about London, every encounter she has, produces a response coloured by the whole texture of her earlier experiences, so that, as we follow her stream of consciousness, we learn all of her previous history, or all that matters.

Though the story is mainly about Mrs. Dalloway, our attention is equally focused on another character - Septimus and his insanity. In fact, the Septimus - Rezia plot runs as a sub-plot, though Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus hardly meet or know each other throughout the novel.

In terms of time, the action of the novel is limited to a single day in the life of the main protagonist, Mrs. Dalloway and a few other people: Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, Sir William Bradshaw, Doris Oman, Lady Bruton, and Richard Dalloway. Characters like Septimus and Rezia do not come in contact with Mrs. Dalloway at all. In terms of location, all the events take place in the city of London. Viewed from a wider perspective, the novel presents us with the consciousness of many characters, in the absence of an omniscient third-person narrator. We get a close look at the thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Elizabeth Dalloway and others. Their thoughts may seem disconnected and unrelated, but that is how the human mind works. Woolf's prime endeavour, as a novelist, was to break away from the Victorian preoccupation with external reality and, in its place, turn her look inwards.



To etch her characters, Woolf often jumps from the past to the present, in the minds of her characters. For instance, Mrs Dalloway's thoughts move from preparations for her party to her memories of her youth in her family home at Bourton though, measured by the clock, only a few minutes may have elapsed. Clarissa Dalloway's brooding over the past acquaints the reader with her most intimate thoughts; as in her memories of Sally Seton. The narrative then jumps to the consciousness of Septimus Smith, Peter Walsh, or any other character and then comes back to Clarissa. This method may give a deceptively disorganized structure to the novel, but it allows the novelist to look beyond the surface - at the hypocrisy and pretentiousness of British upper-class society.

The important point about this novel is that Woolf has been able to present her material in a relatively clear and coherent manner. In fact, *Mrs. Dalloway* represents a compromise between the need for a clear narrative structure and the absence of form in the 'stream of consciousness' technique; with its insistence that "everything is the proper stuff of fiction" and that "no perception comes amiss" (*Modern Fiction* 150). Obviously, without achieving such a compromise, Woolf's novels would have presented a major problem for her readers.

In keeping with the requirements of the technique, Virginia Woolf does not divide *Mrs. Dalloway* into chapters. The only division that we find is in paragraphs - long or short. Let us now concentrate on some of the immediate concerns of the novel. It is, as we have seen, mainly the story of Mrs. Dalloway. But the character of Septimus also emerges quite strongly. His mental state, his insanity and its treatment engage our attention in no small measure. Thus, we find in the novel a study of insanity and suicide. What is more interesting for us to watch is how the world is perceived by the sane and the insane; side by side. To quote Woolf here: "In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticize the social system and to show it at work, at its most intense (*A Writer's Diary* 19 June 1923). The novel, thus, presents a critical picture of contemporary society, its parties and silly chatter, its hypocrisy, snobbery and materialism.

It may interest you to note here that, originally, Woolf had intended a somewhat different story: Mrs. Dalloway was to die at the end, suicide or no suicide. But instead of killing her protagonist, the novelist decided to introduce Septimus, her double, who would die in her place. He is the objectification of the deadness of her soul, as well as of the deadness of contemporary civilization. Thus, the Septimus-Rezia story runs as a sub-plot to the main story. The world of the Dalloways and the world of Septimus-Rezia are quite different, but as we read the novel, we gradually realize that their lives complement each other. Instead of Mrs. Dalloway, it is Septimus who is made to die and act out her role by



proxy. In his death, he defies the evil represented by the likes of Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist - a portrait inspired by the novelist's distrust and hatred of those who dominate others, especially by sharing excessive but false concern.

Other important points about this novel may also be noted. According to Tambling, *Mrs. Dalloway* refers to many particular historical and political circumstances. As pointed out earlier, it is set on a single day in June 1923 in London. Some of these circumstances are explicit in the novel, others are implied - these include the First World War, of which Septimus is a direct victim, and the British Conservative government, of which Richard Dalloway is a member and whose Prime Minister visits Clarissa's party, and London itself in 1923: its sounds and its buildings, some of them quite new. (Tambling: *Essays in Criticism*)

Tambling also draws attention to the novel's references to late nineteenth-century socialist movements, to the British Empire and the characters, loyalties to it, and also to the thinking of the time - about health, illness, insanity, and sexual identity. *Mrs. Dalloway* also shows us a society in which acceptable personal and sexual identities are strictly defined, so that anything other than narrowly conventional heterosexuality becomes subversion or neurosis, and is suppressed.

7.1 Autobiographical Elements in the Novel

Earlier, you have read a brief account of Virginia Woolf's life, and you must have noticed some of the important features which stand out more prominently than the others: her bouts of depression and recurrent attacks of mental disorder; her distrust of doctors, as she suffered greatly - as she believed - at the hands of doctors; the exact nature of her relationship with her husband; her lesbian tendencies; her strong inclination to commit suicide: her concern for privacy of the soul, and so on.

Out of these, the autobiographical feature which is prominently reflected in the novel is Woolf's bouts of insanity, and her desire to kill herself. During her extreme attacks, she was attended to by doctors and looked after by nurses. Her husband, Leonard Woolf, arranged medical help for her, and in general looked after her very well. But what she precisely felt during those periods, her reactions to her doctors and husband, can best be seen in her portrayal of Septimus Warren Smith.

In fact, Virginia Woolf's account of the circumstances and fate of Septimus shows the mind of an expert at work. Her own fits of madness must have stared starkly before her, while writing about Septimus' condition and his final suicide. The anguish, the despair, the sufferings of Septimus are a direct projection of her own experiences. And the suicide of Septimus Smith is a mysterious or intuitive anticipation of her own suicide, fourteen



years later. (Remember, Woolf drowned herself in a river in 1941.) If the character of Septimus is a study in insanity, then what about the characters of Mrs. Dalloway and Peter Walsh? Can we say that Clarissa is a specimen of insanity? Perhaps yes. But what about Peter? Is he insane? Perhaps not. Perhaps he is not fully normal also. He projects himself as an insecure, unbalanced man.

Clarissa Dalloway's feelings for Sally Seton are believed to be a reflection of Woolf's own romantic involvement with Vita Sackville-West. Their relationship has been documented in their letters and diaries. In conservative London of the time, a lesbian relationship would have been frowned upon and, in accordance with social norms, both women got married. Mrs. Dalloway remembers the moment Sally kissed her as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" (29).

7.2 Symbolism in Mrs. Dalloway

A symbol, in the broadest sense of the term, is anything which signifies something beyond itself. Some symbols are conventional or traditional. Thus 'white', 'lion', and 'rose' commonly symbolize or represent, in that order: innocence, courage and beauty. Writers, especially poets, use these conventional symbols, but they also invent and create symbols of their own.

Novelists also commonly use symbols. The particular objects, scenes, episodes or characters that come to stand for the major themes of the work may be repeated or mirrored in many different ways so as to give the work a symbolic structure, although this may be only delicately implied. Symbols, you must remember, are essentially words which are connotative as well as emotive and evocative. Through symbols, the writer is able to increase the expressiveness of the language, and convey his/ her meaning with greater clarity. In fact, the novelists using the 'stream of consciousness' technique, usually convey meaning through symbols; for it is difficult to convey, through ordinary language, the vague sensations and emotions fleeting through the human consciousness.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, we find that a discernible symbolic structure emerges out of the various objects and episodes in the novel. Even characters have symbolic significance. They represent either one or the other aspect of contemporary western civilization. The Dalloways represent the outward façade: the glitter, pomp, and show of a civilization which is hollow and rotten within. Through Septimus Warren Smith, the novelist criticizes contemporary civilization; which generates neurosis, nervous breakdown, and insanity. The horrors and grim realities of war have had an unsettling effect on the mind of Septimus, and he cannot tolerate people like Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw.



Doris Kilman represents the ugly aspects of religion and love. Through her, the novelist severely criticizes corrupt religiosity and possessiveness. Not only the frustrated Doris Kilman, but a number of clergymen also come under this category; such as those who hide the love of power under a religious cloak. Some of Kilman's actions also have symbolic overtones. The way she eats 'greedily' indicates her hunger for domination and intimidation. Her external ugliness and shabbiness symbolize her spiritual hollowness. The car incident at Oxford Street does not fail to strike us as symbolic of the manner in which the English public worships Royalty. Hugh Whitbread and Bradshaw also symbolize the desire to keep the existing social order undisturbed. They represent the false pride and snobbery of British high society.

The airplane, which is seen by many people, not known to each other, may not be a specific symbol in itself, but it certainly projects the novelist's view that humanity is bound by a common thread. The main characters in the novel are seen as part of a larger humanity; acting, participating in life which goes on and on. Big Ben, chiming every now and then, at one level, merely tells us the time. But on another level, it is also symbolic of the march of time, regulating peoples' lives and actions. The characters, at any given time, may be lost in their consciousness, may be ruminating over past events, but the clock ties them to the present; to action and decision rather than inaction and indecision. The past is important, true, and one's consciousness can never get rid of it, but the present is also important. As Tambling observes:

Heard repeatedly throughout the course of the day's events, its chimes death-like ('leaden') and its presence, like that of the state, pervasive. Its evocation of negative feelings in the novel focuses the critique made of the state, viewed by Woolf as the very embodiment of patriarchy, both assertive and restricting. By a set of metonymies which deserve farther inspection, it now stands in contemporary media representations for both Parliament and the nation . . . (42)

Certain actions in the novel, too, have symbolic overtones. The most important example is Peter Walsh's knife, which he always carries in his pocket. It symbolizes his lack of confidence in general, his weak-mindedness, and by fidgeting with it, he reassures himself. The pocket-knife is also a phallic symbol. His repeated handling of it on different occasions demonstrates his awareness of his own masculinity. He has met failures and frustrations in life, and this habit may be a way of assuring himself that, at least, sexually he is a vigorous man.



7.3 Manipulation of Time

One of the important features of the novel is the skilful manipulation of time. First, we have to take into account the ‘mechanical’ time; as measured by a clock. Second, there is the ‘psychological’ time or inner time, influenced by Bergson’s concept of time, which could be any point of time in a character’s life; traversed in the mind. You would be interested to know that the working title of the novel was *The Hours*.

Thirdly, there is historic time, or time in relation to nation-wide and world-wide events. For example, there are direct references to the War which is just over; also, there are indirect references to the British Empire, such as Peter’s visit to India. The clock-time tells us about the passing of time, and this is indicated by the chiming of Big Ben – the great bell in the clock tower of the British Houses of Parliament. The frequent chiming of Big Ben marks the progress of the day. Read the novel carefully and you will mark that it is early morning when Clarissa comes out of her house to purchase flowers; eleven o’clock when Peter comes in to meet Clarissa; half-past eleven when Peter is in Trafalgar Square; a quarter to twelve when, in response to Rezia’s query, Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiles mysteriously at the dead man in the grey suit; twelve o’clock when Septimus and Rezia enter Sir William Bradshaw’s house and Clarissa lays her green dress on the bed; half-past one when Hugh Whitebread and Richard Dalloway meet for luncheon at Lady Bruton’s in Brook street; three o’clock when Richard comes home with his flowers; half past three while Clarissa is thinking about Elizabeth and Kilman, and then watches an old lady move away from the window; six when Septimus kills himself and Peter thinks of the “triumphs of civilization” (122).

The march of time cannot be stopped. Most of the characters, on different occasions, are conscious of its importance, and regulate their lives accordingly. It brings proportion, order, and discipline in their lives. But unknown to them, Time also performs the act of binding different characters and different situations in its folds. Coming to psychological time, let us quote David Daiches here:

. . . the added dimension afforded by allowing the persons of the novel to move back and forth in time to encompass an entire life in a few seconds of thought, enriches not only the personality of the characters but, in a great measure, the psychological depth of the book. (16)

Psychological time involves the backward and forward movement of the stream of consciousness of the various characters. It is similar to the flashback, often used in films, where it is becomes easy to show the past. But in the written medium, one has to be extra careful while closely following the thought processes of the characters. We frequently move into the past and, then come back to the present and, in the process, learn a lot



about the characters. For example, when Clarissa thinks about her past, we come to know about her younger days at Bourton, about thirty years ago. This peep into her past, also tells us of the various events and forces which influenced and molded her personality.

This method is followed throughout the novel and we learn a lot about Clarissa through her own flashbacks. But the novelist also uses the consciousness of the other characters as well, to present before us the full, rounded personality of Clarissa. We will come to this point when we discuss her character. In this way, the story of a whole life-time is concentrated within the compass of a few hours. The other characters too are portrayed in the same manner. As pointed out by critics, this 'confrontation' between mechanical or clock-time and psychological time is quite significant. The mechanical or clock time is a June morning in the present, but the psychological time is also Mrs. Dalloway's girlhood thirty years ago. The scene is London, but it is also Bourton; the town where Mrs. Dalloway lived before her marriage. The early June morning reminds her of equally fine mornings at Bourton in the country-side. It simply means that the specific time in a day - notified by Big Ben and other bells - helps in the smooth transition from the past, back to the present, or from one consciousness to another. A character is fixed at a place, and is conscious of the time of the day, but his/ her mind travels far and wide. There is danger of complete chaos and disorder. But the novelist achieves a semblance of order and discipline by the smooth transitions that we have noticed earlier. You may be interested to know that the working title of the novel was *The Hours*; an attestation of the significance of time in the novel.

Sometimes, the characters are fixed in a moment of clock-time, while the novelist gives an account of the various events taking place in space at the same time. For example, the sudden 'explosion' outside the flower-shop attracts the attention of many people: Clarissa, Miss Pym, Septimus and Lucrezia. and many others. All make various types of guesses, and react in different ways. The incident, in itself, is insignificant, but it causes a ripple of excitement among the people. We see here, humanity in action, giving us a sense of the flow of life.

Again, we have the example of the airplane. Many characters look at it simultaneously - Mrs. Coates, Mrs. Bletchley, Mr. Bowley, and Lucrezia. Later, one or two other characters too notice the plane, evoking different reactions. Mrs. Dempster is reminded of her nephew, who was a missionary in a foreign land. For Mr. Bentley, it is a symbol of human aspiration and mental concentration. And exactly at this moment Clarissa enters her house, enquiring from her maid what they were looking at.

Unknown, unrelated characters react to the same event, thus bound by the same thread. This is the flow of life, where humanity is linked to each other in this way. We get a



sense of the wider life that goes on round the principal characters. Conversely, we are also made to move back and forth in time through the memory of one of the characters. However, the thoughts are interspersed with words, uttered by the character, which prevent us from losing track of the present. Now, let us come to the third type of time - historic time. Woolf makes references to important historical events: such as the First World War, the British Empire, and so on. The war is over, but it has left painful memories for people like Mrs. Foxcroft or Lady Bexborough, who have lost their dear ones - killed in battle. Otherwise, life is usual, everything was fine: "The King and Queen were at the Palace" (4). The general public is keenly enjoying their sports - cricket, horse-racing and polo. The after-effects of war are felt in other ways too: it has emotionally upset, almost unhinged, people like Septimus; whom, the sense of emptiness drives to suicide.

7.4 The Empire in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Coming to the British Empire: you will notice that there is an oblique criticism of the way the natives in India or Africa are treated by their colonizers. People like Peter Walsh, of course, are somewhat innocent; they are honourable, dutiful servants of the empire, and not guilty of "Conversion" (81). European powers often resorted to conversion of their subjects - forcible or otherwise - and imposed their will upon the hapless ones. Similarly, Sir William Bradshaw is a determined imperialist, imposing his will upon his patients. Septimus is a new subject to be 'converted' to his iron will. "Conversion," as the novelist tells us, is practiced "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever, in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own" (81). It is "that Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself" (81). Like the European imperialists, Sir William's greatest desire is to exercise power: "Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up" (83). Notice the choice of words; these are strong words, both for Dr Bradshaw, who represents the medical profession, and for the British Empire.

8. Characterization in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Keeping in line with her new method of writing a novel, Virginia Woolf also evolved new methods to present her characters. Before Woolf, novelists presented readers with detailed descriptions of their characters. Appearance, manner of dressing up, and other salient features of a character - all these are described by the omniscient narrator. Secondly, we come to know about characters through their own deeds and words, as well as through



what others have to say about them. Mrs. Woolf, however, considered such methods of characterization as superficial. In this way, according to her, we get the externals of character, and not the inner reality. You must have read Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" (1919), in a previous semester. In this essay, she expresses her admiration for the Russian novelists, who gave importance to the 'soul and the heart' of a character. The term she used to describe them is "spiritualists," as opposed to late-nineteenth century English novelists, whom she dismisses as "materialists," for the excessive attention they paid to material reality (147). Woolf, in her novels, wanted to delve deep into the soul or the 'psyche' of her characters, and the conventional methods of character-portrayal seemed inadequate to her. Life, as Virginia asserted, should be conveyed not only in its external aspect, but as it is experienced within. As she asserts in "Modern Fiction" (1919), "the proper stuff for fiction" was the myriad impressions received by the mind "exposed to the ordinary course of life" (154). Since her approach was psychological, she shifted the focus from the mind of the narrator to the minds of the characters. Calling this an important discovery, she wrote in her diary in 1923: "I should say a good deal about the hours, and my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (263).

It is important for you to understand this 'tunnelling process.' It is connected to the new technique that she experimented with: the stream of consciousness, or interior monologue. The personality of a character is built up not all at once, but gradually, step by step, by noting the impact on his/ her soul of significant scenes and moments, both past and present. Further revelation of a character is achieved by noting his/ her impact on the minds of other figures in the novel. Thus, we derive our impressions of them from the effects they produce on the minds of other characters in the novel. This method can be termed 'cumulative': there is a gradual increase in information about the characters as they think about themselves or about others. The omniscient, third-person narrator, who can guide our responses, is mostly missing from the novel. For example, take Mrs. Dalloway's character. We come to know about her through her own thoughts and memories, and through the minds of several other characters. Stepping out to purchase flowers on a fine Sunday morning, her mind goes to her past when she was young, a girl of eighteen years, and her love for Peter Walsh. Thus, through her stream of consciousness, we learn a lot about her. But that is not all. We get other points of view about her. We come to know what her husband, Peter, Elizabeth, Kilman, Sally Seton, and others, think about her. We know about her as she is today and as she was in the past, and also know the various factors which have influenced her soul and determined her character. In this way,



we have been given a peep into her soul; we come to know her more intimately than would ever have been possible by the use of conventional methods.

Later on, Peter Walsh too indulges in self-revelatory monologues and broods over his relationship with Clarissa Dalloway. His train of thought continues in this manner, and we come to know a lot about him and Clarissa. But to learn more about him, we have to see what other characters like Sally Seton, Richard Dalloway, and of course, Clarissa, think about him; what are their impressions about him. This practice of portraying character through the comments made by others is common enough in fiction. However, what distinguishes Woolf's fiction from others is the predominance that interior monologue has in throwing up the various traits of a character throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Thus, Virginia Woolf, in her novels, emphasizes the fluidity of human personality, rather than its fixity. Character is not conceived of as anything fixed and definitive, but as something constantly growing and becoming different. Certain scenes and moments throw a character into sharp relief and, in this way, understanding of the peculiar traits of that character is built up. And there is no dearth of richness and variety of characterization in the novel. Through Peter, the novelist succeeds in conveying the deep anguish of frustrated love; through Doris Kilman, the agony and bitterness of frustrated ambition, and through Elizabeth, what it feels like to be young and healthy. Through Septimus, Woolf has conveyed the nerve-shattering impact of war, and through Rezia, what it feels like to be lonely in a crowded, populous city. In fact, Rezia emerges as the most pathetic figure in the novel. Similarly, Septimus strikes us as one of the most convincing studies of 'a mind adrift,' of neurosis induced by the horrors of life in the trenches.

Since Rezia and Septimus hardly come in contact with any other character in the novel, their characterization is achieved through 'inner monologue' as well as through direct description. The novelist, in her capacity as an omniscient writer, supplies the missing details. Critics have noticed that most of the time Woolf deals with characters belonging to the upper middle class. She herself belonged to this class, and so could write with authority about them. The Dalloways and their circle all belong to this class. To that extent, her range of characterization can be said to be limited. But when it comes to drawing characters like Doris Kilman, Rezia, and Septimus, Woolf shows her skill in bringing them alive, even though they belong to a lower class.

Critics have also pointed out certain shortcomings in Woolf's characterization. There is no drama in her novels, for drama depends on clash of characters and there can be hardly a clash if each of them is a solitary, self-centered person; enveloped in his/ her own luminous halo or semi-transparent envelope. The treatment of the theme of love too, is dissatisfactory. It is different from what we find in traditional novels where, most



of the time, happy conclusions form the climax of the story. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the love story between Clarissa and Peter Walsh somehow fails to touch us. The characters, no doubt, do come alive and impress us because of their feeling and passion for each other, but too much concentration on their inner lives leaves us puzzled and cold sometimes. Clarissa and Richard Dalloway have a comfortable arrangement, but romantic love is missing from their marriage.

Clarissa Dalloway's experiences throughout life show that she is able to maintain a somewhat balanced approach to life. Even a major decision, like choosing a partner, does not cause any mental conflict: she coolly decides to marry Richard Dalloway. This shows she does not possess too passionate or emotional a nature. She has come to a sort of understanding with her husband, who does not mind if she sleeps separately. She has a positive attitude to life, enjoys London and its sights, and keeps herself busy by throwing parties. Of course, she does have an inner life too; such as when she thinks of her own death. But strangely, the death of Septimus enables her to win a victory over thoughts of death.

9. Virginia Woolf's Narrative Style

One of the important features of the novel is its style, which is out and out, poetic. Ordinary prose would not have served her purpose since she was experimenting with a new technique. Her attempt to convey the inner states of mind compelled her to use vivid similes, metaphors and symbols. As David Lodge observes, use of metaphor and symbol is a sign of modernist writing.

The images which Woolf's metaphors evoke are often more vivid and startling than the metaphors of normal prose. R. L. Chambers observes: "What Mrs. Woolf does is to borrow the technique of poetry to enlarge the possibilities of expression in prose, at one and the same time to make clear her meaning and drive home its emotional implications" (42).

In the first paragraph itself, we have description of "a morning - fresh as if issued to children on a beach" (1). This is a poetic description of a particular morning. The next paragraph begins with quite evocative phrases: "What a lark! What a plunge!" (1). And the past is recaptured in a style that brings back the past most effectively. "How fresh, how calm . . . the rooks rising, falling" (p. 1) The fresh morning symbolizes the morning of Clarissa's life, her happy girlhood at Bourton. Flowers and green fields in the novel, again and again, symbolize peace and contentment. Thus, when Lucrezia dreams of her happy life at Milan, she thinks of fields and flowers. A rose is a symbol of love and fulfillment. When Richard Dalloway wants to express his love for Clarissa, he brings roses for her.



Again, while walking home along the Strand, Elizabeth observes the beautiful cloudscape with its alternating lights and shades: “A puff of wind . . . darkness” (112) Alternating light and shade symbolize the alternating joys and sorrows of life.

Another feature of the style is economy of words: “The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh” (4). The relative calm and peace that prevails in Britain after the war, and British sporting life has been captured in these few lines.

This technique of presenting characters is deficient in one respect: lack of variety. There is a deadening sameness in the style. All characters - rich or poor, young or old - are presented in the same style. The cool, cultured, snobbish, upper-class Mrs. Dalloway is presented in the same language as Peter, a broken-down, insecure failure.

However, while reading the novel, one is not necessarily put-off by the sameness of style. We get thoroughly involved in the inner drama of the minds that unfolds before us. On the poetic element in the novel, Joan Bennett observes: “often the form and substance of Mrs. Woolf’s novels resemble the form and substance of lyric poetry more closely than they do those of prose fiction” (17). A lyric is subjective, giving expression to personal emotions. As we have noted earlier, *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates the characteristics of a lyric.

10. The Character of Mrs. Dalloway

In the light of what we observed about Virginia Woolf’s art of characterization earlier, let us briefly discuss Mrs. Dalloway’s character. She steps out of her house to purchase flowers, walks through London’s streets and parks, and comes back. In the process, important things do happen. If not outwardly, at least inwardly. Clarissa perceives, thinks, remembers and generalizes; and, in doing so, suffuses her present experience with the feelings and experiences of thirty years ago. What she remembers becomes a part of what she sees now, and these in turn contribute to what she thinks; her attitude to life: London: this, moment in June.

In fact, the opening sentence seems to be the start of a conventional story: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (1). But it proves to be a deceptive start; we are immediately taken into her past. The delight of plunging into the London morning reminds her of similar feelings experienced as a girl at Bourton, and makes her think of Peter Walsh, which brings into her mind the fact that he is soon due to return from India. She vaguely remembers his remarks about vegetables, his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, and so on. Notice that the past here is not in contrast with the present, but involved with



it. How? Because, Clarissa feels the same as she did at Bourton. Peter, we shall find, is still making remarks about vegetables and playing with a pocket-knife.

While Clarissa is lost in her thoughts, she is observed by her neighbour, Scrope Pervis, who thinks how charming she is, and compares her to a bird: “a jay, blue green, light, vivacious,” and notices how white she has grown since her illness (1). Can you guess why Scrope Pervis - who does not appear again in the novel - is made to observe her in this way? Simply to give us an idea of her personality, outward instead of inward. Avoiding a direct method of description, the novelist is able to give an external view of Clarissa; ageing, pale, elegant, and charming. And thus, we have two views of her internal, emotional life - about which we keep learning throughout the novel, and an external view.

What we have just witnessed is the stream of consciousness technique in operation. But in order to avoid incoherence and chaos, which this method can lead to, the novelist briefly describes the location, the setting, and a few historical details: “For it was the middle of June. The War was over . . .” (2). This is the conventional way of describing a scene. The chance meeting with Hugh Whitebread in St. James Park activates Clarissa’s memory, and we come to know more about her love for Peter Walsh; how and why they separated, and why she came to marry Richard Dalloway: “She could remember scene after scene at Bourton” (p. 5). In a flashback, the whole past comes surging back, giving us a peep into her mind, and we come to know that Peter was very possessive. His remark that she was “the perfect hostess,” still rankles (6). The remark implied that she was insincere and hypocritical; that she believed in showing off and threw parties for ulterior motives.) So, she rejected him and married Richard Dalloway – a man of means and status.

As she remembers, she was right not to marry Peter. He would not have allowed her freedom and independence. But Richard was different, and gave her plenty of space. As she recalls:

For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house: which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what). But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish: and then the horror of the moment when someone told her at a concert that he had married a woman he met on the boat going to India! Never would she forget all that! Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her.



Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably - silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops. And she wasted her pity. For he was quite happy, he assured her - perfectly happy, though he had never done a thing that they talked of: his whole life had been a failure. It made her angry still. (6-7)

Clarissa, it seems from the above passage, prized 'privacy' and 'freedom' much more than anything else. She had the wisdom and intelligence to realize that she wouldn't be able to lead a happy married life with Peter, even though she loved him intensely. Hence, she married Richard Dalloway. Thus she loved one person, but married another one. What does it show? Was Peter right when he taunted her that she would marry a Prime Minister and become the perfect hostess? Perhaps yes. She might have married for money and status. But the fact remains that her instincts were right. With Peter, her very soul would have suffered. She is an independent bird. Her nature comes across as paradoxical: "She felt very young; at the same time, unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on" (7). This, and the rest of the paragraph sums up her personality. Later on, we are told: "Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on" (7).

Such a woman could not have become a slave to a person like Peter. As pointed out earlier, she vehemently believes in the privacy of the human soul. She believed that,

there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect - something, after all, priceless. (97)

How right she was, becomes immediately clear when she reaches home. She reads the disconcerting message written on the telephone pad: "Lady Bruton wishes to know if Mr. Dalloway will lunch with her today," and Lucy tells her: "Mr. Dalloway, ma'am, told me to tell you he would be lunching out" (24). This news, no doubt, deeply upsets her; makes her even jealous. But she is not prejudiced against her husband. They have a clear understanding: freedom to go wherever they want. And she has her own 'attic room'; her single bed, symbol of her solitary, private life, for she gives utmost importance to the privacy of the human soul. In fact, as we gradually learn through her stream of consciousness, her real problem is an instinctive dread of menfolk. She remembers the times when she 'failed' her husband, failed to satisfy him sexually. She is 'cold' towards her husband, and we must acknowledge that Peter's charges of coldness, hardness and woodenness against Clarissa are



largely true. But she did yield to the charm of a woman; Sally Seton, for example. (Her lesbianism is another dimension of her character.) Thus, her choice of Richard and rejection of Peter symbolize her commitment to emotional, and even sexual virginity. For, loving and protecting her as he does, Richard would never intrude on Clarissa's well-guarded privacy. It is precisely because of this reason that she hates Miss Kilman and Sir William Bradshaw.

Let us turn to the section where she gets upset on seeing Miss Kilman and Elizabeth going to the market (101). Why should Kilman try to 'convert' Elizabeth, to dominate her, to possess her soul. "Had she ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? . . . but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it" (102-103).

Clarissa's dislike for Dr. Bradshaw stems from the same reasons. Men like Bradshaw try to impose their will on others and Clarissa, as we have seen, hates such people. As noted earlier, it was because of Richard's moral and psychological support that she could survive.

Coming back to her consciousness again, we find that she reveals a lot more about herself. For this, you should concentrate on two sections: when she is at home, in the afternoon, and when she is busy in the party. For, even while attending to her guests, her mind is at work, all the time. However, Clarissa's character is also revealed through the thoughts of Peter and Sally Seton. For instance, it is from Peter's stream of consciousness that Clarissa comes across as a worldly-wise woman, who cares too much for rank and 'getting on' in the world. According to him, Clarissa enjoys imposing herself upon others, likes to have famous people around her, and that she is a snob. (For Peter's views, you have to read different sections of the novel carefully, as his thoughts are scattered here and there. For Sally's thoughts, you can read the party section.)

Let us now sum up her character. As we have seen, she is a sociable lady, likes to visit people, above all, likes to throw parties. Of course, she throws parties for selfish reasons, like enhancing her husband's career. We also notice that she is a loving wife and an affectionate mother. She sincerely appreciates her husband's gestures like presenting roses or bringing in her pillow and quilt: "Part of his adorable, divine simplicity, which no one had to the same extent" (94). Her way of introducing Elizabeth to Peter as 'My Elizabeth' shows that she is proud of her daughter (40).

The next important aspect of Clarissa's character is her suicidal tendency. At her party, she is deeply hurt to hear about a young man's suicide. She remembers an occasion when she too wished to die. In Septimus' death, she sees her own image. For Septimus, life was made intolerable by people like Dr. Bradshaw. However, for Clarissa, life was



made tolerable by her husband, who provided psychological support to her. Otherwise, she would not have survived. Mrs. Dalloway, ultimately, represents the upper middle-class world of London, in which she lives and moves. Through her the novelist criticizes the society also. It is not without reason that Peter calls Clarissa a 'perfect hostess.' The implication is quite clear: she stands for the insincerity, the triviality, the hypocrisy of the upper-classes. The world she moves in reminds us of the world of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where modern civilization is a spiritual waste land, and the soul dead. Mrs. Dalloway is a denizen of this society. There is no depth of feeling or understanding in her. She lives on a superficial plane, but she is also painfully conscious of her own spiritual sterility, of the lack of purpose and direction in her life. Hence, she gives parties frequently - parties which are a symbol of social triviality and frivolity. In this way, she is able to forget her loneliness. Mrs. Dalloway may be a representative figure, but that does not imply that she does not have an individuality of her own. Virginia Woolf's skill lies in portraying a character who is both representative as well as individual. She remains etched in our memory, and we remember her as a young girl, a wife, a mother, as a woman in love, and as a conventional hostess. All this is achieved through the stream of consciousness technique, which helps create a highly interesting figure with whom we can easily identify. All her strong points and weak points are part of common humanity. We enjoy, in fact relish, some of the thoughts which pass through her mind, and we cannot fail to remark the resemblance to real life.

11. Summing Up

Mrs. Dalloway, as you must have understood by now, is a superb example of the modernist novel. Influenced and impacted by the literary environment of her times, Virginia Woolf believed that the modern novelist should do away with nineteenth-century conventions and experiment with form. For her, reproducing the inner mind of her characters, with immense fidelity, should be the aim of the novelist. You will agree that Woolf has recreated the inner reality of Mrs. Dalloway. The absence of a plot and a chronological sequence is a characteristic feature of modern fiction. Though the events in *Mrs. Dalloway* cover the span of a day, they evoke a lifetime of experience. It is important to remember that the novel critiques the social mores of high society and the British empire. Through the seemingly unrelated sub-plot of Septimus Smith, Woolf underlines the madness beneath.

However, the most significant achievement of Woolf is in her presentation of the manner in which the human mind works. Her narrative technique is the stream of consciousness; an extremely realistic approximation of human thought.



12. Questions

- i) *Mrs. Dalloway* is a fine specimen of the stream of consciousness technique. Discuss.
- ii) Describe London, as depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway*.
- iii) Discuss Mrs. Dalloway's character, as portrayed in the novel.
- iv) Attempt a critical evaluation of the role of the party in *Mrs. Dalloway*.
- v) "No novel of Virginia Woolf's is as saturated with the pain and the exultation of living, the obsession with death, the terror of loneliness, as *Mrs. Dalloway*." Discuss.
- vi) Write a character-sketch of Peter Walsh on the basis of your reading of the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*.
- vii) Write a character-sketch of Septimus Warren Smith, with special reference to his insanity.
- viii) *Mrs. Dalloway* is a satirical comment on contemporary civilization. Discuss.
- ix) Write a note on the theme of love in the novel.
- x) How does Virginia Woolf deal with the theme of sanity and insanity in *Mrs. Dalloway*?
- xi) Discuss the significance of the use of symbols in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.
- xii) Write brief notes on: Dr. Bradshaw, Richard Dalloway, Lady Bruton, Doris Kilman, Sally Seton and Elizabeth Dalloway.

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