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JANE EYRE
Charlotte Brontë

Usha Anand

1. INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre, is the story of a penniless orphan child who grows up to be a fiercely independent woman, overcoming innumerable hardships that come her way and who is finally able to find love against all odds. When first published in October, 1847, Charlotte Brontë's novel took the reading public unawares. It became the talk of the literary world. It went into a second edition in three months and a third followed soon after. It has remained a hot favourite ever since.

Originally the novel was published under a pseudonym. The title page said *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* edited by Currer Bell. It was only after the novel had gone into its third edition that Charlotte acknowledged it to be her work.

It is easy to understand the nineteenth century appeal of the novel. Cast in the form of an autobiography, it is largely based upon Charlotte's personal experiences as a schoolgirl and governess. Besides, it gives a picture of English social life as it was in the middle of the last century. The hardships faced by the middle classes, the difficulties that lay in the path of unmarried girls that belonged to such households, the paucity of opportunities for such girls in a society which thought that marriage was their only goal and the difficulties in achieving this goal for girls who had no money to their name - all these issues are dealt with/highlighted in the novel. Jane is just such a girl. She is plain looking, has no money, no social status and being an orphan has no family support to fall back on. Fighting her circumstances spiritedly she is able to educate herself and take up the job of a governess which was the only occupation open for girls like her at that time.

Jane's story of struggle however has not a single dull moment. With its feisty heroine, its story full of mystery and romance, Jane's passionate love affair with Rochester, her moral dilemmas and her final self-realization, *Jane Eyre* has remained a favourite with readers till today. From the time that we meet the ten-year-old Jane who knows she is being discriminated against and is sufficiently brave to raise a voice against the injustice, to the time when an adult Jane emphatically states "Reader, I married him", we experience all the ups and downs of her life and her final triumph of marrying her love. We, as



readers, remain riveted and involved till the novel ends on a note of wish fulfilment with the marriage of Jane and Rochester.

Jane Eyre is however, much more than just a love story. It is a *bildungsroman* or a ‘coming of age’ novel and traces the growth of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood. Being an autobiography, it is narrated in first person where Jane tells us the story of her life. Thus, when she recounts her childhood, she gives us the child’s point of view and narrates the events from a child’s perspective. This was something new that was seen in Victorian literature at that time. Prior to this, even in Children’s Literature, which was mostly didactic, the child’s perspective had never been considered. Here we were being shown how a child actually feels and reacts to situations. Jane is bold, passionate, courageous and rebellious and is not scared of speaking plainly and demands to be treated right as is evident in her intense outburst against her aunt: “I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to visit you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick....” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 4).

The novel also lends itself to various other interpretations. It has been seen as a gothic novel because of its various gothic features such as its atmosphere of mystery and romance; the dream sequences; the imagery; the use of the supernatural; its Byronic hero; the depiction of terrifying experiences like the red room, or the madwoman’s cackle or the fire in Rochester’s room; the exotic setting; the idea of the double being represented in the figure of Bertha Mason and the burning down of Thornfield Hall. All such features and events create the gothic atmosphere in the novel. Critics have also pointed out the postcolonial element in the novel drawing attention to references to England’s colonial forays. Rochester loses out on his colonial venture in the West Indies while Jane inherits from her uncle John Eyre who had made a fortune in England’s presence overseas in Madeira. St. John Rivers specifically mentions his plans to go to India as a missionary. England’s imperial venture is represented in the novel through its presence in these three colonies. Racist overtones are unmistakable as these colonies are presented as being either barbaric, and in need of being civilized, or open to exploitation as a source of immense wealth. Under the pretext of the white man’s burden, England set out to civilize the uncivilized natives of these colonies. St. John’s missionary zeal to go and educate the natives of India is a part of the same endeavour. In the context of the colonizer’s attitude towards indigenous people, the presentation and treatment of Bertha Mason becomes symbolic. She is shown to be of a mixed race, almost dehumanized and remains locked up on the third floor and is never allowed to speak. She symbolizes the oppression and exploitation faced by the colonized races. Many years later Jean Rhys’s novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966),



came out as a rejoinder to Bertha's unjust and outrageous portrayal in *Jane Eyre*. This novel tells the story of Bertha Mason and her marriage to Rochester where Bertha is one of the narrators and is worth a look.

What is most significant however is the freeing of the woman's voice that we witness in the novel. Feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* stress on the fact that in Jane, Charlotte Brontë has created a nineteenth century heroine who for the first time actually acknowledges her desires and is not shy to speak about them. What had been kept under wraps by the Victorian code of behaviour for women, comes out into the open. Women in Victorian England were meant to be confined to their homes, not allowed to use their talents, had no freedom to express their opinions about anything and always lived in the shadow of their male counterparts. *Jane Eyre* challenged all of this. Dissatisfied with the existing social order, Charlotte Brontë gives us a heroine who is passionate, rebellious, demands equality and expresses her thoughts, her feelings freely and openly. At one point she says "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you - and as much heart!" (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 23). At yet another instance she asserts "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 23). The culmination of her love affair with Rochester is announced with the famous line 'Reader, I married him.' According to Victorian standards 'Reader, he married me' would have been more appropriate and acceptable. But phrasing it the way she does Jane announces that the final decision has been hers and that she is an active participant in the relationship.

Throughout the novel Jane demands to be treated and respected as an equal. We can see that through her heroine Charlotte Brontë gives a voice to the nineteenth century woman and thus subverts the patriarchal structure that dictated and expected a certain kind of behaviour from women. In her own way Jane fights for women's independence and their rights.

We can see from this brief introduction that *Jane Eyre* is much more than a simple tale of romance. The subsequent analysis of the various aspects of the novel shall enable us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of it.

Towards the end of this study material you will find a list of questions on the novel which you can try and attempt. A list of 'Suggested Reading' is also included. You can explore the novel further with the help of articles and books mentioned in this list of 'Suggested Reading.'



2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this study material, you would be able to:

- Know about Charlotte Brontë's life and works.
- Understand the historical context of the novel.
- Become familiar with the events of the novel through its brief summary.
- Be able to analyse these events critically.
- Understand the various themes in the novel.
- Critically examine the various relationships in the novel.
- Analyse the structure of the novel.
- Note the features of Charlotte Brontë's style.

3. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlotte Brontë was the daughter of Rev. Patrick Brontë. She lost her mother when she was only four years old. She was a third child in a family of four sisters and one brother but one by one, they sickened and died. She was herself not destined to live long and passed away at the young age of thirty nine, barely nine months after she had been happily married to a man who had been accepted with difficulty by her father. She made every sacrifice to make her only brother stand on his own two feet, taking up teaching which she least liked, but he came to a dismal end, notwithstanding his early promise as an artist of some talent. Emily, her younger sister and celebrated author of *Wuthering Heights* died of consumption soon after the publication of her book. Anne, her youngest sister and novelist of some ability died five months later. Her father, Rev. Patrick Brontë loved his children but he had strict ideas regarding their upbringing and training. They grew up suppressed and repressed in every way, but acutely sensitive and intelligent. Maria, the eldest child, when merely seven-years old, could occupy herself with a newspaper or periodical and the father's satisfaction was that he could always converse with her on any topic with pleasure, as with a grown up person. The story of the life of the Brontës is, indeed, a tale of loneliness and tragedy.

3.1 Charlotte's Schooling

Charlotte Brontë was born on the 21st of April, 1816. At the age of eight, she went to Cowan Bridge School. This was a gloomy and damp place and admitted the daughters of



the poor clergy. The children were cruelly treated in the name of austerity and discipline, and deliberately starved. She studied there for a year or less but so bitter was the memory of those days that she bore the scar for the rest of her life. The Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*, with its deadening routine and life of physical hardships, presents, perhaps, the nearest approach to the conditions at Cowan Bridge. In 1831, she got a chance to study again. This time, her experience in the school at Roe Head, was pleasant and happy, though her stay there was not long. She read a great deal and made some good friends. She became, particularly fond of her Principal, Miss Wooler. The Miss Temple in Lowood School is, evidently, built around the sweet personality of Miss Wooler who must have encouraged the students by precept and example, “to keep up our spirits, and march forward”, as she said, “like stalwart soldiers”.

3.2 Early Literary Activities

Charlotte had developed a love for literature at an early age. She had been reading and writing voluminously since her school days. She was fortunately placed in this at least. The entire family was devoted to creative activity. The father had published religious poems and sermons. The mother had some small printed works, to her credit, before her marriage. Emily was a poet and novelist and Anne was a minor novelist with two published books, but popular nonetheless. In spite of the harshness of life at Haworth, where their father had shifted in 1820, after the death of their mother, the children lived an intense, inner life and “grew up in the private worlds of day-dreams” for want of outside amusement. They played games with wooden soldiers and peopled imaginary towns with characters. Charlotte and Branwell (her brother) founded the Great Glass Town of Angria and Emily and Anne discovered the island of Gondal and took part in its wars and shared its adventures of love. These games of theirs helped them to produce literature which might not have counted for much as quality literary creation but which certainly speaks well of their rich, inner life. “They are the products of immense solitude, of imagination turned inwards upon itself, and of ignorance of the world outside Haworth and literature”, as Walter Allen says in his book, *The English Novel*. Emily never forsook this world of her early days, though Charlotte began increasingly to realize the dangers of this dream existence and tried to steer clear of her fantasies and her preoccupation with themes of passionate love. She was not wholly able to overcome adolescent fancies and love of melodrama. Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* is a typical character from a Gothic novel, secretly hiding mad wife in the garret of his mansion leading a Bohemian life. That Jane should not only desperately fall in love with him, for all her scruples and religious bent of mind, but also continue to adore him even when she comes to know of his first wife being alive, was really hard to accept in Victorian homes. Whatever we may think of the moral implications of such a



situation in our own day, it is fair to say that Charlotte Brontë could not have created it without believing in such juvenile passion.

Charlotte had experienced love briefly, while at Brussels when she fell in love with her French teacher Mr. Constantin Heger her first and only love. She had, however, to do something to make a living, for even though she might succeed some day in getting some work of hers printed, literature could not feed the many mouths in the house. She had to teach in schools or act as a private governess. She had been toying with the idea of running a school of her own. This had taken her and Emily to Brussels in Belgium to study with Professor Heger. Emily soon returned to live with the sick father but Charlotte completed her term. She had tasted freedom for the first time and the Professor was also interested in her, in a kindly sort of way. She fell in love with him without being consciously aware of the impropriety of such a passion for a married man. Her sense of duty triumphed at long last though. “This trial of her feelings and fortitude,” as Baker says, “opened new worlds of experience for her feminine heart from which she was to draw material for her books, again and again”.

3.3 Experiments in Authorship

It was a happy coincidence which made the Brontë sisters think seriously of publishing their writings. On Charlotte's return from Brussels, their plan to run a school of their own did not seem to prosper. Meanwhile, Charlotte made a discovery that her two sisters had a good enough collection of poems. She had also been composing verses and they decided that they should get them printed in a single volume. It was in 1845 that “Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell” was on sale in the market. Moderate success greeted their venture but their desire to set up as authors was duly whetted. They now looked for a publisher who would accept their three novels -- Charlotte's *The Professor*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey*. Unfortunately for Charlotte, her book was rejected on all hands, A faint hope was held out, all the same, by Messrs. Smith, Elder and Company. They wrote to her that they would consider favourably Currer Bell's (Charlotte's assumed name) new work as soon as it was ready. She worked hard on *Jane Eyre* to finish it and became a successful writer the day it was published.

3.4 *Jane Eyre* gets a Publisher

There is an interesting story behind the acceptance of *Jane Eyre* by the publishers, The publisher's reader glanced through the manuscript and persuaded Mr. George Smith, the head of the firm, to read it. He took it home and being free till mid-day on a Sunday, he began to browse through it. And this is what happened: “Before twelve o'clock, my horse came to the door, but I could not put the book down. I scribbled two or three lines



to my friend, (with whom I was to go into the country) saying I was very sorry that circumstances had arisen to prevent my meeting him, sent the note off with my groom, and went on reading the manuscript. Presently the servant came to tell me that luncheon was ready. I asked him to bring me a sandwich and a glass of wine, and still went on with *Jane Eyre*. Dinner came; for me the meal was a very hasty one, and before I went to bed that night I had finished the manuscript.”

Jane Eyre took the reading public unawares. It became the talk of the literary world. It went into a second edition in three-month time and a third followed soon after. And it has remained a ‘hot favourite’ ever since October 1847.

3.5 Discovery of the Author’s Identity

The secret of the real identity of the author, Currer Bell, came out under equally interesting circumstances. Mr. Newby, the publisher of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* made a plan of capitalizing on the success of *Jane Eyre*. He brought out in June 1848 Anne’s second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and cleverly inserted in the advertisement that the novel was written by the author of *Jane Eyre*. There was no option left to the sisters but to disclose their identity.

3.6 Other Works

Shirley was published in 1849. *Villette*, her third novel appeared in 1853, while *The Professor*, her first novel, was brought out posthumously in 1857. *Emma* was never completed and was published as a fragment in the Cornhill Magazine, in April, 1860, with a preface by Thackeray. Her “letters” were printed in a book-form, under the title, *Hours at Home* in 1870.

3.7 Last Phase

Charlotte Brontë could no longer remain confined to the solitude of Haworth parsonage after her literary success. She had to go out frequently on visits to meet literary celebrities, friends and admirers, although she disliked publicity and continued to be shy and retiring to the last. Her literary acquaintances included the great Thackeray (to whom she dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre*), Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell. She married her father’s curate, the Rev. A.B. Nicholls, in 1854, more out of loneliness and less for love. She found real happiness, though short-lived, with him, for she died at Haworth some months after the marriage on March 31, 1855.

3.8 Critical Opinions

It will also be of some interest to you to know what literary critics say about Charlotte Brontë and her most popular work (even if not most mature) *Jane Eyre*. These bits of



information may not be useful from the point-of-view of an examination, but being familiar with them would help you to enjoy your reading of this book in a critical manner and to assess for yourself its merits and demerits.

Let us see what Lord David Cecil says about Charlotte Brontë, in his book *Early Victorian Novelists*.

“She cannot be placed with the great painters of human character, the Shakespeares, the Scotts, the Jane Austens; her faults are too glaring, her inspiration too eccentric. But equally she cannot be dismissed to minor rank, to the Fanny Burneys, the Charles Reads: for unlike them she rises at times to the greatest heights. She is predestined to hover restlessly and forever, now at the head now at the foot of the procession of letters, among the unplaceable anomalies, the freak geniuses; along with Ford and Tourneur and Herman Melville and D.H. Lawrence”. And speaking of *Jane Eyre*, he writes.

“Childish naivete, rigid Puritanism, fiery passion; these would seem incongruous elements indeed; and it is their union which gives Charlotte Brontë’s personality its peculiar distinction *Jane Eyre* astonished the public on the one hand because its heroine was a plain governess; on the other because she was so frankly violent in her love. And naturally: for it was in the combination of qualities which these two facts implied, that Charlotte Brontë’s originality lay”.

Walter Allen writes in his book, *The English Novel*:

“Charlotte Brontë is to be judged as romantic writers, whether poets or novelists, always must be, by the intensity with which she expresses her response to life and experience. Her response is total and uninhibited. Her, appearance represents something new in English fiction; with her, passion enters the novel”.

He goes on to say of *Jane Eyre* that it “is a highly subjective novel, as subjective as Byron’s *Childe Harold* or Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, and Jane as much a projection of her author as Harold and Paul Morel are of theirs.

..... *Jane Eyre* is the first romantic novel in English. Everything in the novel is staked upon the validity of its author’s sensibility; Charlotte Brontë is concerned with truth to her own feelings; the value of feelings she never questions, it is taken for granted because they are her own”.

Compton Rickett in his *A History of English Literature* estimates the value of Charlotte Brontë’s achievement in the following words:

“She is insurgent just because she is a primal woman: She is insurgent just as a caged thrush is insurgent that beats itself against the bars of its cage



Charlotte Brontë is the first to sound the note of sex revolt. She is the pioneer of the novel of emancipation”.

Margaret Lane says that in *Jane Eyre* there is a powerful combination of “profundity of character, united to exquisite capacity for feeling and to genius of expression It is not, perhaps, the most mature of her works, but even *Villette* does not surpass it in poetry and truth”.

4. JANE EYRE: A SHORT SUMMARY

The novel *Jane Eyre* appeared under the title, *Jane Eyre, an Autobiography*. The story of her life, as such, is narrated by Jane Eyre herself. There are in the main, five movements of which the plot is composed, and they all converge on the central point of interest, that is fulfilment of the destiny of *Jane Eyre*. They are:

- Jane’s early life at Gateshead Hall to the point of her eviction.
- Her schooling at Lowood and subsequent life as a teacher.
- Her going to Thorn field as a governess, Rochester’s proposal of marriage and her leaving Thorn field on learning the truth about his mad, living wife.
- Her stay at Moor House and her leaving it on hearing the supernatural call from Rochester.
- Her final union with Rochester.

Let us take a look at them one by one:

4.1 Chapters 1-4: Jane’s early life at Gateshead Hall

Jane Eyre is the orphan daughter of the sister of Mr. Reed of Gateshead Hall. After the death of her parents, her uncle Mr. Reed adopted her and she came to live at Gateshead Hall. Her uncle treated her very kindly, and we are told that he was more indulgent to her than he was to his own children. This naturally irritated Mrs. Reed, who might have disposed of her, if Mr. Reed on his death-bed had not exacted a promise from his wife that she would treat Jane as her own daughter. But Jane’s life became very miserable after the death of her uncle. Mrs. Reed hated her; she hated her intelligence and her outspoken manner. Moreover, Jane is not a beautiful child, whereas Mrs. Reed’s daughters, Eliza and Georgiana, and Georgiana in particular, are very beautiful. Mrs. Reed showers love and affection on her own children and treats ten-year-old Jane as an outcast. This makes her children haughty and encourages them to ill-treat Jane. John, the only son of Mrs. Reed is particularly cruel to her. Except for the kindly interest that Bessie the nurse takes in



her, it is a sad and cheerless life that Jane leads at Gateshead Hall makes her more and more defiant and aggressive.

One day as she was looking into Bewick's *History of British Birds*, a picture-storybook. John called her and as she came up to him from her seat behind the window curtain, he struck her a blow. When he was about to repeat the blow, Jane "sensible of pungent sufferings" hits back. Mrs. Reed arrived at the scene, and instead of punishing the guilty son, ordered that Jane be locked up in the red room. Jane had an inexplicable horror of this room, for here Mr. Reed had died. Superstitious, afraid and desperate Jane became hysterical and screamed. She was taken out by Bessie, only to be locked in again by Mrs. Reed in spite of her 'frantic anguish and wild sobs.' Wrecked by despair, she fell into a swoon.

She came to her senses in the nursery with Mr. Lloyd, the local apothecary, sitting by her side. Mr. Lloyd was a kindly man; he closely questioned her and realized that maltreatment meted out by Mrs. Reed might kill the child and, therefore, recommended to Mrs. Reed that Jane should be sent to some boarding school.

Three months passed but nothing seemed to have been decided about Jane. One day Mr. Brocklehurst, the supervisor of the Lowood School came to Gateshead Hall and Jane was to him a wicked and deceitful girl. When he left, Mrs. Reed asked Jane to leave the room. But all the lies talked about her were 'raw and stinging' in her mind. She burst out, accused her aunt of being a cruel, deceitful woman, and told her that her daughters were wicked and not she. Her aunt was stunned by Jane's passionate and righteous indignation. Eventually Jane was sent to the Lowood School on a raw, winter morning. No one accompanied the child.

Thus closed the first chapter of the unhappy life of Jane, the orphan girl.

Now read chapters 1-4 from the novel and try to answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. How does Charlotte Bronte create sympathy for Jane in the first two chapters of the book?
2. Why was Jane shut up in the Red Room?
3. Who is Mr. Lloyd? What does he do for Jane?
4. Who is Mr. Brocklehurst? What does he say about Jane?
5. What impression do you form of Jane from these chapters?



4.2 Chapters 5-10: Jane's Schooling at Lowood

The Lowood School was a charity-institution for orphan girls. The pupils were sent there to be trained in Christian ways and to render them “hardy, patient, self-denying”. In actual practice the orphan girls were treated in a cruel manner and kept on starvation diet. The school routine was harsh and unimaginative. Mr. Brocklehurst took an especial delight in making worse their already hard and miserable lot. Death and disease were common.

Jane made efforts to adjust herself to this rigorous life as best as she could. For all the isolation of her present life, she was glad to have left the life at Gateshead far behind her. Here she found a godsend companion in Helen Burns, a consumptive girl of great character and intellect who had a heart pure as gold and boundless faith in God and goodness. Miss Temple, the superintendent of the school was another kind and gentle lady, whose very presence made Jane's stay at Lowood tolerable. As Jane says “I would not have changed Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries”.

The spring came. ‘Lowood shook loose its tresses; it became all green, all flowery...’ but typhus epidemic broke out. Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the girls to infection. The school routine was suspended, and those who continued well were allowed to ramble over beautiful woodlands. While disease became an ‘inhabitant’ and death, ‘a frequent visitor’ of Lowood, Jane spent most of her time out on the hills. One day she returned from one of her rambles to learn from Dr. Bates that Helen was ‘very poorly indeed’. At night she slipped out of her room and went to Miss Temple's room where Helen was lying waiting for death. Jane had a feeling that she ‘must see Helen’. She entered Helen's bed and nestled close by her. Helen put her arm affectionately on her. Next day Jane was found sleeping in this very posture by the side of Helen who had died in her sleep.

The number of deaths at Lowood roused the conscience of the public and efforts were successfully made, during Jane's stay there for eight years, to run the school on a human basis and shift the building to a healthier site. After completing her studies, Jane became a teacher in that school. When Miss Temple married and went away ... ‘I was no longer the same: with her was gone every feeling, even association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me’. She resigned her job. This marked the end of the second phase of her life and signalled the beginning of an altogether new course, sad as well as happy.



Now read chapters 5-10 from the novel and try and answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. Who is Miss Temple? How does she influence Jane?
2. Who is Helen Burns? What is the best thing about her?
3. How was Jane treated by Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood?
4. What was the result of the outbreak of typhus in the Lowood school?
5. Mention four points to describe life at Lowood as seen by Jane.

4.3 Chapters 11-21: Jane goes as a governess to Thornfield, meets and falls in love with Rochester.

She had applied for employment as a private governess at Thornfield Hall, and on receiving a note from Mrs. Fairfax that she had been accepted and could start her work there, she left Lowood. At Thornfield Mrs. Fairfax was the housekeeper, and the little girl to be taken care of by the governess, was a ward of the master of the Hall, Mr. Rochester. Jane first met Mr. Rochester in unusual circumstances. After three months of her stay at Thornfield Hall, she one day went out to post a letter for Mrs. Fairfax. On the way she saw a man and horse go down. She helped the man, who was evidently injured in the leg, to remount the horse, although on more than one occasion he had asked her to go away. On returning to Thornfield, she discovered that the injured man was Mr. Rochester himself.

This was the beginning of the love between Mr. Rochester and Jane. Mr. Rochester was a man of few words and kept his distance from the members of the household. He usually remained away from Thornfield, visiting friends in the neighbourhood or going to the continent. Next day Mr. Rochester called Jane in the evening and in the interesting conversation that followed he gathered information about Jane and was clearly impressed by her paintings. Jane on the other hand, gathered all her information about Mr. Rochester in bits from Mrs. Fairfax. He had inherited the property after the death of his elder brother. He had led a gay life on the continent. It was Mrs. Fairfax who told Jane that the laughter she had heard on certain occasions in the house was of Mrs. Grace Poole whom she had employed to help her in sewing.

Strange enough, a change had begun to come on Mr. Rochester. He liked to talk more often to Jane and shared, every now and then, confidences with her. He told her one evening how he had led a disreputable life on the continent and the little girl (Adele) was in reality the daughter of a French mistress of his. Jane was puzzled at his informality but felt happy in being his confidant. She could not go to sleep that night and at about



two o'clock heard movements in the room of Mr. Rochester. She found the air thick with smoke and as she got up to find out the cause of this, she saw Mr. Rochester's bed in flames. She saved his life by waking him up. At that time, the old familiar laughter was heard again. Mr. Rochester went up presumably to silence Grace Poole. On his return, he made her promise not to talk about the accident to anyone.

Jane was nervous but tongue-tied. Mrs. Fairfax could not throw much light on the incident, although she knew about it. She, however, told Jane that a young pretty girl, Blanche Ingram was likely to get married to Mr. Rochester. This seemed to be true because a few days later, a big party arrived at the Hall including Miss Ingram. Feasting, singing and dancing went on for a number of days. Jane had been specially asked by Mr. Rochester to be present at the parties. She felt that she was happy to be in the company of Mr. Rochester but that she did not think very much of Miss Ingram, as a woman. In other words, she was beginning to fall in love with the master, and hence was jealous of beautiful Blanche Ingram.

One evening, a sensational thing happened. An old gypsy-woman came there and insisted on telling them their fortunes in the privacy of a separate room. When Jane went in she was surprised to find that the fortune-teller knew intimate details about her life, past and present. Actually, the fortune teller was Mr. Rochester himself in the guise of a gipsy woman. He had decided to declare his love to Jane in this unusual fashion. She was confused but gratified.

In that very room, Jane told Mr. Rochester that one Mr. Mason had come in the evening to stay with him. On hearing this, Mr. Rochester turned gray. "The smile on his lips froze; ... a spasm caught his breath." For the second time, Mr. Rochester leaned on Jane for support. He promised to tell her all in good time and in the meantime asked her to fetch him a glass of water and call Mr. Mason in.

That night she heard a terrifying scream .. 'a shrilly sound that went from end to end'. She went out. Mr. Rochester took her to the upper room to stay with Mr. Mason, who was bleeding profusely and lying unconscious, while he himself went for the surgeon. Jane, as usual, was requested by Mr. Rochester not to ask any questions or to talk about the incident to anyone.

Some days later Jane left for Gateshead to be with her dying aunt. Mr. Rochester was very unwilling to let her go and elicited a promise from her to return. On her death-bed, Mrs. Reed told Jane how she had wronged her by telling *John Eyre* of Madeira, an uncle, who wanted to leave Jane his property, that his niece was dead. *Jane Eyre* freely forgave her aunt and stayed at Gateshead long after the funeral and then took final leave of her cousins whom she would never again meet in her life.



Before she had left for Gateshead, Mr. Rochester had told her in as many words that he intended to marry Blanche Ingram. In fact, it was only a ruse played by Mr. Rochester to make Jane jealous and inflame her with love for him. When she returns, Mr. Rochester in one of the most powerful and beautiful scenes, openly avows his love for Jane and pleads with her to accept him as her husband. Jane is overwhelmed and gives her consent. That night, however, the chestnut tree under which Mr. Rochester had proposed, is struck by lightning and half of it splits away.

Now read chapters 11-21 from the novel and try and answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. Briefly describe Jane's meeting with the master of Thornfield Hall. What is the purpose served in bringing the together in this manner?
2. Describe very briefly your impression of Mr. Rochester.
3. Write a note on (a) Adele and (b) Blanche Ingram.
4. What happened to disturb Jane when she went with Mrs. Fairfax up to the Leads? What was the explanation given by Mrs. Fairfax?
5. Briefly describe the purpose of M. Rochester disguising himself as a gypsy and the result of his having told Jane's fortune.
6. Who is Mr. Mason? Where is he found, in what condition and why?
7. What are Mrs. Reed's dying thoughts?
8. What is the significance of the great horse-chestnut tree splitting in half?

4.4 Chapters 22-27: Rochester betrays Jane's trust, the marriage is called off

Soon, preparations for marriage were afoot. Adele was sent away to a boarding-school. The family jewels were brought from London. But on the night before marriage a fearful thing happened to Jane. A mad-looking woman entered her room and tore her bridal-veil. She fainted. In the morning, Rochester though expressing great relief that nothing had happened to his little Jane, assured her that the crazy thing had been done by Grace Poole. As they went to the church for the marriage-ceremony, there were Mr. Mason and a solicitor warning the priest not to proceed because Mr. Rochester was already married to Mr. Mason's sister and that she was alive, though mad. The marriage was stopped and Jane returned to the house, broken in body and spirit. It was now clear that she had been deceived and that the mad wife of Mr. Rochester lived under the same roof and under the care of Grace Poole.



Now read chapters 22-27 from the novel and try and answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. What happens just the night before marriage?
2. Who is Grace Poole? What is her job?
3. What is the significance of Jane's dream in which she sees Thornfield Hall in ruins?
4. How does the marriage ceremony come to be obstructed and why?
5. What does Jane do when she learns the truth about Mr. Rochester?
6. What is the story of Mr. Rochester's past?

4.5 Chapters 28-35: Jane leaves Thornfield and meets St. John Rivers

Mr. Rochester begged of Jane to be forgiven and told her that he could not live without her. She heard his entreaties in a dazed state of mind and quietly left the house that night to go away someplace else. She spent the first night in the open. She had no money with her, no clothes, and no place to go to. She wandered about for a few days without food and rest. One evening at last she fell down out of exhaustion at the door-step of a lonely house in the moor-land. It turned out to be the residence of St. John Rivers, a parson. She was rescued in time. His two sisters were staying with him at that time. They all helped her to recover and slowly friendship developed among the girls. Jane stayed there as Jane Elliot and took up work as a schoolteacher in the parish. Meanwhile, a letter was received by the Rivers informing them that their uncle at Madeira had died, leaving all his property to his niece, Jane Eyre. His solicitor had written to him (St. John Rivers) to find out where Jane was. St. John Rivers now told Jane that he knew who she was (having noticed the name Jane had written on a paper in one of her thoughtless moments) and that they were all relations, cousins to one another. She came to know that she had inherited twenty thousand pounds. She insisted on the money being equally divided among them and kept only five thousand pounds for herself as her rightful share.

Jane had written a number of times to Mrs. Fairfax to get some news of Mr. Rochester but did not receive a single reply. She could not forget Mr. Rochester and longed to hear about him. St. John had begun to learn Hindustani because he had decided to become a missionary. Jane used to learn lessons with him to make him happy. One day, he asked her to go with him to India and suggested that the only way in which she could do this was by marrying him. She told him that she could go with him as his sister and not as



his wife. This did not suit his purpose and he began to rouse her conscience to the call of duty. She was on the verge of promising to marry him when all of a sudden, she felt that she heard the voice of Mr. Rochester, crying for her help; she thought that she heard her name being shouted thrice. This led her to change her mind and refuse St. John River's proposal of marriage.

Now read chapters 28-35 from the novel and try and answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the circumstances that bring Jane to Moor House.
2. Write short notes on (a) Diana (b) Mrs. Oliver.
3. What is your impression of St. John Rivers? What do you like about him? Is he a foil to Mr. Rochester?
4. What is the story of Oliver's association with St. John?
5. How does Jane come to work as a village school mistress?
6. How does Jane come to be a rich heiress?
7. Why does Jane reject the proposal of St. John?
8. Why does Jane decide to go back to Thornfield Hall?

4.6 Chapters 36-38: Jane's final reunion with Rochester

Jane Eyre left the house for Thornfield next morning. She arrived at an inn, called "The Rochester Arms", after a journey of thirty-six hours. She learnt there that Thornfield Hall was in a state of ruin because it had been burnt down by the mad wife of Mr. Rochester who had later killed herself by jumping down from the top of the building. Mr. Rochester had lost one of his arms and one of his eyes in the effort to save her. He was now living in an old manor house with the coachman and his wife.

Jane lost no time in going to the manor house to meet Mr. Rochester. She saw him helpless, sad and broken. She took water into his room and revealed her presence to him. The lovers met and were soon in each other's arms. He told her how on a certain day he had shouted for her in utter pain and helplessness. Jane did not tell him that she had heard his anguished call.

They were married after a few days. Adele was brought back from the school. A son was born to them and after two years or so, he even recovered the use of one of the



damaged eyes. When his son was put into his arms he thanked God, with a full heart, saying that he had tempered judgment with mercy.

As to St. John Rivers, he went to India. He remained unmarried and threw himself heart and soul into his work of saving souls for the love of God. Jane concludes the story of her life with characteristic humility, speaking her last words, not of her happiness, but in praise of St. John Rivers, calling him a high master spirit, “standing without fault before the throne of God”.

Now read chapters 26-38 from the novel and try and answer the questions given below:

Check Your Progress

1. Comment on the use of the supernatural in bringing Jane back to Rochester.
2. What does Jane see when she arrives at Thornfield Hall?
3. What had happened while Jane was away?
4. Why does Jane decide to marry Rochester and settle down with him?
5. What happens to St. John?
6. Describe the change that comes over Rochester.
7. Comment on the ending.

Points to be Noted.

You have now read a short summary of the novel. This should stimulate your interest to go through the original text, from cover to cover. You will discover that the story of *Jane Eyre* is a special sort of story. The points listed below highlight some interesting aspects of the novel:

- There are two distinct threads running through its complicated pattern. Charlotte Brontë is, on the one hand, presenting a picture of life as we know it, through the description of various incidents and scenes. On the other hand, she is introducing into the story of Jane some of her own fancies and fantasies of her girlhood days. In this way, she realizes through her creations what she wished to achieve in her own life. She becomes Jane Eyre herself. This is the reason why the novel makes such a strong impact on the minds of the readers.
- Another point of interest in this novel is the new type of a heroine created by the author. She is neither beautiful nor highly connected. She is, to the contrary, a plain



girl. She does not charm the reader by her external qualities but by the force of her intelligence and the strength of her character.

- Further, there is a close linking of the plot and character. Things happen to influence the course of the life of characters or characters will things to take place in a particular way in view of the type of qualities which they possess. For example, it is the firm resolution of Mr. Rochester, guiding the course of events concerning Jane's life. With all her dignity and balance, she is being driven to a false position. In the same manner, the exposure of Mr. Rochester's apparent deceitfulness or the burning down of Thornfield Hall by his mad wife brings about a total change in the fortunes of characters. This interdependence of action and character is the basis of a successful drama. A novel like *Jane Eyre* following the same method belongs to the class of dramatic novels.
- You remember that the story of the life of *Jane Eyre* is narrated by her own self. That is to say, it is an autobiography. She gives us a detailed account of her life from the time when she was ten years old to the period when she settled down in a happy manner, after her marriage with the man of her dreams. There are, however, certain things connected with her early life, not treated in detail in the order as they come) in this book. They are important, all the same, for a proper understanding of the "attitudes" of the heroine. For example, we are told that Jane Eyre is living with Mrs. Reed, and she is not kindly treated. The explanation goes far back in time into the happenings before Jane was even born. Her mother married a poor clergyman, against the wishes of her people and worse still, both her parents died early, reducing her to the position of an orphan. If Mrs. Reed is cruel towards her, it is because Jane's parents were poor people, unworthy of being the relations of Mrs. Reed. It is also because the only person who would have cared for the daughter of his sister, that is Mr. Reed, is long dead, thus making Jane Eyre as much of a burden which Mrs. Reed is compelled to carry. Such details are interspersed in the narrative at appropriate places. You will do well to make a careful note of them to fill in the gaps in your understanding of the events in the novel.
- Secondly, you will take care to observe if certain incidents are important when they occur or whether they continue to influence the course of action at a later stage also. Similarly, it would be interesting to watch how characters grow and shape themselves in various situations. For example, the bullying of Jane by John Reed is important not merely because it leads ultimately to a decision of Jane being sent out to Lowood, but more so because, it is responsible for the hardening of Jane's normal responses to life in her tender years, thus upsetting the balance of her emotional



development. She had to struggle hard in later life to smoothen the many edges of her personality, developed during her stay with the Reeds.

We shall return to a fuller examination and discussion of many of these points of interest in the novel in subsequent sections of this study material.

5. JANE EYRE: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Complex and Contradictory

To the nineteenth century reader, *Jane Eyre* was something new in the field of fiction. It was totally unlike any other novel popular around that time. The novel's exciting and melodramatic story, its vigorous characterization and unconventional treatment of characters, the convincing simplicity and sincerity of its narrative and its persistent moralizing all indicated a new point of departure in the art of the novel.

In what respects does *Jane Eyre* differ from the typical novel of the last century? The answer to this question leads us to a discussion of the art of Charlotte Brontë.

Jane Eyre is a strange and complex novel. It can only be characterized by using a number of paradoxical statements because the novel combines within its structure many contradictory features. We may characterize this novel as romantic and realistic, traditional and experimental, conventional and original, simple and complex, all at the same time. One reason of the enormous vitality of this strange novel is that Miss Brontë's art forges into unity many disparate elements.

Let me explain this in greater detail. The novel has both romantic and realistic elements. As a romantic novel it deals with the basic theme of the power of love. It portrays the impact of passionate love of two human beings. Dr. Johnson commenting on the romantic dramas of the seventeenth century remarked that the aim of the writer of romantic plays was:

“to bring a lover, a lady and a rival into the fable, to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, to harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other to distress them as nothing human was ever distressed, and to deliver them as nothing human was ever delivered.”

This observation may be transferred to the story of our novel. The plot of *Jane Eyre* has this melodramatic quality. More than this, there are improbable coincidences, mysterious events and echoes of preternatural life, such as ghostly laughter, omens and premonitions such as are to be usually found in the romantic novels of the Gothic variety.



But in spite of these romantic elements, we find that the novel is deeply anchored in the realities of experience. I referred already to the autobiographical elements in the book and also to the realistic picture of contemporary life in it. It is in the form of an autobiography. Indeed, it bore the following title when it was published in 1847. *Jane Eyre: An autobiography*: Edited by Currer Bell. The latter name was the pseudonym adopted by Charlotte Brontë. The story, told in the first person, traces the career of Jane Eyre from childhood to middle age. The events in the novel are specifically defined as regards both time and space. The locale of the events is the mid-counties of England. And the incidents are supposed to have taken place during the nineteenth century. There is, further a strain of persistent moralizing from the very beginning to the end.

5.2 Characterization

Consider, next, Charlotte Brontë's art of characterization and her depiction of the two major characters, Jane and Rochester. From one point of view they are romantic, from another point of view, they are thoroughly unromantic. Jane is portrayed as rebelliously independent and where love is involved she is thoroughly unconventional. Yet the novelist tells us that Jane's is the portrait of a governess, disconnected, plain and poor. She is a strange figure to play the part of the heroine in so popular a novel. By her own confession:

A greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: a more fantastic idiot never surfeited herself on sweet lies and swallowed poison as if it were nectar, Her main delusion consists in "rejecting the real and rabidly devouring the ideal". In presenting an ordinary governess Jane Eyre as the central personage in an extraordinary tale of passion and suffering, Miss Brontë is turning the tables on those novelists who portray beautiful and winsome heroines, but whose character, on closer analysis, will be found to be superficial and whose emotions tepid and insincere.

Mr. Rochester, the hero of the novel, is a study in contrast. In fact, he is the least heroic among the heroes to be met with in the major novels. As he is introduced to us in the early chapters of the novel, he is not distinguished by any of those qualities which the heroes of the traditional novels possess. He has neither remarkable powers of the body nor of the mind. With a spice of the devil in him, he is a weak imitation of a dissipated Byronic figure. Often moody, frequently unpredictable, he is enigmatic both in speech and conduct. He says.

"When fate wronged me, I had not the wisdom to remain cool. I turned desperate; then I degenerated" (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 14).

But this unheroic hero of the earlier part of the novel emerges at the end as an admirable figure. The degenerate Rochester becomes the regenerate Rochester, as we see



him blind, an invalid, bravely facing his tragic destiny and secretly nursing his undying passion for Jane. This then is a major feature of the art of Charlotte Brontë. She takes the conventional and traditional material and reshapes and remoulds it into a totally new and significant pattern.

5.3 The Structure

An analysis of the structure of the plot of *Jane Eyre* will reveal clearly her art in transforming the material of her novel. An ordinary story of a dissolute master's passion for his governess has been moulded into a well-knit and unified plot which with unflagging attention engages the reader from beginning to end, *Jane Eyre* is never dull and always powerful. Here is the plot in a nutshell:

Jane begins with her earliest recollections. She engages our attention by the masterly picture of a strange and oppressed child. She is an orphan, unwanted dependent in the house of a cruel aunt.....Jane rebels against the tyranny of her aunt. And at eight years of age she is transferred to a charity school, called Lowood where, too, life is oppressive to begin with. The puritan Mr. Brocklehurst who is the treasurer of the school subjects the inmates of the orphanage to needless severity in the name of religion. But soon the conditions change. A number of girls die on account of an epidemic-an enlightened committee of managers replaces Mr. Brocklehurst. Life becomes easier. On the whole here Jane spends eight years in the school, six as a pupil and two as a teacher.

Now, she is interested in improving her career and advertises for a situation. She obtains one as the governess in Thornfield Hall. It belongs to Mr. Rochester who is a bachelor and much addicted to travelling. Consequently he is, more often than not, absent from the house. Jane finds Thornfield Hall a pleasing house to live in and the inmates, an old gentlewoman housekeeper and a young French child called Adele, are cordial to her. The servants are courteous. Adele is going to be Jane's future pupil. Born of a French mother, she is reputed to be Mr. Rochester's daughter. But in the midst of this pleasing environment, there is one discordant element which perplexes Jane. It is a strangely disturbing laughter frequently heard, especially at odd hours of the night, from some distant part of the house. In spite of Jane's efforts she cannot trace its source. She is now certain that in this peaceful and pleasant house, an inexplicable mystery lurks somewhere. A mystery there certainly is in the house though nothing reveals it. This sense of preternatural mystery comes with marvellous effect from the monotonous life all around.

Before long, Mr. Rochester arrives at Thornfield Hall. Dark in complexion, strong and large in build, he is painted initially as a repulsive figure. There is more in him of the highway man than of the hero. His manners are blunt and sarcastic. He is frank; but his frankness is offensive.



His presence at Thornfield Hall changes the atmosphere of the house. He occasionally sends for the child and the new governess, whom he finds to be a queer little one, to keep him company. She at once becomes his confidante and to her he confides all the sordid secrets (but one of his past life, his numerous love affairs and all.)

His words are not refined and his behaviour to Jane is not polite. A girl of eighteen is hardly the right person to whom such secrets could be communicated. What is more astonishing is that Jane shows no disgust. Miss Brontë's handling of this aspect of Rochester-Jane relationship has been seriously criticised. Furthermore, the passion of love on the part of an inexperienced girl like Jane for a capricious and eccentric brute is difficult to understand. Jane at once becomes attached to him whom she calls her master.

As some critics maintain, could it be that Miss Brontë lacked adequate knowledge of life itself. We cannot support such conclusions. It can easily be noted that the contrasts established between their respective characters and temperaments, between innocence on the one hand and dissolute corruption on the other, produces a powerful effect. Jane and Rochester act as foils to each other. The phenomenon of their love could superficially be understood on the basis of the principle that opposites attract each other.

But to continue the story:

A dreadful event strengthens the dawning love of Jane for Rochester. One night Jane is suddenly awakened by the sound of mysterious laughter close to her ears and the noise of someone trying to feel his way in the dark, on waking up she finds the passage full of smoke. She discovers that her master's bed is enveloped in flames. By her timely exertions, he is saved.

Some days after this episode, Mr. Rochester returned to Thornfield from a visit to a neighbouring family with a large number of guests and a beautiful lady, Miss Blanche Ingram. She is obviously Rochester's fiancée. Jane shows no surprise and retires to her quiet role of governess. Jane in the meantime is called away to her aunt's house on account of her illness for a short while. She returns to Thornfield after a month, all that time this rumour of the engagement between Rochester and Miss Ingram is kept only to try Jane's love and character.

From now, the events move rapidly. One evening when they are together sitting on the roots of an old chestnut tree, Jane confesses her love to him Rochester gives up his mask, makes his declaration in turn and urges her to marry him. The wedding day is soon fixed.

Here, again, Miss Brontë has been criticized for portraying Jane as making the initial advances. It is argued that this is both untrue and unnatural. It is man and not



woman who does the courting. We have an unrealistic situation. But let us not hasten to accuse Miss Brontë of ignorance. A studied unconventionality of treatment is here a part of her purpose.

Now, Jane begins to be troubled by mysterious omens. The very morning after their mutual declaration of love she learns that the old chestnut tree on whose roots they sat confessing their love has been struck by lightning and its trunk cleft into two from top to bottom. The night before the wedding day, a horrid shape enters her bedroom. It tries on her wedding veil, frightens Jane and after tearing the veil into two disappears. From here the story moves to the tragic climax and its final resolution in a happy ending.

The couple, unaccompanied and unassisted by any proceed to the church for the solemnization of the ceremony. At first, we meet there none besides the priest and his clerk. But as the ceremony proceeds and as the priest reads the usual charges a loud voice interrupts it announcing that the marriage cannot take place. There is a serious impediment. Mr. Rochester is already married, and his wife is living in the house. It is she who attempted to burn him at night and two nights ago, frightened Jane and tore her veil. The strange and discordant laughter which frequently assailed Jane's ears came from her.

This is a terrific climax. The joyous expectations of two lovers blighted forever right at the moment when consummation of bliss seemed to be near at hand.

Mr. Rochester explains the secret to Jane. Mrs. Rochester a mad, diabolical creature whom he had been tricked into espousing through the treachery of his father and brother.

The 26th chapter of the novel which depicts these scenes is of the rarest intensity. Jane heroically struggles with her agony of desolation. Few novelists equal Miss Brontë in her power of description here. I am quoting one brief passage for instance:

5.4 Jane's Predicament and her Transformation

"The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and high above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described; in truth, the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me" (*Jane Eyre*, Chapter 26).

Crisis transforms Jane from a common and ordinary governess into a heroine. Soon after this dreadful revelation. Mr. Rochester proposes to elope with her and live clandestinely in Europe and to share once more his life and live. But Jane resists this request. But she emerges unscathed from this fire of temptation both internal and external. Her character is stamped from this moment onwards. Miss Brontë has achieved the well-nigh impossible task of re-moulding a plain and poor governess into a tremendously



fascinating and complex heroine. The rest of the story may be rapidly told, because the central purpose of the novelist has been nearly achieved by now.

Jane runs away from Thornfield and Rochester, leaving no trace behind. And through a series of improbable coincidences she is brought to the house of her cousin, St. John Rivers. Through his help she becomes a schoolmistress. And after the death of her uncle, Jane inherits a small fortune which she shares with her cousins. Eventually Mr. Rivers falls in love with her. At a very critical moment when she is about to accept his offer of marriage Jane is summoned by an imperious telepathic call “Jane, Jane, Jane,” This came from Rochester.

Jane hastens to Thornfield Hall. She learns that the house is in ruins. Some months ago, Mrs. Rochester had set fire to it and killed herself; Mr. Rochester, while attempting to save his wife, was blinded and injured.

So it is as a blind invalid that Jane meets Rochester again. He lives at the Manor House attended to by his loyal servants, John and his wife. The story at this stage is somewhat forced to produce a happy resolution. Jane rejoins her master and lover. They are married and not long after Mr. Rochester recovers his sight.

This bare outline does not do justice to the narrative vigour of Miss Brontë. The main events of the plot are masterly in conception and produce great effects.

5.5 The Novel as a Tale of Passion

This novel then does not present a story of adventure or of intrigue or of sentimental love. There is no place in it for depicting the comic contrasts of incongruous character. But the amazing vigour of the plot and the vitality of the novel are derived from the free expression of passion. It is the power of passion, which transforms all the characters and incidents in the novel. Miss Brontë’s criticism of Jane Austen is well known. She said the passions are perfectly unknown to Jane Austen. A passionate interest in life made her see it with more intensity than her contemporaries and her analysis of life is convincing by reason of its sincerity.

I referred to the criticism that Miss Brontë’s portrayal of Rochester-Jane relationship has been attacked, as revoltingly unconventional and unnatural. This is deliberate. She wants to bring to light the hidden world of woman’s natural instincts and her natural desires. Behind the mask of respectability and social and moral conventions, we suppress our passions and live emotionally stunted and spiritually starved lives. This factor is made the central theme of *Jane Eyre*. To be actually interested in life is to be aware of the tragic elements in it. Therefore, she avoids the comic in all her novels. Comedy and humour have their places, in the novel of manners, but not in a tale of passion.



5.6 Style

Brontë's prose style is also marked by the same passionate intensity. Consequently it becomes poetic. She does not merely describe an atmosphere or an emotion. She communicates them directly, whereas other writers describe love, she communicates it.

The mysterious and the supernatural elements in the novel are themselves explained by the principle of passion. What is miraculous to the ordinary mind is just the sympathy of nature with the spirit of man.

Down with superstition ... This is not thy deception, not thy witchcraft; it is the work of nature, she was roused and did no miracle-but her best.

What appears as miraculous for the ordinary mind is nothing but nature at her best co-operating with man at his most intense state of feeling.

This is essentially a Wordsworth-like attitude to life. Indeed many critics have pointed out and rightly so, the similarities between Wordsworth's theory of man and nature and those of Miss Brontë. There is also close similarity between their styles. She is in the field of the novel what Wordsworth is in poetry. We know that she was especially fond of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. It has been said that Charlotte and her sister Emily are the Wordsworth and Blake of the nineteenth century novel. It was Wordsworth's poetic aim to idealize the real and to invest the lowly and the common with the halo of novelty. So does the art of Miss Brontë.

We have to ask finally whether the novel presents any moral? Is the central theme of the novel bigamy? Miss Brontë has again and again been attacked for espousing an ignoble cause, the cause of bigamy. Her sympathies seem to lie, at least, with the bigamous Rochester. But to urge such a conclusion is to misread the novel, misjudge its theme and to miss the power of its theme and its subtle art. If any theme is insistently proclaimed, it is the theme that love is a many-splendoured thing.

6. JANE EYRE'S CHILDHOOD: AT GATESHEAD AND LOWOOD

When the novel, *Jane Eyre*, begins, Jane is a child of ten. We are at once made to realize that her life so far has not been that of a normal child. In the third paragraph of Chapter I, we are told that Jane's aunt and guardian, Mrs. Reed, deliberately keeps Jane at a distance from her cousins. The members of the Reed family never allow Jane to forget that she is a dependent. Jack Reed even grudges her the simple pleasure of reading. Before he hits Jane with the book she has been reading, he shouts at her: "You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says: you have no money; your father left you



none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense," (*Jane Eyre*, Chapter 1). Such reproaches are familiar to Jane; as she says, "This reproach of my dependence had become a vague sing-song in my ear; very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible," (*Jane Eyre*, Chapter 2).

The reason why Jane is not humiliated by these insults is that in spirit she is very independent. This is her great strength as well as the reason for her acute unhappiness at Gateshead Hall. She is completely out of sympathy with the atmosphere there; not able to give her love to anyone there, nor loved by anyone except, in certain moods, by Bessie. In some moments of depression, such as when she is locked up in the red room as a punishment, she even begins to believe that she may be as wicked as all at Gateshead believe her to be. All kinds of strange and terrifying thoughts arise in her mind; in the darkness of the red room she construes a ray of light as a vision of another world and lets out such a scream that the entire household rushes to the door. But even the terror of the frightened child does not move Mrs. Reed to pity; it is only when Jane faints that she is removed to her own bedroom.

While at Gateshead, the only happy moments that Jane knows are in the company of books. Here, there is no doubt, Charlotte Brontë is using memories of her own childhood when she and her sisters and brother used to conjure up a world of make-believe through reading. It is significant that the first of Jane's books is Bewick's *History of British Birds*. By certain passages in the introductory pages, she is carried in imagination to distant countries, with their eternal frost and snow, in the Arctic Zone. This is the kind of book that would appeal to any child, but one of the other books read by her, Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, is not. By such reading, Jane is able to learn about the times of Roman emperors like Nero and Caligula and some of the cruel sports encouraged and enjoyed by them. This is the kind of knowledge, totally beyond the mental range of her cousins, which enables her to make her points effectively in her quarrels with them. Her intellectual superiority is established from the beginning of the novel.

However, Charlotte Brontë has taken care to remind us that, in spite of her independent spirit and her unusual reading, Jane at Gateshead is, after all, a child. She is spell-bound, like any other child, with Bessie's narration of passages of love and adventure from old fairy tales and old folk songs. Her mind is full of local superstitions and, as she tells the doctor, Mr. Lloyd, what made her ill was being shut up in a room, where there was a ghost, till after dark. Having been fed on Bessie's stories, she had come to believe that the ghost of her dead uncle haunts the red room. This was what made the experience of being shut up there an unforgettable example of her aunt's cruelty. It is as an escape from



this that the idea of going to school is attractive to her; “School would be a complete change, it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 3).

A new life, is, to Jane, a life on this earth; she is not willing to accept the morbid view of Mr. Brocklehurst that, at the young age, she should concentrate her thoughts on the life to come after death. When he interviews her as a candidate for Lowood school he asks her: What should she do to avoid burning in the pits of hell? At once comes her characteristic answer: “I must keep in good health and not die,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 4). Whatever may be her sufferings she never loses her love of life; it is this which, later in life, makes her reject the marriage proposal of St. John Rivers.

Even before Jane has left Gateshead for Lowood, it seems that Mrs. Reed is trying to ensure that her new life should be no happier than the old. In addition to her other cruelties, she attributes to Jane the character of a deceitful person in the presence of Mr. Brocklehurst. This is a burden that Jane carries from Gateshead to Lowood; it is only after strenuous effort on her part that her character is cleared of this stigma. Moreover, she has to fight against the humiliation, disguised as the Christian virtue of humility which Mr. Brocklehurst announces to be the creed of Lowood. That she will fight against it is clear from the nature of her farewell to Mrs. Reed. Cut to the quick by her accusation of being deceitful, she cries out passionately: “I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: ... I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I like you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 4). The justice and violence of her attack frightens Mrs. Reed; she feels guilty in the presence of this child whom she has deeply wronged. Jane sees this and at least for a short time, enjoys her moral triumph.

Charlotte Brontë is, however, not a sentimental novelist. She does not pretend that Mrs. Reed’s attitude towards Jane changes now or later. Eight years later Jane returns to the bedside of the dying Mrs. Reed, willing to forget her earlier oath to the contrary. Jane comes to Gateshead after the warmth and dignity of life with Mr. Rochester at Thornfield. Mrs. Reed can do her no harm and in her pity for the sick and miserable woman, Jane is willing to forget and forgive. But Mrs. Reed cannot overcome her hatred of Jane even at this time. John Reed and Mrs. Reed, the two chief tormentors of Jane at Gateshead, die, but this does not make Gateshead any more congenial than it was in her childhood. She is as glad to leave it for Thornfield as she had once been to leave it for Lowood.



Jane leaves for Lowood on a cold January morning, entrusted to the care of the guard of the coach in which she travels. Her arrival there, with all signs of starvation and discomfort around her, is no more cheerful. The only hopeful sign is the appearance of Miss Temple, who represents the best of what Jane is to get from Lowood. Soon, she also makes the acquaintance of Helen Burns. The means of introduction is characteristic: it is because she finds Helen reading Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* that Jane is attracted towards her. Both Miss Temple and Helen act as tranquilizing influences on Jane. In them, for the first time in her life, she meets persons who are intellectually superior to her, and from them she learns to accept the stiff discipline of Lowood. This was not easy for her, as she says, "My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age, and not the golden age either; it comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwanted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot, though these were no trifles," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 7).

Jane had hated and challenged Mr. Brocklehurst when he first appeared in her life at Gateshead. At Lowood, she has cause to hate him even more, as she sees the contrast between the pampered luxury in which his own daughters are brought up and the degradation and ugliness that he imposes on the students at Lowood. Jane's nature is an instinctively aristocratic one, in spite of the fact that she has been a dependent all her life. What her spirit longs for is beauty, intelligence, love and these are exactly the things that Mr. Brocklehurst does not allow at Lowood. Even Helen feels that Jane thinks too much of the love of human beings; and this remains the essential nature of Jane to the end of the novel.

Tea in the rooms of Miss Temple is for Jane one of her memorable experiences at Lowood. It is not only the company of Miss Temple and Helen which makes it so; there is also the beauty and graciousness which Jane has been longing for. "How pretty, to my eyes, did the china cups and bright teapot look, placed on the little round table near the fire! How fragrant was the steam of the beverage and the scent of the toast," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 8). This feast for the eyes and the tongue is followed by an intellectual feast as Jane listens, in rapt attention, to the conversation between Miss Temple and Helen Burns, on subjects she has never heard of. It is thus that a desire for greater knowledge is created in her. When Miss Temple has found out from Mr. Lloyd that Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst's charge of deceitfulness against Jane is false, she declares this to the whole school. A great cloud is removed from the life of Jane; she genuinely begins to feel that she would not exchange Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries.



With the coming of Spring, Jane discovers the beauty of the natural landscape at Lowood. Always fond of being by herself, she roams about and explores these regions. She has unlimited opportunities for doing this when classes are suspended after the outbreak of an epidemic of typhus. Helen Burns, always sickly, is also stricken. Jane, though still a child, has courage enough to steal to the deathbed of her friend in the dead of night and to spend the night in trying to comfort her. But Helen dies; Jane proceeds immediately to tell us of the public outcry against the conditions at Lowood. This leads to drastic reform and improvement and Jane spends eight years there in an active and useful manner. During the last two years she remains as a teacher; a training which is helpful to her in later life at Morton.

The focus of Jane's life, after the death of Helen, is Miss Temple. The day she leaves, it becomes impossible for Jane to continue there. As she says: "From the day she left I was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me." (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 10). More than this she becomes aware that her independent and adventurous spirit, so long controlled by the influence of Miss Temple, is beginning to assert itself. "My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 10).

In one afternoon, Jane grows from a dependent girl into an independent woman. "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 10). With the advantage of her education, there was an opening for her: as a governess in a well-to-do family. Her application accepted, her luggage ready for her departure to Thornfield, Jane is surprised to receive a visitor from Gateshead. It is, of course, not one of her cousins but the Servant Bessie. The greatest compliment that she can pay to Jane is to say that she looks like a lady; her ability to draw and paint is also a sign of the same thing. What is more, Bessie brings her news of her uncle from Maderia who came to Gateshead to meet her. It certainly seems that Jane leaves Lowood with much brighter prospects in life than when she left Gateshead.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from Mrs. Q.D. Leavis, who writes: "Jane Eyre moves from stage to stage of Jane's development, divided into four sharply distinct phases with their suggestive names: childhood at Gateshead; girlhood, which is schooling in both senses, at Lowood; adolescence at Thornfield; maturity at Marsh End, winding up with fulfilment in marriage at Ferndean. Each move leaves behind the phase and therefore the setting and characters which supplied that step in the demonstration." I may add that



each stage in Jane's life is an essential link in the chain of her development which is remarkably consistent and credible. Never in the novel does the reader feel that Jane is behaving in a way that is unexpected or uncharacteristic. From Gateshead to Ferndean, she is all of a piece.

7. JANE EYRE: A STUDY OF INTER-RELATIONSHIPS

The novel *Jane Eyre* takes its heroine through several stages from her childhood to her happy existence as Mr. Rochester's wife. Her story can be divided into four fairly neat parts: (1) her early childhood spent at her Aunt Reed's house, Gateshead Hall and her subsequent life at Lowood School; (2) her journey to Thornfield, her meeting Mr. Rochester, and the growth of a relationship with him that alters her personality and her whole future; (3) her desperate flight from Thornfield and its master and her life with the Rivers family which results in an involvement with St. John Rivers; and (4) her return to Thornfield, her discovery of the disaster that has overtaken the house and Mr. Rochester and her journey to Ferndean where she is finally united with a blind and broken Mr. Rochester.

We are really concerned with the three later sections of the novel but, in order to understand Jane's relationship with both Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers, we must first consider how she has become the kind of person she is, what influences have worked upon her, and what needs, emotional and spiritual, arising from the circumstances of her early life express themselves and seek an out-let in her friendship with these two men.

As the novel opens we see, on a cold winter day, an orphaned Jane who has been thrown upon the mercy of her Aunt Reed, trying to hide herself unsuccessfully from her cousins who torment and bully her. Mrs. Reed regards her as a burden and her cousins force her to realize her position as a dependent poor relation, little better than a servant. She is not only; "kept at a distance until she tried to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner, something lighter, franker, more natural as it were." (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 1). She is beaten by John Reed and then unjustly punished by being locked up in the red room. We are, therefore, almost at once, introduced to the discord between Jane and the Reeds, the source of her insecurity, her loneliness, her desire for love and affection, her need for a home and family and kind relations. Jane feels physically inferior to her cousins. We hear throughout the novel of this constant awareness of her insignificant appearance. At Gateshead Hall it is against Georgiana's doll-like beauty that she is judged and judges herself; at Thornfield she sees in Blanche Ingram's height and dark majesty a complete and destructive contrast to her own exterior; finally in Rosamond Oliver she meets the last of those women who bring out



her sense of inferiority. In the last part of the novel there is no woman who can disturb Jane's tranquillity or rouse her fears. She is sure Rochester values her for what she is.

The episode of the red room indicates how nervous, sensitive, tense and frightened Jane is, how highly wrought her imagination is. Her imagination colours, and to a certain extent, distorts everything she sees. She is sure the unused room is haunted by the ghost of her uncle Reed and the gleam of a lantern outside drives her to batter hysterically at the locked door before she falls unconscious (At Thornfield, this too vivid imagination misleads her into believing that Mr. Rochester finds Blanche Ingram attractive). When she recovers consciousness after fainting in the red room, her eyes fall on the doctor, and she has a 'soothing conviction of protection and security.' She feels 'sheltered and protected'.

To sum up, what Gateshead Hall does to Jane is to make her know what it is to be an orphan, unwanted and poor, without protection, shelter or friends. She has been disregarded, despised, cruelly and unjustly treated with no one showing any interest in, or consideration for, her feelings. Here she has not known affection or kindness.

7.1 Miss Temple and Helen

The shift to Lowood Orphanage only stresses her poverty and her dependence on the charity of others. The children are subjected to cold and hunger, they are constantly reminded that they are unwanted, every effort is made to crush their spirit and humiliate their pride. The hypocrisy of Mrs. Reed is repeated here in the character of Mr. Brocklehurst who appears to Jane, a black pillar, rigid and hard. Lowood School now even has its compensations. Jane's desire for knowledge is satisfied and her conscience, a sense of rectitude, awakened and strengthened. In Miss Temple and Helen Burns, Jane at last meets two individuals she can respect, admire and love. Helen teaches Jane the value of a true humility and the love of God. Helen judges her own actions harshly by a set of standards that belong to an ideal order, yet she insists on the need for charity in one's dealings with others. She condemns no one, however harshly they treat her. Jane, incapable of such detachment is both attracted and irritated by Helen's attitude. It is much later that Jane learns to forgive those who have ill-treated her. Jane does, however, as she grows up in the school, acquire some of Helen's self-control and restraint, though she remains outspoken and emotional. Helen instils in Jane the idea of God, of a moral order outside the immediate world in which they exist. To Helen heaven offers the compensation she needs for her sufferings on earth. While Helen represents an other-worldly religious attitude, Miss Temple is the embodiment, as her name suggests, of a sane kindly power, active and benign, intervening against evil men such as Brocklehurst.



From both these women Jane learns about the existence of attitudes and ideas which had been meaningless when adopted and uttered by people she could not trust or love. It is in Lowood, therefore, that she gains the kind of moral strength to withstand the temptation of giving in to Rochester's need of her. She acquires not only self-control in Lowood but also a rightness of instinct and purpose which makes it impossible for her to offend either against principle or judgment. Miss Temple not only educates Jane but imbues her with her own kindness of spirit, her indignation at wrong done to others.

Jane's character is shaped and formed by her experiences at Gateshead Hall and Lowood. Her life with her aunt leaves her starved for attention and her capacity to give love and help has lain unused. Her relationship with Rochester is based on this past; Lowood has filled her with a vague idealism which responds easily to St. John Rivers especially since she meets him soon after escaping from Rochester's very human and earthly demands on her.

It is now possible to consider Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers. The novel presents Jane's narrative of the events of her life and it is, therefore, through Jane's eyes that we see the people and incidents that are brought before us. Since Jane is candid we know enough about her to understand her prejudices, her sympathies, and antipathies. Jane is both intelligent and sensitive. The narrowness of her range of experience does not, therefore, form any great obstacle to her understanding and judgment of people. Her imagination, however, does lead her astray and she takes a long time to realize that she can be loved and cherished because she does not easily get over her sense of inferiority. Let us now take a closer look at the second and third parts of the novel.

Jane leaves Lowood for her first encounter with the world outside with a sense of release, "the charms of adventure" and 'the glow of pride' sweetening a very natural fear and uncertainty. Fear soon becomes the predominant feeling as she moves further and further from Lowood. When she arrives at Thornfield Mrs. Fairfax quiets her fears and the house on her very first night seems to her 'a safe haven' for which she offers up her gratitude to heaven. In the morning she has the feeling of a 'fairer era of life opening before her.' It is in this frame of mind that she learns that her new employer is not Mrs. Fairfax but Mr. Rochester. From the former's answers to her questions she builds up an image of her unknown master, that he likes his own way, that he is a just and liberal landlord, but by and large she is disappointed in her curiosity as Mrs. Fairfax is not observant or perceptive.

7.2 Jane's Relationship with Mr. Rochester

It is three months after her arrival at Thornfield that she meets Mr. Rochester. Her account of this first meeting is filled with a sense of the strange and mysterious; it has about it



the air of preternatural as she herself would have put it. Her peaceful walk is disturbed by the tramp of a horse's hooves and her mind is suddenly filled with fairy tales so that when a large dog and a horse and rider appear she is almost willing to believe this is something out of Bessie's stories till she tells herself that it is only a traveller. The horse slips and falls throwing its rider and as he heaves himself up Jane sees Mr. Rochester for the first time though at this meeting she does not know who he is. As she looks at the 'dark face with stern features and a heavy brow', his angry, frustrated frown, she is aware that she does not fear this man, she is merely a little shy. She offers to help him, something she would not have done, she tells us, had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentlemen. Her exact words are "That a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, is fascination; but had I met these qualities incarnate in masculine shape, I should have instinctively known that they neither had, nor could have, sympathy with anything in me, and should have shunned them as one would fire, or anything else that is bright but antipathetic," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 12). It is the fact that Rochester is not beautiful or gallant that makes Jane feel at ease with him from this moment. But more than his appearance, what makes an impression on Jane is the fact that she is useful to him. He needs and asks for help, which she is only too willing to give. In all her life she has not really been able to use her capacity for love, affection or usefulness and all her life she has desperately wanted an outlet of some kind for her generous impulses. Jane is delighted with what he is able to do "transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing and I was weary of an existence, all passive," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 12). Her memory now holds a new face dissimilar to all the other images it holds "firstly because it was masculine, secondly because it was dark, strong and stern." (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 12).

The rest of this second part of the novel *Jane Eyre* is devoted to the slow but momentous change in the heroine's life that turns her from a diffident, shy, unloved girl into a gay, impertinent, lively young woman sure of herself and her power over the man she loves. This change is the product of her relationship with Mr. Rochester. Jane refers to him almost all through the book as "her master" but there is nothing servile or subservient about her attitude and it is precisely her frank, straightforward, truthful manner of expressing her opinions, her avoidance of deceit or deviousness, her self-respect and rectitude of mind that attract her employer. She is everything he has given up hope of finding, a woman who is at once intelligent and innocent, witty but not malicious, honest and direct as a child, impulsive and natural, unaffected but disciplined.

Their relationship cannot be understood unless we consider the circumstances of Mr. Rochester's own life, his unfortunate past. He is himself very similar to Jane in his generosity and openness. His capacity for love has been thwarted by his first marriage to



a mad and vicious woman and his subsequent experiences with women who sought him for his wealth and used him to further their own designs has merely convinced him that all women are rapacious, greedy, unloving and unfaithful, incapable of either decency or regard for others. In Jane he finds a woman with a sense of duty to her charge Adele, someone who thinks first of him and then of herself, a person to whom wealth is less important than her emotions, her emotions less important than her principle. Jane, like him, trusts her instincts but she acts with a formidable and admirable self-control that upholds the “dictates of conscience”.

This part of the novel presents a series of episodes that trace steps in the development of their relationship and an awareness of their dependence on and need for each other. Jane saves Mr. Rochester when his bed is mysteriously set on fire and his debts to her gradually accumulate. While his manner towards her is sometimes domineering she is aware only of his acceptance of their equality. Jane after saving Rochester from a horrible death is filled with a delirium of joy. She knows she is in love with Mr. Rochester. The arrival of Blanche Ingram fills her with despair, and she tries to reason herself into a sane despair by setting against a picture of this beautiful aristocratic woman her own portrait a governess, disconnected poor and plain. But this is a blasphemy against nature, and an effort to kill her feelings. While she repeats to herself that they are, forever, sundered, she knows that while she breathes and thinks, she must love him. As she watches Rochester and Miss Ingram she becomes certain that Blanche cannot charm him because she was neither good nor noble, was not endowed with force, fervour, kindness or sense. Her state was one of “ceaseless excitation and ruthless restraint,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 18).

When, masquerading as a gypsy woman, he describes Jane’s character, one sees what it is he has found in this young woman that makes her different from the Blanche Ingrams of this world, “her eye shines like dew”, her face “looks soft and full of feeling, it mocks, it is full of laughter, or it is sad, it shows pride and reserve. The mouth is mobile and flexible it was never intended for silence. The forehead declares the power of reason, the claims of conscience.” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 19). But it is very soon after this scene when he has all but disclosed his feelings to her that he learns of the arrival of Mr. Mason.

The attack on Mr. Mason makes Rochester once again seek Jane’s aid. But he does not tell her who the mad woman is and continues to talk in riddles after Mason’s departure. Jane goes back to make her peace with her dying aunt still in the belief that Mr. Rochester is affianced to Blanche Ingram. As she returns, she has a presentiment that she will not be with Rochester for very long and she must make the most of her time with him. She thinks that she will have to leave him because Adele will be sent



to school when Rochester marries Blanche. She returns quietly, unobtrusively and steals into Mr. Rochester's presence and is overjoyed at his pleasure at seeing her again, at his reproaches over her long absence of a whole month. His smile she describes as the real sunshine of feeling that is shed over her. As she turns to enter the house she thanks him and tells him that wherever he is, is her home, her only home.

It is on a midsummer's eve in a garden filled with the evening sacrifice of incense offered up by sweetbriar and southernwood, jasmine-'pink and rose that Rochester finally asks Jane to be his wife and she agrees to give him her gratitude and devotion, but ominously that night the great horse-chestnut tree in the orchard is struck by lightning, a warning Rochester ignores and Jane does not understand.

Jane, realizing the peril she stands in if she yields to soft scenes, refuses to sink into a bathos of sentiment and decides to keep Rochester at a distance. Her task she finds a difficult one-her future husband was becoming her whole world, more than the world, almost her hope of heaven. "He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not in those days, see God for his creature; of whom I had made an idol." (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 24).

For this sin she pays heavily and so does Mr. Rochester for ignoring the laws of man and religion in contemplating a second marriage while his first wife still lived. Jane on her wedding day discovers the secret of Thornfield Hall and having heard her master's confession, refuses to listen to his pleading and forces herself to leave him. It is because she is afraid that if she gives in to him he will very soon lose all respect for her, quite as much as her knowledge that an unlawful life with him is morally wrong that makes her run away from Thornfield.

7.3 Jane's Relationship with St. John Rivers

It is as an exhausted, broken, helpless, Jane pleading for admission to his house that St. John Rivers finds on his doorstep and offers shelter to. This particular relationship is almost entirely the reverse of that between Jane and Mr. Rochester and it is because Jane is afraid of the kind of emotions that have been aroused by Rochester that she is drawn to the fanatic idealism of St. John Rivers. He on his side finds her comfortable and sensible. There is no danger that he will be tempted from the path of duty or sacrifice by someone who is so plain. He finds her face sensible but not at all handsome and he is incapable of warm feelings for her. He is in every way the very opposite of Mr. Rochester. Where the latter is of middle height with broad shoulders Rivers is tall and slender; Rochester's face is dark and stern, irregular and not beautiful; Rivers face is Greek, very pure in outline with quite a straight classic nose, quite an Athenian mouth and chin, it is a harmonious



face; Mr. Rochester's eyes and brow and hair are black while St. John's eyes are large and blue, his forehead colourless as ivory, partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair. The contrast between the appearance of the two men is exactly paralleled by the dissimilarity in their characters. Mr. Rochester's incapacity to govern his impulsive nature is set against the self-control of St. John who will not give way to his feelings for Rosamund Oliver. Rochester has an innate gaiety of spirit that manifests itself in his conversations with Jane, an enjoyment of life that is not destroyed by his experiences, St. John's sermon, Jane finds, is filled with bitterness, an absence of gentleness and it is an expression of a Calvinistic faith convinced of imminent doom.

It is inevitable that Jane flying from Rochester is soon bound to Rivers this time by the bonds of gratitude, forged by his charity. He exploits his power to influence her to sacrifice herself to a higher cause than self. But he really does not understand her at all. He sees nothing of her needs and while his influence over her is great she feels imprisoned by him. While in Rochester's presence her spirit finds itself liberated, set free, St. John Rivers took away her liberty of mind, "his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference". Her vivacity she knew gave pleasure to Mr. Rochester, but St. John she was sure regarded it with distaste. "I was so fully aware that only serious moods and occupations were acceptable that in his presence every effort to sustain or follow any other became vain; I fell under a freezing spell," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 34). Contrast this with the image of real sunshine she uses in describing Mr. Rochester's smile. While she is perfectly capable of controlling Rochester's moods she finds herself obeying St. John Rivers like an automaton— "When he said 'go' I went, come', I came do this, I did it. But I did not love my servitude," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 34). There is something cold and chilling about Rivers and she feels she is fettered. Her desire to please him, she feels, involves disowning half her faculties, wresting her tastes from their original bent, forcing herself to the adoption of pursuits for which she had no natural vocation. "He wanted to train me for an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted. The thing was as impossible as to mould my irregular features to his correct and classic pattern, to give to my changeable green eyes the sea-blue tint and solemn lustre of his own," (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 34).

It is not strange that the merciless demands made upon her, the life he wants her to lead, seems an iron shroud from which she wants to escape. When she seriously contemplates a future as his wife she realises that what she feels for him is a neophyte's respect and submission to his hierophant. When he speaks of love she is revolted at the thought and tells him so. To him she appears violent and unfeminine at times. His zeal in his cause is one thing she finds magnetic. Her veneration for him when she listens to his praise



of self-sacrifice takes her rushing headlong down the torrent of his will. She, however, realizes that as it would have been an error of principle to yield to Mr. Rochester so now it would be an error of judgment to yield to St. John Rivers. The mysterious summons of Mr. Rochester's voice calling her in the night breaks the spell St. John Rivers seems to have cast over her and she finds she now has the power to command him.

Jane's return to the ruins of Thornfield Hall and her reunion with Rochester which ends in their marriage are recounted in the fourth and concluding section of the novel. But no new light is thrown on the Jane Rochester relationship. Mr. Rochester in this part of the book is no longer the strong protective figure of the earlier part of the story, neither is Jane the diffident girl seeking protection anymore. Rochester, when he is sure Jane has been restored to him, is grateful to Providence and he thanks his Maker for her return. To Jane a marriage which offends neither man nor God is a blessing. She and her husband have truly only one.

This novel, *Jane Eyre*, is so constructed as to deliberately set off the Jane-Rochester relationship against the Jane—St. John relationship. It is clear that Charlotte Brontë sees in the first a warm human attachment, which is a form of liberty while in the other she sees a loss of individuality that is not the right choice for a person like Jane. Her method, therefore, allows the sets of relationships to illuminate and judge each other.

8. THE PLOT IN JANE EYRE: A STUDY IN TECHNIQUE

The plot forms the backbone of a novel. After all, what is a novel? It is a story about people. Naturally we are interested in the story, how it is told and how ordered. And there are so many ways of telling a story and so many ways of presenting the incidents in it. Let us first look at the ways of telling a story. First of all, the story can be related by the author himself, in the third person. He knows all the characters in the novel and what happens to them. We call this kind of method, the third person narration of an omniscient author. He is omniscient because he knows everything. He describes the characters to us. He thinks of them as friends of his and can even tell you things about them that he hasn't put into the novel! Jane Austen used to tell her sister, Cassandra, how well Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, got on as a married couple! Then the author is not tied down to any one place or time, so he can describe incidents and events that are so widely separated that it would be difficult for any one character to do so without straining our credulity. This is a very popular method of telling a story and we can distinguish two ways of using it which we can conveniently call the objective and the subjective approaches. You will see what I mean when I give you some examples. The author is objective when he relates his story as if he were an impersonal spectator. He merely sets down facts. He does not



assess or judge actions. He doesn't look for motives. He says, "this is what happened. Judge for yourself whether my hero or heroine acted rightly or wrongly, bravely or in a cowardly fashion. This is life and I am showing you a slice of it." Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* is a novel of this kind.

The subjective author on the other hand is not so detached. He likes to take the reader into his confidence and tell him more about the story and the characters than would emerge in a dramatic representation. He comments. He makes comparisons. He expresses regret, pity, delight. He often addresses the reader directly, saying "Dear reader" One of the famous women novelists of the nineteenth century, George Eliot, uses this method in her novels and it enables her to make the moral judgments which give such depth to her work. Most novelists of course who write in the third person combine subjectivity and objectivity in their books. Jane Austen who is on the whole an objective writer, may put her own reflections into the mouth of one of the characters. In the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, she allows Elizabeth Bennett to voice the comments she would herself make. But the beautiful and ironic opening of the book is in Jane Austen's own tone. She says, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" Is this true or the opposite?

Now, apart from improbability, all these advantages of a third person narration by the omniscient author must be considered when we look at other methods. One method which was once popular was the epistolary method. Here the story is told through letters which are written by one or more of the characters. In this way we get a very intimate knowledge of the working of people's minds and hearts and can also look at a situation from more than one point of view. But a novel told in this way can be very tedious and cumbersome. And again, we have the basic improbability of characters who sit down to write a letter every time something of interest occurs. In the midst of an exciting adventure they are looking for their writing materials to note down their reactions for a friend's benefit. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that this method is one of the best for expressing the innermost thoughts and feelings of the characters. And it is this quality which we find in the method used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*—the autobiographical method. The heroine tells her own story in her own words. In between the quiet tones of an unhappy child at the beginning to the equally quiet tones of the satisfied wife and mother, "Reader, I married him" (*Jane Eyre* chapter 38), we are presented with a whole range of passionate emotions in the very accents of their creator. We can understand them, and we can share them.

But there is one interesting difference between the autobiographical account and the epistolary one. The author looks back on his or her past from a position of security and



maturity. The letter writer uses the present tense and conveys the vividness and suspense of life as it is lived. Fortunately if the tale is well told, we do not realize that it relates to events that occurred in the past. At the beginning of the novel, Jane Eyre is ten years old. How old is she when she tells her story? She is twenty-nine or thirty as we know from the fact that she is nineteen when St. John Rivers proposes to make her his wife and take her to India. He says in chapter 34, “How can I, a man not yet thirty, take out with me to India a girl of nineteen, unless she is married to me?” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 34). Soon after, she leaves Morton to look for Rochester and they are married. In the last chapter, she says, “I have been married ten years. In a novel less intensely conceived this could be a disadvantage. Recollection can never be as vivid as immediate experience. But, looking back on her own childhood Jane can both judge herself and others. She realizes why she was unhappy at Gateshead Hall and also why Mrs. Reed and her children could not love or approve of her. In chapter 2, she says, “Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward questions why I thus suffered; now, at the distance of all I will not say how many years, I see it clearly. I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, of her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them.” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 2). At Lowood she comes under the wise influence of Helen Burns and Miss Temple and realizes that she must learn to curb her passionate nature, improve her mind by study and understand the comfort of religion. Again, she can look back on the intensity of her struggle with her moral principles when she decides to leave Rochester and at the same time approve of her judgment in making the decision and keeping to it.

One of the difficulties in the autobiographical novel is when the novelist has to describe scenes and characters which either the character could not know or the author is not familiar with. But, the story in *Jane Eyre* is limited to her own experiences as unwanted orphan, unhappy schoolgirl and humble governess changing to a beloved companion. Then there is a short period of separation with the congenial Rivers sisters and confrontation with a character almost antithetical to Rochester's in St. John Rivers and the final quiet marriage and settlement in a secluded manor house. All this experience could well be undergone and described by the heroine herself. There is nothing improbable about it. But if Charlotte Brontë had attempted to give Rochester's story in his own words she would soon have run into difficulties.

You are perhaps familiar with the details of the Brontë household. Living in a lonely parsonage on the wild and open moors, Charlotte and her two sisters and brother grew up under the stern solicitude of their old father. She knew little of fashionable life



and manners. She passed her brief life in quiet devotion to household duties, saddened and troubled by the unconventional behaviour of the brother, his death and those of her sisters. Apart from a visit to Belgium to learn French and a brief spell as governess she travelled little and had few opportunities for making friends. It was only after the success of her novel *Jane Eyre* that she got into touch with literary people. And tragically enough, her experience of the happiness of married life lasted for less than a year. She died before her child was due to be born. The narrowness of this life was set off by remarkable imaginative and intellectual powers. Set Charlotte's experience and nature, beside Jane's and you can see how the autobiographical method was the best that she could have chosen. She has been criticized for her description of Blanche Ingram and the fashionable house-party at Thornfield, who speak and act as no English people, even of aristocratic pretensions, would ever do. Here her lack of experience betrayed her—though perhaps through the eyes of a scared and diminutive governess, ladies and gentlemen might appear as stupid, tactless and rude. In her later novels, *Shirley* and *Villette* she also tells her story from a woman's point of view but widens the canvas and in doing so loses much of the conviction gained in *Jane Eyre* because she tries to describe people and situations less familiar to her.

Now that we have seen the method used in telling the story, let us look at the structure of the plot. This falls roughly into four parts roughly, because two of them though short can be sub-divided once more making six in all. The first part covers Jane's early life with her aunt Mrs. Reed at Gateshead, (chapters 1 to 4) and her stay at Lowood (chapters 5 to 9); the second and by far the longest and most important deals with her life as governess to Adele at Thornfield and of the love that arises between herself and "her master" Rochester. This part of her life comes to an abrupt close when she discovers the existence of Rochester's mad wife and decides to flee. Chapters 10 to 27 cover this. The third part can also be divided into two, dealing with her life with the Rivers family—firstly as an unknown dependent on their charity, prepared to work as a humble teacher in a village school and then as a recognized member of the family possessed of an income of her own and acknowledged under her own name which could no longer be kept secret. Chapters 28 to 33 cover the first part here and Chapters 34 to 35 the second. The last three chapters of the book form the conclusion. When just at the point of yielding to St. John Rivers' proposal in the name of sacrifice and religious service, a supernatural summons leads her to seek Rochester once more and realize that with his fate her own can now be securely bound up.

These parts are fairly definitely indicated to us by the author herself. At the start of each new development in her life Jane looks forward to new independence, or as she calls it, a 'new servitude'. This act of mental and emotional stock-taking is often associated with natural description. After Miss Temple's marriage, Jane feels restless and looks out



of her window towards the horizon. She says, “My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain and vanishing in a gorge between two: how I longed to follow it farther!” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 10). When she leaves Thornfield her heart is too burdened with sorrow to be aware of the beautiful morning, but the reader is aware of this, when she says, “But I looked neither to rising sun, nor smiling sky, nor wakening nature,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 27). Her approach to Thornfield after the disastrous fire has left it a ruin, is carefully filled in with details about the landscape- “How I looked forward to catch the first view of the well-known woods! With what feelings I welcomed single trees I knew and familiar glimpses of meadow and hill between them,” (*Jane Eyre*, chapter 36). The desolate retreat in which she eventually finds Rochester is described in terms of dark gloomy wood and neglected grass.

The most important requirement in the structure of the novel is unity. An autobiographical novel possesses a built-in unity, *i.e.*, the personality of the narrator and on its appeal the success of the work stands or falls. Fortunately, the character of Jane is sufficient to provide an absorbing interest. The minor characters in the novel only appear to fill out the different settings in which we meet the heroine and so we expect to find new characters introduced at each stage of her life and so they are. She keeps in touch with all the important ones. We rediscover the Reed family when Jane visits her aunt on her deathbed and when we hear the business about the will left by the uncle in Madeira. Diana and Mary Rivers visit Jane after all are married, St. John corresponds with her, and we see Adele grow up useful and happy. The parts have merely served their purpose as signposts in the stages of Jane’s career.

9. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Write short notes on:
 - (a) Mrs. Reed
 - (b) Miss temple
 - (c) Helen
2. What does the novel tell you about the social class system in nineteenth century England? Bring out Jane’s uncertain social standing. Does Brontë support this system or present a critique of it?



3. Describe life at Gateshead and Lowood as seen by Jane.
4. Critically analyse the narrative technique of the novel.
5. Compare and contrast Rochester and St. John Rivers. What are their strengths and weaknesses? Why does Jane choose Rochester over St. John?
6. How does Charlotte Brontë incorporate elements of the Gothic tradition into the novel?
7. How does the novel comment on the position of women in Victorian society?
8. Discuss the role of education and employment of women in the 19th century in the context of the novel “Jane Eyre.”
9. Critically comment on the use of the supernatural in *Jane Eyre*.
10. Discuss the role and representation of Bertha Mason in the novel.
11. Considering his treatment of Bertha Mason, is Mr. Rochester a sympathetic or unsympathetic character? Discuss.
12. In what way can *Jane Eyre* be considered a feminist novel?
13. Critically analyse the character of Jane and her role as narrator.
14. Discuss Jane Eyre as a ‘coming of age’ novel, a bildungsroman.

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‘THE LADY OF SHALOTT’

Alfred Tennyson

Nalini Prabhakar

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will enable you to:

- Understand the various aspects of 19th century England.
- Situate the poet Tennyson within the broader framework of 19th century England.
- Summarize and critically analyze the poem ‘The Lady of Shalott’.

2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Nineteenth Century England

The Nineteenth Century was a period of momentous change. The whole structure of society was being transformed by the Industrial Revolution. As the industries attracted labour, there was a massive migration from the country to the towns. For the first time in the history of England, by 1851, more than half the population was living in urban areas. The horrors of town life, inadequate housing, sanitation, water supplies, resulted due to this large scale migration. Working conditions were equally bad-long hours and minimal wages and the constant threat of being sacked. Industrial Revolution created a society in which the middle classes profited exceedingly and the working classes were reduced to extreme poverty. The situation however, gradually improved due to two main types of thought-Evangelical and Utilitarian.

The Evangelical movement tried to persuade the under-privileged into thinking their miseries were divinely ordained, yet at the same time they urged the privileged classes to take practical steps for the relief of their fellow-men and encouraged humanitarian reform. The Factory Acts, were largely responsible from 1833 onwards, for the improvement in working conditions. This improvement was however woefully inadequate.

Utilitarianism was a rational approach to the same problem and was first propounded by Bentham, and developed by James Mill and John Stuart Mill. The principle underlying this philosophy was “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”. This philosophy



resulted in a long series of reforms which gradually transformed the social, political system based on tradition and privilege into something of a democracy.

The call for Parliamentary Reform came first from the Industrialists and was taken up by the working classes. The demand for Representation and franchise led to widespread riots. After 15 months of violent agitation the first Reform Act was passed in 1832.

England witnessed sensational advances in technology. In 1830 the Liverpool and Manchester Railway had opened. The Railways was a symbol of the progress being made. It accelerated commercial activity and turned England into the richest country in the world. Certain other inventions such as telegraph and photography were beginning to change the character of everyday life.

The accession of Queen Victoria (1837) brought in a new social ethic of respectability and domesticity. This new social ethic laid a lot of emphasis on moral behaviour, resulting in a horror of sex and extreme prudishness in all aspects related to the body and flesh.

The Victorian age also witnessed some very radical and revolutionary thought which made its impact not only in the later part of 19th century but also in the 20th century. The terrible living conditions of the working class were vividly recounted in Engels “The condition of the working class in England in 1844”. In “The Communist Manifesto” Marx prescribed revolution as the only solution. The first serious statement for the emancipation of women came from J.S. Mill in “The Subjection of women” (1869). Lyell’s “Principles of Geology” (1830-33) made it impossible to accept the account of the Creation in Genesis. It was Darwin’s ‘The Origin of Species’ packed with scientific evidence, which conclusively debunked the theory of creation in Genesis. Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection replaced the Biblical Providence by a series of accidents. This led to a general crisis of Faith and started the religion Vs. science debate.

In 1867 when the Reform Act gave the vote to the working classes in towns, notable thinkers of the time, Carlyle, Mathew Arnold felt apprehensive about the transfer of power to uneducated masses. In 1884 Gladstone’s Reform Act gave the vote to the working classes in rural districts.

This account of the Nineteenth Century England is by no means exhaustive. An attempt has been made to introduce you to the socio-political, technological and intellectual development of the age.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain briefly how Nineteenth Century England was a period of momentous change.

**Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892): A brief biographical sketch**

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809, fourth son of George Clayton Tennyson and his wife Elizabeth Tennyson, at Somersby Rectory in Lincolnshire. His childhood and adolescence was not a happy one. His father, though a learned cultured man was given in to drunkenness and violence (probably because he was disinherited by his father). The atmosphere at home was one of bitterness, and genteel poverty and madness. At the age of six, he went to the school at Louth. He was utterly miserable in school and after four years of school life, he returned home to be tutored by his father.

He entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1827 with financial help from his aunt Mrs. Russel. It is here that he met Arthur Hallam and Apostles. In June 1828, he won the Chancellors gold medal for the poem Timbuctoo. Soon after winning this honour in 1829 he published *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. The death of his father in 1830 forced him to return home without taking his degree.

The sudden death of Arthur Hallam in 1833 left a deep impression on Tennyson and inspired the most philosophical of Tennyson's poems in *Memoriam*. Around 1838 for a while he was engaged to Emily Sellwood. The engagement was broken. In 1841, Tennyson after a long silence published *Poems*, and in 1847, the *Princess* in 1849, he published *In Memoriam* on which he had worked close to sixteen years. In the same year he married Emily Sellwood and was appointed Poet Laureate in November after the death of Wordsworth. By the 1850's Tennyson was famous, secure and the poet Laureate.

The remaining forty years of his life, he lived like Wordsworth in the stillness of a great peace. In 1869 he built himself a large pseudo-Gothic mansion named Aldworth in Surrey which he thought would be less accessible to visitors and tourists unlike his earlier home at Farringdon. He published steadily until his death in 1892.

Tennyson and his age

Barring the first and the last decades, Tennyson's life spans the whole of 19th century. We have in an earlier section seen how 19th century England was an explosive mixture of poverty, commercial exploitation, popular discontent, progressive ideas and reforming zeal. Let us now examine Tennyson's attitude towards various issues confronting 19th century. A highly incisive insight, though not very complimentary, into Tennyson as a Victorian poet is offered by Hippolyte. A Taine. He writes "Without being a pedant, he is moral, he may be read in the family circle by night; he does not rebel against society and life; he speaks of god and the soul, nobly, tenderly without ecclesiastical prejudice; there is no need to reproach him like Lord Byron; he has no violent and abrupt words, excessive and scandalous sentiments; he will pervert nobody ... He has not rudely trenched upon truth



and passion. He has risen to the height off noble and tender sentiments. He has gleaned from all nature and all history what was most lofty and amiable.... It (Tennyson's poetry) seems made expressly for these wealthy, cultivated, free businessmen, heirs of the ancient nobility, new leaders of a New England. It is part of their luxury as of their morality; it is an eloquent continuation of their principles, and a precious article of their drawing room furniture." (Taine p.537)

Taine's estimate of Tennyson made around 1863, holds Tennyson as sympathetic to the sensibilities of the middle and ruling classes. Let us briefly examine how much truth there is in this estimate.

Tennyson and the Reform Acts

He was deeply apprehensive at the transfer of political power to the uneducated masses namely, the industrial and agricultural workers. As member of the house of Lords, it was with great reluctance, fearing an impending revolution that he gave assent to the 1884 Gladstone's Reform Act which gave voting power to the working classes in rural districts. In "Freedom" (1854) he warned Gladstone not to give in to "brass mouths and iron lungs" demanding "All things in a hour".

Tennyson and the conservative social ethic

Tennyson never doubted the soundness of the Victorian ethic of respectability, domesticity and moral behaviour. This he expressed with great conviction in his poetry. His longest work Idylls of the King (1859-85) shows sexual irregularity (the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere) leading to the downfall of a civilization. The theme of domesticity is shown to good advantage in Enoch Arden (1864).

Tennyson and the Question of Faith

In spite of scientific evidence to the contrary Tennyson retained his faith in a personal God and in an after-life. "In Memoriam" Tennyson suggests that subjective religious feelings are more conclusive evidence to the existence of God. This solution however is grossly inadequate to explain away the greatest problem faced by the period.

Tennyson and the British Imperialism

"Fifty years of ever-broadening Commerce!
Fifty years of every- brightening science!
Fifty years of ever widening Empire!

These lines show Tennyson at his patriotic best. However, the larger ethical question involved in the "ever-widening Empire" do not seem to have bothered Tennyson. It is not surprising therefore that "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and



the “Defense of Lucknow” only incorporated the Imperialist point of view and not that of the freedom fighters.

When E.J. Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica savagely hanged 600 people in 1865 to suppress a rebellion, his behaviour was denounced by the likes of Gladstone and Huxley. Tennyson however thought otherwise. He not only subscribed to a fund for Eyre’s defense but also seems to have said “Niggers are tigers, niggers are tigers”.

Check Your Progress

1. Briefly explain Tennyson’s attitude towards various issues confronting 19th century.

3. THE LADY OF SHALOTT

Part 1

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And through the field the road runs by
To many-towered Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.
Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Through the wave that runs forever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot,

Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,



And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.
By the margin, willow-veiled,
Slide the heavy barges trailed
By slow horses; and unhailed
The shallop flitteth silken-sailed
Skimming down to Camelot:

But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?
Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to towered Camelot;
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

Part 2

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse Is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,



And little other care bath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot;
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
Or long-haired page in crimson clad,
Goes by to towered Camelot;
And sometimes through the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often through the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot;
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

*Part 3*

A bowshot from her bower eaves,
He rode between the barley sheaves,
The sun came dazzling through the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight forever kneeled
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glittered free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy,
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot;
And from his blazoned baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewelled shone the saddle leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burned like one burning flame together.
As he rode down to Camelot;
As often through the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.



His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed;
On burnished hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flowed
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror,
“Tirra lirra,” by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She looked down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror cracked from side to side;
“The curse is come upon me,” cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Part 4

In the stormy east wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over towered Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.



And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Through the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot;
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and field among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darkened wholly,
Turned to towered Camelot.
For ere she reached upon the tide
The First house by the waterside,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.



Under tower and balcony,
By garden wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame.
And round the prow they read her name
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they crossed themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot: But Lancelot mused a little space; He
said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

4. SUMMARY

This poem was first published in 1832 and extensively revised in 1842. In our analysis we shall use the 1842 version. This poem has for its source an Italian novella "Donna di Scallota", (1321) Tennyson acknowledging the source wrote "I met the story first in some Italian novella but the web, mirror, island etc., were my own. Indeed, I doubt whether I should ever have put it in that shape if I had been then aware of the Maid of Astolat in Mort d' Arthur". Tennyson claimed that he had not read Malory's Mort d' Arthur at the time of composing this poem.

The Poem however is very different from its source. Tennyson changed the "Sc" in the Scallota to the softer sound "Sh". He placed his lady in solitary confinement in a grey tower and gave her the two chores of singing and weaving. He also put her under a curse. These additions make the poem an original work and not a poor piece of imitation.



The Lady of Shalott is a poem in four parts. We shall first deal with each part separately and then critically analyze the poem in its entirety.

PART I

Study Notes:

Wold: Open upland Countryside

Camelot: The Legendary city of King Arthur. In the Italian source the city is by the sea-shore.

Blow: Bloom

Willows *whiten*: The underside of the leaves of willow trees is white. When the wind blows, the leaves turn exposing their white underside.

Imbowers: Enfolds and shelters

Shallop: A small light open boat.

Bearded barley – The bristles on the ear of the barley plant.

Summary:

Part I presents the world's idea of the fairy lady, an unseen presence. Most of Part I is taken up with the description of the landscape. The river cuts through the long fields of barley and rye and through these fields runs the road to the city of Camelot. People going up and down the road gaze upon the island of the Shalott in the middle of the river. The island and the tower are well hidden from the direct view of people because of the various kinds of trees and plants "willows", "aspens", "lilies" and a "space of flowers". In the tower of "four gray walls" and "four gray towers" lives the lady of Shalott.

In Part I the emphasis is on the lady's anonymity. She is well protected from the gaze of the outside world. Her presence is known because of her song which is heard only by the reapers, reaping early or late by the moon light. The song of the lady echoes "cheerly" and therefore one can safely assume that her life is one of contentment and happiness. The song also relates her to Shelly's Skylark "Like a poet hidden in the light of thought, singing hymns unbidden... Like a high born maiden in a palace tower, soothing her love laden soul in Secret hour with music". Part I ends with the reaper's whisper.

Check Your Progress

1. Where does the Lady of Shalott live?
2. What aspect of the Lady is emphasized in Part I?



Part II

Study Notes:

Eddy: Small Whirlpool

Ambling pad: Part of double harness to which girths are attached.

Summary:

The gazing, listening and whispering of Part I is transformed into a strange actuality in Part II. In Part II we enter the mysterious world of the lady. She weaves by “day and night a magic web with colours gay”. This she does because she is under a curse which forbids her to look towards Camelot. She knows next to nothing about the curse, what shape it might take or what retribution might be expected in case of disobedience. In the “magic web” she copies reflections of the outside world seen in a mirror. In a sense all her artistic endeavour is twice removed from reality. The web and the mirror immediately bring to mind Socrates definition of art and poetry as “twice removed from reality”, as recounted by Plato in Republic Book X. The emphasis in Part II is not so much on the magic web as on the mirror’s “magic sight” and “Shadows” of the stream of human life and existence – “village churls”, “market girls”, “damsels glad”, “abbot”, “shepherd-lad”, “knights riding two and two”, “funeral”, “two young lovers”. These sights evoke in the Lady a strange see-saw of emotions. She “delights” to weave but is also by moments “half-sick of shadows”. These contradicting emotions of pleasure and revulsion affirm and undermine the “cheerly” song of Part I and prepare us for what follows next in the poem. Part II ends with the Lady repining “I am half-sick of shadows”.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does the lady weave day and night?
2. What does she weave?
3. Why is the lady “half-sick of shadows”?

Part III

Study Notes:

Greaves: Armour to guard skin

Baldric: Richly ornamented shoulder belt.

Meteor: Reference here to any bright dazzling but transient object.

From the Bank... Crystal mirror: A double image of Lancelot



- (1) A reflection from the bank
- (2) A reflection of the reflection in the river.

Summary:

The lovers at the end of Part II anticipate the appearance of Sir Lancelot in Part III. In Parts I and II the outside world, and the lady's world, despite their awareness of each other through song and mirror reflections maintain their distance. In part III the outer world breaks in on the lady in the form of Sir Lancelot. Sir Lancelot, all colour and light, bright and glittering is reflected doubly "From the bank and from the river", and the lady cannot be satisfied with just the shadow. The lady now is possessed by a passion beyond her control. And so she looks away from shadows to reality and invites her destiny.

In "Memoir Vol. I." Tennyson writes of the lady "The new born love for something, for someone in the wide world from which she has been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities". The Lady's sexual frustration is faintly underlined by the suggestive song that Lancelot is singing when she first sees him from the window. The song "Tirra Lirra" is from "The Winter's Tale" where Autolycus thinks of "tumbling in the hay" with his "aunts" (whores) which forms part of a bawdy tradition.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the outer world break in on the lady?

Part IV

Summary:

In Part IV the Lady enters the public world. The move from the private tower to the public world involves death. We now know the nature of the curse. The lady will suffer the fate of all mortals that is, death. The lady's initial act of transgression is however short lived. She makes preparations for her death, passively without a whimper. All her actions henceforth seem to have a trance-like quality. Her surrender is absolute and complete. As she "flows" into the great world of Camelot, the reapers hear her sing her last song not "Cheerly" but mournfully.

Singing thus she dies before reaching the first house by the water-side. Her entry into Camelot is "Silent", "Dead-pale" nonetheless a "gleaming shape". The gaze of the entire town is now focused upon the lady. Here it is interesting to note the reversal of roles. Earlier, it was the lady who had gazed upon the world and its people, secure in her invisibility and anonymity. Lancelot's musings at the end of the poem serve as a compassionate epitaph,



but his understanding of the entire situation is as limited as that of the others. The lady of Shalott in her death does not influence but merely puzzles her unimaginative on lookers.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the move from the private tower to the public world involve?
2. Comment on the death of the lady.

5. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This poem, in terms of scenic description and lyrical quality must be ranked very highly. The visual sensuousness is evident in the expert handling of colour and light, which makes each scene and object described definite and distinct from the other scenes and objects. The rhythm of the poem too varies, at times it lingers and at times it quickly flashes by.

Although a simple reading of the poem as a fairy tale with supernatural overtones is rewarding in itself, it would nonetheless be interesting to see what other readings this poem lends itself to.

The lady of Shalott, almost always has been seen as (1) A critique of the isolated artist cut off from life, retreating into the aesthetic world of infinite regression designated by the weaving which reproduces the mirror reflections which represent the world. (2) The lady is locked into rigid oppositions, between the rural and the urban, an older order of labour by hand and mercantilism and trade, an organic integrated world and a fragmented commercial world, between isolation and community, between passivity and action, female and male, the aesthetic and the “real”. Unable to mediate these oppositions she is condemned to passivity and death. These readings though valid merely reduce the entire poem into rigid oppositions and a tame acceptance of these oppositions.

There is yet another reading possible which dissolves and interrogates the fixed positions and opposition of the above readings. This reading is possible in both the 1832 & 1842 versions, but the latter exposes the problematic nature of the lady’s position more emphatically. The lady of Shalott is a conflation of a number of mythic structures—the myths of the weaving lady from Arachne to Penelope, and the myths of reflection of Narcissus and Echo. This is a poem of longing for sexual love, change and transformation which is denied. The Lady is a doomed victim and dies a sacrificial death failing to experience her sexuality or consummate it.

This poem seems to explore the status of myth and the relation between myth and power. One condition of the curse is the ceaseless labour of weaving the web, a labour



without escape and without pleasure. There is an alignment between the labour of the lady and the labour of the reapers. The lady weaving her web could also be a representation of the starving handloom weavers displaced by new industrial processes. The possibility of change is explored through the lady's psyche, as she becomes a representation of alienation and work. The appearance of the lover forces upon her the realization that her world is mere representation- "Shadows" when Lancelot bursts upon the scene with his powerful sexuality, her sense of inadequacy forces her into action. Earlier what was lacking was this sense of inadequacy. She was secure in the myth of seclusion and domesticity. The curse is the myth of power, a representation which kept the lady subject. The irony here is that the curse comes true on her realization of estrangement and oppression. Her life is doomed the moment she dares to redefine her life. The recognition that her life is "not-complete" is the first precondition for action. Once the myth is recognized as a myth, which enables action, there is possibility of change, of construction of a new myth. Thus the death of the lady is sacrificial and not passive submission. The situation at the end of the poem is revolutionary without revolution.

Note: The 1842 reconstruction of mythic representation could be owing to Tennyson's familiarity with Keightley's book *The Fairy Mythology*. Keightley in this book talks of:

- (1) Myths, as part of a primal, indigenous peasant culture where the imaginative life of a nation resides, an intuitive form of thought which possesses an organic wholeness prior to thought, and in particular to artificial society.
- (2) Myths as instruments of power and ideology, used by a ruling class to coerce the ruled and frequently changing with a change of power.
- (3) Myths as a poetic fiction, and all the ancient systems of heathen religion were devised by philosophers for the instruction of rude tribes.

Check Your Progress

1. Analyze the poem as a critique of the 'isolated artist'.
2. The lady of Shallot is a conflation of a number of mythic structures. Explain.

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***GREAT EXPECTATIONS*****Charles Dickens****Dr. V.P. Sharma****1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This lesson will enable you to:

- Summarize and critically analyze the novel in detail.
- Analyze the main characters.
- Engage with some important themes in the novel.

2. INTRODUCTION

Great Expectations has all the virtues of a Dickensian novel, and few of the so-called demerits that have been pointed out by some of his critics. The most important feature of the Dickensian world is the abundance of vitality. His novels are peopled with great characters-as well-known to us as any daily acquaintance- Pickwick, Micawber, Jaggers, William Dorrit, Madame Defarge. These are but only a few names, but they show the range of Dickens' fictional characters.

These characters bring out the full meaning of their being, in the context of the whole structure of the novel of which they are a part. Not one of them is superfluous and each has his role in the enactment of the story, strengthening and supporting the various themes. In *Great Expectations* the expectations of Pip, of Miss Havisham, of Magwitch and of others in the novel, are skilfully woven together through coincidences, in a manner, that a coherent tale emerges. Martin Price reinforces this point- "All novels, however realistic they may seem, hold together careers that would drift apart in real life...Dickens is flagrant about connecting his characters and we enter his novels with the expectation that their world permits, in fact demands, such collision. It is a world of heightened significance, a world of unrelieved and often frightening relevance, a world where crime and disease are not discrete (isolated) experiences but dimensions of a larger and more oppressive dehumanization. It is a world of doubles and counter-parts, of actions that reticulate into a vast mesh of consequences". In *Great Expectations* we see how the casual and the causal are blended together, the first meeting of the small Pip, with the escaped convict in the



marshes, apparently is a casual meeting. This chance meeting moulds the entire shape of Pip's life, without his knowledge till the end. The art of the story-teller does not reveal the real benefactor, though the suspense is at a very low key, the reader feels almost certain with Pip that it must be Miss Havisham, who is the fairy god-mother, the different strands of the story are thus connected as they follow the pattern, drawn by the novelist, unseen and unknown to the reader, till the novel reaches its final stage.

The expectations of each character are realised ironically, each one outcome being contingent upon the others. In a way, the dreams are all realised. Pip, with self-aware hind sight, does become a gentleman; kind, forgiving, and self-effacing. Magwitch becomes a gentleman, through the loss of all his fortune, Estella loses her lofty hauteur, and is transformed to a woman bent and broken into a better shape. The steadfast loyalty of Joe is rewarded ultimately with the return of the prodigal Pip-who is free from all the false pretensions he had earlier acquired and gratefully accepts his home and his real kin Joe and Biddy, Herbert Pocket gains his modest ambitions and settles down to a happy life. Each fantasy is turned into reality and the fantasists turn into mature individuals. Like all the other novels of Dickens, the story fascinates and holds the reader's attention from the very first chapter. But the interesting almost dramatic incidents that overtake the uneventful life of Pip in the village, have greater impact in changing the mind of the boy than his outward fortunes. Indeed the changes in the mind of Pip, throughout the course of the novel is the actual point of interest in the story. It becomes evident from the tone of the narrator- that the adult Pip, who has been through it all, is now critical of the stupidity, insensitivity of the younger Pip with his false values.

All the characters in the novel-contribute to the theme and are individuals in their own right, though each is caught up in the intricacies of the story.

2.1 The Plot of the Novel

Great Expectations (1860) is one of Dickens' last novels. While it has the distinct flavour of the Dickensian world, it is in many ways different from his earlier novels. It has often been remarked that one remembers Dickens for his characters rather than for his stories. His plots often are loose and rambling. This, of course, is true of his earlier novels, but not of *Great Expectations*. It has both fewer characters as well as a tightly constructed plot.

Great Expectations, however, does not have the typical Dickensian hero. There is no demigod here, and yet its hero Pip is as interesting as any other character in Dickens. Let us, therefore, have a brief look at the career of Pip and at the rise and fall of his great expectations. However, there lies an irony behind the title. As Chesterton has remarked, 'all his books might be called 'Great Expectations''. But the only book to which he gave



the name of ‘Great Expectations’ was the one book in which the expectation was never realized’.

A perennial theme in Dickens is cruelty to children inspired obviously by his own childhood experiences. Great Expectations has this theme too, although as the story develops it is overshadowed by the theme of Pip’s snobbery in particular.

2.2 Critical Summary

Chapters 1-6

Pip, whose full name was Philip Pirrip, himself tells his story. His earliest recollections go back to the day of his terrible encounter with an escaped convict in the lonely graveyard of the village where his parents were buried. Since his parents’ death he lived with his sister Mrs. Joe Gargery, a tough, headstrong woman. He didn’t even remember their faces. Pip’s brother-in-law, Joe, blacksmith by profession was his companion in their common suffering at the hands of that very stern lady, Pip’s sister. She was fond of telling Pip that she had brought him up ‘by hand’ whatever that meant. But, sure enough, she used both her hands and tongue with equal ease on the two of them, her brother Pip and her husband Joe.

On a bleak, windy Christmas eve the little unhappy Pip was in this graveyard when a harsh voice called out to him. A frightening -looking man with a great iron on his leg came up to him. He turned him upside down, and emptied his pockets. After Pip had given him his particulars and received tremendous dips and rolls in the man’s arms, he was asked to bring along a file and wittles (victuals = food) next day to the same spot. If he didn’t, he was warned that his heart and his liver ‘shall be torn out, toasted and ate’ by ‘a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am an Angel’. And this young man would get at Pip even if he hid himself behind closed doors.

The poor boy believed all this, shivered all over, and ran home, promising to do all that he had been asked for.

The encounter is Pip’s first vivid recollection of his childhood. Pip sees the world upside down, suspended in the mysterious man’s arms and he will continue to see the world upside down, though not literally, as he grows up. Great Expectations has been described as a fantasy and in a fantasy things and characters interact in an odd manner. As we shall see, Pip’s ambitions will give rise to a world of fantasy in which this mysterious man was only one of the characters.

When the frightened Pip reached home, obviously late, he had another rough handling at the hands of his sister. But, of course, he didn’t say anything about the man



‘with the iron leg’. At tea he quietly hid his butter slice in his trouser-leg. He passed a restless night and had fearful dreams. He rose very early, stole some eatables and brandy from the pantry and a file from Joe’s forge and ‘ran for the misty marshes.’

In the marshes, Pip ran into another escaped convict who was dressed in coarse grey, too, and, had a great iron on his leg. Pip came upon him from behind, and believing him to be ‘his man’ softly touched him on the shoulder. The man jumped up and ran away cursing him. Pip was convinced that this was the terrible young man who could get at a boy’s heart and liver. Soon enough, he found the older man who seemed dreadfully cold and hungry and gobbled the food that Pip had brought for him. When Pip mentioned the young man who was hidden with him, the man seemed rather puzzled. However when Pip told him he had met him, he was visibly agitated. It seemed he knew this man and wanted ‘to pull him down, like a blood hound’. He began filing away at the iron on his leg madly. Pip quietly slipped out.

But this was not the last time that Pip saw the convict. When a Christmas party was going on at Joe’s place and at the very moment that Mrs. Joe was wondering where her pork pie had vanished, a sergeant along with some soldiers entered the scene rather dramatically. The guilty Pip thought, for a second, they had come for him. They had, however, come to get a pair of handcuffs repaired. They planned to arrest two escaped convicts from the marshes. The handcuffs repaired, they marched out, followed by the curious Joe, Pip and one Mr. Wopsle to watch the ‘operation arrest’. They got the two convicts soon enough: they were shouting and fighting with each other in a ditch in the marshes. Of course, Pip recognized them. There was, apparently, some long standing animosity between the two. But before the soldiers marched them on to a boat, Pip’s convict took the blame for the theft of food entirely upon himself. The kindly Joe, surely did not seem to mind the loss at all. Despite being an escaped felon, he does not want young Pip to get into trouble on his account. Dickens draws our attention to the convict’s kindness to a little boy, whom he had bullied earlier.

Pip’s encounter with the convict is not unrelated to the plot. At the moment, though, the convict seems to be out of the picture; but he is going to be an inalienable part of Pip’s story. Without his knowing it, Pip’s whole career is going to be shaped by this encounter.

Check Your Progress

1. Who is the narrator of the story?
2. Describe the encounters with the two convicts.
3. What sort of a person was Pip’s sister?



4. What happens to the two convicts?
5. What does this encounter tell us about Pip's convict?

Chapters 7-12

An important development now takes place, one that will change the whole course of Pip's life. A rich, old lady/Miss Havisham living up-town desires Pip to go and play at her house. He had been recommended to her by a family friend of the Gargerys, Mr. Pumblechook. Accompanied by Uncle Pumblechook, Pip reached Miss Havisham's house-Satis House, a big but dismal looking place with many of its doors and windows barred. A pretty, young girl let him in. He was taken upstairs to a large room which was lighted with candles and from which all daylight had been shut out. Miss Havisham, a withered sickly woman, was dressed all in white and had bridal flowers in her hair. She looked more like a wax model than a human being.

Miss Havisham talked to him briefly. She was a tired, broken-hearted woman and she wanted him to play and distract her. But Pip couldn't do much to please her. Then Estella-for that was the young girl's name-was called in. Miss Havisham wanted her to play cards with that boy. Estella was utterly contemptuous in her behaviour towards this 'common labouring boy'. Now and on his future visits to this house, too, she would keep insulting him and treating him like a dog.

But Pip noticed something strange about the room. Time stood still here. The yellowing unworn shoe on the dressing table, the jewel that Miss Havisham had put down exactly where she had taken it up from, and the withered bridal dress of the old lady-all these told him that everything in the room had stopped long ago. The clock on the wall, too, had stopped long ago.

Finally Pip was allowed to go-but not before Estella had humiliated him enough to bring tears to the sensitive young boy's eyes. He was to come again after six days. Pip invented all kinds of lies to tell his sister and Mr. Pumblechook about the 'marvellous' time he had at Miss Havisham's. But later he told Joe that he had lied.

"That was a memorable day for me, for it made great changes in me", says Pip at the end of Chapter IX. So it was. A great change came in Pip's character. He became aware of his 'commonness,' of Joe's commonness, of his coarse hands, and of his ignorance. Estella had made him feel small and inferior. The seeds of snobbishness had been planted in Pip's character. Henceforth, in his pursuit of 'uncommonness', in his desire to be worthy of Estella, Pip was going to isolate himself from those who could love him, without gaining the love of those for whom he underwent such change.



Pip was now beginning to have great expectations. Mr Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe expected Miss Havisham to settle some property on him, make him a gentleman. Pip only knew how miserable he was. The elements of a fairy tale start gathering into the story. The hideous setting of Miss Havisham's house, the strange character of the terrible convict, of the mysterious Miss Havisham and the elusive 'princess' the proud Estella, all contribute to the effect of fairy tale.

Pip now decides to improve himself. He takes the help of Biddy, a fine, young girl who works at the school run by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt. But something mysterious happened while Pip was coming back from that school, one day. He stopped at Three Jolly Bargemen, a public house, to bring Joe along. Joe and Mr. Wopsle were sitting with a stranger. The man turned his head when Joe beckoned to Pip. Later, while the three were having rum he kept winking at Pip knowingly and to Pip's amazement stirred his rum with a file that Pip recognized to be the one he had stolen for the convict from Joe's forge. While parting, he gave Pip a shilling wrapped in a crumpled paper which later turned out to be two one-pound notes. The stranger surely knew the convict Pip had helped. The whole event was a cruel reminder to Pip of his guilty conduct, specially at the psychological moment of his decision to be a gentleman.

But Pip again visited Miss Havisham on the appointed day. As earlier, it was like a visit to another world. It happened to be Miss Havisham's birthday and quite a few of her relatives, who were all hypocrites professing their affection for her, were gathered around. Estella was determined to be cruel to Pip, and even slapped him. He checked his tears with great difficulty. This time he went to a different room, but again he saw daylight shut out and everything in a state of decay: mice, cobwebs holding big spiders, and black beetles sprawled over the place. And here it was that Miss Havisham showed Pip her cobweb covered bridal cake and confessed to him that 'It and I have worn away together'. The mice have gnawed at it, and sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me. What the grief of this decaying old woman was, Pip couldn't guess yet. Nor can the readers.

But Pip had a couple of more surprises before he left this eerie world. A pale young man challenged him to fight and got a bloody nose and a black eye at Pip's hand. Then just as he was going out, the whimsical Estella offered him a kiss. Pip kissed her cheek although he knew that "It was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been". But Estella had ensnared him in a hopeless passion.

And so Pip continued going to Miss Havisham's place, drawn there as if by a magnetic pull and Estella continued behaving most unpredictably towards him: now condescending, now cold, now contemptuous and insulting.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What new development occurs in Pip's life which will change the whole course of his later life?
2. What is strange about Miss Havisham's room?
3. What immediate effect does Estella's humiliation have on Pip?
4. Describe the incident at the Three Jolly Bargemen.
5. Describe the events which occur on Miss Havisham's birthday.

Chapters 13-17

When Pip was old enough, he was formally apprenticed to Joe. Miss Havisham earlier had sent for Joe and after enquiring about Pip's prospects in life, given him a small bag containing twenty-five guineas which, she said, Pip had earned by his visits to her place. Uncle Pumblechook, of course, earned Mrs. Gargery's praise for having introduced Pip to Miss Havisham.

Pip was utterly miserable now. What would Estella think of him if she saw him 'at my grimest and commonest...with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work'? (Chapter 14) Pip inwardly detested being an apprentice to a blacksmith; he was ashamed of his home. Quite clearly, he was turning into a snob. Pip did once open his heart to Biddy whom he liked and respected although 'she was common and could not be like Estella'. He wanted to be a gentleman, he confessed. Biddy, however, did not encourage him.

A dramatic event, though not directly connected with Pip's story, was a mysterious attack on his sister Mrs. Gargery when she was alone. The head injury took away her speech and hearing. Pip suspected Orlick, an assistant at Joe's forge, to be the culprit. She had a quarrel with him earlier, but he was a little puzzled when Mrs. Gargery showed a desire to be friendly with him, when Orlick appeared before her.

Check Your Progress

1. How much was Pip paid for his visits to Satis?
2. Why was Pip miserable at the prospect of being an apprentice to a blacksmith?

Chapters 18-30

After more than three years of apprenticeship-years of quiet misery-Pip had a break in life. A lawyer from London, Mr. Jaggers, suddenly appeared on the scene and told Joe



that Pip had a rich benefactor who wanted to make a gentleman of him. Pip had great expectations. He however, was never to make inquiries of any kind regarding the identity of his benefactor. It was Miss Havisham, thought Pip and he was happy and excited. He was to go to London immediately. Joe was happy to release Pip from his apprenticeship but did not accept any money from Mr. Jaggers for doing so.

A miracle had taken place.

It seemed as if Pip's fantasy was coming true. The good fairy had decided to give him a fortune. And the elusive 'princess' Estella could be his now. As if a magic wand had changed his world. As we shall see later, those who bullied him earlier, were eager to please him in his new status. Pip suitably equipped himself for his new life with the money given by Mr. Jaggers. However, Miss Havisham, whom he visited before his departure, did not seem to show any sign of being his secret benefactor.

A new life, a life that he had only dreamed of, began for Pip in London. New acquaintances, a new way of life and a new environment were to fill Pip's life now. His tutor was one Mr. Mathew Pocket, a distant relative of Miss Havisham, a coincidence which is one of the many in Great Expectations. Pip stayed for some time with Herbert Pocket, son of Mathew Pocket. Pip soon learnt that Herbert was 'the pale young man' he had fought with at Miss Havisham's. He was an affable, frank and modest young man. Herbert was gradually to be Pip's very intimate friend. He nicknamed Pip, Handel.

From now on the novelist begins knotting together the threads hanging loose in the story. Herbert revealed to Pip the mystery of Miss Havisham's dreadful seclusion. She had inherited a lot of property from her father. She was deceived by the young man she was engaged to marry. He had failed to turn up for the wedding ceremony for which all preparations had been made. Since that moment, time had stopped for Miss Havisham, and since then she had not stirred out of her house; she had brought up Estella to wreak vengeance on the male sex. Incidentally, Estella was no relation of hers, and had only been adopted by her.

Herbert's narration not only explained the eccentric life of Miss Havisham but also Estella's behaviour towards Pip, for she was being trained to break young men's hearts and thus afford vicarious pleasure to the great man-hater, Miss Havisham.

Pip was soon introduced to his tutor Mr. Mathew Pocket who lived at Hammersmith, to his wife Belinda and to his two pupils Startop and Drummle; of the latter we shall hear more. He also met some of Mr. Pocket's relatives. He had met them earlier at Miss Havisham's birthday. But their former scorn of once poor Pip had now turned into base servility directed at a now prosperous Pip. Pip got to know more about the formidable



criminal lawyer Mr. Jaggers before whom not only his clients and witnesses but even the magistrates quaked, and about his clerk, Wemmick, who projected a dual personality; one at office, the other outside office.

Pip still adored Estella. When Joe brought him the happy news that Miss Havisham desired to see him, he lost no time in going to visit her. It must be for Estella, he thought. And yet when he met Estella she didn't encourage him. She was polite but she told him that in her heart she had 'no softness there, no sympathy sentiment-nonsense' (Ch. 29). But Miss Havisham urged him, almost in a frantic voice, to love her; 'if the oft repeated word had been hate instead of love-desire-revenge-dire death-it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse', (Ch. 29).

It is a small world indeed in *Great Expectations* to contain a whole lot of coincidences. Pip was surprised to see Orlick (insolent as ever) opening the gate at Miss Havisham's and later to run into his guardian Mr. Jaggers at the place. The mystery would be resolved much later. Pip told Mr. Jaggers about Orlick's past ensuring that Orlick would be removed from his job.

Pip's hopeless passion for Estella alienated him from those who loved him-Joe and Biddy. He was pained at the uncouth manners of Joe when he visited him in London. And conscious of his changed circumstances, he chose to stay at a hotel rather than with Joe, when he visited his old town to meet Miss Havisham. And when Estella said to him, 'what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company for you now', 'any lingering intention left of going to see Joe' died.

Check Your Progress

1. How do Pip's fortunes change?
2. Who is Jaggers?
3. Describe the change in Pip's attitude towards Joe?
4. For what purpose was Estella being groomed and why?

Chapters 31-35

Estella, or Miss Havisham rather, continued to play with Pip's heart. He met Estella again when he escorted her from London to Richmond where she was going to stay for some time. She was as indifferent to him as ever. His heartache grew worse.

Pip visited his old town once again to attend his sister's funeral. She had never completely recovered from the attack on her by a mysterious intruder. Pip himself could see



the change in his manners towards Biddy and Joe. Gone was the old ease and informality of their relations.

Pip's isolation is complete thanks to his snobbery. He detests and avoids those who fawn on him servilely (like Mr. Pumblechook) and he cuts himself off from those who had always given him love, because of their 'commonness'. And the one person he loves, Estella, "does" not care for him. If it were not for Herbert, Pip would be an utterly lonely man.

Check Your Progress

1. Do you think Pip is responsible for his feeling of isolation?

Chapters 36-38

Pip, indeed, redeems himself partly in our eyes by his help to his friend Herbert. When he reached the age of twenty-one, Pip received five hundred pounds from his undisclosed benefactor, through Mr. Jaggers. This was to be his annual allowance. With Wemmick's advice, he quietly invested a certain sum with a shipping broker, Clarriker. The latter was to take Herbert in his business and thus ensure Herbert a steady income, an income that would enable him to marry his beloved Clara. Pip didn't know his benefactor and Herbert would not even know he had a benefactor.

However, Pip could not manage his own affairs as adroitly. His visits to Richmond only excited his jealousy, for Estella had built up a group of admirers there and she warned him in no uncertain terms not to entertain any illusions regarding her. Yet Pip could not draw himself away from her.

But if Miss Havisham had succeeded in her designs, her training had begun to recoil on herself. On a visit to Satis House, Estella had a bitter quarrel with her. When Miss Havisham called her cold, ungrateful and unloving, Estella haughtily retorted, 'I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame' (Ch. 38).

Meanwhile, to Pip's chagrin, Estella had started paying attention to Drummle, an ill-tempered fellow pupil whom Pip had never liked. Pip's despondency was complete.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Pip help Herbert?
2. How would you categorize the relationship between Estella and Miss Havisham?



Chapters 39-47

The story now enters its most crucial phase. Dramatic events now overtake Pip's rather staid life. The novel now reads like a detective story. Old mysteries clear up but the story becomes taut and suspense builds up.

One wet, stormy night when Pip was alone at his London lodging, at the Temple, which he shared with Herbert, a stranger walked in. This was the convict, whom Pip had given food years ago. And to his great shock, Pip learnt that this was his real benefactor, not Miss Havisham. In an instant all of Pip's dreams and expectations had vanished. Pip recoiled from his touch. What an irony! Pip who had wanted to be a gentleman and had felt uneasy even in the company of common, coarse but blameless people like Joe was indebted for all his prosperity to a criminal!

Magwitch, the convict that is, had been transported for life to Australia from where he had come to England secretly to meet Pip. He had made money in Australia and had secretly been helping the boy who had shown him kindness once.

Pip felt repelled but his latent humanity asserted itself. He arranged a separate lodging for him. Magwitch had assumed the name of Provis. Herbert was sworn to secrecy. Pip met Mr. Jaggers and he confirmed Magwitch's story.

As Magwitch tells his story, the different dangling threads in the story start knotting together into a single strand. All the characters in the story start gathering under one umbrella. A small world full of so many coincidences, indeed, where every life is intertwined with every other.

Magwitch had been a tramp and a petty thief since childhood. He came in contact with a fulltime swindler and dealer in stolen money, Compeyson, and under his directions committed every kind of criminal deed. Compeyson had another associate Arthur who died under miserable circumstances.

And then Magwitch and Compeyson were arrested. At the trial, Compeyson betrayed Magwitch so that the former got seven years' imprisonment while the latter got fourteen years'. And these were the two convicts whom little Pip had encountered after their separate escapes from the prison-ship. It was the bitterness of betrayal that had led Magwitch to fight him in the marshes and in the process be re-captured.

As the story unfolds itself, more isolated dots on the canvas begin to be joined together to give a coherent picture. Arthur was Miss Havisham's half-brother who had instigated Compeyson to pretend to love her, rob her and desert her at the last moment.

But Compeyson was still alive. He could, if he came to know of Magwitch's return, get the latter re-arrested. The sentence would be death. Magwitch had to go back



to Australia and Pip would have to accompany him. But Pip wanted to meet Estella before going abroad.

He met Miss Havisham. Why had she encouraged him to think that she was his benefactor? Miss Havisham didn't answer but she was unrepentant. Estella, too, was quite unresponsive to his confession of love for her. To his dismay, Pip learnt that she was getting married to the detestable Drummle. Pip could not have been more miserable. And poor Pip had other problems to occupy his mind.

Herbert had transferred Magwitch to another lodging, under Wemmick's advice, since Pip's place was being watched. Magwitch had to be sent out at the earliest opportune moment. Pip and Herbert decided to put him on board some vessel sailing to a foreign port not from the point of embarkation but somewhere *en route*. Pip hired a boat and frequently rowed up and down the river in cold, in rain, in sleet so that he could carry Magwitch at the right time without arousing anyone's suspicion. And yet he was always sensing danger.

The suspense became unbearable after Pip visited the theatre to see a performance in which Mr. Wopsle (he was in London now) had a role. Pip learnt from him that one of the two convicts that had been captured by the soldiers in the marshes had sat behind Pip at the theatre. Obviously, it was Compeyson.

Check Your Progress

1. Who is Pip's benefactor?
2. What is Magwitch's quarrel with Compeyson?
3. Who is Estella getting married to?

Chapters 48-51

The only person whose past is still shrouded in mystery is Estella. But we will soon know about her as well. In fact, her past would be the most startling story even in this otherwise dramatic narrative.

At a dinner with Mr. Jaggers, Pip happened to observe his housekeeper Molly's fingers, in the action, as if of knitting, that arrested his attention. She went out but her hands, her eyes and her flowing hair kept agitating his mind. There was no doubt they resembled Estella's.

What Wemmick told him about Molly was all the more startling. Twenty years ago, Molly had been tried for murder of a woman out of a feeling of jealousy. The victim had been choked to death. She was acquitted; Mr. Jaggers was her lawyer.



Mr. Jaggers had given Pip the message that Miss Havisham desired to see him. He went to her the next day. Estella, Pip had been told by Mr. Jaggers, was now married to Drummle. Estella's ingratitude had completely broken Miss Havisham. She was a remorseful woman now. As once desired by Pip, she had decided to do something for Herbert's welfare. She was authorising Mr. Jaggers to give nine hundred pounds to Pip for the purpose. She went down upon her knees and begged his forgiveness for her cruel behaviour. 'I stole her (Estella's) heart and put ice in its place', she confessed. But even she did not know about Estella's parentage. Mr. Jaggers had brought the child to her. Pip was convinced that Molly was Estella's mother. But what about her father? We shall soon know.

Another sensational event was to occur before Pip left for London. After going to the house, Pip peeped into Miss Havisham's room to see that she was safe and well. As he turned back satisfied, a great flame sprang up and she ran towards him with fire blazing all about her. Pip extinguished the flames but burnt his own hands badly. He left Miss Havisham in the care of a surgeon and started for London.

Back in London, Pip learnt that Estella's father was none other than Magwitch. The latter's conversation with Herbert in Pip's absence had revealed that he was very fond of his child. But when Molly found he had an affair with another woman she murdered that woman and threatened to murder the child as well. Then she vanished. There was no doubt Estella was the daughter of Molly and Magwitch.

Mr. Jaggers confirmed Pip's hypothesis, though very obliquely.

The plot so far had two strands-Pip-Estella strand and Pip-Magwitch strand. With the marriage of Estella to Drummle, it seems the Pip-Estella episode is over. But before that happens, the two strands get interwoven when Pip's secret benefactor turns out to be his heartless beloved's father.

Check Your Progress

1. How are Magwitch, Molly and Estella connected?
2. What change do you see in Miss Havisham?

Chapters 52-58

Pip still had Magwitch on his hands. Thanks to Pip's generosity and Miss Havisham's, Herbert was to go to Cairo to take charge of a new branch office of Clarriker's firm there. That meant Pip would be left alone.

While Pip and Herbert were getting ready, on Wemmick's advice, to take Magwitch out of the country, Pip received an anonymous note asking him to meet the writer in the



sluice house by the limekiln on the marshes near his native village. The writer wanted to give Pip some important information about Provis *i.e.* Magwitch.

Pip went. The writer turned out to be Orlick who had trapped Pip there to kill him. Orlick wanted to take revenge on Pip for having got him dismissed from service as a porter at Miss Havisham's. He also revealed that he was the assailant of Mrs. Joe Gargery. Pip fought back Orlick's attack and shouted for help. Herbert, guided by Trabb's boy, who had seen Pip going that way, came on just in time. Orlick fled. (Trabb's boy was an attendant at a well-known tailoring firm in Pip's town, Trabb and Co.) What had given Pip the strength to fight back was the sick feeling that "Estella's father would believe I had deserted him, would be taken, would die accusing me...more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death." (Ch. 43) It is an indication of how far Pip's character has mellowed now.

But Orlick had given some information that had imparted a sense of urgency to the task of taking Magwitch out of England. Compeyson knew about Magwitch's presence in England.

Pip, Herbert and Startop took Magwitch, dressed as a river-pilot, on the boat and rowed out on the river. The plan was to put Magwitch aboard either of the two ships sailing out to Hamburg and Rotterdam that day. The ship came but before they could shout to stop it, a galley (a large row-boat) came up. There were soldiers in it and Compeyson in it, too. Magwitch pounced upon Compeyson. The two fell in the water. Compeyson was drowned and Magwitch captured, but he was seriously injured.

The tense drama had ended. Pip had once again seen his convict being arrested. But it was a different Pip now; he would be loyal to him. He no longer felt guilty of having helped him.

But Pip could do nothing. Magwitch was sentenced to death. Pip visited him in the prison every day. Pip had drafted a pathetic appeal for mercy to the Home Secretary, Mercifully, however, death released Magwitch from his misery, but not before Pip had told him that his daughter was alive and he loved her.

But Magwitch's death has not gone in vain. Magwitch has shattered Pip's pride and taught him humility. Pip is a changed man now.

Pip was heavily in debt and had to leave his present London lodging. He fell ill and in a fit of high fever lost his consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he found Joe sitting beside him. (Herbert had taken up his Job in Cairo). He had come to London on learning of Pip's illness. He told him that Miss Havisham had died leaving



most of her wealth to Estella and an account of four thousand pounds to Mathew Pocket, a relative of hers.

Pip had noticed how after he had got well, Joe had started calling him ‘Sir’. It was ‘grating to his ears’, it was old Pip, old chap (that) now were music in my ears! (Ch. 57). Pip wanted the reserve between him and Joe to go but before he could express his thoughts Joe was gone! He had left a brief note and paid off his debts!

After he recovered Pip visited Joe at the village. He wanted to propose to Biddy. But Biddy had already married Joe. And the two were sincerely happy to see Pip there. Pip begged their forgiveness for his former behaviour.

Now Pip sailed for Cairo and joined Herbert in his firm. For several years he lived with Herbert and Clara who were now married. But he maintained a regular correspondence with Joe and Biddy.

Pip’s expectations have come to naught. But he has learnt something from suffering. He has learnt humility. In fact although each of the following had great expectations-Pip, Miss Havisham, Estella and Magwitch- they had failed to achieve them; as we are shown.

Eleven years later, Pip re-visited Joe and Biddy. They had a child-little Pip! Out of a feeling of nostalgia he went to take a round of the place where once Satis House was. (It had been pulled down after Miss Havisham’s death). It was like going down memory lane. And lo! there was Estella there. But a changed woman now! Her husband (who was now dead) had treated her very cruelly. Her sufferings had made her understand the value of Pip’s passion for her. She was a broken woman. The evening mists were rising now, but the mists from their lives had cleared. They were not going to part now.

Thus by the time the novel ends, all the principal characters have undergone a sea change in their lives. Magwitch in his final moments is not the terrible ogre who held the little, innocent Pip upside down in the first chapter. Miss Havisham, when Pip meets her last, is no longer the evil fairy Pip met in the beginning who was out to destroy the hearts of young men. To Pip, her last words, significantly, were: Take the pencil and write under my name, “I forgive her” (Ch. 49), Pip and Estella are broken middle-aged people when they meet at the site where Satis house once stood. But they have come out of the land of fantasy to the real world of human beings, the vibrant world of Joe and Biddy and Herbert.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Magwitch meet his end?
2. By the end of the novel, how are the principal characters changed for the better?



2.3 Analysis of the Main Characters

Pip: *Great Expectations* is the life story of Pip, narrated by him in the first person. The adult Pip is the narrator. He tells us how he grew into adulthood and maturity. This process involves many ups and downs, agony, suspense, misery, happiness and ultimately the hero attains fulfilment. He reaches home and his restlessness comes to an end.

At the beginning he is an orphan, at the mercy of his stern sister, and her sterner friends. His sister has brought him up 'by hand', and she expects that obligation to be carried by Pip like his cross. Her friends Mr. Pumblechook and Mr. Wopsole and the Hubble couple indulge in baiting the boy. He is miserable and unhappy. Only the inarticulate Joe offers him sympathy and affection. When he meets the convict he is made to steal and lie; we are given an insight into the child's psychology, when he participates unknowingly and through fear, in a crime.

It is no fault of Pip that the incident does not leave him alone. He gets involved with a criminal almost casually. He gets involved with Miss Havisham and Estella too. And between these two influences Pip develops that particular attitude to life, which makes him too eager to accept the offer of the unknown benefactor to grow up into a gentleman with great expectations. Actually society has nurtured such false values in his mind, during his adolescence, that he could think of nothing else but how to be a gentleman.

The glamour of Estella overwhelms the poor boy. She looks down on him, on his upbringing, and on his relations. Pip feels ashamed of himself, and wants just somehow to make himself worthy of Estella.

The irony of the whole situation is that Estella herself is the child of two criminals. Her origin is much inferior to that of Pip and his near ones, whom she looked down upon.

Pip's moral downfall is pointed out in the narrative when it is shown that he is concerned only with himself. His mind, at the beginning of his great expectations, is full of what is of advantage to him and he does not care for the feelings of Biddy and Joe. Once in London, he tries to become a gentleman by dressing like one, spending like one, and mixing with such useless company as "Finches of the Grove". He severs all relationship with Joe in his mad pursuit of the nebulous concept of a gentleman. He has the mistaken notion that Miss Havisham is the unknown hand to guide his destiny to its fulfilment. Pip mistakenly thought that she was preparing him for the unattainable Estella.

When the hard fact of the benefactor's identity comes out in the open-Pip feels utterly lost. The criminal source of his financial support shocks him. The criminal Magwitch comes to claim his gentleman. It goes to the credit of Pip that he proves himself to be



a true gentleman as he devotes himself totally to the service of the condemned criminal. He rises above self, and redeems himself through his love for this lost man in whom he only saw a person, much better, more grateful than himself.

Pip does become a gentleman, though not through realising his great expectations that come to nothing. The traumatic experience of the whole Magwitch episode-makes Pip fall seriously ill. In a way, Pip is reborn after the illness he goes through.

His whole attitude changes, leaving behind all pretensions. He understands life in the true sense of the word. The tone of the narrator of the story-the middle aged sober Mr. Pirrip is one of passing judgment on the failures of his younger self. The narrator Pip is both sad and critical, alive to the ludicrous nature of much of his younger self's attitude and activities.

"If young Pip sets out to London as a picaresque adventurer, old Pirrip, comes home to the marshes as a defeated hero."

Miss Havisham:

Miss Havisham is a prisoner of her own negative attitude. Her pursuit of a totally perverse goal brings unhappiness not only to Pip but to herself as well. She is in a mood of perpetual despair, and makes a fetish of the relics of her broken life. Estella's whole personality is distorted by the wrong values inculcated in her by her foster mother Miss Havisham.

Miss Havisham's marriage was cancelled on the day it was to be solemnised, as her betrothed betrayed her. Time came to a standstill for her, the moment she came to know of it. Ever since, she indulged only in self-pity, ruining herself and everybody, and everything around her. She stayed ironically, in Satis House, (Enough House) the house where nobody could want for more. The mistress of the house, *i.e.* Miss Havisham, has nothing but sorrow and emptiness in her mind. The pity is, she never allowed time to heal her wounds, and stopped even the daylight from coming into her room. As a result her mind decayed along with everything else around her.

She is shocked out of her obsession to be revenged upon the male sex, when Estella turns round on her. As Miss Havisham demanded love, Estella frankly tells her - "If you ask me to give you what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities".

Eventually Miss Havisham understands the futility of her pursuit, she realises the wrong she had done to Pip. She regrets that she herself had stolen away the heart of Estella and put ice in its place. All that she wishes at the end, is to be forgiven by Pip. And he forgives her generously.

**Wemmick:**

Wemmick is the clerk of Mr. Jaggers. He is well trained by the stiff, analytical, Mr. Jaggers. He knows the minds of the clients and knows how to put them in their place. Pip has to get his allowance from Wemmick. And soon learns more about the other side of his life. Wemmick's private life, as lived in his Walworth home, is rigidly kept apart from his official life at Little Britain. This double life of Wemmick adds interest to the story (particularly in stage two when Pip is in London prior to Magwitch's return) and shows us a happy home. Wemmick's aged parent is looked after with affection, his home is literally a castle, complete with a bridge and a moat. As Wemmick every evening draws up the bridge, he symbolically cuts off all his communication with his official personality. He is warm, affectionate and hospitable in his home and ends up marrying Miss Skiffins his ladyfriend. In office he has as much a cut and dried approach as his employer. His constant advice is to accumulate 'portable property'. But at the other level of his existence Wemmick as a private person has what has been called the poetic approach to life where the heart and emotions and not the mind and reason, are given the primary importance. Pip admires Wemmick and turns to him for advice and help. The Wemmick of Walworth provides indispensable help to Pip, at every crisis that faces him. The shrewdness of Wemmick's judgment is moulded by his legal training. Mr. Jaggers' clerk could not go wrong in guiding Pip throughout the episode of Magwitch's stay and attempted escape from London. It is Wemmick who warns Pip of danger in time. It is Wemmick who lets him into a vital secret of the past. It is Wemmick, who has his feet on the ground with a sure touch to guide Pip through Newgate and the crowded police court with Mr. Jaggers at work. Pip's innocence and ignorance is balanced by Wemmick's experience. We wholeheartedly agree with Wemmick when he tells Pip-"I'm sure I tried to serve you, with all my heart". We remember Wemmick, not as a type, but as an individual with a personality of his own, and feel convinced that *Great Expectations* could not exist without him.

Joe and Mr. Jaggers:

The story of Pip could be a fairy tale but for the fact that "it is set in a moral universe". The world of fantasy centres round two characters-Magwitch on the one hand, and Miss Havisham on the other. The Moral universe centres round Mr. Jaggers on the one hand and Pip's brother-in-law Mr. Joe Gargery on the other. Their attitude to life is so different that they readily invite comparison and hence the two characters are discussed together. Joe's view of life and his response to it is poetic. He responds emotionally to a situation and looks upon it as a whole.



Mr. Jaggers—the London Lawyer and the legal agent of Pip’s benefactor—has an analytical approach to life. “Joe lives by truth to feeling and Mr. Jaggers lives by truth to fact.”

Joe loves Pip, and nothing can alter this feeling for him, Mr. Jaggers; brilliant and business-like, does not allow any sentiment to cloud his dealings with Pip as he carries out instructions as the authorised legal agent of Pip’s benefactor. The contrast between Mr. Jaggers and Joe may be illustrated more by their different reactions to an almost parallel situation.

Joe married the sister of the orphan Pip, in order to help them and did not even think of separating them, as Pip’s sister was the only person to bring up the orphan child. Mr. Jaggers met Molly and her baby daughter and immediately proceeded to split them up. They also needed help and Mr. Jaggers did help them in his own way. The baby was put out for adoption and the mother was employed by him as a servant.

Dickens shows the different approach of the two men. Mr. Jaggers is scrupulously honest, efficient and dutiful. We do admire him, but along with Pip, would have liked him to be a bit less lofty in order to love him as we do Joe, the blacksmith, who wins our heart. Joe’s character shows, that to be a gentleman, a person needs no varnish. He is gentle, affectionate and genuine. His strength is for protection of the weak, not for showing off. The child Pip gets warmth and affection from Joe. His ingratitude and lack of reciprocation hurt him, but his love for Pip does not change. His values are fixed. He is there to help out Pip in his crisis. He nursed him back to health, during his severe illness, paid back all dues to his creditors and left him quietly, as soon as he recovered.

Joe has been truly described as Nature’s gentleman, the embodiment of true gentility.

Check Your Progress

1. Briefly analyze the characters Pip, Miss Havisham, Wemmick, Joe and Jaggers.

2.4 A General Discussion

“Great Expectations”, is a moral fable, telling the story of a young man’s growth from his first self-awareness to his mature acceptance of the human condition.

In the process, the young man, Pip, passes through various stages of development.

The first phase shows the child Pip, in his natural condition, acting instinctively. He is the object of harsh treatment by his sister, who has brought him up, the target of rude derision and heartless contempt by his sister’s associates. The only friend of the orphan boy is Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith his brother-in-law. Joe and Pip are fellow sufferers



of the harshness of Mrs Joe. Joe, weakened by his gentleness, is as vulnerable as little Pip is to the torments inflicted by his aggressive, temperamental wife.

The second phase of Pip's life, opens up for him the prospects of great expectations. In his mad desire to be a "gentleman," Pip eagerly discards the bounds of affection and loyalty to his near ones. He had already acquired certain false values through his association with Miss Havisham and Estella, grotesquely distorted personalities. Pip goes to the city, becomes a snob and his moral values suffer further degeneration. However, his expectations dwindle into nothing, and he learns to love and feel compassion for a fellow human being. When Pip has lost all his expectations, he acquires humility and kindness, the best attributes for a gentleman. At the end of the period of stress, of his total involvement with the convict Magwitch, Pip has an attack of brain fever- He undergoes a long period of unconsciousness, a kind of symbolic death.

In the final phase of the story, we are face to face with a totally humanised and changed Pip. He goes back to the forge where the warm-hearted, inarticulate Joe, receives him joyously. A mature Pip, sober and chastened by all his trials and tribulations, comes back to his home where charity and forgiveness were always there.

Within the broad framework of this fable of innocence, the loss of it, the consequent degeneration and the final redemption through suffering, Dickens has created a powerful story filled with interesting characters. The conversion takes place, not only in Pip, but also in other characters, such as Magwitch, Miss. Havisham and even Estella.

Great Expectations is rich in irony. Apart from its title, the story has such ironical twists, that at certain points, it reads almost like a whodunit. Compared to the other Dickensian novels, *Great Expectations* is almost without subplots and incidents, not organically related to the broad theme of the novel.

The various incidents that lead to the unfolding of the plot and understanding of the characters, are analysed at some length in the following chapter.

The irony inheres not only in the title, but also in the twists that the characters and the events undergo. Pip feels contaminated by the Newgate taint of prison and crime when he visits Newgate with Wemmick. He feels it all the more as he is shortly going to receive Estella on her arrival in London. The strange coincidence of visiting the prison on the day of his meeting Estella strikes Pip. He wants to beat the prison dust off his feet—to receive Estella in the right frame of mind. Pip is yet unaware that Estella—the haughtily distant beauty of his adoration was in reality born to 'two criminals—outcasts of society—namely Magwitch and Molly. We only have a hint of the shadowy past "what was the nameless shadow which again in that one instant had passed"?



The shadow was, as we come to know later on, is the likeness of her mother reflected on Estella's face. Another instance of irony is the type of gentleman Magwitch comes to own. Pip at the end becomes a real gentleman but not in the sense that Magwitch had wanted him to be. "Both Magwitch and Pip move out of aggressive pride into trust and love." Pip turns into a gentleman, when he looks after the captured, helpless Magwitch, without caring for any material benefit, and provides succour to him for his own sake. The desire of Pip to be a gentleman, is thus realised in a most unexpected manner.

Again Pip had tried his best to go away from Joe and disown him. As the story of Pip comes full circle, he finds his identity, only on return to the humble forge of Joe, linked with the bond too strong to snap, powerful enough to survive the repeated denials and recognise its existence. The incidents in *Great Expectations* hasten the change and growth of Pip as a moral being. Pip, influenced by his environment, gets hardened in his pride and ingratitude. He is matured into a chastened and sober man, through the empathy he develops for the lost and broken man—Abel Magwitch.

The narrator Pip, with the benefit of hindsight, relates the story of his own growth in a tone of amused contempt, for all the follies and errors of judgment, indulged in by the unregenerate Pip.

In this novel about a change of heart Dickens makes his reader feel the inescapable responsibility that every action brings to human beings.

Miss Havisham herself understands this. In her obsession to have revenge on the male sex, she had brought up Estella, away from the influences that form the natural heart. Estella grows up without any warmth of feeling, any capability of response to love. Miss Havisham taught her to be loveless, but the distortion of Estella's personality leaves her aghast. She cannot undo the harm, but she admits responsibility. She moans helplessly after the realisation of her sin in moulding the child into the form that she did, to satisfy her vengeance. She tells Pip in chapter 49. "Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done" "With this figure of myself always before her a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away, and put ice in its place."

So while dealing with the theme of irony in *Great Expectations*, we see that Pip's expectation to be a gentleman, Magwitch's dream of creation of a gentleman, and Miss Havisham's intention to be revenged upon all men—all are inextricably connected and all are realised in a manner, totally unexpected.

The portrait gallery of Dickens is enriched by the characters depicted in *Great Expectations*. Wemmick, Joe Gargery, Miss Havisham, Pumblechook, Estella and Jaggers and Trabb's Boy.



Jaggers is perhaps the most mysterious of all the characters in the novel. His air of sinister authority puts Pip in awe. In Chapter 32, when Wemmick says that Jaggers' immense ability is of a piece with his constant height. Pip says - "I was very much impressed, and not for the first time, by my guardian's subtlety, to confess the truth, I very heartily wished, and not for the first time that I had some other guardian of minor abilities". Jaggers has "an air of authority not to be disputed" and he has, it seems, knowledge of some secret about everyone. He is a criminal lawyer and has a kind of clinical detachment from individual suffering.

Check Your Progress

1. Great Expectations is a fable of innocence, the loss of it, the consequent degeneration and the final redemption through suffering. Discuss.

Reference:

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‘MY LAST DUCHESS’

Robert Browning

Shashi Khurana

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will focus on:

- The poet Browning and his poetry.
- The main features of Dramatic Monologue.
- Critical analysis of the poem ‘My Last Duchess’.

2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The historical background

Since you have already studied the backdrop of Victorian age in your study of Alfred Tennyson, you can contextualize Browning with a few reminders of how the familiar image of Queen Victoria, with her husband Prince Albert and their children only served to emphasise the importance of the family as a key social unit. The Victorian age was also rather moralistic and the Queen’s soberly clad figure only stressed the propriety and decorum that marked nineteenth century English society. Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) by expounding the theory of evolution, shook the foundations of religious faith.

The poet and his poetry (1812-1889)

Of all the poets in British literature, no other is so consciously a teacher of men. Browning feels his mission of faith and courage in a world of doubt and timidity. For thirty years, he faced indifference or ridicule, working bravely and cheerfully, until he made the world recognize and follow him. The spirit of his life is well expressed in the line he wrote when twenty two years old:

“I see my way as birds their trackless way
I shall arrive_____”. ‘Paracelsus’

Browning was born in Camberwell, on the outskirts of London, in 1812. From his home and from his first school, at Peckham, he could see London, and the city lights by night and the smoky chimneys by day had the same powerful fascination for the child that the



woods and fields and the beautiful country had for his friend Tennyson. His schooling was short and desultory, his education being attended to by private tutors and by his father, who left the boy largely to follow his own inclination. Like the young Milton, Browning was fond of music, and in many of his poems, he interprets the musical temperament better, perhaps, than any other writer in our literature. But unlike Milton, through whose poetry there runs a great melody, music seems to have had no consistent effect upon his verse, which is often so jarring that one must wonder how a musical ear could have endured it.

Like Tennyson, this boy found his work very early, and for fifty years hardly a week passed that he did not write poetry. He began at six to produce verses, in imitation of Byron; but fortunately this early work has been lost. Then he fell under the influence of Shelley, and his first known work, *Pauline* (1833), must be considered as a tribute to Shelley and his poetry.

In 1846, he suddenly became famous, not only because he finished in that year his *Bells and Pomegranates* (which is Browning's symbolic name for "poetry and thought" or "singing and sermonizing") but also because he eloped with the best known literary woman in England, Elizabeth Barrett, whose fame was for many years, both before and after marriage far greater than Browning's, and whose work was at first considered superior to that of Tennyson's. Therefore, until his own work compelled attention, he was known chiefly as the man who married Elizabeth Barrett. For years this lady had been an almost helpless invalid and it seems a quixotic thing when Browning, having failed to gain her family's consent to the marriage, carried her off romantically. Love and Italy proved better than her physicians and for fifteen years Browning and his wife lived an ideally happy life in Pisa and in Florence.

Mrs. Browning died in Florence in 1861. The loss seemed at first too much to bear, and Browning fled with his son to England. For the remainder of his life he lived alternately in London and in various parts of Italy, especially at the Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice which is now an object of pilgrimage to almost every tourist who visits the beautiful city. Whenever he went he mingled with men and women, sociable, well dressed, courteous, loving crowds and popular applause, the very reverse of his friend Tennyson. He died in Venice, on December 12, 1889, the same day that saw the publication of his last work, *Asolando*. Though Italy offered him an honoured resting place, England, claimed him for her own, and he lies buried besides Tennyson in Westminster Abbey. The spirit of his whole life is magnificently expressed in his own line, in the Epilogue of his last book:



One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break
Never dreamed, tho' right were worsted, wrong would triumph
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

This poem first appeared in *Dramatic Romances* (1842) and has now become a favourite anthology piece.

Like many of Browning's best poems, 'My Last Duchess' is inspired by Italian history and cultural practices. This poem is probably a dramatization of an account of Alfonso II, the fifth Duke of Ferrara, (Ferrara is a place in Italy) that Browning had read around in 1842. He married Lucrezia de Medici the young daughter of the duke of Florence, a fairly new family in comparison with the count's 900 year old family name. Lucrezia died at the age of 17 — she was poisoned. Three years later Alfonso contracted a marriage with Barbara, niece of the Count of Tyrol. The poem is set in Renaissance Italy (sixteenth century).

This poem is a dramatic monologue. While reading it, we should be aware of its distinct features. What is a dramatic monologue? In a dramatic monologue:

- (a) the narrative is related by one person;
- (b) we can get an idea of the situation in which the person speaks;
- (c) we can also infer what happened before this particular circumstance is described;
- (d) the motives and character of the speaker are revealed. For example, the speaker may praise himself but from the context of the poem, we can infer whether this is justified or otherwise.
- (e) the poet makes use of colloquial speech that is appropriate to the speaker (Michael Mason);
- (f) the treatment is serious (Mason);
- (g) the exotic nature of the speaker and the remoteness of the scene distances the dramatic monologue from both the author and the reader (Mason).

Keeping these points in mind, let us now read the poem.

Check Your Progress

1. What is a Dramatic Monologue?



Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace— all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men — good! but thanked
Somehow— I know not how— as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,'
Or there exceed the mark'— and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, **forsooth**, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!



3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Duke of Ferrara is speaking to a marriage broker, an envoy of a Count. The Duke of Ferrara has taken him upstairs ostensibly to show him his artistic treasures, away from the rest of the company assembled below. This gives him the opportunity of talking to him more intimately. It also gives him ample chance to condition him so that his case for a larger dowry is represented before the Count his master, whose daughter he is to marry shortly.

The poem opens with the Duke of Ferrara pointing to a woman's portrait on the wall. This woman he introduces as his previous duchess. He also remarks on the lifelike quality of the portrait. He then goes on to appreciate it as wonderful piece of art and commends the artistry of Fra Pandolf, who worked for one full day before the portrait assumed its present perfection. He then requests the envoy to sit down and admire the portrait. You must have noticed how adeptly Browning is dramatizing the situation by making quick digressions in the narrative. He continues that he had mentioned the name of Fra Pandolf on purpose. His experience so far had been that whoever saw the portrait always questioned him, if they dared, about how that particular expression came to the face of the duchess. The duke, in yet another aside, says that no one else but he is allowed to draw the curtain that conceals the portrait. He assures the envoy that he was not the first to question him about it.

Check Your Progress

1. Who is the Duke of Ferrara speaking to?
2. Who is the woman in the portrait?
3. What is your impression of the Duke?

In a slightly ironical tone, the Duke tells the envoy that the face of the duchess did not flush with pleasure in his presence alone. He says that the painter had probably made some routine remark about the position of the lady's mantle. Or it is possible that he had complimented her on her beauty saying that it would not be possible to capture the fading blush on her throat on canvas. The duchess was easily impressed with such courtesies and beamed with pleasure. The duke, a suave conversationalist pauses for a moment to choose the correct word to describe the lady's nature. He puts it most delicately saying that 'she had a heart... too easily impressed'. This is sarcastically meant for he had no sympathy with or understanding of the young duchess' innocence. He complains that she liked all



that she saw. He is shocked at her lack of discrimination. Whether she was wearing the ornament presented by her husband, or whether she was looking at the setting sun, or whether she received a branch of cherries broken for her from the orchard by someone eager to please, or whether she rode the white mule round the terrace, the duchess would blush or express her pleasure to one and all equally. He could not get over the fact that since she thanked all equally she probably held his ancient family name in equal esteem with them.

It was below the dignity of the duke to put a stop to such frivolous behaviour. He then tries to enlist the envoy's sympathy by asking him how he could have handled such a situation without compromising his dignity. He simply says that he did not know how to express his desires to her. He could not tell her how her behaviour disgusted him or how she fell short of or exceeded the limits of decorum. He was not sure whether the duchess would allow herself to be corrected without defiance, it would still amount to having 'stooped'. And this is something the duke would not permit himself to do. He hastens to assure the envoy that she was fond of him for she smiled at him whenever he passed. But because of his extreme consciousness of his exclusive name he could not tolerate the fact that she smiled at others as well. As this increased, he gave the necessary commands so that her smiles may be stopped forever. Did he have her shut up in a Convent, as Browning has suggested elsewhere? Or did he have her killed? What is your reaction to this cruelty? Is the duke mad or is he just a proud and jealous husband?

After having narrated the fate of his unfortunate erstwhile wife, the duke once more turns to the portrait with the eye of a connoisseur. He then requests his guest to rise so that they may rejoin the company assembled downstairs. But before they join the others, the duke shrewdly mentions the point he wishes to make. He hopes that the envoy's generous master would be able to meet his demands for the dowry he hopes to receive on marrying his daughter. But observing the norms of propriety and decorum, the duke states that it is not for dowry that he is contemplating marriage but because he is fully impressed with the merits of the Count's daughter. At this point the envoy probably fell a step behind to allow the duke to descend first. The duke graciously insists on their going down side by side. As they walk down, the duke draws the envoy's attention to a rare bronze statue of Neptune, taming a seahorse that had been cast by the famous sculptor Claus of Innsbruck. What is the symbolic significance of Neptune taming the sea horse? Does the poet suggest that the duke had by now 'tamed' the envoy? Or is it the usual habit of the duke to tame all—envoys as well as wives, past and future?



Check Your Progress

1. What according to the Duke was the shortcoming of the Duchess?
2. What in the behaviour of the Duchess earned his wrath? Explain with an example.
3. How did the Duke stop all the smiles of the Duchess?
4. What is your assessment of the behaviour of the Duchess?
5. What is the symbolic significance of Neptune taming the sea horse?

Poetic Devices

The versification of the poem is marked by freedom of flow. The lines are arranged in rhyming couplets such as aa bb cc and so on. But these are not closed couplets which carry a complete thought or feeling. On the other hand, one line continues into the next line. This is thus an open couplet and the technique is called enjambment. This is more appropriate because the monologue form demands an unbroken flow of thought processes. It also caters to the digressions that are a necessary feature of thinking aloud. For example, if we look at the first two lines, we notice that while ‘wall’ and ‘call’ rhyme, the sense of ‘I call’ is only completed in the middle of the next line. The meter varies in different lines. But even so, the rhythm is calm and stately, much in keeping with the character of the speaker.

Another element that recurs in Browning’s poetry, as we have noticed, is alliteration. For example, ‘Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt. When’er I passed her; but who passed without much the same smile?’ are not only musical but also stress the frequency of the offending smiles and the resultant irritation that they caused. The voice of the duke takes on a resentful tone that allows him to issue sinister commands. It is important to remember that the elements of poetic expression like rhyme, metre, alliteration are not an end in themselves. These elements have an artistic significance only in so far as they are an embodiment of the poet’s thought. Therefore, when we pick out a poetic device we must be able to say in which way it helps the poet’s thought, feeling and overall design.

Also notice the diction in this poem. By using words such as ‘countenance’, ‘munificence’, ‘forsooth’ and ‘durst’, the poet has created an atmosphere of a bygone age, Renaissance Italy in this case. The duke speaks in an ironical tone whenever he refers to his last duchess.... she smiled, no doubt, Whene’er I passed her, but who passed without much the same smile? His exclusive breeding and social status are evident in his reference to her death as “Then all smiles; stopped together”. The speech is terse—not a single



word can be removed without affecting the whole poem. There are sudden transitions, changes of mood and shifts in argument induced by the silent envoy. These not only help to generate an impression of realistic portrayal, but they also reveal the character not only of the duke but also of the duchess whom he wishes to denigrate.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a short note on the poetic devices used in the poem.
2. Analyse the poem as a dramatic monologue.

Glossary and Notes:

Ferrara	: a place in Italy
Fra Pandolf	: a fictitious painter
Countenance	: face
Durst	: dare
Spot of joy	: flush of pleasure
Mantle	: loose, sleeveless cloak
Favour	: ornament
Officious	: one who is too eager to help
Forsooth	: no doubt; in truth
Munificence	: extreme generosity
Warrant	: guarantee
Neptune	: ancient Roman god of the sea. Also called Poseidon in Greek mythology.
Claus of Innsbruck	: imaginary sculptor.



THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

George Eliot

Dr. Neeta Gupta

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study material are:

- To introduce you to the writer and her milieu.
- Provide a brief summary, a detailed critical commentary along with a discussion of major themes, characters and structure of the novel.
- To familiarize you with the debate between the creationist and evolutionist aspects of human existence and development.
- Acquaint you with the autobiographical elements in the novel.
- Take an in-depth look at George Eliot as a realistic novelist especially with respect to her sociological and psychological realism.
- Familiarize you with the position of women in Victorian England with an emphasis on the feminist aspect of the novel.

2. GEORGE ELIOT'S LIFE

Mary Ann Evans, also known as George Eliot, was born on 22 November 1819, at Arbury Hall near Nuneaton in Warwickshire. She was the third child of Robert and Christiana Evans the two other children being an elder sister Christiana born 1814 and an elder brother Isaac born 1816. Robert Evans, though not a well-educated man had managed to rise in life through his own efforts and knowledge of the business. Though following his father's business, he began as a carpenter, and later supervised the building of roads and buildings in many parts of Chilvers Coton parish and on acres of Arbury land. He even had a good knowledge of coal mining. By the time Mary Ann was born he was working as an agent for the owner of Arbury Hall.

Though Mary Ann's maternal aunts—the Pearson sisters—are easily recognized in the Dodsons, there was nothing of Mr. Tulliver in Robert Evans. Robert Evans though an emotional and loving man was at the same time a practical man as well. He never knew failures and could always face the world and win. Similarly, Mrs. Tulliver—the



scatterbrained mother of Maggie, bears no resemblance to Mrs. Evans who was known to be an intelligent and thoughtful woman, efficient at her housework and well known and liked in the neighbourhood. There was no superficiality in her, which we find in abundance in Mrs. Tulliver. When Mary Ann was a few months old, the family shifted from Arbury Hall to Griff house. It was a beautiful red brick farmhouse surrounded by tall trees and beautiful green lawns. Not far from it were the green fields and a little further was the Round Pond. All these features are recalled in *The Mill*. Mary Ann was her father's favourite and was often taken by him on his estate visits. These visits and her life at Griff led to an early experience of the details of rural life because Mary Ann was an exceptionally perceptive girl. Apart from her deep emotional ties with her father she was equally attached to her brother Isaac. Mary Ann was not very close to her mother whom she lost at the age of sixteen.

When Chrissy was sent off early to a boarding school Mary Ann and Isaac became inseparable playmates. The childhood of Tom and Maggie Tulliver is very close to the author's personal experiences. The 'Brother and Sister' sonnets recall how Mary Ann followed her brother everywhere 'puppy like' on other little expeditions. Nothing could hold Mary Ann's interest if Isaac was near. Like Maggie she was always trying to please him and make him happy and was miserable if he ignored her. School parted them when in 1824 Isaac was sent off to a boarding school. Mary Ann turned to books for amusement and in 1827, reading a borrowed copy of *Waverly* and not being able to finish it in time she tried writing out the story herself. A parallel to what Maggie tries doing with *The Pirate* (Book V Chapter 1).

In 1828, Mary Ann was sent off to Mrs. Wallington's boarding school in Church Lane Nuneaton. The 'principal governess' Maria Lewis was the next person, outside her own circle of family, to have a deep and lasting influence on Mary Ann. Miss Lewis was however an advocate of Evangelicalism, which placed a strong emphasis on self-denial and the avoidance of all worldly pleasures. At the age of fifteen, Mary Ann, under the influence of Maria Lewis, underwent a form of conversion similar to that experienced by Maggie Tulliver after reading Thomas a Kempis. But this change was not permanent as the future years showed.

After the death of their mother in 1836, Chrissy and Mary Ann shared the management of affairs at home. But when Chrissy was married in 1837 Mary Ann became the sole in-charge of the house. In 1841 after Isaac's marriage, Mary Ann and her father moved nearer to the city of Coventry. Though Mary Ann had household duties yet she found time for reading. She was a voracious reader and she taught herself and soon mastered even Italian and German. She struck a friendship with Charles and Caroline Bray who were



advanced intellectuals. Meanwhile, Mary Ann had begun to question the extremities of Evangelicalism and under the influence of the Brays she discarded it totally. Her skeptical mind made her refuse to go to church with her father. This caused a breach between the two which never fully healed up to his death in 1849.

In 1844, Mary Ann was asked to translate *The Life of Jesus* written by the German philosopher David Friedrich Strauss. This task, which had already been abandoned as too difficult by several other qualified writers, was taken up by Mary Ann and she pored over the various Latin, Greek and Hebrew quotations, finally completing it in 1846. Her name did not appear on the published copy and she was paid £20 for all the work she had put in. Nevertheless, her work on Strauss and her friendship with Brays brought her in contact with the intelligentsia of the time. When she went to London after her father's death she built strong friendships with John Chapman—the editor of *Westminster Review* and Herbert Spencer—one of the founders of modern sociology. The relationship with John Chapman was highly disturbing since he was a married man and already had a mistress. Mary Ann's self-control, vested in moral awareness, helped her to get out of this entanglement. Her relationship with Herbert Spencer came close to ending in marriage but didn't. In 1851 Mary Ann became assistant editor of the *Westminster Review* and met George Henry Lewes, the man who from then on would prove to be her anchor for the next 24 years. But for him, George Eliot might never have blossomed into the great novelist that we know.

George Henry Lewes, a noted writer in his own right, was physically not very appealing. But he was a man of unlimited charm and intellectual vitality and for George Eliot he proved to be the one person her heart always yearned for. There was a snag however in their relationship. Lewes was a married man who had advocated ideas of free love. When his own wife began having an affair he condoned adultery by accepting the son resulting from her affair as his own and thus deprived himself of the possibility of obtaining a divorce.

Mary Ann knew she could never become Lewes's wife legally and yet she took the difficult decision of living with him without marriage and both of them left for Germany in 1854, as man and wife. The staid Victorian society was horrified and heaped innumerable insults on the two especially on Mary Ann. In fact, on their return, Mary Ann had to lead a solitary life for a very long time. This long period of social ostracism gave her plenty of time for reading the classics and she acquired a thorough knowledge of them.

Always a hesitant person, Mary Ann was very apprehensive when in 1856 she attempted creative writing for the first time in the form of short stories which were later published as *Scenes from Clerical life* and were well received. For creative writing she did not use her own name. One can well guess the reasons. One reason could be that she



wanted her creative writing to be received with unprejudiced eyes and not as the work of a fallen woman! Secondly she wanted the critics also to look at her writing with an open mind and not approach it negatively just because it was the work of a woman. Thirdly she wanted to keep her creative writing separate from her critical writing and so adopted the pseudonym George Eliot. The choice of this particular name was determined solely by George Lewes's own name. Since George was the name of the man whom she loved so Mary Ann adopted it and Eliot was added on because in George Eliot's own words—'it was a good mouth filling name.' George Henry Lewes was the major encouragement behind George Eliot's series of novels published in the next twenty years. It was her work and the integrity of her own life which at last secured her an acceptance by her society.

In 1878, after George Lewes's death, Mary Ann almost ceased to live. A person always in need of someone to lean on found herself lost and insecure. Her emotional dependence is revealed in her marriage to John Walter Cross in May 1880. Her marriage re-established a contact with her brother Isaac and her family which had been broken for all the years of her life with Lewes. George Eliot died in London 22nd December 1880. She was not buried at Westminster Abbey since her views were found to be too unorthodox to find favour with the Church. She was buried at the Highgate cemetery beside Lewes's grave. Belated honour was however paid to her greatness in 1975, when the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey gave permission for the unveiling of a memorial to her in Poet's corner, on the centenary of her death.

3. A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The Mill on the Floss was begun in January 1859 and completed on 21 March 1860. The work, according to George Eliot, was to be "a novel as long as Adam Bede, and a sort of companion picture of provincial life a work which will require some time and labour....." (Haight, p. 295). The novel was first intended to be serialized in John Blackwood's magazine *Maga* but the lifting of the incognito about the author's name led Blackwood to have some reservation on this account. Therefore, the novel was published as a whole in three volumes on 4 April 1860, by William Blackwood & Sons of Edinburgh. The second edition in two volumes was published on 29 November 1860 with very little changes. The third edition appeared as a single volume and was carefully corrected by George Eliot herself.

The title of the novel underwent many changes before it was finally decided. It had been called *Maggie*, *Sister Maggie*, *St. Ogg's on the Floss*, *The Tulliver Family*, *The House of the Tullivers* or *Life on the Floss*. The present title was supported by Blackwood and though George Eliot accepted it gladly she had a slight objection, ".....the Mill is not



strictly on the Floss, being on its small tributary, and that the title is of a rather laborious utterance” (Haight, p.319).

All page references to the text are to the Penguin edition of *The Mill on the Floss*.

Adaptations

The story was adapted as a film, *The Mill on the Floss*, in 1937, and as a TV mini-series in 1978.

A single-episode television adaptation of the novel was aired on 1 January 1997. Maggie Tulliver is portrayed by Emily Watson and Mr. Tulliver by Bernard Hill.

In 1994, Helen Edmundson adapted the play for the stage, in a production performed by Shared Experience.

A radio dramatization in five one-hour parts was broadcast on BBC 7 in 2009.

[From Wikipedia]

4. INTRODUCTION TO *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*

Apprehensions and Reception

The Mill on the Floss published in 1860, was written over a period of one year. Though George Eliot's first novel *Adam Bede* had been a phenomenal success, when publishing her second novel, there were reasonable apprehensions in the minds of both George Eliot and her publisher John Blackwood. The incognito which had surrounded the author's name till now had been lifted. The world knew who George Eliot actually was. By itself the revelation may not have amounted to much, but the fact that George Eliot (alias Marian Evans) was at the time living in unwed union with a married man was enough to shock and prejudice the staid and conservative Victorian society against her. Being a woman was itself a drawback in the male dominated world, being a fallen woman would have clinched matters. Apart from her personal life affecting the reaction to the novel, there was the novel's content, which treated the question of man/woman relationship (almost a forbidden topic), in some depth, and the almost consistently somber moralistic tone. The novel's own merit, however, was enough to dispel all reservations and apprehensions. Six thousand copies were sold in the first month itself. It ran into three editions and confirmed George Eliot's well-merited place in the literary world.

The Title

The present title of the novel was decided after many others had been considered. Of course, *The Mill on the Floss*, though striking, was not strictly correct since the mill was



not on the Floss but on its tributary Ripple. This was however a minor variation and the title was finalized. A look at the rejected titles rewards us with an understanding of George Eliot's focus in the novel. She had originally intended to call the novel *Sister Maggie* and the other titles that she considered were *The Tullivers*, *The House of the Tullivers*, *Life on the Floss* and *The Tulliver Family*. *Sister Maggie* at once draws our attention to the fact that the novel's emphasis is on the development and analysis of the character of a young girl. The other titles indicate that family and society have an equally important role to play. But these titles are inadequate in so far as none of them gives the total picture. Neither is the novel only about Maggie, nor is it just a social document. Thus, the present title was decided as it sounds attractive as well as indicates the role of the mill (around which the life of the protagonists revolves) and also the role of the river Floss which becomes instrumental in bringing about the end by causing a flood and is also symbolic of the life of the young girl Maggie.

Autobiographical Element

Over the years the literary world has witnessed the emergence of many creative works which are largely autobiographical. In the area of the English novel there have been, in the nineteenth century, Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a little later in the twentieth century D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*, to name a few. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, too, bears unexpected resemblance to the author's own life. The childhood scenes have been acknowledged by her as having been drawn from her own memories and the character of Maggie Tulliver is a close projection of George Eliot herself. Both Maggie and Mary Ann Evans not only share the first letter of their names but many character traits as well. They both have a sharp intellect, a desire for knowledge and a thirst for beauty. But their social circumstances clip all their soaring aspirations. The narrow-minded middle-class society in which they are born and the rigid morality of the Victorians, hem them in from all sides. Both have to contend with the backwardness of their societies in which one emerges a winner and the other a loser. George Eliot could rise above the pettiness of her circumstances, could establish herself as a noted writer and could flout the Victorian convention by choosing to live with a man without sanction of marriage. Maggie Tulliver on the other hand is unable to face the consequences of loving Stephen and is victimized by the society till death provides an answer to all her troubles.

Maggie dies at the young age of nineteen while Mary Ann lived a successful life till the ripe old age of sixty. Apart from this difference however there are still many similarities in the lives of these two women to have labelled *The Mill on the Floss* as an autobiographical novel. Both are sensitive, shy but clever and deeply affectionate. The



relationship that Maggie shares with her father has a direct parallel in George Eliot's own life. The deep love that both these women have for their respective brothers is another instance lifted directly from the author's own life and about which we learn more in the "Brother and Sister" sonnets. There are many similarities in the character and conduct of both Tom Tulliver and Isaac Pearson. The treatment meted out by both these men to their erring sisters is harsh and unsympathetic. Tom is united with his sister only in face of death while Isaac can bring himself to forgive Mary Ann only after she is legally married to J.W. Cross.

George Eliot's Realism

The childhood scenes with their vividness and their amazing psychological depth bring us to another merit of George Eliot's writings. Her ability to depict the world of children with a realism that makes it come alive before the reader's eyes and her power of penetrating and reaching the depths of a child's mind and be able to understand its workings, makes the novel one of the best descriptions of childhood in the nineteenth century novel along with *David Copperfield*. Unlike Dickens however, George Eliot does not romanticize or sentimentalize these scenes. The realism is stark. Maggie's loneliness after being hurt by Tom's, unkind words, Tom's inability to understand and therefore respond to Maggie's ardent and demanding love, Philip's alertness to any pity and his hypersensitivity due to his deformity are few of the many facets analyzed in the novel. The scene at Garum Firs describes the small jealousies of childhood with an insight which makes the incident have tragic overtones that we might otherwise have not detected. The adult perspective however, in which all these scenes are placed, avoids the danger of sentimentalizing by providing an ironic under current. Unlike Dickens' novels where equally good depictions of childhood are somewhat coloured by oversentimentality, George Eliot presents her scenes objectively.

The psychological realism seen in the childhood scenes is evident in the delineation of almost all major characters but with more attention to Maggie. Maggie's forgetfulness which had led to the death of Tom's rabbits, her ability to become oblivious to the reality around her which makes her mother call her "half an idiot" finally explains how she could have drifted down the river with Stephen without realizing what she is doing. Again, her deep love for Tom, for Lucy, for Philip, her ties with the past help us to understand her final decision of returning to St. Ogg's even though marriage with Stephen would have been a more practical solution. But Maggie cannot be untrue to her own self. Therefore, she returns to face the consequences. Renouncing something before you have had the taste of it is very easy, but once you have enjoyed a particular thing it becomes increasingly difficult. Philip, who has been Maggie's mentor throughout, had warned her of the danger. Maggie realizes the truth in Philip's words only when the struggle seems unbearable. Her



decision, however, is final and in keeping with her character as we have seen it developing in front of our eyes.

The Ending of the Novel and Stephen Guest

Readers have felt dissatisfied with the character of Stephen and his relationship with Maggie. Contemporary readers thought him to be a vain, complacent smug fellow with no depth of character, being engaged to Lucy on the one hand, and having eyes for another girl at the same time. But the growing love that he feels for Maggie gives him a depth which he would otherwise have lacked. The conflict and the struggle that takes place in his mind, and his unsuccessful efforts to forget Maggie are meant to show a development and a change in his character which has been brought about through the influence of Maggie's love. His plea for marriage being the only answer is, however, rejected by Maggie and she returns only to be misunderstood by the narrow, rigid society and to be consequently ostracized. Death by drowning comes as an answer and the abrupt end leaves us somewhat dissatisfied. Although technical pointers have been cleverly placed at various points in the text, indicating that Maggie's end will be violent and sudden, yet the dissatisfaction remains, both with the character of Stephen and with the end as such. George Eliot's own confession was that the love for her own childhood memories had made her linger too long with the first book consequently leaving not much space for the conclusion of the novel. The childhood scenes were felt to be crucial to the development of the central characters, so the criticism was directed at the chapters describing the Aunts and Uncles, and they were found to be irrelevant. This brings us to another important aspect of George Eliot's method—namely, the sociological bent of her character - analyses.

The Sociological Element

It would not be wrong to say that George Eliot was one of the first sociological novelists of the nineteenth century. Society as such had been presented often in the nineteenth century novel, for example in the works of Dickens, Thackeray, and earlier Fielding. But all these novelists described society only as a backdrop to the action of their tales without depicting or analyzing the connection it had with the characters. George Eliot was the first one to go into such depths, which revealed the **causal connection** between the individual and the society in which he lives. The Dodsons and the Tullivers thus become crucial to our understanding not only of the kind of environment in which the central characters live, but also to realize and gauge the influence that environment has in shaping and moulding the character of a person. The social background thus becomes not merely incidental but essential to the whole work. George Eliot had once commented on the task of the novelist declaring that he ought to investigate “the natural history of our social classes, especially of the small’ shopkeepers, artisans, and peasantry—and the



degrees in which they are influenced by local conditions, their maxims and habits, the point of view from which they regard their religious teachers, and the interaction of the various classes on each other” (Haight, p. 294). In *The Mill on the Floss* various social classes are described beginning with the Tullivers, the Dodsons and going on to the Stelling the Wakems and the poor peasants of Basset. The Dodsons and the Tullivers are the main shaping influences on the minds of the two young protagonists. The rigidity and insensitivity of the Dodsons, their concept of kinship, their unimpeachable honesty; their narrow restrictive attitude to life, their extra careful attitude towards money for economic security and their consequent materialistic natures are stated and then vividly “portrayed”. This conservative, conventional, narrow perspective is what Maggie will have to fight against. However, identical situations influence Tom shaping and moulding his character into one exactly of the kind codified by the Dodsons. The Tulliver’s way of life, though full of vitality and exuberance, is found to be deficient because of its blindness to reality and its impulsiveness. Its kind-heartedness and genuine generosity, its realization of the worth of human relations are the redeeming aspects and both the traits are found to be present and developing in Maggie.

The Feminist Angle

While describing the ways of these two different families, George Eliot touches upon some other aspects of the social life of Victorian times. The status of women is seen to be markedly inferior to that of men. Thus Mr. Tulliver is sad at noticing Maggie’s extraordinary cleverness, yet he is ready to spend energy, time and money not for the education of his clever daughter but for the education of his not so clever son. Mr. Stelling, the tutor, though cannot deny Maggie’s merits and intelligence, yet finds an explanation in the shallowness of women saying they are quick to learn but equally quick to forget. Tom gets sovereigns on Christmas but Maggie gets only shillings because she is a girl. Maggie’s decision to earn her own living is looked upon as undignified and is met unfavourably.

A brief look into history can explain some of the causes for such an attitude. By mid-nineteenth century a general awareness regarding women’s rights had begun and the first waves of feminism were felt. George Eliot too is one of the first feminists of her times. But before such awareness was created women were considered to be social inferiors in the male-dominated England. They were denied the right to vote, were confined to the hearth, and denied any meaningful education. Gender bias made a distinction even among men and women employed in physical labour. For the same amount of work women were paid less than men. Women were not given legal equality of rights within marriage, they had no right to divorce, to property of their deceased husbands and even the rights over their minor children in case of widowhood were denied to them. Women could not even



serve as jurors. By George Eliot's time the early feminists had succeeded in a few areas yet the basic attitude of Victorian society remained the same towards women and we see glimpses of it in the novel under consideration.

State of Education

The state of education in Victorian England was dismal and George Eliot deals with this problem at some length. Mr. Tulliver is ready to spend any amount of money to educate his son Tom so that he can stand on his own two feet. But Tom's education at Mr. Stelling's trains him not for any profession but for the life of a gentleman. Establishments like Mr. Stelling's school where a tutor would keep a few lodgers with him in his house and 'educate' them were a common feature of the times. These schools were, however, an eyewash for they trained their pupils not for any vocation but in subjects like Latin, geometry and algebra, which were quite useless when it came to practical applications. Thus, even though Tom has been studying hard all these years, when the need arises and he has to look for a job he finds he can do nothing—not even simple accounts. In the end his 'education' fails to achieve the purpose for which it was intended and Tom has to 'unlearn' all the things he had learned at Mr. Stelling's. Mr. Tulliver's money has been spent in vain.

Growing Industrialization

The growth of industrialism is hinted at in Mr. Pivart's ambitious schemes and in Uncle Deane's references to steam power which revolutionized the transport system. The general resentment that the country felt towards this rapidly spreading industrialization is observed in Mr. Tulliver's stubborn refusal to accept the changes going around him and to stick to his beliefs. The old Mill becomes a symbol of the anchor in the Tullivers' life; it also evokes nostalgia for the past which had become a common feature in the rapidly changing Victorian world. Along with the spreading industries there were the evolutionary theories like Charles Darwin's which challenged the very basis of Christian faith. Of course, *The Mill on the Floss* is set in a time some decades before the publication of Darwin's theories, but the temperament of the Victorian people was being threatened by various changes going around it. Consequently we find an adherence to and a nostalgia for the past dominating the literature of this period. By the time *The Mill* was published in 1860, people had already been exposed to Darwin's theories which proved that God had not created the world in six days as the Bible stated. Where could one turn to for moral guidance now?

The Tone

This uncertainty in the Victorian temperament gave rise to a heavy moralistic tone in the literature of the time. Thus, we find the novelists often intruding into the narrative to



guide the reader's responses and at times to generalize and offer moral comments. George Eliot too follows this convention and constantly comments on the action, on characters, on situations. At times these authorial interventions impede the smooth flow of the narrative, for example, the four-page commentary on Mr. Riley's reasons for supporting Mr. Stelling as Tutor for Tom. On the other hand, whenever such authorial intrusions comment on some character, analyze the character's motives, reflect on his/her past, supply links between incidents, at such times they are always welcome. The sense of the teller and the tale in *The Mill* is created in the first chapter itself and is kept up right till the end.

The above introduction to the novel is only to help you keep a few points in mind while reading the text. It is not a complete analysis of the novel. The same will however be attempted in subsequent sections. For the time being these points will give you a general idea about the novel.

5. A SHORT SUMMARY

Read the 'Books' of the novel one by one and then try and answer the questions listed under each separately. To facilitate the endeavour, I have provided a brief summary of each 'Book' before listing the questions. This exercise will help you to get a good grip on the text.

BOOK I—BOY AND GIRL

The author/narrator has been sitting in an armchair and dreaming. Through her eyes we are given the first description of the river Floss, the town of St. Ogg's and the Dorlcote Mill. In the dream itself, the narrator's eyes focus on a little girl who is standing on the stone bridge and watching the mill. The reference to this little girl, Maggie takes us into the world of the Tullivers where Mr. Tulliver is discussing the question of Tom's education. Though Maggie is cleverer than Tom and more imaginative and perceptive, her education takes a back seat because she is a girl. Maggie's love for her father and brother is stressed. The next few chapters give a deep insight into her emotional dependence on Tom. Her unhappiness at Tom's harshness towards her on occasions further highlights this point.

A vivid picture of the Dodson's' and the Tulliver's way of life is created. The Aunts and uncles are invited where Mr. Tulliver tells them his decision about sending Tom to Mr. Stelling, a parson, for further studies. There is an altercation between Mr. Tulliver and Aunt Glegg that ends with Mrs. Glegg hinting at repayment of a loan she had made to Mr. Tulliver.

Maggie's childhood seems to be full of mistakes she wishes she could rectify. She forgets to feed Tom's rabbits and is punished for it. She cuts off her hair because she is



teased about it. While visiting the Pullets, she incenses Tom by making him spill his wine in the process of hugging him and then out of jealousy pushes Lucy into the mud, and then runs off to the gypsies to hide herself. Mr. Tulliver decides to call in the 300-pound loan he had given to his sister, Mrs. Moss, but is finally unable to make himself do so.

BOOK II—SCHOOL TIME

Tom goes off to school to Mr. Stelling's to be coached in Latin and Geometry. Maggie visits him twice. On her first visit she is enthralled by the world of books and yearns for a similar opportunity. The Christmas holidays are subdued because of the impending lawsuit between Mr. Tulliver and Mr. Pivart, his neighbour. On Maggie's second visit she meets Philip Wakem—the crippled son of lawyer Wakem against whom Mr. Tulliver is fighting. Maggie becomes fond of Phillip because of his deformity but also because he is gentle with her and shares his knowledge and learning with her. The relationship between the two boys, however, is always uneasy.

Maggie is sent off to Miss. Firniss's school along with Lucy. When she is thirteen she is suddenly summoned home because of her father's serious illness consequent to his loss of the lawsuit and the attendant bankruptcy. Tom is also summoned home.

BOOK III—THE DOWNFALL

As the title of the Book suggests, this section traces the gradual downfall of the Tulliver family. Mr. Tulliver is too ill to even know what is happening around him. Tom, though only sixteen, takes charge of the situation. The aunts and uncles come once again to see what can be done. Maggie is furious with everyone because they seem to be only blaming her father without caring for him. Bob Jakin who had once worked for the family and who is now a peddler brings them all his life's savings (a contrast with the rich Dodsons who would not part with a penny because they thought Mr. Tulliver deserved what he was getting).

Tom goes to work for his uncle Deane at the Guest and Company, beginning from scratch, proving the worthlessness of his education. There is a plan for Guest & Co. to buy the Mill and put Mr. Tulliver as manager. This is however spoilt by the well-meaning but misdirected efforts of Mrs. Tulliver and the Mill is eventually purchased by Wakem as further humiliation to Mr. Tulliver. On recovering, Mr. Tulliver agrees to work for Waken though wishing that evil may befall him. Tom vows to pay his father's debts and carries a hatred in his heart for Wakem and family.

BOOK IV—THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

This section of the novel, though concentrating on Maggie, describes a period of dull misery for the whole family. Mr. Tulliver and Tom are too preoccupied with their single-minded



obsession of earning money to pay the creditors. Maggie's heart, overflowing with love, gets no response from them. She feels terribly lonely, not knowing what to do with herself till one day Bob Jakin brings her a pile of books. One of these books is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a' Kempis. On reading this book Maggie seems to find an answer to her problem in self-denial and rejection of all worldly pleasures and an acceptance of life's limitations. Mrs. Tulliver is surprised at her daughter's subdued looks, but the author hints that this change is not going to be permanent.

BOOK V—WHEAT AND TARES

This Book opens with a meeting between Maggie and Philip. Maggie is nearly seventeen now and although she feels it is wrong nevertheless she continues meeting Philip secretly for about a year. Philip, who is obviously in love with Maggie, introduces her to a world of art and culture, lending her books, singing her songs. Maggie's resolutions about self-denial crumble in the face of these attractions which life has to offer. The affair is eventually discovered by Tom and ended cruelly with an insult to Philip and a threat of disclosure to Maggie. Tom makes Maggie swear on the Bible never to meet Philip again. Meanwhile, Tom by entering into a trading venture with Bob, is able to pay the creditors before the anticipated time. Yet the section ends on a dismal note. Mr. Tulliver, while returning from a celebration after paying his creditors meets Wakem on the way and attacks him in a fit of fury. For his weak state of health, this excitement proves to be too much and he dies the next day. Maggie and Tom once again come close in their sorrow.

BOOK VI—THE GREAT TEMPTATION

We see Maggie now after a lapse of about two years, during which she has been working as a governess. She has come to spend a month or two with her cousin Lucy. Once again, after a life of deprivation Maggie is attracted towards this life of leisure where art and culture promise her mental and emotional fulfilment. Maggie is even attracted to Stephen who in contrast to Philip, is a handsome rich man. Stephen, however, is unofficially engaged to Lucy. Gradually, this attraction becomes mutual though not immediately recognized as love. Lucy, unaware of what is happening, encourages Philip to visit them often. Maggie, however, feels she ought to get Tom's approval first. Tom, though not welcoming the idea, does not forbid it in plain terms.

On his part Tom has been doing exceptionally well, steadily making a reputation for himself at Guests & Co. At the age of twenty-three there is talk about him being made a partner in the company. There is even a plan for Guest & Co. to buy the Mill from Wakem and have Tom in-charge of it.



The relationship between Maggie and Stephen gets complicated after an open declaration from Stephen about his feelings. Maggie is overwhelmed as well as outraged but cannot conceal her own feelings too. Despite this they decide to part. But things suddenly go wrong at this moment. Philip is unwell and so Stephen decides to row Maggie in a boat to the village where she is supposed to meet Lucy. But Stephen deliberately lets the boat drift till it is too late to return home. Stephen tries to persuade Maggie to marry him, but Maggie refuses on grounds of her affection and ties with Philip and Lucy.

BOOK VII—THE FINAL RESCUE

It takes Maggie five days to reach St. Ogg's by herself. Tom, who is now living at the mill disowns her. Mrs. Tulliver goes with her unhappy daughter and they find shelter with Bob who is now married and a father. The whole town ostracizes her. Maggie is befriended only by Dr. Kenn. When people start criticizing her relationship with Dr. Kenn, Maggie decides to leave the town. Before leaving, however, Maggie is assured of forgiveness from both Lucy and Philip. Stephen once again writes to her begging her to marry him. Maggie has still not answered when the Great Flood comes. Maggie gets into a boat and is able to rescue Tom who finally forgives her. But both of them are swept away to their death by a pile of broken machinery floating down the river. Their graves are visited by both Stephen and Philip and many years later there is a hint that Lucy and Stephen finally get married.

6. DETAILED ANALYSIS

By now you are familiar with the events as they happen and also with the characters as they appear in the novel. It is now time to take an in-depth look at the novel to understand the deeper issues being discussed and also to get an idea of George Eliot's art as a novelist. The critical commentary given below attempts to do just that! Before you read the critical comments, however, you must read the chapter under consideration.

BOOK I—BOY AND GIRL

Chapter 1

The first short chapter, written in the form of a dream sequence, describes the river Floss, its tributary Ripple, the Mill and the town of St. Ogg's. The narrative is in first person but unlike *Wuthering Heights* where the story is told by one or more characters who have a part to play in the novel, here the first-person singular refers to the author. George Eliot intervenes very directly in the first chapter itself and alerts us to the fact that such authorial interventions are going to be quite consistent throughout the work. The



atmosphere created through the author's dream puts an emphasis on memories. The sense of the past which is thus evoked remains central to the working out of the whole novel. Right at the outset we notice that George Eliot has cleverly mentioned 'the flood'. This is the first of innumerable such references that help us anticipate the end.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 (along with chapter 3) while embarking upon the dominant theme of the brother and sister relationship also deals partially with the theme of education which is taken up in detail later in Book II.

The second chapter introduces us to the Tulliver household. What do you notice about Mr. Tulliver? Mr. Tulliver emerges to be a man of fixed opinions, generous heart and good intentions; a caring father who wants his son to achieve what he himself could never do—namely, acquire knowledge and be educated. He wants Tom 'to be a bit of a scholar, so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talks fine and write in' a flourish... a sort o' engineer, or a surveyer, or an auctioneer and vallyer, like Riley, or one o' them smartish businessmen as are all profits and no outlay, only for a big watch-chair and high stool' (p.56). Yet picking the right kind of school for Tom, is tricky business for a virtually uneducated man like Mr. Tulliver. Therefore, he plans to take Mr. Riley's opinion.

What do you learn about Mrs. Tulliver? Mrs. Tulliver is depicted as a fussy mother only bothered about her son's physical well-being. She is also quite conventional. Certain facts about Tom and Maggie are revealed while their parents discuss both their children. Tom is slow while Maggie is 'twice as cute' (p. 59) as him. According to Mr. Tulliver Tom has taken after his mother's side while Maggie takes after her father's family. Thus, the distinction which will be drawn between the Dodsons' (Mrs. Tulliver was a Dodson before marriage) and the Tullivers' way of life throughout the novel, is mentioned for the first time, in passing.

Maggie, the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss* is a child of nine years in this chapter. Her parents disagree in their estimate of her. While Mr. Tulliver finds her clever and smart, Mrs. Tulliver thinks she is "half an idiot" Maggie's brown skin, black eyes and black hair also stand in her disfavour as far as her mother is concerned. (Read p. 60). Mrs. Tulliver's objections to Maggie's rambles along the river, result from her fear that she will 'tumble in and be drowned someday' (p. 61). Once again George Eliot is inserting a technical pointer towards the ending of the novel. In the last paragraph of this chapter, the author speaks to us directly about her impressions of Mrs. Tulliver. This authorial intrusion is welcome for the information it gives about Mrs. Tulliver as well as the author's attitude towards her.



Chapter 3

So far as the plot of the novel is concerned the third chapter does not advance it much further except deciding Tom's education. It supplies, however, some information and contributes towards building up the characters of Maggie, Tom and Mr. Tulliver. We come to know that Mr. Tulliver holds a grudge against all lawyers and we have the following narrative comment "Mr. Tulliver was on the whole a man of safe traditional opinions, but on one or two points he had trusted his unassisted intellect and had arrived at several questionable conclusions, among the rest, that rats, weevils, and lawyers were created by Old Harry" (p. 63). Since Old Harry refers to the devil in Mr. Tulliver's opinion, lawyers are devilish people out to cut other people's throats. There is something in the air about a dam, the height of the water and one's rights to waterpower, but nothing is made clear yet (p. 63). Mr. Tulliver's additional pragmatic reasons for wanting his son to have a good education are brought in. As he says "I shall give Tom an education an' put him to a business, as he may make a nest for himself an' not want to push me out o' mine... I shan't be put off in' spoon-meat afore I've lost my teeth," (p. 65).

Maggie's intense love for her brother Tom is indicated for the first time in her reaction at hearing his name (p.64) and in her defense of him when Mr. Tulliver hints at Tom's possible wickedness in future (p. 65). Maggie's cleverness which had been referred to in passing in the previous chapter, is displayed for the benefit of Mr. Riley (and also the readers) when she describes the contents of the various books which she has read, one of them being *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is a comment on the Victorian attitude towards women, when Maggie's cleverness is seen not as a benefit but a drawback.

Mr. Riley's suggestion of sending Tom to a clergyman, for further education, is the first step taken towards the many misfortunes which will befall the Tulliver household. Mr. Tulliver's simplicity and naivety is highlighted when he gets taken in by Riley. The discussion between Mr. Tulliver and Mr. Riley reveals to some extent the extremely limited education was available to the middle-class in Victorian times. Poor clergymen, anxious to earn some money, would gladly take in a few students as lodgers and educate them in Latin and geometry. Mr. Riley's self-interest in recommending the name of Mr. Stelling is discussed on pages (75-76).

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 provides many insights into Maggie's character. It opens with yet another sample of Maggie's rebelliousness when she dips her head into a basin full of water because she does not want her hair to be curled (p. 78). Direct authorial narration tells us about Maggie's habit of retreating to the attic in her moments of crisis and taking all her anger out on a



wooden doll. Maggie's highly imaginative mind is seen at work when she weaves a story around the spiders she sees in the mill (p. 80). Her impulsiveness is revealed in her ardent efforts to make Luke read about the world; her forgetfulness, which will be the cause of much of Maggie's sorrows, is first seen in this chapter when due to her absentmindedness Tom's rabbits are all dead. Her generousness is hinted at in her reaction to the picture of the Prodigal Son, which she sees at Luke's house. She tells Luke: "I'm very glad his father took him back again... for he was very sorry, you know, and wouldn't do wrong again" (p.83). There is a hint here that Maggie feels an affinity with the rejected figure she sees in the picture. Very often she has done wrong, has been sorry and has wished to be forgiven. This pattern of behaviour in Maggie persists right till the end.

Chapter 5

Maggie's love for her brother is emphasized but Tom's behaviour makes for a contrast between the two. Though he loves his sister dearly, has gone to great lengths in order to buy a fishing line for her, yet he is severe in his judgments. He feels it is right to punish her when she does wrong. This surely does not bode well for someone like Maggie who is constantly making mistakes.

Bob Jakin, belonging to the lowermost rung of the social ladder, is a new character introduced in this chapter. Tom gets involved in a tussle with Bob just because Bob has tried to cheat him in a game of heads or tails. Tom does not give up till Bob has taken out the half-penny being used for the game. Tom, however, does not want the half-penny. He only wanted to make Bob see the unfairness of cheating. Though his behaviour is right according to any moral precepts, yet Tom's self-righteousness borders on the cruel and we have the following narrative observation as a conclusion to such behaviour:

"Tom you perceive, was rather a Rhadamanthine personage, having more than the usual share of boy's justice in him—the justice that desires to hurt culprits as much as they deserve to be hurt, and is troubled with no doubts concerning the exact amount of their deserts... But if Tom had told his strongest feelings at that moment, he would have said, "I'd do just the same again." That was his usual mode of viewing his past actions; whereas "Maggie was always wishing she had done something different" (p. 107).

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 introduces the aunts and uncles who have an important part to play insofar as they represent the constricting, confining, conventional middle-class world which will continually oppose the various aspirations in Maggie's heart. Pages 96-97 create a vivid picture of the Dodsons through narrative comment. Their middle-class notions of



respectability, their feeling of kinship, their prim and proper behaviour at all times, their rigid adherence to customs and traditions are a few of the many Dodson traits mentioned. Apart from introducing the Dodsons, the chapter includes two incidents which further highlight Tom's self-righteousness. The first is the jam-puff incident on page 99 when after having himself divided the jam-puff unequally; he refuses to take the better bit because Maggie has inadvertently chosen it with closed eyes and he will never do what is unfair. When Maggie has eaten it he accuses her of being greedy. The next incident is with Bob.

Chapter 7

George Eliot's sociological impulse is seen at work once again in this chapter. The Dodson sisters, representing a significant section of the Victorian society, enter the narrative at this point and George Eliot's treatment of them is at once humorous, and satirical as well as full of all the details which create a complete picture of a certain way of life.

As far as the plot is concerned the aunts and uncles have come to discuss the matter of Tom's education. But George Eliot's purpose in creating the Dodson world is to put before us the rigidity and conventionality that will oppose Maggie's wider aspirations throughout her life.

The chapter also contains the famous hair cutting episode when Maggie tired of constant criticism of her black unruly hair, cuts them off in a fit of rebellion and undergoes humiliation. Only her father takes her part when he sees her crying and says "... never mind you was right to cut it off if it plagued you. Give over crying: father'll take your part" (p.125) and George Eliot comments:

"Delicious words of tenderness. Maggie never forgot any of these moments when her father 'took her part' she kept them in her heart and thought of them long years after when everyone else said that her father had done very ill by his children" (p. 125).

The above is a further insight into the father and daughter relationship—one shared by George Eliot herself with her own father. Towards the end of the chapter an important development takes place regarding the plot of the novel. There is an altercation between Mr. Tulliver and Mrs. Glegg which is a further step towards the misfortune awaiting Mr. Tulliver because Mrs. Glegg hints at a repayment of the five hundred pounds that she has lent Mr. Tulliver.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 shows the weaker side of Mr. Tulliver. His visit to his sister Mrs. Moss is undertaken with the express wish to recover the three hundred pounds he had loaned to his brother-in-law Mr. Moss at one time. But the severity of manner is soon overcome by the



genuine kindness and love that he feels for his sister and her family. The dominant feeling in Mr. Tulliver's mind is that if he behaves harshly with his sister then it will somehow make Tom behave in a like manner towards Maggie. The analysis of Mr. Tulliver's psychology at this moment could not have been possible without narrative comment (p.144). George Eliot's psychological realism provides an insight into Mr. Tulliver's mental turmoil.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11

These chapters give further insights into the characters of Tom and Maggie—child psychology being an important theme. Maggie as usual but without intending to, manages to make Tom angry, first by knocking the house of cards that he had built (p. 147) then by making him spill his wine in the process of hugging him (p. 155), George Eliot's penetrating analysis of child behaviour and psychology is witnessed effectively in the way Maggie behaves on being rejected by Tom. The desire to hurt Lucy springs from a desire to hurt Tom because he has preferred Lucy to Maggie all the time. So, she pushes Lucy into the mud, then unable to face the consequences she runs off to become the queen of Gypsies.

Maggie's flights into fancy have been witnessed earlier too but in chapter 11 her romantic notions about the gypsies are shattered by the unpleasant reality she actually faces. (Read p. 177). Structurally the gypsy incident is a direct parallel to the conclusion of the novel when Maggie inadvertently hurts Lucy by falling in love with Stephen and then tries to run away from the consequences. Of course, in the end her ties with the past win the conflict between marrying and not marrying Stephen and she returns to face the consequences.

Chapter 12

The twelfth chapter is an amusing chapter which though not having much to do with the plot of the novel yet has a place in the thematic design. In this chapter George Eliot recreates the history of the town of St. Ogg's telling us about Ogg, the son of Beorl who had ferried the Virgin across the river Floss, in his boat. There are references to this boatman later in the novel which link up with Maggie's rendezvous with Stephen.

References to the Great Flood in this chapter once again help to prepare us for the end. The main body of the chapter is, however, devoted to portraying the conjugal relations of Mr. and Mrs. Glegg. George Eliot's subtle sarcastic humour exposes the Gleggs to be respectable hypocrites. As she comments on Mr. Glegg:

“There was no humbug or hypocrisy about Mr. Glegg: his eyes would have watered with true feeling over the sale of a widow's furniture, which a five pound note from his side-pocket would have prevented; but a donation of five pounds to a person ‘in a small way of life’ would have seemed to him a moral kind of lavishness



rather than ‘charity’ which had always presented itself to him as a contribution of small aids, not a neutralizing of misfortune” (p. 187).

The only outcome of this chapter, as far as the plot is concerned is that Mrs. Glegg decides not to call in the money from Mr. Tulliver for no other reason except that there isn’t any better investment in sight.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 widens the family breach because Mr. Tulliver lays all doubts to rest by writing to Mrs. Glegg and letting her know that her money will be paid as soon as possible. Ironically and unfortunately, Mr. Tulliver can find no other man except Wakem’s client, who could lend him the desired five hundred pounds. So, the net of impending misfortune tightens even further.

Check Your Progress

1. How does the story begin? Who is the narrator? Is the narrative in first person?
2. What is being discussed at the Tulliver household at the beginning of this story?
3. What kind of education does Mr. Tulliver want for his son?
4. What is the legend of St. Ogg’s— (read chapter 12).
5. What do you learn about the Dodson’s and the Tulliver’s way of life?
6. What makes Maggie run away to the gypsies?
7. Who is Bob Jakin?
8. List a few instances that have a direct bearing on the author’s life.

BOOK II—SCHOOL TIME

The Second Book of the novel deals with the theme of education at some length. The kind of education that was available in the Victorian times; how it was geared to a particular class; what was the relevance of this kind of education; does it help at all in preparing the student for a profession—these are some of the questions tackled by George Eliot in her description of Tom’s school, his tutor and the type of education he gets.

Mr. Stelling—the parson—is an ambitious man and is determined to push his way in the world. For that purpose alone, he has procured Tom Tulliver as his solitary student in the first half of the year so that he might be able to get more students later on.

Mr. Tulliver’s intentions concerning Tom’s education are thoroughly defeated because even though he pays dearly for it yet, Tom learns nothing better than Latin and



grammar. Such an education does not prepare Tom to be self-dependent. Mr. Tulliver's money is wasted and George Eliot expresses her displeasure in chapter 4: "Education was almost entirely a matter of luck—usually of ill-luck—in those distant days" (p. 174). A little later she describes one of the grammar schools common in those times: "... a grammar school yet unvisited by commissioners, where two or three boys could have all to themselves, the advantages of a large and lofty building, together with a headmaster." The Victorian attitude to women and the suppression of all their rights on account of their sex, is keenly felt in the difference between the kind of education that Tom receives despite being slow-witted and not on the clever side at all, and the kind of education that Maggie receives despite being twice as clever as Tom and genuinely interested in learning. In chapter 1 itself Mr. Stelling expresses the general opinion held about women in Victorian times when he says: "They can pick up little of everything. I daresay, ... They've great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (p. 157).

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 plays an important function in clarifying and providing certain details about the plot. The reasons for the impending lawsuit (which has been mentioned more than once in Book 1) are stated for the first time on p. 161. The quarrel is for waterpower. Mr. Pivart who has lands higher up than Mr. Tulliver, has plans for irrigating them, and this means that he would be infringing on Mr. Tulliver's legitimate share of waterpower. In the simplicity of his mind Mr. Tulliver holds the lawyer Wakem responsible for the lawsuit and carries a grudge against him in his heart.

Chapters 3-7

Chapter 3 introduces a new character—Philip—the deformed son of lawyer Wakem. The affinity of temperament between Maggie and Philip is soon established—they are both sensitive, imaginative, lovers of art and beauty and desirous of knowledge. They are gentle in manner and both crave affection. But Tom is at once repelled by Philip's deformity and the relationship between the two boys begins on an uneasy note and remains so throughout except for the time when Tom hurts himself with the sword and Philip is considerate enough to find out and tell him that he will not be lame for life.

In chapter 7 the blow finally falls. Maggie comes with the news of their father's loss of the lawsuit and the consequent bankruptcy. The chapter is aptly subtitled as "The Golden Gates are passed", because it marks the end of Maggie's and Tom's happiest time in their life—that of their childhood when they had not a single care in the world.

From now on there is a steady regression in the fortunes of the Tullivers.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Why did Mr. Tulliver go to law with Pivart?
2. What kind of man is Mr. Stelling?
3. What are George Eliot's views on education? (Read chapter IV).
4. What kind of education is Tom getting? Do you think it will be useful to him in later life?
5. What news does Maggie bring to Tom at School?

BOOK III—THE DOWNFALL**Chapter 1**

We are taken slightly back in time. At the end of Book II, Maggie had already come to Tom with the terrible news of their misfortune. The first chapter of Book III, however, begins by providing all the details of how the crisis in the Tulliver household has been brought about. Mr. Tulliver has lost the lawsuit and knows that the costs incurred will take more than what he possesses to pay them. Everything seems to be going against him. He loses two hundred and fifty pounds that he had stood as security for Mr. Riley due to the latter's sudden demise. The creditor, from whom Mr. Tulliver had borrowed five hundred pounds to pay Mrs. Glegg, had suddenly become uneasy about his money so Mr. Tulliver had rashly acceded to the demand that he should give a bill of sale on his household furniture and some other effects as security in lieu of the bond. Furley, who holds the mortgage on the land, is Mr. Tulliver's only hope. He plans to sell the estate to Furley, retain the Mill as tenant and by and by, from the profits of the business, he would be able to repay Furley and the rest of the creditors too. The final blow falls when Furley transfers the mortgage to Wakem.

The news is enough to cause a nervous breakdown in Mr. Tulliver. Henceforth we see him a completely broken man. George Eliot's realism and her power of seeing tragic potential even in a common and insignificant man as Mr. Tulliver, and the depth of her psychological insights into such characters are glimpsed in a short paragraph which deserves to be quoted:

“It is precisely the proudest and most obstinate men who are the most liable to shift their position and contradict themselves in this sudden manner. Everything is easier to them than to face the simple fact that they have been thoroughly defeated and must begin life a new. And Mr. Tulliver you perceive, though nothing more than a superior miller and maltster, was as proud and obstinate as if he had been a very



lofty person age in whom such dispositions might be a source of that conspicuous ear-echoing tragedy, which sweeps the stage in regal robes, and makes the dullest chronicler sublime. The pride and obstinacy of millers and other insignificant people, whom you pass un-noticingly on the road everyday have their tragedy too; but it is of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation, and leaves no record” (p. 275).

The present chapter records the tragedy of Mr. Tulliver and his family. The Dodsons are rich and it is expected that they would help the Tullivers, but George Eliot’s earlier comments on their rigidity and conventionality and their strict sense of justice have already dampened any hopes we might have had from that quarter; a narrative comment to the same effect confirms our doubts:

“... there was a general family sense that a judgment had fallen on Mr. Tulliver which it would be an impiety to counteract by too much kindness” (p. 279).

Maggie and Tom, on the threshold of adolescence, set out on this new journey together but with different feelings. Tom, like his father, holds Wakem responsible for all that has happened and almost swears a feud against the lawyer. He instructs Maggie also to never speak to Philip again. Maggie on the other hand shows a greater humanity and a deeper understanding of the whole affair for she bears no grudge in her heart.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4

These chapters further increase the misery because the bailiff comes into the house to make a sale of all the furniture and other household things. In a vivid scene in chapter 2, George Eliot shows Mrs. Tulliver in an extremely pitiable light. For her, all her furniture and linen and her crockery and cutlery have a value almost equal to deities. She is unable to bear the thought of having the name of the Dodsons scattered all over the world in this ignoble manner.

Both Tom and Maggie react in a different manner towards this crisis. Tom’ is sympathetic towards his mother, does not expect any undue help from his aunts and uncles and resolves to take the matter in his own hands. Maggie on the other hand rebels against the insensitive attitude of her mother as well as her aunts. She cannot understand how Tom and Mrs. Tulliver can cry over inanimate things like furniture when her own father was lying speechless and may never speak to them again (p. 284). Similarly, there is her fiery outburst in chapter 3 against her aunts and uncles on page 296.

The Dodson’s materialistic attitude towards life is very much in the forefront. Even personal relationships are governed by money. They have no compunctions in asking poor



Mrs. Moss to raise the three hundred pounds that she owes to Mr. Tulliver even though they know that to do so she will have to sell off all that she has.

Tom for the first time, under this crisis, takes an independent decision of burning any Note which can oblige Mrs. Moss to pay the money because he knows his father would have wanted it this way.

Both Tom and Maggie's characters that had been following a parallel course of development till this moment, now diverge into separate paths of growth.

Chapter 5

The fifth chapter is devoted entirely to developing Tom's character—how within a few days he grows up from an adolescent, carefree boy into a responsible careworn person. This chapter shows Tom in a better light than ever before because it highlights those qualities in him which are now required for putting some order into this chaos. Seeing the consequences of going to law, Tom feels his father is really blamable just as his aunts and uncles had always said, "and it was a significant indication of Tom's character that, though he thought his aunts ought to do something more for his mower, he felt nothing like Maggie's violent resentment against them for sharing no eager tenderness and generosity. There were no impulses in Tom that led him to expect what did not present itself to him as a right to be demanded" (p. 308).

Tom is proud—he will not accept charity but will work for his living. He is honest because he wants to pay back all the creditors as soon as possible. The irrelevance of his education is now exposed. Even though Mr. Tulliver has spent so much only on Tom's education, when the need arises it is seen to be deficient in making him capable of earning his living through a profession. It has not prepared him for life in any useful way, it has only "whitened (his) hands and taken the rough work out of (him)" (p. 315). To work in Mr. Deane's company, he has to start from scratch by learning book-keeping and accounts.

Towards the end of the chapter a contrast is drawn between Maggie's and Tom's lot. While the crisis has pushed Tom into active work which will keep him occupied with a single-minded obsession of paying back the creditors, Maggie the girl who had longed for better opportunities now finds her world shrinking to the few rooms in her home with the constant companionship of her mother's narrow griefs and of her father's heart-cutting childish dependence. George Eliot comments:

"Maggie... was a creature full of eager passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind unconscious



yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it” (p. 320).

There is a fierce conflict between Maggie’s individual aspirations and the limiting, narrow world that thwarts them. Her life is surely not going to be an easy one.

Chapter 6

The sixth chapter brings Bob Jakin back into the picture. Bob’s genuine desire to help the Tullivers is felt in the gesture he makes when he offers Tom the nine sovereigns he has been paid for putting off a fire. Those nine sovereigns are all the money that he possesses. Bob’s simplicity and true generosity and kindness makes us recall the selfishness of the Dodsons.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9

Mr. Tulliver is declared bankrupt. Tom begins to work temporarily in the warehouse and even begins taking evening lessons in book-keeping and accounts— the seventh chapter focuses on Tom as far as development of character goes.

The plot of the novel takes an interesting turn here due to the well-intentioned but misguided efforts of Mrs. Tulliver. She goes to plead to Wakem not to buy the Mill so that it can be bought by Guest & Co. and Mr. Tulliver can remain as manager. Wakem, who till that moment had not even thought of the idea, now likes it, and goes ahead with buying the Mill so that further humiliation awaits Mr. Tulliver when in Chapter 8 he comes down from his sick chamber for the first time. But he agrees to work for Wakem because he feels he has troubled his family enough by bringing them down to poverty. Mr. Tulliver never forgives Wakem for what he has done to him. In Chapter 9 he makes Tom swear eternal hatred and vengeance against Wakem and his family and makes him write it in the family Bible.

Book III concludes at a point when a feud between the Tullivers and Wakems has begun.

Check Your Progress

1. What change do you notice in Tom?
2. Do the Dodsons help in this time of crisis? Who else comes with an offer of help?
3. What steps does Tom take to retrieve his family’s fortune?
4. How does Maggie respond to the predicament?



5. How does Bob Jakin help in the time of crisis?
6. Who becomes the new owner of Dorlcote Mill?
7. What does Mr. Tulliver make Tom write in the family Bible?

BOOK IV—THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

Chapter 1

The first chapter begins with a reference to the Flood which reduces dwellings to desolation. The ruins thus left oppress the author with a feeling that “human life—very much of it—is a narrow, ugly grovelling existence, which even calamity does not elevate” (p. 362). A direct parallel is then drawn between this feeling and the feeling that weighed upon us in “watching this old-fashioned family life on the banks of the Floss, which even sorrow hardly suffices to lift above the level of the tragi-comic.” The importance of the chapter lies however in the fact that it is here that George Eliot clearly states her reasons for describing the dull, prosaic lives of the Dodsons and Tullivers. We feel the oppressiveness of their narrow worldly notions and habits, their moral notions which though held with strong tenacity serve to have no standard beyond hereditary custom, but as George Eliot says, it is necessary for us to feel all this so that we can understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie. This is the sociologist at work. The chapter is devoted to yet another account of the Dodson’s way of life, and a contrast is drawn up towards the end, with the Tulliver’s way of life which though having similar traditional beliefs yet carries in it “a richer blood having elements of generous imprudence, warm affection, and hot-tempered rashness.” (p. 365).

Chapters 2 and 3

The second chapter describes a period of dull misery in the Tulliver household but chapter 3, concentrates on Maggie’s development of character and deals with an important change in her life. Bob Jakin, enters the scene once more, bringing Maggie a present of books. Among these books is the *Christian Year* written by Thomas `a Kempis.

After reading Thomas `a Kempis, a remarkable change comes over Maggie. Self-denial, self-renunciation seems to be an answer to all her problems, to all her longings. She becomes unnaturally subdued killing all the vitality and life that abounds in her.

The next Book deals with Philip’s efforts to shake Maggie out of this stupor.



Check Your Progress

1. What does Bob Jakin get for Maggie?
2. What makes Maggie change her attitude? What are these changes?
3. Can you draw a parallel here between Maggie and George Eliot?
4. What are George Eliot's reasons for describing the lives of the Dodsons and the Tullivers in such minute detail?

BOOK V—WHEAT AND TARES

Chapter 1

Maggie is now seventeen years old. In the first chapter of this Book, she meets Philip after an interval of four years and the whole Book is devoted to the development of the relationship between Maggie and Philip. Though Maggie knows that it is wrong to conceal her meeting with Philip, she is unable to resist herself and acquiesces to a plan of meeting Philip by chance, without an appointment. Philip once again opens her mind to a world of beauty, art and culture. It is obvious that Philip is in love with Maggie but on Maggie's part she never thinks of Philip to be more than a brother.

Chapter 2

Notice that all through the narrative a parallel development is being traced in Tom's life along with Maggie. Bob comes with a helpful gesture once again when he invites and advises Tom to invest in trading ventures. Aunt Glegg is approached for a loan of money. A vivid description of Bob's salesmanship is seen in the way he sells his wares to Mrs. Glegg. Finally, Tom manages to borrow money from Aunt Glegg and at the same time Maggie meets Philip in the Red Deeps. Tom already has 150 pounds of his own capital, has risen in position at Guest & Co. and is on his way to Laceham on behalf of his company. The end of the chapter sees him happy with the thought that in another year's time the ignominy of debt would be lifted off his father's head and he would have risen further in the platform of employment.

Chapters 3 and 4

The third and fourth chapters deal with a further development in the relationship between Maggie and Philip. What role does Philip play? Philip's role in the novel is seen to be that of a mentor to Maggie. He opens her eyes again to the world of art and culture pointing out that her feelings of renunciation and self-denial are unnatural: "It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way." He tells Maggie: "You



will be thrown into the world some day and then every rational satisfaction in your nature that you deny now will assault you like a savage appetite” (p. 429). The depth to which Philip understands Maggie’s nature and the truth of his words is clearly reflected in how intensely Maggie responds to the luxuries of life in Books 6 and 7. Philip’s words have an important bearing on the further development of Maggie’s character. Towards the end of Chapter 3 George Eliot gives us a clever, deep penetrating analysis of the psychology of a deformed person when Philip feels singled out for pity. In Chapter 4, however, he opens his heart to Maggie and there is a clear indication that Maggie’s feelings for Philip are dominated not by the kind of love that unites two people in marriage, but by pity. In support of the same we have the following narrative comment after she kisses Philip: “She had a moment of real happiness then—a moment of belief that if there were sacrifice in this love, it was all the richer and more satisfying” (p. 438). Quite subtly George Eliot is preparing us for the change in Maggie’s feelings a bit later.

Chapter 5

The fifth Chapter ends the love affair between Maggie and Philip. Tom discovers their meetings and cruelly puts an end to them by directly confronting Philip and literally ordering him to lay off. Maggie’s behaviour in this scene is questionable. For a girl of her fiery temper and independent opinions she is shown as rather meek and submissive. Maggie tells Philip she is giving him up because of her father’s sake but once again there is a subtle hint that this is not the whole truth. Taking a peek into Maggie’s thoughts, George Eliot writes:

“And yet how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip. Surely it was only because the sense of a deliverance from concealment was welcome at any cost” (p. 451).

Can you recall another similar hint placed in the narrative by the author?

Chapters 6 and 7

These two chapters concentrate on a development in plot. Tom has been able to save enough money to pay the creditors before the anticipated time. A celebration is held but the day ends on a dismal note. Mr. Tulliver, while returning from the celebration meets Wakem on the way and in a fit of vengeful triumph he beats him up. Mr. Tulliver’s weak and bruised nerves are unable to take the strain of so much excitement and he collapses and is dead by the next morning. The brother and sister are once again united in their sorrow.



Check Your Progress

1. What happens at the Red Deeps?
2. What role does Philip play in Maggie's life?
3. What does Tom make Maggie swear on the Bible? Does she do so?
4. How is Tom able to earn money so quickly?
5. What does Tom promise his dying father?

BOOK VI—THE GREAT TEMPTATION

Two years pass in the interval between Books V and VI.

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces us to an entirely new character, Mr. Stephen Guest. It is revealed in the course of the narrative that he is unofficially engaged to Lucy. Mr. Stephen Guest's "diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure, at twelve o'clock in the day," (p. 469), makes a disagreeable impression on the readers, an impression which led Sir Leslie Stephen to describe him as "a mere hairdresser's block". George Eliot is careful to state his financial superiority.

Though the Chapter mainly deals with the light, flirtatious courtship of Lucy and Stephen certain important facts are also revealed. An interval of two years has passed since Mr. Tulliver's death. Lucy's mother, Mrs. Deane is dead and Mrs. Tulliver now manages the Deane household. Maggie has been in a dreary situation at some school because as Lucy says, "she is determined to be independent and not live with Aunt Pullet" (p. 471). Tom is gradually rising in his employer's esteem. One incident is quoted when he saves them from considerable loss by "riding horse in some marvellous way like Turpin, to bring them news about the stoppage of a bank. . ." (p. 363). Maggie is expected to come to the Deane household for a long vacation. Lucy is very eager about it and intentionally misleads Stephen into thinking that Maggie will also be like Mrs. Tulliver— "a fat blonde girl, with round blue eyes, who will stare at (them) silently" (p. 472). What do you think will be the effect of this kind of deliberate misleading?

Lucy is shown to have grown up into a beautiful kind and generous girl, always desirous of making people happy, taking particular pleasure in reuniting the Tulliver family and planning to surprise them with gifts.

An insight into Stephen's character, towards the end of the chapter, reveals him to be conventional in his attitude to women, complacent and even condescending in having



chosen Lucy to be his life partner. Instead of allowing the credit to go to Lucy he takes it himself in having made such an excellent judgment.

Chapter 2

As is obvious from the subtitle, this chapter describes the first meeting between Stephen and Maggie. The meeting takes both of them by surprise since Lucy had misled both regarding the appearance and personality of each. In a brief insight into Maggie's state of mind, George Eliot prepares us for her reaction to the joys that life is offering her now. Thinking about her future Maggie feels that it "was likely to be worse than her past, for after her years of contented renunciation, she had slipped back into desire and longing: she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder—she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for, and despaired of, becoming more and more importunate" (p. 482).

The first meeting between Maggie and Stephen is itself indicative of things to come. Stephen is unable to conceal his astonishment on seeing this unusual and beautiful girl. Maggie on the other hand, for the first time in her life, finds herself admired by a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. "This new experience was very agreeable to her" writes George Eliot, "—so agreeable, that it almost erased her previous emotion about Philip" (p. 484). Can you recall how George Eliot has prepared us for this reaction in Maggie? The physical element that was lacking in Maggie's relationship with Philip surfaces here in the first meeting itself. Stephen, on his part, keeps wishing for a look from Maggie's deep, beautiful eyes. When he saves Maggie from falling while getting out of the boat, once again Maggie experiences something new: "It was charming to be taken care of in that kind, graceful manner by someone taller and stronger than oneself. Maggie had never felt just in the same way before" (p 492). Notice that George Eliot is repeatedly emphasizing the difference in the physique of Philip and Stephen. Philip had also admired Maggie but it had never made her feel the way she is feeling now because in Philip's case Maggie is conscious of her superiority over him because of his deformity.

Chapter 3

This Chapter begins once again with the author's intervention and a further insight into Maggie's mind. The world of books, of imagination seems to come alive now. "A world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreams" (p. 495). The reason given for her extreme reaction is her starved nature, starved in a third-rate schoolroom with all its jarring sounds and petty rounds of tasks.



The rest of the Chapter describes a few confidential moments between Lucy and Maggie when Maggie tells about her past relationship with Philip and of her promise to Tom never to speak to him again without Tom's knowledge. Therefore, she finds it imperative to go and seek Tom's permission before meeting Philip at Lucy's place where he is a regular visitor.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 brings brother and sister together one more time. This is an important chapter from the point of view of getting a perspective on Maggie's character. It gives a harsh but truthful analysis of Maggie's nature as it has been seen and understood by Tom. He makes it clear to her that if she ever thinks of Philip as a lover then she will have to give up her brother. Maggie's assurance does not have the desired effect because as Tom says he has no confidence in her. She would be led away to do anything. Quite unimaginatively and unsympathetically Tom states the truth: "I never feel certain about anything with you. At one time you take pleasure in a show of perverse self-denial, and another you have no resolution to resist a thing you know to be wrong" (p. 504).

The chapter finally ends with Tom giving in to Maggie's wish, though not without a warning and a qualification. Maggie can meet Philip, as Lucy so wishes it, but on no other footing than friendship. Certain other things we learn from this chapter. Bob Jakin is now married and presently Tom is living with him. There are subtle hints that Tom has a soft corner for Lucy in his heart.

Chapter 5

Tom, because of his hard work and devotion earns a share in the business. Tom's attachment to the Mill and his promise to his father that he would get it back one day makes him suggest to Mr. Deane that it will be more than anything to have that Mill again. He suggests the firm should buy it and if Tom is made in-charge he will gradually work and pay off the price.

A sad admission from him that he wants to have plenty of work, "There's nothing else I care about much" (p. 511) highlights the change that the years have wrought in this man who was once so carefree and gay.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 brings us back to Maggie's world and illustrates the growing attraction between her and Stephen. The plot is thus getting complicated because we know Stephen is already engaged (though unofficially) to Lucy. This Chapter introduces Maggie to the life of leisure—for the first time she knows the luxury of getting up late with nothing particular to do than enjoy reading, listening to music and going for walks and rowing.



Chapter 6 is also important from the point of view of understanding how a character is shaped in George Eliot's world. What the future has in store for Maggie cannot be determined solely from Maggie's characteristics. The author allows us an interesting insight into her own methods of working when she disagrees with Novalis who had said that "character is destiny." According to George Eliot however, our destiny is not determined solely by our character. As she writes: ". . . the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. Character is not the whole of our destiny" (p. 514). Giving the example of Hamlet she argues that had the circumstances surrounding him been different, Hamlet might have lived through life a happily married man with a reputation of sanity. From the above argument one can infer that the creator of Maggie, having delineated her character with deep understanding until this point, now wants us to see her acting under certain influences and circumstances in which she is placed. But since characteristics cannot determine one's future so Maggie's destiny is at present hidden and "we wait for it to reveal itself like the course of an unmapped river: we only know that the river is full and rapid and that for all rivers there is the same final home" (p. 514). The symbolic significance of the river Floss comes to the fore. It is obviously portentous of Maggie's life.

The rest of the chapter illustrates the growing attraction between Maggie and Stephen, to which they have not yet been able to give the name of love. Stephen's feelings are laid bare and the struggle in his mind arises from knowing that he was engaged as strongly an honourable man need be and yet he was being drawn irresistibly towards this girl full of delicious opposites. Maggie is not the kind of girl Stephen would have normally chosen for himself but it is no use wishing now to have never seen her.

Chapter 7

Philip re-enters the narrative at a point when Maggie is feeling the need of some external force to withhold her from an attraction she herself is unable to resist. Once again Philip's role is that of a mentor and a rescuer, and we have the following narrative comment:

"For Philip, who a little while ago was associated continually in Maggie's mind with the sense that Tom might reproach her with some justice, had now, in this short space, become a sort of outward conscience to her that she might fly to for rescue and strength" (p. 525).

Philip's keen sensitivity immediately arouses his suspicions regarding Stephen and Maggie. The Chapter ends with a further development in plot when Lucy implores her father to buy the Mill for Tom so that he can get reconciled to Philip. Maggie and Philip need have no obstacle in the way of their marriage. Lucy's total trust in Stephen and her unsuspecting nature make us feel deeply for her. Maggie and Stephen's deception might have made



them loathsome to us but for the fact that George Eliot has strategically presented the struggle that both of them are going through.

Chapters 8 and 9

In Chapter 8 we see Wakem in a new light noticing that George Eliot never paints any of her characters black. There is a potential of goodness present in every human being and it emerges in Wakem when he is projected as a loving father who forgets his hatred and anger and agrees to accept Maggie as a daughter-in-law. It is for this purpose that he goes and meets her at her stall in the charity-bazaar organized by the ladies in Chapter 9. Chapter 9 confirms Philip's suspicion of an attraction between Maggie and Stephen and also reveals to Stephen that there is some bond between Philip and Maggie. Dr. Kenn, who has been mentioned earlier, now meets Maggie and she feels a brief connection with him because of his sympathy. Structurally it is important to place this meeting here because later when Maggie is in distress she will again think of no one but the sympathetic Dr. Kenn to whom she can turn.

The ninth chapter ends with Maggie's declaration of going to a new situation as a teacher. The reason she gives Lucy for not marrying Philip is ostensibly Tom's disapproval of him, but there are indications that Maggie's relationship with Philip is very different from her relationship with Stephen.

Chapters 10 and 11

These two chapters bring about an open declaration and a mutual acknowledgement of their love for each other from Maggie as well as Stephen. In Chapter 10, while at the ball, being held at the Guest household, George Eliot subtly inserts a passage describing the conflict going on in Stephen's mind before presenting the scene in which he is overpowered by his desire and love for Maggie. At first he reasons with himself:

“ . . . there was some attachment between her and Philip; at least there was an attachment on his side, which made her feel in some bondage. Here then, Stephen told himself, was another claim of honour which called on him to resist the attraction that was continually threatening to overpower him. . . Nevertheless, he had done what he meant to do this evening: he had kept aloof from her” (p. 559).

The reader can understand the intensity of emotions when Stephen kisses Maggie's arm. But Maggie, unable to comprehend the reason behind such action takes it as an insult and thinks it to be a punishment for being treacherous to Lucy and to Philip.

On the other hand, Maggie's relationship with Philip also seems to be facing a stalemate. At the end of Chapter 10 Maggie reiterates her reason for not marrying Philip



because of her brother Tom. Philip's jealousy, however, makes him doubt Maggie, thinking that these were not the only reasons for her decisions.

Chapter 11 carries Stephen-Maggie relationship even further. Stephen's love cannot be doubted after this. His physical as well as mental state is testimony to this fact. If his love was shallow he would not have been tormented thus and would not have ridden all the distance to Mrs. Moss's house where Maggie is paying a visit, to ask for her forgiveness. In spite of her better intentions, Maggie is not able to refuse Stephen when he asks her to take a walk with him. This brings out Maggie's feelings in the open. At the same time, however, knowing that it is wrong, she resists a culmination of this love with all her might. The basis of Stephen's argument is their mutual love. Following their natural inclinations, they should get married. But for Maggie there are some other things more important than natural inclinations. There is the past with its affection and its duties. There are ties which have developed over the years and cannot be broken at any cost:

“The real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds,” she tells Stephen. “Else all pledge might be broken. When there was no outward penalty, there would be no such thing as faithfulness” (p. 570).

Both Maggie and Stephen have often been accused of being deceitful and hypocritical. Even Tom says as much to Maggie when she returns. But notice how George Eliot has very ingeniously placed their mental and emotional conflict at this moment. Only one chapter intervenes between the decision which is to part them, taken in chapter 11, and the event which is to throw them together in chapter 13. Chapter 11 therefore speaks in defense of both Maggie and Stephen. Though it may be hard to believe yet, their so-called elopement was entirely unforeseen by either. Whatever happens was surely not intended.

Chapter 12

The gloom which had fallen on the Tulliver family in the first few sections of the novel now shows signs of lifting. The Mill will soon be back in its rightful hands. The family gets together to celebrate. Maggie's decision to go into service once again is frowned upon by all the aunts and uncles, especially since now she may have no need to earn her living. Lucy's revelation about Philip's role in contriving to give the Mill back to the Tullivers, is not received with the expected pleasantness by Tom. A narrative comment puts Tom's character in a nutshell:

“... strength of will, conscious rectitude of purpose, narrowness of imagination and intellect, great power of self-control and a disposition to exert over others ...” (p. 579).



To such minds prejudices come naturally and they come to stay. So, Lucy gets a cold refusal from Tom for her proposal of Maggie's marriage with Philip.

Chapters 13 and 14

Both these Chapters mark a turning point in the lives of Maggie and Stephen. "Borne along by the tide" is an apt title to describe the incident in which Maggie, in spite of her will, drifts down the river, in a boat, with Stephen, quite oblivious of her surroundings, till it is too late to return. One could have found it difficult to believe this of any other ordinary girl. But Maggie has been extraordinary right from the beginning. By now we know that to lose herself in a dream world, to forget her surroundings, is a common feature with this highly imaginative girl. So, she drifts along thinking that one last moment of togetherness with Stephen cannot do much harm since they had already decided to part. Stephen too on his part feels the same, but the blame for letting the boat drift past their appointed destination sits totally on his shoulders.

When Maggie realizes what has happened, she is desperate and wants to return home at any cost. Stephen, however, once again pleads his case, arguing in favour of love and pointing out how everything had come without their seeking. It is an exact replica of the scene we witnessed in Chapter 11 and once again Maggie is going to be firm in her resolution of not going forward with an act which will hurt many others. She reproaches Stephen in her desperation calling it unmanly on his part for bringing her into such a position, but then checks herself because what right had she to reproach him when she had been so weak herself. Subsequently, things happen as if in a trance, and the moment of awakening comes in the next chapter.

"Waking" is the chapter which explains to Maggie the true meaning of the word 'renunciation'. Once before, in the far-off years we recall how Maggie had decided to lead a life of renunciation. But "she had renounced all delights then, before she knew them, before they had come within her reach" (p. 597). Philip had been right, she realized, when he told her that she knew nothing of renunciation. True renunciation comes only when you have to renounce something after desiring it with your body, mind, and soul. In spite of the irrevocable nature of their past act, Maggie decides to return. Stephen, like any normal lover, thinks it foolishness on Maggie's part. But knowing Maggie for what she is, we can understand. Of course, her return cannot erase the mistake which has blackened her name, nor can it rectify the hurt that Lucy and Philip would be enduring now. Yet Maggie's decision is unshakeable. The arguments she gives to Stephen are a repetition of what she had told him in chapter eleven. Nothing has changed. The past still stands as the binding force. As she tells Stephen: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should



have no law but the inclination of the moment.” (p. 602). For Maggie there are “memories and affections and longings after perfect goodness” (p. 603) that have a stronger hold on her. If she could go back in the time before this mistake, she would choose to live with her calmer affection and “without the joy of love” (p. 603).

In the light of their present circumstances Stephen is unable to understand Maggie’s arguments or her decision. “Good God, Maggie” said Stephen... “You rave. How can you go back without marrying me? You don’t know what will be said, dearest. You see nothing as it really is” (p 605). This accusation had been leveled at Maggie often. Can you recall when? But reality is not merely what meets the eye. There is something within which is more real. Being true to oneself, to what one has held most dear and sacred to one’s heart, is what is more real much more than succumbing to circumstances. Therefore, Maggie stands resolute and Stephen has to let her go.

Check Your Progress

1. Who is Stephen? What impression do you get of him? Do you think the attraction between Stephen and Maggie is plausible?
2. What two changes in the plan result in Stephen and Maggie going together for the boat trip?
3. Do you blame Maggie for what happens?

BOOK VII - THE FINAL RESCUE

The last book of the novel proves the truth of Stephen’s words. Society is unable understand the nobleness of Maggie’s decision. She is a ‘fallen woman’ now and the first person to drill these words into Maggie’s ears is her own brother Tom.

Chapter 1

Maggie returns to the Mill only to be called base and deceitful by Tom and to be further disowned by him. Do you agree with this assessment of Maggie’s character? Mrs. Tulliver goes with her unfortunate daughter and both take shelter under Bob Jakin’s roof, who is now the proud father of a bonny baby. Bob Jakin’s character once again is used as a foil to Tom. His innate chivalry, his understanding of Maggie’s character, his belief in her essential goodness do not leave room for doubt in his mind. He tries his best to allay some of Maggie’s grief.

Chapter 2

The whole of St. Ogg’s is ablaze with the explosive news of Miss Tulliver’s return without having married the man she eloped with. St. Ogg’s actually passes a judgment on the



miserable girl. George Eliot's sociological bent emerges once again in her analysis of society's reaction with a deep understanding of its psychology.

“We judge others according to results, how else? not knowing the process by which results are arrived at. If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest—with a post martial trousseau and all the advantages possessed even by the unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St. Ogg's as elsewhere, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results” (p. 619).

Since nothing like this happened, the world's wife at once saw Miss Tulliver's conduct as detestable and Mr. Stephen's as excusable since “a young man of five and twenty is not to be judged severely in these cases—he is really very much at the mercy of the designing bold girl” (p. 621).

Stephen had warned Maggie against such social ostracism. But Maggie, who was firm then, remains firm even now. She resorts to plain sewing to earn her bread and then applies to Dr. Kenn for further suitable employment. Dr. Kenn is the only other person, apart from Bob and Philip, who understands Maggie. Having been widowed recently he offers Maggie the post of a governess for his children. The last straw, however, comes when people begin to draw nasty conclusions about Maggie's relationship with Dr. Kenn. Stephen's letter of vindication has no effect, whatsoever, on the people St. Ogg's.

Chapter 3

George Eliot is known to see some goodness in every human being. Earlier in *The Mill* she had redeemed Wakem's character by describing him as a loving and indulgent father. Now in this chapter she redeems the Dodsons, particularly Aunt Glegg. The Dodson's concept of kinship had been earlier seen to be only as some kind of a tradition. Here, however, it is this same concept which comes to Maggie's help when Mrs. Glegg decides to stand by her own kin in her time of trouble. Mrs. Glegg “allowed that Maggie ought to be punished—she was not a woman to deny that—she knew what conduct was—but punished in proportion to the misdeeds proved against her, not to those which were cast upon her by people outside her own family, who might wish to show that their own kin were better” (p. 631). She is prepared to take Maggie under her wings but Maggie wants to fight her own battles. In the same chapter Maggie receives the much-awaited forgiveness from Philip in the form of a letter in which he reasserts his belief, his trust and faith in her at the same time realizing the difficult nature of her decision. What estimate would you form of Philip's character from this?



Chapter 4

Lucy had been the person most deeply hurt through Maggie's act because unlike Philip she had never suspected anything and so had never anticipated the turn that events took. Yet this chapter brings her to Maggie, not so she can reproach her or indict her but to reveal her realization of Maggie's nobleness. "You did what it must have been very hard to do" she tells Maggie wonderingly. Maggie, amidst her tears, pleads for Stephen, for Lucy to forgive him and accept him. Lucy leaves with the final confession that Maggie is a better person than her even though society had declared her to be a 'fallen' woman.

Chapter 5

Maggie's troubles have not ended. By now people have started conjecturing about her relationship with Dr. Kenn which is throwing Maggie into the dungeons of despair. Stephen's last letter, asking her to come to him or call for him, comes at such a time and the struggle resumes in Maggie's mind. But her decision remains unchanged even though her heart almost breaks while writing the refusal. In her despair she wishes for death and the subsequent events seem like a wish fulfilment. The flood comes! Maggie tries to save her brother in her boat, but both brother and sister are swept away.

Nothing, except the frequent technical pointers, had prepared us for such an end. Even Tom's realization about Maggie's nobleness is too sudden to be believed. This makes for dissatisfaction with the end which readers have felt over the decades. Do you also feel the same?

Conclusion

The conclusion takes us into a time five years later than the time of the flood which killed Maggie and Tom. Philip remains devoted to Maggie's memory while it is hinted that Stephen and Lucy finally marry thus fulfilling one of Maggie's last wishes.

Check Your Progress

1. What role does the town of St. Ogg's perform in hastening Maggie's tragedy?
2. How do Tom and Maggie die?
3. Do you think the ending is abrupt?
4. Can you explain why the author decides to kill her heroine?
5. How far is Maggie a victim of the society and of the fact that she is a woman?



7. CHARACTERIZATION

When George Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, raised a few objections regarding the characters in her novels, she wrote him a letter of defence. An extract from the same is worth quoting because it includes an emphatic assertion of George Eliot's methods and purpose as far as her choice of characters and their delineation is concerned. In her letter she wrote:

..my stories always grow out of my psychological conception of the dramatis personae...my artistic bent is not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I feel to be true in character (Haight, p.279).

A few important facts ought to be noted. Firstly, the *psychology* of an individual is important for George Eliot. Secondly, her characters are human beings drawn in the shades of grey rather than in the shades of black and white. Therefore, no character is either totally good or totally evil. The potential for goodness is always present in characters who seem to be bad whereas there is always a likelihood of errors and mistakes surrounding the characters who are essentially presented as virtuous. Thirdly, having chosen such characters who are ordinary, erring human beings like us, George Eliot's presentation and treatment of them does not condemn them. Instead, it aims at evoking a sympathetic and tolerant response in the readers.

Though the characters are drawn from the ordinary mundane spheres of life, George Eliot's perceptive and deep analytical treatment of them exposes their tragic potential which had hitherto been denied to them. For her, a character's 'placing' in life is not the determining factor. It is not as though only princes and nobles have a potential for tragedy. The mind of any individual is the seat of innumerable conflicts and struggles which have as great a scope for tragedy as there is in the falling of a prince. Therefore, the mind is the place where George Eliot wants to look and the inward struggles are what she wants to present. Be it the mind of an ordinary miller like Mr. Tulliver or the mind of a nine-year-old little girl. The potential for tragedy is present in all. What is required is a sensitive, perceptive presentation and analysis of these struggles so as to draw forth this potential.

For the emphasis she places on the psychology of an individual, George Eliot has often been called one of the first psychological novelists. But she does not study the mind in isolation. For her, the various factors which have contributed towards shaping and moulding that particular mind are equally important. The historical, religious, and social factors that



surround the various characters are seen to be interacting with them and affecting them. Thus, the characters emerge as fully rounded, three-dimensional figures having tragic depths and moral complexities. George Eliot had once written to Charles Bray: “If Art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures” (Haight, p.282). The sympathetic novelist was successful in achieving what she aimed at. The depth of her analysis ensures that the reader’s complete involvement with her characters at every step. Let us now take a look at a few major characters and see how this is achieved.

7.1 MAGGIE TULLIVER

Over the years readers have reacted differently to the character of Maggie Tulliver. Some have seen her as a rebel, others as a victim of society and some others still see her as a victim for the simple reason that she is a woman. Some have felt compelled to denounce her for her mistakes; some fail to see why she could not be a little more practical towards the end and almost all see her untimely death as full of tragic waste. Even those who condemn her towards the end cannot help sympathizing with her because she never wanted to hurt anyone intentionally and what happened was unforeseen. Her desire to allay some of the hurt she has inflicted, and her courage to face the consequences of her act shows how accurately George Eliot had conceived and assessed the character of Maggie Tulliver, when she commented on her and said that Maggie is “...a character essentially noble but liable to great error” (Haight, p. 179). Maggie’s essential nobleness runs parallel to the many errors she commits throughout the narrative. She is seen to be continually blundering, imagining, romanticizing, and consequently making mistakes that she always wishes she could somehow rectify because she never wanted to commit them in the first place. Right till the end of the novel when she unintentionally sails off with Stephen and is later ostracized by the whole society, her behaviour is consistent with her creator’s conception of her character. St. Ogg’s judges and condemns Maggie, but can we do the same? Can we say that Maggie is really ‘base and deceitful’ (*The Mill*, p.612) as Tom describes her? To answer this question justly one has to go back to the earliest instances and trace the gradual development of Maggie’s character right from the moment when we see her as a little nine-year-old girl.

The Rebel

Before Maggie actually appears on the scene we are already given some information about her through the conversation that is going on between Mrs. and Mr. Tulliver. We are told



that Maggie is ‘twice as cute as Tom’ (p.59) and also that she is a bundle of mischief. Her mother cannot keep her in a clean frock for more than two hours and try as she might she can never get Maggie’s dark unruly hair to curl like her cousin Lucy’s. George Eliot indicates the unconventional aspect of this child by calling her “a small mistake of nature’ (p.61). Not only is Maggie not conventionally good looking with a rosy complexion and golden curls, but her mind too is not ready to accept the ordinary lot of an average girl in Victorian England. Mrs. Tulliver wants Maggie to do her patchwork like a little lady’ (p.61) but Maggie even at the age of nine is firm about her likes and dislikes. She does not like Aunt Glegg so she would not do anything for her and moreover, according to Maggie, doing patchwork “is foolish work...tearing things to pieces to sew them together again” (p.61).

There are many similar incidents, even at this early stage of the narrative, which bring out a rebellious streak in Maggie’s nature. She dips her head in a basin full of water to thwart all her mother’s attempts to curl her hair; she cuts off her hair because she cannot put up with the teasing which goes on about it; she pushes Lucy into the mud and then runs off to the gypsies. Maggie’s refusal to conform gives her mother enough worries on this account.

The Dreamer

Maggie’s rebelliousness is not the only thing that troubles Mrs. Tulliver about her daughter. She is even afraid that Maggie is “half an idiot in some things” (p.60). As she explains to Mr. Tulliver “If I send her upstairs to fetch anything she forgets what she’s gone for an’ perhaps will sit down on the floor in the sunshine an’ plait her hair an’ sing to herself like a Bedlam creature all the while I’m waiting for her downstairs” (p.60). This forgetfulness, this daydreaming and romanticizing, often leads Maggie into trouble and the first of these is when she forgets to feed Tom’s rabbits and all of them die.

When Tom is told about the rabbits he is extremely angry with Maggie and punishes her by saying that he doesn’t love her and that she would not be going fishing with him the next day. Maggie’s pitiful pleadings “But I didn’t mean, I couldn’t help it” (p.88), fall on deaf ears. Maggie knew “she was naughty to her mother, but she had never been naughty to Tom—had never *meant* to be naughty to him” (p.89). But Tom is unable to distinguish between motive and action and thinks his sister deserves to be punished. Similarly, when Tom, Lucy and Maggie visit Garum Firs, Maggie once again incurs Tom’s wrath when she makes him spill his wine while hugging him. Without meaning to she somehow manages to do things she later wishes undone. Thus, while Tom’s usual mode of viewing his past actions was “I’d do just the same again; Maggie was always wishing she had done something different” (p.107). She is never forgiven for her mistakes and



consequently has a harsh childhood. Yet her love for her brother Tom is a continuous one and George Eliot, with complete psychological plausibility, shows how it becomes a part of Maggie's adult personality.

Relationship with Father and Brother

Maggie's relationship with her brother Tom and with her father, and her emotional dependence on them, is an element lifted directly from the author's own life. "The need of being loved is the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature" (p.89) and her dependence on Tom springs largely from her need for love and security. The author tells us that as a little girl "There were few sounds that roused Maggie when she was dreaming over her book, but Tom's name served as well as the shrillest whistle: in an instant she was on the watch, with gleaming eyes, like a skye terrier suspecting mischief, or at all events determined to fly at anyone who threatened it towards Tom" (p.64). Maggie believes in the innate superiority of her brother. It is ironic though because George Eliot makes it clear that as far as intelligence goes Maggie is far cleverer than Tom and as far as personality goes she again comes across as a much more humane person than him. But for Maggie it does not matter who is better or cleverer. All she knows is that she loves her brother dearly and needs his love in return.

The 'need of being loved' not only by Tom but by others too often leads Maggie to do things to please others and to live up to their requirements, particularly Tom's. When she is unable to do that she often lapses into clumsiness resulting from her own insecurity. Take for example, the fishing episode. After being punished and later forgiven for not feeding Tom's rabbits, there is peace again between the two and Tom takes his little sister for fishing.

"He threw the line for her and put the rod into her hand. Maggie thought it probable that the small fish would come to her hook, and the large ones to Tom's. But she had forgotten all about the fish and was looking dreamily at the glassy water when Tom said in a loud whisper, 'Look, look, Maggie!' and came running to prevent her from snatching her line away.

Maggie was frightened lest she had been doing something wrong, as usual, but presently, Tom drew out her line and brought out a large trunk bouncing on the grass...Maggie was not conscious of unusual merit, but it was enough that Tom called her *Magsie* and was pleased with her" (p.93).

Two things should be noted in the passage cited above. Maggie does not even know how to fish, she can never tell when she has a fish on the line, but it is enough that she has Tom's company and her catch has pleased him. The desire to please is upmost, at the



same time she is never sure of what she is doing and is ‘frightened lest she had done something wrong as usual.’ Notice that her intentions are always good, yet the fear is there that she is in the wrong. At Garum Firs when she makes Tom spill his wine in the process of hugging him, ‘it was not as though she had troubled him intentionally. Only the music from Uncle Pullet’s snuff box was so beautiful and Maggie was so rapt in her enjoyment of it that when she wanted to hug Tom to share the pleasure she failed to notice that he had a glass of wine in his hand which was emptied on his clothes due to Maggie’s clumsiness.

The Social Angle

Maggie’s dilemma, though springing partly from her need for love, her desire to please others and her unintended clumsiness has yet another dimension to it and this is her social situation. She is an above average girl living in highly conservative Victorian England. Thus, though she is more clever and more witty than Tom, and is genuinely interested in acquiring knowledge, extremely fond of reading and learning, Maggie is denied the kind of education that Tom gets just because she is a girl. Of course, she is sent to school along with her cousin Lucy, yet the education that she does receive is superficial and frivolous—the kind any girl in nineteenth century England could have expected. It does not take her into the mysterious world of Latin, Algebra and Geometry she had glimpsed while visiting Tom at his school. Maggie’s potential for self-development is therefore stunted and her resultant hunger for knowledge becomes another aspect of her conflict with her environment. Her soul yearns for a life of learning but her circumstances deny her all this. She becomes restless, trying to find a foothold in this limited world. By the time she is seventeen years old Maggie has become a:

.....creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of the mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it. (p.320)

The Phase of Self-denial

There is a dichotomy between the internal world of Maggie’s desires and aspirations, and her external world of limited choices. She wishes the two could be combined or that there could somehow be a balance between the two. Bob Jakin’s gift of books suddenly seems to provide an answer. *Thomas a Kempis* and *The Christian Year* are the two books Maggie chooses from the lot. On reading *Thomas a Kempis*, who advocated total abandonment of all egoism and a path of self-denial, renunciation and endurance, Maggie finds a solution to



all her problems. She decides to deny herself all worldly pleasures so that her soul would stop yearning for them. But even in this attempt, Maggie, characteristically, exaggerates and romanticizes. George Eliot is careful to point out the same to her readers when she comments:

From what you know of her you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud (p.386).

The example used for illustrating this particular aspect is when having decided to work at plain sewing so she might contribute towards the household fund, she goes and asks for it, in the first instance, at a linen shop in St. Ogg's instead of getting it in a more quiet and indirect way. When Tom reproves her for it she cannot understand why yet endures his rebuke as another cross.

Maggie and Philip

For a girl like Maggie, who is so full of life and yearns to enjoy all that it has to offer, these attempts at self-renunciation and self-denial prove to be self-destructive, aiming at destroying vital aspects of her personality. It is at this juncture that Maggie meets Philip once again after an interval of a few years. In their childhood Maggie had been attracted towards Philip not only because she felt pity for his crippled and deformed body, but also because he was gentle with her and shared his world of books and learning with her. When they meet now, once again Philip opens for her the world of art and culture, bringing her books to read, telling her about what he had read, and singing songs to her and so on. But he is quick to see that without realizing Maggie was wasting her life, in her unnatural efforts at self-renunciation. His role as a mentor for Maggie gains momentum at this point in the novel. He tries to reason with her. As he tells her, "You are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature," and argues further by telling her that "Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed—that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance—to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellowmen might become known to you...You are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself" (p.427).



Maggie wavers towards believing Philip but is checked by thinking that his vehemence was there because it made an argument against the resolution that opposed his wishes of continuing to meet her. Philip, however, persists in his attempts and warns her at one point: “You will be thrown into the world some day and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite” (p.429). The truth of these words surfaces only towards the end of the novel when Maggie abandons herself to the enjoyment of life at her cousin Lucy’s. In the meantime, however, Philip is able to draw Maggie out of her shell but before he can complete his task their meetings are discovered and ended cruelly by Tom.

Maggie’s feelings for Philip are never indicative of the kind of love which brings a man and a woman together in marriage. Even when she kisses him it is with a feeling that “if there were sacrifice in this love—it was all the richer and more satisfying” (p.438). Maggie remains quite passive throughout the quarrel that ensues between Tom and Philip. Her behaviour here is hardly in keeping with the girl whose fiery outburst against the selfishness and unreasonableness of her aunts and uncles had won applause from the readers. Here, however, she refuses to retaliate even though later when alone with Tom she does point out his harshness to him and how she had despised the feelings he had shown while talking to Philip. Yet, when alone by herself, she thinks: “how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip? Surely it was only because the sense of a deliverance from concealment was welcome at any cost?” (p.451). Can we accept Maggie’s explanation at face value or are there some hints that are not very clear to her at this stage; some unconscious, psychological reasons which become evident when she meets Stephen and despite her efforts to the contrary falls in love with him.

Maggie and Stephen

Stephen Guest, though often criticized for being a superficial dandy, even called “a mere hairdresser’s block” (Leslie Stephen, p.104), enters the narrative quite late. Consequently, George Eliot did not have enough time and space to build up his character as thoroughly as she had done with the others. Nevertheless, the attraction between Maggie and Stephen is shown to be mutual. Is there any explanation for Maggie’s attraction towards Stephen? Over the years critics have refused to accept that an unconventionally beautiful, witty intelligent and above average girl could fall for the superficial charms of a dandy like Stephen. George Eliot disagreed with all such readers and said: “If I was wrong here—if I did not really know what my heroine would feel and do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her—I ought not to have written this book at all but quite a different book, if any. If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character



essentially noble but liable to great error, error that is anguish to its own nobleness—then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology” (Haight, p. 301).

Maggie’s behaviour then is psychologically consistent according to her creator. At this point we may recall how Philip had warned her of just such a moment in life when she would be thrown into the world and all her subdued appetites will assault her savagely. This is exactly what happens. Maggie is a healthy sensuous girl desiring a mate who would be able to satisfy not only her spiritual but all her physical desires as well. Her relationship with Philip had not offered her complete satisfaction. Stephen, however, assaults her senses first rather than her mind. Physical attraction enters into their relationship right from the moment when they first set their eyes on each other:

For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair, the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. This new experience was very agreeable to her— so agreeable that it almost effaced her previous emotion about Philip. There was a new brightness in her eyes, and a very becoming flush on her cheek as she seated herself (p. 484).

All earlier impressions of Stephen Guest have been so disagreeable that one cannot but wonder at Maggie’s growing attraction towards him. Yet she is not acting contradictory to her character as far as her creator’s conception goes. What Maggie felt for Philip was entirely different from what she feels now for Stephen. In chapter 7 of Book 6 George Eliot takes a peep into the mind of our heroine to isolate and analyze these feelings and comments:

[Maggie’s] tranquil tender affection for Philip, with its root deep down in her childhood, and its memories of long quiet talk confirming by distinct successive impressions the first instinctive bias — the fact that in him the appeal was more strongly to her pity and womanly devotedness than to her vanity or other egoistic excitability of her nature — seemed now to make a sort of sacred place, a sanctuary where she could find refuge from an alluring influence which the best part of herself must resist, which must bring horrible tumult within, wretchedness without (p.525).

Stephen is therefore an ‘alluring influence’ catering to such feelings, emotions and needs in Maggie, which had not been awakened so far. Yet the disagreeable impression with which Stephen’s characterization began remains with us. We still find it difficult to accept Maggie’s falling in love with him. George Eliot herself had not intended to leave the readers with



the same impression about Stephen. According to Joan Bennet (*George Eliot: Her Mind and her Art*), she had intended to show that Stephen's love for Maggie "should shatter his complacency, humble his masculine vanity and give a new depth to his character" (p. 230), which becomes capable of tragic suffering. His mental struggle at the ball when he makes desperate efforts to control himself and later in the chapter "In the Lane" when he lays bare his heart to her and his despair at Maggie's decision of putting an end to it — all point towards the change which Maggie's love has wrought on this man.

Maggie's Essential Nobleness

The chapter entitled 'In the Lane' firmly decides the course of action as far as Maggie is concerned. Her love for Stephen has to be subdued since she can never be convinced of it not being wrong. Stephen's heart-rending pleas fail to move her. Though neither of them can deny the deep love they feel for each other, though in face of such love the fulfilment of their pledges to Lucy and Philip would be unnatural and as Stephen argues "we can only pretend to give ourselves to anyone else" (p.570). Maggie is not convinced. With a solemn sadness she answers Stephen:

It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feelings—but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us—the ties that have made others dependent on us—and would cut them in two...if life did not make duties for us before love comes—love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other. But I see—feel it is not so now: there are things we must renounce in life—some of us must resign love—I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural—but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too (pp.570-71).

This is what George Eliot meant when she called her heroine "essentially noble." In spite of what happens later Maggie remains true to the people who have loved and trusted her.

'Borne along by the tide' is the chapter that marks the turning point in the lives of almost all the five young people we have been with in this novel. Having known the little girl who imagined herself the queen of the gypsies, this chapter comes as no surprise. Both Stephen and Maggie, knowing they would soon be parting forever, try to match a few moments together in the boat which is to take them to Luckreth. Surely there is nothing wrong in that. But quite characteristically Maggie becomes unaware of her surroundings while sitting in the boat with Stephen and realizes only too late that they had long passed their destination. "O what shall I do?" she cries in agony. "We shall not get home for hours—and Lucy—O God, help me!" (p.590). Stephen tries to show her reason: "See, Maggie, how everything has come in without our seeking—in spite of all our efforts, we



never thought of being alone together again—it has all been done by others. See how the tide is carrying us out—away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us—and trying in vain.” He urges her to end the struggle and bind herself to him till only death can part them. “It is the only right thing—dearest,” he says “—it is the only way of escaping from this wretched entanglement” (p.590). Maggie, though tempted to believe him, summons up all her courage to resist him:

Let me go’ she said in an agitated tone, flashing an indignant look at him, and trying to get her hands free. ‘You have wanted to deprive me of any choice. You knew we were come too far—you have dared to take advantage of my thoughtlessness. It is unmanly to bring me into such a position’ (p.591).

But when Stephen paints for her a picture of himself suffering while she was vindicated she is unable to resist him:

The indignant fire in her eyes was quenched—and she began to look at him with timid distress. She had reproached him for being hurried into irrevocable trespass—she, who had been so weak herself (p.591).

After this everything happens as if in a trance “Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness, than resistance—it is the partial sleep of thought—it is the submergence of our own personality by another. Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence...” (p.592). The moment of awareness comes in the chapter titled “Waking.” Before the boat touches the shores of Mudport, the struggle begins all over again. When Stephen mentions how they will be together in a chaise in another hour and a half, Maggie speaks with distinct decision:

‘We shall not be together—we shall have parted.’

The blood rushed to Stephen’s face.’

‘We shall not,’ he said. I’ll die first’ (p. 600).

The struggle is continued in the inn where they take lodging for the night. Maggie’s resolution about parting from Stephen does not change even in the light of changed circumstances. “Is it possible you don’t see that what happened yesterday has altered the whole position of things?” (p. 604), Stephen asks, and a little later, when Maggie persists in her decision, he almost gives up in despair. “Good God, Maggie!” said Stephen rising too and grasping her arm, “You rave. How can you go back without marrying me? You don’t know what will be said, dearest. You see nothing as it really is” (p. 605). All that Maggie can see is that she has hurt people who trusted her and had depended on her. Her own personal plight is a secondary thing compared to the misery she had caused others.



In an agonized voice she tries to reason it out with Stephen: “There are memories, and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me—they would never quit me for long—they would come back and be pain to me - I have caused sorrow already—I know—I feel it—but I have never deliberately consented to it—I have never said, “They shall suffer, that I may have joy” (p. 603). A little later she pleads with him: “Dear—dear Stephen—let me go! —don’t drag me into deeper remorse. My whole soul has never consented—it does not consent now” (p. 606). Stephen knows he has no hopes.

Significance of the Past for Maggie

Maggie’s decision had had nothing to do with the traditional codes and ethics of behaviour. She is not bothered about what society will have to say to her. Religion too does not determine her choice as it had not determined George Eliot’s own choice when she elected to live with Lewes. Maggie’s code of moral behaviour depends instead on her past, memories of the people and places she has known, the relationships she has had with people. Thus, her decision depends entirely on the consequences it may have for the people she has loved and who have loved her in return. As she tells Stephen, “If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment” (pp.601-02). Now we understand the absolute need for the emphasis that George Eliot has placed on Maggie’s past.

Maggie returns to St. Ogg’s only to be disowned by her brother and to be ostracized by the whole society. Stephen’s letter to his father in which he vindicates Maggie, has no effect on the people of St. Ogg’s. Yet Maggie faces the consequences of her act with courage and fortitude. Lucy and Philip understand and forgive her, both realizing that not many people would have had the strength, the will and the courage to come back from such a point from which Maggie had returned. It is only when Dr. Kenn’s attempts to help Maggie are misunderstood and when he advises Maggie to look for a job in some other town, that Maggie’s defences seem to crumble. Her loneliness and her misery are increased at the thought of going out among fresh faces. At this point Stephen’s letter, pleading to her to let him come to her, begins the struggle afresh. Maggie feels tempted and wins another struggle when she burns the letter over a candle. “I will bear it,” she says, “and bear it till death...But how long it will be before death comes!” (p. 649). It is as if in answer to her prayers that she feels the cold water about her knees and feet, announcing the flood.

The End

Even in her last few hours the “essential nobleness” of Maggie filters through her acts. The brother who had disowned her and called her “base and deceitful, is uppermost in her



mind as she rows her boat towards the Mill to save him. She is able to rescue Tom, and just before the brother and sister drown, George Eliot allows Tom a flash of recognition about his own harshness and Maggie's nobleness. The brother and sister are united in the end but the conclusion as such leaves much to be desired. We are not adequately prepared for the tragedy and Maggie's death comes as a surprise. Of course, one can argue that at many points in the narrative technical pointers had been placed by the author to warn us of the end. Mrs. Tulliver is forever expressing her fears about Maggie drowning in the river one day, and George Eliot herself had compared Maggie's life to an unmapped river, hinting at the ending that all rivers have the same destiny, but all this is not enough to remove the element of surprise from Maggie's untimely death. It is too much like a wish being fulfilled. It is sentimental and also melodramatic—in fact it has been seen as a failure on George Eliot's part. Joan Bennet puts it succinctly when she observes that "George Eliot has cut the knot she was unable to unravel" (Bennet, p. 190).

Is it a Tragedy of Character?

It has been observed that Maggie's tragedy is a tragedy of character. In other words, Maggie's mental, emotional makeup is totally responsible for the course her life takes. If she had not been the kind of girl she is, her life may have been different. She could have snatched her share of happiness, disregarding the misery she is causing to others, and could have lived a happy married life with Stephen. None of this happens because Maggie is what she is and so it is often inferred that Maggie's tragedy is a tragedy of character.

George Eliot however disagrees with such an inference. At one point in the narration, she comments: "...you have known Maggie a long while, and had to be told, not her characteristics, but her history, which is hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of characteristics. For the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within." (*The Mill*, p.514). A little later, disagreeing with Novalis, George Eliot says that character is not the whole of our destiny (*The Mill*, p.514). She illustrates her point through Hamlet's example, saying that had his circumstances been different, Hamlet could have lived to a ripe old age with a reputation for sanity. So according to George Eliot, circumstances also have a part to play in the shaping of our lives. When we relate this point to Maggie's life we can see many 'ifs' coming our way. If Maggie had not gone to Lucy's; if Maggie had not met Stephen; if Maggie had not gone rowing with Stephen; if she had been aware of her surroundings; if she had somehow got home sooner, ...the possibilities are endless. In other words, if the circumstances had not been what they were, Maggie's life would have been different, and the end also would not have been the same. But then, even under these circumstances, one question remains. If Maggie had been a different girl from what she was, then too the tragedy might have been averted. There are



many conjectures. But the novel stands as it is with its given set of circumstances and with Maggie's particular character both of which combine to bring about the tragedy of this 'essentially noble' girl.'

Check Your Progress

1. "In Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot has portrayed a character too sensitive and imaginative for her environment". Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Write a note on the roles of Philip and Stephen Guest in Maggie's life.
3. Do you agree that *The Mill on the Floss* is a tragedy of character, and that Maggie is responsible for her destiny? Give reason for your answer.
4. Do you agree with the view that while Maggie Tulliver as a child elicits our complete sympathy, as a young woman she appears to be less likable? Give reasons for your answer.

7.2 TOM TULLIVER

As opposed to the warm, loving and compassionate Maggie, who has taken after the Tullivers way of life, Tom is a true Dodson in his rigid stance to do what is right and proper and in his surety that he *knows* what is right and proper. Heredity plays its role in the shaping of both the protagonists of the novel. As the brother of a sensitive imaginative, emotional girl like Maggie he emerges as sadly lacking in all these qualities. Though he is conscientious, has an integrity of character, is honest and hardworking yet his character is seriously marred by flaws which surface as early as the third chapter of the first 'Book' and remain with him till the end. There is no development, no maturity, just a strict adherence to the rigid codes of moral behaviour, practiced and preached by the Dodsons.

From a very early age Tom displays a thoroughly self-righteous manner which exposes his limited imagination due to which he fails to see that there can be modes of behaviour different from his 'own. His concept of justice allows for no compassion and like the Dodsons, is not motivated by any fellow feeling for the person involved. Instead, he judges according to strict accepted standards of right moral behaviour. The earliest instance used to illustrate this particular trait in Tom's character, is the rabbit incident in which he punishes Maggie for letting his rabbits die. Though he loves Maggie dearly, has brought a fishing rod for her, yet when the occasion demands he can punish her just the same. George Eliot comments:



Tom was only thirteen, and had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic, regarding them for the most part as open questions, but he was particularly clear and positive on one point, namely that he would punish everybody who deserved it: why, he wouldn't have minded being punished himself if he deserved it, but then, he never did deserve it (p. 91).

He finally forgives his little sister and goes and shares his plum-cake with her and we have the following narrative comment: "... he was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper and punish her when she did *wrong*" (p. 92). Yet it is not just Maggie who always has to endure her 'deserved' punishment. Tom's friend Bob Jakin too is meted out with the same treatment. In Chapter 6 of 'Book One', both Tom and Bob have a tussle over a half-penny while playing heads and tails with it. Bob, not wanting to part with his half-penny, lies about it coming to rest after falling with heads on. Tom, who realizes it, demands the penny since he had won it in a fair game. When Bob persists in his lie, Tom gets into a physical fight with him and wins. He now demands that Bob should give him the penny. When Bob throws it on the ground Tom loosens his hold on him and rises:

"There the half-penny lies," he said, I don't want your half-penny; I wouldn't have kept it. But you wanted to cheat: I hate a cheat. I shan't go along with you anymore,' he added, turning round homeward, not without casting a regret towards the rat-catching and other pleasures which he must relinquish along with Bob's society (p. 105).

It was not that Tom wanted to possess Bob's half-penny. It was in fact that he wanted to teach him a lesson for being a cheat and to make him admit that he was lying. At such an early age Tom displays his sense of justice and George Eliot comments:

But Tom, you perceive, was rather a Rhadamanthine personage, having more than the usual share of boy's justice in him-the justice that desires to hurt culprits as much as they deserve to be hurt, and is troubled with no doubts concerning the exact amount of their deserts (p. 107).

Rhadamanthus, the judge of the dead in Greek mythology, was an incompatible and severe judge. At this stage we may tend to take the comparison lightly but as the story develops and Tom remains as rigid and self-righteously sure of his goodness and of other's faults, the comparison begins to have ominous overtones for Maggie who is continually making mistakes.

'Book Two' is devoted entirely to Tom's schooling and we pity him for the suffering he has to undergo at Mr. Stellings, yet his behaviour towards Philip is again repelling. One



can see it as adolescent and immature at this stage because Tom is only a growing child here. But the progressing narrative does not change his behaviour towards this sensitive crippled boy. It remains immature till the end.

The downfall of the Tulliver family creates circumstances in which Tom's severity towards his own self helps him to create a goal towards which he can strive with total diligence and faith. These are the chapters that show Tom in a better light than he had been until now. Maggie's passionate outburst at the cruel behaviour of her aunts and uncles elicits a characteristic response from Tom: "it was no use to talk so" (p. 297). A little later George Eliot comments: "... though he thought his aunts ought to do something more for his mother, he felt nothing like Maggie's violent resentment against them for showing no eager tenderness and generosity. There were no impulses in Tom that led him to expect what did not present itself to him as a right to be demanded. Why should people give away their money plentifully to those who had not taken care of their own money? Tom saw some justice in severity-and all the more because he had confidence in himself that he should never deserve that severity" (p. 308).

Though he is severe towards others he can be equally severe towards himself. All his dreams of making "a figure in the world, with his horse and dogs and saddle, and other accoutrements of a fine young man..." (p. 267) are given a backseat in favour of a hard struggle to earn and save enough to pay the creditors. The moment at which he establishes himself as the head of the family till his father's health improves, is the best moment in his life, and George Eliot comments: "Tom never lived to taste another moment so delicious as that; and Maggie couldn't help forgetting her own grievances. Tom was good and in the sweet humility that springs in us all in moments of true admiration and gratitude, she felt that the faults he had to pardon in her had never been redeemed, as his faults were" (p. 456). The only aspect that mars Tom's determination of purpose is the feeling of revenge which taints it. When Mr. Tulliver makes his son swear eternal revenge against Wakem it is with a feeling of imagined injustice, an unthinking response. But Tom approaches it with all his rigid and severe concepts of justice. Forgiveness and compassion do not figure in his world.

From this point onwards, Tom's sole aim in life is to pay the creditors and re-establish the Tullivers as the owners of the Mill. For this "he would ask no one to help him more than to give him work and pay him for it" (*The Mill*, p. 309). To work with Uncle Deane, he has to 'unlearn' all that he had learned at Mr. Stellings and begin right from scratch. Tom now works during the day and learns accounts and bookkeeping by night. Life becomes mere drudgery. Tom's self-denial is real and in the novel it runs parallel to Maggie's attempts at self-renunciation in the abstract. The difference between



the two implies a criticism of Maggie's behaviour, on the author's part. Tom becomes a foil for Maggie.

Tom's pragmatic and practical efforts, and his continuous hard work at Guest & Company give him repute and he is able to pay the creditors before the anticipated time. Bob's help in the nature of a profitable business proposal also contributes largely towards this major step. Though Tom is as hard and unforgiving as ever, in fact even more, yet one cannot help but admire him here. However, his cruel treatment of Philip, when he goes and meets him at the Red Deeps, is a serious blot on his character and shows that Tom has been unable to make a distinction between impulse and principle. He has made his father's hatred of Wakem, a rule of his own life and is blind to everything else. Philip is Wakem's son and so has to be treated accordingly. Maggie almost succeeds in showing the mirror to Tom when she bursts out at him in anger: "You have been reproaching other people all your life—you have been always sure you yourself are right: it is because you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims" (p. 479), and a little later she accuses him of having no feelings: "You are nothing but a Pharisee. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues— you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a vision of feelings by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness" (p. 450).

Is it really so, we wonder? Does this man have no feelings at all? But then we recall his thoughtful consideration for his mother, his determination to help his father, his love for his little sister, his dreams of cutting a fine figure—and we are checked from agreeing with Maggie totally. In fact, it is Maggie who seems to be having rather an excess of feelings and not being able to control them. Tom on the other hand has had to subdue so much in himself that when he tells his uncle Deane that he wants plenty of work for there is nothing else to care for much, George Eliot comments: "There was something rather sad in that speech from a young man of three and twenty, even in Uncle Deane's business-loving ears" (p. 511). There is an indication that Tom has even had to forgo his love for Lucy. One realizes the bitter truths of his words when he reprimands Maggie for her behaviour after she returns to him from Mudport : "... You struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! I have had feelings to struggle with—but I conquered them. I have had a harder life than you have had; but I have found *my* comfort in doing my duty" (p. 613). Once again he judges harshly and severely, with a limiting intelligence which fails to see the sensitivity and nobleness of his sister who has had the courage to face the consequences of her act. But Tom's own struggles, his real self-denial, his sense of duty are all pointers to the fact that George Eliot herself is presenting a critique of Maggie's excesses of feeling and of her attempts to live life theoretically. Tom's role in the novel



then is not merely to show us the Dodson influence working on his character, but also to provide a contrast and thereby a criticism of Maggie's behaviour in similar circumstances.

We are totally unprepared for Tom's final enlightenment as to the essential nobleness of his sister's character. One can argue that in the face of impending death, the realization is plausible, yet as with the ending of the novel, this too comes suddenly and is consequently difficult to believe. George Eliot's vision, however, sees the brother and sister, united at last in death.

Check Your Progress

1. Do you think Tom judges his sister too harshly?
2. How does Tom provide a critique of Maggie's character in the novel?
3. Does Tom elicit any sympathy from the reader? Give a reasoned answer.
4. "George Eliot's work shows us the process of refinement and sublimation of character under life's trials." Does this view apply to both Maggie Tulliver and Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*?

7.3 PHILIP WAKEM

Intelligent, sensitive, caring and gentle, yet crippled and deformed. This is Philip Wakem, son of the eminent lawyer Wakem, against whom Mr. Tulliver fights in the law courts and loses. Philip enters the narrative in the second 'Book' as the new fellow at Tom's school. A child with "a very old looking" (p. 233) face and having a hump-back, timid and at the same time proud, is not able to attract the friendship of a healthy, robust country boy like Tom. Though Philip's amateur efforts at sketching do finally arouse Tom's interest, the relationship between the two borders on the barely cordial. It does not improve even when Philip helps Tom with his learning and is sensitive enough to find out and tell him that he would not be lame even after the accident with the sword.

Philip Wakem in fact stands in opposition to Tom in the structure of the book. His artistic and perceptive nature, his imaginative sympathy, his sensitivity, and tenderness are all virtues which Tom lacks and is blind to. Therefore, it is the sensitive and imaginative Maggie who is drawn towards Philip, not only because Philip arouses her pity due to his deformity, but also because he is what Tom isn't. He is loving and gentle with her and Maggie, who though "loved Tom very dearly... Often wished he cared more about her loving him" (p. 252). In Philip she finds a person who is almost thankful to her for loving him. He shares all his knowledge and learning with her and for the first time, with his books, his piano and his songs, he opens for her the alluring world of art and culture.



Philip's role in the novel, at one level, is to provide Maggie some kind of access to the higher life of beauty and culture for which her heart yearns but her circumstances thwart. At another level however he becomes her mentor, her guardian angel which happens at their second meeting in "Book Five." They have both left their childhood behind. Philip, being the son of Wakem [who was responsible for the downfall of the Tullivers], has to face resistance from Maggie since she knows that her father and brother would never approve of her friendship with him. Maggie at this time is going through a phase of renunciation after reading *Thomas a Kempis* and is consequently denying herself all worldly pleasures in order to quell the many aspirations and desires that tug at her heart. Philip tries to reason with her and resolves to bring her out of this state of mental stupefaction: ". . . the pity of it that a mind like hers should be withering in its very youth, like a young forest tree, for want of the light and space it was formed to flourish in! Could he not hinder that, by persuading her out of her system of privation? He would be her guardian angel . . .," writes the author (p. 404).

Philip succeeds in persuading her to meet him and talk to him if only by chance. George Eliot's deep understanding of the psychology of a deformed person is seen at every point in the delineation of Philip's character. In chapter three of 'Book Five', a largely authorial comment reveals the reasons behind Philip's apparent selfishness in trying to interfere in Maggie's life. When he tries to justify this action by arguing that Maggie should have some opportunity of culture, George Eliot comments:

If we only look far enough off for the consequences of our action, we can always find some point in the combination of results by which those actions can be justified; by adopting the point of view of a Providence who arranges results or of a philosopher who traces them, we shall find it possible to obtain perfect complacency in choosing to do what is most agreeable to us in the present moment and it was in this way that Philip justified his subtle efforts to overcome Maggie's true promptings against a concealment..(p. 430).

A little further on in the same passage George Eliot analyses his reaction:

.... there was a surplus of passion in him half independent of justifying motives. His longing to see Maggie and make an element in her life had in it some of that savage impulse to snatch an offered joy which springs from a life in which the mental and bodily constitution have made pain predominate. He had his full share in the common good of men: he could not even pass muster with the insignificant, but must be singled out for pity, and excepted from what was a matter of course with others. Even to Maggie he was an exception: it was clear that the thought of his being her lover had never entered her mind (p. 430).



Maggie is surprised and taken unawares when Philip puts the question to her. It is important to note that pity has been the dominant feeling in her relationship with Philip therefore when she kisses him as a token of love “she had a moment of real happiness then—a moment of belief that if there were sacrifice in this love—it was all the more satisfying” (p. 438). Philip appeals only to the spiritual aspect of Maggie’s character. Because of his physical deformity he will forever be unable to satisfy the other half of Maggie’s nature which is rooted in the earthy and the sensual like any normal healthy girl. Maggie feels a sense of relief therefore in the forced separation effected by Tom. Thus, even towards the end of the novel when Lucy makes all the efforts to bring Maggie and Philip together, it is not Philip but Stephen to whom Maggie is attracted and who finally becomes responsible for her tragic fate.

Philip is not without faults. He is morbidly sensitive at times, especially in the concluding section of the novel and because of his abnormality he is extra sensitive to other people’s emotions. Commenting on this aspect of his nature George Eliot says: “Perhaps there is inevitably something morbid in a human being who is in any way unfavourably excepted from ordinary condition until the good force has had time to triumph. . .” (p. 431) Till this ‘good force’ triumphs over the worse half of his character Philip continues to be extra-sensitive and consequently sometime morose in his thoughts. He is able to sense the growing attraction between Maggie and Stephen but is unable to do anything about it. This only leads to a bad temper and fits of jealousy. Yet his belief in Maggie remains unshaken and the ‘good force’ that George Eliot had mentioned surfaces in the letter he writes to her after everybody has denounced her character. He writes:

I believe in you—I know you never meant to deceive me—I know you tried to keep faith to me and to all. I believed this before I had any other evidence of it than your own nature (p. 633).

Not only does he believe in her he is thoughtful and unselfish enough to even control his emotions for the sake of her happiness:

...even in those terrible throes that love must suffer before it can be disembodied of selfish desire—my love for you sufficed to withhold me from suicide, without the aid of any other motive. In the midst of my egoism, I yet could not bear to come like a death-shadow across the feast of your joy: I could not bear to forsake the world in which you still lived and might need me... (p. 634).

Once again it is his deeply sensitive nature that helps him to feel that Maggie might need him again and he should be available. His role as Maggie’s mentor persists till the end. The nobility of character that emerges through his letter, redeems all the minor faults he had. One cannot help but feel angry and frustrated at the unfairness of his lot in life.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What is the role of Philip Wakem in the novel?

7.4 STEPHEN GUEST

In Book Six of the novel an entirely new character is introduced. George Eliot describes him as “...the fine young man...whose diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure at twelve O’clock in the day are the graceful and odoriferous result of the largest oil-mill and the most extensive wharf in St Ogg’s” (p. 469).

This is Mr. Stephen Guest—the rich complacent man who has made an initially disagreeable impression on us with his diamond ring and attar of roses. Yet he is intended by George Eliot to be the conventionally attractive man in Victorian literature. He is handsome, gay, and charming, educated, cultured and has a good ear for music. He obviously belongs to the higher circles of the society at St. Ogg’s and is perhaps one of the most sought-after bachelors in town. He has, however, bestowed his affection on the gentle and beautiful Lucy but his reasons for making this choice once again carry our initial discontent with his character even further. George Eliot exposes his patronizing attitude in a lengthy authorial comment:

“Was not Stephen Guest right in his decided opinion that this slim maiden of eighteen was quite the sort of wife a man would not be likely to repent of marrying . . . A man likes his wife to be pretty: well, Lucy was pretty, but not to a maddening extent. A man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate and not stupid; and Lucy had all these qualifications. Stephen was not surprised to find himself in love with her and was conscious of excellent judgment in preferring her...” (pp.477-78).

Stephen’s consciousness of his own superiority, his pompousness and his sense of his own dignity all highlight the superficiality of his character. He is even blind to Lucy’s real virtues. Over the years it has been difficult for the readers to believe that a girl of Maggie’s distinction, with her depth of character and her fine sensitivity, could fall in love with such an insensitive, self-satisfied, and condescending young man like Stephen. These few chapters of the novel jar on our ears, striking a discordant note in a work which until now has followed a steady and smooth development. A sad lapse of artistry on George Eliot’s part is felt in the creation of Stephen Guest. In fact, Sir Leslie Stephen, a noted critic of her times, went as far as to say that “George Eliot herself did not understand what a mere hairdresser’s block she was describing in Mr. Stephen Guest. He is another instance of her incapacity for portraying the opposite sex” (Leslie Stephen, p. 104). Joan Bennet, another famous critic of George Eliot’s works, compares Stephen with the other male characters



of her novels and finds him sadly lacking in virtues. According to her “he is a vulgarian compared with Arthur Donnithorne, a coxcomb and an insensitive egotist compared with Philip Wakem, a man without chivalry and without perception compared with Bob Jakin, a man without conscience or principle compared with Adam Bede” (Bennet, p. 234). It is not easy for us to swallow that Maggie could fall in love with such a man. But when attacked on this issue George Eliot said in her defense: “If I did not really know what my heroine would feel and do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her—I ought not to have written the book at all” (Stephen, p. 98).

It is clear that George Eliot does not see any discordancy in Maggie’s behaviour. So, we have to look for reasons to make it psychologically plausible. While Maggie is a soulful creature, we must not forget that she is at the same time a young beautiful girl who has sensual desires as well. In fact, the tension in her character stems from the conflict between her aspiration for spiritual beauty and her desire for earthly happiness. Stephen caters to the latter desire. This is obliquely indicated in the fact that physical attraction forms the basis for the growing relationship between Maggie and Stephen. Their love transcends the physical later yet it never excludes it. At this point, however, we have to remember that Stephen comes as an attraction to Maggie’s senses, to her vanity. Victorian morality never permitted a discussion of the physical aspect of a man-woman relationship, so George Eliot has to content herself with implications and suggestions.

Maggie’s attraction for Stephen can thus be explained, yet the dissatisfaction with Stephen’s character still remains. The trouble seems to lie in the abruptness and brevity of this part of the narrative. Firstly, Stephen Guest is thrust upon the readers with a suddenness which leaves no room for consideration and explanations for his behaviour. The rest of the major characters, Maggie, Tom, Philip, Lucy, we have known from their childhood. We have been with them throughout the novel but not with Stephen Guest. He is given no background as such. Moreover, the influence of Maggie’s love changes him for the better and he is shown to be maturing in the chapters which show their love developing. However, even here there is not enough space to show a convincing development. Yet it will be worthwhile to look at a few passages which are nevertheless indicative of it.

In the chapter called “Charity in Full Dress” in Book Five, Stephen is trying his best to overcome the growing attraction that he is feeling towards Maggie. Philip, who had his doubts about them now seems to find confirmation when he observes the two as they converse. He calls Stephen a hypocrite when he tries to tell him that he had been snubbed by Maggie. At this point George Eliot comments:

It is clear to you, I hope, that Stephen was not a hypocrite— capable of deliberate doubleness for a selfish end; and yet his fluctuation between the indulgence of



a feeling and the systematic concealment of it might have made a good case in support of Philip's accusation (p. 552).

A little later, in the next chapter, Stephen observes Maggie at the ball:

Stephen had not asked her to dance— had not yet paid her more than a passing civility. Since yesterday, that inward vision of her which perpetually made part of his consciousness, had been half-screened by the image of Philip Wakem which came across it like a blot; there was some attachment between her and Philip; at least there was an attachment on his side, which made her feel in some bondage. Here then, Stephen told himself, was another claim of honour which called on him to resist the attraction that was continually threatening to overpower him (p.559).

He tries but fails and what follows is the incident in which he kisses Maggie's arm under a mad impulse. Maggie's anger though is not totally justified. We have been watching Stephen's futile attempts at staying away from her. "In the Lane" is the chapter which focusses pointedly on the struggle and mental conflict that he has been undergoing. As he explains to Maggie:

As if it were not enough that I'm entangled in this way — that I'm mad with love for you — that I resist the strongest passion a man can feel, because I try to be true to other claims — but you must treat me as if I were a coarse brute who would willingly offend you. And when, if I had my own choice, I should ask you to take my hand, and my fortune and my whole life, and do what you liked with them. I know I forgot myself — I took an unwarrantable liberty — I hate myself for having done it. But I repented immediately — I've been repenting ever since. You ought not to think it unpardonable — a man who loves with his whole soul, as I do you, is liable to be mastered by his feelings for a moment, but you know — you must believe—that the worst pain I could have is to have pained you — that I would give the world to recall the error (p. 567).

One can believe his sincerity here. His love for Maggie is not just a passing flirtation of a rich handsome man. It has taken its root deep down in his heart and soul yet the circumstances and Maggie's own sense of duty to her past ties and affection paint the future of this love quite black. The decision for parting is taken by Maggie and Stephen respects her wishes. At Mudport when circumstances have changed and Stephen's logical mind sees no answer to their predicament except marriage, Maggie still clings to the past. Stephen again respects her wishes though he suffers intolerably. The letter that he writes to his father, vindicating Maggie, again shows a depth of character which includes thoughtfulness and consideration. Towards the conclusion of the book, his letter of appeal



to Maggie reveals his suffering, haunted soul and also the sincerity of his love for Maggie. All of this points towards a growth, a development and maturity in Stephen's character, which is possible under the influence of Maggie's love. He has even become capable of tragic suffering. So, it would be correct to say that as far as Stephen Guest is concerned we are not left with our first disagreeable impression that he had made on us.

The inclusion of Stephen Guest in the novel, and thereby an inclusion of all the events that result from his presence in it has another dimension. George Eliot's own relationship with George Henry Lewes, had made the issue of the fallen woman a delicate one. George Eliot chose to live with Lewes in what can be called an adulterous union. Maggie on the other hand refuses to marry a man who is only unofficially engaged. Barbara Hardy a noted critic of George Eliot's works is worth quoting on this aspect. According to her "George Eliot is not affecting moral delicacy (as some hostile readers thought) but inventing a situation which brings out her own defense which eliminates all the personal particulars and invents new ones which generalize her argument. In her own case there is the breaking of a social, moral, and religious 'Law'; in Maggie's case nothing approaching law or contract. In her own case there are no human victims, but George Eliot's own freedom and isolation, and Lewes's already wrecked relationship with his unfaithful wife. In Maggie's case there are two human beings, Lucy and Philip, out of whose painful deprivation would be taken her joy. The novel's apologia says, in effect had human ties been involved I would not even have broken the faintest commitment, since there were none, I was prepared to break social laws and commandments' (Barbara Hardy, p. 266). Thus, Maggie and Stephen become a vehicle of defense for George Eliot's own decision regarding Lewes.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on the roles of Philip and Stephen Guest in Maggie's life.
2. Compare Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest as Maggie's suitors.
3. Comment on the autobiographical relevance of the events.

7.5 LUCY

With her rosy complexion, her row of golden curls, her clean clothes and her obedient manners, Lucy is the kind of child that Mrs. Tulliver always wished she had instead of Maggie. From the beginning of the novel Lucy's role is to provide a contrast to Maggie and thereby highlight her unconventionality.

Even as a child Lucy is gentle and loving and is surprised when inadvertently she is made the target of Maggie's jealous anger and pushed into the mud. The cause



is entirely mysterious to Lucy and she could never have guessed what she had done to make Maggie angry.

After the incident at Garum Firs, we meet Lucy again only in the Sixth Book when we see her as a girl grown up to be beautiful and the kind of wife any man could desire. So, she has a suitor - Stephen Guest, hanging by her little finger. Her gentleness, thoughtfulness, and beauty are admired and Stephen can pompously congratulate himself on his choice of a wife. But once again Lucy's role is largely to highlight Maggie's unconventional beauty and personality the moment the latter appears on the scene. Lucy's kindness is reflected in the way she tries to make amends between the Tullivers and Wakems, the manner in which she tries to bring Maggie and Philip together once she learns of their previous relationship and also the way she becomes instrumental in making Wakem sell his mill to Guest and Company so that Tom may be made in-charge and get back what he had lost. She is unaware of the attraction that is growing day by day between Maggie and Stephen revealing how blindly she trusts the people she loves. Therefore, one can well imagine the shock that prostrates her when she feels betrayed by both the people she had loved and trusted.

Lucy is shown to have no faults. She is one entirely good character in the whole novel and therefore remains sketchy. She is not given the complexity and depth which the other characters have and which makes them real to us. Of course, she does not remain at the level of a picture-book figure. George Eliot tries to humanize her by endowing her with a little vanity. As Stephen wishes her good-bye Lucy is unable to sit down to her embroidery and walks in a slightly ruffled state of mind. George Eliot comments:

...and you will not, I hope, consider it an indication of vanity predominating over more tender impulses, that she just glanced in the chimney glass as her walk brought her near it. The desire to know that one has not looked an absolute fright during a few hours of conversation may be construed as lying within the bounds of a laudable benevolent consideration for others (p. 476).

Lucy's benevolence is one aspect of her personality that is made much of by George Eliot, so much so that she sees even Lucy's small egoisms impregnated with these benevolences. If Lucy is happy and proud of being loved by Stephen she is at the same time planning little surprises for Mrs. Tulliver and a perfect union the Tulliver family. Even the animals on the farm feel her gentle touch. "She was fond of feeding dependent creatures and knew the private tastes of all the animals about the house delighting in the rippling sounds of her canaries...and...the more familiar rodents" (p. 477).

It is only at the very end of the narrative when Lucy comes to meet Maggie after Maggie has been judged and condemned, that one gets a hint of the growing depths in



Lucy's character. Her largeness of heart is seen in her understanding and her forgiveness of first Maggie and then Stephen (since there is a hint that many years later Stephen and Lucy finally get married). In spite of being betrayed by the people she loved, Lucy is able to recognize Maggie's true nobility and her strength of character. As she tells Maggie: "You have more to bear than I have — and you gave him up when — You did what it must have been very hard to do," and just before she leaves she says, "Maggie.." in a low voice that had the solemnity of confession in it. "You are better than I am. I can't ..." and the words are left unsaid' (pp. 642-43).

7.6 BOB JAKIN

Bob Jakin belongs to one of the lower rungs of the social ladder of St. Ogg's, and yet George Eliot shows that after all, birth, wealth and education cannot create gentlemen. The innate chivalry and gentlemanliness of Bob finds little parallels in the whole of St. Ogg's. For Tom he is "an inferior who could always be treated with authority in spite of his superior knowingness" (p. 101). As the narrative progresses, however, we find that it is Tom with his cold harshness, insensitivity and moral blindness who comes out inferior when compared with Bob's sensitiveness to other people's troubles and his helpfulness. But then, George Eliot comments, that Bob's virtue, supposing it to exist, was undeniably 'virtue in rags' which on the authority even of bilious philosophers who think all well-dressed men overpaid, is notoriously likely to remain unrecognized (perhaps because it is seen so seldom)," (p. 102).

Having had no formal education at all, Bob Jakin is an uncouth, dirty and naughty young fellow in the first book of the novel. To Maggie's horror he keeps snakes and bats in his caps, enjoys making gaps in hedgerows, throwing stones after sheep and does not hesitate to kill stray cats. Thus, for Maggie he is an altogether irregular character in their childhood.

His Kindness: As we move further in the narrative, however, Bob Jakin proves to be a man with a heart of gold. At the time of the Tulliver's downfall when the bailiff is in the house and the rich aunts and uncles refuse to help because they think Mr. Tulliver deserves to be punished, it is heartwarming to see Bob come with all the money he has earned as a reward for putting off a fire and offer it to Tom. All these years he has treasured Tom's gift of a pocketknife and produces it at this moment for recognition. When Bob offers the nine sovereigns he has (and this is all that he has) even Tom is ashamed of his pride and suspicion and is touched by Bob's kindness. It is at this point that Maggie realizes her mistake in judging Bob wrongly and is penitent: "O, I'm sorry Bob — I never thought you were so good. Why, I think you're the kindest person in the world!" (p. 327).



A True Friend: Bob is obviously in love with Maggie but his love is of the adoring kind. He almost worships this beautiful girl, and in spite of his lack of education he is at once able to perceive Maggie's dismay at losing her precious books at the auction and on his next visit brings her a pile of the same. These touching gestures reveal the perceptiveness, the sensitivity and the kindness which is present in him. He is the only one who can be called a true friend of the Tullivers for he helps them without any selfish motives and out of no obligation. He becomes a foil to all others.

Tom is able to earn extra money through Bob's help. Bob, a peddler by profession is able to convince the Gleggs, of profits which can come out of their investment in Tom's business. So, Tom is able to get the money he needs, puts it in trade by sending a bit of cargo to foreign ports and selling it at a better price. The whole scheme is Bob's idea and Tom benefits by it and is able to pay the creditors before the anticipated time.

Towards the end, once again it is Bob who comes forth as a true friend. He is the only one who offers Maggie shelter of his house after her own brother has disowned her. Bob is married by this time and even has a son and in his simplicity the best way he can find of conveying to Maggie that he believes in her is by bringing his baby to her for her to play with and leaving his dog with her for company. His attitude towards Maggie remains that of a worshipper right till the end.

Regarding the plot of the novel too Bob has a certain role to play. He is brought in as a vehicle to promote the narrative further. George Eliot's knowledge of the rural dialect is well illustrated in Bob's manner of speaking and lends the novel a lively touch. Yet his more important function in the novel is to present a contrast to the educated, high-born hypocrites of society and show what true chivalry is, what real friendship means.

7.7 MR. TULLIVER

Though *The Mill on the Floss* has obvious autobiographical overtones yet Mr. Tulliver bears no resemblance what-so-ever (except the love for his daughter) to Robert Evans (George Eliot's father) who was a master of a variety of trades and quite a successful man. Mr. Tulliver on the other hand, is a man who has limited knowledge of his own trade, is a bad speculator and who finds it difficult to adjust to the changing conditions of his age. He can be called a loser and a failure and yet his love and care for his daughter and his sister exalt him above the cold, harsh pragmatists who surround him. In spite of his failures there is a certain dignity that surrounds this man. We see him struggling against a world that he is unable to comprehend. His honesty and his integrity even in the face of terrible personal losses compensate for all his limitations.



His patriarchal attitude is quite evident in the novel. Regarding women he is a thorough Victorian and does not believe in giving his daughter a higher education in spite of knowing her to be cleverer than Tom. He has even picked the dumb Mrs. Tulliver for wife on purpose because “I wasn’t a-go-in to be told the rights o’ things by my own fireside” (p. 68). He wants to give his son the best of education so that he can grow up to choose any career he likes. But it is sad that he gets taken for a ride and ultimately Tom’s education proves to be of no use to him.

As the narrative progresses the world keeps cheating this honest and simple man till finally he is left with nothing. When he tells his wife that “this world’s been too many for me” (p. 350) one can see that he is giving up the fight. For the sake of his family, he swallows his pride and decides to work for Wakem but swears eternal hatred against the man who has ruined him. In spite of blaming him one can only pity him for his impotent rage.

7.8 MRS. TULLIVER

George Eliot’s own mother Christiana Pearson was a lady of intelligence and wit, socially active and an efficient housewife. There is no resemblance between her and the scatter-brained Mrs. Tulliver in *The Mill* who never thinks beyond the superficial. Her world is limited to her house, her children and her various possessions. There is no depth in her character and it is frustrating to see her more bothered about her furniture, her linen and her cutlery than her husband who is gravely ill. She is the perfect representation of an average Victorian Lady whose dependence on the male never ceases. Before marriage she depends on her father, after marriage on her husband and later on her son. Yet there is a time when she takes a decision and acts on it without consulting others and goes to see Wakem to prevent him from buying the mill. Her well-meaning efforts, however, have the opposite effect. One pities her throughout because she loses all that she thought precious. Her mute dependence throughout the novel is however thrust aside when, paralyzed with fear she sees Tom barring the gates of his house on his lost sister. “The poor frightened mother’s love leaped out now, stronger than all dread” (p. 614), and she calls out “My child I’ll go with you. You’ve got a mother” (p. 614). At this moment she has not stopped to think who would support them, where they would go and live. “She had only clear to her the mother’s instinct that she would go with her unhappy child.” The fact that she stands by her daughter when the whole society rejects her is one point where Mrs. Tulliver shows her strength of character. Otherwise, she remains a sketchy figure, only a representative of the Dodson cult.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What is Bob Jakin's role in the novel?
2. Critically analyse Mr. Tulliver's character in the novel.

8. DODSONS AND TULLIVERS: TWO WAYS OF LIFE

Readers of *The Mill on the Floss* have often felt that the novel has a faulty structure. The length, the fullness, and the details of the first three Books is disproportionate when compared with the ending which is not developed fully at all. Usually, the long chapters describing the aunts and uncles or describing the Tulliver's way of life are thought to be superfluous. But, if we look close enough we will find that there is method even in this disproportion and that it is entirely necessary to George Eliot's way of dealing with character.

George Eliot was one of the first of the series of novelists who began to treat the relation between individual and society with deep sociological thoroughness. She studies character not in isolation but in relation to religion, economy, society and general culture. It was not as though society had never been presented before in the English novel. *Tom Jones*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Vanity Fair*, and even the novels of Dickens presented the picture of the existing society in their times, but it all seems to be there incidentally, as necessary for the presentation of a realistic picture and no more. The details are missing and the connection between this society and the people who live in it is never touched upon. George Eliot, however, sees the *causal* connection between the existing society and its formative influence on the psychology of her character. But she is not a theorist even though her novel presents many of the sociological insights formulated by leading sociologists of her time. Her method is to give us the total picture with the eye of a social critic who knows the anatomy and the physiology of this society. Thus, the Dodsons and the Tullivers become important and necessary in the novel for it is their two respectively distinct ways of life that are the major formative influences on the main characters Tom and Maggie. The detailed chapters that deal with the Dodsons thus become thematically relevant. George Eliot, however, is too much of a skilled writer to leave them so. Her detailed presentation makes them come alive before our eyes. Let us take a look at their world:

...the Dodsons were a very respectable family indeed—as much looked up to as any in their own parish or the next to it . . . There were particular ways of doing everything in the Dodson family: particular ways of bleaching the linen, of making the cowslip wine, curing the hams and keeping the boiled gooseberries, so that no



daughter of that house could be indifferent to the privilege of having been born a Dodson, rather than a Gibson or a Watson. . . . When one of the family was in trouble or sickness, all the rest went to visit the unfortunate member, usually at the same time, and did not shrink from uttering the most disagreeable truths that correct family feeling dictated: if the illness or trouble was the sufferer's own fault, it was not in the practice of the Dodson family to shrink from saying so. In short, there was in this family a peculiar tradition as to what was the right thing in household management and social demeanour, and the only bitter circumstance attending this superiority was a painful inability to approve the condiments or the conduct of families ungoverned by the Dodson tradition There were some Dodsons less like the family than others — that was admitted — but in so far as they were 'kin' they were of necessity better than those who were no kin'. And it is remarkable that while no individual Dodson was satisfied with any other individual Dodson, each was satisfied, not only with himself or herself, but with the Dodsons collectively (pp. 96-97).

Through the lengthy narrative comment quoted above George Eliot gives us an insight into the ways of the Dodsons before they actually burst on the scene. Their pride in their family name, their clannish nature, their blind adherence to tradition, their air of superiority, their narrow and limited minds which think no further than household management and social behaviour, their self-righteousness and their insensitivity are all included. But to understand the Dodson code we have to scrape the surface and look beneath and actually see them in action.

A Rigid Code: The Dodsons are surrounded by images of domesticity. We see linen, teapots, closets, sugar-tongs, tarts and puddings and cakes all with the mark of a Dodson on them. In fact, even in their household affairs and social behaviour there are rules to govern everything. What is to be served to guests, what kind of front Mrs. Glegg will wear on a weekday, what quality of linen will a Dodson provide — all this is determined by the strict rigid code that the sisters follow.

Hypocrisy: At times the rigidity of the Dodsons does not leave them untouched by traces of hypocrisy which George Eliot so cleverly and so humorously points out. When Mrs. Pullet arrives at Mrs. Tullivers house, she is prostrated with grief at the death of one of the ladies she has known in her parish. She is crying and shaking her head sorrowfully but when she gets down from the chaise it was "not without casting a glance at Mr. Pullet to see that he was guarding her handsome silk dress from injury" (p. 111).

Concept of Kinship: Even their concept of kinship and their duty towards kindred is found to be coloured by their rigid self-righteousness and their consequent insensitivity



towards the other person's feelings. For example, Mrs. Glegg would not let her kin want bread, but only require them to eat it with bitter herbs. So, when Mr. Tulliver goes bankrupt, the Dodsons decidedly feel superior and looking down from their heights pass a judgment that makes the punishment a just desert for Mr. Tulliver's irresponsibility and blindness to reality. The feeling that binds the sisters together is found to be not sisterly love but family tradition and so all possibilities of spontaneous generous help in this time of crisis is excluded. Their concept of justice is not influenced in any way by any fellow feeling for the person concerned. They judge only according to the rigid and accepted standards of rightful behaviour. It is clear-sightedness of a sort because it sees the distinctions between right and wrong, but it is a very limited and narrow sight which allows for no concessions.

Life Denying Attitude: Since the Dodsons are so self-righteous there is always a fear in them to be irreproachable themselves, and this leads to a number of their life-denying attitudes. They refuse to act for fear of making a mistake; they refuse to make a choice for fear of being proved wrong; they have their money, lock their doors, make their wills and deny themselves all pleasure. In fact, for the risk of losing their money the Dodsons are willing to accept low interest-bearing notes because they are safe.

This obsession with self-denial and irreproachable behaviour is carried even into the realm of life after death. "Other women if they liked, might have their best thread lace in every wash, but when Mrs. Glegg died, it would be found that she had better lace laid by in the right-hand drawer of her wardrobe in the spotted chamber, than ever Mrs. Wool of St. Ogg's had bought in her life, although Mrs. Wool wore her lace before it was paid for" (p. 108). Though Tom and Maggie need money at the time of crisis, still Mrs. Glegg will not give the share she has put by for them in her will because that would mean leaving behind two or three hundred less—"me as have always done right and been careful, and the eldest o' the family, and my moneys to go and be squandered on them as have had the same chance as me, only they've been wicked and wasteful" (p. 295). Mrs. Pullet is proud of the rows of physic-bottles displayed on the long storeroom shelves and agrees with Mr. Pullet when he refuses to sell even one of them because "it's nothing but right folks should see'em when I'm gone" (p. 156).

Economic Insecurity: One noticeable fact that emerges from the Dodsons self-denying attitude and their checks on the indulgence of the will is that they are not doing all this out of love or fear of God or for power or ambition. They lead such lives only out of fear of being found economically insecure. Mr. Glegg is a kindhearted man, 'his eyes would have watered with true feeling over the sale of a widow's furniture, which a five-pound note from his side pocket would have prevented: but a donation of five pounds



to a person “in a small way of life” would have seemed to him a mad kind of lavishness rather than ‘charity’...’1 (p. 187). The extra-careful attitude about money once again points at the lack of any spontaneous generosity in these people - This attitude colours their response even to the people with whom they share the deepest possible relationships. Thus Mrs. Glegg when thinking of Mr. Glegg’s will is afraid that he might leave her off poorly when he dies “in which case she has firmly resolved that she would have scarcely any weeper on her bonnet and would cry no more than if he had been a second husband” (p. 193). It is not out of any fellow feeling that Mrs. Glegg decides to let Mr. Tulliver keep her money a little longer. It is only because there is no other good investment in sight and the money which is fetching her a five per cent interest would only fetch a four per cent if put out on a mortgage.

The Dodsons have a firm belief that one sinks in other’s opinion if one turns out to be poorer than expected so they guard their money carefully—not even venturing to help poor Mr. Tulliver because he deserves what he is getting. This causes an outburst from Maggie:

‘Why do you come then,’ she burst out, ‘talking and interfering with us and scolding us, if you don’t mean to do anything to help my poor mother — your own sister — if you’ve no feeling for her when she’s in trouble, and won’t part with anything, though you would never miss it, to save her from pain? Keep away from us then, and don’t come to find fault with my father — he would have helped *you*, if you had been in trouble (p. 296.)

The basic difference between the Dodsons and the Tullivers is thus laid bare. The impulsive, warm and generous miller is worth the whole clan of the Dodsons yet even he is not complete. He lacks their virtues of clear-sightedness and acceptance of facts which leads him to act irresponsibly and finally end up in deep trouble. But even the Dodsons way of life cannot be called complete. Though they show maturity in realizing their moral responsibility for their actions yet their fear of being insecure makes them shut out the world, which makes their attitude a life-denying one. Their sense of kinship is a negative one and only asserts itself positively when, towards the end, Mrs. Glegg refuses to forsake Maggie in her time of trouble because she is one of her kindred and because nothing has yet been proved against her. Otherwise, kinship remains only as a family tradition without any real affection of the kind Mr. Tulliver feels for his sister Mrs. Moss. The Dodson’s rigidity, their concept of justice and of righteous behaviour, their obsession with mortality all make their code stifling and narrow. They may be able to live securely but they miss so much of the life which this world has to offer.



In contrast to the Dodsons there is the Tullivers' way of life which goes to the opposite extreme. If the images used to characterize the Dodsons suggest closeness, morbidity and mortality, those to characterize Mr. Tulliver suggest life and vitality. The images associated with him are the mill, the river, the open fields, the horses. Mr. Tulliver with his impulsive and passionate nature is basically a simple honest man at heart who knows the value of love and affection. His standards are not the materialistic standards of the Dodsons. If his poor sister Gritty needs money he does not hesitate to lend it to her. Though he resolves to get it back from her when Mrs. Glegg demands repayment of her loan, his heart gets the better of him.

So, the miller returns empty-handed. His generosity here is understandable and laudable. But his blindness to reality and his naivety regarding certain facts make him unsuited for success economically and accounts for the inadequacy of the Tullivers' way of life. He has ambitious plans for Tom's education and wants his son to rise in life and be equal to any other gentleman. But his simple mind is unable to grasp the worthlessness of the kind of education that Tom is getting at Mr. Stelling's with the result that though Mr. Tulliver spends a lot of money Tom is unable to get the kind of education desired by Mr. Tulliver.

Though there is abundant warmth in the Tulliver's way of life yet the heedlessness of the consequences of one's actions and the stubbornness of not seeing the reality, the facts, the inability to take in the rapid changes that are going on in the world around him once again makes it an imperfect way of life. It is because of all these flaws that Mr. Tulliver brings upon himself the disastrous bankruptcy. Even in the years of misery Tulliver is not able to forgive Wakem and carries a hatred against him throughout his life. He is not able to comprehend that Wakem is only a representative of the law that has undone him and is not a personal enemy. His desire for personal vengeance causes the final catastrophe when he beats up Wakem in a fit of triumphant rage and then succumbs to his excited nerves.

In spite of all the flaws Mr. Tulliver still remains a likeable man with a wealth of generosity and kindness in him which make him a better human-being any time. But his inability to control himself makes him unable to cope with life as such and in a world like the one portrayed, where pragmatism and practicality are virtues essential for a successful life, Mr. Tulliver is a sad failure.

In the first chapter of the fourth Book George Eliot explicitly states her reasons for including such detailed descriptions and analyses of the Dodson's and the Tulliver's way of life. As she says:



It is a sordid life, you say, this of the Tullivers and Dodsons—irradiated by no sublime principles, no romantic visions, no active self-renouncing faith — moved by none of those wild, uncontrollable passions which create the dark shadows of misery and crime — without that primitive rough simplicity of wants, that hard submissive ill-paid toll, that child-like spelling-out of what nature has written, which gives its poetry to peasant life. Here, one has conventional worldly notions and habits without instruction and without polish — surely the most prosaic form of human life: proud respectability in a gig of unfashionable build: worldliness without side dishes...you are irritated with these dull men and women...it is necessary that we should feel (all this) if we care to understand how it acted upon the lives of Tom and Maggie. . . (pp. 362-63).

The Dodsons' and the Tullivers' ways of life are the two major influences on Tom and Maggie in the formative years of their childhood. It is unfortunate that neither of the two possible ways is complete in itself and it is equally unfortunate that a mingling of the two is not possible. Thus, Tom takes to the Dodson's way of life and Maggie, who has an affinity with her father right from the beginning, remains a Tulliver at heart. George Eliot's awareness of Darwin's theory of evolution is evident in the manner in which she delineates environmental and genetic influences contributing to the development of character.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the role assigned to Maggie's uncles and aunts in *The Mill on the Floss*?
2. How does George Eliot use the Dodson sisters to bring in some humor in her novel?
3. Which do you think is a better way of life? The Dodsons' or the Tulliver's? Give a reasoned answer.

9. STRUCTURE AND THEMES

The plot of almost all George Eliot's novels is simple and straightforward. Unlike a novelist like Dickens who indulges in complexities and intricacies of plot often working towards the solution of a mystery, and who uses the external events to delineate the characters in the novel, George Eliot does not do any such thing. There is no suspense in her novels (except *Silas Marner*), and there is no complicated unraveling of events. Her plots work in the simplest possible manner and as far as characterization is concerned the external events are not as important as the internal workings of her character's mind. At the same



time, there is a close connection between the plot and the themes that are being discussed in the novel.

The Mill on the Floss is divided into seven 'Books.' Each of these 'Books', while focusing and tracing the development of the main theme namely Maggie's struggle towards self-awareness, also have a significant theme at the center of each one of them at the same time. This theme is clearly indicated through the sub-title of the 'Book' concerned. Let us take a brief look at each one of them to further clarify this point.

'Book' One is sub-titled 'Boy and Girl' and appropriately deals with the childhood of Tom and Maggie, laying the foundation for the brother and sister relationship as well as Maggie's deep attachment to her father and brother. In tracing the destinies of Tom and Maggie from their childhood, this novel also necessarily focusses on their family, with uncles and aunts as well as more immediate parents. The unusual feature of this novel is the dominant role played by the secondary characters in it. The same has already been discussed at length, in section number 3.0.

The second 'Book' is aptly subtitled 'School-Time' since it deals largely with the schooling of Tom. Maggie too goes through the schooling which Victorian England provided for girls. By showing us the kind of schooling Tom gets, George Eliot exposes the state of education in Victorian England. In spite of spending a large amount of money on Tom's education, Mr. Tulliver is still not able to prepare him for a life in which he can earn and fend for himself. The ill effects of this kind of education are seen later.

In the third 'Book' we see the misfortunes which come in upon the Tulliver family. The theme of the Book is the gradual 'downfall' of the Tullivers and the title of the 'Book' clearly indicates it. The lawsuit, which Mr. Tulliver has been fighting against Wakem is decided in the latter's favour. Mr. Tulliver not only loses the lawsuit but also the mill which had been mortgaged when he borrowed the money. Things do not stop at this point. Mrs. Tulliver in her well-intentioned effort manages to produce just the opposite effect and Wakem becomes the new owner of the mill. There is further humiliation in store for Mr. Tulliver when he has to swallow his pride and work under Wakem. From this point onwards, the effects of this downfall on Tom and Maggie are dealt with in isolation and the next 'Book' focusses on Maggie.

'Book' Four has a title which refers to the inner states of the members of the Tulliver family but deals more specifically with Maggie and Mr. Tulliver. This book deals with Maggie's efforts of coming to terms with the world by renouncing its joys. The first chapter of this 'Book' is a meditative one in which George Eliot analyzes the limitation of the Dodson's and Tulliver's ways of life, which leave us with an oppressive



feeling. However, according to her it is necessary for us to feel this limitation in order to understand its influence on Tom and Maggie in their formative years. Taking Tom and Maggie as a springboard, George Eliot generalizes about the tragic potential of ordinary human existence.

‘Book’ Five, subtitled ‘Wheat and Tares,’ alludes to Christ’s parable of the man who sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came in the night and sowed tares (*i.e.* weeds), amongst the wheat. Both were left until harvest when the tares were burned. When interpreted in the light of the events included in this part of the novel, the title seems to refer to a mixture of good and bad, in the life of Tullivers, particularly Maggie. Philip Wakem enters her life once again. There is a development of their relationship, which is cruelly ended by Tom. Tom on the other hand, with his honesty, diligence, and business acumen, is able to earn enough money to pay back the creditors. This long-awaited day is however overshadowed by the grief which follows close on happiness. Mr. Tulliver, in a fit of rage, beats Wakem and then succumbs to his weak nerves.

‘Book’ Six once again takes a leap ahead in time and we meet Maggie now grown up into a young and beautiful woman. ‘The Great Temptation’ refers directly to the life of beauty and leisure, art and culture, which tempts her during her stay with Lucy, and more specifically to the irresistible attraction of Stephen Guest. This part of the novel tests Maggie’s character by placing her in certain circumstances. All her flights of fancy into a world of renunciation seem to be coming face to face with the actual world when she would have to renounce what she loves. Maggie wins the struggle, by her strong adherence to her past, her memories and the ties she has established with the people whom she loves and trusts. Yet the conflict is won at a cost to her character which is now maligned by the society and she is branded a fallen woman. Even Tom disowns her.

‘The Final Rescue’ is the title of the seventh ‘Book’ which deals with Maggie facing the consequences of her act. The final rescue comes in the form of a natural calamity—the *flood*, which though ends her life, yet manages to redeem her character in the eyes of the one person whose forgiveness she craved for. Tom, in their moment of death, finally realizes the essential nobleness of his sister. Subsequent to these events, the ‘Conclusion’ once again leaps ahead in time and its importance lies merely in indicating that Stephen is forgiven and accepted by Lucy while Philip roams the fields alone.

Apart from this simple linear development of the plot, that at times disregards the factor of time and takes a leap ahead in years, *The Mill on the Floss* is interspersed with a number of lengthy analytical passages in which the author intervenes very directly. It was stated earlier, how delineation of character, in George Eliot’s novels, does not depend on the external events alone. For her the internal working of her character’s mind is more



important. So how can this be achieved if not by authorial interventions and long analysis of motives, and consequent generalization about the nature of human life? There are innumerable such instances and to pick one is difficult yet, the masterly analysis of the miner's mind as he returns from his sister's house, empty handed can be quoted as typical:

And so, the respectable miller returned along the Basset Lane, rather more puzzled than before as to ways and means, but still with the sense of a danger escaped. It had come across his mind that if he were hard upon his sister, it might somehow tend to make Tom hard upon Maggie at some distant day, when her father was no longer there to take her part; for simple people, like our friend Mr. Tulliver, are apt to clothe unimpeachable feelings in erroneous ideas, and this was his confused way of explaining to himself that his love and anxiety for 'the little wench' had given him a new sensibility towards his sister (p. 144).

How else can we have such a deep understanding of Mr. Tullivers actions, if not through the narrative analysis? All such passages have a very important place in the novel, even if they seem deterrents to a smooth flow of our reading of it. To understand George Eliot's characters and her treatment of them, such passages cannot be ignored. It was her psychological realism that was so refreshing to the Victorian reader, after the cluttered and complicated and even melodramatic plots of writers like Dickens. This technique of narration therefore has a direct effect on the plot of the novel.

The Ending: Regarding the structure of the novel, one more fact remains to be discussed, namely, the unsatisfactory nature of the ending of *The Mill*. By killing Maggie in a flood, George Eliot seems to be evading the problem created by Maggie's action in returning to St. Ogg's. The moral and psychological treatment seems to be betrayed by an act of Nature — the Flood. Moreover, if the central theme of the novel is Maggie's struggle towards self-awareness, then the same is accomplished on the boat. It is there that we have the moral crisis and the moral choice. The decision to return to St. Ogg's is a difficult decision but Maggie has not foreseen the consequences. George Eliot could have opted for an open ending but does not.

If we keep the autobiographical interest of the book in mind then it seems that the author identifies with Maggie and is probably tempted to create for Maggie the opportunity for a heroic act. When the Flood comes she can commit an act of heroism in willingly sacrificing her life to rescue Tom and Lucy. In addition to this there is an autobiographical need for reconciliation between Tom and Maggie, borne out of George Eliot's personal desire for reconciliation with her own brother Isaac. The ending therefore becomes a wish-fulfilment.



Though the Flood as a natural event has been prepared for by several indications in the early part of the novel, nevertheless all these hints seem to be merely technical and do not grow out of the natural course of events. Moreover, since George Eliot is writing in realistic mode, a sudden Flood seems all the more out of tune. The dissatisfaction remains.

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Primary Reading

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‘HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS’

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Dr. Neeta Gupta

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This objective of this study material is to do the following:

- Briefly introduce you to the poet.
- Familiarize you with the sonnet form.
- Help you understand the radical use of the form by Elizabeth Barret Browning.
- Provide an analysis of the prescribed poem.
- Help you understand and appreciate the poet’s concept of love as it transforms itself to take on a spiritual dimension in the poem.

2. ABOUT THE POET

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a prominent Victorian poet who is known for her exceptional poetry that explored themes of love, politics, and social issues. Her life was marked by personal struggles, including chronic illness, but her writing was a testament to her indomitable spirit and remarkable talent.

Born on March 6, 1806, in Durham, England, Elizabeth was the eldest of twelve children of Edward and Mary Barrett. Her family was wealthy, owning sugar plantations in Jamaica, and well-educated too. Elizabeth received an excellent education, particularly in literature and languages. By the age of ten, she had already written her first epic poem, “The Battle of Marathon”.

When Elizabeth was fifteen, she suffered a spinal injury that caused her to become bedridden for years. During this time, she read extensively, particularly in philosophy, literature, and languages. She began writing poetry in earnest and published her first book of poetry, *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*, in 1826 when she was just twenty years old.

In 1838, Elizabeth’s health improved somewhat, and she began to lead a more active social life. She also began to correspond with other writers and intellectuals, including



Robert Browning, who would become her husband. They fell in love, eloped and were married in secret in 1846, against the wishes of Elizabeth's father, who disapproved of the marriage. They moved to Italy, where they lived until Elizabeth's death in 1861.

Barrett Browning's most famous work, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, is a collection of love sonnets that she wrote to Robert Browning during their courtship. The poems are of a very personal nature and the volume's title was chosen as a ploy to camouflage their biographical relevance. It was made to seem as though the poems are translations of the works of a Portuguese poet, Luís de Camoëns, especially because Barret Browning's poem "Catarina to Camoëns" which precedes the sonnets in the second volume of *Poems* (1844), talks about the love of Catarina for this poet. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* was published in 1850 and consists of some of her most famous poems, including "How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)".

Barrett Browning's poetry was also notable for its exploration of political and social issues. She was a strong advocate for the abolition of slavery and wrote several poems on the subject. She was also a champion of women's rights and wrote poems that addressed the gender inequality of her time.

One of Barrett Browning's most famous poems, *Aurora Leigh*, is a novel in verse that explores themes of gender, class, and identity. It tells the story of a young woman who struggles to make her way as a writer in a male-dominated society. It is considered a ground-breaking work in feminist literature.

Despite her success as a writer, Barrett Browning struggled with chronic illness throughout her life. She suffered from various ailments, including respiratory problems, and was often bedridden. Despite her poor health, she continued to write and publish poetry, and her work continued to be highly regarded by critics and readers alike. She died on June 29, 1861, in Florence, Italy, at the age of 55.

3. INTRODUCTION

When three years after marriage Elizabeth Barret Browning imperceptibly slipped the little book of sonnets into her husband's pocket telling him that she once wrote about him, her reticence all these years might have stemmed from Browning's chance remark objecting to personal poetry. He was however astounded by the beauty and genius of this work. As her biographer Margaret Forster writes, "Elizabeth writing to (her sister) Arabel did not convey Robert's astonishment and pride; she said merely, "he was much touched and pleased." But he wrote to his sister that during this summer he had come to know his wife as he had never known her before and that he was mistaken in thinking that there



was nothing left to know.” (Forster, p. 237). They decided to publish the sonnets yet give it a name that would act as a camouflage not only because of the personal nature of the sonnets but also for the fact that these were Elizabeth’s original writings. Calling it *Sonnets from the Portuguese* left the readers guessing, the popular perception being that these were translated from the Portuguese.

Elizabeth Barret Browning was writing in times when female writers were not easily accepted and often had to write under pseudonyms. George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte are just two names from many who challenged the patriarchal mindset and the gendered boundaries of Victorian times. In this context Browning’s use of the sonnet form is nothing short of revolutionary. By appropriating the genre of the sonnet she made forays into a domain that was predominantly masculine. What she did was unprecedented and extraordinary. Originating in the thirteenth century Italy the genre was immortalized by Petrarch with his *Canzoniere* a sequence of 366 poems where he expressed his ardent love for his unattainable beloved Laura. He used the form to write about his unrequited love and the suffering and pining resulting from it. In these amorous sonnets the woman is objectified and has no agency. She is merely an unreachable, beautiful but unresponsive lady who the lover pines for.

In her use of the sonnet Barret Browning subverts the conventional expectation. In a reversal of the masculine tradition we have a female speaker who is an active agency in the sonnets and speaks of her love for a man. These sonnets are addressed by the female speaker to the male lover rather than being the other way round. Neither of the lovers is cold or distant; the love between the two is reciprocated and established rather than unrequited. As against the conventional suffering lover and the distant beloved the subject of the 44 sonnets in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is the legendary romance of the Brownings culminating in their marriage.

“How do I love thee, let me Count the Ways” is the 43rd sonnet in the sequence. The poem is supposedly a love letter to her husband, Robert Browning, but nowhere in the poem are the speaker and beloved named. It is written in iambic pentameter, which means that each line has ten syllables and follows a pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables.

“How do I love thee” is divided into fourteen lines and follows the structure of a Petrarchan sonnet where the first eight lines are called the *octave*, and they present the idea or the problem that the poet wants to explore. The last six lines are called the *sestet*, and they provide a resolution or a conclusion to the problem presented in the octave. In Browning’s poem, however, the question is posed in the first line of the octave while rest of the poem presents various answers to the question.



In the octave, the speaker explores the question of how she loves her beloved. She uses a series of comparisons to describe the depth and intensity of her love. She says that she loves him “to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach,” which suggests that her love is limitless and all-encompassing. She also compares her love to the “quiet need” of a person’s “daily breath,” which emphasizes that her love is essential and fundamental to her existence.

In the sestet, the speaker continues to provide further answers to the question she posed in the octave. The movement now is towards the spiritual nature of her love. She says that she loves her beloved with the same passion and intensity that she had when she first began to love him, and that her love will continue to grow even after death. She concludes the poem by saying, “I shall but love thee better after death,” which suggests that her love is eternal and transcends the limitations of time and space. The sublime nature of this love is akin to divinity.

4. THE POEM

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height.
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use.
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose.
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath.
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and if God choose.
I shall but love thee better after death.



5. ANALYSIS

From a first reading of the poem it is clear that “How do I love thee” is a poem about the speaker’s declaration of love for her beloved. Though a very personal poem yet it does not mention any names. It may, however, be safely assumed that the speaker is the poet herself and has addressed the poem to Robert Browning. The poem uses various literary devices and techniques to express the depth and intensity of the love that the poet felt for her future husband. To that extent the poem is autobiographical in nature and contains oblique references to some other events that reflect the poet’s personal life and experiences.

“How do I love thee” is written in iambic pentameter, which means that each line has ten syllables and follows a specific rhythm. The constant repetition of the phrase “I love thee...” is a striking feature of the poem and helps to create a sense of musicality and flow, which adds to the poem’s romantic and passionate tone. It also creates a sense of continuity and fluidity at the same time it reinforces the strength and depth of the speaker’s love.

In the first line itself the speaker asks a question, and the rest of the poem provides various answers to it. It seems that the poem is an answer to a question that has been asked by her beloved as to how much she loves him. The speaker asks, “How do I love thee?” and then goes on to list the different ways in which she loves her beloved. It is intriguing how love, which is an abstract concept, is treated as quantifiable by Browning and yet the movement that is traced in the sonnet is from love that can be defined in tangible earthly terms to one that transcends physical boundaries to transform itself into a spiritual and eternal love. The speaker uses a range of metaphors to describe this love, such as comparing it to “the depth and breadth and height” that her soul can reach, and to “the quiet need” that her “silent tears” express. In the course of the entire poem the speaker declares seven different ways in which she loves her beloved.

Lines such as “I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life!” suggests that Browning’s love for Robert was a source of strength and comfort during difficult times in her life such as her lifelong struggle with ill health and the death of her beloved brother. Additionally, the final couplet of the poem, “I shall but love thee better after death,” is believed to reflect Browning’s belief in the eternal nature of love. The overarching theme of the poem is therefore love that transcends the boundaries of the earth to go beyond into the realm of the spiritual.

Let’s attempt a detailed analysis of the poem.



“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

The first line is a rhetorical question that the speaker poses to her beloved addressing him as “thee”. The poem can therefore be seen as an apostrophe where the speaker addresses a listener. The use of the first-person throughout, stresses on the active agency of the female speaker as against the conventional sonnets where the lady has no voice and is merely an object of desire. The phrase “let me count the ways” suggests that the speaker will enumerate the various ways she loves the person. As mentioned earlier, the speaker is treating love here as something that can be measured. As readers we begin to expect that the poem will shape up not as “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” but as a rational list of the various ways in which the speaker loves her beloved. If quantifiable, one would expect these reasons to be tangible as well but the first of these gives us an idea of the extent of her love.

“I love thee to the depth and breadth and height.

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight.

For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.”

Using the metaphor of the soul, the speaker compares the extent of her love to the dimensions of space: depth, breadth, and height. Her soul expands to cover all three dimensions of space suggesting the greatness of her love. She also suggests that her love is not limited by physical presence or sensory perception. Her soul which stands here for the love that she feels for her beloved, expands to reach for things that are “out of sight”, that are not visible. These are the “ends of Being and ideal grace”. In other words her love is expanding to transcend the physical world and bring her closer to heaven. The vastness of her love reaches the very purpose and essence of existence and spiritual perfection bringing her closer to God.

“I love thee to the level of every day’s

Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.”

Here, the speaker contrasts the grandeur of her love in the previous lines with the intimacy and simplicity of loving someone in daily life. She expresses a commitment to meeting her beloved’s needs and being present in all aspects of his life. From the splendour of the first four lines we move to a more modest concept of love which is rooted in the day-to-day life of day (“sun”) and night (“candlelight”). The speaker describes her love therefore as earthy as well as spiritual.

“I love thee freely, as men strive for Right.

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.”



Continuing to “count the ways” that she loves her beloved, the speaker uses a simile to describe the next way. She states that she loves her beloved “freely” as a matter of her own choice, just like those men who choose to fight for right. (One may recall that Elizabeth’s father was strictly opposed to her relationship with Robert Browning, yet she chose to go ahead with it and finally marry him against her father’s wishes). The speaker’s love is neither forced nor motivated by personal gain or ego, but rather it is given freely and selflessly. She also suggests that her love is virtuous and “pure”, akin to striving for moral righteousness or turning away from seeking attention or approval. The purity and humility of her love brings it once again closer to its spiritual aspect.

“I love thee with the passion put to use.

In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith.”

The speaker describes the depth of her love by referring to two different emotional states: the intensity of her past sorrows and the innocent trust she had in her youth. The passion that had been directed at the struggles and sorrows of her past life is now put to use in the love she feels for her beloved in the present time. She implies that her love transcends time and experience.

“I love thee with a love I seemed to lose.

With my lost saints....”

The speaker next counts the restorative nature of her love. As she says, her love for her beloved has restored her faith which she had seemed to lose at some stage in her life. This further emphasizes the eternal nature of her love by stating that it is comparable to the love she once had for religious figures (“saints”).

“...I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life; and if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.”

In the last three lines of the poem, the speaker gives us the essence of the entire poem by making a connection between romantic love and spiritual love. She declares that her love encompasses every aspect of her earthly life, her “breath” her “smiles” and her “tears”. Immediately however she talks of how her love would transcend the earthly and go beyond into the realm of the spiritual. Death cannot weaken her love but will rather make it better and stronger. Her love will not stop or end with death but will continue eternally even into her afterlife.



6. SUMMING UP

In conclusion, we can say that “How do I love thee” is a profound expression of the speaker’s love, which encompasses a vast array of emotional states, experiences, and beliefs, and culminates in an affirmation of eternal love that transcends death. At the same time, the poem reflects the Victorian era’s preoccupation with issues of morality and virtue. The speaker frames her love as something pure and holy, drawing on religious language and imagery to suggest that love is a divine and sacred force that transcends human experience.

The poem uses a range of literary devices and techniques, including metaphor, repetition, and rhythm, to express the depth and intensity of the speaker’s love. The poem’s romantic and passionate tone, combined with its beautiful language and imagery, has made it a classic example of a love poem in English literature.

Above all, the intricate form of the sonnet with its fourteen lines, a complex rhyme and a fixed meter is used well by Barret Browning to establish her poetic genius in times when women writers were considered subordinate and occupied at best a tenuous position. In choosing to write in the classical genre and giving agency to the female speaker, Barret Browning challenges and overthrows the masculine conventions and traditional expectations.

She does it again with the writing of her epic poem *Aurora Leigh*. Once more she tears into the male bastion and appropriates it for herself telling the story of a female epic hero.

7. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the poem about?
2. Who is the poem addressed to?
3. Discuss the form of the poem.
4. How does the poet subvert the use of the sonnet form?
5. Discuss some of the metaphors used in the poem.
6. What is the theme of the poem?
7. Does the poem talk about the unity of romantic love and spiritual love?

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